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**WORKPLACE LEARNING:**

**EXPLORING CONFIDENCE & MOTIVATION**

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**WORKPLACE LEARNING:**

**EXPLORING CONFIDENCE & MOTIVATION**

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be

and

you help them to become what they are capable of being.

*von Goethe*

**Zoya Zuvcenko**

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**ABSTRACT**

How are adults affected by studying maths and English as part of a workplace-learning programme? Is confidence enhanced by the way they learn?

This thesis attempts to understand the roles of confidence and motivation in learning. I have tried to explore how adult learners feel when it comes to studying maths and English in a formal environment.

Specifically, my research explores the microlevel interaction between eleven adults who study in a classroom for one day a week over five months. They all work in the care industry. Using a diary and reflective methods, I also explore my role and relationship with them as their tutor of maths and English, and my personal attitude towards aspects of my learning - both past and present.

I interview the participants on two occasions. From these dialogues, several one-to-one conversations emerge, which I describe as cameos. I also use reviews with participants that are completed by the training manager. These examine the impact of my role as their tutor.

Analysing my data thematically, my findings show that confidence in learning occurs, in part, due to personal relationships. Whilst the use of scaffolding and situated learning are seen to develop confidence, participants also acquire it from their group peers. When adult learners work together and share an interest in caring for one another, their perception of their own development is affected. I have found that encouragement and building trust are vital for their learning. The development of the tutor/learner relationship has tended to increase learners’ motivation because they want to please the tutor as well as themselves.

For both participants and myself, the confidence to continue to learn and to use the knowledge gained took place when encouragement, trust and motivation were present in the process.

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 The study**

Eleven adults, in full-time work in the care industry, are studying maths and English in a classroom, for one day a week, over five months. I am their tutor. The aim of this research is to understand their experiences connected to their learning in this situation. I am interested in understanding if their confidence develops or changes during the time I teach them. Kushner (1993) suggests that it is necessary to understand education events through the context of one’s own life experience. I also consider aspects of my childhood and adult feelings about learning, comparing some of the participants’ experiences with mine.

To obtain this information I use descriptive qualitative methodologies. These include semi-structured interviews, cameos, and personal reflections as both tutor and learner. Transcribed audio recordings of participant interviews and a reflective journal act as supporting data sources.

The study explores the following three research questions, built on the foundation of my thesis that is concerned with classroom based-learning in the workplace. They are:

1. what do adults in the workplace say they feel about classroom-based learning?
2. Who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning?
3. Does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?

The findings chapter considers how well the questions were answered.

This chapter begins by explaining the structure of the thesis. I then outline the backgrounds of the organisation and participants who are the focus of my research, followed by highlighting why I chose to do this research. Hearing thoughts from participants, as well as from myself, is a cornerstone of the thesis. I question what makes a good story and I present my positionality.

**1.2 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis consists of this introduction as my first chapter followed by seven additional chapters. The literature review is my second chapter, where I consider two main themes that evolve from my research. In the methodology chapter, I outline the framework that develops from the pilot studies. I also provide descriptions of the methods used in the study, highlighting ethical issues and how they were managed during the research. Never having conducted a major piece of research before this doctorate, I felt it necessary to trial aspects of intended research before starting. Chapter four, therefore, discusses my pilot studies.

I have opted to take an unconventional route and, although I present the actual research in chapters five and six, these being the group interviews and cameos, chapter seven contains detailed findings that combine the two. Chapter eight discusses issues around my role as a tutor and then continues by reflecting on issues concerning workplace learning. It then considers changes in thinking that seem to have occurred from this study for both participants and myself. The chapter ends by looking at aspects for further research, contributions to education and recommendations for workplace learning.

**1.3 The organisation and participants**

Participants work for Creative Care, a branch of a national care organisation that employs staff in nursing homes, hospitals and mental health units.

It serves local communities although it is a national organisation. It has both an outreach approach to care, as well as having places for people to receive short and long-term care. It supports people of varying ages, depending on need. Staff may come from a nursing, administrative or general healthcare background. They may also be interested in supporting the welfare of the public and may have no previous academic or work background. The company’s approach is to encourage continuous professional development so that staff can develop their skills that should benefit the company. Although not all staff want to improve academically, as will be read in chapter eight, people are requested to do so in order to retain positions they already hold.

It has been organising maths and English classes for its staff since Autumn 2012. The terms numeracy and literacy were used until August 2013 and the qualification to be studied were called Key Skills. Subsequently these terms were changed to maths and English and the qualification became known as Functional Skills. The way of assessing ability changed from multiple-choice tests and a portfolio, to exams alone.

The offer of formal learning for its staff was adopted by managers at Creative Care when they discovered that staff were entitled to educational courses through government-funded initiatives, such as those proposed in The Skills Strategy White Paper (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2010), to widen access to formal education in the workplace.

Creative Care opted to obtain its courses from a private training company, rather than accessing a college. The learner approach is similar. The difference is that a college has a larger remit of staff with specific skills to support those who may need extra tuition, whereas private training companies are more likely to be small-scale and therefore less expensive. This difference affects training costs to organisations like Creative Care.

Katya is the owner and manager of the training organisation selected by Creative Care. Alongside my interviews, Katya also interviews the group and some of the participants on a one-to-one basis in order to obtain feedback for the development of her company. I include these interviews as part of my research. Katya also becomes an additional participant in that she agreed to being recorded when we talked about the learners.

Wolf & Jenkins (2003) and Wolf *et al* (2004) suggest that both businesses and individuals significantly benefit from improved levels of maths and English, including increases in productivity, reductions in costs and enhanced customer satisfaction. In discussion with management at Creative Care, it is believed that improved understanding of maths and English equips their staff with the skills the organisation needs them to have, such as an ability to use computers, be able to read notices, write e-mails and be pastorally supportive of others.

Some participants were asked to attend maths and English classes and had agreed to the request. Others volunteered. Some attended classes as part of an apprenticeship course, known as a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), or used these classes as a stepping-stone towards it. These participants had no choice but to attend. Despite the different motives, as can be read in the interviews, reasons for attending can be summed up by Tanya: “*I’m just doing it to learn more skills so I can do more in the company and help the staff, and also it will help to move my way up to a higher band, as well as going on the Level 3 [NVQ]"*.

Participants were invited to share their feelings about the learning they experienced whilst on the course. As will be read in the research, some reveal more about themselves than others.

**1.4 Why I selected this research**

There are several reasons why I undertook this thesis and I highlight three.

Primarily it is because I am fascinated by how people are affected in a formal learning environment when encouraged to study a course by their employers. I want to understand who or what influences how people learn in a classroom environment. Previous governments seem to have wanted people at work to become lifelong learners and it is becoming increasingly difficult to advance in a job without formal qualifications (Department for Employment and Learning, 2005; Coffield *et al*, 2008).

My second reason is for self-development. As will be read in my positionality later in this chapter, my path to teaching was circuitous. My educational and work background influenced my way of teaching, which consequently motivated this study.

I also selected this research because I continue to be involved in work that has many facets and this study has allowed me to explore several subjects that I can use with different groups and individuals.

**1.5 Telling the story**

Josselson (1993: xi) asks:

What is a good story? Is just a good story enough? What must be added to a story to make it scholarship? ... do we derive concepts from stories and then use these concepts to understand people?

What makes a good story scholarly? This question is perhaps the main issue in determining if a narrative is credible, dependable and trustworthy – all cornerstones of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ellis (1995) contends that stories may be considered scholarly if they encourage readers to believe experiences are authentic, believable and possible. Bruner (1996) argues that story making is central to creating an understanding of the world into which a person can feel they will fit.

My challenge is to create a story that is relevant to those who teach adults and to those who are interested in the academic development of adults through learning. I want to give a voice to learner experiences, my experiences of education and my teaching approaches. I aim to draw out stories that are relevant to an audience of learners, people who teach and those who are interested in the development of adults who participate in formal learning. I hope that tutors who read this may reflect on their own practices.

I hope to have created a *“patchwork of feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviors (sic) that portray a more complete view of … life”* (Muncey, 2005: 10), which reflects the confidence that participants may have experienced through their learning in the classroom.

**1.6 A note on style**

The writing style of the thesis switches between the academic and the narrative because a narrative style seems appropriate for the reader to appreciate the conversations.

**1.7 Positionality**

*Once upon a time, a little girl believed she was stupid. Her parents and teachers also thought this because she did not appear to learn in conventional ways. Listening whilst doodling, for example, was not encouraged at school and she quickly forgot information given to her verbally. Studying different subjects in one day confused her.*

*Authority figures appeared to be proved right about her lack of ability. As a teenager, the little girl failed her exams. She kept failing one subject in particular – maths. She could not tell her father that, for the third time, she had failed her maths exam, without even obtaining a grade.*

*Her father, mother and older sister understood maths. Her sister passed her maths ‘O’ level when she was 15 and her further maths a year later. She was someone to admire.*

*Many years passed. As an adult, the little girl learnt that other girls - and boys - also failed some subjects at school. Like her, they felt inadequate.*

Kanter highlights the psychology and culture that sustains *“losing streaks”*:

If losses mount, pressure goes up … Stress makes it easier to panic. Panic makes it easier to lose. Losing increases neglect … Signs of failure cause people to dislike and avoid one another; hide information, and disclaim responsibility – key elements of denial. All of this makes the cornerstones of confidence crumble. People doubt themselves (2004: 96).

*What if it was not her lack of ability at school that was the issue? She began to realise that there might be other issues that affected her. This included, she realised, her lack of confidence and the way she learnt. The little girl questioned herself and she knew that self-pity had to go.*

*At 34, she trained to become a tutor for adults. At 40, the little girl still needed to prove to herself that she was not stupid.*

*She contacted the Open University. It enabled her to study modules that would lead to a Master’s degree. Once she had achieved this, she realised that she had, perhaps, skills that she could use to enable other adults to develop their potential. Some years later, this led her to study towards an Ed.D.*

*Within a few months of her starting her doctorate, the little girl was invited to a job interview.*

*The interview went well. She knew beforehand that she might be asked to sit a maths test in order to be offered the job and she prepared as best she could. The little girl, however, at aged 49, burst into tears and lost her composure when told that the time had come for this assessment. Surprisingly, the interviewers were not fazed by this reaction, but insisted that, if she wanted the job, she had to go through with this ordeal.*

I passed and I was offered the position.

This was a turning point for me. Why had I passed? How had I passed? What could I have done earlier in my life to make this incident less traumatic? How could I help others deal with this kind of situation? I was determined to use these experiences positively for others.

I thought about how my childhood affected my learning.

My father had been a sociable man. He was a political refugee from Eastern Europe. His experiences encouraged him to be generous. My mother told me that he shared all he had with all he knew, whether these were ideas, food or money. Due to war, he did not have the opportunity to study in school as a teenager. Learning, my father believed, took place not only in the classroom, but also by being with others. He recognised that everyone had skills they could share.

Vygotsky came from the same political and geographical region as my father, but was one generation older. Vygotsky *“theorized (sic) that learning occurs through participation in social or culturally embedded experiences”* (Raymond, 2000: 176). Vygotsky believed that people learnt together, being influenced by social interactions, which took place in meaningful contexts. He did not think that people could learn in isolation (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bransford *et al* (2000) confirm this thinking. They suggest that when children interact with others who know more than they do, those influences change their way of thinking. This moves them on from what they already know to develop new ideas.

This may not always happen, however. If there are people who understand an idea but do not know how to pass on their knowledge, then some who follow may get left behind. In addition, people have different gifts. What one person is capable of may not be what another can achieve as successfully.

Even though I had not read Vygotsky before this doctorate, due to my father’s influence and similar thinking, I recognise how my approach to teaching and learning has been influenced by his approach. Goodson & Sikes (2001: 52) suggest that *“most people’s preference among research topics is likely to be for ones which have meaning to and interest for them, and this meaning and interest generally stems from something in their own lives”.* This is the case with me, not only due to my educational and family influences, but also because of my work.

From the age of 20, for fourteen years, I was in paid or voluntary work with both children and adults with learning difficulties, mental health issues or physical disabilities. This background influenced my development as a teacher.

My first experience was living in a Steiner community in Scotland to care for children who were on the autistic spectrum or had other special educational needs. I spent a year there and returned for three weeks every year for ten years.

I moved to London. I volunteered with the Gateway Club, a group for adults with learning difficulties, and the PHAB Club, an organisation that encouraged the integration of people with physical disabilities and those who were able bodied.

For five years I lived, as a volunteer, in one of the houses set up by Social Services to support people who had previously lived in mental institutions. I was responsible for six adults who might have had mental health issues or learning difficulties. Skills such as cooking, money management, finding work or catching a bus were ones that I was able to show by example to those I lived with. Some years later I lived in a residential home run by MENCAP and I used what I had learnt previously in that job.

I moved to Wakefield. I worked as a volunteer in a school supporting children with learning difficulties. I was told that if I had a qualification I could be paid. This had never occurred to me.

I applied to colleges, opting to study towards an adult teacher training qualification due to my previous experiences. One of the tutors from the college I studied with invited me to teach there. This began my paid experience of teaching. It appeared that I had an aptitude for working with students who seemed uncertain of learning in the classroom and I was encouraged to develop my teaching with this type of learner in mind.

I moved to the south of England. In the one year I worked with academically able ‘A’ level students, I was told by other teaching staff that they had *“never seen someone who could make so many teaching mistakes, with so many people, in such a short space of time”.* It seemed that my approach to teaching did not meet the expectations of staff at this particular college, even though the students told me they appreciated my style and they passed their exams.

Most of my teaching experience has been with people who have struggled academically, or they have had learning difficulties. One of the tutors at a college I worked for suggested that I could train other staff in some of my approaches. This then began my work as a trainer.

When I moved to the north west of England, I began teaching adults in the workplace, using the skills I had acquired. I also taught and became an educational consultant for people with autism and acquired brain injuries.

I work all over the country with private training organisations, further education colleges; schools; hospitals, care homes; prisons; businesses and in industry. As a freelance trainer and tutor, I may work with groups or individuals on short or long-term contracts. The training I run includes understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Asperger’s syndrome, dyspraxia, Tourette’s syndrome and dyscalculia; how to manage teams, and equality and diversity issues. Teaching includes maths and English Functional Skills and topics surrounding health and social care.

**Summary**

Although still the little girl inside, I am also the adult who is taking responsibility for my own learning in the hope that my experiences can support others. My intention is that this research will help people to understand and challenge themselves as learners or as tutors, and recognise their own qualities.

The next chapter explores the literature I used for this research and how they relate to my research questions. As will be read, my interest is not about education in general, but about interactions between learners and those who teach them. How this developed is considered in the methodology.

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Introduction**

The intention of this review is to provide readers with an understanding of some of the topics and theories I studied for the thesis. I have read books and articles from many parts of the world to gain a more rounded view of the ways in which adults use learning in their work that they acquire in the classroom. The literature has also given me the opportunity to discover ideas about what develops confidence in learning, which has helped me to determine my approach to the study and identify my interests.

I thought I knew what it was I wanted to research. I was, however, muddled in my thinking. I had many ideas, but I struggled to clarify which ones were relevant for me. What new thoughts could I offer the academic and educational communities? The research evolved from reading others’ thoughts that challenged me. Keeping the research questions in my mind helped me to focus my ideas. They are:

1. what do adults in the workplace say they feel about classroom-based learning?
2. Who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning?
3. Does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?

The findings reveal interactions between the participants and me as their tutor. The literature reflects this. I explore what created the motivation to teach and be taught.

The timing and role of literature reviews are debated. There are those who suggest that a review should occur before any data is collected (Hart, 1998; Freshwater, 2004; Polit & Beck, 2004) so that what will be gathered as data will have been fully considered. Another viewpoint is that literature reviews should only occur once all research has been completed (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011), so as not to influence what may be looked for.

I elected to do both, exploring ideas before and after any data was collected. This dual approach allowed me to collect viewpoints to develop my research, and helped me to analyse the findings once completed. It also let me understand how my thinking developed concerning the content of the thesis over the time of the study. I realised, for example, that one of my methodologies, autoethnography, had not been used as much as I had expected and it developed into reflective practice. This change is explained in the methodology. Reflective practice also evolved as a theme that permeated the research.

What follows is an inquiry of the topics based on the findings and issues that emerged and can be read in chapters seven and eight.

**Section 1 – aspects of learning**

1. Lifelong learning
2. Workplace learning
3. Confidence in learning
4. Situated learning
5. Scaffolding

**Section 2 – comparative research**

1. Teaching and learning
2. Autoethnography
3. Reflective practice

**SECTION 1: ASPECTS OF LEARNING**

**1.1 Lifelong learning (LL)**

Although not a theme, the notion of lifelong learning (LL) pervades my thesis. As will be read in chapter seven and then discussed in chapter eight, participants took their learning out of the classroom and used that knowledge at home and at work. My third research question – *‘does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?’* – influenced my thinking with this subject.

There may be an assumption that LL is a recent phenomenon. Gopee (2001) suggests the 1970’s as its most recent beginning, embracing formal, non-formal and informal education, which Dave (1976), amongst other scholars, developed. Tight (1998a; 1998b) traces it to the early 20th century. Hutchins (1970), however, advocates that *‘paideia’* – the Athenian term for culture – was LL, promoted as an on-going concern that began as soon as civilisation developed. Athenians recognised that there was no separation between living and learning:

education was not a segregated activity, conducted for certain hours, in certain places, at a certain time of life. It was the aim of the society. The city educated the man. The Athenian was educated by culture, by *paideia* (Hutchins, 1970: 133).

These cultural experiences, however, excluded the majority. Only rich, titled men gained from the city’s education.

Thousands of years have passed since this Greek model and in Britain, formalised learning for adults is no longer purely for the elite, as The Skills Strategy White Paper (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2010) highlights. The cost of formal education, however, in terms of effort and time, in addition to financial outlay, is beyond the reach of many adults (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2011). My participants had an opportunity to learn because their company obtained government funding. Participant expectation was to commit to the study.

A discussion concerning the impact LL has had on participants occurs in chapter eight.

**1.2 Workplace learning (WPL)**

All three research questions were in my mind when considering this topic. Within the literature, WPL can have a variety of meanings, for example:

1. to promise improvements in performance and productivity (Sung & Ashton, 2005);
2. to potentially create opportunities for personal and professional development and promise job satisfaction and self-fulfilment (Matthews, 1999); and
3. to potentially facilitate a movement towards an equal and socially inclusive society where there will be better jobs and more skilled, knowledgeable and flexible workers to occupy them (Senge, 1991).

These potentials are not only met by the recognition that learning occurs in work time; I needed to appreciate that both the practices and discourses of WPL required understanding and development.

