WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE LEGACY OF THE BULLOCK REPORT

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This thesis presents an exploration of the path of writing as a cross-curricular feature of learning in the decades following the Bullock Report *A Language for Life* (1975). It presents the initial impact that the Bullock Report made on the educational community and the subsequent policies that came after it. It shows that though hopes were high for the establishment of a Language for Life, as described in Bullock, there is little in today's literacy practice that can be tracked back to Bullock.

This research has been conducted as part of a project that combines Action Research and Case Study to develop a better understanding of the issues raised above in order to take literacy policy and practice within the school forward.

The research took place in two city high schools. The students involved in the interviews were aged 11-15 and were of varied academic ability. The teachers interviewed teach a variety of subjects across the curriculum. Some have additional roles within the school.

The key themes that emerged from the research were:

- The National Literacy Strategy has had little effect on the development of students' writing experiences across the curriculum;

- Teachers are significantly affected by exam requirements when planning writing experiences for their students;

- There is evidence that teachers lack autonomy to make independent decisions in the delivery of their curriculum.

The thesis presents the findings in light of the quest to find what should be done to promote writing across the curriculum. The findings are analysed and new directions sought to take the teaching and learning of writing forward.

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CHAPTER ONE

'Of all the recommendations of *A Language for Life*, the Report of the Bullock committee, the reasonable-sounding, apparently straight-forward and certainly cheap ones embodying the idea of 'language across the curriculum' have proved the most difficult to implement'

(Robertson 1980: 7)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research examines the legacy of the Bullock Report (1975), a document that examined the way English was taught to 5-16 year olds in the mid 1970s. One of its conclusions was to establish the need for the teaching of language to become a cross-curricular responsibility in secondary schools. As a secondary school English teacher, I have been working with the development of literacy skills for more than twenty years. I have seen and been a part of a number of attempts to develop these skills beyond the English classroom but have been struck by the resistance encountered. Since these initiatives were small and grassroots programmes, none of them have been reviewed in terms of their success or failure: they've just ended. I am in a position to be a leader of developing literacy policy at my school, so I reflect on my experiences of unsuccessful attempts in the past and realise that, in order to develop a successful literacy programme, I have to understand what has happened since the Bullock Report made this a goal for secondary schools more than 30 years ago.

I began this thesis with the goal to understand the path that literacy has taken from Bullock to the present. I wanted to better understand the landscape of my professional world and learn about the factors that shaped the experience of both the teacher making decisions about literacy in the classroom, and the students who were the recipients of these decisions.

The quote at the start of this chapter sets out the gap in knowledge that this study seeks to address: why is a whole-school approach to writing (language) so 'difficult to achieve'?

1.2 A STORY FROM EXPERIENCE

Though there is clearly a link between all the strands of literacy, my interest is particularly in writing. To briefly explain this I offer a story and commentary:

> *Robbie the Scot was a bright, energetic failure at school. He played the fool, messed about and was always in trouble. His reports painted a picture of poor behaviour, poor progress and underachievement. He was however a likeable lad. I found him enthusiastic about everything in my English classes except writing. He enjoyed the speaking and listening activities and was always a volunteer to read aloud. But when asked to write he became a bag of distractions.*
>
> *When I talked to Robbie the Scot about this, he said he hated writing, he said it was very hard and he felt like he was 'crap at it'. I asked to see what he was doing in different subjects and noted that he seemed to have plenty of writing in his exercise books.*
>
> *"Yeah, lots of words but they're not really mine"*
>
> *I asked him what he meant by that*
>
> *"I can write what they tell me, but it's not really writing…more like filling in the blanks"*
>
> *I did a rough count of the words that Robbie the Scot averaged per week over the period of a month: 2,600. If we multiply that by the 48 weeks that he is in school, we can see what Robbie the Scot writes in a year: 124,800 words.*

1.3 THE POINT OF THE STORY: A commentary

Robbie the Scot wrote but he didn't learn much from his writing. Here was a student who would put pen to paper, albeit reluctantly, and would eventually produce something that resembled what appeared to be the product asked for, but at a low standard. The writing was scrappy, many tasks seemed unfinished and his grades were poor. Most importantly, what struck me was the number of words he wrote with so little progress as a writer. It appeared his writing taught him nothing, he felt no pride in it and it reinforced his sense of failure. He was *crap at it*.

This story is part of the context for this study. The memory of that moment remains dominant as I explore the ways teenagers write and feel about their writing. The definition of literacy is reading, writing, speaking and listening. But it seems that for Robbie the Scot it was writing skills that he didn't have that held him back, not reading, speaking or listening. According to Margaret Meek '…there have always been fewer writers than readers' (Meek 1991: 23) and yet it is writing that is used to assess learning in almost all subjects.

I should establish how this research uses the term 'literacy' when its clear focus is on writing. The National Curriculum establishes literacy to incorporate writing, reading, speaking and listening. This study will not attempt to explore the links between the different aspects of literacy but focus on writing. For the purposes of simplicity, I will not attempt to differentiate writing when referring to literacy in national policy and current practice unless there is a notable distinction. This is further explored in Chapter Three as part of the review of literature.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My first line of questioning was prompted by my work with students like Robbie the Scot. There have been many Robbies. They look as though they are being force fed a diet that doesn't nourish them. They grow more cynical, distant and distracted as they move through high school. The biggest damage done by this is to their self-esteem. As a result they seem not to be able or willing to engage in learning in a meaningful and positive way. It is the phenomenon described in Chapter Three by an experienced teacher in New York (Cucchiara in Street: 2005), who felt that she was seeing too many children 'slip though the cracks'. This link between being successful as a writer and self-esteem is also a concern that has been widely explored in research and educational literature (see Quigley: 1992 and 1997, Evans, G., & Poole, M.:1991, Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P R.:2003, Maruyama, G., Rubin, R. A., & Kingsberry, G. G.:1981, Rosenberg, M: 1965). And further, it is also acknowledged by the UK government as important: 'Better literacy leads to improved self-esteem, motivation and behaviour. It allows pupils to learn independently. It is empowering.'(DfES: 2001, 3).

I found it hard to be a part of a system that seemed to fail its students so I began to consider the high school experience for students and the role this plays in influencing their development, both academic and social. My first questions were an attempt to find that out.

For example, *What are the writing experiences that students encounter across the curriculum?* and *What kinds of writing are students actually doing outside their English classes?* I used a pilot study to look at these questions (see Section 1.6 of this chapter). The results of this pilot study led me consider the wider context of learning and the factors that affect the decisions that teachers and administrators make when directing that learning.

The next set of questions arose from my interest in the way in which the structure of the school and, most importantly, the curriculum, might play a part in the development of writing skills. As described previously in this thesis, I have been teaching English for more than twenty years. In that time I have been impressed with the apparent impossibility of high schools to develop any cross curricular initiative. I have worked in four different high schools both in the UK and the United States. In all four, there have been attempts to create a variety of whole school approaches but none have lasted more than a few years before another initiative is launched. I offer this as anecdotal evidence of unsuccessful attempts to introduce whole-school literacy policy.

This suggested to me that there were two dominant beliefs amongst high school teachers and leaders: first, that learning in high schools, though delivered within clearly marked out subject boundaries, has features that cross those boundaries. And second, that writing was one of those features. In all my years of teaching, I have never come across any high school teacher who expressed views that contradict these two beliefs. My experience, though, suggested that achieving any bridging (or blurring?) of these subject divisions in order to allow a shared understanding of how students might benefit from a consistent approach to writing is difficult. I had witnessed policy implementation, both local and national, in four different schools, in two different countries, none of which produced the kind of practice that was identified by Bullock as preferable. Why? What was stopping the implementation of what was being spoken about at many levels as ideal practice?

I developed the following key research questions:

1. *What is the lasting legacy of Bullock's recommendations for a 'Language for Life' with regard to writing at Key Stages 4 and 5?*

2. *What has been the role of government policy in these contexts?*

3. *What do students perceive as important in the development of writing skills?*

1.5 THE CONTEXT OF THE ENQUIRY

Literacy in secondary schools generally, and writing specifically, is an area characterised by controversy: much has been stated in government literature and the press that does not fit the reality in the classroom. Haydn refers to such a paradox as being a 'rhetoric-reality gap' in his exploration of the use of computers in the teaching of history (Haydn, 2005:14). The widely held perceptions and public statements about both the use of computers and the teaching of writing across the curriculum at KS3 do not match what is actually happening in the classrooms. In Haydn's study he reveals that 'Although computers are widely perceived to be 'a good thing', there is some evidence to suggest that many history teachers '…do not make use of them' (Haydn, 2005:14). So too in the area of literacy: it is widely perceived by politicians and policy makers that the teaching of writing skills across the curriculum is a priority, and yet an analysis of student progress at KS3 and KS4 (students aged 11-16) conducted by the Institute for Public Policy Research has revealed that during these two key stages, students' literacy levels seem to be falling compared to their results at the previous key stage (Hacket, June 26, 2005). Further to this, in an article in *The Guardian* (23 August, 2005), it was revealed that recent research into standards of achievement at Key Stage 2 (8-11year-olds) may have been exaggerated. The article suggests that the government may have overstated improvements in primary school standards. Such revelations obviously make headlines since it exposes the rhetoric-reality gap, the stark contrast between what politicians are saying and what is actually happening in schools. They also highlight the amount that has been spent on improving literacy - £1 billion according to Hacket in her *The Sunday Times* article referenced above.

A great deal of money has gone into the development and implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, the blueprint for the teaching of literacy in KS1, 2 and 3. Such a level of

financial investment suggests a clear priority, making literacy a target for government policy and, consequently, suggests it should be a priority for teachers of students in these Key Stages. Evidence of this is the prominence that literacy has played in the government's KS3 Strategy in which Literacy Across the Curriculum is one of the four themes identified for whole-school improvement (along with numeracy, ICT and Citizenship). This study explores the results of this investment by looking at its implementation at the level of the classroom. How has this prioritisation of literacy affected the experience of the developing writer at KS3? Do the students perceive writing as a cross-curricular issue? How do teachers feel about the use and teaching of writing?

This research has explored this area by (in the first instance) working closely with students in KS3 to establish a picture of the experience of writing in different subjects. From the students' point of view, I have explored some of the contradictions, claims, assertions and counter-assertions that can be found in the representation of writing across the curriculum. There is significant agreement amongst the students who took part in the study about the subjects in which writing is an important part of learning and assessment. What is most interesting is the features of the tasks that seem to prompt a sense of achievement and motivates them as writers. This is discussed in Chapter Three.

The purpose of this research has been to consider the controversial debate about the teaching of writing by focussing on students and their teachers talking about their experiences as writers and teachers across the curriculum in an urban high school. In doing so, I hope to present an understanding of the situation that 11-16 year-old students and their teachers are actually in, and from this, construct new insights for those who are responsible for the creating and delivery of curriculum and assessment to move forward in the use of writing across the curriculum.

How do students develop writing skills at KS3 and KS4? The English curriculum, based on the *Framework for Teaching English: Year 7, 8 and 9*, has clear objectives for the development of pupils' writing and the KS3 Standard Achievement Test (SAT) exam assesses writing, so it can be assumed that there is writing instruction in the KS3 English classroom. The government's intention, as articulated in the KS3 National Strategy, is that

literacy skills are the responsibility of all subject teachers, with the English department taking the lead and supporting the development of resources, assessment and best practice. This suggests that all teachers are taking some responsibility for writing. It is this theory that I hope to explore in my field work.

1.6 THE SHAPING OF LITERACY POLICY

The 1975 publication of the Bullock report has shaped policy regarding the teaching of English and literacy (Bullock 1975). This report, commissioned by the government, was produced by a Committee of Inquiry which looked at all aspects of the teaching of English, how the then current practice might be improved, what might be done to improve teacher training and in-service training and how progress might be measured. This report played a significant role in the evolution of English teaching and national literacy policy (see Chapter Three). It covers a vast territory, creating a comprehensive picture of the state of teaching English at the time, as well as recommendations for future development. It is in these recommendations that we find the theme of cross-curricular writing. In the section 'Language Across the Curriculum' the conclusions are clear: children will benefit greatly from a school-wide approach to the teaching of language. The concern over literacy is therefore not new. The report went on to say:

'…we have made several references to the role of language in other areas of the curriculum than English. It became clear to us in the early days of the inquiry that we could not do justice to the first term of reference if we did not direct our remarks to all teachers, no matter what their subject' (188)

and also:

'We strongly recommend that whatever the means chosen to implement it a policy for language across the curriculum should be adopted by every secondary school' (193)

Since the Bullock Report was published there has been a clear understanding and assumption that writing can and should be taught across the curriculum (see Chapter Three). The report states that secondary schools should develop policy that clarifies the role that all teachers play in the development of writing. According to the DfES, however, '…we have not yet 'got it right' for a sizeable number of the population' (DfES, 2001:1). What the government acknowledges here is a failure to achieve the implementation of effective cross-curricular literacy policies in high schools. There is then a clear imperative that the educational community needs to do more to establish writing (and reading, speaking and listening) as a priority across the curriculum.

This research has attempted to examine this complex area of high, and apparently unattainable, aspirations towards an educational community in which writing is considered a school-wide issue. The objective is to understand better the experiences of the developing writers at my school and their teachers. The approach will be a study of the lived experience of KS3 students and their teachers as they receive and engage with (or not and why not) the writing tasks that are set in a range of classroom settings**.**

The context for an examination of the teaching of writing appears to have two distinct and conflicting visions: the first vision is the demand from the Bullock Report that schools tackle the issue of writing across the curriculum, and the subsequent plethora of government documents that echoes this (for example The National Curriculum: 1988, The National Literacy Strategy: 1997, The Framework for the Teaching of English: 1998 and The KS3 Strategy: 1999 and 2002, The National Curriculum Revision: 2007); and the second vision is the reality that, according to their own admission (see above), there are few schools that have achieved the first vision. There is no shortage of books and papers to guide schools towards achieving this vision. There is money allocated to the development of literacy skills, as much as £1 billion in some estimates (Hacket: 2005). All schools will have literacy in their strategic or development plans at some level. Most local authorities have an advisor (or team of advisors) whose responsibility is literacy. All the signs point to a prioritisation of writing across the curriculum – what then is the experience for the student within this system that has apparently prioritised writing?

It is worth looking at what the net result of 30 years of policy in the teaching of writing is from the students' point of view. There are important decisions being made in schools at the time of writing and there will no doubt be more funding, more initiatives and more policy regarding literacy and writing at KS3 in the future, prompting more decisions. What can we learn from the way the student feels and reacts to writing experiences in the classroom?

This is an area that is worth researching because a great deal depends on it. Aside from the government literature that stresses the importance of writing across the curriculum, there are many books, papers and research studies that show that writing is a cross-curricular issue (for example Sheeran and Barnes, 1991; Parker, 1993; Lewis and Wray, 2000).

There is also a body of literature that states that being able to write (and read and speak) well gives the student confidence (this is developed in Chapter Three). The government recognises the importance of literacy skills, not just as skills for life in a literate society, but also in terms of the child's self-esteem: 'Better literacy leads to improved self-esteem, motivation and behaviour. It allows pupils to learn independently. It is empowering.'(DfES: 2001, 3).

Given the financial investment in school-wide literacy and the power of the claims made for its importance in the development of our young people, it is worthwhile looking closely at this issue. Important decisions will be made by policy makers, head teachers and teachers regarding the best way to teach children to write and the role that writing plays in learning

1.7 THE GENESIS OF THE ENQUIRY

My interest in the teaching and learning of writing skills stems from my work as a high school English teacher. My responsibilities have included the development of schemes of work to include the teaching of writing. In doing so I have worked with the guidelines established by the government for the teaching of English. This has led to my work at a whole-school level with cross-curricular literacy. Again, a large part of this work is the analysis, interpretation and implementation of government directives and frameworks for the development of literacy across the curriculum and the teaching of writing. From this scrutiny

of government directives the priority of the raising of standards in writing is clear and unambiguous (see Chapter Three). There is no doubt that our work as teachers – of any subject - must reflect an intentional approach to the teaching of writing.

One of my first questions was to consider what happens to the skills learned in the English classroom when students move to other curriculum areas? I assumed that there would be some evidence of writing skills that students would take from their work in English and apply in other subjects. I started with a list of different writing genres thinking that I would audit the work of a selected group of students to find out which of the different genres were being used.

However, I found that the experience of the students in school I was teaching in some years ago indicated a paucity of opportunities across the curriculum to develop writing skills, since a large amount of the writing that was done was copied. In a small pilot study, I looked at all the writing done by 3 Y8 students over the course of two weeks and found that an average of 65% of it was copied. There were very few opportunities for the students to use writing to construct new knowledge in the way that Vygotsky outlined in his book *Thought and Language* (1962). Writing can provide the student with an opportunity to reflect, extend and secure new understandings. It is, according to Christine Counsell 'a pedagogical tool' and 'can be used to help pupils into higher-order thinking…for the acquisition of knowledge' (Counsell, 1997: 9). Given what Robbie the Scot got out of all those words that he wrote, this seems an important issue to consider: I wanted to understand better the writing process as a 'tool' towards meaningful learning and self-esteem. I have therefore explored the theories of writing as an instrument of learning and then looked at how this aligns with what 11-16 year olds at my school are actually doing. This is explored more fully in Chapter Four

My exploratory survey of student writing indicated that writing was being used to clarify or reiterate information. It was not being used develop understanding at anything more than a superficial level. A more in-depth survey of writing was later done with a local authority advisor and revealed the same problem: the products of student writing within the school suggested that there was limited writing instruction taking place beyond the English classrooms. It further indicated that writing was largely used to show what I consider to be

ephemeral understanding of new knowledge. As Robbie the Scot's story suggests, students are being asked to write lots of words, but not much of it is an indication of understanding. In my discussions with the advisor, it was clear that this is not an unusual situation for schools in our area.

During the course of my review of writing in Y8 I spoke to a small group of students in semi-structured interview. They reviewed the collection of writing that they had done over the two weeks and confirmed that it was representative of their wider experience – i.e. a large amount of copying. They stated on a number of occasions that writing was typically not taught except in English. Their perception was that if it wasn't an English assignment the writing didn't matter. As far as they were concerned, the teacher appeared not to care about style, sentence construction, vocabulary, spelling, text organisation or other aspects of writing; s/he would be marking solely for content.

This perception suggested a significant feature of students as writers: they appeared to be separating the writing done in English from the writing done anywhere else in the school. Hardly the 'language for life' that Bullock envisioned. It is the student who must make the decision to apply the writing skills that s/he has mastered to the writing that is done in other subjects. The review of student writing and follow-up conversations indicated that there were few areas of learning for the students in which they were being prompted to transfer their knowledge and understanding about writing in subjects other then English.

The results of my exploratory pilot study, revealing limited writing experiences for students in most subjects, stand in stark contrast to the way it *should* look according to the mandates from government. Where were the experiences that developed our students' writing outside the English department? Given the expectations of government policy that all teachers would assume responsibility for writing, why was there so much time being spent on copying? This led me to consider the possible reasons for this phenomenon. Why isn't more writing instruction happening in subjects other than English? What are the objectives and expectations of teachers when they ask students to write? What are the perceptions of the children? What are the expectations about writing and how are these expectations shared with the students?

These questions create a delicate and sensitive professional context for me. As a practitioner within the field of study, I am aware of the demands being made of my colleagues. Teachers have become a target-driven profession: a great deal rides on their ability to meet targets that are imposed on them by local and national administration. These targets are not negotiable. Typically these are student performance targets as measured by tests or other forms of assessment. If these targets do not explicitly include writing, there is little hope that teachers will prioritise writing. The significance of the types of writing that tests demand is that this will dictate the ways that teachers use writing in the classroom. For example, in any given exam, if youngsters are asked to write only in brief answers that expect only a word or two, the teachers are unlikely to have them write much more in the classroom as part of day-to-day learning. This then presents itself as a situation to consider further, particularly from the teachers' point of view (see Chapter Five).

My dilemma was a professional understanding of this situation, an empathy that prompted sympathy for my colleagues and a reluctance to pursue that line of investigation. This conflicted with a belief that more could be done to develop cross-curricular writing. Alongside this is the imperative that the government expects more *has* to be done to raise writing standards for KS3 students. Given all of these complex factors I found that my questions were changing: what were these conflicting demands on teachers? How did they manage them? What were the results of their need to prioritise?

I was sure that these were important questions, but they prompted defensiveness from my colleagues when I asked them. It was clear that they felt uncomfortable talking about this. The discomfort I felt in exploring the issue of writing across the curriculum by directing my attention towards my colleagues was a significant block. I had assumed that my role of researcher would be simply examining the way writing was being taught, make recommendations for change and assessing these changes: action research. I studied the literature on action research. I designed my work as an action research project, with cycles of feedback as described by Elliot (1996). I felt fully committed to my work being true to the definition of action research. That is until I realised that I was not going to be able to simply

cycle my way through research, acting on what I found and implementing change. There was a bigger story to be told in terms of the teachers' position.

In order to explore that story, I felt I had to consider a different approach. Though I was still committed to a qualitative research methodology, I was going to have to ask different questions to the ones that had prompted my initial pilot study into Y8 students' writing across the curriculum. Back to the genesis of this enquiry: I had the same intention – i.e. to better understand the landscape of my professional world and learn about the factors that shaped the experience of both the teacher making decisions about literacy in the classroom, and the students who were the recipients of these decisions – but the method of getting to that place of understanding had to change. This is explored in more depth in the following chapter.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study serves two purposes: the first is that which has been discussed so far in this chapter – to provide insight into the experience of developing writing skills from a student perspective; the second is to satisfy the requirements of an Education Doctorate. Due to the second purpose this research has some unavoidable time restrictions. There are also time constraints imposed on the design of the research due to the nature of the school calendar, since much of the fieldwork took place during the school day. The study had to be completed by a fixed date. The contact with students had to happen during term time. The extensive reflections leading to further reading and writing had to happen largely during school vacation.

As a result of these issues I have worked on a cycle of gathering data from subjects during term time and reflections on these findings during the vacations. During these reflections my work has been guided by constant reviews of literature. The literature review has informed the fieldwork and the fieldwork has generated issues for further review of the literature. The reflective writing has prompted unanswered questions that have required a return to the field and so on.

The fieldwork was largely interviewing and observing students, teachers and others involved in education. Van Manen's chapter on 'Investigating Experience as We Live it' in his book *Researching Lived Experience* (Van Manen, 1994) provided helpful advice on how to go about the exploration of the phenomenon under investigation, including an important section on interviewing and observation. He suggests that there is real danger for the researcher when embarking on interviews and observations to get lost in an abundance of material from subjects with little sense of its meaning and relevance to the research topic. The way to guard against this during interviews is to be clear about the question(s) to be answered. This will help direct the interview, leaving it open for the interviewee to develop ideas 'naturally' but should prompt the interviewer to refocus the interviewee to specific incidents or experiences that relate to the focus of the investigation.

So too with observation: there is a tendency to become awash with what Van Manen refers to as anecdotes.

> In gathering anecdotes, one needs to be quite rigorous and construct accounts that are trimmed of extraneous, possibly interesting but irrelevant aspects of the stories. An anecdote is a certain kind of narrative with a point, and it is this point that needs honing.
>
> (Van Manen, 1994: 69)

This 'point' is the focus of the study. Observation then is a process of seeing, recording, reviewing, writing and honing. The story that emerges from the observation may not be the one that appeared to the researcher during the observation. As the story gets honed, so its significance should become clear. It is important to consider the observation as an opportunity to see hitherto invisible aspects of the experience being observed. It is this uncovering of hidden details that makes this approach both attractive as a tool for developing the desired insight into the life of the emerging writer, and also a challenge for this researcher who has spent many years in the classroom being relatively blind to these details.

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The pragmatic element to this study is that the students who have participated have been those who were available, willing, whose parents agreed to their participation and who were in classes taught by teachers who were willing to participate in the study. There was more flexibility with the teachers whom I interviewed as I could meet with them out of school if they were willing. I was also limited in the times available to me to conduct the interviews and observations as I teach full time. Realistically these factors have played a large part in dictating the sample.

1.9 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This opening chapter has set the context for the research along with my position within this context. I have attempted to establish the features of my work that have shaped it, i.e. my professional interest, my interpretation of where we are in relation to the Bullock Report and the methods I have used to conduct my research.

In Chapter Two I recreate the methodological route that this thesis has taken .

In Chapter Three I present a review of the literature relevant to this thesis

In Chapter Four I present what the students said about writing and reflect on this in terms of what has been established in Chapter 3 regarding the influence of literacy policy.

In Chapter Five I present the perspective of the teachers as a snapshot of what I consider to be representative of the profession. What do they say about the use of writing in different subjects?

In Chapter Six I offer conclusions and suggestions for how we can move forward in developing effective strategies for making writing work better for our students.

Chapter Two

Methodology

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study began as an action research project. My interest was in studying the field of practice regarding the teaching and learning features of cross-curricular writing so as to inform the development of school-wide literacy policy and practice. It was, as described by Carr and Kemmis, "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr and Kemmis, 1991: 162)

Elliott has developed the definition of action research further in his book *Action Research for Educational Change*. He writes that the aim of action research is 'to feed practical judgement in concrete situations, and the validity of the 'theories' or hypotheses it generates depends not so much on 'scientific' tests of truth, as on their usefulness in helping people to act more intelligently and skilfully.' (Elliott, 1996: 69).

Elliott's use of the term 'usefulness' was key to the initial selection of action research as a methodology. This study is designed to inform my practice and that of my colleagues. The literature on the subject of action research, from Lewin (1946) onwards, confirms that this is a methodology that is conducted by practitioners in the field who are exploring it in order to better understand it and improve it. Elliott's belief that it provides practitioners with useful information that can 'feed practical judgement' made this the most appropriate approach to begin this study. My position as researcher is clearly inside the research arena. The purpose of the study was to provide information about a fundamental aspect of our school's strategic plan. I play a role in those decisions. The information that will be generated by this study will be useful, providing significant information about how children are actually learning to write in our school, guiding our decisions in the development of policy. I assumed at the outset that action research was the best way for me to inform my practice and allow me to 'act more intelligently and skilfully' in the development of writing across the curriculum at my school.

My research began as 'a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action' (Maccoby, Newcomb and Hartley, 1958: 201). But I found it difficult to work in this mode, confronting resistance at the very early stages of fact-finding prior to implementing any new action as described in the previous chapter. This resistance presented an ethical dilemma for me, as I was assuming features of professional practice on the part of my non-English teaching colleagues that I did not find. This is developed in the following section.

I returned to Elliott's definition of action research: it should 'improve practice rather than produce knowledge' (Elliott 1996: 49). Though I was determined (and obligated) to improve our practice with regard to writing across the curriculum, it seemed to me that action research was not right for this context. It was indeed knowledge that I needed first, before we could begin our cycle of planning, action and fact-finding. It was clear that I could not facilitate the process of change at our school without a better understanding of the complex features of both teaching and learning. A new methodology was required, one that would illuminate the particular aspects of this case.