Unwin & Wellington (2001) consider WPL in the context of young people who are new to the work environment. They deliberate on the implication of Key Skills, the forerunner of Functional Skills in the workplace. Although they discuss adults who are somewhat younger than those I am involved with, Unwin & Wellington are sensitised to the fact that what may be *“up to date”* (p. 2) in terms of educational opportunities for adults today might not be the case tomorrow. A new government, or education minister, can change qualifications and therefore WPL, in a moment. In chapter eight I discuss how ongoing governmental changes in education impact on WPL.

As mentioned earlier, the processes of change have meant that WPL has attained several meanings, rather than one definitive idea that is universally agreed upon. One reason for this may include an issue of competing interests and values:

The workplace has become a site of learning associated with two quite different purposes … The first is the development of the enterprise through contributing to production, effectiveness and innovation; the second is the development of individuals through contributing to knowledge, skills and the capacity to further their own learning both as employees and citizens in the wider society (Boud & Garrick, 1999: 6).

Another reason may be linked to disciplinary backgrounds from which WPL has been approached, investigated and theorised (Boud, 1998; Hager, 1999; Stern & Sommerlad, 1999; Poell & Van Woerkom, 2013). This has generated diverse views as to what WPL is. Taking these two main reasons together, I am in agreement with Boud’s claim that *“workplace learning is a site of intersecting interests, contested ideas, multiple forms of writing and rapidly evolving practice”* (1998: 11).

Stern & Sommerlad (1999: 2) contend that WPL can be understood based on how the words ‘learning’ and ‘work’ are separated, which they consider in three ways:

1. the workplace as a site for learning;
2. the workplace as a learning environment; and
3. learning and working as inextricably linked.

The first approach completely separates learning from the workplace environment. The second consideration is, I believe, more work-based learning, where organised learning takes place at the job location. Zuboff suggested that *“learning is the new form of labour”* (cited in Stern & Sommerlad, 1999: 2) and this is the third point Stern & Sommerlad make, which is based on the idea of ‘continuous learning’, where there is an on-going process of employees developing skills and learning from others whilst at work.

My teaching is in the first category and will be commented on in chapter seven as part of the theme of teaching and learning.

**1.3 Confidence in learning**

One of the themes my research revealed is how aspects of the word confidence seemed to develop with some of the participants. Chapter seven explains how this occurred. Research questions one and three were answered from this finding.

The Chambers Dictionary defines “*confidence”* as *“firm trust or belief ... self-assurance; self-belief; assuredness, especially in the outcome of something”* (1998: 344)*.* Cicero defined confidence as *“that feeling by which the mind embarks in great and honourable courses with a sure hope and trust in itself”* (2007: 326).

What has not been said about confidence? Who can add any more? At the time of writing, when adding the word *‘confidence’* to search engines, Google produced over 479,000,000 hits and Google Scholar 3,700,000. Although it is a concept that is present in current thinking, as the quote from Cicero highlights, the word confidence and its meaning has long been contemplated. In that there are many types and interpretations of the word, I focus on aspects that specifically emerge from my findings.

The Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing (2014) confirms Bandura’s (1997) thinking that confidence is equal to self-efficacy. The interpretation is that people develop an innate belief that goals can be achieved and that optimism is a way of seeing adversities as temporary, and restricted to one area of life without it spilling over into another.

My understanding of confidence is that it is both a present state of mind and a future belief that things will go well. I also interpret this to mean that it is a positive judgement on ability.

Norman & Hyland (2003: 8/9), when discussing their research of student-teacher ideas on confidence, found that the term could include three components:

1. that confidence is connected cognitively to the self, e.g. *“belief in one’s knowledge and ability”*;
2. that confidence also has an emotional component, e.g. *“being able to relax”* and
3. that confidence has a performance association, e.g. *“ability to overcome nerves”*.

The findings reveal this to be the case in all three areas.

Kanter (2004), focusing on a sporting mentality rather than on educational successes and failures, is concerned with how people can develop a positive outlook and so compete successfully against others. In that my participants are competing against themselves, the analogy works as well for them as for those involved in sports. She claims that *“Everything about an economy, a society, an organization, or a team depends on it [confidence]”* (2004: 7). Kanter argues that success or failure do not tend to be isolated events but are part of what she describes as *“fortunate or unfortunate cycles”* (p. 3) or winning and losing *“streaks”* (p. 11). I interpret this to mean that successes and failures are not one-off events but ongoing explorations where each success and failure provide opportunities to adapt to life.

Kanter also explains how confidence consists of positive expectations with favourable outcomes. She draws on Seligman’s research. Seligman (2006) carried out research to show how teams, not just individuals, have an optimistic or pessimistic *“explanatory style”* (p. 109) and how this affects the performance of the team. As will be read in the findings, the role of the group, as opposed to group work that I might have provided, is an important factor in the development of confidence. Seligman’s consideration of optimism and self-esteem include the ideas of *“feeling good”* and *“doing well”* (Seligman, 2006: vi).

Although Kanter uses Seligman’s ideas that working in a group has benefits for confidence, she sometimes contradicts herself. An example is when she connects the terms ‘winning’ and ‘confidence’, assuming they belong together, as in *“Confidence does not guarantee you that you will win every single time”* (p. 350) and *“confidence brings: the resilience to bounce back from defeat to victory”* (ibid). In this context it becomes clear that Kanter’s sport analogies do not directly correspond to education, as her thinking about confidence is concerned with personal success that can only be achieved if people are in competition with others.

**1.4 Situated learning**

I conducted the research with a group I was teaching, described by some as *“practitioner research”* (Walker, 1985; Hopkins, 2014). I explain my teaching in the methodology chapter, with an awareness that I used situated learning.

Whereas there has been some literature written on practitioner research, (for example, Herrington & Kendall, 2005; Hillier & Morris, 2010) more is needed to support educators involved in maths and English workplace learning. This thesis, however, does not only focus on the way I taught. As will be read in chapter seven, it is more involved with the relationships that developed in the classroom and the impact this had on individuals. Nonetheless, in that I tried to approach practitioner research creatively, breaking away from conventions that may have constrained it, (Dadds *et al*, 2001), I hope that my findings will be seen to encourage educators with additional ideas on how they could approach this type of research.

My findings noticed in what ways participants benefited from learning in the classroom and I realised that I used situated learning in my teaching. The theme of teaching and learning developed from this finding. Wilson (1993) and Anderson *et al* (1996) propose that situated learning experiences guide the development of classroom or workplace activities:

1. learning is grounded in the actions of everyday situations;
2. knowledge is gained situationally and transfers only to similar situations;
3. learning comes out of social processes which includes the way people think, perceive ideas, overcome problems and work alongside others;
4. learning is part of all social environments.

I agree with the notion that learning is grounded in the actions of everyday situations. I have learnt in this way. It is not necessarily the best way of learning, however, which Wilson and Anderson *et al* appear to imply. I know of learners who find theoretical learning equally satisfying. To state that knowledge is acquired situationally and transfers only to similar situations is where I particularly differ. If learners are shown how to transfer knowledge, then they will be able to reassign that information to a variety of situations, whether they are similar or not. The whole premise of situated learning, as I understand it, is to free the learner from the shackles of insular learning and be able to transfer the learning to any situation that they encounter. In that all learning is social, Wilson and Anderson *et al* merely state the obvious. All learning in this case could be viewed as situational.

Apart from two people who had met each other previously, participants joined the classes without knowing anyone else. The group was formed out of the need or desire to learn maths and English. One of my findings concerned how the group related to each other.

Maslow (1954) developed an idea that describes individual needs, but can also be applied to the reasons people join and stay in groups. *“At the most basic level, people join groups to survive; at the highest level, people join groups in order to reach their own full potential”* (Engleberg & Wynn, 1997: 29).

Unlike Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Schutz’s theory of interpersonal behaviour – Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation (FIRO) (1958) - concentrates on three interpersonal needs that he claimed most people seem to share at some level: that of inclusion, control and affection. As will be read in chapter seven, feeling included was expressed in different ways by several of the participants. The control that Schutz describes is concerned with competency and confidence. My participants were not expected to work as a team, although a group cohesion developed.

Affection towards me was a surprise finding that resulted in reasons given for some participants wanting to succeed. Schutz suggests that this is concerned with people wanting to feel liked. Chapter seven reveals that it may have been my care for individuals that created this feeling.

As with Maslow’s conclusions, however, which *“seem closely tied to middle-class American cultural experience, so the theory may not be valid of all cultures or socioeconomic strata”* (Lefton, 1994: 372), the same warning can be applied to FIRO and I have treated Schutz’s theory cautiously.

This theory interlinks with Lave & Wenger’s social theory of learning (1991), which I highlight in chapter seven. It developed from their analysis of how individuals learn to become members of a community of practice through the process of legitimate peripheral participation. They state that they concentrate on the journey new learners undertake from the edge of the community of practice to the mainstream. Their belief is that people learn from interactions with more experienced colleagues. The theory, however, says little about on-going learning with those who are uncertain of their journey. Analysing these characteristics could suggest both opportunities for and barriers to learning that might affect individuals. My thesis does not explore these areas.

In order to instruct, situated cognition connects subjects to the needs and concerns of learners (Shor, 1987). Situating learning in the classroom in which I work let me create the conditions where participants experienced the complexity and ambiguity of learning in their lives, not merely in a classroom. Participants developed their knowledge from their experience. Interactions gave participants the opportunity to consider how to change what took place in all aspects of their lives, at home, at work and socially.

Chapters seven and eight explain my use of content, context, community and participation (Lankard, 1995). These ideas provided me with opportunities to engage with participants in a variety of ways. Participants needed more than abstract concepts and self-contained examples to understand maths and English.

**1.5 Scaffolding**

According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a social, collaborative and interactional activity. The teacher sets up a tutoring situation to enable learning to occur with interventions to provoke and prompt that learning. Vygotsky suggests that teachers must support learners to develop and accelerate their ability to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. As with situated learning, it is an area that I found I used with my participants and is addressed in chapter seven.

The term scaffolding was devised by Wood et *al* (1976), to attempt to use the idea of teaching alongside the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which Vygotsky (1978) defined as the distance between what a learner can do with and without support. It is used to explain the social and participatory nature of teaching and learning.

Scaffolding is used on a building when it needs to be created and when repairs need to be made. It is removed when the building can stand alone. When learning, it can be interpreted to mean that tutors may support students when needed, whilst also encouraging independence: *“The workers cleaning the face of the Washington Monument do not confuse the scaffolding with the monument itself. The scaffolding is secondary. The building is primary”* (McKenzie, 2000: 2).

Scaffolding can be interpreted in a number of ways, such as by *“providing assistance to students on an as needed basis, fading out assistance or providing help on an as-needed basis fading the assistance as learner competence increases”* (Zheng, 2008: 766). Although McKenzie (2000) suggests there are at least eight characteristics of scaffolding, including clarifying expectations and purpose, as well as providing direction and momentum for learning, the term does not provide clear guidelines about ways it should be used. The expression itself is also considered by some educationalists as an umbrella term for any kind of teacher support (Jacobs, 2001).

Verenikina (2008) provides case study examples of how scaffolding, due its lack of clarity in that there is no definitive term that can be agreed upon, may be misunderstood by those studying educational courses to degree level. Stone (1998) also analyses scaffolding limitations, suggesting that even though the term encapsulates Vygotskian approaches to teaching as guided by others, it does not help educators to understand the nature of such guidance. On the contrary, it may even encumber an understanding of Vygotsky and the relationship between tutors and learners.

As will be read in the findings chapter, although I found it useful, there may be weaknesses to using scaffolding for some teachers.

**SECTION 2: COMPARATIVE RESEARCH**

My second research question – ‘*who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning’* – influenced the preparation of this section due to the themes of becoming confident learners, and teaching and learning, which came out of my findings.

**2.1 Teaching and learning**

teaching and learning – which are, after all, the fundamental businesses of, and raison d’être for, education - involve people with particular histories who have had particular experiences, who hold particular beliefs and values and who, consequently, construct particular and different situational identities for themselves, coming together, relating to each other and interacting in a variety of ways (Sikes, 2007: 2).

Crossan *et al* (2003) explore participation in further education (FE). They recognise that social, economic and demographic factors affect learning. I am aware that these elements are important in that they affect the development of approaches to learning. I question what, if anything, changes participant attitudes to learning, from when they first attend a class to when they complete the course.

Crossan *et al* suggest that

learner identities can be fragile, contingent and vulnerable to external changes, and indeed can incorporate elements of hostility to education, as well as a degree of denial of responsibility even on the part of enthusiastic learners (p. 55).

My research looked at whether this statement held any truth with the participants.

Crossan *et al* build on the work of Bloomer & Hodkinson (2000). In their study, Bloomer & Hodkinson develop the concept of young people's experiences of learning, conducting their fieldwork among students in further education colleges. They describe the learning career that *“refers to the development of dispositions to learning over time”* (p. 590).

Three theoretical perspectives inform their approach:

1. the symbolic interactionist theory and in particular the work of the Chicago School of Sociology’s use of 'career' as a device for analysing young people's trajectories;
2. the language of ‘dispositions’, as highlighted by Bourdieu, and
3. the theory of situated learning.

These perspectives are the “*interplay between the social and economic structures which shape people's lives, the educational institutions which determine the processes of engagement with learning, and the learners themselves”* (Bloomer & Hodkinson: 58). It is this latter concept and the third of the perspectives that I explore in my research. Bloomer & Hodkinson describe how situated learning is used to explain changes in individuals' attitudes because of their exposure to new influences and situations. Learning careers are seen as an aspect of identity formation which may be *“noticeably transformed”* (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000: 594) through *“the exposure of young people to more diverse forms of social interaction, and to new events and changing circumstances, such as occur during the adolescent years”* (ibid). They analyse the learning careers of adolescents, but these exposures also affect my adult participants. Adolescence is not the only time people experience *‘new events and changing circumstances’*. They occur continuously in life, with identity formation taking place at any time. As will be read in the findings, my participants also changed how they saw themselves due to their new experiences and relationships with others.

Crossan *et al*’s approach was to obtain data from interviews conducted during a one-year funded research project. It is unclear what impact that had on their ethical stance. Were they influenced by the expectations or the concerns that their sponsor had? Did they omit areas of interest and relevance because of their remit? Although I work for a private company, I am not sponsored by it and my research is not influenced by what the organisation may hope to obtain in terms of references to it as a business. This aspect is explained further in the methodology chapter.

Crossan *et al* elicit the views of three learner groups; I select one. They particularly examine further education and use 70 interviews; my work is with a private company, small scale and intimate. They focus on the life histories of two people. They contain their data collection. In contrast, I use a number of cameos.

They draw on feminist and symbolic interactionist perspectives. I do not. It might seem that there are no similarities. This is not the case. Although I explore confidence in learning and Crossan *et al* consider learning careers, we have similar aims. We both want to understand experiences of learning to support adults who may participate in formal education in the future.

Crossan *et al* claim to be looking beyond institutionalised learning. Yet further education is in itself an institutionalised form of learning, as it is with private companies. They assert, however, that *“most micro studies investigate and rarely address the types of low-threshold involvement typically entered by non-traditional learners”* (p. 1). The majority of my participants are these types of learners. My research looks at the microlevel of relationships. In this instance I understand the term microlevel to mean examining the relationships of learning in the classroom and how, evolving from these interactions, self-belief and confidence may influence a desire to learn.

Wedege & Evans (2006) specifically write about mathematical resistance. Their work is based on concepts that include beliefs, attitudes, emotions and motivation. They also examine these aspects through positioning adult mathematics education as affiliated to the perspective of resistance. Wedege & Evans produce two accounts of interconnected motivation and resistance to learning mathematics by using the experiences of two adults.

My concern with what motivates adults has similarities to the findings that Wedege & Evans already describe. My intention, however, is to go beyond their conclusions and delve more into the conversations concerning how participants say they think and feel about their learning experiences.

As highlighted in my positionality, my challenge had a maths focus. For some participants, English is their problematic area. In the United States, Coles & Wall (1987) examine concerns their learners experience with English.

Coles & Wall’s methods differ to mine. Sixteen participants are selected from hundreds they teach. They interview and observe. They do not compare their personal experiences to those of the learners. They know their respondents.

Coles & Wall consider class, gender, colour and race. In that I do not highlight these cultural aspects, my work may appear to be less valid than their research. I therefore need to ensure that my research acknowledges the limited, yet detailed, aspect of particular lives. I explore a small number of people’s experiences that may display universal truths, although it will be up to the reader to decide if this is the case. I present my findings and make recommendations from it, but I do not assume generalisability.

Coles & Wall’s learners express a knowledge of the course and its expectations. The participants use their history to relate to the books they are studying. Coles & Wall use this information to understand more about how their learners think. It is an approach that challenges my ideas about how topics are taught in the classroom. Does the subject matter make a difference to confidence? If that is the case, how does that work? Coles & Wall describe the sense of powerlessness their participants say they feel regarding their position in life. The sense of success or failure are important aspects of their findings. My research underpins this thinking.

Referring to Ohmann’s concept of students in America in the 1970’s, Coles & Wall describe *“real students”* (1987: 298) as having histories and bringing these with them to class:

These represent more than just the "backgrounds" from which students come; they are the active and ongoing histories that make them the kinds of students they are, the sources of the motivations that bring them to college and of the experience and knowledge they bring to the work they will do here. These histories, as Ohmann reminds us, are not only personal and "individual" but also are cultural, economic, and political, and as such they represent life-contexts that many of our students have in common (p. 298).

The descriptions are rich. I hope my descriptions are also rich.

**2.2 Autoethnography**

I had intended using autoethnography as one of my methodologies. Towards the end of the research, however, I realised that, even though I tell some of my story, the study is more concerned with reflective practice. I therefore needed to adapt my research accordingly. Throughout the thesis, however, my thinking was influenced by this methodology.

Sikes (2007: 2) claims that autoethnography uses:

Testimonio, performance ethnography, participatory action research, confessional tales, socio-poetics, collective autobiography, diary research – and there are more, each with their own distinctive characteristics, intentions and rationale.

When considering these methods, however, and reading Hall (1994: 394) who states that *“identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past”,* I realised that these autoethnographic concepts could also be reflective practices.

**2.3 Reflective practice**

When I had completed my research, I realised that my work was not an autoethnographical account. I had been reflecting on my teaching practice more than writing my story and the thesis contains a reflective account of teaching in the workplace and the impact this has had on learners.

Moon (2006) highlights four reflective practitioners – Habermas, Kolb, Dewey and Schön.

She suggests that the authors emphasise different areas, which are the process of reflection, the purpose for it, or the outcomes of reflection. Habermas considers the building of theory, which is not an area that I develop in this thesis. Moon (2001: 4) states that Kolb refers *“relatively little to reflection itself”*, yet I have found his model of reflection in learning useful when considering my approach to reflection. Dewey explores a holistic view of reflection as a process. Schön (1996) considers reflection as a mechanism for professional and possibly personal development, which accommodates Kolb’s cycle of experiential learning (1984). This is the approach I have taken and I use it in chapter eight to reflect on how I considered my development.

Boud *et al* (1985) suggest that emotion in reflection is often ignored. Moon (2006) proposes that reflection is important and, if used, may have an emotional connection. She challenges whether this emotional content is always present and influential*.* She continues to challenge whether the emotions could be part of the process of reflection. As will be read in chapters seven and eight, my feelings about both the way I teach and the way I learn are considered.

In that my life has been influenced by working alongside people who had varied learning needs, chapter eight also considers how those experiences shape my approach to teaching and how, through reflection, I continue to learn about improving my practice. Swain *et al* (2004; 2013) edit articles that highlight experiences of people with disabilities within society and issues of exclusion and inclusion within education. Although the thesis is not concerned with disability as described by the editors above, my experiences influence who I am. I briefly reflect on one article in particular – Hunt (2013) – who considered how people appeared to be perceived.

My interest in self-directed learning has emerged from my encounters of teaching and training adults. I realise that some adults want to be taught differently to the pedagogic traditions I was shown in some aspects of my teacher-training course. Studying aspects of andragogy in my Master’s degree enabled me to understand more about the ways in which some adults learn. Practising elements of those ways, however, led me to realise that pedagogic and andragogic approaches have both similarities and differences. This thesis is not concerned with comparisons between the two theories. I recognise, however, that even though I have used andragogy in my teaching, the idea can be debated (Tennant, 2006). Even so, I consider the concept of self-directed learning that andragogy encourages as one that may empower people. Knowles (1984: 12) suggests that as people mature, they change from *“one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being”.* An increasing resource for learning comes through experience and maturity. This maturity, Knowles proposes, provides a readiness to learn which enables people to consider how to overcome problems, rather than focusing on a subject. Also, “*As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal”* (ibid).

If adults know how to learn then they may be free to discover the world in their own way, at their own pace and transfer their knowledge from theory in the classroom to the practicalities of life.

Hyland & Johnson (1998), when discussing Key Skills, the predecessor to Functional Skills, consider transferable skills from the classroom to the workplace to be *“illusory”* (p. 164). Pepper (2011), when highlighting differences between Key Skills and Functional Skills, concurs with this. He claims that some of his learners stated that *“there was a lack of relevance to their vocational work”* (p. 16). As will be read, my findings disagree with the above contentions. As both NIACE, through Southwood *et al* (2012) and the National Research Council (2012) suggest, if adults are able to reflect on what they have learnt and how they can apply it, with the help of andragogical teaching, the transferability of skills may occur.

**Summary**

A key issue has always been what is it that enables people to want and be able to learn and if the way I teach allows this to happen. It is with this in mind that I conducted the literature review and, appraising it after collecting my data, as well as before it, helped me to consider what some people’s needs may be as adult learners.

The methodology chapter that follows continues to explore aspects of literature that I have used. It explains how the research evolved and in what ways it changed.

**CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

**Introduction**

The chapter looks at the variety of methods I use to understand some of the feelings that participants said they experienced when engaged in learning. Section 1 begins by explaining why, before starting my actual research, I conducted pilot research. I then move on to explain my research. It looks at how the participants were chosen, the data I used to collect the information and the structure of my teaching.

Being new to research, I had many issues regarding the asking of questions. This included my concerns as to how to use them and how many questions I needed. Section 2 explains the process of how I came to the selection of questions.

Section 3 looks at why my research is qualitative. I explore whether this was the best approach for my research. I then move on to consider how I developed the group interviews. It continues by explaining the decision to use cameos.

I had originally planned to use autoethnography. As my research progressed, however, I realised that the research was based more on reflective practice. The end of section 3 looks at the questions I considered concerning the two methods.

Section 4 deliberates on the thoroughness of my research. It begins by considering how I analysed my data. I then continue to examine validity, objectivity, neutrality and ethics.

Section 5 concludes with potential limitations to the study. I include deliberations on my role as both tutor and researcher with the same learners.

**SECTION 1: PREPARING FOR THE THESIS**

* 1. **Pilot research**

I had not undertaken research before, so before I began teaching the selected group from whom I obtained my data, I conducted pilot research. Piloting of qualitative approaches is recommended if *"the researcher lacks confidence or is a novice, particularly when using the interview technique"* (Holloway 1997: 121).

My pilot studies consisted of four one-to-one pilots, followed by three group pilots. The one-to-one interviews took place with colleagues and friends. The group interviews came from classes I taught in three different organisations. The colleagues, friends and learners knew I was studying and all agreed to participate.

The pilots were as important and valuable as my research, because they taught me to consider what it was I wanted to know and how best to obtain that information. Most importantly, the data I collected helped me to develop my research techniques by enabling me to eliminate basic mistakes (van Teijlingen, & Hundley, 2004). Learning from the pilots was immense. The methodology developed from these experiences.

The pilots helped me to consider how I could conduct my research. They were an essential aspect of my learning that enabled me to understand issues around group interviewing and the complexity of one-to-one talks.

Chapter four explores the pilots and evaluates what I learnt.

I now explain the development of the actual research.

* 1. **Selection of participants**

I was invited to teach a group of staff from Creative Care, who employed the participants. I did not know who I would be teaching before the research took place. This made me vulnerable in that I had not chosen the group. It also made for interest due to the random selection. I knew there would be between 10 and 15, but not the gender, ethnicity, age group or academic background. Both the company and Katya, who organised the teaching, approved the use of this group. It was also dependent on participants agreeing to being part of my research. Letters of explanation and consent were given to participants (Appendices A & B).

On the first day I taught the group, I explained my research topic and my interest in them as learners. All participants had the opportunity to ask me questions about the research before I began any interviewing. Not everyone chose to talk in the group or be recorded individually and, as the Adult Information Letter states (Appendix A), individuals were not obliged to participate. Even though everyone had originally said yes, throughout the period of the research participants were informed that they could withdraw their permission at any time.

As will be read in this next section, an unplanned additional participant became part of the research.

* 1. **Data collection**

The data was collected over five months. It consisted of group interviews, cameos, one-to-one interviews, conversations and a journal. Ten of the participants were women and one was a man. All worked in the care sector for Creative Care. Ages ranged between 21 and 55. All individuals had been educated in England. They were at different academic levels. The majority had none or few ‘O’ levels or GCSEs. Two of the participants had ‘A’ levels. One of the two hoped to use this course as a stepping-stone towards acceptance at a university. For the purposes of the maths and English courses that I was teaching, one was learning at Entry 3, which is below GCSE level, seven were at Level 1, the equivalent to GCSE grades E/D and three were at Level 2, the equivalent to a GCSE grade C (Appendix E provides a table that highlights the differences between levels).

Having planned to interview the group, my intention was then to use one-to-one interviews that I conducted with them. I had not considered that any other data would be available. After three weeks of teaching, however, I realised that I had the opportunity to obtain additional information. Katya, the owner and manager of the private training company who employed me to teach the participants, needed to review their progress. I asked if these accounts could be recorded. Everyone agreed. One group interview and five individual interviews were recorded. An opportunity arose to obtain additional data when Katya and I were talking and I asked her if I could record our conversation, which she agreed to. She therefore became another participant in my research. Her involvement provided extra dimensions to the research by triangulating some of my findings.

Personal data was collected by keeping a journal of my thoughts as I worked on the research. I attempted to develop critical self-reflection, which Burgess (1981) claims makes a substantial contribution to teacher’s confidence and professional expertise. It enabled me to consider my feelings about the whole process of the research, as well as my thoughts on how I taught. Some of the reflections link directly to those I taught for the thesis; some contemplate my struggles about writing the thesis; some reflect on past learning episodes and others consider teaching or training experiences I was involved in whilst working on the thesis.

The key sources of materials used for the research came from:

1. semi-structured interviews;
2. cameos;
3. personal reflections;
4. Katya’s group review;
5. Katya’s individual reviews;
6. conversation with Katya.

The cameos and interviews occurred in the order Table 1 shows.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group Interviews** | **Cameos****with Zoya** | **Reviews****with Katya**(Zoya not present) | **Conversation****with Zoya** |
| Interview 1 with Zoya |  |  |  |
| Interview with Katya(Zoya not present) |  |  |  |
| Interview 2 with Zoya |  |  |  |
|  | Sasha |  |  |
|  | Bertha |  |  |
|  | Sasha | Sasha |  |
|  | Luke |  |  |
|  | Luke | Luke |  |
|  | Maya |  |  |
|  | Maya |  |  |
|  | Maya,  |  |  |
|  | Maya, Luke, Lydia | Lydia |  |
|  |  | Vera |  |
|  |  | Rose |  |
|  |  |  | Katya |
|  |  |  | Katya |

Table 1

The first interview occurred at the end of my first teaching session. Katya’s interview was conducted six weeks after the start of the course. My second interview took place two weeks later.

The cameos, and Katya’s reviews, began after I had been teaching the group for two months. They took place either in the classroom when other participants had left, or in the kitchen, which was along the corridor, when no-one else was present. I used a digital recorder to collect accounts. Wellington (2000: 85) suggests that recording can not only *“enhance and encourage respondent validation”,* but also ensure that the accuracy of the data collected is assured. The data was transcribed by a professional audio typist who knew nothing about my research and had no known links to the learners. Rigidly ensuring the anonymity of others who may be mentioned could have been overlooked, but pseudonyms are used and the name of companies are changed. This should ensure that the stories create an accessible experience to both the public and professionals without making anyone vulnerable.

Although autoethnography was used less than I had intended, Feldman’s (2003: 27/28) four criteria upon which data collection are based for this methodology are still valid for a reflective approach.

1. *“Provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work.”*

This methodology explains what and how the data was collected from participants, from Katya and from myself.

1. *“Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data. What specifics about the data led us to make this assumption?”*

I created tables and charts (Appendix F) from the data I collected from participants and used them to inform my findings. I explore the specifics about the data in my analysis.

1. *“Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study.”*

I describe some situations that are not specific to participants, but arose from teaching experiences during the time of writing this thesis. Katya’s interview and reviews consolidate my interviews and cameos.

1. *“Provide evidence that the research changed or evolved the educator and summarize its value to the profession. This can convince readers of the study’s significance and validity.”*

The findings that came from the data shows what I learnt from this research and how I developed as a tutor and as a researcher. Chapters seven and eight provide evidence of change.

**1.4 The teaching environment and structure of my teaching**

The research and teaching took place in a classroom that was in a training block belonging to Creative Care. It was important that participants were comfortable in their environment so that it did not distract them from learning. I may have had no control over the location, but where possible I tried to influence conditions including light and technical concerns. Unfortunately, in the first few weeks of our time together, there was one light that kept flickering and so, on occasions, we had to have less light than was desired. Also, there were issues with printing out test papers that caused some frustration to both the participants and myself. The classroom had computers on all desks and I had access to a Smartboard. Beyond this room were other classrooms, a reception area and a kitchen.

Excluding holidays and work expectations, there were fourteen weeks within the five months of the course in which participants could be assessed to achieve Functional Skills qualifications in maths and English. Attendance was for 3 hours of maths in the morning and 3 hours of English in the afternoon for one day a week. Participants could also choose to study in their own time on other days.

Tests were verbal for a speaking and listening assessment, but otherwise were written or online. Participants had the opportunity to take tests before the end of the course if they and I felt they were ready to do so.

The format was the same for both sessions. For the first half hour I would review study from the week before, check if or how participants had used what they had learnt in their workplace or at home, and then teach one or two topics, addressing all levels where possible. This would take place by suggesting that those who knew the topic already could use it to revise, or they could try to design a more complicated question. I would also ask those who knew one of the topics to explain it to the class. This expectation would always have been made known the week before. Initially participants were reluctant to do this, but over the weeks, as will be read, they became confident to share ideas and not be concerned if they made mistakes. I would then ask for ideas on how they could continue to learn these topics, or I would make suggestions.

The following two and a quarter hours consisted of me working with pairs, groups or on a one-to-one basis. This took place by encouraging participants to share what they knew with others, or to try to work out a common problem. If some wanted to work alone, that was their prerogative.

As they worked on the instruction I had provided, I then guided each learner as to how they could continue until they felt able to pace themselves. I regularly checked that they were studying appropriate to their level. Relationships that developed can be read in chapter seven.

At the end of each session I reviewed what they had learnt and questioned how they might be able to use that knowledge away from the classroom. I always told the participants what they would study the following week and I encouraged them to bring something in that might relate to their job. For example, for English, some participants brought in newsletters or articles pertinent to their job, which would then be scrutinised. For maths, participants sometimes brought in recipes or maps that could be adapted.

Sessions worked well when it was possible to relate topics directly to their lives. When subjects were more theoretical, such as needing to understand formulae, classes proved to be more challenging. My teaching experience taught me to teach subjects that appear more relevant to learners in earlier weeks. Learners would then recognise the need for the subject and become more accepting of more challenging ideas, having learnt how to study and transfer the knowledge to aspects of their lives. As will be read in chapters six and seven, some participants, early in the course, such as Bertha, said that they felt that they would not be able to achieve. I discuss how this attitude gradually changed.

Unlike other types of classroom research, where teachers and educational institutions may have little or no control over the research (Walker, 1985; Hopkins, 2014), I was responsible, as the practitioner, for this research. I wanted to improve my practice, develop my professional judgement and increase my expertise in teaching: *“… by taking a research stance, the teacher is engaged not only in a meaningful professional development activity, but also engaged in a process of refining and becoming more autonomous in professional judgement”* (Hopkins, 2014: 3). As highlighted in the literature review, however, my findings are not only based on my teaching, but on the relationships that developed in the classroom. Reflecting on how I teach is part of this study.

**SECTION 2: QUESTION DEVELOPMENT**

* 1. **Devising the research questions**

A major criterion for judging my research questions was robustness. Could my questions generate complex results?

I began my research with too many ideas about what I thought I wanted to do. This meant that my thinking was blurred and consequently my aim was unclear. Deciding on my research questions, therefore, was difficult. It took me many months to realise that the research questions and the questions I would ask in the group interviews were different. Once I had grasped this, it seemed so obvious, yet it was an element of research that I could not understand and therefore move on from. It was only as I realised that my doctorate was a way of understanding my thinking as much as it was about developing research that questions began to emerge and I could separate them.

I became aware that my research questions had to meet the criterion of identifying my study's contribution to a body of work. I began to consider and identify what I was doing and what interested me. This developed from the taught section of the doctoral study, theoretical conversations, pilots, reading and a specialised knowledge of my discipline concerned with workplace learning.

My research questions became:

1. what do adults in the workplace say they feel about classroom-based learning?
2. Who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning?
3. Does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?

To obtain this information, I considered what I would need to ask. This is explored in the next section of this chapter. The use of my pilots helped me to decide which questions I would eventually ask. Maykut & Morehouse (1994: 84) describe this searching as *“categories of inquiry”.* I considered, for example, how important it was for me to be aware of participants’ educational backgrounds. Would knowing the detail of qualifications make an impact on my findings? Was understanding school experiences important? Was it necessary to be aware of the cultural and historical perspectives of participants? The answers may have been interesting, but this information would not necessarily develop my research. I could spend hours unpacking the background to these questions and spend little time on perceptions participants said they had about learning. When I began to plan my research, I thought all these aspects were both important and necessary, because I believed that the more information I collected about people, the more thorough and credible the research would be.

Patton (2002) highlights six main question types that it is possible to ask on any topic. These focus on

1. experiences and behaviours;
2. opinions and values;
3. feelings;
4. knowledge;
5. sensory information;
6. background or demographic information.

Patton also highlights the importance of the first few questions for setting the tone and creating rapport and the final question for eliciting important information that has not yet been volunteered. He further provides useful guidance on using ‘probes’ to increase the richness and depth of the responses and using different types of feedback and reinforcement.

Having considered his advice, questions for my group interviews developed into

1. what are you learning?
2. Why are you taking this course?
3. Who or what helps you to learn?
4. Does anything get in your way of learning?
5. How does learning make you feel?

Detailed considerations and an evaluation of how I arrived at these questions can be found in the next chapter, which discusses the pilots.

* 1. **Developing questions to ask participants**

I spent hours drafting questions for the research. It has been suggested that

Asking questions is widely accepted as a … cost-efficient way of gathering information about past behaviour and experiences, private actions and motives, and beliefs, values and attitudes (Foddy, 1993: 1).

Constructing questions has been an ongoing battle for researchers and, even though much has been written about how to overcome the complexities of interview techniques (Foddy 1993; Wellington, 2000), there is no substitute for the personal discovery of what it is possible to learn about how to obtain information.

I discussed questions I had planned to ask participants with lecturer colleagues and fed back thoughts to my supervisors. I thought, early in my preparation for the research, that I would be able to ask participants a vast number of questions that would provide me with extensive, detailed data that could be analysed. I deliberated over each question. This occurred despite knowing that I wanted semi-structured interviews. Had the questions been used it could have closed the options for participants to respond openly. I was changing my method from semi-structured to formal question and answer. This change could have simplified my research in that I could have asked direct questions and influenced answers so precisely that I might have been able to anticipate some responses. I would have been selecting and coding data to report on and advocate on a position I already held.

What my colleagues did not say, but what I subsequently realised, was that I had an overwhelming number of questions - over forty for my group interviews alone (Appendices C & D). My supervisors had warned me that the numbers were unreasonable, but I could not see the dilemma this would cause. It was by revisiting the questions once my colleagues and supervisors had fed back their comments that I recognised the issues I would encounter. The amount of detail I wanted from each question also meant that, had I kept to my original plan, my research would have taken several years to complete. The questions had become an academic exercise rather than a resource to obtain data. It took time for me to realise that my goal was to understand the participants’ ideas of learning and that I had to let go of my need to influence the answers.

Having so many questions filled my mind with ideas of what I wanted to know, rather than what it was I needed to understand. For example, I was initially interested in experiences of learning as a child compared to an adult; the perception of success; family background and class. Whereas these topics may have produced interesting information, they were not specifically relevant to the research and these enquiries would not answer my questions about how participants said they experienced learning in the classroom.

I worked through the process of constructing and devising tens of questions. When I met with my first two group pilots, I discovered that they did not need any questions and the group interviews only needed five. In that much of the research also came from the cameos, most of the conversations developed without the need for any questions I had planned. All the effort – the time, thinking and reading - appeared to come to nothing. I finally learnt that the necessary ingredient in research is not so much the number of questions, as their quality. As frustrating as it was, I realised that I needed to go through this process for my development. The questions were for me.

**SECTION 3: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS**

**3.1 Deciding between qualitative and quantitative research**

There are questions about whether qualitative research is considered unscientific (Mays & Pope, 1995). Qualitative research is not scientific. It does not aim to be. That does not stop it from being a valuable source of research. The problem is that researchers may not be systematic in data collection or not acknowledge bias that inevitably occur in findings. I am aware that there are no techniques for complete accuracy in anything as all ideas are subjective.