2.2 FINDING MY FEET AS A RESEARCHER

My work as a field researcher, at this point, became both more complex and more straight forward: I had to work with a different paradigm, one that I wasn't expecting, which presented a challenge, but there was something of a relief to be able to clarify the quest. I was looking at the experiences of students and teachers in writing, investigating their realities. I had been struggling with conflicting demands up to this point: those of the institution to make change happen and develop better writing across the curriculum versus what were huge obstacles for non-English teachers to fully implement the conclusions of the Bullock Report for a *Language for Life*. My reading on this subject showed clearly that the Bullock Report was a well-thought of but not established document: in Chapter 3 of this thesis, I explore the literature regarding the short and medium term impact of the Bullock Report; in Chapter 6, I explore its long-term impact. For the purposes of this articulation of methodology, it is important to capture the effect of the on-going reading about Bullock and its impact on my research process. The literature on Bullock suggests that it was well-received at the time of its publication, with a wide range of stakeholders welcoming its findings (see Chapter 3). Much

of the report focuses on the teaching of literacy in primary school. These recommendations, according to Robertson (1980), had some immediate effect on learning. And, as is developed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, there is a demonstrable line between Bullock and subsequent policies such as the National Literacy Strategy, the introduction of coursework in assessment at KS4 and the development of the moderation to ensure standardisation of assessment to name a few. However, as Robertson identified:

> 'Of all the recommendations of *A Language for Life*, the Report of the Bullock committee, the reasonable-sounding, apparently straight-forward and certainly cheap ones embodying the idea of 'language across the curriculum' have proved the most difficult to implement' (Robertson 1980: 7).

This resonated with what I was finding as I observed and interviewed the teachers who were involved with the 'embodying' of these 'reasonable-sounding' recommendations, and talked to the students who, 30 years after Bullock was published, might have shown the impact of this 'embodying'. I couldn't find evidence of non-English teachers doing what Bullock recommended e.g. using speech as a source of learning, the use of multidrafting, employment of more than the transactional mode in writing (see Chapter 6 for further discussion on the specifics of Bullock's recommendations). And students I spoke to were clear that writing only seemed important in English and some humanities lessons. This last revelation flew in the face of Robbie the Scot's portfolio of thousands of words per year.

The reframing of my investigation, from action research designed to improve practice, to case study designed to reveal key features of the context, meant that I was more able to conduct a defined investigation into writing across the curriculum. My questions changed. I was no longer just looking for how writing was being used as part of the learning process beyond the English classroom, but rather what were the factors that shaped the use of writing. My position as an insider researcher, which had threatened to derail my study, became now clearer. Though messy, this re-visioning of the study suggested a different, more appropriate methodology.

The important issues in methodology are the positioning, decision-making and worldview of the researcher. Methodologies are nothing if they are not applied. Once applied, they are the tools of the researcher. That person's role is therefore central to the process.

> The inseparability of research and researcher is, many would argue, an essential feature of the research in social sciences; and the methodology, which drives such research, is as much to do with personal values as it is to do with 'rigour' and 'hygiene' in research methodology. For, in a sense, methodology is as much about the way we live our lives as it is about the way in which we choose to conduct a particular piece of research. Methodology is about making research decisions and understanding (and justifying) *why* we have made those decisions
>
> (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002: 68)

Developing a methodological self-consciousness foregrounded the process of decision-making in this research and provided a framework to analyse the subjectivity of the process, revealing the personal values that Clough and Nutbrown suggest are omnipresent in qualitative research.

My reading on research methodology, prompted by the early problems I encountered attempting to engage in action research, led me to consider the ideas behind the reflexive nature of the researcher. The articulation of the process of positioning and subsequent decisions regarding methodological approach is discussed here to establish reflexivity on the part of the researcher. The ongoing analysis of the decisions that have led me to this point are significant in what they reveal to me in the role of researcher and also to the reader of the research. Reflexivity is employed in this study as a tool to continue to inform the researcher and reader of the situation of the researcher regarding the subject and how this is influencing the ongoing research. The aim is to 'yield more "accurate," more "valid" research'" (Pillow, 2003:179). Though it would be naïve to assume that there is any one way to ensure validity, 'reflexivity becomes important to demonstrate one's awareness of the research problematics and is often used to potentially validate and legitimise the research precisely by raising

questions about the research process.' (Pillow, 2003:179). There is further discussion about validity in this chapter when looking at transferablility and generalisability.

Methodology begins from the moment the first research question is asked. The first questions that occurred to me are present in this paper. They came about as a result of discovering Robbie the Scot's great bank of useless words that prompted me to ask what was going on. I sought answers to questions that would explain Robbie's situation: a reluctant writer writing hundreds of thousands of words every school year. Robbie and his peers clearly had a story to tell about their experiences as writers and learners. I knew it was important to capture that story. Alongside this, I sought to gain a picture of the teaching of writing: the teachers' point of view. Those initial questions led me to consider my role in a sensitive context. I suffered a kind of paralysis at this point in the research sequence. I seemed not to be able to see how my insiderness could be managed so that I could explore the issues that were revealing themselves, most importantly the discovery that students were getting what I consider limited opportunities to develop as writers. There certainly was no evidence of the cross-curricular *language for life* that Bullock had recommended more than thirty years ago. Was I too close to this to be able to gain any perspective?

Finlay's theory is that instead of my subjectivity and insiderness somehow inhibiting the research, it can be 'transformed from a problem to an opportunity' (Finlay, 2002: 531). I am in the corridors and classrooms of my school all day and every day: my position as a practitioner researcher is not in doubt. For some time in the early days of my research, I was concerned that this might make any 'real' understandings hard. Would I be able to 'see' the things that would inform me as a researcher or would I be blind to them? As it developed, the problem I faced as an effective researcher, was not that I was too involved in the field to see it – it emerged that what I found was a challenge to understand. This challenge proved to be a show-stopper, as is discussed below.

2.3 WHY CASE STUDY?

Though the initial phases of the research were influenced by the action research model, it became clear that in order for me to move forward as someone responsible for developing writing across the curriculum, I had to understand the nature of the context better. I had assumed that the issues that seemed to have prevented sustainable implementation of cross curricular writing in the past would reveal themselves to me easily. All I had to do was ask the right questions to the right people. Once revealed, these issues would then equally easily respond to change – an action research model. But these 'issues' turned out to be my colleagues. The initial research questions now seemed inappropriate. It had not occurred to me that asking them would create tension. A naïve assumption in hindsight. As was shown by my review of the literature on the implementation of cross-curricular writing post Bullock, discussed previously, there was little evidence that practitioners had found it easy to engage with the demands of developing a whole-school approach to writing. Elliott characterises this as a need for re-framing of the questions based on the findings as a fundamental part of research.

The 'action' part of my research was dramatically halted by this realisation. No action could take place without the understanding and agreement of the teachers in the building who might implement it. The questions now emerging were about the professional situation of my colleagues. This presented a need for a change in approach from action research to something else. My work was now a search for better understanding in order to consider appropriate action. An additional question was added to the initial questions (see p5), which was designed to explore the issues that appeared to shape the use of writing:

What are the key features of teachers' professional contexts that influence their decisions about the use of writing in the classroom?

This then became a case study, exploring the nature of the context in which my colleagues, that is non-English teachers in my school, made decisions about writing in their curriculum areas. Merriam (1998) believes that all social science research is case study, but specifically suggests that case study allows the practitioner to become 'aware of a situation or event that is problematic'(6). The situation I encountered, with fellow professionals apparently unable or unwilling to engage with the meaningful development of writing across the curriculum,

was certainly 'problematic'. She contends that understanding is the most important outcome of the research: it is 'hypothesis-generating' (3). Yin (2009) writes that case study provides an opportunity for complexities in findings to be explored. It was obvious that no cycle of action would develop from my research into the development of writing without a better understanding of the complexities of the situation that became apparent after my initial pilot study.

The circumstances within which the teaching of writing is delivered were, I thought, something I understood. I had assumed that my work would be about exploring the best ways forward for already existing practice to be improved. I did not expect to find that the circumstances were almost antithetical to the development of writing across the curriculum. Stake (1995) writes: 'Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' (xi). At a fundamental level, I had to understand the activity within the working context of my colleagues.

What case study offered me was the opportunity to develop a rich description of the key players, the context and interactions that shaped the experiences of both teachers and learners. I wanted to create what Baszanger and Dodier (1997) refer to as the 'backdrop' for the research. This is the setting against which the actors can be seen to act. It is descriptive. Case study accepts the situation as it is and tries to explain it. Gluckman (1961) developed case study as a means by which social processes can be analysed. He maintained that only when the social context under investigation has been described – Baszanger and Dodier's 'backdrop' - can the processes within the context be identified, their key features exemplified and the 'scene' be explored. I have taken a descriptive and documentary approach to this study. My aim has been to include different perspectives so that the scene can emerge, creating the 'thick description' that is often cited in qualitative research (for example, Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1990)

> In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting
> individuals are heard. (Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

These voices are represented in this thesis in Chapters Four and Five. In order to achieve the 'thick description' that I felt essential to the study, I have interwoven these voices with interpretations and speculations. This then is the researcher's job, as described by Ponterotto (2006): 'Thick description refers to the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behaviour) within its particular context.' (6). Hertz explains this as 'an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment' (1997: viii). Ponterotto's view is that this process produces an authenticity, or 'verisimilitude':

> Again, a sense of verisimilitude is achieved as the reader can visualize the participant-interviewer interactions and gets a sense of the cognitive and emotive state of the interviewee (and interviewer)
>
> (Ponterotto 2006: 547)

There is a clear acceptance here that the researcher is the 'human instrument' (Lincoln and Guba 1985) of the process. This raises issues of bias which are explored in the following section.

2.4   ADDRESSING ISSUES OF BIAS

Given my role as insider researcher, it was important to be alert to the possibility that my view would be inhibited and that subjectivity would somehow 'taint' the process. As mentioned earlier, Finlay promotes the view that it is *only* an insider who can really see what is going on as s/he has great access to the organisation's inner workings, and thus able to see and hear many details that an outside might miss. A persuasive argument but not without its critics. Richards (1995), for example, suggests that this kind of research makes claims about understanding the field being researched it cannot justify. He states that insider ('participatory') research would always run the risk of being co-opted by competing stake holders rendering any validity in the conclusions of such research 'based more on faith than science' (4). Though I make no claims of this research study being 'scientific' I believe it presents findings that can be taken as more than just 'faith'. The variety of approaches taken to gather data, interviews, work scrutiny, student forums and questionnaires (see below for further details of these activities), ensured that there was no opportunity for any particular narrative to emerge during the data-gathering phase that might allow any single participant to

hijack the research process. There was also a need to triangulate the findings, using a range of methods. This allowed me to reflect on the findings from the different sources and compare the outcomes. I was seeking to find corroboration of the findings by testing them in different ways, putting the emerging theories to the different actors to compare their thoughts. This is in line with the belief that qualitative research can be considered valid as articulated by theorists such as Cohen and Manion (2000) and Denzin (2006). My commitment was to allow the actors to speak for themselves. The methods used to achieve this are detailed below in Research Activities. There is a more detailed discussion about validity later in this chapter.

2.5 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

RESEARCH ACTIVITY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	FEATURES OF ACTIVITY	FEATURES OF PARTICIPANTS
Questionnaire	21	Semi - anonymous	48% of teachers at the school All subjects represented
In-depth interviews with teachers	6	Informal 30-40 mins Recorded and transcribed (see Appendices for sample transcription)	4 science teachers 2 members of senior leadership team
Forum with English specialists	5	Informal discussion Recorded and transcribed	
Interviews with students: Phase I	3	Informal group interviews, focussing on review of students' writing Recorded and transcribed	Y8 Students aged 12 1 boy 2 girls
Interviews with students: Phase II	3	Informal group interviews	Y8 Students aged 12 1 boy 2 girls
Interviews with students: Phase III	4	Group discussion using sets of questions from which students selected which questions they wanted to answer	Y9 Students aged 13 2 boys 2 girls

A variety of approaches were taken to gather data. As I moved forward, reviewing, analysing and reflecting on the data, I found it necessary to develop different tools or approaches to explore areas of interest that were emerging from each research activity.

Students: The study began with an audit of student writing (portfolios) and led to three distinct phases of student interviews, each building on each other. In the third phase of these interviews I explored ways to promote student voice by giving students a range of questions from which they selected the ones they wanted to answer. I sought parental permission from all those involved in the project (see Appendix 1), but I was concerned that the students may have been easily led into participating in the study: they accepted that I, as a senior teacher in the school with some authority, wanted them to do something and they didn't challenge it. None were reluctant to take part, but it's hard to know if this was because of the novelty value, a sense that they had been selected and felt therefore special, or indeed if the prospect of getting out of a lesson to do the interviews was motivation enough. This concern prompted me to read around the issue of power in studies involving young people. As previously discussed, the issue of power is particularly significant when interviewing young people (see Briggs: 1986, Holmes: 1998, Basett and Beagan: 2008, Grover: 2004, Kortesluoma et al: 2003, Punch: 2002, Danby et al: 2011, Eder and Fingerson: 2001, Thomas and O'Kane: 2000, James: 1993, Esterberg: 2002). I wanted to create an interview method that would allow the students to feel as though they had some control over their participation in the interview. Of course, this is something of a confidence trick in that I controlled much of the interview process e.g. the time of the interview, where we had the interview, the set up of the room and the questions to be answered. But the method of offering a number of questions from which they could pick the ones they wanted to answer (see 4.4) went some way to encourage them to take some control over the process. It turned out to be one of the most enjoyable methods for me as I felt that my presence was much less significant than in previous interviews where I had controlled the interview by managing the questions and the pace of their delivery.

Teachers: I used a questionnaire to provide an initial overall picture of teacher-perspective of writing across the curriculum. This allowed me to collect views from a wide sample of teachers. It proved to be useful in guiding the in-depth interviews. These were mostly unstructured and informal. They took place during the school day at different times, depending on availability. There were a total of six in-depth interviews with individual

teachers and one forum involving four teachers. These were recorded and transcribed. I intended to attempt to have the interviewees review the transcripts to ensure they felt well-represented but that proved impossible. The teachers interviewed were reluctant to make the time necessary to review the transcripts.

Since my study focussed on the use of writing across the curriculum, I chose teachers outside the English department. (This is explained in more detail in Chapter Five). However, an opportunity presented itself to get the views of a number of experienced English teachers. Four English teachers took part in an informal discussion (forum) sharing views on writing across the curriculum. This is included in Chapter Five to add an additional perspective.

2.6 VALIDITY, TRANSFERABILITY AND GENERALISABILITY

An essential feature of any research is what others can make of it. What can those reading the research do with its findings? Are they valid? Can they be transferred to other contexts? What can be generalised from its conclusions?

Since the inauguration of qualitative research, its participants have fought against the definitions of research coming out of the positivist, experimental, quantitative school. This approach to research takes hypotheses and tests them to generate understanding. The tests must be replicable. There is an emphasis on a belief that there is an objective reality that can be revealed by the researcher if s/he uses the 'right' tools. There is also a requirement to make the researcher's values invisible, a belief that these values have no place in an experimental investigation.

Qualitative research challenges this paradigm, using an approach that attempts to generate hypotheses rather than test them. Case study is a qualitative research method which uses a natural setting to develop theories which are usually presented to the reader in a descriptive format. The responsibility for the transferability of these theories could be said to be with the reader, not the writer, of the research.

'(validity and transferability) are developed by the reader's interpretation i.e. the reader brings his/her own experience to the reading of case study' (Stake 1981: 35)

Case study therefore does not attempt to develop any kind of objective validity but rather can be read as something the reader can assess in terms of the extent to which the case study accurately represents the phenomena being represented. As stated in the previous section of this chapter, my intent was to create a thick description of the context in which writing was being taught and learned within a clearly bounded case. In doing so, I used what Lincoln and Guba suggest are the elements of case study that make it reliable:

i)   make the role of the researcher clear

ii)   use multiple methods of data collection

iii)   make the analytical process clear

(Lincoln and Guba 1985: 288)

Robinson and Norris (2001) develop this concept proposing that generalisations of case study suggest 'a realignment of the responsibility to generalise away from the researcher and towards the reader/policy-maker/practitioner.' (306). It is, therefore, up to the reader to 'generalise away' from the research, seeing it as a point from which they can measure their own cases. According to Lincoln and Guba:

The naturalist (researcher) cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry;

he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable
someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about
whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility' (1985: 316)

Stake offers a different emphasis for the validity of case study's findings: case study is not a methodology that should attempt the same kinds of claims of validity and generalisation as quantitative, positivist research. Its purpose is not to provide replicability, but rather present the reader with the possibility of finding aspects of the case that s/he can relate to and compare to his/her own situation. The reader can thus make his/her own generalisations. It is, according to Robinson and Norris,

> …the researcher's responsibility is to provide sufficient
>
> contextual information to enable the reader to make judgements about
>
> whether or not any particular case can reasonably be generalised to their
>
> own specific field of practice.
>
> (Robinson and Norris, 2001: 306)

Stake makes the point that applying the criteria for validity used in quantitative research to case study is to miss what case study has to offer.

A final note on the design of this study is to consider the notion of sampling. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander offer the following advice on approaching sampling for research: 'The aim is not to strive for a representative sample, but to identify purposive cases that represent specific types of phenomenon' (1990: 10). These 'purposive cases' are, in my case, students and teachers whose experience is of interest to the focus of the research. The central question regarding the perceptions of teachers and students in the school hasn't changed, but a reflexive approach has demanded that the subquestions reflect the emerging story. This means that in order for the sample to be purposive the people chosen to be interviewed and observed have changed, but the ones who seemed most able to communicate information were interviewed on multiple occasions. As new questions arose, I considered who might best answer them.

2.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research has been conducted in line with the guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association. Voluntary Informed Consent was sought from all participants. All participants were assured that their names would be changed.

In the case of the students involved, given their age, letters were send home explaining the nature of each students' involvement in the research and written permission sought (see Appendices 1 and 2). I was also concerned about the susceptibility of the students to me, as I am a senior teacher in the school. I felt it essential to establish they had the choice to take part, it was not required. And that they could withdraw at any point.

There was a further concern for me regarding the students' sense of ownership and autonomy during the research process. This is discussed earlier in this chapter and more in Chapter Four. The need to tackle this issue led to some interesting exploration of interview technique with young people, which is explored in more detail in the rest of this chapter (see Phase III, p81)

2.8 CONCLUSION

Issues of methodology created my biggest challenges in this thesis. The position of being so firmly involved in the processes that I was looking at caused tension and confusion on many occasions. This chapter represents a post-research version of this experience. Using the words of Stanley and Wise (1993) that research requires 'a relationship between researchers and researched' there was no other way for me to explore the reasons for Robbie the Scot's disengagement from the writings he produced. In doing so, I have prompted many conversations with colleagues about writing and its use within the curriculum, its potential as a tool for learning and its importance in the ways students see themselves as learners. These findings are dealt with in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

The aim of this chapter has been to describe the methods used in this research and account for their selection. I have been an involved and empathetic researcher, attempting critical self-consciousness in order to ask the right questions and effectively represent the responses. At times it has felt uncomfortably like 'part philosophy and a good deal of confession' (Geertz, 1973). I have attempted to 'confess' the assumptions that underlie my work and in doing so establish its authority.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This review of the literature aims to explore the influences on literacy, with a focus on writing across the curriculum at KS3 specifically in England and the key issues that have shaped it. A review of the literature on literacy is a particular challenge because the task is constantly renewing itself as new texts, policies and theories about literacy are published. It was therefore essential that the focus of this review should inform my research. I have designed my review therefore to reflect the key themes that have emerged in my work with teachers and students and also to support analysis of the data and inform research decisions.

One of the key themes of this research is the relationship between the stated goals of government policy on literacy development and what students and teachers tell me about their work. In order to understand this better, the first part of this review looks at the evolution of literacy policy in England and Wales (3.2). This provides an understanding of the political influences on policy.

This is followed by a section looking at the complexities surrounding the very definition of literacy (3.3). It became apparent early in my review of literature on literacy that there is some considerable difficulty in establishing a shared definition of literacy. This seems particularly relevant to my study when considered alongside the efforts of the government to improve literacy: in some of the literature produced by the Department of Education (and its previous incarnations) there is a reluctance to define it at all.

The next section of this review is an examination of literacy theory (3.4). This section, like the previous sections, had to be limited to a particular aspect of literacy theory as there is a vast array of literature on this. My focus has been the apparent tension revealed in the literature that attempts to define literacy. I seek to explore the possible politicisation of literacy. My review starts with the work of Paulo Freire. Freire's understanding of the problem of widespread low literacy levels in a working class urban environment and his

suggested approaches for tackling this have significantly influenced subsequent literacy theory. For this reason I have used Freire's theories to frame a review of literacy theory. I have looked at the development of the theory by people working in the UK such as Brian Street and Colin MacCabe to consider its application and influence on theory and practice in the UK.

Section 3.5 looks at writing across the curriculum. I have looked at the literature around writing as a learning tool, exploring the basis for promoting whole-school writing initiatives and the chronology of the theory and development of the pedagogy of writing as a cross curricular concept.

The final section (3.6) attempts to summarise the finding from the literature. My aim here is to formalise a better understanding of the issues that have led to the current situation in literacy and writing across the curriculum to help guide future planning.

3.2 GOVERNMENT POLICY FROM THE BULLOCK REPORT (*A LANGUAGE FOR LIFE*) TO THE PRESENT

I have used *The Bullock Report: A Language for Life* as the benchmark from which to assess the evolution of literature and policy that has led us to our current position. This document is understood to mark a watershed point in terms of the development of English and literacy policy (see Davis and Parker: 1978, Spencer:1983, Corson: 1990, Webster et al: 1996, Lewis and Wray: 2000). The report proposed a whole-school approach to literacy:

> We strongly recommend that whatever the means chosen to implement it a policy for language across the curriculum should be adopted by every secondary school. We are convinced that the benefits would be out of all proportion to the effort it would demand, considerable though this would undoubtedly be.
>
> (DES 1975: 193)

When the report was published in 1975, there was widespread support for its recommendations, according to Davis in her reflections on the report, *Teaching for Literacy: Reflections on the Bullock Report (*1978). Davis observes that schools which were already working with the ideas of whole-school literacy were given support and direction from the report, and those who were not were provided a stimulus to act. She continues by saying that despite the report having a 'significant impact on language teaching and learning in Britain…the difficulties faced in translating the Committees recommendations into action, however, are great.'

And yet, 26 years later in the June 2001 issue of *Literacy Today*, Marland comments:

> (As a result of the publication of *The Bullock Report*)Working parties, local education authority leadership, and in-service training led to a flush of school policies. However, there has been little fundamental change, despite the efforts of so many.
>
> (Marland, 2001)

That there was a call for action as a result of *The Bullock Report* seems incontrovertible but the lack of influence that the report had on policy and practice is interesting and a significant feature of my research. *The Bullock Report* presents what is arguably a widely acknowledged truth amongst practising teachers, that when learning is shaped around subject division as it is in most high schools, subject-specific teachers will prioritise subject-specific features of learning. Bullock's insistence in Chapter 11 that literacy be considered a whole-school, cross-curricular feature of learning suggests that it wasn't at that time. Just how much has that changed? Goodwyn (2011) suggests that The Bullock Report may have had support from schools, but

> …its recommendations…were never backed by government and its momentum was gradually lost. (Goodwyn 2011:2)

This loss of 'momentum' seems to have happened despite what Marland refers to as 'a flush of school policies' (2001) which suggests that the policies did address the recommendations of *Bullock*.

First among these policies is the National Curriculum introduced in 1989 which established clear subject divisions in high schools that promoted specialisation and created distinct lines between the subjects. These lines have been reinforced with the introduction of high-stakes testing, as discussed in the June 2009 edition of the journal *Educational Research* which is dedicated to the exploration of National Curriculum assessment in England. In the editorial, Whetton establishes the need for a thorough examination of testing in English schools to consider previously neglected issues such as validity, reliability and the way they are used by teachers, administrators and politicians.

> A critical evaluation of something that has such an influence on generations of a nation's children is vital, giving lessons for the future and for other countries and their own reforms
>
> (Whetton 2009: 131)

This demand for attention on the effect of testing on children includes a close look at what Wyse and Torrance refer to as a 'narrowing of the curriculum':

> The evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that the current intense focus on testing and test results in the core subjects of English, maths and science is narrowing the curriculum and driving teaching in exactly the opposite direction to that which other research indicates will improve teaching, learning and attainment.
>
> (Wyse and Torrance 2009: 213)

The focus on high-stakes testing has a number of negative effects such as demotivating students (Harlen and Deakin Crick: 2003), creating stress and otherwise negatively affecting the daily life of students (Reay and Williams: 1999) and prompting teachers to adopt a

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teaching style that emphasises the transmission of knowledge at the expense of more active and creative learning opportunities (Wyse and Torrance 2009).

Subject leaders in high schools are highly accountable for the results of students in their subject: if the initiative cannot promise improvement in student performance in their subject, and they are not mandated to address it, it is likely that the initiative will not be adopted. This could be seen as a direct result of the 'narrowing of the curriculum'. This aspect is further developed in Chapter Five where the experience of teachers charged with the implementation of literacy is explored.

A survey of the commentary on and advice for emerging theory on writing across the curriculum reveals that, as stated above by Davis, the ideas about the cross curricular nature of literacy expressed in *A Language for Life* were widely accepted by teachers(see Davis and Parker:1978, Spencer:1983, Corson:1990, Webster et al:1996, Lewis and Wray: 2000). But except for a couple of unsustained initiatives, there is little evidence in this literature that much of Bullock's recommendations have been implemented. (A notable exception to this is James Britton's work on writing that led to the Writing Across the Curriculum Movement, which emerged from Bullock. This is discussed in detail later in this chapter).

The Bullock Report, although commissioned by the government, seems not to have informed government policy a great deal at the time, or indeed since (Marland: 2001, Goodwyn: 2011). However, the pedagogical issues raised by the report, specifically in Chapter 12, have received the close attention of successive governments over the last few decades. According to Mike Kent in his article 'Spare us the army of robots' (Kent: 2009) there have been 459 government directives sent to schools over a period of eight years concerning literacy across the curriculum. Kent refers to this as part of a 'torrent of directives from central government' that prove overwhelming to class teachers who have to implement them. And ultimately, he suggests, these directives inhibit good teaching. This opinion is echoed in the literature reviewed below – seen as a diminution of teachers' autonomy - and is also a recurring theme in the field work discussed in Chapter Five.

It might seem ironic that the attentions of government can be identified as the cause for the failure of what appears to be a sound, well-regarded initiative: Dickens certainly thought government intervention hindered rather than enhanced life. He tried to expose this irony in novels such as *Little Dorrit.* His anger at the meddling nature of an ineffective government is embodied in the Circumlocution Office, a dysfunctional government office that made life miserable for the Dorrit family. The more the family petitioned the office for help with their predicament, the worse their lives became. Kent's suggestion that the constant surveillance and adjustment of government policy on literacy has a similar effect on teaching and learning.