I used a qualitative methodology. This approach dealt with how people understood their experiences (Chang, 2008). Quantitative approaches tend to define categories as precisely as possible before the study is undertaken (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Relationships between them are then determined. The qualitative goal is somewhat different. It defines and isolates categories during the research process.

The advantage of qualitative research over that of quantitative for my research is that it let me investigate the subject through probing and understanding participant attitudes, motivations and behaviour. It also looked beyond surface comments to find the complexities surrounding possible underlying agenda.

Phillips (1993: 43) is aware that some critics might challenge qualitative data, in that the response to *“If someone else did the fieldwork, would the ethnography have turned out differently?”* may only be a qualified yes, because of each person’s subjectivity.

To accord with the features of qualitative research, I took into account some of Woods’ suggestions (2006: 17):

1. understanding: my research may have been inaccurate due to personal interpretations of my questions. This was overcome in two ways – first, by my asking the same questions for the group interviews twice, with a gap of several weeks between the occasions and second, through the use of Katya as another interviewer. She both interviewed the group separately and completed reviews with some participants.
2. The nature of the data required: the purpose of my questions was to find qualitative material. My cameos used open questions.
3. The need to identify the context in which replies were being given.
4. The need for checks, balances, extensions and modifications.

A difference between quantitative and qualitative research seems to concern the way in which participants respond. Closed questions can be easier to answer than open ones (The Economics Network, 2013), which may elicit precise and perhaps rapid responses. Open questions are more demanding. They require more thought. There can be difficulty, however, in determining what is wanted and it can be challenging to articulate a response. It would appear reasonable to assume that when questions enable participants to answer readily and unambiguously, closed questions and quantitative methods are called for. When questions are likely to cause the participants greater difficulty and imprecision, however, then the broader, more flexible net provided by qualitative techniques is appropriate (Burns, 2000).

By undertaking qualitative research, my aim was to *“understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting and making meaning in our lives”* (Ellis, 2004: 25).

The quantitative researcher appears to require investigators to construct a sample of the necessary size and type from which generalisations may be made (Fish, 1994). In the qualitative case, however, the purpose seems not to discover how many people share a particular characteristic, but to gain an insight into the cultural categories and assumptions according to how people view the world. For my research, it is not the number of people who hold a particular view that I am concerned with, but the categories and assumptions themselves. Qualitative research appears to be more intensive than extensive in its objectives, which is what I needed for my study. These considerations had implications for the number of participants. It was more important for my research to provide detail with a relatively small group of people than to be superficial and use more people.

* 1. **Interviewing**

*“We will approach interviewing as a craft, as a knowledge-producing activity, and as a social practice”* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 17).

My interviewing style, as well as the way I defined and perceived interviews, developed over the time I worked on my research. The pilots taught me about formal, direct and structured interviews (Chang, 2008) and I began to understand in more detail the meaning of semi-structured interviews (Bell, 2005; Johannessen *et al,* 2006). When conducting an unstructured interview, the topic is set in advance with questions being modified for each interview. Semi-structured interviews let the researcher prepare an interview guide in advance. The order of questions and topics can vary between interviews, moving back and forth within the interview guide. I opted to use a semi-structured approach based on this understanding.

One of the main advantages of interviews is their adaptability (Bell, 2005) and, according to Wijayatilake (2012: 132): *“Unlike questionnaires, the interview gives the researcher the opportunity to probe and clarify and can reveal information and attitudes that a written response might conceal”*. The strength of recording the interviews let me listen to experiences at a later date so I could focus on the participants.

We live in an ‘interview society’ (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Richards, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007). People are aware of the etiquette, expected participant roles, turn-taking conventions and even certain linguistic phrases used in interviews (Miller & Crabtree, 2007). Researchers differ as to whether they consider this a positive or negative situation (Wijayatilake, 2012). It can be too easy for both interviewer and interviewed to *“play a part”* which results in data that is less than the pure resource it purports to be (Richards, 2003: 8).

There is disagreement as to whether only open-ended questions should be asked during interviews (Morse & Field, 1995), or if a mix of both open-ended and closed questions elicits most data (Legard *et al*, 2003). Some literature advises that questions should not lead participants (Legard *et al*, 2003; Cohen *et al*, 2004). Rapley (2004: 16), however, argues that interviewers should *“just get on with interacting”* with interviewees. Therefore, along with a few closed questions, I used broad open-ended questions (Morse & Field, 1995) which tried not to influence responses (Wellington, 2000) or lead discussions (Polit & Beck, 2004; Streubert & Carpenter, 2011; Seidman, 2013). Legard *et al* (2003) state that closed questions are difficult to avoid if conversing naturally. In that they also allow an interview to be refocused when required, they are useful. They may also appear less difficult to answer, in that they are direct, which could help interviewees feel at ease.

Wragg & Kerry’s (1982) explanation that interviewing is the oldest and yet sometimes the most poorly used research technique in the world may be pertinent. They list many pitfalls, but three types of bias are of particular interest to this research. These are, first, that of the interviewer, second, that of the participants and third, the conversational act itself. Millband (1984), commenting on these biases, suggests that a teacher may ask questions, however consciously or unconsciously, which cue children into giving answers that direct them towards building a framework of ideas. Being aware of this, my challenge was to attempt, at least in part, to *“abandon all established and preconceived values, theories, perspectives … and prejudices as resources for study”* (Vidich & Lyman, 2000: 60).

Using interviews may elicit particular replies because of the interviewees’ mood at the time of the process or their perception of me. Under interview conditions, answers may sometimes be given which are thought to please the interviewer. This can be overcome by having interviews at different times (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) which is what took place. I asked similar questions at different times to see if the answers given would be the same. Using Katya as an external person to interview the participants was also beneficial as it provided additional evidence for the research.

The questions used were intended to draw out participants. Many were tested with pilot groups. The feedback warned me of the importance of being sensitive due to the potential of them appearing too personal and intrusive.

Oakley (1981: 49) highlights that in interviewing there is *“no intimacy without reciprocity”.* The emphasis enables the development of a closer relation between interviewer and participant, attempting to minimise status differences and doing away with traditional hierarchies. Interviewers can still be vulnerable whilst aiming to be as objective as they can (Tisdale, 2004). In that I was also the tutor, I was set apart, in that I was not one of the group, but I was not set above. I was no more important than those I was researching or teaching.

**3.3 Group interviews**

My research began with group interviews.

The interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased. He should be neither too grim nor too effusive; neither too talkative nor too timid. The idea should be to put the respondent at ease, so that he will talk freely and fully (Selltiz *et al*, 1966: 576).

This approach seems as useful in the 21st century as it did in the 20th. My aim was to engage the participants. I wanted them to become involved in the discussion.

Tripp (1983: 33/34) argues that the interview ought to provide coherence for the subject. He claims that it should attempt to understand, take on board and explore what the interviewees’ questions are, as well as pursuing the interviewer’s agenda. He suggests that an effort to record what someone thinks on a particular question must also include the attempt to discover how that question connects to the world-view of the interviewee. It is important to ask the question in a way the interviewee will understand and have relevance to them, as well as being important to me as the interviewer. One way of achieving this, suggests Tripp, is to allow the interviewee joint responsibility for structuring the interview. It can take place in terms of the progress of questions, in content, kind, sequence and number. This approach challenges power structures. Bearing this in mind, I questioned whether my desire for the participants to be involved, as highlighted above in relation to Selltiz *et al* (1966), is the same as them taking responsibility.

I realised that shared responsibility for the interviews was not right for my research. I did not know the participants at the start of the research. Even as we became familiar with each other, I felt that sharing was not appropriate for my needs. I opted for what I believe best suited my research, which was for me to manage the interview process.

* 1. **Individual conversations**

Before putting my final plans for the thesis together and sending off my ethical review, I had intended using case studies. I initially selected the case study approach because I felt it would be particularly appropriate to my research. Merriam (1998) emphasises that a case study can be as important for learners as for researchers, because they can gain a detailed understanding of the situation and meaning from their experiences.

Simons’ (1980) 1960’s research in schools and Yin’s (2009) generic exploration of case study both suggest that the best way to advance the practice of innovation is to make available fully documented accounts of individual cases. My plan was that characteristics of my case studies would contain relevant data; be publishable; encourage replication and, I hoped, provide innovative ideas.

Case study research explores a small number of cases in depth and, in some instances, it can be used to modify generalities. It is not, however, an appropriate foundation for establishing broad generalisations (Stake, 1995).

My research then led me to use conversations that I initially described as vignettes. Having completed the research, however, and with the advice of my supervisors, it was clear that what emerged were cameos - short literary pieces (The Chambers Dictionary, 1998). The Dictionary also states that cameos are *“miniature, small and perfect of its kind.”* (p. 232). Whereas I cannot claim my cameos to be *“perfect of its kind”* (ibid), they can be read as literary pieces as described in the Dictionary.

Cameos are used in many ways, including acting as illustrations of good practice and to contrast experiences (Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011), reflecting on teaching and learning (Hopkins, 2014) and to mediate educational awareness (Drevdahl *et al* 2003). As will be read, this is what emerged from my research.

Wellington *et al* (2005) use cameos to show how students who were following doctoral programmes reflect on how their experiences influenced them as researchers. I use the same format with participants.

I am also following aspects of Mohammed’s (1998) ideas on cameo writing and her thoughts on critical incidents. She attempts to reflect on practice. Like me, she became interested in developing cameos as a result of reflecting on her own learning.

Mohammed (1998: 2) highlights her understanding of critical incidents connected with cameos as:

the development of understanding of the issues involved; they mark a movement forward in insight; they are subject to identification, description/articulation and analysis; the act of subjecting incidents to critical appraisal is instrumental in bringing about that development of understanding and movement in insight.

Cameos may be seen as *“a flash of insight recognition/realisation that has an affective impact”* (Mohammed, 1998: 2) which is then subject to analysis. Mohammed continues by suggesting that, in contrast, critical incidents are first identified and analysed, with the insight/realisation occurring as a result of the analysis. *“The criteria which might be applied to help decide whether or not there is a significant difference is that suggested by the definition of a cameo as a sketch that is dramatic in the sense of having an impact on the emotions of the one who is describing the significant moment”* (ibid). *“Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event*” (Tripp, 2012: 8).

My original plan was to invite participants to talk with me at a set time and with questions that I had anticipated being answered, i.e. the research questions, where I would be instigating the conversation. What occurred, however, was that some participants were keen to talk with me about their development. The approach came from them. This surprised me. Their change, from the first time I met them when they were wary and lacking in confidence, to several weeks later where they were eager to discuss their progress, was significant. This is discussed in the findings chapter. As will be read, participants seemed to have benefited from this study.

Millband (1984) suggests that the advantage of conversations is to give time for observing, as well as for listening and talking. Gestures and facial expressions provide additional information as to what occurs in participants’ minds and helps to identify when further probing is necessary.

I wanted to capture the occasions when individuals spoke about learning, including their experiences and recollections of previous learning. In that I was keen to listen to what participants wanted to disclose, as opposed to what I wanted to hear, experience taught me to move from interview approach to conversational mode as it allows people to relax (Allport, 1942). It lets them become more vulnerable and open to discuss feelings. This exposes *“a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, re-fract, and resist cultural interpretation”* (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 7). As highlighted, however, the danger is that participants potentially could become vulnerable when sharing their feelings with me. I did not want to encourage them to provide answers they thought I wanted or expected to hear.

* 1. **Autoethnography**

My interest in autoethnography was aroused when I heard tutors describe the idea during my time as an Ed.D. student. I had not previously come across this term. I selected it as one of my methods because telling some of my story was a process I needed to go through in order to discern and develop who I am, both as an academic and as a tutor.

Towards the end of my research, however, I realised that what I was producing was less autoethnographical and more reflective practice. Nonetheless, autoethnography permeated my thinking from the start and it is a method I did not fully abandon, as some of my experiences are told alongside the participants.

Muncey (2005) saw autoethnography as a way of releasing her experiences. She hoped readers would achieve an insight into their own development and gain confidence because of it. It is this idea that encouraged me to embark on autoethnography.

Muncey describes being a teenage mother - something concrete that has personal significance. In comparison to her life, mine seems mundane. Although I had initially planned to include my academic story, I realised that this was not necessary because it did not have relevance to how the participants developed. Like Muncey, however, I explored *“personal meanings of events and behaviors”* *(sic)* (p. 7) that are not generated by mainstream research. Whereas they are individual and subjective, they are no less valuable as research.

Clandinin & Connelly (1994) suggest that researchers are free to speak as players in a research project, and to combine their experiences with those being studied in order to move inquiry and knowledge further along. If a researcher’s voice is removed from a text, the writing only interprets another’s work and provides nothing new. I suggest that personal experience can best be described by the one whose experience it belongs to. *“Experimental writing means re-thinking the condition of representation and therefore [engaging] with figures of subjectivity that do not depend on representation as it has been understood”* (Clough, 2000: 286). Dethloff (2005: 5) confirms this thinking: *“A study that discounts the role of the researcher in the process is not providing a holistic view regarding the subculture studied. You cannot answer the question, “What is happening here?” by removing yourself from the experience”.*  I realised that these considerations also worked well as reflective practice. I had not completely engaged with autoethnography and reflective practice was more on par with what I had produced.

* 1. **Reflective practice**

As Stinson (2009) highlights in his autoethnographical doctoral thesis of a maths teacher, Dewey (1933) asserts that teachers must be reflective practitioners so they can examine and improve practice. If the goal of teaching is to enhance learning, then *“Reflective teaching is the conscious explicit enquiry into or reconsideration of, instructional beliefs, practices, decisions or problems”* (Stinson, 2009: 6) and

Reflective teachers are those who are concerned with professional artistry and are willing to construct new teaching practices when they see the need to change those practices (Schön, 1987). Schön (1983) refers to two types of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-in-action refers to reflection occurring simultaneously as the action happens. Reflection-on-action refers to the process of reflecting after the action has taken place in order to improve the future implementation of the action (ibid).

I used both in my research.

Through reflection, he can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience (Schön, 1996: 26).

As maintained by Schön, finding our own solution potentially lets us understand our practice better – not only through what we are doing, but also by the factors that affect what we do.

I wanted my thesis to tell a story. Atkinson’s (1997) assertion that the purpose of a storyteller is therapeutic rather than analytical challenged me to ensure that this study was reflective. Comparing and contrasting my thoughts with participants let me retain a critical stance and provided me with an opportunity to obtain insights that I may not have found alone.

**SECTION 4: DILIGENCE WITHIN THE RESEARCH**

**4.1 Analysis**

analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques: it is imaginative, artful, flexible and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly and intellectually rigorous (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996: 10).

Based on this consideration, it could be argued that undertaking data analysis is the most challenging part of research. Ely *et al* (1991: 87) consider it to be like a *“simultaneous left-brain right-brain exercise”* in that it is both creative and methodical.

There was the potential of having too much information and becoming overwhelmed with themes that developed. To overcome this, I evaluated the importance of each theme once data had been collected and I had condensed them.

Although analysis can be seen as a distinct stage, it also occurs throughout the whole research process (Richards, 2003). As soon as data has been collected, there is a natural tendency to begin trying to scrutinise it, and, as Coffey & Atkinson point out *“analysis is inseparable from writing and strategies of representation”* (1996: 23). This echoes my experience.

When analysing responses from the interviews, I explored three stages of data analysis that Pope *et al* (2000: 114/116) advocate.

1. “Familiarisation - *immersion in the raw data”.* I listened to the recordings, read the transcripts and studied the notes. I listed key ideas to discover common and recurrent themes and highlighted them. Bird (2005) stresses that data management begins with transcription. It is a key phase of data analysis and integral to its interpretation.

My first strategy, therefore, was to use ‘open coding’ of my interviews, which is *“the process of breaking down the data for the purpose of categorising, conceptualising and comparing”* (Richards, 2003: 276). I skim-read the transcripts and made notes of key words and phrases. Some of them were text summaries and others were thoughts I had as I read: *“the aim here is not to produce a set of categories but to generate a set of labels from which categories can be derived”* (Richards, 2003: 273). Following this initial exploration, I read each interview in detail, looking at possible themes. I chose open coding with all data.

2. “Identifying a thematic framework” - identifying the key issues, concepts and themes by which the data can be examined and referenced. This was carried out by drawing on assumed issues and questions derived from the aims and objectives of the study, as well as issues raised by the participants and views or experiences that recur in the data. The product of this stage was a spreadsheet, which labelled the data into manageable chunks for subsequent retrieval and exploration. For example, I tried to determine how important wording was – how strongly was a view held? Were there any throwaway remarks?

This stage, therefore, was to *“go beyond a mere descriptive labelling of the relevant data segments”* (Dörnyei, 2007: 252) to become aware of patterns and connections between different parts of the data. I colour-coded themes and ideas that regularly occurred.

3. “Mapping and interpretation - *defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of phenomena, create typologies and find associations between themes with a view to providing explanations for the findings”*. The process of mapping and interpretation was influenced by the original research objectives as well as by the themes that emerged.

When looking at the themes, I found closely related labels that could be joined into broader categories. In the light of the new list, I recoded some data. At this stage, I worked with the list of themes that emerged from my initial coding. Although they were not final categories, the process of sorting them in this way helped me to think about the data in new ways.

I returned to my set of labels and tried to organise them again without reference to my initial categories. At this stage I felt that, although there were useful themes emerging, they were somewhat decontextualised. I returned to the original interviews and reread them.

At the final or ‘selective’ stage of coding *“a* *central category (or explanatory concept) is identified, in terms of which other categories can be refined and integrated*” (Richards, 2003: 277). I gradually realised that the participants were gaining confidence in learning and my analysis began to develop by exploring how this occurred and whether there were other key themes that emerged.

* 1. **Validity and reliability**

Richardson (2000: 15) describes five factors she uses when reviewing personal narrative papers. These include analysis of both evaluative and constructive validity techniques. The criteria are:

1. *substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life?*

My research contributes to understanding the ways in which some adult learners develop confidence in learning.

1. *Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically?*

I want my story to be read by more than academics, so it is not only an academic piece of research, but also a narrative that might be understood by those who would not normally read a doctoral thesis.

1. *Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?*

I explore my subjectivity through aspects of autoethnography and reflective practice.

1. *Impactfullness (sic). Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action?*

I want to create a story that has an impact on readers so that they have a greater understanding of the needs that adult learners have, whilst also recognising that there are many ways in which learners can gain confidence.

1. *Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience?*

I wanted to encourage participants to express themselves without reserve. The stories emerge from personal and social histories. The aim was that the participants would share their experiences with me. Through conversation I wanted them to relive what, if anything, affected their confidence to learn.

Creswell (2007) highlights that validity is concerned with the trustworthiness of the knowledge produced. He also suggests that it is possible to differentiate between two types of validity - internal and external. Internal validity refers to whether or not questions are appropriately designed without any danger of misinterpretations. External validity asks if results can be generalised. My intention was not to produce generalisations about participants and attitudes to their learning. The aim was to examine the complexity of the data, working towards an understanding of the diverse range of issues that played a role in the learning participants experienced whilst with me. I aim to present the work as examples that have relevance to other adult learners and educators.

I used both a deductive and an inductive approach. A deductive approach uses established theory and creates a hypothesis based on this model. An inductive approach, however, looks for an interesting supposition where hypothesis and theory are a result of research, rather than acting as a starting point (Molberg, 2010). Whereas I may not produce universal claims from all my research, I hope that there may be elements that ring true with those reading this thesis.

Russel (1998) draws attention to the issue of memory and suggests that fragmentary recollections, which are rich in detail, are characterised by disjunctions. Muncey (2005: 2) also considers this: *“although memory is selective and shaped, and is retold in the continuum of one’s experience, this does not necessarily constitute lying”*. In that memory is subjective and relies on feelings, recalling something one day may be different to remembering it in the same way another time. To overcome this as fully as possible, I regularly returned to the participants to confirm that what I had written and how it was interpreted was as they had remembered the conversations. I also ensured that I retained the credibility of the stories by confirming what I had written once the research was complete.

Katya interviewed some participants. If they were uncertain about talking freely with me, they could speak with her. It was her responsibility to ensure that my teaching met their needs. It secured some validity in that she was obliged to tell me what I had to change about my approach if it became necessary, because she had to ensure that my teaching would enable students to pass.

Reliability can be understood to mean that researchers collect true and correct statements (Thagaard, 2003). Creswell (2007) explains that reliability evaluates the quality of the interpretations made by the researcher and determines if the findings are trustworthy. This study highlights my interpretation of the thoughts of the participants.

* 1. **Objectivity**

Gluck & Patai (1991: 14) suggest that *“Traditional research approaches encouraged researchers to present themselves as faceless, objective nonentities.”* This may work for some. The reality, I suggest, is that objectivity is impossible. Essentially, validity and relevance are determined by me as the researcher, and, as Whitaker (2001) suggests, there is no such thing as an objective evaluation. Ball (1993) describes how important the individual researcher is in obtaining data and recognising their impact, either positively or negatively. Whereas objectivity is not completely possible and researchers cannot be *“researcher proof”* (Ball, 1993: 44), Phillips (1993) suggests that it is at least important to be critically aware, enabling accuracy as much as possible. He also suggests, however, that the best research is the type that attempts to be the most objective. Bias is intrinsic to who we are and it is not possible to separate it from research. In that this research is concerned with how people say they feel, including myself, it is inevitable that my interpretation, based on my experiences, will influence the evaluation of the findings.

For this research, then, being subjective is necessary. In that I acknowledge, challenge and reflect on the data, some pitfalls of prejudice may be overcome. Katya’s interview, reviews and conversation helped to manage some of these concerns by adding a different perspective.

When Peshkin (1998) began to conduct research, he became aware that he was subconsciously subjective. In order to raise this to consciousness, he chose a way of understanding linked to his subjectivity in terms of, for example, the impact of his personal experiences and cultural background. He examined both the positive and more challenging parts of who he saw himself as, defining these essences as *“I’s”* (1998: 18). He claimed that

it is no more useful for researchers to acknowledge simply that subjectivity is an invariable component of their research than it is for them to assert that their ideal is to achieve objectivity. Acknowledgments and assertions are not sufficient … researchers should systematically seek out their subjectivity, not retrospectively when the data have been collected and the analysis is complete, but while their research is actively in progress. The purpose of doing so is to enable researchers to be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their inquiry and its outcomes (Peshkin, 1988: 17).

I tried to retain some objectivity by working at an analytical distance with my participants and attempting to make *“the familiar seem strange”* (Jeanes & De Cock, 2005: 3). This was potentially achievable by being a stranger to the participants at the start. Phillips (1993) acknowledges that this can be difficult but the effort is necessary. As will be found, the issue was that some participants began to connect with me and wanted to succeed for my sake as well as theirs. This changed their attitudes towards me.

Whereas this qualitative approach may seem to offer insight, it is not without difficulty. I only used evidence from thirteen people, including Katya and myself. This was too small a sample to make generalisations that could apply to everyone involved in workplace learning. Also, the methods used meant that I spent time trying to appreciate viewpoints and condense them for this thesis. I am also aware that this research is a *“snapshot frozen in time”* (Woods, 1988: 102). I am providing stories limited to one set of individuals and circumstances over a particular period. Therefore, whilst my qualitative data may have produced rich data, it was time consuming and could have produced sampling problems that does not allow for generalisations about large groups.

* 1. **Being neutral**

An issue that I needed to consider when conducting interviews was neutrality. Traditionally, bias has been seen as the enemy and researchers have been offered advice on how to avoid it (Bell, 2005). Neutrality is concerned with creating a space for interviewees to share their experience freely whatever the content (Dörnyei, 2007). As well as avoiding bias oneself, Dörnyei claims that interviewers must create an environment that encourages sharing even *“socially less-than-desirable”* information or attitudes (p. 141). While it is clear that the interviewer should not influence the responses of interviewees, the issue of interviewer bias is more debateable. All research is subjective. It is necessary to acknowledge and work with our bias. By implication, if a particular topic is being researched, people are likely to have strong views on it. Fontana & Frey (2005), for example, see interviewing as a co-constructed social exchange in which it is impossible to avoid taking a stance.

In that I am an active participant in the research, I did not aspire to be neutral. We study how we live in conjunction with others in a social context. Interviews, discussions and conversations are useful ways of gaining understanding.

Ellis (2004) contends that this approach is most useful when participants have had experience of the topic under discussion and it is particularly suitable when researching personal or emotive topics that benefit from reciprocity and building of trust. Establishing trust is essential to elicit information (Polit & Beck, 2004; Holloway & Wheeler, 1996). As I progressed in my study, this approach became more appropriate. In the cameos, participants talked about their feelings surrounding learning. I could relate to them as a doctoral student.

**4.5 Ethics**

Carroll (1998: 22) challenges what ethical concepts are based upon. He appears to agree with the research that he cites from Patterson *et al* that ethical decisions are made to *“unwritten, personal standards”*. This is in line with other literature (for example, Howieson & Semple, 1998). Carroll implies that nothing can be assumed. Ethical behaviour has to be explained because what one person believes is ethical may be the opposite to someone else.

I was initially concerned about the information I heard when the voice recorder was switched off. Disclosure of sensitive thoughts was an issue I was aware of. Conversations constantly took place. I was aware of the difference between professional discussion and private talk. The private conversations I had with participants were as interesting as the professional ones and at first I thought this would be an ethical dilemma. If I thought the talk was relevant to my research, however, I asked to record. Participants could agree or not. When they said no, although I continued with conversations, I did not record or use anything said for my research.

Even though the group interviews and reviews were formal and the cameos were not, there was still the possibility of people revealing more about themselves than they were comfortable with. Each time Katya and I met with the participants, however, we informed them to be careful of what they said. Although deemed confidential on my part and taking every precaution possible, I saw it as my role to caution. Even so, there were several recordings that I could not use because the information was too personal and could have revealed identities. Although this had an impact on my research in that I did not have as much information as I had anticipated, the ethical stance taken had to be kept (Denscombe, 2003).

The ethical dilemma of studying people for opportunistic reasons (Fine, 1992) was something I had to be aware of. I was interviewing people so that I could gain my doctorate. Did participants gain anything from my study? They gave me time and thought. I gave them the opportunity to speak, to reflect, to challenge, to think through the way they learnt. My aim was also that, through them helping me, my research might enable others to understand more about the sensitivity of adult learners.

**4.6 Listening to the participants**

Green (2014), when evaluating why Americans struggle with maths, highlights that one reason was that learners felt that they were not being listened to. They were being taught as opposed to having the opportunity to experience maths and share ideas. I encouraged discussion to take place so that they could find their own ways of solving problems. This enabled them to encourage each other and take risks in exploring ideas. To support those who preferred to work in silence, the group agreed set times to speak and set times to be silent. If some wanted to speak during a silent time, they left the room and talked in the coffee room.

The research uses the participants’ words to attempt to ensure that their voices would be accurately represented. Marshall & Rossman (2011) encourage qualitative researchers to use participants’ words as primary data to understand the perceptions of their worlds, which is what I endeavoured to do. I tried to represent their voices in the conversations. I actively listened by paying attention to ensure I heard what was being said. As will be read in chapter four, which describes the pilot research, I learnt that language can be misinterpreted. When the participants spoke with me about their learning experiences I clarified that I had interpreted their words according to their understanding. I always let the participants know how I was going to use the conversations.

In wanting to allow the thoughts of the participants to be heard, large sections belong to the participants’ voices through the direct transcription of the interviews and cameos in chapters five and six, which contain the data, and chapter seven, which is the evaluation. Shernoff *et al* (1999: 17) suggest that a *“philosophical leap of faith”* is taken when student perceptions are considered.

**SECTION 5: LIMITATIONS**

Goetz & LeCompte (1984: 108) note that methods are

adjusted, expanded, modified, or restricted on the basis of information acquired during the mapping phase of field-work ... Only after final withdrawal from the field can researchers specify the strategies they actually used for a particular study.

I began with pilot research. I am conscious that I could have predicted or made assumptions based on how I collected data and what I discovered. The very nature of data collection and its interpretation will have been influenced by my beliefs, position and perspectives (Etherington, 2004; Silverman, 2006). My credibility as an interviewer and researcher could be questioned, as my lack of experience will have influenced responses. It is also possible that my attitude will have become entwined with the participants (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997), which could also have affected my interpretations.

As highlighted in this chapter, which mentions that autoethnography can be seen to be self-indulgent and narcissistic, I was aware that this was a potential issue and I recognised the danger. Nonetheless, an awareness of a personal presence within a study can enhance the process and outcomes of research (Etherington, 2004). I had to be aware, however, of *“intellectual baggage”* (Silverman, 2006: 377). This relates to my assumptions, preferences and prejudices throughout the research. It was important that I acknowledged and explored them in a reflexive manner (Etherington, 2004; Silverman, 2006).

A potential difficulty is that the extracts from the recordings may seem lengthy. I wanted to add *“rich, detailed, thick description”* (Firestone, 1993: 18) from participants, and from myself. As the accounts provide detailed information about people in narrative form, I had to be aware that it might be difficult to hold a reader’s interest. I also realised, however, that for the reader to understand my analysis, I had to present detailed elements of the data that I was evaluating. My interpretations, inevitably, will vary from someone else’s interpretation, but not so much as they are so far apart as to be deemed inaccurate. As Wellington (2000: 140) indicates, *“One can never be sure if the data have been analysed fairly, adequately or reliably.”*

I have found that being a researcher is not easy. Ball (1993: 33) emphasises the importance of the way researchers come across to others. It is necessary to be *“self-aware*”. As CARN (2005) indicates, this is fundamental. As I was also the tutor, I had to be particularly sensitive to participants.

Before beginning to teach the group, Katya and I met to discuss the research that I would complete. We deliberated as to whether it might have a detrimental effect on my teaching. We considered how I would separate the researcher from the teacher role.

Aside from the research, I was a tutor and it was my responsibility to ensure that participants passed external examinations. This split role could have had an impact on my research. The participants may have felt differently if they had not passed their tests. My role as tutor, therefore, could have had a direct impact on my research.

It could have been easy for me to experience confusion concerning my identity, because, in the same class and with the same group, although at different times, I was tutor and researcher. I could have wondered which was my primary aim – to facilitate and impart information, or to discover some aspect of how people said they felt about learning? The two were not mutually exclusive, but the situation may have given rise to conflict between the roles that could have affected both the teaching and the research. Could I even accomplish both roles, given the time, expertise and motivation required? I could have become so caught up in a personal agenda that I might have found it difficult to extrapolate the teacher from the researcher (Ball, 1993).

In that I was also exploring reflective practice, the research might have become so specific to my development that it could have become irrelevant to anyone apart from me. I may only have looked to the participants for results I wanted.

Both roles could have suffered. I consciously separated them by focusing on the teaching and then researching when this was complete. When I was teaching I did not think about what it was I was researching – I was totally focused on the learners.

Who the research is for, who it will benefit and how the research is to be interpreted may determine the validity and relevance of the study (Hammersley & Scarth, 1993).

I had worked with Katya on several occasions. It could be perceived that she is a stakeholder in my work. Her company does not have any financial, ethical or political hold over the research. She merely states that she is interested to know if attitudes change during participants’ experience of learning. Nonetheless, had my teaching not met the needs of the participants as the course progressed, Katya could have experienced resentment towards my research and the participants may have been reluctant to share their thoughts as the research continued. Katya could have decided not to ask me to teach again for her company. She also had the right to remove me from the class if complaints had been made about my approach. In that Creative Care pays Katya’s training company, if participants had not accepted the way they were being taught, funding could have been withdrawn. The implication of this is that the training company could have lost that contract. The consequence of that happening is that I could have been asked to stop teaching. This would have meant that my research might not have been completed.

There was also the possibility that during the time of teaching some participants may have opted out of the class, left their jobs or decided not to allow me to use their recordings. Apart from one person who became ill, people stayed the course.

**Summary**

This chapter focused on the ways in which I planned to approach my research. I have attempted to be rigorous in stating how and why I selected my chosen methods. I have explained what I originally planned and the reasons for my changes. Chapter eight provides reasons for my struggles with preparing this methodology.

Section 1 began by introducing my approach to the chapter. I then explained the details of my actual research, from how participants were chosen to how I collected the data.

Section 2 explored question development, from devising the research questions to creating ones I thought I would need for my research. The subject matter of this section took the longest time for me to understand. Separating the research questions from how I was going to obtain my findings confused me. Although obvious now, I could not understand the difference between the two.

My reasons for choosing the methods, and considering how I would use them, was appraised in section 3.

Section 4 reflected on my attention to the detail of the research. I explored how I would analyse my findings. I also questioned how objective or neutral I needed to be.

The most challenging observations I made were connected to my role as both tutor and researcher with the same participants. This was considered both when thinking about being a reflective practitioner and as part of the limitations in section 5. Questioning this dual role was difficult.

The importance of the next chapter, which explores my pilot experiences, is explained by the fact that it helped me to begin to understand how I could approach qualitative research. As will be read, it examines what I learnt from the experiences.

**CHAPTER 4: PILOTS**

**Introduction**

The pilot research was crucial to my development of this thesis. The pilots helped me to identify potential practical problems in the research procedure. I took the advice of De Vaus (1993: 54) who suggested *"Do not take the risk. Pilot test first”.*

van Teijlingen & Hundley (2001: 1, as cited by Polit *et al*) give two examples of how pilot studies can be used. They can be *"small scale version[s], or trial run[s], done in preparation for the major study"* and they can also test research methods. As will be read, I used trial runs and tested the some of the research methods.

Section 1 discusses my experiences of individual pilots, whilst section 2 explores the group interviews.

**SECTION 1: INDIVIDUAL PILOTS**

* 1. **One-to-one pilots**

All volunteers were willing to support me. I arranged to speak with each person once, for up to an hour. This proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. At the time of talking with them, I believed I had formulated my ideas. I had not. I did not know what it was I wanted, and, having so many questions, conversations were difficult to manage. The pilots ensured that I appraised my thoughts and I assessed my intentions. I learnt about how long I could spend with people before they became bored or frustrated. Without these volunteers and learning from them, collecting relevant data from my participants may have been impossible to obtain.

The discussions consisted of three face-to-face interviews and one that was conducted over the telephone. I knew two of the pilot participants on a professional level and two on a personal level. They were all British and had attended schools in England. The first three participants were in their forties. One was a fellow doctoral student, the second was a work colleague and the third was a neighbour. The fourth person, who I spoke to over the phone, was in her seventies. I had known her for many years. I asked her to be a volunteer because she had told me that she was uncertain of herself academically and she lacked self-belief.

I was still in the process of developing questions that I thought I would need for my research when working with the volunteers. Each interview lasted over an hour without me covering what I thought I wanted to know. I realised I was collecting too much information. For example, I did not need to know whether participants described their coursework as *learning* or *studies*, or whether they thought of themselves as a *student* or a *learner*.

Note-taking took more time than if I had audio-recorded conversations. When using a recorder, I focused on individuals and engaged in conversation. I could hear the nuance in the voices when listening back. I could also check what and how I asked questions.

I elected not to digitally record two of the conversations to see what effect it would have on my recollection, my approach to the volunteers and their reactions. Responses to this decision varied. One volunteer was relieved not to have been recorded, but another wished I had, saying that I did not seem to be listening to her, but only the words she used. Nunan (1992) claims that, whilst recording can be useful, it is not the only way to record data and it is only the data the researcher has selected to preserve that it records. Not focusing on the interviewee, however, could be an issue. Wellington (2000: 85) suggests that recording *“is often seen as a compliment by the person being interviewed”.* I learnt that I needed to ensure that I valued people as individuals, not simply as sources of data.

* 1. **Individual pilot volunteers 1, 2 and 3**

My first interview was with Jack. It was formal. I recorded it. I had fifty-two questions that I wanted to ask him, but I began with one question, which was concerned with his 11-plus examination. The question was: “*What do you remember about the 11 plus?”* Even that had two supplementary questions: “*Was it easy/difficult to do? Why?”*

We had not even begun to discuss how Jack said he felt as an adult learner by the end of our talk. I therefore asked him if we could have a second meeting so that I could obtain more information. I had asked six questions in that first interview, but only one was on my list of fifty-two.

When transcribed, those two conversations were almost 1,600 words. I began thinking how I would analyse them if they had been part of my research. When I looked at how I might evaluate them for themes, I realised that I would struggle if questions, either with the group or individually, were to be as long and unstructured as in these interviews. I also realised that I had to ensure that the length of time with my participants was agreed upon beforehand so that I would be fair to both them and me.

Jack and I met in a public place, albeit in a private area, but we were both aware that conceivably others could overhear. On both occasions, however, I was conscious of how vulnerable Jack might have been. It was something that I learnt to monitor with my participants by turning the recorder on only when I was sure they were happy for me to do so and then encouraging them to listen to what they had said.

I checked with Jack that he was comfortable in the chosen environment. Although he said he was I, however, was uncomfortable about the situation and it made me realise that any interview had to meet my needs, as well as that of the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The second volunteer was Emma, a work colleague. We met in her house. This gave her control of the environment. In that this was not a neutral place, I could have felt uncomfortable. Once again it highlighted the importance of location.

I told her that I had decided not to digitally record the interview. Emma provided me with detailed information about her work and her study, but because I was writing I did not focus on her, which she said was annoying. Also, Emma challenged me about the purpose of the research. Did I want to know about present day experiences or was my work an historical thesis? My lack of precision was reflected in the way I asked questions.