It is impossible to point to any one moment as the decisive point at which cross-curricular literacy's development stalled, but we can identify an event which is widely considered to be very significant in the development of education policy. This is the so-called 'Great Debate' first introduced by the then prime minister, James Callaghan. Callaghan spoke at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1976 on the topic of education. His speech contained three main points that, according to Phillips and Harper-Jones (2002) 'pre-empted debates over education which were to dominate the 1980s and 1990s.' These points were:

- There was insufficient involvement of industry and parents in education;
- There should be a critique of teachers methods and curriculum organisation;
- There should be more emphasis on literacy and numeracy.

This speech can be seen as the point at which government became involved with educational policy that led to the major initiatives that are detailed below. According to Phillips and Harper-Jones, this speech raised fundamental doubts about progressive education which had found favour during the 1960s, promoting experiential, student-centred learning. Connections began to be made between educational and economic success (or failure). It also criticised teachers and prompted a scrutiny of practice that left methodological and curricular decision making to them. The term 'accountability' was coined as a result of this speech. From this point on, education generally and, as we will see from the subsequent raft of policy, literacy specifically, has been increasingly controlled by central government.

What follows is a survey of the two significant government initiatives that have been introduced since *Bullock*: The National Curriculum and The National Literacy Strategy. The intention is to reflect on the stated intentions of these initiatives, present some reaction from the educational community and lead towards a better understanding of how these initiatives have shaped our current situation. This, along with a grounding in literacy theory, is the context for my work in guiding literacy policy in my school.

The National Curriculum was introduced in1989 by the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Its stated vision was to establish specific curriculum areas as required by law and to set out clear guidelines for content and assessment. Guidelines would be reinforced by an Inspectorate that would monitor their implementation. This document covered education for all 5-16 year olds in England and Wales. It delineated the secondary curriculum into three so-called Core Subjects (English, maths and science) and seven Foundation Subjects (history, geography, technology, modern foreign language, music, art and physical education).

There was significant criticism of the National Curriculum which can be exemplified by the contradictory articles by White and Woodhead in O'Hear and White's *Assessing the National Curriculum* (1993). The book contains 16 essays by educationalists which are largely critical of the National Curriculum with the exception of Woodhead's in which he confronts the criticisms found in White's article. This reference is included here to show the volume of criticism levelled at the National Curriculum in its early years. It was the first major educational policy since *Bullock* and a large number of articles in this collection which claims to assess the National Curriculum suggest that the recommendations of *Bullock* were largely ignored by its creators.

In 1997 the government introduced the National Literacy Strategy, perhaps the first step towards implementing some of the recommendations of the Bullock Report. Certainly it could be seen as being informed by some of the recommendations of Bullock. Firstly, a Literacy Task Force was set up by the then opposition Labour party to look at improving literacy in schools in 1996. This Task Force made two reports in 1997, the second of which introduced the National Literacy Strategy (NLS). Its stated intentions, though widely considered ambitious (see Hannon: 2000 and Bailey in Grainger: 2004), appeared to reflect

an emphasis on approaches that involved areas other than English, together with work in English departments stating that such an approach was more likely to be successful than if it were located in the English or SEN department. But perhaps its major contribution to the shaping of literacy development in this country was its aim to introduce the explicit teaching of grammar, thought by the architects of the strategy to have been abandoned in the previous decades. According to Wales (2009) the issue of the teaching of grammar had been a subject of lengthy debate amongst educational policy makers. The strategy was designed to reinstate the formal teaching of language.

> Topics were organised by linguistic learning objectives at word, sentence and text levels. The sentence-level objectives covered sentence grammar and punctuation.
>
> (Wales 2009: 524)

Resources were produced to support this focus on grammar suggesting that those who made the policy did not expect teachers to be used to or indeed prepared and able to effectively plan lessons with this focus. Both *The Bullock Report* (DfES: 1975) and *The Kingman Report* (DfES: 1988) noted the lack of teachers' explicit grammatical knowledge. These objectives remain a core part of the teaching of literacy at KS1 and 2 and of English at KS3 (see Primary Framework for Literacy and Secondary English Framework on National Strategies website, now archived). This prioritisation of grammar suggests that students would be immersed in a literacy programme rich in learning experiences that foreground the study of language from age five onwards. The purpose of this design was to make students aware of the building blocks of language so that they may decode it as readers and, most interesting for this thesis, use it as emerging writers. This is discussed later in this section in terms of a critical response to this approach and it is also considered in Chapter Four in terms of the voice of students as they discuss their writing experiences.

In its initial phase the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was introduced at the primary level. It was designed to be rolled up the age range into secondary education. Its introduction therefore was focussed on its implementation at primary level rather than secondary level. However, the final section of the report set out a clear statement of principle that echoes the Bullock Report:

> Every secondary school should specialise in literacy and set targets for improvement in English. Similarly, every teacher should contribute to promoting it…In shaping their plans it is essential that secondary schools do not see work on reading and writing as exclusively the province of a few teachers in the English and learning support departments

(DfES 1997b)

At this early stage in the introduction of the NLS it seems that there was already dissent among the ranks of educational theorists. The NLS was almost immediately seen as having been introduced without due attention to research-based evidence. In his article 'A Framework for English? Or a vehicle for literacy?' Goodwyn (2004) considers the evolution of the NLS through primary education and its development in the secondary sector as the Framework for English (FwE). He is critical of the NLS for a number of reasons including the apparent lack of independent review before and after the implementation, stating that the NLS 'had no explicit research base'. He considers the two major reviews of the NLS – Beard's *National Literacy Strategy: Review of research and other related evidence* (2000) and the reviews done by Ontario Institute of Education led by Michael Fullan (see *Watching and Learning*: 2002). He finds that neither review provides evidence of either a clear research base or an independent, expert appraisal of the implementation of the strategy. Without these features, Goodwyn believes, like others, that the NLS lacks legitimacy (see Hannon: 2000, Grainger: 2004, Street: 1984, and Lewis and Wray: 2002).

And yet these same voices of dissent agree that the NLS was a major educational initiative in this country, '(the) most radical programme of teacher and curriculum development since the introduction of the National Curriculum' (Goddard: 2009, p30). Though there is widespread agreement, even from the critics mentioned above, that the NLS has prompted *some* improvement in student literacy, there is concern that any modest improvement in student literacy has come at a high cost: that is both financial (more than £1 billion according to Hackett: 2005) and, more seriously, damaging to the profession of teaching and negatively impacting on pedagogy. These last two features are a theme in the literature (see Harrison: 2002, Goddard: 2009, Ellis: 2003, Goodwyn: 2004, Goodwyn and Finlay: 2003). They are of

particular interest to me in this study as these are themes which have emerged in my interviews with both students and teachers (see Chapters Four and Five).

First, the theme that the NLS has imposed a teaching methodology that has undermined teachers as decision makers: this resonates with the issues raised earlier about The Great Debate. At that time (1970s), there was friction between those who wished to shape the way teachers taught and those who believed that teachers should be empowered to make pedagogical decisions independently (see Phillips and Harper-Jones : 2002). This friction continues and is perhaps exemplified in the critical voices commenting on the NLS, presented in this literature review.

The NLS approach is thought to have seriously undermined the autonomy of teachers, creating a climate of professional passivity that has shaped, and continues to negatively influence, teaching and learning (see Harrison: 2002, Goddard: 2009, Ellis:2003, Goodwyn: 2004, Goodwyn and Finlay: 2003).

> No other educational policy can be said to have had such a powerful impact. Its drive is clearly to make teachers implementers and not policy makers in any meaningful sense.
>
> (Goodwyn and Findlay: 2003, p33)

It is this final phrase – teachers as 'implementers and not policy makers' – that is echoed in other literature. The issue appears to be that the vehicle for the implementation of the strategy was a system of training including professional development for teachers and an array of resources. This approach required teachers to teach in a particular way using prescribed materials. This was first introduced in primary schools as part of the Literacy Hour. Teachers were told to structure the hour in three parts: starter, main, plenary. This structure was carried into the secondary school and remains today as the expected model of delivery for all lessons across the curriculum. It seems the debate amongst the critics is not about the merit of such a pedagogical approach, but rather that its requirement is ubiquitous. The teacher is not

encouraged to consider its merit, just to use it. The suggestion in the literature is that such an imposition on teachers deskills them:

> (the NLS is) a centralised, top-down model of training and development which distrusts and therefore must fail to engage the professional expertise and judgement of teachers
>
> (Goddard: 2009, p30)

Ellis (2003) considers this approach to be a 'flawed model of continuing professional development'. Her opinion is that 'There is no serious attention to the pedagogic rationale for these routines' and therefore fails to engage the teachers as professional decision-makers, in control of their classrooms. It is an opinion shared by others (see Harrison: 2002, Goddard: 2009, Goodwyn: 2004, Goodwyn and Finlay: 2003) and also Fullan's evaluation team which assessed the impact of the NLS on behalf of the government. In this assessment, Fullan et al, though generally positive about the impact of the NLS, recognise that this approach may be harmful in the long run:

> In the early implementation of the Strategies, pressure for compliance with central directives served to engage schools, pushing them to classroom practice. However, continuing this kind of accountability for too long may result in a culture of dependence, reducing professional autonomy.
>
> (DfES 2003: 63)

A further issue that appears in the literature which is critical of the NLS, as mentioned above, is that it has negatively impacted the pedagogy of literacy: critics believe that its introduction has imposed not just a way of teaching (see above) but also a culture of accountability via target-setting. This system of target-setting imposes a pressure on teachers to teach to the test. Ellis (2003) expresses some serious concerns about the pressure on teachers that results from the focus on tests and scores, and echoes the opinion of the Fullan team charged by the government to review the NLS by stating:

…targets are now seen to be operating more as a stick than a carrot and most importantly are leading to misinformed and counter-productive activities in the classroom (Ellis 2003: 96)

These 'counter-productive' activities that were also identified by the Fullan team, are seen by Goodwyn and Findlay (2003) as prompting teachers to prioritise technical features of language, the focus on grammar mentioned in the previous section of this chapter. According to their findings when looking at the KS3 curriculum, there is 'a very heavy emphasis on linguistic terminology and language rules' (27-28). These technical features are easily measured in tests but, according to Goddard (2009) limit the learning of children to a technical approach to language reception and production, thus missing out on the rich complexities of language and the influences that have shaped them.

The entire realm of cultural, political, economic and ideological determination within which texts are negotiated and constructed is banished from consideration and the view promoted that texts can be entirely understood and effectively engaged with through attention to their internal organisation and propositions. (Goddard 2009: 36)

Goddard refers to this as a 'desocialised' form of language. It reflects the views expressed by literacy theorists such as Freire and Street which are explored in the following section.

To summarise, it is clear that critics such as those cited in this section have established that there were significant flaws in the NLS which have shaped literacy development in England and Wales. In this review of literature it has been hard to find published work that supports its implementation aside from government documents. This marks a stark contrast between the way the Bullock Report was received and the design or implementation of the NLS. Of course, one is a report and the other a strategy: the first presents the context and suggests strategies, the second prescribes action. *The Bullock Report* was widely supported by professionals across the educational community, the NLS was not.

At the time of writing there are further rumblings in the air about significant changes to policy regarding the current literacy strategies. This is being framed most notably by The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the government department which inspects and regulates schools. Ofsted released a new inspection framework in January 2012, which includes a requirement that lesson observations in high schools should note the use of reading, writing and communication in all subjects.

> A recent report on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education, *Overcoming the barriers to literacy*, (2011.All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education) recommends that secondary schools should develop cross-departmental strategies to improve literacy. It also recommends that Ofsted should look more closely at this and include it in the new inspection framework. Thus inspectors should expect to collect evidence about literacy (communication, reading and writing) from more than just English lessons and assessment data. Literacy teaching and the application of literacy skills will be a focus across the school and in a range of different subjects. Schools might be expected to have comprehensive policies on the teaching and application of literacy skills within subjects.

(Ofsted 2011: 10)

And later from the same document:

> It is clear that literacy within the primary curriculum and across the secondary curriculum will once again have enhanced status as part of the drive to raise literacy standards for all pupils, but particularly for those for whom literacy levels are below those expected for their age.

(Ofsted 2011: 34)

(The phrase 'once again' above suggests that there was a time when literacy had a different, apparently 'higher' status in schools. It would be interesting to find out from the authors of this statement what exactly they meant by this.)

Literacy then is part of the Ofsted Inspection visits. And if Ofsted tell schools that they expect to see certain features in lessons, it is a safe bet that schools will ensure that those features are addressed. It's too early to say what the result of this will be and what effect it will have on the development of writing across the curriculum.

This review of policy provides a sense of the issues that have been prioritised by successive governments but also, perhaps more interestingly, the 'great debate' about a nationalised curriculum. The conclusions drawn from this review will be explored together at the end of this chapter alongside the findings from the following sections on literacy theory.

3.3 THE LITERATURE ON LITERACY: What is literacy?

Despite the fact that there is a wealth of literature about literacy, an equally vast array of government literature on the subject and its popularity as a topic in the press, literacy is a surprisingly difficult concept to define. The Bullock Report does not offer a clear definition:

> An immediate difficulty is in arriving at a universally acceptable definition of the terms 'literacy', 'semiliteracy', and 'illiteracy', for the uncertainty surrounding them makes objective discussion far from simple.
>
> (DES, 1975: 10)

It goes on to offer some attempts at defining literacy, largely using the concept of functionality e.g being able to read a newspaper. It is worth noting that this debate in the report takes place entirely within the section on reading. In a subsequent section, the authors of the report note that at the time of writing literacy was defined entirely by reading standards but that this 'should be replaced by criterion capable of showing whether the reading and

writing abilities of children are adequate to the demands made on them in school and likely to face in adult life' (DES, 1975: 36). In the section on writing, the authors note that writing has always played a significant role in high schools because of 'its traditional use as a means by which students put on record what they have learned.'(DES,1975: 163).

In his article 'Defining literacy: Paradise, nightmare or red herring?', Roberts explores the impossibility of establishing a clear definition for literacy.

> The problem of defining literacy has bewitched scholars, policy makers and practitioners since the early 1940s. The range of definitions of 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' advanced in the past half-century is quite remarkable, yet there remains little agreement among 'experts' over what these terms mean.
>
> (Roberts 1995: 1)

Roberts's paper articulates the major issues in the debate. He suggests that there have been many forces that have shaped the way literacy is defined over the last few decades, but two seem to prevail: politics and money. As literacy programmes have been developed or initiatives introduced, those who have designed them seek to find ways of showing their success. This has been particularly true in the case of literacy programmes in the developing world where international funding has been secured to run the programme. Funding bodies require results in order to decide whether or not to continue the funding. These results require that something gets measured and reported on so that there can be some kind of judgement made about their effectiveness. What that 'something' is has become the de facto definition of literacy. Politicians control the programmes and what gets measured, and administrations everywhere, not just developing economies, are vulnerable to pressure to ensure that the programmes that they have introduced are considered effective. Literacy programmes everywhere, therefore, have to ensure that the students learn what is prescribed by the politicians as being the key features of literacy.

Wagner echoes this concern in his work on measuring literacy in developing world countries (Wagner: 1993). The difficulty, according to Wagner, centres on the need to recognise the cultural specificity of literacy: literacy skills are not global constants. Rather, the literacy needs of a society will be based on the way the population of that society is required to communicate both verbally and via print. Wagner's work spans the last three decades and so he is able to trace the development of sensitivity to the imposition of literacy measures. He establishes a UNESCO initiative as being a turning point in global perception of literacy: in the 1950s, UNESCO established the term *functional literacy* to indicate a citizen's level of ability to engage in the activities for which literacy was assumed in his/her social setting. This definition established literacy's cultural features and allowed for those features to be incorporated in the definition of literacy. From this point, literacy could be considered to 'encompass a wide variety of attitudes, beliefs, and power relationships between individuals and groups of individuals' (Wagner 1993, p.1)

This approach to literacy allows for local specification: the particular features of literacy can be set regionally to include items that reflect the local culture and lifestyle. But it still means that, as Roberts suggests, literacy measures are indicators of what administrative bodies consider important and therefore may be subject to political pressure.

This creates a cynical picture of government-led initiatives. Indeed, Wagner declares ethical objections to this method of defining literacy because it leads to people being classified as literate or illiterate according to very narrow parameters.

> Searching questions need to be asked about exactly what kind of 'literacy'
>
> is being measured when students pass or fail…these tests (Wagner 1993: 5)

Literacy therefore is not something that can easily be measured, and yet, according to Wagner and Roberts, it usually is measured and this process of creating a system of measurement is limiting and worse, may prove oppressive.

Wagner establishes two schools of thought regarding approaches to measuring literacy:

- Quantitative: literacy is measured by years of schooling or reading level;
- Qualitative: literacy is defined in terms of sets of abilities or skills. It tends to describe the experience of becoming literate.

In England and Wales levels of literacy are expressed in a qualitative way as levels or grades achieved on national tests or against national standards.

He finds both approaches lacking and suggests that a pluralist approach is best. This approach can be seen simply as an acknowledgement of the many forms of literacy in common parlance:

- Emotional
- Social
- Cultural
- Computer
- Functional
- Critical

This widespread use of the term 'literacy', suggests that it is multimodal. And as such, the issue of the *context* for the development of literacy is important. This focuses on the experience for the student: the particulars of the setting will determine the literacy expectations. These expectations cannot be fixed but must adapt to the demands of the context. And these contexts are changing rapidly. This theory will be explored in the following section.

This review of the literature on literacy serves to provide an understanding of the context for my research. As such, no clear definition of literacy has emerged but rather a picture of the ways in which literacy shape-shifts depending on the situation, be it political, social or economic. What has emerged is the priority placed on literacy by governments around the world (see Wagner: 1993, Street: 1984) and the controversies that such priority prompts.

3.4 LITERACY THEORY: Research and Pedagogy

Paulo Freire's work amongst disadvantaged adults in Brazil established a perspective about literacy that significantly shaped literacy theory (see Archer 2007; Gadotti 1994; Maclaren, 1993; Mayo 2004; Roberts 2000; Peters 1999). His theory of Critical Pedagogy calls for a liberating education based on dialogue between teachers and learners, a learning process that respects people as active and creative subjects rather than treating them as passive objects or receptacles. He argued that learners must see the need for 'writing one's life and reading one's reality.' Education should therefore acknowledge the students' individuality as being the essence of what makes them learners. It is from their own perspective that learning can and should take place.

Freire's beliefs have been fundamental in shaping literacy policy worldwide. In the dedication to *Literacy; An International Handbook* Wagner states:

> (Freire's) many books as well as his personal involvement, have prompted
>
> students, teachers, researchers, planners and others to rethink their views on
>
> education…The memory of his life work will continue to inspire new
>
> generations of literacy educators in the years to come.
>
> (Wagner 1999, dedication page of book, not numbered)

Though much of the immediate influence of Freire's work was amongst adults in poor countries such as his homeland of Brazil, so-called Freirian principles – the link between literacy and knowledge, power, access and freedom - underpin and inform literacy studies widely as Wagner's dedications suggests. The influence can be seen in both pedagogical approaches such as the one described below and research approaches.

Much has been written about literacy policy and programmes that reflect the influence of Freire (see Archer 2007; Gadotti 1994; Maclaren, 1993; Mayo 2004; Roberts 2000; Peters 1999, Street 1984). I have selected one account that presents this influence clearly to represent this. I found this account had many similarities to the work I do in a city high

school with a good deal of social disadvantage. This is a literacy project in New York City called 'Project Friere Saturday Literacy Academies: Recreating Freire for High School Students in Brooklyn' (Cucchiara in Street: 2005). The author (Cucchiara) had been teaching in the city for many years. She worked with students from many backgrounds. She became progressively more concerned that the work she was doing on language and literacy programmes was not effective.

> What I came to recognize…was a painful but realistic truth about the largest public school system in our nation: the system was working for some, but too many were slipping through the cracks.
>
> (Cucchiara in Street 2005: 214).

She and some fellow educators who shared her concern about the underachievement of the students created the Saturday Freirian Literacy Academy in response to poor test scores, widespread concern amongst educators and politicians about student underachievement and, interestingly, high staff turnover. The programme was designed to provide instruction for students for three hours on a Saturday morning and one hour for ongoing professional development for the teachers involved. Thus the approach to tackling literacy could be sustained and indeed broadened by the educators who were taking part in the Saturday programme.

All of this was taking place in a high-stakes testing climate, much like the one in which I work. New York State has state-wide tests known as Regents which are required for graduation from high school. According to Cucchiara, there is a great deal of pressure on schools to ensure success in these tests so there is an inevitable culture of teaching-to-the-test. Under these circumstances, it is very hard to promote an individualised, student-centred, liberatory curriculum. All of this seems to mirror our current situation in England.

At the heart of the work done with the students in this project was the Freirian tenet:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word

implies continually reading the world

(Freire and Macedo 1987: 35)

This meant that the instruction in the Saturday academies took the shape of inquiries into the worlds in which the students were living, locating them in their neighbourhoods and fostering a sense of identity. So they then were reading their world. The leaders of the academies recognized the importance of skills in reading and writing as key outcomes (reading the word), but the approach was not to start with an autonomous bank of these skills that had to be mastered. Rather the approach created the sense that learning literacy was creative, critical, contextualized and authentic. This is critical pedagogy: literacy as a key to social transformation.

The evaluation of this project suggests that its success was in both skill mastery (reading scores) for the students and renewal of professional commitment for the educators involved. Just how transformational the experience was for those involved is hard to measure since no longitudinal studies have been done to assess the sustainability of the achievements. But the apparent impact that it had on those teachers and students involved was that the programme had

…been successful in boosting students' achievement and helping educators to acquire the methodologies and the sensibilities needed to work with adolescent literacy students.

(Tewkesbury in Street 2005: 228)

It is the second part of the above quote that I am drawn to: it seems that the key to the success of this programme was recruiting, training and retaining the educators. The vision provided by their Freirian approach appears to have inspired the teachers who according to Cucchiara were 'moved and mobilized by a pedagogy of hope, a hopefulness that refuses to succumb to cynicism' (Cucchiara in Street 2005: 230). This establishes the importance of

literacy as more than a bank of skills that must be mastered. This aspect of Freirian beliefs can be seen to have shaped the teaching of literacy perhaps more in adult education than in developed world schooling. There is no evidence of widespread application of this in English education. It is an interesting phenomenon that Freire's name appears widely on bibliographies in texts written about literacy, except those produced by the UK Government. Though beyond the scope of this thesis, the questions that arise as a result of this could well answer the big question that this review has posed: why have so few of the recommendations of *The Bullock Report* regarding whole-school language been implemented?

As the approaches to the teaching of literacy were shaped by Freire's beliefs, so

the research into literacy established a clear link with ethnography from the early 1980s. In an article call 'The Ethnography of Literacy' Szwed writes about the 'social meaning of literacy' and suggests that in order to better understand the literacy needs of individual students it is essential to first understand the ethnography of that student:

> …assumptions are made in educational institutions about the literacy need of individual students which seem not to be born out by the students' day-to-day lives and it is this relationship between school and the outside world that I think must be observed and highlighted
>
> (Szwed in Whiteman 1981: 20)

Szwed proposes the use of ethnography as the method best suited to 'finding out what literacy really is and what can be validly measured' (20)

This then creates a lens through which to view literacy. And like Freirian beliefs, the focus is on the individual and his/her culture, habits and customs. Out of an ethnographic stance has emerged New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991; Street, 1984). This initiative develops the basic tenets of a Freirian approach to literacy. At its core is the belief that literacy is a social practice rather than mastery of technical language features. Reception and production of language is negotiated based on the situation. Understanding is constructed using interactive skills and influenced by the learner's sense of self and what s/he brings to the interaction

from outside school. According to this approach, schools must take account of the variation in understandings that students may have, and these various understandings are context dependent.

Brian Street established two distinct models of literacy as part of his work on New Literacy Studies: 'autonomous' and 'ideological'. The autonomous model sets out to teach literacy skills as 'a neutral technology that can be detached from specific social contexts' (Street 1984). Literacy is therefore established by society as a set of skills that is the same for all and right for all. It is highly valued and usually linked to learning in that these skills are needed to learn in other subjects and to get on in life generally. Teachers or curriculum designers decide what these skills are. In an autonomous model, literacy is key to cognitive development and all that that brings e.g. economic success, professional fulfilment, objectivity, empathy, critical understanding and so on. Street suggests that this is the model adopted by educators thus shaping the curriculum.

He is critical of this model as it denies the learner has a context. In the ideological model the context individualises the learner - accent, social status, gender, sense of self, ethnicity – and also the political and social structure of the context in which the learning is taking place. He argues that literacy is communication which is dynamic: communicators construct meaning at the point of utterance depending on many features of the moment e.g. the speakers accent, his/her social status, where the conversation is taking place and so on. A similar process takes place when the communication is written rather than spoken: the presentation of the text, its location, how it was given to the student, use of graphics, etc. All these features are influential in both the production and reception of the text.

The ability to engage in this process as speaker, listener, reader and writer is what makes us literate. An example of how this may inhibit learning is if a non-standard English speaking learner is told how to construct meaning using standard English, s/he is not actively involved in the process. S/he is arriving at understanding by using the literacy practices prescribed, rather than by any that could be said to belong to him/her.

However, this model is not without its critics. Colin MacCabe took issue with Brian Street's views on literacy in an exchange of opinion in the journal *English in Education*. Street's chapter 'The implications of the 'New Literacy Studies' for literacy education' from *Language, Literacy and Education* (ed. Goodman) appears as an article in the journal. MacCabe responds to the article in the following edition of the journal and Street replies to this in the subsequent edition of the journal. In this exchange of views, we see a scrutiny of the concept of schools as purveyors of value systems examined. For MacCabe it is a given that there is an inherent value system in educational contexts. It is also inevitable that this value system is prioritised by the teacher when planning and responding to the students' work. Whereas Street would say that this prioritisation excludes or even oppresses the student, MacCabe sees it as a fact of life, not a threat.

> While these values must be responsive to the values of others, it can make no sense for them to be considered as of no greater worth because at that point there would simply be no purpose or point to a school at all.

(MacCabe 1998)

MacCabe, then, is not only *allowing* for the inevitability of a privileging of a value system but saying it is *what makes the system work*. He suggests in this article that the teacher's job is to represent 'the values that are the very purpose of school'. Street challenges this by asking us to consider not *what* the values are but *whose* they are. Where do they come from? What is the impact on learning if these values go unchecked? The implication here is that establishing a set of technical skills in the name of literacy can alienate students: 'the teacher is failing to use the learning base with which his/her pupils arrive'.

His concerns centre around the belief that young people can and should be encouraged to challenge the ideology of the school and its policies and practices. There is in this an assertion that good literacy education sets students up to 'develop critical and sceptical habits of mind'. For me it is at this point that I find I cannot hold to Street's vision. 'Critical' and 'sceptical' are very different. The first prompts discovery, the second prompts cynicism.