Emma did not want to reply to some of my questions. She told me that I seemed to be intrusive. When I explained more about the research, however, Emma responded, but said that I should have been clear about my intentions before the interview began. On reflection, I wonder whether some of this reaction was due to her being a work colleague and I would learn aspects about her that could affect our working relationship. Although the research participants would be strangers, the concern regarding prying might still be felt. It was vital that they would know that they did not have to speak, that anonymity was assured and that, consequently, anything with which they were uncomfortable would be removed from the research. This was dealt with in the letter of introduction given to participants (Appendix A).

Emma also stated that I asked the same question in different ways. Part of this was checking that the questions were answered consistently (Sheridan & Niwa, 2003). I remembered her feedback and tried to be more sensitive to participants.

When people do not feel that they are being controlled, they may be more likely to respond positively to an idea (Eisenberg, 2007). Due to my uncertainty about how to research, I became so caught up in the need to supervise what people were going to say that I forgot that I needed to hear what they said about their feelings concerning their learning. Ultimately, I knew that I did not want participants to be constrained by my questions, but to be able to make their own decisions about what to discuss. *“Intrinsic motivation happens spontaneously and as such cannot be coerced”* (McLean, 2003: 11). It can, however, be helped by providing people with the opportunity to discover personal issues and inviting them to participate in making decisions. As McLean continues to highlight, *“Excessive pressure could backfire by undermining exploration, curiosity, creativity and spontaneity”* (ibid).

My third volunteer, Philomena, talked about her work, relationships and family. I knew her personally. Focusing on questions about her feelings around education was challenging as I still was not clear what it was I wanted. I was not succinct in my questioning and nor was she in her answers. I recorded her and I did not make any notes. I became aware of the difference in my approach and hers straight away compared to my interview with Emma. We had eye contact, my body language was more relaxed and I was more animated.

Philomena’s contribution taught me about needing to be precise when asking questions. I had recorded her and therefore I was able to listen back to nuances of voice, my style of questioning and the way she responded. The recording became corrupted before I had it transcribed. This made me aware of the need to take some notes at the time, however brief, and not to assume that everything would go according to plan.

The conversation with Philomena gave me another opportunity to become aware of how some people might respond to being questioned. I noticed how her voice occasionally changed from a calm, even tone to a high pitched one. Had this been my research I might have considered analysing it for potential signs of anxiety. I could have been side-tracked, however, into considering the research as a psychological discourse analysis, as opposed to interpreting the content and listening to what was being said. Having too many ideas as to what and how I would interpret my findings was a danger I began to consider (Wellington, 2000).

* 1. **Individual pilot 4**

Anna’s interview took place over the telephone. I did not audio-record her. As she spoke, I made notes, which made the conversation slow and stilted. Having learnt from other volunteers, Anna enabled me to explore ideas in more depth. We only touched on questions I had prepared. That was positive, as I wanted them to be a starting point for discussion.

Anna was a woman in her seventies who last studied formally 20 years previous to this thesis. At the time of the interview, she regularly attended non-vocational courses. I asked her to be a volunteer because she often spoke about lacking in confidence, feeling *“silly”* and not being clever. In conversation, she focused on what she could not do.

She expressed her feelings of inadequacy as a raw experience. Anna’s understanding of self-esteem, confidence and motivation fascinated me. I spent more time considering what she said than I did with the other pilot volunteers. I began to write Anna’s piece as if she were part of my research. As I began to work through my interview notes, however, I became aware that, as with Jack, my first volunteer, I could be overwhelmed with data.

I spent too much time developing this interview rather than remembering that this process was a practice run. Nonetheless, working on this procedure as a discipline was useful as it enabled me to realise the time it would take to examine my data and discover themes.

I fed back to Anna what I believed she had said about some of her thoughts. She denied ever having made certain comments. In that I did not have her words recorded, I could not prove what she had said was accurate. I learnt that, if possible, I would need to record whenever I wanted to collect data.

**1.4 Language**

I was aware, but had not realised, the extent to which language is subject to interpretation (Rorty, 1977). Hardy & Taylor (1997) contend that communication need not involve identically shared meanings between participants. It is enough for meanings to be compatible. If neither person does anything completely unexpected to the other, then their illusions of identically shared meaning are maintained (ibid). My discussion with Anna, for example, where her definition of words such as *“good”* and *“capable”* appeared to be different to mine, was a pivotal learning point for me. In my notes about Anna I wrote:

Anna said she was *“capable”* of doing something, whereas her mother was *“good”*. “*Capable”,* she said, was concerned with *“being able to follow instructions”*. It was not about adapting, or being creative - my interpretations. It was about being passable. In contrast, *“good”* is concerned with being better than capable - *“everything turns out right”.*

This experience taught me that I had to be careful in my research not to assume that what I understood or how others used words had shared meaning. I learnt to check for understanding. Derrida (1978) emphasises the idea that language is always unstable and that its form is inadequate but necessary. He reminds the reader that communication may not exist as fully as we might think because of these conjectures.

**SECTION 2: GROUP PILOTS**

**2.1 Issues with questions**

I have discussed some of the problems of question preparation in the methodology chapter. There are a number of issues, however, that I want to highlight specifically concerning the group pilots. I had already contacted lecturer colleagues about the types of questions I intended asking. Before working with my pilot volunteers, I sent four questions to the same colleagues to obtain feedback about their suitability. The questions were:

1. have you ever thought about these words: self-esteem, confidence, motivation?
2. Has a tutor ever used your skills to enhance your learning?
3. What is your perception of success as linked to adult education?
4. Does the time regarding when you last studied have any impact on your confidence?

Four responded verbally – one emailed. Each replied stating that the language I had used was too convoluted for the learners I intended to research. The reality of working on my pilots helped me to appreciate that the wording I used needed to be simplified.

I did not ask questions with my first two groups. For my third group pilot, I asked the following questions:

1. what are you learning?
2. Why are you here?
3. What do you enjoy about study?
4. What gets in your way of study?
5. How does studying make you feel?

Having used them, my questions were fine-tuned for the actual research to:

1. what are you learning?
2. Why are you taking this course?
3. Who or what helps you to learn?
4. Does anything get in your way of learning?
5. How does learning make you feel?

As will be read, the word *“studying”* changed to *“learning”* due to my experiences from the third pilot group.

**2.2 Group pilots**

My group pilots took place two months after my individual interviews and within three months of each other.

Having understood the need to record, I was keen to do so on every occasion. Wanting to do something and being allowed to, however, is not always achievable. The first and third group pilots were not recorded because some volunteers, although happy to participate, did not want this to happen. I respected that choice.

**2.3 Group pilots 1 and 2**

In that I knew my research group would come from people in the care industry, I hoped that I could find a similar pilot group.

Pilot 1 were such a group, consisting of women who were similar to those who became my research participants in terms of ages, cultural backgrounds and job types. There were thirteen women who were aged between twenty-one and forty-nine. They had also studied through Katya’s training company and were working towards a care apprenticeship. As with my research participants, I had taught them how to improve their maths and English for one day a week over fourteen weeks. I interviewed them at the end of their time with me.

My second group comprised of fifteen men on an apprenticeship course at a college. They were aged between twenty-five and fifty-five. They lived and worked countrywide. They had been given study leave by their companies. The men all worked for the same company, although they came from different parts of the country.

I worked with this group for six days over a three-week period, helping them to improve their maths and English. I interviewed them at the end of the three weeks.

As part of their English assessment, both pilot groups were required to hold a discussion to show evidence that they could listen to each other, ask questions and share ideas. Both opted to talk about the course. I asked each group if I could use these opportunities to learn about how to develop my thesis. They agreed. I did not record group 1, but I did record group 2.

Both groups were people who did not know each other before attending their courses, but had become friendly by the time I met with them. Each group reflected on the course and what formal study had meant to them. I realised that these discussions were more like focus groups, rather than semi-structured interviews, in that the groups led themselves. Wellington (2000: 125) suggests that a focus group can *“spark each other off”.* This is what occurred and I learnt that this was not what I wanted for my research.

The third group was different to the first two. I asked questions and it was similar to the research that I finally conducted.

**2.4 Group pilot 3**

Like Anna’s one-to-one interview, I began to write this third pilot as if it was a short research project, looking for themes and evaluating them. This was helpful because it let me consider the time it would take to complete the research.

The group consisted of five unemployed men to whom I taught social skills. Their ages varied from twenty – fifty-five years old. They were not studying towards a formal qualification. They were encouraged to attend sessions to benefit them on a personal, as opposed to a professional, level. I anticipated that their lack of academic interest would challenge me to adjust the language I would need to use with the research participants. I interviewed the group after five months of working with them.

This pilot led me to think about how I could use the questions I had finally planned for the research.

The questions were:

1. what are you learning?
2. Why are you here?
3. What do you enjoy about the study?
4. What gets in your way of study?
5. How does studying make you feel?

When I began asking questions, as with Jack’s interviews, I realised that some of the information I thought I needed was unnecessary.

My influence and presence will have made a difference to the way in which the volunteers responded. They knew me. I used this group for one pilot session, but I had worked with the group previously and I continued to work with them for several weeks afterwards. This experience revealed that familiarity created less perceptiveness on my part as sessions moved on. I needed to be aware of this for my research. Peterson & Langellier (cited in Ellis, 2004) point out that context and power relationships are important considerations in interview situations. My power as the tutor was an element I had to be aware of with my research.

Even though I had set questions, the men moved the conversation on themselves. They spoke about what helped them to remember ideas. Their thoughts related to their experiences of learning – exactly what I wanted to understand. This was key to my approach for the research. They made me realise that I was not to be constrained by questions.

When I asked a question concerning what they enjoyed about the study, I received mixed responses. I realised then that it was not the study that I wanted to know about - it was their learning. What was it about *learning* that they said they enjoyed? I had made an assumption, however. Did they understand what I meant by learning? Did I understand what *I* meant? Once again I realised that I would have to be clear in my mind what it was I wanted to know.

**Summary**

Pilot studies may be *"underdiscussed, underused and underreported"* (Prescott & Soeken, 1989: 60). When reading other research papers, I have noticed that pilot research is not regularly used in detail. As van Teijlingen & Hundley (2001: 4) highlight, “*Some of these processes and outcomes from both successful and failed pilot studies might be very useful to others embarking on projects using similar methods and instruments.”* They continue by noting that *“This is particularly important because pilot studies can be time-consuming, frustrating, and fraught with unanticipated problems, but it is better to deal with them before investing a great deal of time, money, and effort in the full study"* (as cited from Mason & Zuercher, ibid).

Without the use of the pilots, my research would have been difficult to achieve. They helped me by confirming that I wanted group research based on semi-structured interviews using the questions I had developed and not have them as a focus group.

It is from the individual interviews, however, that I realised how much I would need to reconsider my approach to what I thought would be vignettes. They helped me to listen to participants when they wanted to talk with me. This was useful for what became the cameos. I learnt that focusing on people, asking pertinent, but hopefully not intrusive questions, and recording was vital if I was to answer my research questions.

I was ready, I thought, to begin the research.

**CHAPTER 5: GROUP INTERVIEWS**

**Introduction**

I interviewed the group on two occasions with an eight-week gap between them. Katya, the owner/manager of the training company, interviewed them once between my interviews. The cameos, and the one-to-one reviews that Katya completed, took place in the weeks after the group interviews.

This chapter is a description of what took place. The findings are in chapter seven.

I begin with the two interviews I conducted. Quality data can produce masses of information (Wellington, 2000). The decision of what transcripts to include in this chapter has been a challenge: *“There are no straightforward answers”* (Wellington, 2000: 140). I decided to compare and contrast my two interviews, highlighting each question I asked. I provide reflections of my experiences in section 5.2. These thoughts are combined with those of the cameos, in chapter seven.

I end this chapter by considering the interview Katya undertook.

**5.1 The group interviews**

When I conducted the interviews, my research questions were at the forefront of my thinking. They are:

1. what do adults in the workplace say they feel about classroom-based learning?
2. Who or what influences their experiences of learning?
3. Does formal learning make any difference to people’s lives?

I chose to ask the group the following questions to obtain the answers I was seeking:

1. what are you learning?
2. Why are you taking this course?
3. Who or what helps you to learn?
4. Does anything get in your way of learning?
5. How does learning make you feel?

The tables of extracts from the interviews reveal the contrast in both my questioning and the responses between the first and second interviews.

The first question I had planned to ask should have been: *“what are you learning?*”

|  |
| --- |
| **Question 1** |
| Interview 1**Zoya****What is it that you are learning; what courses are you on?***Rose*I’ve come on this course to do maths and English Level 1 and I plan to do my apprenticeship Level 2.**Zoya** **Are you anxious about that, afraid about it?***Rose*I’m not afraid I’m quite willing to do it; I need it. |  | Interview 2**Zoya****What are you learning? Are any of you happy to tell me what it is you feel you’re learning? It could either be in the course, or it could be about life.***Magritte*Do you mean learning about the course or what we’re learning generally?**Zoya****It could be your interpretation, what you’re learning on the course, what you’re learning in life or what you’re learning by being here; what your interpretation is, so it is a broad question.***Luke*You’re working out that you’re never too old to learn something.*Magritte*I think learning as a mature group is a lot better…Because when you’re younger – well when you’ve got mixed age groups should I say you’re a bit more embarrassed as an adult when you’re still learning the same as somebody who’s a lot younger, but here because we’re all learning I think this has given us more confidence because we’re all adults and we’re all doing it together. |
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Table 2

In the first interview, the group said they were embarking on the course as a necessary first step on the ladder to academic learning. Rose highlighted that she needed it and others concurred with this.

Some mentioned that they were taking the apprenticeship course, which includes maths and English, to support the roles they had with Creative Care and to give them the skills necessary to improve their job opportunities. Their development was concerned with scholarly achievement.

My style of questioning varied between the two interviews. I was more factual in the first interview than I was in the second. At times, in order to obtain a response in the first interview, I needed to ask some of the questions twice.

I realise that I could have put words into people’s mouths. For example, I used the term *“anxious”* in interview 1 – *“Are you anxious about that, afraid about it?”*

I expected additional information from the group in the second interview because of our familiarity. My desire to want to know more about the individuals and of not simply expecting a straightforward answer as had been given the first time, was rewarded with complex responses.

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| **Question 2** |
| Interview 1**Zoya****Why are you actually doing the apprenticeship?***Maya*So I can get further on and do other training to help the department.*Magritte*I’m doing the apprenticeship health and social care at Level 2 and part of the course is to do the maths and English, which I admit I do need to brush up on.SILENCE**Zoya****Why are you doing that particular course?***Magritte*I want to progress but there are certain things I want to train in, and to train on them you’ve got to pass NVQ Level 2 before you can go any further.*Alex*I find maths quite hard and I’m hoping to brush up on the skills.*Tanya*I’m just doing it to learn more skills so I can do more in the company and help the staff.*Lydia*They asked me to!**Zoya****What made you say yes?***Lydia*You’ll learn more won’t you, you’ll learn more skills. |  | Interview 2**Zoya****Why are you taking this particular course? Now this could be *[thinking]* and it’s your interpretation; do you see the course as in the maths and English, or in the apprenticeship, or because you’re wanting to improve skills?***Luke*It’s all about development.**Zoya****About development - your development?***Luke*Yes, personal development and development in your job.*Maya*We’re doing the apprenticeship so we can improve our skills so now we’ll work better and be a better member of the team.*Tanya*Now we’re doing work on dementia the unit that we are on now, I know how to deal better with dementia patients where we work because we do get quite a few, so it does improve a lot the way you work.**Zoya****Anyone else want to add anything about why you’re taking the course?***Magritte*It gives you a bit more confidence in your job ... you understand a bit more about what’s going on and how to approach different aspects of what’s going on … It gives you a feel for what you’re doing.*Luke*I think it gives you confidence just in yourself as well … Your own development not just within your job, your own personal development. |
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Table 3

The second question should have been: *“why are you taking this course?”* My anxiety took over in the first interview and I was unclear in my questioning.

My nerves were constantly on show in the first interview. I asked question 2 twice and the same person answered, although slightly differently.

At the time of the second interview, eight weeks after the first had taken place, the group had begun to question if their study was not purely an academic exercise, but something that affected their lives.

Question 2 began to raise issues around confidence. The participants discussed how the learning that they were involved in gave them confidence, not only in what they were studying, but also in their daily lives. The development of confidence is discussed in the findings chapter.

Although in some circumstances participants had been asked to attend the course, it was their choice to accept the offer. This decision meant that their approach to learning was different to school, as they said this had relevance to them. The reason those who spoke gave, however, was that the course was for work purposes.

I was too anxious to ask the third question in the first interview. I realised that the participants were not forthcoming with their responses and I was almost afraid to ask them anything more. Instead, I asked a question linked to how they might best be supported in learning. When thinking about this later in the day, I noted the following in my journal:

What happened in the asking of questions? By the time I got to my third one, I realised that the group were just not interested. So I did not stick to the script. No, it was not that they were not interested …

I could not ask the questions. I felt embarrassed. I felt as if I was imposing on them. Perhaps I was. Perhaps I was too polite. Even though they knew the questions were for my research, I could not bring myself to ask what was really important. Why? What was I embarrassed about? Never having done research before, I lacked the confidence to ask a group of strangers’ questions about their learning. Would it have made a difference if I had known them for longer? Who knows?

The third question should have been *“who or what helps you to learn?”* Before I asked this question in the first interview, however, I accidentally skipped it and asked the fourth question before returning to the third one. To avoid confusion, I am keeping to the order that I had originally planned.

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| **Question 3** |
| Interview 1**Zoya****Have your apprenticeship tutors told you about how to study best; have you been given some ideas?***All*Not yet/no |  | Interview 2**Zoya****Who or what helps you to learn? What’s enabling you to do the learning?**MayaYou, explaining things better so it becomes clearer.**Zoya****So you find that having a tutor and having me here is easier than just doing online learning?***Luke*It’s not being talked **at**, it’s being talked **to** which is a big difference ... I actually do work with someone coming round and helping me a lot better.**Zoya****You need interaction.***Tanya*It helps that you’re approachable as well.**Zoya****So personality traits will make a difference.***All*Yes.**Zoya****Anything else helps you to learn or anyone else do you think?***Magritte*We have a mentor or the majority of us have a mentor for doing our NVQ’s so there’s someone else who we can talk to and help going through the booklets that we’re going through, and obviously you’ve got your verifiers as well.*Bertha*We see each other as well within the group.*Magritte*We can talk about ‘I’ve got to do this, and got to do this. Have you done that?’ so we can actually bounce off one another if we’re struggling and talk to one another.*Maya*It’s also ourselves, we motivate ourselves and we want to learn so that’s a major thing. |
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Table 4

The group, the individuals themselves, outside sources and my approach to teaching appeared to have had an impact on their learning. These themes will be discussed in chapters seven and eight.

The fourth question was: *“does anything get in your way of learning?”*

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| **Question 4** |
| Interview 1**Zoya****Another question generally for you and you don’t all have to answer but do feel free to speak: what may get in the way of you completing the apprenticeship and the numeracy & literacy? What do you think might get in the way?***Magritte*Illness.*Maya*The weather.**Zoya****So there could be illness. Anything else?***No reply* |  | Interview 2**Zoya****Does anything get in your way of learning, is there anything that you think stops you from learning or gets in your way of learning?***Tanya*I struggle on concentrating with noises. When I read something it won’t function and I keep reading it and reading it. It takes me a good few times for me to get it to stay there with distractions.*Magritte and others*Family commitments.*Luke*IT problems.*Alex*Work commitments.*Luke*Management. |
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Table 5

In my journal I reflected on how I felt about asking questions and not being answered.

I fudged, tumbling over my words. I could not ask about learning. I was being too polite. Due to my inexperience, fear and lack of confidence, I made excuses that encouraged participants not to answer. I spoke too much and I garbled. I was not clear with them about what it was I wanted to know. I was too shy to ask. I tried not to impose on them – the nerves showed. This was my first day with them and I did not feel in control.

Rather than asking: *“does anything get in your way of learning?”* which, on reflection, appears clumsy, *w*hat might have been preferable was: *does anything get in your way* ***when*** *learning?*

The question I asked concerning what might prevent participants from completing the course was not the same as what may stop them from learning. I asked a different question to the one I wanted answering.

In that the group did not respond to my comments, I moved to another topic. The silence from the group in the first interview was daunting. I wanted to obtain information and encourage conversation when they were not ready to do so because I had not properly prepared them for the interview.

When I asked this question in the second interview, I was given responses that I could then deal with as a tutor.

The fifth question should have been: *“how does learning make you feel?”* Once again, in the first interview, I opted for a different question, perhaps to compensate for my fear. Was I noticing their attitude? Did I realise that asking this question was not going to generate an answer? I did not have the courage to ask it to see what response I would receive.

In the second interview, my confidence triumphed, although I still had the issue of asking the question twice. My self-belief increased as the participants became more open.

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| **Question 5** |
| Interview 1 **Zoya****How does coming into the classroom make you feel and seeing all these banks of computers?***Rose*I feel okay with it.*Maya*I try to make sure I get here on time.*Magritte*I think you’re looking at it in a different aspect; when we were at school you had to do it, this time we **want** to do it.**Zoya****So it’s about choice?***All*Yes.**Zoya****Do you think you’ll enjoy this way of learning?... Are there any other ways of learning that you prefer? So you’re going to be learning on the computers, any other ways you would prefer to learn? Let’s think about numeracy and literacy, I’ll be bringing things in next week for you to have a look at, to play with – but are there other ways that you like to learn …***Lydia*I like to have one-to-one and communication. |  | Interview 2 **Zoya****How does learning make you feel? How does this learning, or generally, how has it made you feel?***Bertha*It makes you want to learn more because you start and get into it you want to progress and you want to carry on.*Maya*It gives you more confidence, especially with your writing - that’s the part I used to struggle with; I still struggle a bit but I’m more confident in that now.*Luke*It can trigger something… I’ve started writing and I quite like writing but I’ve not done it for a long, long while, now I’m starting with it.*Bertha*More reading as well. |
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Table 6

From interview 1 I realised that there were some participants who wanted one-to-one tutoring. I took this 4. As will be read in Katya’s interview at the end of this chapter, the comments made about individual support shows that this helped to build up confidence.

**5.2 Reflections on the differences between the two interviews**

Chapter seven explores the themes and findings that emerged from these interviews and combine with the cameos. What follows are my reflections that focus exclusively on the two interviews.

A good interview *‘doesn’t rest simply on the mastery of a range of different techniques … it calls for a sensitivity on the part of the interviewer that can be developed only through time and honest self-evaluation’* (Richards, 2003: 58).

The first interview was formal. The participants were polite, but appeared wary. Answers were stilted and given in short sentences.

I began my research with trepidation. I had not met the participants before. Apart from their names and their maths and English assessments, I knew nothing about them.

I was not confident and, as can be read from the first interview, it showed. I did not ask my set five questions succinctly.

When I listened to both recordings, I realised that in the first interview I talked more than the group. I spoke for 53% of the time. The first interview was concerned with me dealing with my nerves, rather than ensuring participants were at ease and collecting data.

My research began with a splutter in that no rapport had been created. The participants did not know me. I knew that conversational interviewing did not need to be mechanical. It can be smooth and relaxed, enjoyed by both sides and suffered by neither. Adreski (1972) argues that, unless it becomes such an act, it will fail in achieving the results required. This is what seemed to happen with me. Had I also conducted the interviews by assailing participants with questions, as I had planned before conducting pilot research, I would have obtained even less information. It was important that I acquired the quality of answer necessary. Adreski suggests that the only way to make interviews an enjoyable, social act, both for the interviewer and the respondent, is to enable two-way traffic. In this way, participants might consider themselves to be less of a victim and more a partner in the discussion. My aim was to create a relaxed atmosphere so we could talk without fear of retribution or ridicule. This approach was important to my research. Although this did not happen with the first interview due to the insecurity that I experienced, it developed with the second interview.

In retrospect I realise that asking questions on the first day was awkward and unwise. I had not created the atmosphere necessary for trust to occur. I was nervous – they were nervous.

I attempted to frame the first interview in ways that at least provided opportunities for the participants to reflect within the interview itself (Walker, 1985). I wanted to use tactics to attempt this by pausing at intervals, giving participants’ time to think, offering summaries and asking for an assessment of my understanding as the interview progressed. The intention of the interview was made clear from the start, but my inexperience showed, despite my practice with the pilots.

In interview 1 question 5, I asked the same question several times over. The following comment I made to the group in interview 1 provides an example of speaking more than necessary.

**Zoya: doing Level 2 actually is a very good grounding for Level 3, there is huge jump between the 1, the 2 and the 3 and I think people don’t realise that. So look at it as a learning curve and if you can stretch yourself as much as possible then when you do get to Level 3 you’ll be able to refer back to an awful lot of information, so that you can approach it in a number of ways …**

Interview 2 was a different experience, with both the amount of words I used and how participants talked with and responded to me. In part, this was because we had grown to know each other, which changed the relationship. One of the themes – becoming confident learners – developed because of this change and can be read in chapter seven. This consequently gave individuals confidence to ask questions to clarify what I was asking of them. Some participants became more fluid in their thinking. Ideas followed from each other. They said they were positive about my way of teaching, what they hoped to get out of the course, and of their own abilities. As can be read from the interview, some said that they had gained in confidence.

Although the group interviews took about 10 minutes – one was 36 seconds longer than the other - I obtained more feedback from the second interview. The questions were similar, yet the second interview was more concerned with how people said they felt. Participants were more succinct in their responses. They responded directly. As we began to learn about each other, I discovered that, both for the purposes of this research and for my teaching, the longer I knew the participants, the more relaxed and confident we all became.

My experience confirms that of van Teijlingen & Hundley (2001: 3) when they state that

Qualitative data collection and analysis is often progressive, in that a second or subsequent interview in a series should be 'better' than the previous one as the interviewer may have gained insights from previous interviews which are used to improve interview schedules and specific questions.

I had the confidence to ask what I most needed to know and was most on my mind. I listened more, and, in contrast to the first interview, I spoke for 26% of the time, which was less than half that of the first interview.

Between the first and second interviews there appeared to be changes in thinking about the maths and English courses and the way participants were learning. Interview 1 highlighted what people were doing – it was inward looking and factual. Interview 2 was concerned with interacting with others and thinking about their own personal development. There was the realisation that the importance of the group affected individual participants and their approach to learning. The cameos, which follow this chapter, explore these ideas in more depth.

**5.3 Katya’s group interview**

Katya interviewed the group in the sixth week of the course, which was between my two interviews. She needed to review and evaluate what took place in the classroom for her business. Her approach to interviewing differed to mine. Her questions were more open-ended – *“how do you feel”,* for example, was asked three times.

To bring the group onside, she placed herself as one of the people who struggled with maths. She did this by highlighting her dislike of the subject, which appeared to free participants to talk openly. She tried to put herself into people’s shoes*: “It’s divided into maths and English so shall we start with the subject of maths, the one that we all dislike?”* Whereas I never spoke of my lack of confidence with maths to the group, Katya assumed the participants would feel uncomfortable with this subject and she appeared to have no qualms about mentioning it.

Katya empathised with the learners – she understood the likelihood of certain stresses they may have encountered. She understood that participants might have been anxious about taking tests. By using words such as “*daunting*” she implied that she recognised what the participants may have been feeling: *“I know some of you are not far off the test are you, does that feel like a daunting experience to any of you?”*

On first hearing the recording, I thought that Katya should not have connected herself emotionally when asking questions. Throughout the interview and the one-to-one reviews she conducted, Katya appeared to lead participants into the answers she was looking for. I assumed she would be more objective and I noted in my journal:

What is Katya doing? How is she talking to people? Having heard the recording for interview 3, I am really not sure about her approach. Isn’t she twisting their thoughts to get them to say what she wants? By understanding how they are?

After listening to it several times, however, I realised that if learners were to be supported, they first had to be understood (Knowles *et al*, 2011). Katya allowed people to think she was in accord with them. Keeping a distance by trying to be objective may not have given participants confidence to speak. Attempting to bond with the group benefited her training company if participants responded positively. It was a win-win situation.

Two excerpts from the interview follow.

**Excerpt 1**

**Katya: Are you finding that you’ve got a lot of work to do in your own time, or are you managing to do it within the group?**

Tanya: She *[Zoya]* said you can do it by your own choice if you do have time ... If you do have time then you can just do it - you don’t have to do it, so she gives you an option then.

**Katya: Have any of you felt the need to want to do it, have you felt spurred on by it that you want to practise in your own time?**

Tanya: I’d wanted to, to be honest.

**Katya: You don’t feel pressurised?**

Magritte: I felt it was quite enjoyable as well although we can bounce off one another if we’re getting stuck *[and]* we’re obviously asking Zoya first. Doing some of the stuff at home I think it **has** helped a bit, it’s not classed as homework but **wanting** to do it and just trying your best.

**Katya: Do you feel as a person that it might have made a difference to you at all?**

Magritte: Yes, more confident.

**Excerpt 2**

**Katya: I know some of you are not far off the test are you, does that feel like a daunting experience to any of you?**

Magritte: I think to a degree yes I think it is sometimes, but I think it’s because we’ve not done it for so long; we’ve been out of school and have been out of that environment for so many years so suddenly going back to a test/exam. I think it’s the word exam or test isn’t it? We’ve had practice runs.

**Katya: It makes you feel more confident?**

Bertha: We’ve been given the option as well to do it either online or on paper and I think that makes a difference to everybody to choose which way to do it.

**Katya: What’s the feeling with maths, how many of you *[thinks]* can we just have a show of hands how many are going to do it online and how many are going to do it on paper?**

Vera: I changed my mind … I was going to do it on paper but I’ll have a go online.

**Katya: You feel more confident?**

Vera: Yes, it’s just new.

There were eleven participants in the group. The interviews I conducted include a comment by all but two. Katya’s interview included everyone. She seemed able to draw out thoughts from those who were more reluctant to speak with me.

Katya’s comments and approach perhaps reassured participants by encouraging them to think in a positive way. They seemed content to talk about their feelings and they did not appear to be coerced. Katya could elicit information from the participants that I could not due to my connection to the research. McLeod (1998) recognises that personality has as much to do with what information will have been gathered.

Katya’s interview provided me with valuable data. Although her concern was with the structure of the course, what participants spoke of was their feelings about learning. The participants were able to speak freely due to her approach and by the fact that they were not constrained by my presence.

**Summary**

The three interviews gave me an opportunity to reflect on how the participants began to gain confidence. It also allowed me to reflect on my approach to research and how I teach.

The next chapter is concerned with how the cameos emerged from these interviews, and Katya’s one-to-one reviews. Like this chapter, it begins to consider aspects of my approach to teaching that may have developed learner confidence in my participants. Themes that emerge are explored in the findings chapter and are discussed further in chapter eight.

**CHAPTER 6: CAMEOS**

**Introduction**

After the interviews, some participants were keen to talk with me about how they thought their learning was developing. Others, in conversation, spoke of how their confidence was improving. Some also explained that they were excited about the changes that were taking pIace in their thinking. This surprised me. I had not expected participants to want to talk with me about their progress. My original plan, which was to arrange times to meet with some participants so that my research questions could be answered, was overtaken by my recording these opportunities.

Participants and I regularly spoke during breaks. I began to suspect that these opportunities to hear experiences and attitudes could be used as part of my research – the personal, casual conversations that highlighted what participants said they thought and felt about learning.

These informal conversations gave me the data that I believed was important in terms of understanding some attitudes the participants said they held. The information gained corresponded with answers to my research questions. I asked if I could record and this was agreed.

Halliday (2002) contends that a casual conversation between a participant and a researcher may have as much significance as a formal planned discussion. Informal conversation may have more significance because people speak as they think, developing their thoughts as they progress. These thoughts are not tampered with by boxing them into a formal interview.

When people are encouraged to talk in this way to those with whom they have a relationship that is primarily professional in nature, the tendency is to talk at an abstract and uncontroversial level (Halliday, 2002). The difficulty is that it is not always possible to record this information.

Although I had planned a more formal approach, there was no reason to waste this informally collected evidence. Valuable data was captured: *“talk becomes an interview when the researcher designs their contribution to elicit responses focused on a particular topic”* (Richards, 2003: 51).

Section 1 considers these conversations and reflects on the interviews Katya completed as part of the course review.

I begin with Bertha. In that she said that she had concerns about learning maths, I contrast my experience of maths with hers. I do this by reflecting how I taught. I then highlight some of my anxieties as an Ed.D student. Detailed findings and discussions concerning both maths and English are in chapters seven and eight.

Maya and Luke were keen to talk with me about their progress and it is from them that I obtained the most data. Another participant, Lydia, joins one of the conversations. Sasha, the only participant I approached before realising that I could obtain data in an alternative way, tempers the enthusiasm that Maya and Luke express. I had been aware that she had spoken very little in class and I wanted to hear her thoughts of experiences in the classroom. Katya also reviewed the course with Sasha, which is included here along with others.

Section 2 reflects on the conversation that took place between Katya and myself on the same day that she organised reviews with some participants.

**SECTION 1: CAMEOS AND INTERVIEWS WITH KATYA**

**1.1 Bertha & Zoya**

My teaching style with the group initially did not work well. I was nervous. I had to learn how to adapt to the participants and the impact my style had on individuals. This initial approach affected Bertha, a Level 1 learner, who had told me about her fear of maths on the first day. She became upset in the second week and I wanted to know why. One of the most under-appreciated and biggest obstacles to confidence may be the tension between the demands of expectation and the associated fear of failure (Mahone, 1960). From what she expressed, Bertha seemed to experience this fear.

The following extract is taken from my journal during the second week I worked with the group:

I worked with a learner *[Bertha]* who was studying maths. She lacked confidence. I gave her and the group, challenging work. I said: *“I am giving you this as it is basic stuff and I want you to begin to develop the skills to understand it”.* She burst into tears. She *[Bertha]* said: *“Basic stuff? I can't do it, so what on earth makes you think I will be able to do anything else?”*

… The problem was, to me, this *[a particular aspect of maths]* was easy. I assumed that because I had grasped it, so they *[the group]* had, too. Is being more able at a subject alienating people? When I don’t know something so well, do I teach better, because of the struggles I encounter?

… Was my confidence *[in maths]* now becoming a problem? Am I too able *[in the subject]* to teach?

*“We teach best what we most need to learn”* (Bach, 1978:48). How true was that of me?

I assume that people can understand basic concepts in maths that I now understand … I need to … ensure that I do not make people feel inadequate.

The other part of me thinks, though – *“give them a challenge. Let them struggle. Let them feel as if they can’t do anything at the moment. Then they will realise, after a while, that they can. They’re on a journey and if they know it now, why do the study?*” But I did not get this across. I helped to make someone feel stupid, the very thing I constantly try not to do.

Perhaps I had not met with this person for long enough for her to trust me and for her to know that she could achieve. She said that she felt overwhelmed. I know that feeling and I hate it. Is it bad, though? Is it OK to feel overwhelmed?

Before I began the research, I noted that I had also experienced the fear that Bertha had highlighted:

I was unable to understand the ways in which I was taught mathematics and I never passed an ‘O’ level in it despite several attempts … Percentages, ratios, volumes – all were incomprehensible to me. The feelings of panic, fear and incompetence flooded through me.

Had I anticipated this tension, I could have warned Bertha that this was a natural process. I had overcome similar issues when studying for this thesis. Even towards the end of this doctorate, I struggled. I noted in my journal:

I’m having a panic attack.

I have seen my tutors. I feel as if I can’t do this.

Yesterday I felt so positive.

Today I look at all the work and think – how on earth am I going to complete it?

**Two hours later**

OK, I feel a little better now. I hope I can do it. I need to focus.

**Two hours later**

I have had a eureka moment. I think I now know what it is I need to do.

Why has it taken me this long?

One step at a time.

Like me, Bertha needed to overcome her mental block and see it as a transition from being a passive learner who had yet to appreciate the value of learning from mistakes, to developing resilience. The resolution of this tension lay within her.

Eight weeks after Bertha’s panic, she was ready to take her maths test. She was just over halfway through the course. I was curious. What had changed her attitude towards maths? What follows is a substantial part of the conversation, as it explains Bertha’s development and my style of questioning.

**Zoya: Bertha, when you came onto this course … you were very confident with the English, far less so with the maths, and my recollection is that I said something about a maths issue and you became upset and said *“if this is basic how on earth am I going to [thinking]?”* So tell me about your feelings then and your feelings now. So two months ago how were you feeling?**

Bertha: When I first came onto the course *[thinking],* I mean I’ve always struggled with maths anyway so I was dreading it. Then we sat down that first morning and you went into things and I didn’t have a clue what you were talking about, it was just going over my head and it just put a full stop to it; I just thought *“I can’t do this”*. But then as the weeks have progressed with your teaching and learning it’s become easier. I’m starting to *[thinking]* I wouldn’t say I was still perfect, I’m not good at it but I’m beginning to understand things more and I feel more confident and easier with doing it. I had originally asked to do the maths paper later in the year but I now feel that I’d like to have a go at doing it sooner, so I’m going to take the test next week online and see how I do with that. If I fail it then I can always take it again, but I do feel much more confident about it now than I did then.

**Zoya: What changed? Now you said a little bit about the teaching and learning that’s taken place, anything else that has changed for you to ask to take the maths *[early]*? When you told me that last week it took my breath away!**

Bertha: I think it’s just from doing the tests online *[the practice tests]* … so that’s given me more confidence.