Without being reductive, it seems that this is the point of departure from the theoretical to the practical. Street proposes a way of working with young people that seems to deny the reality of education in a city high school such as the one in which this research was conducted. Encouraging critical thinking in such an environment is a good thing and, as my review of government mandate shows, there is evidence that Whitehall agrees. For example, the most recent revision of the National Curriculum moves secondary subject teachers away from the privileging of content towards competencies, Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (so called PLTS). It remains to be seen what kind of impact these PLTS have on teaching and learning, but it is worth noting their existence. It may reflect an institutional acceptance of Street's belief in the importance of a student-centred curriculum that encourages student voice. However, if I have learned anything in this review of the literature on literacy and the government policies that have shaped it, it is that literacy initiatives since *Bullock* have not delivered on the call to create a *Language for Life*. It seems that the underlying issue for schools is the tension that has been created by the introduction of high-stakes testing: the question is how to align this with a pedagogy that allows for and encourages the development of literacy. The theoretical positioning on the different aspects of literacy (reading, writing, speaking and listening) are similar so this section has considered them globally as 'literacy'. The following section considers the theory of writing as a distinct feature of literacy.

3.5 WRITING

In 1977, Jeanette Williams asked the question, *Learning to Write or Writing to Learn?* In this section of the literature review, I suggest that this question is both an essential question to pose in my research on writing across the curriculum at KS3 and also, perhaps most interestingly, at the time of writing, 35 years since Williams first asked it, it is a difficult question to answer.

Williams' question captures some of the debate about literacy generally discussed in the previous section: is writing a set of skills with agreed parameters that can be taught, or is it a tool for learning? This echoes Street's belief that literacy has the potential to be liberatory and socially transformative (*writing to learn*) but is usually considered by policy-makers to be a set of autonomous skills (*learning to write*).

In her book, Williams echoes the challenge set out in Chapter 1 of *The Bullock Report* that schools should develop policy to promote 'Language Across the Curriculum'. She sets the context for this by charting the development of thought on writing and learning from the work of a variety of educators and policy makers in the 1960s such as The Schools Council and the Writing Research Project up to the Bullock Report and the Schools Council project 'Writing Across the Curriculum'.

Her point is that there was much interest in the development of writing skills before the Bullock Report was published. But what Bullock did was to establish the importance of writing as a cross-curricular feature of school life for 11-18 year-olds *because* of its role in learning.

> Although *The Bullock Report* is mainly about reading it was Chapter 11
> ('Language across the Curriculum) which caught the popular imagination, possibly because it fitted current ideas about curriculum integration and 'the   unity of all knowledge' (Williams, 1977: 11)

She explores this idea of a 'unity of knowledge' as part of her critique of the School Council's 'Writing Across the Curriculum'. It includes a summary of the then current understanding of how children learn and the role of language in their learning. She cites the theories of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotski as significant in shaping this understanding: that as a child's mental structures develop, so too do his/her language functions. Language is therefore seen as a key aspect of learning. And the production of language in writing and speaking is central to a young person's academic growth. This is considered in more detail below.

Williams' book was published two years after Bullock. As previously discussed, the Bullock Report entered the mainstream understanding of the role of language and literacy across the curriculum and Williams' book reflects this. She suggests that forces were gathering behind the belief that language can and should be seen as fundamental to learning.

These concepts were explored further by educational theorists of the period (for example Emig: 1971, Halliday: 1978, Flower and Hayes: 1981, Bruner: 1983) who considered the role played by cognitive process in composing texts. They drew upon the work of Piaget and Vygotsky which established the importance of language as an essential factor in learning and cognition. These ideas were being developed mainly in the United States and initially focussed on higher education.

By the early 1980s there was widespread support amongst educational theorists that writing was central to the learning process (see Humes 1983). Applebee summarized the key features of the research as follows:

1. Writing involved a variety of recursively operating subprocesses (e.g. planning, monitoring, drafting, revising, editing) rather than a linear sequence;
2. Writers differ in their uses of the processes;
3. The processes vary depending on the nature of the writing task.

(Applebee, 1984: 582)

At about the same time, a number of writers published works that explored the process of writing (for example, Britton: 1975, Graves: 1975, Parker: 1993,). These writers coined the term *writing process* to describe the experience of writing. In doing so, they established a way of developing written texts using prewriting tasks including talk as a key part of preparation for writing, and multi-drafting. This approach to writing was considered not only effective, but most importantly, could be taught and modelled for emerging writers. These same theorists who promoted such a pedagogy, were advocates of Bullock and joined the cry for language, in this case writing, to be seen as a cross-curricular feature of learning. The importance of writing to learn can be characterised in this statement from Mayer, Lester and Pradl's book *Learning to Write/Writing to Learn*:

'…the writer makes previously unrealised meanings at the precise moment

words are being written on paper' (Mayer, Lester and Pradl: 1983 p. 5)

This captures the importance of writing as a learning tool. The process of producing text, working on an original (not copied) piece of writing, plays a significant part in learning.

> Writing to learn depends upon an active rather than a passive approach to learning. It requires that we conceive of both learning and writing as meaning-making processes that involve the learner in actively building connections between what she's learning and what is already known. Research on the composing process has shown that writing is not a simple process of transcribing a predetermined text, but a complex process of discovery
>
> (Mayer, Lester and Pradl: 1983 p.78)

Robert Parker (1993) explores the importance of writing in the learning process in his book *The Craft of Writing.* He referred to language generally and writing specifically as being 'the main instruments of learning'. He creates a clear picture of writing as a learning medium but adds that when it is used more widely as a pedagogical tool it not only shapes understanding but also the writer is given opportunities to improve his/her writing.

In the article "Why write? A reconsideration" (1984) Young and Sullivan argue that we write because it enables us to think in ways that are not otherwise possible, given our cognitive capacity. Writing allows us to work with "more units of information than our short-term memories can reasonably accommodate" (155). If we do not write, according to Young and Sullivan, 'there are mental acts we cannot perform, thoughts we cannot think, inquiries we cannot engage in'(158).

The case for writing as a learning medium is easy to make given the critical theory since the 1970s. This theory, though, is not without its critics. In 1999 Klein published an extensive review of the research to date on writing-to-learn and found generally speaking, despite the plausibility of the assertions that researchers made, 'they lack the control groups and pre- and post-writing measures of students' knowledge that would allow them to demonstrate rigorously the effects of writing' (Klein 1999: 2). Even given his conclusion that there was no

definitive study that could "prove" the efficacy of writing-to-learn, Klein took up the challenge of showing that there was mileage in exploring the issue further. He posited the theory that the previous research studies were methodologically flawed: they had largely used a presence/absence model to show that students had improved learning as a result of some writing tasks. The results apparently were mixed with most studies showing both positive and negative results. This, claimed Klein, was the wrong inquiry. Instead of attempting to show that learning had taken place as a result of writing tasks, he suggested that the focus should be 'on the cognitive processes through which writing-to-learn operates' (4). So, when writing *can* be seen to enhance learning, what is going on? His paper presents a comprehensive study of the approaches to writing-to-learn in terms of what they add to understanding of the psychology of writing-to-learn.

What seems important to note about Klein's position is the acceptance, indeed the almost slavish attachment to the theory, that writing can enhance learning. His article cites a vast array of research studies, none of which proved that writing improved learning, but he assumed that this was simply because they were asking the wrong question. But his is not really a blind adherence since he saw in another field of understanding, cognitive learning theory, that there were answers to how students learn. How then was this suggestion followed up?

Kieft, Riljaarsdam and Van Den Bergh produced a paper in 2006 that, like Klein, reflects on claims of educators that writing facilitates students' learning alongside what they found to be a dearth of empirical evidence to support this.

> Many educational researchers have tried to find empirical evidence for the claim that writing facilitates learning. However, the results are inconsistent and inconclusive… (Kieft, Riljaarsdam and Van Den Bergh, 2006: p.18)

Here, then, apparently more proof of the lack of hard evidence for the importance of writing-to-learn. And yet, Kieft et al, like Klein, continue to pursue a line of reasoning that has, at its core, the fundamental belief that writing can enhance deeper learning.

The authors suggest that one of the reasons for the lack of conclusive evidence is that the studies have not taken account of the different writing strategies used by students. Their paper describes a study of high school students learning to respond to literature. The authors were looking at different writing strategies as being key to developing more meaningful responses from the students. The purpose of the study was to 'to test whether it is effective to adapt writing-to-learn tasks to both a revising and a planning writing strategy of high school students when teaching literature' (21)

Again I find a paper, written by academics with some international standing, in a peer-reviewed publication (which should suggest a high level of legitimacy), identifying a lack of empirical evidence to support writing-to-learn but apparently maintaining a belief that it exists. As a student within a doctoral programme, I have been taught to substantiate my assertions using either my own empirical data or those of others. Here it seems that educational theorists do not adhere to this doctrine when exploring the issue of the links between writing and learning. In the face of a lack of hard evidence, there is still an apparent belief that writing plays a significant role in learning. It seems to be a powerful theory.

So, to return to the chronology that has led to this point: after an intense interest in the power of writing as a learning medium immediately post-Bullock, amongst educational theorists, there followed a good deal of work that explored this phenomenon.

The movement known as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) had significant effect on the pedagogy of writing in both the United States and the UK. Its main feature was to consider writing as both a learning medium and a vehicle for student voice and empowerment in the Freirian school, rather than a set of technical skills learned in isolation. The movement began in the UK around the same time as the publication of the Bullock Report (DES:1975) and was led by James Britton who had played a role in the research that informed the Bullock Report. Britton's main contribution was his work with colleagues at the London School of Education from 1966–1976 which produced *The Development of Writing Abilities: 11-18* (Britton: 1975a). Britton and his co-authors suggest that writing should be seen as a dynamic form of communication with written texts having specific features depending on the purpose and

audience of the task. Teachers were prompted to encourage young writers to use expressive language and consider the essential role that audience plays in writing.

This is a feature that has become embedded in writing pedagogy in the English teaching curriculum via the National Literacy Strategy: central to the prescribed methodologies in the NLS is the concept that there are different types of writing which demand different approaches to language and layout. It is the purpose and audience for the written tasks that will dictate the language and layout. Students will be taught this in KS1,2 and 3. Significant to this thesis, however, is the distinction that at KS3 it is only the English teacher who is required by the NLS to teach writing in this way, whereas in KS1 and 2 the NLS stipulates that the primary classroom teacher use writing instruction to support learning across the curriculum as part of the integrated curriculum in primary education via The Literacy Hour and themed topic work. What impact would the NLS have made if this kind of feature of writing had been established as part of subjects other than English? Locating it firmly in the English department at KS3 reinforces the belief that the construction of written texts is not something explicitly taught across the curriculum: only in English lessons. This is explored in the interviews with students and teachers in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Along with Britton's theories of writing as part of learning across the curriculum is the work of the Genre Theorists (Halliday: 1975, Martin and Rothery: 1986, Martin: 1992, Kress: 1993). This movement began in Australia in the 1980s, emerging from the Sydney School and its work with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. Halliday's work on language and communication (1975) established an understanding that the production of language, in writing and speaking, was governed by choices available to the speaker/writer. Theorists began to use genre as a way in which the social, functional and pragmatic features of language production could be viewed. Work had been done previously in establishing the importance of genre in received texts (Miller: 1984, Bakhtin: 1986,) which informed theories exploring reading and literary criticism. The Sydney School theorists brought these theories to the study of writing and the production of texts, which established the social nature of writing. Writing, like literature, was seen as having generic features that served particular functions and were governed by the situation in which the writing was being done. Give students the means to make informed choices about their written products and you open them

up to the world of meaningful communication that will, according to genre theory, mimic the discourses beyond the classroom walls. Genre theory suggests that to deny students a chance to experience these discourses disadvantages them. Learning the discourses of one's community is a fundamental part of learning its culture and its meanings.

Language, in Halliday's view, was 'learning how to mean': a child develops language so s/he can express needs, feelings and opinions, to form relationships, to learn and gain knowledge about his/her world and explore his/her imagination. This was in stark contrast to the work done by Noam Chomsky (1965) and the school of transformative or generative grammar that believed that the production of language was shaped by an innate potential to manipulate the grammar or building blocks of language to create speech or writing. Chomsky proposed that humans have a Language Acquisition Device (so-called LAD) which enables them to develop language. Though the LAD concept has evolved significantly since its initial introduction, the concept that infants have this innate ability to generate language remains at the heart of this school of linguistics. What Halliday took issue with was the belief that, according to Chomsky, an infant's development of language was not dependent on exposure to language. Chomsky proposed that exposure to language merely triggered the infant's innate capacity to create language. Halliday countered that it is the social, contextual exposure to language that prompts a child to develop an understanding of and ability to create and manipulate language. For Chomsky, children 'acquire' language: for Halliday children actively create 'meaning potential from their exposure to language'.

> …if we say that linguistic structure "reflects" social structure, we are really assigning to language a role that is too passive ... Rather we should say that linguistic structure is the realization of social structure, actively symbolizing it in a process of mutual creativity. Because it stands as a metaphor for society, language has the property of not only transmitting the social order but also maintaining and potentially modifying it.
>
> (Halliday 1978: 37)

This is significant to the review of the influences on writing pedagogy because there emerged in Australia in the 1980s a belief that Halliday's concepts of language development were an essential feature of the work of teachers and their student writers. The Genre Theorists introduced the concept that language is used in social contexts to achieve particular goals (e.g.to give information, to express ideas or views). What Halliday refers to as the 'realization of the social structure' is, according to genre theory, a critical feature of writing pedagogy. Children must be given intentional learning opportunities to 'realize' the different types of text types (genres) in order to understand and produce them. Genre theory then considered the different discourses found in society and created a lexicon of text types that teachers could teach, model, deconstruct and construct with their students.

We know this in the UK as the different types of writing mentioned above that are described and prescribed in the National Literacy Strategy and The National Curriculum. They were initially presented as triplets, e.g. Argue/Persuade/Advise, Explore/Imagine/Entertain. This has evolved to simply suggest that there is a range of forms of writing and students should have opportunities to work across this range.

For example, this is taken from the most recent revision of the National Curriculum (DCSF: 2007):

> Pupils should be able to:
>
> - adapt style and language appropriately for a range of forms, purposes and readers
>
> - structure their writing to support the purpose of the task and guide the reader

In order to ensure students are able to meet these requirements, English teachers at KS3 must create opportunities for their students to work with a range of forms, prompting awareness of the purpose of the task its audience.

According to Michael Rosen (2011) this Australian-initiated movement had a major influence on the teaching of writing in the UK.

> The result was that Genre Theory got mapped on to the 'matrix' of the National Literacy Strategy. It was a staggering coup. One single theory was used as the main prop and justification for how different ways of writing and speaking would take place in every primary (later, in secondary) schools.
>
> (Rosen: 2011)

Rosen goes on to take issue with the central positioning of Genre Theory in the NLS. His concern is that it takes the form of 'top-down instruction' which places the teacher as gatekeeper controlling access to writing. Students are passive recipients of what the teacher gives them, which, according to Rosen, serves to 'reinforce the system of power and control and domination over the pupil.' (Rosen:2011).

There followed from this critique of Genre Theory an interesting response from Frances Christie who was one of the academics working on the development of Genre Theory at the University of Sydney in the 1980s. Christie addresses Rosen's concerns about the limiting role that the teacher plays in students' writing development.

> … it does not follow that children are necessarily rendered powerless. Indeed, where genres (or indeed anything else) are taught in such a way that the students are not actively engaged and indeed consulted in much that is taught and learned, then that is inappropriate pedagogy, and a problem not in itself to be laid at the door of genres or genre theory.
>
> (Christie: 2011)

Given the powerful evidence presented in this review of literature, I find that Christie's comment above, that any pedagogical approach which does not actively engage the learner is

an inappropriate one, is perhaps the best summary of the review on policy that has shaped writing since Bullock: directing teachers to teach a certain way and putting high stakes tests at the foreground of education may be the source of the 'inappropriate pedagogy' that Christie refers to.

It seems that this research did not produce a definitive answer to the question posed by Williams: Are students learning-to-write or writing-to-learn? And yet, there appears to be a continued support for the use of writing as a learning medium. Are we then at a point in our understanding of this phenomenon that has yet to be fully articulated? Much like the evolution of qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), there has been a 'Golden Age' of work done in the area of writing and learning from the 1970s to the present but we are perhaps now in 'Crisis of Definition' comparable to the 'Crisis of Representation' that Denzin and Lincoln identify in our understanding of qualitative research. We know a great deal about writing, and likewise we can agree on issues to do with learning but we are not yet able to define how writing plays a role in learning, though there seems to be firm support from the critical theorists that is does play a key role.

I use as support for this position a recent article in the University of London's Institute of Education magazine IOElife by Roger Beard, Professor of Primary Education. In this article Beard makes a strong case for further research to be undertaken to better understand writing:

> Writing, the aspect of literacy education that has been least responsive to government reforms, is the focus of substantial international debate. Approaches to teaching writing have been slower to change than those to teaching reading and, according to national test data, pupil attainment in writing has not increased as much as achievement in reading.
>
> (Beard, 2008: 22)

Beard goes on to argue that this lack of writing development is a problem for students in that it prevents access to the wider curriculum. A view widely shared (see Quigley: 1992 and

1997, Evans, G., & Poole, M.:1991, Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P R.:2003, Maruyama, G., Rubin, R. A., & Kingsberry, G. G.:1981, Rosenberg, M: 1965). Beard's work has shown that there has been little improvement in writing as compared to reading, despite the attentions of government policy. He believes that 'writing is an under-researched topic compared to the attention that reading has received'.

> Despite attempts by educators and government agencies, primary school pupils' progress in writing lags behind that of reading and many children fail to achieve standards of writing to support their personal and academic needs at secondary school and beyond.
>
> (Fisher 2012: 2)

Though writing may be under-researched in terms of its place in contemporary western pedagogy, these is a good deal of research that suggests that it is an essential feature of learning.

3.6 SUMMARY

The key findings that have emerged during the course of the preparation of this review of literature are that government policy has promoted literacy/writing across the curriculum but, as is suggested by Roger Beard above, in practice there has been poor implementation. This is corroborated by the students interviewed for this research, all of whom felt that writing was not a cross-curricular issue (see Chapter Four). There is an undeniable school of thought that supports the theory of writing as a leaning medium but little clear practice to show that this is either happening in schools or when researchers attempt to set up control studies to explore it, that it is working to enhance learning. Given this Crisis of Definition and lack of clarity, it is perhaps understandable that the development of writing has stalled. This is further explored in the final chapter as it is applied to the data that I found when exploring this issues with students and teachers in my school in the following chapters

In terms of understanding the theory of literacy, there is much that appeals to me in Street's ideological model. The value that it puts on the individual learner and the importance of hearing what s/he has to say in his/her own words aligns with my views on education. My educational position is also aligned with the theories of Freire: the difficulty is in applying them in the world of state education today in a time characterised by high-stakes testing and league tables. At the time of writing we are in an age of accountability, kick-started by Jim Callahan's speech in 1976 when he make teaching and pedagogy the subject of national policy. This difficulty is acknowledged by Schultz in his foreword to Street's *Literacies Across Educational Contexts*:

> At the same time that youth are exploring and learning from new technologies in their lives outside of schools, national legislation has been passed to regulate teaching in the United States, Great Britain and elsewhere. As a result, while possibilities for learning are rapidly expanding outside of school, mandated curricula inside of classrooms are becoming increasingly restrictive (Schultz, K in Foreword to Street, B. *Literacies Across Educational Contexts,* 2005)

This sense of restriction shapes day-to-day decision-making and is often in direct contrast to the philosophy of the New Literacy

As a result of this, I realised that if I was to get anything useable out of my research I would have to make my approach practical. Hence my vision of Pragmatic Critical Pedagogy. This is the adaptation of the theories of radical educators like Freire to a workable approach to developing literacy policy for my school. At heart is the acceptance, like MacCabe, that there are areas of our decision-making in schools that are not within the control of teachers, most importantly the preparation of our students for national exams. But that preparation can take many different forms. This then seems to be the pragmatic approach. This is explored further in the Conclusion to the thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

What do the students say about writing?

4.1 INTRODUCTION

My goal was to find out from students what they thought and felt about the writing they were doing in different subjects. In line with my investigation into the implementation of The Bullock Report and its mandate to promote literacy across the curriculum at high school, I was interested in how this might seem to the emerging writers I had contact with. My fieldwork with students took place in three distinct phases, partly due to a change in my circumstances, but largely due to my own developing understanding of issues that arise when interviewing young people.

4.2 PHASE I

The first phase of my work with young people was a pilot study. The purpose of this research was to look at the different kinds of writing done in different subjects – this is referred to in Chapter One. I collected and photocopied all the work done by three Y8 students over a period of two weeks: two boys (Student A and B) and one girl (Student C). My hope was that I would review the writing and establish the different modes in which they were being asked to write. I would then discuss this work with the students, establishing how they felt about the process of producing the different types of writing. My intention was to explore the development of understanding regarding genre theory in writing: this is the classification of writing into genres that can be identified in terms of the purpose and audience for the writing. The National Literacy Strategy and *The Framework for English* have been developed along the lines that students need experience in a variety of different types of writing, specifically highlighting the differences in purpose and audience for the different genres and also with a strong emphasis on grammar (see Chapter One). Much of the curriculum development in literacy across all three Key Stages has prioritised the teaching of different genres in reading and writing and also the language of grammar, focussing on word, sentence and text level language features. My hypothesis was that students would be asked to write in different genres across the curriculum and also that they would have an awareness of grammar, being at least aware of the terms used to describe different features of writing.

I was therefore preparing to conduct an analysis of student writing using the classification of writing established by James Britton et al in *The Development of Writing Abilities (1975).* Britton used three classifications of writing to describe the range expected in a student's experience: *expressive, transactional* and *poetic*. The National Literacy Strategy imposed a teaching methodology for English teachers that uses different text types (see discussion about Genre Theory in previous chapter). Though the titles of these differentiated texts in the NLS are not the same as Britton's classifications, the theory behind distinguishing text types for student writers can be tracked back to the work he was doing 10 years before the NLS was devised, and, indeed, can be found in The Bullock Report. This has been more fully explored in Chapter Three. I pause to explain it here to provide the rationale behind my use of these classifications in my initial audit of writing across the curriculum. I chose to use Britton's classification rather than that of the NLS because it is simpler. My aim was to get a general sense of what writing experiences were like for a sample of KS3 students. This information would form not only the basis of continued research into writing across the curriculum but also provide detailed information about the writing process as it is taught and how it is learnt. It is the latter features that were of significant interest for me in the development of whole-school literacy policies regarding writing.

The research did not go as planned. As described in the Chapter One, I did not find what I expected when I looked at the students' work. Whereas I had anticipated seeing a variety of writing genres, e.g. transactional and expressive, what I actually found was that much of what students were writing in this sample was copied, on average 65%. I had thought subjects in which students were presented with factual information such as humanities and science would use transactional writing to demonstrate the learning of the information and perhaps also expressive writing in which students explored the information and developed opinions and arguments featuring the information they had learned. From there I planned to explore the links that students were making between what they were learning about how to approach these different writing genres in English and the transference of these skills when asked to write in these genres in other subjects. Given the assumption that writing can be taught (Parker: 1993), and should be taught across the curriculum (Bullock: 1975, DfES: 2002), I was looking to see where opportunities for the development of writing were and how we could best capitalise on these opportunities for our youngsters. I recalled the impression that Robbie the Scot made on me when he talked about his feelings of pointlessness and worse,

paralysis, when it came to being a writer. I intended to explore the context for learning that might have created this sense of failure in Robbie.

As described in Chapter One, I was uncertain how to continue as my planned research was an exploration of the current state of writing across the curriculum in light of 30 years of policy since Bullock. It was designed to explore how writing was being used as a learning medium and also how it was being taught outside of the English classroom. If I considered this sample of students' writing to be the 'purposive case' (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander 1990: 10) that I assumed it to be, I had stumbled upon information that I was not expecting that suggested that students were certainly writing a lot of words but not much that could be said to be real writing: not much that could constitute the development of writing skills across the different genres, which was what I had expected to find.

In order to explore this situation further I got the three students together to discuss their writing. This was originally intended to be a forum looking at the links between writing skills taught in English and applied in other subjects. But given the fact that I had found their work across the curriculum to be largely copied, I had to rethink my approach. Though I did ask the students to talk about writing generally, the main purpose of my discussion was to establish how typical this collection of writing was. I wondered if perhaps there had been some feature of the timetable and lesson planning over the two week period which meant that there was more copying than usual.

This discussion forum took place during an afternoon period. The students were delighted to be taken out of their normal lesson and came into the room enthusiastically. I didn't teach any of them so they knew me only as another teacher at the school. They already knew the purpose of my research as I had spoken to them about it some weeks before and written home to get permission from their parents for their participation. I wanted to establish a pleasant environment so had chairs arranged around a central table with a large bag of sweets in the middle of the table. They knew that I had been collecting their work over the previous two weeks. I explained that I was going to record the conversation using a small voice recorder but encouraged them to ignore this as much as possible.

I handed them copies of their collection of work and asked them to look it over to remind themselves of what they had done. They did so with an initial show of interest. Their comments were not fully audible as they flicked through their work.

I asked all three of them to look through their work and find pieces that they had enjoyed doing. They were very quiet as they went through their work. They made semi-audible comments about superficial features of writing like handwriting and spelling. They appeared not to be finding things that they wanted to talk about. I asked them if this was the kind of work they usually did in classes. They all said yes to this. I pointed out that a lot of it was copied, not their own original work. Was this normal? Again, they all said yes though I sensed that they were confused by the question.

STUDENT A   *Original? Do you mean like poetry or stories?*

DPH   *Yes, that sort of thing*

STUDENT A   *We do that in English.*

DPH   *And what about when you're asked to write your own opinion about something you've learned? Do you do that in some lessons?*

STUDENT A   *Yeah…I've done that in history. Like we sometimes have to say which of the sources is the best, don't we?*

STUDENT B   *Oh yeah, I've done that*

STUDENT C   *Yeah, we did that with those letters from The First World War. We had to say what life was like in the trenches for the soldiers*

DPH   *So that was you giving your own opinion. Do you do that in other subjects?*

All three paused to consider this and said no, they didn't think so.

I was sensing their discomfort with this process. I realised too late that they were feeling that they were giving the "wrong" answers. I was looking for something that wasn't there i.e. original writing and they felt responsible for the fact that most of their work was copied. I changed the subject to plans for an upcoming drama festival to relieve this tension. I drew the forum to a close since I felt I had got much to consider before continuing. I had established that the students felt that the collection of writing reflected what they considered normal. I

had also discovered that it is hard for them to talk about writing features beyond the superficial, e.g. handwriting and spelling. Given the priority given to the inclusion of the language of grammar, sentence and text structure in the NLS, I was struck by how little the students seemed to know or understand about these features when reviewing their writing. And most importantly, I realised the difficulties in interviewing young people.

I found myself faced with three issues that prevented me from taking the next step:

- My hypothesis was wrong – I didn't find a variety of writing genres in students' work across the curriculum;

- There were significant implications for me regarding the practice of my colleagues who were working with the National Literacy Strategy – and had been for more than two years at this point – but were apparently not implementing it;

- I had false assumptions about the nature of interviewing students.

This sent me back to the drawing board in terms of research design. I returned to the literature to develop a better understanding of my situation and consider my alternatives. Firstly, that my hypothesis was wrong was a common feature of research, as the term means a provisional idea that must be tested. When a test proves the hypothesis wrong, another hypothesis can be developed, presumably more informed than the first. This is clearly stated in Lewin's original work on action research (1946) and developed by later theorists such as Kemmis (1980). A development of the original hypothesis in this instance meant asking questions of those who design and implement the teaching programme i.e. teachers. If there was little evidence of writing opportunities across the curriculum, I had to first examine why I expected there would be, and secondly, if there was a theoretical case for expecting writing development to be part of the non-English teaching at KS3, why wasn't it there?

This created a dilemma for me as it felt as though I would be holding my colleagues to account. This is the situation that Elliott refers to in his chapter 'The dilemmas and temptations of the reflective practitioner' (1996: 57-68). As an insider-researcher I have wide access to what goes on in the school. It is likely to create tension as it's inevitable that I will come across features of practice, mine or a colleague's, that are unexpected and may appear unprofessional when viewed from an outsider perspective:

> The dilemma here for the teacher researcher arises from a conflict between the value
>
> of critical openness …and respect for the professional expertise of colleagues
>
> (Elliott 1996: 59)

My approach to this dilemma is explored in the next chapter in which I conduct interviews with teachers who were able and willing to discuss this issue. At this point, it seemed best to pursue a different course with the students and assume that a new line of questioning with the teachers would develop an understanding of the first of my issues listed above, i.e. the hypothesis.

But this left me with a further dilemma: how was I to continue with my attempt to explore the lived experience of emerging writers now that I had discovered that they didn't get much chance to write? It seemed like a really easy conclusion to leap to: Robbie the Scot and his peers were not developing writing skills because they weren't being asked to write. What now?

Again, a return to the literature provided direction. Clough and Nutbrown (2002) propose an approach they refer to as *radical looking*

> …*radical looking* means more than using observations to generate data for a
>
> research study…It holds within it the important dimension of looking *for* as
>
> well as looking *at*, the act of seeking *meanings* as well as *evidence*. (53)

If I was to coordinate the development of literacy policy within my school, I felt I had to consider the meaning of what I had found. That there was a paucity of opportunity for young writers to develop may have been what appeared as data, but what does that mean for our young writers? Clough and Nutbrown prompt researchers to look 'through data to see the truths they hold'. As stated above, there was clearly a need to address this issue with those who made decisions about writing in the classroom, i.e. the teachers, but there was then a gap in my research: the voice of students. Asking them to talk about writing in different subjects was apparently a dead end. Except that they all agreed that they did do some original writing in history. If I wanted to further explore the experience of emerging writers as they encountered learning in a post-NLS classroom it seemed that there was some data to be explored in the teaching of history.

4.3. PHASE II

The next stage of research pointed me towards talking to students about their work in history. As noted previously, I was struck by the discomfort displayed by the three Y8 students whom I had interviewed for the pilot study. I had assumed that since I was an experienced teacher, comfortable talking to teenagers, that they would be comfortable talking to me. This was obviously not the case. There is a body of literature that explores this phenomenon (Briggs: 1986, Holmes: 1998, Basett and Beagan: 2008, Grover: 2004, Kortesluoma et al: 2003, Punch: 2002, Danby et al: 2011, Eder and Fingerson: 2001, Thomas and O'Kane: 2000, James: 1993, Esterberg: 2002). There is broad agreement among these writers that there are significant issue regarding power when a child is talking to an adult.

> …children as participants have few rights accorded to them, and most often consent for their participation is given by adults, such as members of a school board or parents
>
> (Holmes 1998: 24)

Though the children I had invited into the pilot study above had agreed to do it, on reflection, I could guess that they didn't know what they were saying yes to. Students spend much of their time negotiating their position within schools, not least in their relationships with the adults in the building. There is an expectation that teachers command respect from students by nature of their role. Considering the three students I had included in my pilot study, it was easy to see how they could have agreed to participate simply because I was a teacher and they wanted to fit in with their expected role in school which is to go along with their teachers' requests. This would fit with the mood of the discussion when it seems they were eager to please and provide what I was looking for (e.g. original writing), but couldn't, and clammed up, unsure of how to react, what to say and so on.

Esterberg maintains that 'researchers need to address the power relationships that are embedded in research' (2002: 48). Grover suggests a way to mitigate the effects of the power inequity between the adult interviewer and student interviewee is to encourage the youngster to challenge anything s/he may feel is wrong in assumptions held by the adult. This would require the interviewer to make clear that it would be all right to ask questions and not just answer them.

Such a supportive approach in fact enhances the accuracy of the children's reporting in the 7 or older group in that it instils in the child the notion that challenging the (interviewer) may be necessary, as well as the idea that he or she, even though a child, is competent to do so.

(Grover 2004: 9)

With this in mind, I began to set up the next round of student interviews. My plan was to focus on the subject area in which the students said they did original writing, history, and explore those writing experiences from their point of view. I wasn't able to use the same students, as I had changed school. A brief round of informal conversations with students in my new school confirmed that the experience in history was similar to that of my previous school, i.e. that they felt they did original writing in history, so I began selecting students to talk to about their writing in history. I was guided in my selection by the issue of access: I needed to have easy access to the students and their work. I found that there was one history teacher with whom I had a relationship who was happy to have me scrutinise the work of students in her class. I asked her to select students so I had a representative sample of ability and from that list select students who she thought would be comfortable talking to me. I met with 6 of these students together to introduce the research task. In doing so I was careful to stress that they shouldn't feel obliged to do this and also that I was ignorant about what they did in history so I was expecting them to put me straight if I got something wrong or misunderstood something. My aim was to establish a climate of open questioning from the start to promote the students' sense of competence as interviewees in line with Grover's suggestions above. I was encouraging them to challenge my assumptions and feel free to speak honestly and candidly about their experiences as writers. I was conscious that my previous discussion with students had been shaped by the power dynamics of teacher/student interaction.

All six were enthusiastic about taking part but due to time constraints I focussed on three whom I could easily make plans to meet: two girls (Students D and E) and one boy (Student F).

The work I collected compromised two distinct units:

UNIT 1 Elvis Presley: A consideration of different types of evidence about Elvis e.g. artefacts, first hand accounts, transcripts, newspaper articles.

UNIT 2 The Tudors: Facts about the life and times of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

Each unit had a large amount of original writing, much of it transactional and some expressive.

I arranged to meet with the three students as a group twice: the first meeting was designed to create a sense of comfort and openness in the interview setting. It would also allow me to consider what questions to ask, based on their initial engagement with the process of reviewing their work.

I got the three students together and gave them their collections of work. I invited them to look the work over with no specific instruction. This was work that had been done over the previous few weeks; some of it was three months old. During this first meeting, I encouraged them to take their time looking at the work, reminding themselves of what they had done and to make any comments they wanted to make. I stayed quiet, making the occasional prompt. This gave me an opportunity to observe the students interacting with their work spontaneously without any direction from me.

Their comments were initially focussed on the superficial features of the writing i.e. the handwriting, layout, general neatness of the piece and visual impression it made. There were no comments about word choice, sentence structure or text organisation e.g. use of paragraphs. All of these features have been taught extensively through the Literacy Hour and throughout the KS3 English programme. As with the students interviewed for Phase I above, these phrases never came up.

Since they were in the same class, they had the same pieces. Student E asked if the others remembered doing a piece of work on the Tudors – she couldn't remember doing it. The

students chatted about this, recalling that there were things in the packet that appeared *random*. I asked them what they meant by this.

> STUDENT E   *I don't remember doing it and it sort of doesn't fit*

> STUDENT F   *Yeah. Sometimes we do things that don't fit with what we've been doing. I think [the teacher]makes it up*

> DPH   *Is that OK with you?*

> STUDENT E   *Oh yeah. I don't mind doing these things – like this diagram of my bedroom – what was that for? But it was fun to do.*

> STUDENT F   *I didn't like it. Pointless. And this timeline. Didn't like doing that.*

> STUDENT D   *I hate doing timelines…boring*

> *(They all review the tasks mentioned, the diagram and the timeline and make various semi-audible comments about the tasks.)*

I allowed them to continue in this way, flicking through their work and making occasional comments to each other. The comments were about the way the piece looked. There were no more references to the content of the writing.

From this initial meeting I developed the following themes to follow up:

- How important are the superficial features (handwriting and spelling) to them?

- How important do they think these features are to teachers?

- Which tasks did they enjoy? Why?

- Which tasks didn't they enjoy (or find *boring*)? Why?

- What had the teacher done to inspire or hinder them as writers?

The next meeting took place at the same time a week later. The students arrived as planned and took their collections of work with some degree of enthusiasm. I was concerned that they were not interested in their writing enough to make the review I had planned seem worthwhile. I was pleased to see that they seemed positively disposed to their work.

I asked them to talk about the importance of handwriting

STUDENT F   It's really important 'cos if they can't read what you've written, there's
no point in writing it.

(Both the girls agreed. All three students made comments about their own
handwriting, all of them negative.)

STUDENT D   Like look at this? (She holds up her work) That's horrible.

Not neat. I had to write that in a rush. I can't believe how crap that
looks

DPH   It may not be very neat but I can read it. Can't you?

STUDENT D   I s'pose so. But that's embarrassing.

I was struck by Student D's strong feelings: she is a confident, bubbly girl who declared herself to be *embarrassed* by the way her work looked. This was surprising as she didn't present herself as someone who is easily embarrassed, and the work she was referring to was legible if perhaps a little scruffy. I was reminded of Robbie the Scot and his feelings of how bad a writer he was. Though he hadn't used the term *embarrassment,* he expressed similarly negative feelings about his writing. The conversation continued with all three students critiquing their handwriting.

I asked them how important they thought handwriting was for the teachers. They all answered immediately that it was very important. I asked them how they knew this. Did the teachers make comments about their handwriting? They were less sure of this. I pointed to the piece of work that Student D had held up and asked her if the teacher had said something about the handwriting on that piece.

> STUDENT D   *No, but it's still crap*

> DPH   *But actually you got a positive comment at the end from the teacher. She hasn't said anything about the handwriting.*

> STUDENT D   *Oh yeah. But it could have been better*

I could not be sure from their comments how they got the impression that handwriting mattered to teachers. It was clear to me that we were not simply talking about legibility: their work was all legible. And there were no comments from the teacher about their handwriting on any tasks. It appeared that the students have a perception that handwriting is important to teachers, but it's not born out in the comments the teachers make on their work, nor can the students recall teachers making verbal comments. There was no doubt however that they all felt that handwriting was very important. However, even with prompting, the students were not able to consider their work in terms of its structure and the choices they made as writers about vocabulary, sentence structure and text organisation.

I next asked them to consider which of the tasks they enjoyed doing.

        STUDENT E   I liked doing this piece on Elvis

        (refers to essay: What can we learn about Elvis from the evidence?)

        STUDENT E   Yeah. I got a Level 5 for that – and two community points. That was
                     good.

        STUDENT D   Oh god, I got Level 3 for that. Rubbish.

        STUDENT F   I got a Level 5 too. And three community points. Yeah. I
               enjoyed doing that too.

        DPH   What did you like about it?

        STUDENT F   I liked that I could write what I thought. I had a free hand. I felt like I
               was being asked what my opinion was. I liked that. Most of the time, it
               feels like all they want us to do is write what the right answer is. In this
               piece she said there wasn't a right answer – do you remember that?

        STUDENT E   Yes, she did say that. She told us we had to decide ourselves
               what the sources told us about Elvis and then decide which
               were the most useful. Is that right? I can't remember now.

        STUDENT F   Yes, that's what she said.

They continued to talk about this task as something that was enjoyable and *easy*. At one point Student F pointed out to Student D that perhaps she hadn't completed the work which would explain why she got a lower grade. They discussed this together for a few moments, agreeing that Student D had been absent, so hadn't done all the work. It was interesting to note that Students E and F who had both felt like they'd done well and enjoyed it, were sure that Student D's poor grade was not because she wasn't able to have done better. They seemed intent on proving that her apparent poor achievement could only be attributed to her absence, not to the challenge of the task, or her ability to succeed at it. For them apparently the task was accessible to her and she could have done as well as they had if she'd been there.

I asked them to talk about writing tasks that they didn't like

STUDENT F   I hate it when we have to basically fill in the gaps

(Refers to a worksheet: The causes of Henry VIII's break from Rome. There are four boxes to write in: Love, Money, Faith and Power. At the bottom of the sheet is a list of 'Key words and Phrases')

STUDENT D   I didn't do that (worksheet), but I know what you mean. Like this one (refers to worksheet: Historical interpretations of Elizabeth I from film Elizabeth.). This was really boring. I liked watching the film but I didn't really understand what this work was. I didn't write much, did I?

STUDENT F   This is what I said earlier, isn't it? You have to come up with the right answer

DPH   So do you feel that when there are gaps to fill or boxes to write in, that the teacher is expecting particular answers?

STUDENT F   Yes. Yes. As long as you know what it is, you're all right. But it's still boring

DPH   But the essays that ask your opinion aren't boring?

All three students voice agreement

This response to essay writing surprised me. My experience of teaching English is that there is a calming effect on the class if you give them the kind of task that these students seemed to dislike, i.e.worksheets. I find that students will settle to complete them without fuss whereas the more open ended tasks like essays create some tension in the classroom. I said this to my three interviewees. Was I wrong to think that worksheets or gap-fills were easier and built confidence?

STUDENT E   No, they are easier but boring. I look at my work here and I am much more proud of that essay (on Elvis) than the thing on the film of Elizabeth (a worksheet). As long as I get what the teacher wants me to do, I really prefer writing essays. Not everyday, 'cos they're hard work, but like at the end of the unit.

I picked up on her phrase *As long as I get what the teacher wants me to do*. I asked her if this experience was common

STUDENT E   No it's not. I like Mrs X because she does make it clear but like in other subjects we don't get the chance to say what we think.

STUDENT F   yeah we just write what they want us to write…like the right answer. I like the freedom of giving my opinion.

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> *DPH*   *It sounds like there is a perfect recipe for you to enjoy your writing and feel proud of it. Can you tell me the ingredients for this recipe?*

> *STUDENT F*   *Freedom*

> *STUDENT D*   *Yeah, freedom and time to get it right – I am away a lot and can't get it all done unless they give me time*

> *STUDENT E*   *Freedom and being sure you know what it's got to look like*

This was an interesting collection of responses. A picture was emerging of the way teachers can support students to develop confidence as writers: the students wanted real tasks to tackle that asked for their opinion and allowed them to negotiate their way through the knowledge they had of the subject, selecting for themselves the content. They also wanted clarity about what was required of them. But they did not want too much to be done for them. I put this to them to see if my assumption was correct

> *STUDENT E*   *Yeah. I do like to be able to write with some freedom but it can be hard to come up with ideas so I need some structure. I don't like feeling muddled and confused (she looks at a piece of her writing). Like this…I needed more information to do this and it's come out badly*

> *STUDENT F*   *Some structure but not boxes*

> *The other two students express agreement*

This seemed to be a view that they shared. They felt they did their best writing when they had clarity about the task, confidence about the way it should be put together but freedom to make independent choices about content. Echoes here of the work described in Chapter Three at the Freirian programme in New York. The central concept that drove that project was the belief that students needed to be given opportunities to 'read the world' (Freire and Macedo 1987: 35) and find themselves within it. Certainly these students only really felt a sense of engagement with the writing task when they had a sense of freedom. This links also to the position Rosen (2011) takes when he takes issue with the prescriptive nature of the English curriculum, inhibiting student ownership and meaningful engagement with original writing.

This round of interviews gave me an opportunity to address the issues I had encountered in Phase I regarding the students' reticence to speak. I planned to develop a better climate for my young participants. I was concerned that the students I spoke to previously had appeared uncomfortable. These interviews were more successful in terms of the students' participation than my previous round of interviews. They spoke to each other more and this seems key to creating an inclusive atmosphere. When I review the recordings of these conversations I am struck by how little I talk. I am also struck by the fact that there are long periods of silence. I know that during that time, the students were looking at their work and engaged in that task. I remember feeling anxious about those silences and working hard not to fill them with prompts and questions.

I drew from these interviews a clear sense of what supports students as writers in the transactional and expressive modes. It was an emerging understanding of the teaching and learning process that our youngsters experience. Again, as with the students I spoke to during Phase I, I am able to establish that my sampling of students and their work fits the criteria of being 'purposive' as described by Minichiello (1991) in that the students I had selected represented the phenomena I was looking at, i.e. writing experiences in history. I was not attempting to survey the breadth of experiences but rather drill down on a small sample in order to inform the next stages of research. This was a means to an end: I expected that having explored these writing experiences with the students, I would understand this phenomenon better. But I was aware that I would need to look beyond this narrow sample to draw any conclusions about writing across the curriculum.

4.4 PHASE III

The next phase of interviews with students was designed to explore the experience of writing beyond the history classroom. I also wanted to further my understanding of how best to hear the voice of young people in my educational environment. I was confident that the setting of the previous interviews in Phase II had created a space in which the young people could express themselves with more confidence than my initial interviews (see 3.2). The next phase gave me a chance to consider another aspect of interviewing young people in which the youngster could take some control over the interview process. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, the issues around power and control in qualitative research generally, and such research with young people specifically, suggest consideration must be given to the methods used. My reading around the subject had given me the idea that there were ways that the students involved could be less dependent on me to manage the discussion. I was looking for a way to get the students

I wrote ten questions on separate pieces of card. I invited the students to spread them out randomly on the desk and pick whichever they wanted to talk about. The questions were not numbered but I have numbered them here to facilitate an explanation of their selection:

1. What are the features of a good writer?
2. What helps you write?
3. What makes it harder for you to write?
4. In which lessons do you write?
5. In which subjects do you feel more or less confident about your writing?
6. What do you think is the link between writing and learning?
7. What do you remember of the Literacy Hour from primary school?
8. Who owns your writing?
9. If you could have one wish about your writing what would it be?
10. What colour would you use to describe yourself as a writer?

These questions are designed to prompt reflection about the writing process. The method of self-selection was designed to establish a level of control for the students so they could answer the questions they felt most confident about. The questions were also presented as being neutral and I hoped less threatening than if I had asked them in an interview style. Of course, they were still controlled by me as I had written them.

There are three distinct styles of question:

Questions 1-5:

These questions are designed to get the students talking about their feelings about the writing process in different subjects and look again for signs that students are developing an understanding a vocabulary to discuss writing beyond handwriting.

Questions 6 and 7:

These questions are designed to encourage the students to explore what Elliot calls the meta reflections about the learning process (1996). This gives an impression of how aware the students are of the over arching issues that shape their writing experiences. I am particularly interested in this as it gives some insight into how writing is seen as a cross-curricular, transferable skill. When they have had discrete learning experiences as writers (as they do in the English classroom), how have they then applied this learning in their other studies?

Question 8 was an attempt to explore how much investment students had in their writing. None of the students chose to answer it.

Questions 9 and 10:

These questions prompt the students to think abstractly about themselves as writers. I was persuaded of the potential for using metaphor in interviewing as it provided an opportunity for them to describe their feelings about writing experiences using an abstract medium. My aim was to avoid imposing an adult-defined set of words of phrases but rather to allow the students to access a neutral mode of expression that they could make their own. Punch (2002) describes this as attempting 'to strike a balance between not patronising young people and recognising their competency but maintaining their interest and keeping the research familiar and relevant' (10).

I put these questions to four Y9 students. My decision to work with Y9 students rather than Y8 as I had for the previous two rounds of interviews was partly because of convenience – I could easily set up interviews in my free time with this group – and partly because I wanted to be sure to get the most confident, articulate students possible. I also selected them based on their ability – they were all from top sets – for the same reason. I picked four students who knew me and with whom I had an easy and relaxed relationship. As with the previous group, I got them together as a group and told them what I was planning to do, assuring them that this was not an assessment of their writing but rather their views on writing experiences. I encouraged them to decide for themselves if they wanted to participate. They were all keen to do so, but I should point out that one of them asked if it meant they would miss lessons to do it which seemed to tip the balance in favour of participation for all of them.

There were two girls (Students G and H) and two boys (Students J and K)

I interviewed them individually using the randomised placement of questions as described above. They sat at a desk with the questions scattered in front of them. They were free to answer the questions in any order or indeed leave some unanswered.

 All four students picked out Question 1 early in their interviews.

What are the features of a good writer?

It wasn't always the first question but for all four it was the first one that they spoke at length and with some confidence about. And all four assumed that this question referred to the features of writing done in English lessons . I assume that this is because I had taught them all at some point previously so they associated me with the English programme. Both girls spoke about creativity and an awareness of audience. Both boys spoke first about mechanical issues like spelling and both mentioned handwriting. I prompted all four to consider writing across the curriculum and not just in English. Only one of the four had anything to add to this:

> *STUDENT G   I know I'm doing good writing if I can use what I've written*
> *when I need to later on, like when I have to get ready for an*

exam or something. I see that what I've written down is a
record of what I've been taught and I can use it to revise.

     DPH   *Do the teachers help you set it up like this so you know what to*
write and how to write it in a way that makes it useful later?

     STUDENT G *No, actually, I can't think of when they do. I think I just know*
myself. It's experience I suppose.

Even with further prompting all four students' focus was on superficial features of writing like handwriting, spelling and basic punctuation. This has been the case in each of the round of interviews: students prioritise these superficial features of writing. This would seem the case even with students who are confident about their writing, enjoy it and are successful at it.

This focus on superficial skills was reinforced by their responses to Question 9: *If you could have one wish about your writing what would it be?* All four initially stated that their wish would be to be better at some superficial aspect of writing i.e. spelling, handwriting or punctuation. The two girls had a longer wish list and added:

STUDENT G: Clear communication so the reader can understand
STUDENT H: Freedom to write what I want

That they care how their writing looks fits with my experience in the English classroom but the strength of feeling about handwriting or spelling that they expressed surprised me. This is further explored in the final chapter.

All four students had little memory of what they did or what purpose was served by the Literacy Hour (Question 7). I know that they all came from primary schools in which the

Literacy Hour was delivered along the prescribed guidelines of the National Literacy Strategy. This means that everyday they had an hour of instruction on literacy skills, foregrounding the language used to talk about language. Student H remembered that she had done some spelling and punctuation in the Literacy Hour but none of them could recall any details or how what they'd learned was used in writing or reading in other subjects. They saw no connections between what they had done in primary school and what was done when they arrived at secondary school. These four students are top set pupils who are successfully negotiating their way through secondary school: if they are not able to see how the learning of literacy skills can be applied across the curriculum it's likely that this is going to be true of most of our student body. If we are going to enhance the transference of skills across the curriculum we are first going to have to make students aware of their transferability.

As with the previous round of interviews, the issue of freedom came up when answering Questions 1-5 where they are prompted to consider what helps or hinders them as writers.

> STUDENT G: *I like it when I have freedom to write for myself. I prefer prompts from the teacher rather then being told what to write*

> STUDENT H: *I do well when I understand what I'm meant to be doing. Sometimes it's confusing what they want so the writing gets muddled. I get muddled actually. And I have to have a clear structure for the writing, otherwise it gets really muddled.*
>
> *I like it when the teachers give us that structure. Sometimes they show us a model of what a good piece should look like. That's helpful*

> STUDENT J: *It works well for me if the teacher gives me guidelines but then lets me write. Like in some subjects we need the special vocab words and the teacher gives us them but then we use them as we want. That's what happens in science a lot. I do best in science when I get the words I need but I can use them for myself.*

STUDENT K: I probably do my best writing when I'm unrestricted and then free to write what I want.

Another aspect of common agreement for these students was that feedback from teachers helped them as writers, giving them confidence. When I asked them about the subjects that provided this feedback, it was always English and sometimes the occasional other subjects depending on the teacher.

There were a number of similar features in the four interviews. It is these areas of agreement that they come up with spontaneously that provide the most powerful insights for me.

4.5 SUMMARY

Through the process of the three different phases of interviewing I was able to firstly establish a climate in which the youngsters appeared comfortable and engaged in the interview and secondly adapt the questions to provide understanding of key features of being an emerging writer. These features are:

- Students have a frustration with writing experiences that inhibit their freedom to express themselves;
- In order to feel confident to express themselves they need a certain level of support or structure and this differs depending on the subject;
- There is almost a formula for successful teaching when it comes to writing i.e. clear instructions, hands off approach to the production of the piece and then supportive, constructive feedback;
- Students are very concerned with superficial writing features especially handwriting;
- Students have not become fluent in the language of grammar that shaped the development of the National Literacy Strategy (see Chapter Three: Section 3.2);
- Students see little connection between what they are learning about writing in their English classroom and the application of these skills in other subjects.

These ideas are discussed further in the final chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Teachers' Perspective

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter records the process and results of my work with teachers, exploring their thoughts and beliefs about writing in their classrooms. The working hypothesis that launched my inquiry was to consider the path from Bullock to the present, establishing the significant influences on the development of cross-curricular policy in order to better affect its future development. By the time I turned my attention to the views of teachers, much had influenced my thinking on this. Some key themes had emerged from my review of the literature and my initial fieldwork:

- Mismatch between what appeared to be a widespread sense from students that writing was not being developed across the curriculum and information for teachers that said writing skills were important;
- An strong tendency to maintain the status quo of subject divisions such that the adoption of so-called Cross-Curricular skills such as writing was hard to achieve;
- The effect of significant amount of government policy regarding literacy;
- The impression that there has been a decline in the professional autonomy of teachers over the last few decades.

The research process was a messy one. Fitting the field work into the busy week for me and the staff and students who took part was hard. What this meant was the sequence of interviews was not ideal. I also found that there was a time delay between accumulating the data, analysing it and shaping the next steps as a result of what I found. This was particularly true of the understandings I gathered from the teacher questionnaire (see below). It was clear that given the design of the questionnaire, there was a limit to its usefulness, largely because of my decision to make it anonymous. This anonymity, I believe, prompted a greater number of responses and a higher level of honesty regarding respondents' professional practice. It provided some clear pointers for me to develop further lines of questioning with specific subgroups and to set up follow up interviews. Given the teachers' schedules, these interviews

took far longer than I had expected. The time delay meant that some of my respondents were no longer available – they had left the school. Other factors imposed themselves on this process, not least a change of government and subsequent changes in educational policy which meant my interviewees were considering different factors between the initial questionnaire and the follow up interviews.

I have organised the presentation of my findings as follows:

5.2. The Questionnaire

This section presents the findings and analysis of the questionnaire that launched my inquiry with teachers. The questionnaire proved to be an imperfect instrument for measuring anything beyond indicators of how teachers view writing in my school, but it provided key understandings for me to develop in follow up interviews. As Walker notes: 'The intention (of the questionnaire) was not simply to ask questions in order to secure answers for later analysis but rather to set signposts, to indicate a tone, to set a going line of thought and analysis' (Walker1990: 102). The results of the questionnaire provided the 'signposts' that focussed the inquiry in terms of further questions and the group to put those questions to.

5.3 Science Teachers

This section captures in-depth interviews with four science teachers. It is here that I found the clearest articulation of the reality of the forces that shape the decisions of a teacher regarding the use of writing.

5.4 English Teachers

This section explores my conversation with a group of English teachers discussing the issues regarding the promotion of writing across the curriculum. My reason for talking to English teachers was to validate my perception that the writing skills taught in the English classroom are not furthered by non-English teachers when they ask students to write in their subjects. It has been a long-held belief of mine and one that is perhaps one of the key elements in my choice of thesis. To return to the situation of Robbie the Scot in the introduction, it seemed to me that Robbie was being given opportunities to write in many places around the school, but few of his teachers gave him the opportunity to care about his writing and develop a sense of achievement and pride in his written outcomes. As a result, he lost confidence and motivation. Before creating a research programme that explored the reasons for this, I felt it

important to talk to some experienced English teachers to confirm that Robbie's situation was not unique.

5.5 Senior Leaders

It became clear during my review of the literature and the discussions with various teachers that a good deal of pressure was felt by teachers to respond first to exam requirements and only second, if at all, to the guidance of the National Literacy Strategy. According to the documents published by the QCA from 2002 onwards, the year that the NLS was introduced into KS3, there was an implicit focus on language and literacy policies, away from the traditional focus on curriculum content. It is reasonable, given this shift of focus, to assume that by 2009-10 when this study was conducted, this emphasis would be embedded and a literacy skill such as writing might be described as integrated into the different subjects. This was not what I found when talking to students and teachers. Students felt that writing was less important than content in most subjects (see Chapter Four) and teachers felt obliged to prioritise exam syllabuses over literacy skills (as detailed in the rest of this chapter). I was interested in the role played by individual teachers, who appear to have a good deal of agency to shape the learning in their classrooms. If this is so, why is there so little evidence of the implementation of the NLS? In order to explore this, I spoke to two teachers from the senior leadership team who play key roles in directing teaching and learning in the school.

5.2 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

There are 54 teachers at my school. I received 21 responses. This sample therefore represents 39% of the total number.

Given the number of returns it is safe to assume that this data represents most of the school's seven subject areas, but as stated in the previous section, the anonymity of the questionnaire means the responses are not identifiable. This is an acceptable limitation to the questionnaire as a tool. Cohen, Manion and Morrison state that one of the strengths of using questionnaire as a data gathering tool is that anonymity can encourage openness and honesty (2000: 245-266)

Question 1

1. Rate the following features of writing from very important to insignificant

WRITING FEATURE	IMPORTANCE *1=very important* *5=insignificant*				
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Sentence Structure	1	2	3	4	5
Paragraphing	1	2	3	4	5
Content	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy of details	1	2	3	4	5
Handwriting	1	2	3	4	5
Overall text structure e.g. introduction, conclusion	1	2	3	4	5
Other feature *Please describe*	1	2	3	4	5

This question is designed to find out what teachers value in terms of the writing they ask students to do and also how they are likely to set it up and respond to it, based on which features of writing they value. I have selected the key features of writing that are prioritised in the literacy strategy. My intention was to use this information to indicate what the experience for students might be given the features of writing that teachers say they prioritise in their subject.

From the raw data (Figure 1 below) it seems that most of the features are given a grade of 3 or higher: there are few teachers who have put any of the features below level 3. This indicates that most of the teachers consider them all of some importance.

Responses to Question No 1	1	2	3	4	5
spelling	10	7	2	2	0
punctuation	6	11	0	2	2
vocabulary	6	13	0	1	1
sentence structure	5	11	2	2	1
paragraphing	3	8	4	4	2
content	14	3	2	1	1
accuracy of details	7	12	0	1	1
handwriting	4	5	5	4	3
overall text structure	1	12	4	3	1

Figure 1: Question 1 Raw Data

In order to explore this more, the graph below (Figure 2) represents the responses grouped by order of preference. If we assume that, using the scale presented in the question, a preference of 1, 2 or 3 indicates that the teacher believes that feature to be of at least some importance and 4 or 5 indicates no importance, we can see which features of writing are largely valued by the teachers in the school and which are not. This will broadly capture the experience for our emerging writers: it suggests what message they might be getting from the teachers who ask them to write, what the key features of that writing might be.
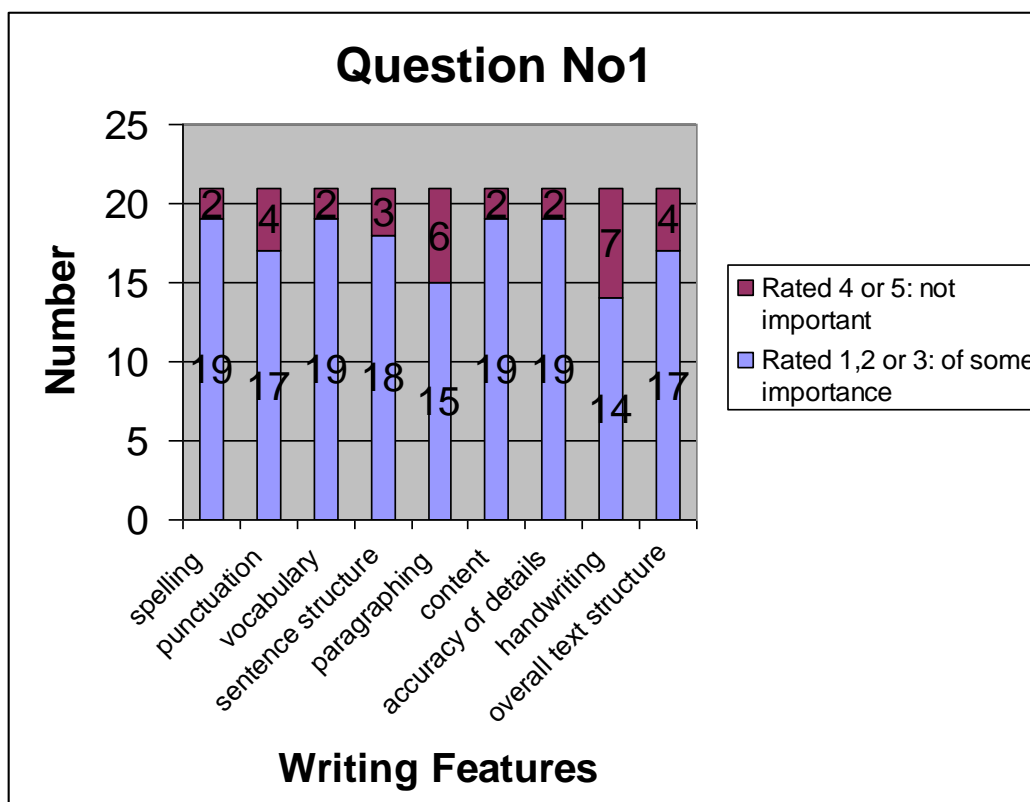

Figure 2: Graph representing respondents' prioritisation of writing features

The graph suggests that most of the teachers consider all the identified writing features of at least some importance. Interestingly, this contradicts what the students themselves say (refer to Chapter 4). The student perspective at my school is that writing is only of importance to English and History teachers. This data suggests that it is of much greater importance across the curriculum. Students also stated that they felt teachers cared a great deal about handwriting, but according to the data above, handwriting is the feature that was of least importance to the teachers surveyed.

This is partly explained by students' impression of writing being shaped by the amount of writing done rather than the approach to that which is done. But it cannot be dismissed, since it reveals a key feature of the climate in which our youngsters take pen to paper when asked to write. If the teachers instructing them believe that writing has a number of significant features beyond superficial features like handwriting, the data gathered from students suggests that they are not passing on that belief to the students.

The features that attracted the attention of the teachers most were Spelling and Content (rated *very important* by 10 and 14 respondents respectively). These features are easy to identify within a piece of writing. Those that might be considered higher order features, such as sentence structure, paragraphing and text structure were rated lowest at 5, 3 and 1 respectively. This might explain why students feel that writing is only important in English and history: these subjects require extended writing where organisational features are important. It suggests that there is little extended writing outside of these subjects. This was a question that I explored in my interviews with science teachers (see 4.3).

This perspective can be further explored by looking at the responses to

Question 2:

QUESTION 2: If students were more confident and competent writers, would they be likely to do better in your subject?

- Yes (17 teachers)
- No (4 teachers)

This is a significant piece of data. It suggests that the majority of teachers believe that students generally are somehow held back from doing well in their subject because of their writing skills. This, alongside the suggestion from Question 1 above that most teachers value many of the key features of writing, suggests that high quality writing is valued across the curriculum but as we learn from the exploration of the student perspective, that is not the message we are giving our youngsters.

One of the areas of interest that will further our understanding of writing across the curriculum is explored in Questions 3 and 4 below. This question was designed to show what kinds of writing teachers are using in their day-to-day teaching and what our students are expected to do in exams. Since our school, like most schools in the UK, is keenly attuned to exam performance, it is important to see if the kinds of writing they are required to do in exams is being used and taught.

(An interesting side note here is that when I gave the questionnaire to a colleague to trial it, he asked me why I had included 'Copied or dictated' as one of the types of writing. He said he thought it was an unnecessary inclusion since, as far as he was concerned, no one was using copying in their classrooms these days. My pilot study showed otherwise (see Chapter Two). This teacher is an Advanced Skills Teacher with a lot of experience and professional standing. I found it interesting that he should be so sure that the use of copying was or perhaps should be used rarely.)

QUESTION 3: What kinds of writing do students do in your lessons/homework?

TYPE OF WRITING	NEVER	OCCASIONALLY	OFTEN
Student's own words – brief response 1-2 sentences		7	14
Student's own words – paragraph		12	9
Student's own words – extended i.e. half page or more	4	13	4
Copied or dictated	8	9	4
Transactional *analyse, review, comment, argue, persuade, advise, inform, explain*	1	10	10
Expressive *explore, imagine, entertain, describe*	5	11	5
Other *Please describe*			1

QUESTION 4: What kinds of writing are required in exams in your subject?

TYPE OF WRITING	NEVER	OCCASIONALLY	OFTEN
Student's own words – brief response 1-2 sentences	2	1	18
Student's own words – paragraph	3	9	9
Student's own words – extended i.e. half page or more	5	6	10
Copied or dictated	18	1	2
Transactional *analyse, review, comment, argue, persuade, advise, inform, explain*	4	8	9
Expressive *explore, imagine, entertain, describe*	5	9	6
Other *Please describe*	2	1	

For the purposes of this research, I am looking particularly at how writing features in the learning experience of our students. The data above suggests that our students are writing OFTEN though it may be only in brief responses i.e. 1-2 sentences. Writing is then a medium for learning and, perhaps more importantly, a means by which our students are assessed: the chart above shows that in exams students are expected to write in at least paragraphs, if not half page or more, most of the time. This response surprised me, since the students were clear that writing wasn't important in most subjects, I expected teachers to say the same, i.e. that they weren't using writing a lot in the classroom and that writing didn't feature in exams. Not so: according to the data above, students are indeed expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of subjects by writing about them. This would indicate writing plays a significant part of the students' experience as students and examinees.

5.3 SUMMARY

The results of the questionnaire throw light on an aspect of practice that our school's literacy policy must address. If we are to provide guidance for educators that will develop better writing skills for our students, we must first understand how it is that teachers can apparently value good writing and yet not engage in developing it. They appear to say that writing is important because students' progress is linked to writing skills and they value the features that make writing good, yet apparently not transmit this to their students, which may provide a good place to start our work in developing the literacy policy. This is further developed in the final chapter.

The questionnaire proved to be a blunt instrument to measure teachers' views of writing since it could only ever indicate general perception, not specific to any subject. But it shaped some interesting theories to explore in interviews with teachers:

- Teachers seem to value many aspects of writing, but what do teachers actually ask the students to do as writers?
- What features of writing are prioritised in the day-to-day curriculum?
- Students appear to have to use writing often in exams. How much are teachers influenced by what is expected of their students under exam conditions?

5.4 SCIENCE TEACHERS

I decided to look closely at the views of science teachers for two reasons. Firstly, the science curriculum has changed recently such that there is now an increase in extended writing at KS4 and secondly, there appeared to be an interest in considering the role of writing in the teaching of science on behalf of the department. According to the teachers I spoke to, this interest was largely prompted by the increase of writing required. As a result of these developments, there has been some crossing of curricular lines between science and English in my school: science teachers have actively sought guidance from the English department in their work with students to create extended pieces of writing for GCSE science. This has lead to some work on cross-curricular learning, amongst other things. This meant that I already had a working relationship with the science department, a place to begin my research. And given what appeared to be an increased awareness of the role of writing in their programme, a focus for my inquiry.

Two themes emerged from this round of interviews:

- The pressure of preparing students for exams
- The reduction in teacher autonomy

These issues are linked but create different tensions for the science teachers I interviewed. When considering the use of writing in the science curriculum, the four teachers I spoke to were unanimous in their sense that there is more that they could do with writing and sensed that not only was it key to their students' success in high stakes exams (due to the introduction of the case study at GCSE), but also good for their longer-term education and learning. However, this understanding of the importance of writing was tempered by the pressures felt to meet government directives and prepare students for exams. This pressure is understandable as the school's GCSE results were below the government floor target of 5 A*-C including English and maths some years ago. This has led to the classification as a "National Challenge" school (schools with less than 30% of their student body achieving the floor target). The reality of this designation means that, despite there being support available to improve results, there is considerable pressure on the school to ensure that students get certain grades. This pressure is keenly felt by many teachers and is frequently the subject of colleagues' conversations in the corridors and staffroom and has a main agenda item on staff

meeting and training day agendas. It was interesting to hear how the teachers I spoke to have internalised it and the extent to which it shapes their decision making. This will be explored during the analyses below and the summative conclusion.

5.4 (i) JANET

Janet is a young teacher and has been teaching for five years. She has been at my school for four years. She was quickly identified by the senior management team as a high flyer and got promotion to middle management as a pastoral leader soon after she arrived at the school. She is well-regarded in the school, with a reputation for being well-organised, efficient, good with students, successful in the classroom.

I started each interview with asking the teacher how important s/he felt writing is in their respective subject. For Janet, it seemed essential. She explained that she was currently revising her Year 11 students for important exams and felt that their writing was key to being able to review previous work. For her, writing was part of developing an understanding of the subject and creating a body of work that could be reviewed in order to be recalled under exam conditions. She was concerned that the teaching of science that she has delivered may not have been captured as meaningful learning if the student wasn't able to write well enough.

> *Well, simply put, I agree that writing and learning are linked because if you can express yourself orally that's brilliant and shows that you know what's going on in the lesson, but at this time of year, as we're coming up to the exams and revision, you're trying to cram the kids with information and if they have a good writing level, they're gonna come back to their books now and be able to understand what they've written.*

I was taken with the focus that Janet had given her response, focussing immediately on writing as a record of learning.

> *I don't know if I'm just focussing on that because they're preparing for exams right now. As good as they might be orally in class at expressing themselves, not having the written stuff...puts them at a massive disadvantage when it comes to the exam which affects the school's results, but also you know, reading and writing help with your long term memory and if you don't have access to that, then your ability to retain information suffers.*

Janet's thoughts on writing seemed to be clearly about recording information as part of preparation for exams. Despite some exploration of other types of writing that she does with her students, she returned to this theme on a number of occasions throughout the interview. She reflected on this and expressed her concerns that she was so exam-driven:

> *I don't like this way of working. That's why I've chosen a pastoral route because I would like a freer curriculum when you're not so restricted by exams.*

I was surprised to hear this from Janet. I knew that she had been thrilled to be appointed to a position of pastoral leadership in the school, since she is considered young for middle leadership, but had assumed that it was an opportunity for promotion and not a choice to shape her career path away from curriculum development. At my school, pastoral leadership tends to be focussed on behaviour and attendance. At the middle leader level it is considered largely stop-gap efforts at best because there is little that can be done to change some of the significant features that cause students' poor behaviour. This isn't always the case, and in other schools that I have worked in and am aware of, pastoral leadership is seen as more proactive. In such schools, teachers take up roles of pastoral leadership and work closely with student progress, aligning their efforts with curriculum leadership. It could thus be a stepping stone to school leadership. Not so at our school. It is seen as something of a dead-end. Janet's decision to go this route seems prompted by her desire to work in a *'freer'* way. To most, pastoral leadership would be restricting at the middle leader level as little can be done to affect meaningful change. But for Janet, this is preferable to the pressure of being exam-driven. It might be seen as evidence of MacCabe's (1998)views on the spheres of responsibility in education: that there are areas of decision-making within the professional practice of teachers that are outside their control, for example the demands of high-stakes

testing. Janet was made to feel that there were things she *had* to do, even though she thought them wrong.

She continued to reflect on the pressure of exams:

> *I know it's not very PC to say it , but for some kids who can be bothered to do the work and for those kids who you say week after week 'You have to come after school to do this' I would like to, say, not withdraw help but…step back a bit and allow them a chance to fail. I know you're not supposed to say that as a teacher, because we should be helping and we do help the students, but we're so exam-driven, we're not allowed to say 'All right, you haven't been…you haven't (done the work)' but it's very difficult to allow kids to learn from mistakes and errors*

Because of the pressure of exam results?

Yeah

Accountability?

Yeah, basically. And it is gonna come back at the end of the day on your department and you don't want to let your department down either.

Janet's sense of ethics as a professional appears to be compromised here. She is prompted to act in a certain way for the good of the school's exam results despite her belief that it's wrong. It seems here that her preference would be to allow students to fail, but she feels she can't because other factors dictate her course of action. She expresses a sense that her work with students is part of a larger picture; that of the school's standing in terms of exam results. The implication is that there will be judgements made about the school, her department and

her, based on the results her students get in exams and to allow failure would be to *'let your department down'*

She has lost the sense of autonomy to make take a course of action that she feels is right. She expresses her concerns in an almost guilty way, saying that her ideas are not *'politically correct'* suggesting that there is an accepted understanding of what the right thing to do is and to challenge it is considered deviant.

Janet went on to talk about the kind of writing that she does in science and how she prepares the students to complete extended writing tasks. Again, due to the restrictions placed on her by exam specifications, she has to take a course of action that goes against her sense of what would be best for the students.

> *…and then there's the case study based on a particular argument, like using mobile phones is wrong or cloning is wrong so they have an outline and they have a frame with sentences to help them…But you know…say with a student who's got a really low reading level and literacy level even if you give them that framework in which you tell them exactly how to start each section, you can't fill in the whole thing for them, but then it comes back to the pressures of results… so how much help do you give them…it's almost like you're having an English lesson when you're having a science lesson.*

For Janet, the *'pressures of results'* means that she has to run her class as though it were an English class, creating perhaps all sorts of tensions for her in terms of comfort level and confidence. The irony here is that Bullock's call for language across the curriculum would welcome the development of a science teacher addressing writing skills within the context of a scientific inquiry. But for Janet, she is uncomfortable with it, appears to find it wrong, and feels pressured into doing it. Janet's is the clearest articulation of this perspective, but it is one that came up in the other three interviews with science teachers.

This thesis has focussed on institutional policy and practice regarding the development of writing across the curriculum rather than an individual context. Within this, there isn't the

capacity to fully explore the issues that emerge with a focus on the individual and its effect on shaping the use of writing across the curriculum: however, it has been informative for me to hear my colleagues hint that their teaching of writing is determined by their level of confidence as writers. This is explored further in the conclusion to this chapter.

Given Janet's obvious concerns about the purpose of the tasks she was being asked to complete with her students, and her sense that she was feeling obliged to conform to an imposed set of requirements, I wondered what she thought was the point of the task:

> *With the case study, it's about what is related to them in outside life so for example, cloning is going to be a big thing in the future and mobile phones…they all have one so if they can learn a bit of the science behind it, the science in the everyday world…*

She is clear about its significance for the students. She seems to believe that it's an appropriate task to engage in; worthwhile, meaningful, appropriate. Yet she is uncomfortable with the way it has to be done, to the point where she seems have chosen to take a career path – the *pastoral route* - that means she will be focussing on issues unrelated to the development of the science curriculum. I'm sure there are a number of factors that have gone into her decision, but it was striking to hear that a young and talented teacher should find these impositions were restricting enough to consider a route away from the science curriculum so early in her career.

The culture of testing emerges here as a dominant feature of professional decision-making and, indeed, personal professional development choices that affect the use of writing in the classroom.

5.4 (ii) NIGEL

Nigel is an experienced science teacher and a Ph D biologist. He is an Advanced Skills Teacher for science. This means that he spends a day per week doing outreach science work. Most recently he has been working with the primary schools in our area. He has also led our school's professional development work on Assessment for Learning. He is well-regarded in the school with a reputation for excellence in the classroom.

This interview was done in the last week of the school year. It had been hard for us to find a good time to conduct it. I sensed during the scheduling process that Nigel was uncomfortable about it. It turned out he was very uncomfortable. Though the written transcript may not reflect this, there were times when there was a definite atmosphere between us. This was unexpected as we have always worked well together. We took part in a leadership course together the previous year and enjoyed a supportive and still challenging partnership, able to engage in discussion about significant issues including ones on which we disagreed.

This interview touches on a number of issues that are reflected in my review of the literature regarding the implementation of cross-curricular literacy as was the case in the other interviews with science teachers. What is perhaps notable about this is the appearance that Nigel was deliberately misunderstanding my questions and prompts. As is evidenced below, the tension was clear from the start. There is a point towards the end of the interview when Nigel describes his approach to extended writing and appears to become almost confessional in tone, saying that he knows his way of teaching is wrong but he is obliged to take this approach because of a the pressures of exam results and also maintaining his own Advanced Skills status.

I have provided an extended analysis of Nigel's interview to demonstrate the level of unease that built up during the interview. I started, as I have the other interviews, by asking what role writing takes in the science curriculum. I added that my survey of teachers at our school had revealed that the majority of teachers had said that students would do better in their subjects if the could write better.

Yeah, well, isn't just about writing is it? It's about organising things in their head. And the converse…obviously…if they were worse in English they'd be worse in science.

I remarked that he'd said *English* rather than writing. In my question I had said writing. My point was not to correct him but rather to explore his thoughts on the relationship between writing and English. I wondered if he saw writing as fundamentally something that belonged in the English curriculum rather than a cross curricular skill.

His answer was straightforward

I meant writing

I went into a lengthy explanation of the Bullock Report's recommendations for literacy to be taken on as a cross-curricular skill. He paused before responding:

To be honest with you Dot, I don't really know what you mean by cross-curricular

It is not possible that this was the first time Nigel had come across the term 'cross-curricular'. There was a fraught silence. I assumed we shared an understanding of literacy generally (and writing specifically) as a set of skills used across the curriculum. His response implied that though he knew the term, he didn't understand my use of it.

I clarified what I meant:

The skills which are transferable

Well, I suppose I don't ever teach writing in the way that you do…

But you use writing in the science classroom?

Yeah, I use it, but I'm not really thinking too much about how they are writing…like when they are writing up an experiment…well, they don't really   write up experiments anymore…you know…that's not really considered   important anymore. It's about thinking skills.

Nigel had made a link between writing and thinking before: his earlier comment about improving performance suggested that he saw *organising things in their head* as being a key feature of student performance. This, we can assume, is the same thing as thinking. This, then, was Nigel's pedagogical position: he appeared to consider thinking skills as important rather than writing skills. More importantly, he saw a clear distinction between writing and thinking. I consider them both important, with many similar aspects, not least that they are both cross-curricular skills. So, I put that to him as a way of creating a shared understanding of this concept.

Well, those (thinking skills) are transferable, aren't they? And writing is another one. My survey showed that teachers in this school are finding it difficult to get kids to write…(unfinished)

I don't know that I feel that

But they would do better if they wrote better?

They would in any school.

Yes, it is a universal problem. But the question I am trying to explore here is why? Why is there not more possibility for you to address that? As you can identify that as something that is impeding progress

(Nigel had previously said that he felt students would do better in his subject if they wrote better)

I wouldn't say it impedes progress but if it was (fades and pauses)…my time is better spent dealing with things that really do affect their grades and at the moment, I don't really see writing as being right up there. See what I mean? Otherwise I'd be dealing with it.

There was no doubt that there was a tension between us at this point. My questions were making Nigel uncomfortable and his answers were defensive. He and I have had disagreements about issues in the past but we had never reached a point such as this. I thought it best to move things along by asking questions about the way Nigel uses writing in his classes. I asked him how much writing they do in science

Quite a lot…(collects a pile of students' books)

Nigel explained that he thought these books were typical of the kind of work he did with Y8.

…[the type of writing] kind of varies doesn't it?

(He flicks through the books and seems to be surprised at what he sees)

I mean they're not really writing a huge amount, I mean not in the way they would in your subject. I mean it's mainly visual isn't it? But then that's because I'm a much more visual kind of person and I think that if they've got pictures of stuff down there, they're more likely to remember it than if they're writing things…

So, this is writing as a learning medium, they're using writing to learn? (referring to labelled diagrams)

Well of course they are. They're in school.

But you're not assessing it. There's a difference between writing to learn and writing do demonstrate understanding. I mean in many subjects they have to write…in order to be assessed, but this isn't being used as an assessment tool, it's being used to construct knowledge…

Yeah, I guess so

So you are giving them a chance to use writing, you know drawing and labelling, that's all writing, to clarify what they understand?

Yeah

So writing is used largely as a learning tool?

I don't know…well, I just said to you they don't really do much writing

But when you walked over there to get the books, you said they did a lot of writing?

I don't really know. I don't really think about it to be honest with you Dot. Well, you tell me

Again we seemed to have reached a serious misunderstanding that neither of us had the words to sort out. I was unsure of how to proceed since I was aware of him giving up his time to take part in this interview. It seemed as though it was making him frustrated. I offered a definition of what appeared to be the way writing was being used in the books we were looking at, books that he had selected to show as typical of the work done by students in his class.

…it seems here that you are giving the students a chance to consolidate their understanding (of science), to get a permanent record of their understanding, something that they can review and that is this writing (unfinished)

Yeah…but it's not just that. It's the process they're going through

What do you mean by *the process*?

Well, it's getting them to slow their thinking as they're writing this stuff down. I mean I've never really thought about it before.

This was further reference to his belief that writing and thinking are fundamentally linked. It seemed as though he was saying that when the students were being asked to write in his classes, it was a way of getting them to think about certain things and perhaps writing served that purpose.

Together we reviewed the books, discussing the students in the class as I taught some of them English. Nigel seemed unhappy about what he was finding in the books, as though he didn't really know what was there. There was little evidence of marking. He explained that their assessed material was in the form of tests which were marked using the National Curriculum assessment frameworks and wasn't in these books.

We came across a piece of extended writing that looked like a position paper.

> Can you talk about that task? What is it and how would it be assessed?
>
> *Well, it hasn't been assessed…*
>
> No but it could be. What would you be looking for?
>
> *I'd be looking for this person to present both sides of an argument*
>
> So that's what the prompt was? An opinion…give us your opinion?
>
> *Yeah, well, a balanced opinion…a balanced view on it.*

We talked about the nature of this task, Nigel explaining that writing such as this in science was fairly common: its purpose was to prompt students to consider the facts about a scientific issue and present their views. I pointed out this kind of writing was used in other subjects and might be an example of what I was talking about earlier, i.e. a transferable skill.

> Those of us who teach writing as a discrete skill are looking at ways we can support the students to do better when using those writing skills in other subjects.
>
> (I look closely at the work in the science book)
>
> This looks pretty minimalist for a Y10 student…you could expect more, particularly since he has got a lot of facts because you've been focussing on the science
>
> *That's interesting …I mean obviously in an exam you would never write, I mean that would be too much for an exam. So I wouldn't really want three pages of the stuff*
>
> Well, that's interesting
>
> *Also, I wouldn't know what to do with three pages of science*

At this point there seemed to be almost a sense of relief on Nigel's part. As I listen to the recording and reflect on this moment in the interview, it's clear that Nigel sounds sure and firm here, more so than previously in the interview. It appears to me that he has assumed that I was promoting the idea that students should simply write more and he points out that, in fact for science, that would be counterproductive. He asserts a solid position regarding writing: there is no call for extended writing skills in science.

It was not my intention to suggest that there was a problem with what I saw in the student's book, and, to be candid, I was unaware at the time that I was promoting a view. Looking at this transcript, it's clear how what I said could be seen as a judgement regarding the amount the student had written, suggesting there is problem with Nigel's expectations.

To return to the interview, our discussion turned to the kinds of writing used in science exams. I asked if they did a lot of multiple choice type questions.

> *Just about all of them are sort of whole sentence kind of answers*

> And at any point is their writing skill likely to be an impediment to them delivering the goods?

> *I don't think so…I don't know…I haven't the faintest idea…I mean they just write stuff down*

> It's just that previously you said that students would do better in your subject if they wrote better

> *Well, if they could write better, maybe they…I dunno, maybe I want to change my mind about that on reflection*

This then is another defining moment in the interview. I appear to have prompted a complete about face such that Nigel has gone from considering writing an important feature of his subject, to wanting to dismiss it entirely.

I knew from my other interviews that there is a requirement in GCSE science for extended writing. I moved on to ask Nigel how he taught this part of the course.

> *Well, coursework used to be in just a couple of subjects but now because it's everywhere, they just sit in my lessons and I have to remind them that it's like you are*

in an exam hall, this is 20% of your grade and I'm telling you the answers. And they
kind of sit there. Why aren't you writing this down? Unless I'm standing over them.

What do you put that down to?

Well…

(various starter thoughts that aren't finished)

they can't be bothered to because they're used to[doing assessments in the
classroom]

What is the coursework requirement in science now?

They're big tasks so there is a lot of writing but it is totally broken down.

This just minutes after he has told me that *they don't really do much writing.* There is some
misunderstanding between us about what constitutes writing. Nigel tells me that there is a lot
of writing for the GCSE coursework but it's done in such a way that it isn't what he considers
a lot of writing. The process of generating the writing must then be fundamental to his
understanding of the definition and purpose of writing in his subject.

He went to explain that process:

> *In my lessons, we have 10 minute sessions where they have to write a paragraph on*
> *something. They get pretty well advised on that. They all do it and it gets marked at*
> *the end of that 10 minutes, then we move on to the next thing.*

He explains that he does this to *stop them worrying about the process of generating five sides*
of coursework.

> *So I just do it bit by bit. And they all do it, together and they don't leave the room 'till*
> *it's done. And at the end of it, every single kid gets a good grade in coursework. Like*
> *really stunning grade. Like our triple scientists this year, 85% got A* in their*
> *coursework and I did all that with them. And why did they get that? Because I am*
> *breaking it down. You know, in another school up the road, they're probably doing it*
> *in a way that is better for their general education and being about to produce a*
> *project but they wouldn't get the grades that I get*

Though I appreciated his honesty, I was surprised at this insight. He appeared to be acknowledging that his approach was driven entirely by grades even in the face of the knowledge that this approach wasn't educationally sound. It is what Fullan (DfES 1997b) identified in his review of the NLS as there being a 'pressure for compliance', that is, a need for teachers to do what is considered important with regard to external criteria, such as the demands of a high-stakes exam.

I suggested that the students in the other hypothetical school that he described as doing their coursework in a way that was *better for their general education* might be getting a deeper learning experience than his students. He agreed that they would.

> Don't you think that it's kind of ironic though [that it's more important to get the grades than deliver a good educational opportunity]?
>
> *Yeah, I think it's tragic*
>
> So you're not letting them go as researchers and writers because you have anxieties about the finished product?
>
> *Well no, not my anxieties*
>
> Well you do because as a teacher you want them to get good grades…
>
> *At the end of the day, what do I want? What do they need? And what should I be giving them? I should be giving them the best possible chance they can get and they do brilliantly. You want to know why our science students do so well? What did we get last year? 57% A*-C which is way above other subjects in the school and it's because of their coursework. We absolutely do their coursework for them, more or less. I have to admit.*

This confession from Nigel is key to understanding the place of writing in the curriculum: writing is used as an assessment tool, a means to measure a students' understanding of taught material. With an emphasis on content, i.e. no marks given for how it's written, teachers are encouraged to teach in a way that promotes only the presentation of that content, and not a consideration of the construction of the document as a whole.

Though I wasn't clear about this at the time, it seems that Nigel considered my investigation to be primarily a comparison between writing in English and writing in science. There is a feeling here that he was defensive about the appearance of how he uses writing perhaps because, as head of English, he suspected my raison d'etre was to judge him in this regard. I am sorry, on reflection, that this was not clearer to me at the time as it was not my intention, and clearly affected our interview.

His confession regarding the way he prepares students to complete their coursework was revealing. The pressure that he feels to get good grades forces him to make decisions about the way he teaches that seem to make him uncomfortable. This echoes the views of his science colleagues. When students are required to produce extended writing as part of a high-stakes assessment (e.g. GCSE) this teacher tells them what to write. It is exactly what the students in Chapter Two described as limiting their writing process. But, as Nigel states, they got top marks. An interesting paradox and one that will be further explored in the following chapter.

5.4 (iii) SIMON

Simon is head of science. He had been in post for three years at the time of this interview.

Simon started out by talking about the changes he has seen in the way writing is used in the science curriculum

> *...gone are the days when you simply write notes. (Now) it's writing to show understanding of knowledge… To me, this is an opportunity to write an explanation to link things and use data and explain things. (For example) the (GCSE) case study is a development of knowledge – if it's done properly*

Simon is able to see the potential for writing as a learning medium as discussed in Chapter Two. This also echoes the thoughts of Nigel who could see that the GCSE case study offered opportunities for students to develop worthwhile and enduring skills, but for Nigel, the

pressure to get good results meant that he compromised his professional beliefs in order to ensure that the students did well. For Simon, who is head of this department, he can see that this pressure will shape the decisions the teachers in his department will make.

> *I think that a lot of the time, (the GCSE case study) is a tick box exercise. In theory it's a wonderful idea: the kid goes off, researches, writes what is essentially a dissertation. In practice what we find that we all go around saying have you got this, have you included this, have you included that? It basically becomes leaping through hoops because it's tied to their GCSE results. So, we are not educating kids to the greater good: we're educating them in such a way that they are able to pass the assessments.*

He went on to consider this in light of the goals of the Bullock Report, to promote writing across the curriculum, and its lack of success.

> *(The government) needs to show year on year increase in GCSE grades (so) there is a constant pressure…rather than educating the kids holistically, you've got a continuous focus to get the kids through the hoops to get qualifications. Teachers have become increasingly good at getting kids through the exams. As a consequence, we are teaching what they need to pass, as opposed to what they need to be a good learner.*

This is a lot like Nigel's views above, confessing that it's more important to get good grades than teach the students well. I asked Simon how he felt about this situation.

> *As head of department I have to show the headteacher that the department is getting better results and those children need to go out with qualifications so they can do the next step, jobs and college. Are we educating to the best? No, we're not – we're not even close. Would I prefer to produce children who are able to communicate, but maybe not get better results? Yes, but in the current climate that's a recipe for*

absolute suicide. So, am I happy with it? No. Is it in the best interests of the kids? No, in the long term, no. But yes in the short term.

This *short term,* prioritising the teaching of exam skills, is a shared view of the science teachers whom I interviewed.

Simon's views on writing in the science classroom highlight both the key themes identified as central to the views of his science colleagues i.e. the pressure of exams and the deskilling of the teachers. In Simon's case, the key issue was what he refers to as the *'dichotomy where you've got KS3 students who feel encouraged to show this skill (writing)…then they got to KS4 and suddenly they have to start leaping through hoops..'* This is an interesting point to explore: since the abolition of the KS3 SATs exams in 2008, schools have been free to create their own programme of assessment for KS3. They no longer have to prepare KS3 students for high stakes, externally set and marked exams. There is, in fact, no mandated measure of performance for the end of KS3, but there is a lot of pressure for schools to use an assessment framework called Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) which will be further explored later in this chapter. For Simon, this move away from SATs opened up opportunities for science teachers to teach in a new, preferable way. He describes what they teach to Y9s:

> *(The GCSE syllabus) has narrowed the ability to write…but KS3, yes, we're pushing explanation writing. That's the key thing: explanation with models for us creates better results.*

(He didn't explain what he meant by *results* and at the time, I didn't ask him, but I did ask him clarify this later. He said it was performance against APP criteria which will be explained more fully later in this chapter. The important thing to note is that he is not referring to exam results such as GCSE)

> *With the Y9s, I've focussed exclusively on explanation writing. And they've started to turn a corner and they will write an explanation using data and that is the key part of being a scientist*

The freedom from high stakes exams provides for Simon an opportunity to teach in a way that promotes real scientific enquiry. It was clear from what he said, and his obvious enthusiasm, that he knew the role writing plays in *being a scientist* and with this new direction for science teaching at KS3, he was able to give students a chance to achieve this.

Simon, like both Nigel and Janet, feels bound to teach in a certain way to meet the demands of exams. He sees this as a compromise. He does not feel able to challenge this compromise as it would be *a recipe for absolute suicide*. However, he finds that there is the prospect of change at KS3 where high stakes exams have been withdrawn and replaced with what he sees as an assessment system that promotes writing in line with authentic scientific study.

5.4 (iv) MARTIN

Martin is a former head of science who has moved into senior management. I wasn't able to do a live interview with him, but he provided written responses to my questions. His views echo much of what has been said previously by his science teaching colleagues as detailed in this chapter so far. Of particular note were his thoughts on the changing role of writing in science with the demise of SATs and the advent of APP. This had been mentioned by both Janet and Nigel in passing, but as can be seen in Simon's interview above, was a key feature of his appraisal of the current status of writing in the science curriculum.

Martin, like Simon, believes that the writing demands of the exams in science determine the way writing is used as a learning medium, to the detriment of good science teaching:

> *The value (of writing) is predominately as an opportunity for a pupil to consolidate their ideas and show a synthesis of a range of evidence and understanding. This makes excellent scientists, but has never been a skill which aids in the passing of science exams in this challenging school, either in SATs or GCSEs. By this I mean that although the approach leads to rigorous understanding through the process of*

writing and developing arguments, exams have traditionally been about regurgitating facts and at best, definitions.

Martin therefore sees the value of writing to learn in science, but explains that, despite the fact that it might make *excellent scientists*, is not the common approach, because high stakes exams force him to adopt a way of teaching that limits writing, and, apparently, *rigorous understanding*.

He goes on to discuss the assessment criteria for the GCSE case study, a topic which has been raised by each of the interviewees. He makes a comparison between this mark scheme and the newly introduced APP assessment criteria used at KS3:

The mark scheme (for the GCSE case study) does not require demanding writing skills to obtain a grade of B or above. Students can pass well simply by bullet pointing much of the their evidence to support the conclusions…The advent of APP in science suggests that future assessment will, by necessity, require longer written responses to what has traditionally been the case at KS3. The very nature of APP in science makes it impossible to assess in traditional tick-box, multiple-choice and single word answers way.

This then links to Simon's views on the impact that APP is likely to have on teaching and learning in science. In order to better explore this within the context of this thesis, there follows a section on APP generally, and the specifics about APP in science.

5.4 (v) ASSESSING PUPIL PROGRESS

Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) was first introduced as a pilot at KS3 in 2006. Its stated goal to 'put the learner at the heart of assessment' (QCDA). According to the Department of Education's website it is 'a national approach to assessment that equips teachers to make judgements on pupils' progress'. This approach is a departure from tests or exams. It does not require special assessment activities, set and marked by external sources, but is marked by the

teacher using 'evidence' that s/he gathers through their day-to-day interactions, observations and ongoing assessment. The teacher decides what makes up this evidence. Schools are free to establish an assessment schedule in line with their existing policy and practice.

At the time it was introduced, SATs were still being used at the end of KS3. Since its introduction, it has become the method used by most schools to assess at KS3 as the SATs exams are now gone. It is not mandated so in theory schools can choose to use it, but there is pressure on schools to make that choice as Ofsted inspectors will expect to see it, or schools will have to explain what they are doing instead. Both Simon and Martin believe that using this kind of assessment will promote writing and learning in science. They are broadly supportive of its use. According to the government's QCDA website, there are the following benefits:

- it does not require special assessment activities but involves taking evidence from the opportunities generated by planned teaching and learning
- it reduces the need to use tests and specific assessment tasks to make assessment judgements by taking into account a far wider range of evidence – this gives a clearer and more accurate picture of pupils' achievements and progress
- it provides a valuable opportunity for professional development as it gives teachers effective tools to develop their assessment and teaching techniques
- it provides a common framework for teachers to share and discuss the evidence they have of pupils' progress, to build assessment expertise and develop confidence
- it directly informs discussions with pupils, as well as future planning, teaching and learning
- it helps teachers identify gaps in their teaching, for example when a periodic assessment shows little evidence of a particular assessment focus.

At this point it is important to establish the difference between formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is what the teacher uses to inform his/her practice and give students feedback on their progress. It is the marking and responding to student outcomes that teachers do on a daily/weekly basis, the ongoing, short- or mid-term assessment that teachers use to provide a measure of success of both the student's learning and the effectiveness of the teaching. Summative assessment is the level or grade given at the end of a marking period such as a key stage or GCSE exams. This tends to be the "result" that gets published either internally in school reports or externally as part of the government's rating of schools'

performance. APP was first introduced as a formative assessment tool. The Y9 SATs exams were the summative assessment used to assess schools' performance via the so called 'League Tables'. With the demise of the SATs exams, APP has become the default assessment tool for the end of KS3, however, its method of assessment is very different from an exam. It promotes assessment by a portfolio of evidence gathered during the course of the term. This evidence can be just about anything that the student produces. For example, a student's grade for English could be arrived at based on:

- extended or shorter focused pieces of writing in a variety of different forms for a range of purposes
- information from different curriculum areas
- text annotation or visual organisers such as thought mapping, storyboards or timelines
- oral work such as pupil presentations to the class, contributions to class discussions, drama activities or discussions with teachers
- observing pupils' behaviour and interactions
- pupils' self-assessment.

No mention of exams. The 'range of evidence' that makes up the assessment can be wide, and most importantly, is not strictly prescribed. It is up to the teacher, working within the department's guidelines, to decide what makes up this evidence.

In a recent research project conducted by National Foundation for Educational Research (Rowe: 2010) Naomi Rowe set out to look at the uptake of APP in science since its introduction in 2009. Key in her findings in relation to my conversations with science teachers was a conclusion that for the pilot schools, there was an immediate sense that they were freer to construct their programme. The previous assessment framework (from 1999-2009) was considered too prescriptive (see Oates: 2009). According to this NfER study, 'It was believed, by some, that this limited teachers' flexibility'(Rowe: 2010, 14). In her conclusion, Rowe states:

> There are a number of positives concerning APP in relation to assessment. Most notably is the way APP can be seen to support teachers' classroom

assessments in a structured manner. This contributes to the re-professionalisation of teachers in terms of putting the trust back into their professional judgement, and increases their confidence.

(Rowe 2010: 26)

5.4 (vi) SUMMATIVE THOUGHTS ON INTERVIEWS WITH SCIENCE TEACHERS

All of the science teachers introduced in this chapter expressed concerns about the dominance of external assessment and its effect on their choices. In Janet's case, it was enough of an issue for her to choose a professional route that moves her away from the science classroom. For Nigel, the need to get good results forces him to do what he considers wrong. These two teachers are certainly working within the kinds of constraint discussed by Rowe in the study above. We are not a pilot school for APP so the science department are only just beginning to align their teaching with the APP framework. The effects suggested by Rowe above, to promote a 're-professionalisation' of the science teachers, have not been felt. But interestingly, both Simon and Martin, in their roles has head of faculty, have been introduced to the theories of APP and clearly see that it provides not just an opportunity to teach science beyond the narrow requirements of an exam syllabus, but to get students using writing in an authentic, scientific way. The issues of control over how writing is used in science may then be moving toward the position expressed by Simon and Martin: when science teachers are free to plan a curriculum that includes writing they are likely to achieve a programme that supports *rigorous understanding through the process of writing and developing arguments,* leading to the shaping of *excellent scientists*. At the time of writing, it's impossible to say how this might shape the experience of our students, but in terms of developing literacy strategy in the school, APP promotes the use of writing as a learning medium in science in a way that can be transferred to other subjects.

5.5 ENGLISH TEACHERS

I met with four English teachers right at the beginning of my research programme, before setting up any other questionnaires or interviews. As noted above, my questions for the teachers were designed to triangulate my belief that writing skills are a. largely not taught outside of the English classroom (with some notable exceptions) and b. this lack of consistency when it comes to teaching writing is detrimental to a student's development as a writer. This is demonstrated in the vignette of Robbie the Scot presented in the introduction to this thesis. I wanted to explore with my English teacher colleagues, the veracity of my long-held beliefs about the lack of writing across the curriculum and also, perhaps more importantly, consider the effect of this.

This interview took the form of a forum. This was due simply to expediency rather than research design as the teachers are at different schools which meant I could get their views at the same time if we set this up as a discussion forum rather than have to find time to met up with them individually. There were four teachers, all experienced English specialists. Between them they have contributed to almost 80 years of teaching English in a wide variety of schools, over two decades of government policy and under a number of different school leaders. This was a meeting set up as part of an informal regional network that brings Heads of English and English Advanced Skills Teachers together to discuss key aspects of current work in English. We come from different schools. We were meeting on other matters, but it seemed a good opportunity to put gather some views from experienced English teachers.

SHARON is head of English

CLARE is second in charge of English

PAT is second in charge of English

LAURA is an English Advanced Skills Teacher

They come from different schools

Three issues emerged that all four teachers seemed to agree on

- the key to promoting writing as a cross-curricular skill lies in communication between English teachers and non-English teachers
- One of the key hurdles to overcome in the promotion of writing in subjects other than English is a lack of confidence on the part of the teachers who may not feel able to address writing as a discrete skill
- This lack of consistency of expectations regarding writing creates a challenge for our emerging writers as they get a mixed message: English teachers telling them that writing skills are important and teachers in other subjects dismissing the importance of writing and seeing it simply as a medium for delivering knowledge.

Firstly I asked them what they thought about writing across the curriculum. The response was firm agreement that they had never worked in a school where writing was taught as a cross curricular skill. There were a couple of notable experiences in which they as English teachers had linked with a teacher from another subject and they had produced a cross-curricular unit which promoted, amongst other things, specific writing skills. These experiences are notable in the fact that they are rare and, according to these English teachers, unsustained, so there was little if any change to the status quo of subject division, leaving writing largely as a skill taught in English alone.

This led the group to consider why it was that writing wasn't taught in other subjects. Out of this discussion came the shared belief that teachers (other than English teachers) using writing in their classrooms were unaware of what students were doing in English:

SHARON   *You know, we teach a discrete set of skills, like writing to explain, writing to inform, writing to persuade but we don't necessary tell the teachers in let's say the history department what we're doing*

CLARE   *Yes, we could be more explicit about what we do to other teachers. Other subject teachers probably don't even think about it.*

Pat and Laura both indicated their agreement here. Laura later suggested that it was perhaps the responsibility of the English teacher to make a bridge between the taught skills in English and their application in other subjects:

LAURA   *I think we need to talk more to other subjects. We need to sort of plan in conjunction with other subjects. The problem is that at the moment there is so much happening*

PAT   *But there is always something happening. There's never been time to develop that kind of connection.*

SHARON   *Maybe if we had someone who was a sort of evangelist about the different writing that we do in English, taking it to other subjects, maybe we'd have some way to influence the other teachers.*

CLARE   *And it's a two-way process because there are things that we can do to help other subjects*

I was taken by the level of responsibility that these teachers were prepared to assume to promote writing across the curriculum. When I suggested that there had been many initiatives and millions of pounds spent on doing this job, e.g. the National Literacy Strategy to name but one, they were unanimously dismissive. They began to list the examples of what they considered bad writing across the curriculum that could be produced as evidence of the failure of government attempts to establish all teachers as responsible for literacy generally and writing specifically:

PAT   *When you go in to cover a lesson in another subject you get to see what kind of writing kids are doing ...they always seem to be copying and not writing their own work*

SHARON   *They do use close (gap fill) exercises though don't they?*

PAT   *Yeah they use cloze exercises so they're doing things so they don't*
        have to think.

This opened up a discussion about the reason for cloze-type tasks that have limited demands on students. Sharon put forward the idea that non-English teachers tend to be reluctant to tackle writing as a discrete skill because they lack confidence:

SHARON   *There is a kind of fear about it*

There was general agreement that this is a widespread phenomenon. Sharon went on to give an example of this

SHARON   *I was talking to a geography teacher who was showing me these great poems*
        that his students had written about a field trip. Then he had to cover an
        English lesson for me where he was in charge of teaching the poem 'Vultures'.
        He said he couldn't do what I planned for him as he wasn't an English
        teacher. He was delighted with the poems his kids had produced in geography
        but he wouldn't teach poetry.

The other three teachers expressed no surprise at this. There was general agreement that there are a few teachers who tackle writing skills and they tend to be humanities teachers. None could recall a teacher outside humanities who had approached writing as a set of skills to be taught within the context of his/her subject area. And there was a return to the theme that teachers tend to give students highly structured, limited and limiting writing activities including a lot of copying:

LAURA   *There's nothing wrong with that I suppose if it's used judiciously*

PAT　　　　　*But that's why the students react in our classes sometimes, because you ask them to write...they act out…they misbehave and disrupt*

This brought the conversation to another shared belief: asking students to produce original writing is hard and most teachers outside English avoid it because they not only feel lacking in confidence as writing experts themselves but also it creates tension in the classroom and some students *act out…they misbehave and disrupt* as Pat said. All four agreed that asking students to do extended, original writing is hard and often prompted outbursts of defiance and bad behaviour in students, especially boys. The fact that there seemed a low expectation of writing outside the English classroom made it harder for English teachers. They discussed the frustrations that this causes and the missed opportunities to reinforce key writing skills. It was agreed that students get the wrong message about writing when a non-English teacher asks them to write, then appears not to care about the quality of the writing but instead just marks it for use of key words or ideas. There was some discussion about how this reinforces bad habits, for example, bad spelling, inaccurate punctuation, lack of attention to text organisation (e.g. paragraphing).

They began to discuss how this might change if writing were done differently in non-English classrooms. I asked them what they felt would make a difference to writing across the curriculum

PAT　　　　　*Consistency. Everything the same*

SHARON　　　*Yes, I was going to say impose the language that we use for different kinds of writing. And make teachers aware of the purpose of different types of writing. They probably don't do many different types actually so that shouldn't be hard. And be consistent about how to talk about writing like using the term 'topic sentences'. We have to get across the idea that at secondary school you have to design your writing based on its purpose and audience.*

LAURA   *And another magic wand to improve writing across the curriculum*
would be to have the same teacher for English and history in say Year
7 and Year 8 so you have some kind of consistency

CLARE   *And make time for cross-curricular planning*

The conversation came to a natural conclusion here as the four English teachers agreed that the only way any change would come about in writing across the curriculum would be if school leaders valued it enough to make time for teachers to meet and plan for it. All felt they had never seen this working successfully and doubted that it would happen, despite the efforts of the National Literacy Strategy.

This conversation took place in 2008, six years after the NLS was introduced into secondary education. It was striking how dismissive these teachers were about its efficacy.

5.6 SCHOOL LEADERS

My conversations with teachers had revealed the influential role that exam preparation plays in the decisions teachers make. In order to explore this further, I spoke to two assistant head teachers who have responsibilities to lead the school's curriculum and assessment, Ivan and Patrick

They teach different subjects but my questions were focussed on their views on two specific issues:

- The influence of exam requirements on teachers' decision-making
- The impact of the National Literacy Strategy

Both teachers were immediately clear that the National Literacy Strategy had little effect on their own teaching or on teaching and learning across the curriculum.

IVAN   *Speaking rather cantankerously, I am yet to see the NLS as a priority focus in a school which usually means its responsibility gets passed on to a junior member of staff who does not have the influence, experience or knowledge (or even support in some cases) of how to bring about change in this regard. As a result, as I have seen in more than one school, the NLS ends up diluting itself into a programme of posters up in classrooms without that teacher's support or encouragement. Without buy-in at all levels, any such endeavour will always fail after an initial impetus.*

This man has direct responsibility for teaching and learning at the school. It is he who leads the school's direction for curriculum. His candour regarding the lack of effect of the NLS was unexpected. He went on to consider the benefits of a successful whole school approach to literacy. I explained that I had spoken to a number of teachers all of whom were pretty vague about the NLS and its purpose and effect. I said I was finding it hard to find evidence that the school was addressing literacy issues in line with the NLS

In summary to your direct question as to why is there so little evidence of its implementation, I would answer by stating that the issue is not the evidence - the evidence is correct, it's purely demonstrating the lack of use of the NLS in the classroom and until a school considers it an absolute priority, it can only ever remain a sidelined "bonus" that only individuals seeing it as important utilise or a very diluted shadow of its intention.

No doubt he understood it had purpose but equally clear is his belief that the NLS was a *sidelined "bonus"*.

Patrick was also clear that the NLS had no significant application at the school. He is actually a history teacher so was more aware of the details of the strategy, but even given this his response was

> *If I may be candid, I also would say that the NLS has never directly influenced my teaching*

I have worked closely with Patrick and know that he is an excellent teacher who uses and teaches writing in his classroom. He is an advocate of Christine Counsell and her work on developing analytical writing. He is implementing applied writing skills in the way that fit with the NLS, but feels that he's not. Unfortunately I didn't ask him about this – an opportunity missed. I don't know why he feels he isn't influenced by the NLS but he obviously doesn't consider it a successful strategy.

We moved on to discuss the issue of exam requirements influencing learning.

PATRICK   *I think writing is increasingly governed by the pressures of the exam. This is where we are so different from emphasis on writing in primary schools. We can see that there is a big emphasis on the literacy hour in primary schools. A lot of time is spent on literacy. What happens when they come to high school is that subjects break up into compartments and no one is teaching writing in their subjects.*

I agreed with this and summarised what I had found when speaking to the history department, that there was an awareness of the limits imposed upon them as science teachers when it came to writing due to the pressures of the exam syllabus.

IVAN   *Yeah, let's face it, I don't think there's a teacher in this country who has not at some point geared their lesson towards the way in which their students are being examined or assessed. Because that's the hoop they have to jump through.*

Patrick began to consider other reasons for the low status of writing some subjects

PATRICK   *There's obviously a balance between the need to do the content in*
               some subjects like science and also to develop the skills of writing as
               well. And some teachers aren't confident to teach writing. Perhaps
               they had bad experiences as writers when they were at school.

I have heard the issue of content over skills before but not during my interviews for this research. I was interested that a man who had trained in history, a subject with arguably a heavy content load, should be putting this forward as a reason for the neglect of writing. When I pointed this out to him he clarified that he didn't think it was right that writing was being neglected but he understood how it happens.

His second point above about teachers not feeling confident was a recurring thought from lots of the teachers I spoke to during the course of this research. When I asked this question as part of the questionnaire discussed earlier in this chapter, of the

Ivan went on to talk at some length about APP. He felt that the advent of APP moved assessment in the right direction but for as long as it was being used as a measure of school's success, it was vulnerable to being reduced to *jumping through hoops*

IVAN   *I believe the theoretical basis for APP is sound because its roots were*
            grounded in getting away from teaching to the test. (It is assessment of) a rich
            task that you might be doing anyway…But we are very much in the situation
            now for as long as there are league tables, for as long as teachers are held
            accountable for the work the students are producing, for as long those things
            are driving standards, that will be our only measure. So while I understand it
            and know that it is fundamentally wrong, if we don't, everyone else will. It is a
            system which I believe is fundamentally broken but there isn't an alternative.

I was interested to hear more about his views on the potential for APP since that has come up with the science teachers who saw it as a possible improvement in the teaching of science. I suggested that my understanding of APP and the views of two of the science teachers

considered APP as being more authentic which was what I thought he too had begun to say above

IVAN   Yes, it's a way of teachers ascertaining students levels that doesn't require a way of putting up barriers and getting students to jump through hoops. It's a way of saying, here is a task, a rich task, here is something that you can do which is a learning experience. I will measure your learning rather than expecting you to put this particular cross to this particular question.

This fits with the views of Martin and Simon, the science teachers. They too felt that APP provided potential for learning to take place along meaningful lines such that assessment was built into the learning rather than creating curriculum to fit into a test criteria and perhaps sacrificing learning – *jumping through hoops*.

CHAPTER SIX

What now?

This thesis has explored the reality of the teaching and learning of writing across the curriculum alongside the literature that informs it. In order to represent its findings, this final chapter is organised around the research questions presented in Chapter One.

1. *What is the lasting legacy of Bullock's recommendations for a 'Language for Life' with regard to writing at Key Stages 3 and 4?*

More than 30 years ago, the Bullock Report established that writing was part of a *language for life*. Schools were charged with the responsibility of creating programmes of study that would give Robbie and his fellow students opportunities to develop as confident and competent writers by making writing an important aspect of all subjects, and also opportunities to write in a variety of modes, not just the once dominant transactional mode. It is important to remember that the Bullock Report was a review of the teaching of English. One of its conclusions was that the skills taught in the secondary English classroom should be developed across the curriculum. The intention was to ensure that young learners were both challenged and supported as writers wherever they wrote, in any subject, not just in the English classroom.

The literature reviewed for this study suggests that Bullock's recommendations on the whole-school nature of language learning have remained peripheral to curriculum and assessment, never achieving the kind of fundamental underpinning of the secondary curriculum that was intended by its authors.

The data from the fieldwork suggests that, though students write a great deal, there is little evidence of Bullock's recommendation, that non-English teachers 'pay particular attention to the part (writing) plays in learning' (DES, 1975: 188). The students interviewed spoke about their writing as though it served only to show what they had learned, rather than as a means of expression or discovery. Bullock's suggestions about the mode of writing, that secondary

school teachers should use more than just the transactional mode, especially the introduction of expressive writing, has clearly not been fulfilled. The students were clear that expressive writing was done only in English and history.

The teachers who participated in this research seemed to understand the aspirations of Bullock, that writing can and should play a part in, as Ivan put it, *rich learning experiences*. But they also spoke with regret that they could not design their curriculum to allow for this type of learning – that to do so would mean sacrificing other, in their view, more important features of learning. These features were largely related to the demands of high stakes, national exams.

The pressure that these exams exert over the decisions that teachers make cannot be underestimated. This is discussed in more detail in the following section, but it's worth noting that this feature of education was found by the authors of the Bullock Report:

> Many teachers, however, protest that the greatest constraint upon them in helping children to gain a progressive control over language is the public examination system (DES, 1975: 176)

The research done for this study echoes this concern. The teachers expressed their frustrations at these 'constraints'. They understood the benefit of creating learning opportunities that promoted the development of writing to learn, but were unable to make it happen. This is further developed in the next section

2. *What are the key features of teachers' professional contexts that influence their decisions about the use of writing in their classrooms?*

A key feature of my conversations with teachers has been that of the influence of exams. It was a consideration for all the teachers interviewed for this thesis, and, as Ivan put it, *(There isn't) a teacher in this country who has not at some point geared their lesson towards the way in which their students are being examined or assessed.* McCabe's view that literacy has to accommodate the climate in which the learner is learning suggests that where there are exams we must prepare students for them. However, there is clearly a delicate cost/benefit balance to how much teachers gear their lessons towards the preparation for exams. For Nigel it has meant an abandoning of good teaching: for Janet is had meant a career decision to move away from curriculum development. These revelations were significant in this research. To balance this Martin and Simon both spoke about their hopes that the newly introduced Assessing Pupil Progress would promote more authentic assessment which in turn would remove some of the pressure to design writing experiences around the limitations of writing in and for exams. Rowe's work also suggested that APP might reintroduce some autonomy for teachers. Given the views of the teachers I spoke to, any initiative that provides the teaching profession with opportunities to regain some agency in their classrooms would be welcome.

I share this hope for APP. At the time of writing there is a review underway considering the direction for educational policy. There have been a number of significant changes made by the current government. New policies regarding curriculum and assessment are being introduced and reinforced by the Ofsted Inspection regime. This in itself will not satisfy this researcher, having explored the development of policy from Bullock the present. The apparent failure to fully implement the recommendations in Bullock has not been for want of policy. There has been plenty of policy around literature. There is no indication at this point of how literacy and writing may fare in this current review of the National Curriculum and the examination system, but it would be safe to say that the emphasis put on target setting, uniform delivery and, most importantly, the use of student performance to rate schools, has not created a climate for success for the teachers I spoke to.

3. What has been the role of government policy in these contexts?

As the review of policies on literacy reveals, there was no lack of attention given to the development of writing. From Bullock onwards there have been, according to Kent (TES 13/11/09: 40), hundreds of initiatives designed to improve students' writing, including the National Curriculum (and its revisions), the National Literacy Strategy and most recently Assessing Pupil Progress. Billions of pounds has been spent on these educational initiatives. Reviews of these programmes claim success, though in some cases it is qualified as moderate success (Stannard and Huxley: 2007, DfES, Fullan et al: 2003). But, as discussed in Chapter Three, there is a large critical element that challenges both the successes claimed by the government in terms of improved writing skills and, more significantly, the positive effect on the teaching and learning of writing skills.

My fieldwork with both student and teachers concurs with the critics. The students were clear that writing is not a cross-curricular feature of their learning and were unclear about their role as writers with choices about word, sentence and text level features. Both of these are features that are central to the National Literacy Strategy. If the NLS had made the positive impact it was designed to make, I would expect to find that there was a variety of writing being done in different subjects across the curriculum and also that students who were appearing to succeed by the measures established by the government should be able to articulate an understanding of the writing process. To review the findings of Chapter Four, students such as STUDENT E and STUDENT F expressed positive feelings about certain types of writing experiences and appear to be making good progress, but are unable to discuss the features of their writing beyond the way it looks or the handwriting. Awareness of the grammar features that have dominated the literacy teaching of primary schools and significantly influence English teaching at KS3 were not embedded in their understanding of themselves as writers. This emphasis on the technical features of writing which was seen from the outset as controversial (see Street: 1984, Ellis: 2003, Goodwyn: 2004 and Goddard: 2009) has not paid off in terms of giving students the language to reflect on the writing process. They also fail to see that the skills they are learning in the English classroom can be applied in other subjects. They assume that the quality of the writing in subjects other than English doesn't matter.

And to extend this consideration of the ideology that emphasises these technical features, my fieldwork with teachers shows that there has been no significant development of teachers' awareness of or implementation of these features in non-English teachers. None of the teachers that I spoke to considered the NLS as significant in their work. Ivan's honest admission that the NLS has had no effect on his teaching or indeed on any teaching across the curriculum in his experience was representative of all the teachers I spoke to.

4. *What do students perceive as important in the development of writing skills?*

My research has always had at its centre a need to understand the nature of the teaching and learning of writing across the curriculum to inform my work as coordinator of school policy. This has taken me beyond the questionable success of the NLS, to consider the lived experience of the students as emerging writers and as such, some key features of learning to write and writing to learn have emerged. Most surprising has been the students' depth of feeling about handwriting. It was an almost universal feature of all the students I spoke to and so cannot be ignored. As head of English I admit to never having prioritised this in the past. This could prove to be a cheap and simple solution to some students' problems as writers. As a result of this research we have begun an intervention programme with incoming Y7 students to address issues with poor handwriting and spelling. Our approach is to find out from the students how they feel about their handwriting and spelling and provide intervention support for those who are self-conscious about it.

It also seems that our time is wasted by attempting to use the grammar approach advocated by the NLS. The students who spoke about their feelings of success as writers in Chapter Four did not make links between their positive feelings about writing and the work done on technical features of language during, for example, the Literacy Hour. And this emphasis on the acquisition of these supposed autonomous technical aspects of language has not found its way into the wider curriculum, for students or teachers.

A further conclusion from my work with students for this research reveals that there is a critical tension for our young writers between feeling inspired and inhibited to freely express themselves. They identified some key features of the writing experience that support their writing:

- They appreciated clear instructions regarding expectations of writing;
- They found models of writing helpful;
- They resented attempts to overly structure the writing experience;
- They appreciated opportunities to feel like they were being asked what they really thought and felt.

THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH

If students are to become competent and confident writers, teachers must have the autonomy to design learning experiences that promote authentic writing in their subjects. Schools must develop whole-school approaches that create the transference of skills such as writing learned in one subject and applied in another.

The genesis of this inquiry was to find out why students like Robbie the Scot had stalled as writers, writing thousands of words every school year but making little or no progress as a writer. This study has revealed some clear insights into the context for secondary school learners that shapes their experience as writers. But it has also stimulated a great deal of discussion that has led to a number of developments including a whole-school focus on literacy and writing. The participatory nature of the study has meant that its findings have fed into the working practices of the teachers. Over the last two years, I have led whole-school inservice training which has focussed on the essential transferability of writing skills. In order to address the issues that arose out of the interviews with teachers, I and a fellow English teacher have met with subject leaders to develop policies that reflect the particular way writing is used in each subject. Great care was taken to tease out the subtle but significant features of writing for different purposes in different subjects. We felt it was important to

develop writing policies that came out of the teachers' understanding of writing in their subjects.

Alongside these small group meetings with subject specialists, our whole-school inservice sessions focussed on what teachers could expect of students in terms of technical accuracy, fluency and their understanding of purpose and audience for writing. Our aim was to establish a culture in the school of having high expectations for writing and a keen awareness of the use of writing as a learning medium. The seeds have been planted.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1   Sample Letter of Consent

Appendix 2   Sample Consent Form

Appendix 3   Sample Memo to Staff

Appendix 4   Sample transcript of Interview

Dear Parent/Carer

I am conducting research as part of a programme with the University of East Anglia. This research is looking at writing across the curriculum.

I would like to interview your son/daughter as part of this research. I hope to have three different interviews with the students. They will be conducted in groups and last about 20 minutes.

All names will be anonymised and all references that might identify the students involved will be removed.

These interviews will take place during form time or possible lesson time, but there will be no significant disruption to learning.

The contribution that the students' views will make to this research is invaluable. I hope that you will support your child's participation in the research.

Regards,

NAME OF SCHOOL

RESEARCH ETHICS: SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project: Writing across the curriculum: the legacy of the Bullock Report

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Ms D. Higgin
Head of English
Telephone XXXXX

Please read the letter attached and complete the form below

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided in the accompanying letter for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions about my child's involvement in this study

2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that s/he is free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to my child taking part in the above study

_____
Name of child

_____   _____   _____
Name of Parent   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

MEMO

I am doing a research project with at UEA looking at if and how students transfer writing skills across the curriculum.

Could I have 3 books/folders of student work to photocopy and use in this project from your_____?

The criteria for selecting the books is firstly the ones you want me to see. As long as they are from students who we consider in the normal range of comprehension and output then they fit the criteria for the sample. I am most interested in HAPs and MAPs. Hate to discriminate against the LAPs but this project isn't able to consider the issue of special needs.

Could you put them in my pigeon hole before lunch on Monday January 28? I will return them by 5pm on the same day. If that is a problem, please let me know.

I would like to follow up on this sampling by talking briefly to those students over the next couple of weeks. I hope it would be all right to take them out of your_____ class for a 5-10 minutes.

CONVERSATION WITH NS

July 22, 2010.

DPH   Maj, of thcrs have said students wd do better in their subject if they cd write better

NS Yeah, well, it's not just about writing is it? It's about organising things in their head

And the converse…obviously if they were worse in English they'd be worse in Science

DPH   you've said Eng rather than writing

NS   I meant writing

DPH [long explanation of importance of writing identified by Bullock and lack of take up since that time, linked to Nat Curric and highstakes testing etc…]

NS   To be honest with you Dot, I don't really know what you mean by cross curric…

DPH   the skills that are transferable,

NS   Well I suppose I don't ever teach writing in the way that you do…

DPH   But you use it?

NS   yeah, I use it but I 'm not really thinking too much about how they are writing…like when they write up and experiment…well, they don't really write up experiments any more…you know…that's not really considered to be important any more. It's more about thinking skills

DPH   well those are transferable aren't they? [writing is another transf skill but it seems that tchrs in this school are finding it difficult to get kids to write in a way that wd ???]

NS   I don't know that I feel that

DPH   But they wd do better if they wrote better?

NS   But they wd in any school

DPH   yes it is a universal problem…but they question is why? Why is there not more possibility for you to address that? As you can idendify that as something that is impeding progress

NS I wdn't say it impedes progress but if it was…my time is better spent dealing with the things that really do affect their grades and at the moment I don't really see writing as being right up there…see what I mean? Otherwise I wd be dealing with it…

DPH But they wd do better if they wrote better?

NS   Well, they wd do better if they did lots of things better. But I wdnt say that writing is right up there, I wd say that…there understanding of science…

DPH   How much writing do they do in science?

[NS gets up to get kids ex. Bks]

NS Quite a lot… this is an average Y8 gp…[referring to ex bks]it kind of varies doesn't it…I mean they're not really writing a huge amnt, I mean not in the way they wd be in yr subject…I mean it's mainly visual isn't it but then that's because I'm a much more visual kind of person and I think that if they've got pictures of stuff down there they're more likely to remember it than if they're writing things…

DPH   So this is writing as a learning medium, they're using writing to learn?

NS Well course they are, they're in school

DPH but you're not assessing it…there's a difference between writing to learn and writing to demonstrate understanding..I mean in many subjects they have to write, under exam conditions, they have to write in order to be assessed, but this isn't being used as an assessment tool, it's being used to construct knowledge…

NS [pause] yeah I guess so

DPH yeah so what you're saying is that you are giving them a chance to use writing, you know drawing and labelling…that's all writing…to clarify what they understand…

NS [pause]…yeah

DPH so writing is used largely as a learning tool…?

NS I don't know…well I just said to you, they don't really do much writing

DPH but when you walked over there you said they did a lot

NS I don't really know, I don't really think about it to be honest with you Dot…well you tell me

DPH I'm looking at it and hearing you describe it…you're giving them a chance to consolidate their understanding to get a permanent record of their understanding, something they can look back on, and that is writing

NS [pause] yeah…but it's not just that it's the process they're going through…

DPH right, they're developing an understanding…what do you mean by 'the process'?

NS   Well it's getting them to slow their thinking as they're writing this stuff down…I mean I've never really thought about it before I mean this obviously completely different from…I mean if they're going to do a piece of creative writing which I do every now and they cos I think it's fun for them to do…

DPH   do they do that in science now?

NS No, I do it sometimes now…but I can't make sweeping statements about

DPH ???

NS If we look through here we'll find some kind of stories or something like that they've written… [NS flicks through pages of book which contains a number of different types of tasks. NS seems surprised by what he finds in the book and moves to another book. Seems not to be finding what he's looking for. DPH and NS exchange comments about the nature of the student in this gp. NS gets up to look for another set of students' books]

DPH But you use extended writing, or story writing to ???

NS   Yeah, ??? to reinforce the science, you know like Cyril the Sperm meets ??? the Egg and how they meet and all the places they kind of go through

DPH   Why a story? Why that particular medium?

NS   Just cos it's different, not because it's better than anything else but I like to do different things, not that a story is better or worse than drawing

DPH   and how do you assess that?

NS   How do I assess it? By going through and looking for the science. I go through and tick off if they have used the key words …and if they've made me laugh

DPH   Ah so there is a qualitative aspect to it?

NS You know the big dilemma for scientists is do I give them exercise books that they can take home that they can revise from you know with a big load of information for them to revise for their exams and that's what I used to do when I first started teaching…but I do that less now because there are revision guides that do that and it seems kind of pointless going through rigourously everything that they need to learn and I dunno, maybe that's a mistake…Jenny the AST says she really worries about the science books that she looks at she probably would about these aswell you know they don't have every piece of info that they need to learn

DPH   she worries because it lacks info?

NS   Yeah…

DPH   It lacks science?
NS   Yeah it lacks the scientific information

DPH   really so what is it that she is…

NS   no, no,no it hasn't rigorously got every last piece of information that they need to learn but they thing is science is so different these days and it isn't just a series of facts it's the whole idea behind how science progresses and that's kind of difficult to write down

DPH   [pointing to specific page of writing in student's book] Can you talk about that task. What is it and how wd that be assessed?

NS Well it hasn't been assessed…

DPH   well it doesn't matter…in theory it has assessment potential…what wd you be looking for?

NS Id be looking for this person to present both sides of an argument, that's what you'd be looking for there

DPH   So that's what the prompt was?...an opinion, give us your opinion?

NS   Yeah…well a balanced opinion…a balanced view on it. And that's what they need to do and for this particular one and other sort of tasks like this it wd need to talk about maybe how they wd weight either side of the argument on the basis of where they found the information

DPH   Informed debate? Your looking for informed debate

NS   Yeah

DPH   You know that they do this kind of writing in a number of different subjects? You know ARGUE/PERSUADE/ADVISE…they do this in history, English and so on

NS   Well yeah

DPH   And are you aware of the standards…I mean what I'm getting at is that those of us who teach writing as a discrete skill are looking at ways we can support…how can we support them to do better when using this skill in other subjects? I mean I don't know this student but this is year 10 and it looks pretty minimalist by English standards for a response you'd expect more particularly if they got a lot of facts which presumably he has because that's what you're looking for is the science

NS   That's interesting…I mean obviously in an exam you wd never write…I mean that wd be too much for and exam…so I wdn't really want three pages of stuff

DPH   well that's interesting

NS   Also I wdn't know what to do with 3 pages of science and stuff, I mean I wdn't

DPH   You're really just looking for facts and content aren't you?

NS   Well not really…

DPH   let's just talk about that for a moment: when you are preparing youngsters for assessment…what is your process for preparing them for the tests GCSE tests

NS   well you know the usual kind of stuff getting them to realise the different between 'describe' and 'explain' and to think about what the words…all these new science words like 'valid' all these new science words and getting them to understand also getting them to realise that 4 marks means 4 things that they've got to write rather then calculating exactly what they've got to write…they haven't got to worry about putting the odd wrong one in there because the examiner will seek out the right answers

[discussion about what kinds of assessment kids do at GCSE…DPH thought they did multiple choice but NS explained they don't…'just one word answers']

NS   Just about all of them (exams) are sort of whole sentence kind of answers

DPH   and at any point is there writing skill likely to be an impediment to them delivering the goods

NS [pause]I don't think so…I don't know…I haven't got the faintest idea…I mean they just write stuff down

DPH Its just that you said 'yes' to question 3 (WD STUDENTS DO BETTER IN YOUR SUBJECT IF THEY WROTE BETTER?)

NS   I guess there are some kids who are unable to write therefore they're not going to write…but is seems insignificant…I mean how many kids in Y10 are unable to write a sentence

DPH   not many but that's an extreme…but let me tell you that research shows that fm 14-16 students, particularly boys, loose a lot of confidence as writers and as a result they are less productive, the produce less and less and by the time they're 16 and they're doing their…

NS But in science it's insignificant

DPH   OK, so I go back to what you meant when you said yes they wd do better in science if they cd write better

NS   Well, if they cd write better, maybe they… I dunno, maybe I want to change my mind about that on reflection

DPH   right, so writing really doesn't make any difference?

NS   Well that's just going to extreme…if they can't write they can't

DPH   I'm not talking about the abilty to use a pen and paper…I'm talking about the ability to express themselves in writing at the same level that they cd verbally

NS   I don't notice that mismatch…I'm not saying there isn't one, I saying that I don't notice it I don't see that I wdn't be thinking I wdn't be putting at the top of the priority list that I need to teach students how to construct a sentence

DPH I guess I need to clarify I'm not talking about sentence construction either because they're not being marked for that correct? Although I understand the new controlled assessment tasks has a small percentage for writing…anyway, this issue is not to do with fundamentals; the issue is to do with how they can use language to express themselves under the conditions that they're being asked to do so. I mean in some subjects where they're being marked, it's going to make a difference but for example in lit that' snot being marked so you want them to express them selves and fluently and confidently as possible. Do we then say to the kids that spelling and punctuation doesn't matter so don't worry about that? Do you see what I mean?

NS   I do yeah

DPH   and what research shows is that particularly with boys as end of KS4 they loose confidence as writers to express themselves so they're loosing confidence in lots of ways, thinking skills they don't take, for them producing something for assessment is a risk and it gets to be a higher risk when the stakes are higher and they pull back and that is one of … in all subjects and get lower grades…it's a vicious circle

NS   I mean I just see that the number of kids doing what you're describing is really really tiny but there are some who will draw all over it but the confidence thing doesn't get in the way of science

DPH   I think research wd show otherwise because it's a holistic problem it isn't just in specific subjects…it's kids who were showing signs early in their school time average ability but as the stakes get higher and more is expected of them to produce for assessment the older it gets,

NS   We just do it all the time in science and they're so absolutely used to it and I don't thinks there is a confidence issue…

DPH   doing what?

NS   end of topic tests constantly and passed exam papers to the point where I don't think confidence is an issue. If anything they're blasé about it because they get to see it so much that they don[t see it as important anymore…it's a bit like what's happened to coursework

DPH   what has happened to coursework in science?

NS   Well it used to be in just a couple of subjects but now because it's everywhere they just sit in mmy lessons and I have to remind them that it's like you are in an exam hall, this is 20% of your grade and I'm telling gyou the answers and they kind of sit there…why aren't you writing this down? Unless I'm standing over them

DPH   and what do you put that down to?

NS   well just cos they're so, you know it's the same thing as them writing their answers in an exam, they are so used that in science they're not nervous about writing it, I don't see that as an issue but what might an issue is that they can't be bothered to because they're so used to…

DPH   what is the coursework requirement in science now?

NS   they're big tasks so there is a lot of writing but it is totally broken down. In my lessons, we have 10 min sessions where they have to write a paragraph on something and they get pretty well advised on that and they all do it and it gets marked at the end of that 10 mins then we move on to the next thing. I mean I wd be worried about their writing skills if I was managing it ina different way and I was saying this is a project and I want you to go home and do it because then I think they'd get into a panic so I use strategies to stop them worrying about that process of having to generate 5 sides of

coursework so Ijust do it bit by bit and they all do it together and they don't leave the room till it's done. And at the end of it, every single kid gets a good grade in coursework. Like really stunning grade, like our triple sciencetist this year 85% got A* in their coursework and I did all that with them. And why did they get that? Because I am breaking it down. You know in another school up the road they're probably doing it in a way that is better for their general education and being about to produce a project but they wdn't get the grades that I get

DPH   they might get a deeper learning experience?

NS   Yeah that's right. My wife goes made at me

DPH   don't you think that' s kind of ironic though?

NS   Yeah I think it's tragic

DPH   so you're not letting them loose as researchers to do it themselves because you have anxieties about what the finished product will look like?

NS   well no, not my anxieties

DPH   well you do cos as a teacher you don#t want them to get good grades

NS   at the end of the day what do I want, what do they need and what shd I be giving them…I shd be giving them the best possible chance they can get and they do brilliantly…you want to know why our science students do so well…what did we get 57% A*-C which is way above any one else in the school and it's because of coursework…we absolutely do their coursework for them more or less. I have to admit…my Mrs goes bananas at this conversation here, working at UEA. She gets PhD students wanting to write, wanting her to plan out every paragraph and why is that? That's because that's' what we're doing as teachers. The fundamental problem here is coursework…is coursework

DPH   what wd it take to allow you to give them more freedom to create those 5 pages?

NS   time

DPH Just time?

[pause]

DPH   cos it doesn't sound like a time constraint you have concerns about them…

NS   I wdn't be happy with them I'm just thinking about how I structure my lessons. They know what they need to be doing in the immediate future. They're not allowed to spend time constructing a bit bigger. It wd be lovely to have three lessons where the lessons sort of rolled on and did all the organising things in there and ???not a lot of groups can cope with that. But as an AST I'm really constrained…my lessons have got to be outstanding and that wdn't be and outstanding lesson, me standing up the front here and them getting on with it. And that's kind of sad. So all my lessons are, I'm absolutely totally managing them every moment. The know exactly what they need to be doing and where they need to go on a minute by minute basis and there isn't that room to give them space to do the sorts of things we've been talking about. And that's very sad and probably has abig impact on them and what happens to them when they get older. When they are undergraduates…

DPH   But the constraint on you is simply your AST status

NS   no it's more than just that…I mean there is more of a constraint on me because as and AST I am expected…when I am observed it is expected that my lessons are outstanding so that impacts on how I do my planning I am expecting that they might come in (to observe) so I need to have them in the routine of doing that kind of thing. For other people who it is OK to be satisfactory then they have a bit more space…I feel very very ???

DPH   I find that somewhat concern making to be honest as it seems quite ironic…are the other teachers who may only be getting satisfactory also getting good results

???

NS   what they don't have is the ability to do a larger kind of project and on their own and I don't see them as developing as independent learners because of the constraints on me trying to teach to the Ofsted formula

DPH   so there's Ofsted stuff that you are concerned about and there's also assessment

NS   that's part of it…if you read the ofsted thing you need to be assessing every moment of time throughout the lesson. You might now like what you've seen here (exercise book?) but they are constantly being marked and told where they are and what they need to do and the idea behind coursework is to give the opportunity to do that but if you let them go free rein then they get stressed by massiveness of it so it needs to be broken down into little bitesize chunks so that's what we do. I don't think I do anything different. I think I'm probably a bit more controlling than other teachers …I don't particularly like it

DPH   so why don't you do it differently?

NS   cos they wdn't get the results

DPH   What will you do with CAT where they have to do it completely independently?

NS   well that wd be gd, I'd welcome that

DPH   well why don't you do it now?

NS   because it's coursework

DPH   but CAT replaces coursework – it's the same teaching ???

NS   I will welcome the day when I don't have an impact on their coursework in the way that I run my lessons cos that's not fair but I've got to do what I do in order to get them really good grades and that's why they do get good grades