… But I think it’s practising as well and being in the group with other people because they’re supportive as well. If I struggle with things someone will always say *“well why don’t you try it this way?”* or *“this is how you do it”* or whatever, so that does help as well.

**Zoya: Has your involvement on this course or within the apprenticeship generally made any difference to you in … your home life at all?**

Bertha: If I’m out shopping and I see 30% off, or a fraction of something or whatever I try to work it out in my mind. It’s got me thinking yes, and it does help because then you know exactly what you’re paying …

**Zoya: Certainly on the personal perspective I’ve noticed how you seem to have grown in confidence about doing things, and that change has been very gentle, it’s come and come and come *[until]* … last week when, as I say, I was completely taken aback by you. For me that is great to *see [that you have the confidence to take your tests early but]* that you might still be concerned perhaps?**

Bertha: Yes.

**Zoya: But is it that you lack the anxiety now or is it that … you had a tangible fear and you clearly don’t have that now?**

Bertha: Yes. I think the thing was with my maths *[thinks]* because I knew I wasn’t very good at it, I think I was blocking it out and any questions that were asked I wasn’t thinking about it because I thought *“I can’t do that”* so I just didn’t take it in. But now that things have been explained and it’s becoming clearer, I wouldn’t say easy, but easier to do, so that makes a difference.

Bertha’s progress moved from the anxiety and fear of not being able to understand maths to a place where she was beginning to be at ease with it. This can be seen through her language. At the start of this cameo, Bertha used the words *“struggled”, “dreading”* and *“didn’t have a clue”.* By the end, she said, *“it’s becoming clearer”; “easier”.* Bertha spoke about being unable to cope with the work and blocking it out, to being able to think through what she had to do. What created that change in confidence was that she began to understand that she was already using maths on a daily basis. Both research questions 2 and 3 – *‘who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning?’* and *‘does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?’* - were being answered.

Bertha was transferring what she had learnt from the class into other areas of her life. For example, she highlighted that she had started to use maths when shopping. She used it every day, not thinking of it as maths, but as part of life. Bertha began to appreciate that she used maths more than she had realised. As will be read in chapters seven and eight, by encouraging Bertha to recognise the value of maths outside the classroom, she became less fearful of the subject.

I reflected on Bertha’s earlier experience and I responded in my journal to my question as to whether it was *“OK to feel overwhelmed”*.

Yes, it is ok to feel overwhelmed. It’s part of the learning. If I knew it *[whatever I was studying]* now I would not be learning, I would be revising what I knew. Sometimes the feeling of being overwhelmed is because I and others lack confidence; but perhaps sometimes it is because we are so keen to learn but our minds are not yet ready to learn a particular aspect. It is a process.

It is from this cameo that I began to realise that becoming confident learners and teaching and learning were key themes. This then was confirmed when I read Maya’s conversations.

**1.2 Maya**

Maya and I talked together on three occasions on a one-to-one basis, and once with two others participants.

She was initially tentative about engaging in the process of formal learning. Her previous life experiences had given her little confidence in classroom-based study. She expressed her feelings of fear. Becoming involved and committed to learning in the classroom was faltering at first, with engagement emerging slowly over time. Her initial anxiety and later excitement with learning is evident.

Maya explained that on the first day of the course she felt unsure about coming to class due to her experiences of education systems and the emotional impact it had on her as a person. Like the majority of participants, she did not know anyone in the group. Apart from an introductory letter explaining the course, she was unprepared for what would take place when she first attended.

Maya’s history of failure in formal education had affected her approach to this course.

**Zoya: When you first came to the group several weeks ago, how did you feel when you were coming into the classroom, how did you feel about that learning, how did you feel about the environment, and then how do you feel now?**

Maya: I was still unsure because I didn’t know any of the actual people that I was going to be studying with. I didn’t know you as a teacher. I didn’t know what we were going to do. I mean, maths I’m always confident with, but my English I’ve never been confident with, my spelling, my writing, the rules *[thinking]* I never understood and so I was very apprehensive when I first started. I’m trying to get me confidence back for me English.

**Zoya: Has anything changed?**

Maya: A lot’s changed. Obviously the group that we were with are very friendly and talkative which does me well; you’re very approachable; my English I’m really enjoying it now, my spelling’s coming on so much which I’ve noticed myself and when I do check it most of it is right. I’m beginning to learn the hidden rules for English and for writing, so my confidence has gone up and I’m feeling that I’ve learnt a lot here as well as when I’ve taken it to work or outside. I can feel better in myself.

The second time I recorded Maya was three weeks after our first conversation and eleven weeks after the first day of the class. She was explaining why she was ready to take her English test four weeks ahead of time. She had already taken her maths test within three weeks of the course starting. As with Bertha, I was curious to understand what had occurred within the few weeks she had attended the course.

**Zoya: Maya, you said a moment ago that you’re ready to take your English … Why do you think that is, what has changed?**

Maya: I feel more confident and my spelling is a lot better …

**Zoya: What has created that, what has helped you? You’ve been reading for years but you’ve said that you have dyslexic tendencies, so what do you think has changed?**

Maya: The spelling tests we’ve been doing, that’s built my confidence, because when I first started I was getting one right, and then I’m getting over half now, I’m getting about three-quarters *[thinking]* the last one I got three-quarters right; so it’s improving and that’s what’s made me, it’s the spelling tests.

On the same day as this earlier conversation, Maya and I were talking casually about how she said she felt regarding the development of her confidence with learning. I realised that this would also be valuable evidence.

**Zoya: Maya, you mentioned that my personality was a key influence in building up your confidence and your learning and I just wondered whether, if you had another tutor … whether that would have made a difference to the way you learn, or your confidence.**

Maya: It probably would have because I’ve had other teachers in the past and I’ve not had the confidence. This is the first time I’ve had confidence and so that’s got to be down to you. So it must be your personality, your positive feedback to us all that’s done that, so I put it down to you.

**Zoya: With other tutors then was it their style of teaching, was it the personality do you think, was it the approach? What do you think it was?**

Maya: They’re more negative I think, they’re showing you where your mistakes were but they didn’t show you where the good parts were and the things that you’re doing right. You know things are going right and then as more things are going right you realise you’re getting better instead of just pointing out mistakes. That’s what I think they’ve done before and that’s why I was never confident in English.

**Zoya: So you have been able to work out your own mistakes, is that what you’re saying?**

Maya: You show the mistakes but you also show the positives, so it shows you’ve done this wrong, but you’ve done this right and if you do it like this again you’ll get the other one right. So that’s how you’re doing it; you’re showing the positives as well as the negatives, but you’re more focused on the positives but bringing in the negatives so you know where to go right but you praise at the same time.

In the process of her personal development, success appeared to replace her perception of failure.

Both research questions 1 and 2 – ‘*what do adults in the workplace say they feel about classroom-based learning?’* and – ‘*who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning?’* were answered in this cameo.

Maya’s appreciation of the way she was taught by me is tempered by my experiences outside my research with another group I was working with at the same time. I wrote in my journal:

How can one person admire my teaching so much, yet I have just had three people in a training group say *“she cannot communicate; she does not explain; she expects us to do the work that she has been sent to show us*”. Perception counts for everything.

The final time I recorded Maya was when she and another participant, Luke, were talking about the course and I overheard them. I asked if I could join them.

**Zoya: What’s made you comfortable or uncomfortable on the course?**

Maya: Mostly the comfortable is like repeating, going through it slowly and it’s being explained to on a one-to-one basis to make sure that you do understand it and that’s helped me a lot.

**Zoya: And what about for you Luke, what’s made you comfortable or uncomfortable?**

Luke: The one-on-one learning’s been fine; that’s made me feel more comfortable and eased my mind. I was worried about it at first but slowly it’s dawning.

The discussion continued, with both highlighting how their confidence was developing. I asked them if anything had changed about the way they felt about learning since beginning this course – research question 1.

Maya: I’m more confident in learning, it’s not as scary as it was and I don’t feel as thick as I was.

**Zoya: Okay. What’s caused that do you think?**

Maya: Basically with you doing one-to-one you build your confidence up and you realise you’re not as *[thinking]*. After school or whatever you put your bar really low in what you think you can do; being told that you’re thick all your life you begin to believe it, and *[now I]* realise that you’re *[I’m]* not. So it’s confidence.

**Zoya: So one of the things was about the feedback that I give to you, it sounds as if you’re saying that’s positive feedback.**

Maya: Yes … I’ve had people telling you like when I was at school, because of me being slightly dyslexic I’ve always been told that I’m thick and was always put in the bottom classes and everything else, and when I’ve tried to build myself up they always knocked you down, so eventually you don’t try and build yourself up.

**Zoya: So this course has helped you to build yourself up?**

Maya: Yes, my confidence, that’s me.

**1.3 Sasha**

Sasha, Luke and Vera studied maths and English to Level 2, the equivalent academic level of a GCSE. All three highlighted that there were issues with a combined levels group. Sasha particularly highlighted that I spent more time with Level 1s than I did with Level 2s. She was right. There were more participants at Level 1 than there were at Level 2 and there was one participant at Entry Level 1. The ratio 3:7:1 (Level 2: Level 1: Entry Level 1) in terms of participants meant that I spent about 35% more time on lower level needs.

My style of speaking with Sasha was more formal than it was with others. In part it may be that she was the only person I approached before I started recording other conversations.

**Zoya: We were talking in the group *[in the second group interview, which took place the week before this discussion]* about how people felt their learning was developing. A number of them said they felt as if they were more confident now than they were earlier. You didn’t say anything in the group but then when I spoke with you privately you said you didn’t speak because your experiences were different to the ones in the group. Can you explain a little bit more about those feelings?**

Sasha: The other people were saying that as they were learning stuff it was making them feel more confident, whereas I was feeling that I was struggling and that was making me feel less confident. I felt like I’d come into the course knowing that I needed to work on certain areas but maybe not knowing that I needed to work on them quite as much as I did. I felt that the more I tried to do them *[the study of maths and English]* the more difficult it was becoming.

As with Bertha, who voiced her feelings of inadequacy in the first few classes, Sasha did not believe she could achieve academically.

Spelling tests were regularly given. Once complete, I invited people to call out their answers. When we first spoke, Sasha stated that:

Sasha: I like the fact that we can shout out if we want but we don’t have to, because I would never want to say *“this is how I’ve spelt it”* because it would generally be wrong, so I like to look and just mark off my own work and know where I’ve gone wrong and where I haven’t.

When we spoke a few weeks’ later, however, she said:

Sasha: I need it to be quiet; I can’t do it when it’s noisy and there’s people talking and shouting the answer out across to each other. I need to sit and concentrate on what I’m doing.

Although she appreciated how others learnt, it seemed that the way she absorbed information was to work in absolute quiet, only having support from a tutor if it directly related to her need.

In the next chapter, I discuss the concerns that Sasha experienced whilst taking this course and compare them to other participants.

**1.4 Luke**

Luke was also a Level 2 learner. He recognised his struggle with maths. Unlike Sasha, who saw her struggles as barriers to her learning, Luke was able to use that knowledge to his advantage because my way of teaching and his way of learning seemed to connect. He answers all three research questions in these cameos.

Luke: I have a problem myself with area and volume … I only worked it out because you came round and pointed out what a perimeter was, what an area was, a volume, and what formulas were, but I think if it had been left to being on a computer I wouldn’t have got around to it.

… just looking at a classroom board doesn’t interest me but when the work’s given to you and someone comes around and explains what it is and what you have to do then it has got my interest then. So I am learning because it’s based like that because it’s teacher/pupil and not just somebody talking to you all the time. Obviously you are talking to us and teaching us but also coming round individually and also letting you get on a little bit as well; if you feel like you’re doing okay we are allowed to move on a bit and so that does help.

**Zoya: How does learning make you feel …?**

Luke: More confident, definitely more confident. You’re looking at everyday things and working them out whereas you wouldn’t have done before, you’d have just looked at it …I can do harder crosswords.

As will be discussed in chapter seven, Luke described how he used these ‘everyday things’ in his home life and he answered research question 3 – *‘does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?’* This also feeds into the theme of becoming a confident learner.

Several weeks’ later, in my second conversation with Luke, he stayed true to his original thoughts.

Luke: Something’s triggered. I now do find I want to learn it, I’m not just here because I’ve got to be here. Monday’s now are now coming to do some learning, which I thought maybe I was getting a bit old for because you can’t learn new things but you can. This proves it because I know more now than I did when I started, and I know maths formulas that I never knew even though I did school and everything it just passes you by, but now I’m picking up again.

**Zoya: Great.**

Luke: And as for the English the same thing, the more you write the more you enjoy it and the more you kind of get into doing it, you get a focus out of it. So that’s good.

When talking with Katya, the following shows evidence of how his learning developed who he was.

**Katya: I see a different person … I’ve not seen you now for at least 6 weeks … but in that time I can see a difference in you.**

Luke: Confidence…

**Katya: Yes, you look a different person.**

Luke: The maths is higher, so much higher now. I’m dealing with questions and I take them in work and people have a look at them and go *‘ooh’* and I feel like I can deal with them now.

**Katya: So you have a different feel about yourself as a person?**

Luke: Yes much more confident about anything like that now, much more confident.

**1.5 Lydia**

Lydia, the Entry Level 1 learner, joined a conversation that Luke and Maya were sharing.

**Zoya: Is there anything that you feel has worked really well or that’s been really difficult?**

Lydia: Your one-to-one skills are good for us ... Because sometimes when you’re in the classroom you don’t get as much one-to-one with the teacher as we are doing because we’re all struggling with something.

Luke: Looking at a board all the time doesn’t work … It does in certain parts because you’ve got to learn formulas and whatever, but staring at a board all day, no.

Maya: Even when we were doing the boards you were trying to get us to answer it all to make sure that we had understood what you were saying, so even that part you were including us all.

In Katya’s review with Lydia, there was a realisation that her confidence had developed not only due to the 1-1 support but also because of the group. Lydia was excited about improving her skills even though she came to the class with the assumption that she knew more than she did. The result of her increased confidence meant that she had begun to use maths and English both at home and at work. Lydia stated that she feltmore skilled at her job, the implications of which will be discussed in the next chapter. She explains what changed.

Lydia: Yes I can see a massive difference, especially with my English and my punctuation which is what I originally had the problem with.

 … I also feel the kind of course and the group that we’re with makes you a more confident person in general, well it does me anyway because we discuss a lot of things as groups as well as our one-to-one’s with Zoya and I think that improves your confidence.

**Katya: … The work that you have done over the time with Zoya, some of that you will use in the workplace; have you noticed at all since you’ve been on the course any difference in the way that you do your work at all?**

Lydia: I’ve noticed with my English with my writing of notes and things that I have to fill in that you’re actually making sure that you write it all in the correct grammar, which sounds a bit ridiculous really because you should have been doing that in the first place but it’s only when you start ... it’s only when you start looking back at it and you think *[thinking]* because you’ve got to bear in mind that whatever you’re writing the next person that comes along has got to be able to understand what you’ve written, and I think that has made a massive difference to me doing that.

… I think we take our maths and English for granted on a day-to-day basis and it’s only when you start a course that you realise that you’re not as good as you actually thought you were. I think it does give you lots of confidence and it does let you learn abilities that you didn’t realise you had before.

… I feel I’ve benefited massively with my maths especially and I’m going up and up and I will use that, and I think everybody if they get the opportunity to do a maths and English course should do it and not just take for granted that they know everything because we don’t.

**1.6 Rose**

Due to illness, Rose did not complete the course, but she agreed that the review with Katya could be included.

As with Lydia, Rose realised that there was more to the subjects than she had initially thought.

Rose: I never realised there was a lot more to English because I always presumed at school that I was really good.

**Katya: So what sort of things are you looking at differently now?**

Rose: With my English it’s more of the punctuations, I really struggle with my punctuations, putting them in the right places. I suppose I get bits of it now more than what I did when I started. I’m still a bit struggling with that bit but I can do sentences a bit better - write a letter out but I think I do need to brush up on my English more.

**Katya: Just transposing *(sic)* what you’ve learnt with Zoya through your maths and with your English; do you think it will make a difference to the way you will work now within the company at all?**

Rose: Yes, yes. Obviously you write things down every day and you don’t realise you just write it down and you don’t *[thinks]* you just don’t seem to do it as you should; you just do it without thinking. I think when you’re writing things down now you’ll be able to do it **with** *[my emphasis to reflect inflection in her voice]* thinking and do it the right way now, whereas before it was just scribble it down and that was it and not thinking about it!

Katya’s questioning, as in the group interviews, was to ensure that I, as her employee, was adopting the best possible style of teaching for her clients and that I was meeting both their needs and her expectations. Her reason to interview the participants was to find out if they believed they were learning. She had to double-check answers by reframing the same question. This ensured that the participants reflected on what had been already asked. They could have contradicted themselves, but this did not occur within the scope of Katya’s interviews.

**SECTION 2: MY CONVERSATION WITH KATYA**

Katya was present at four of the fourteen weeks I taught. She used the time to review the progress of participants, but she also came to observe my approach. She conducted thorough evaluations on my teaching.

We spoke regularly. There was one conversation that took place when she began to share, not the work, but her own feelings about learning. Katya allowed me to record.

**Zoya: You were saying that emotionally you find *[thinking]?***

Katya: Yes, with me it’s extremely important that people get the right level of learning and the right kind of learning with everything. The reason I’ve set this company up is because it’s got to be like that and it goes back to my learning experiences when I was younger. I feel now, looking back, that I was never taught in the right way; nobody was interested in learning styles in those days. I’m going back a long time now, I’m going back 40 odd years ago; it wasn’t anything that was really considered in teaching *[thinking]* you just sat in a classroom and you basically just had to take it in no matter what. Then you’d have a teacher there that would be angry.

Katya’s openness with me about herself had been prompted by the interviews she had conducted with the participants. They told her how they had developed confidence over the time of the course.

Katya: It wasn’t that you’d want to get the hanky out or anything, it was just a very powerful – “*I’ve moved on”; “my confidence has grown”; “I can cope in the workplace a lot better”; “I can write my reports a lot better”; “I understand why I’m doing things in this way”.* Somebody else said something to me as well which was quite profound and that is *“I write something now and I know I can put it down and somebody else can come along on the next shift, pick it up and understand what I’ve been doing. They can read it and understand it”*. That to me speaks reams.

**Zoya: It’s like it changes people’s lives.**

Katya: It does and that’s the most important thing.

After a break due to noise issues, the conversation continued.

Katya: Another thing that came out of the conversation from Luke was that this has been one of the best learning experiences of his life; this is why it was quite an emotional sort of thing really to listen to … in his workplace he said you have to go on quite a lot of training and he said you don’t learn. He was quite determined about that … people just talk at you … He said you sit there reeling for a start because you’re having to listen all the time and he said you get up from the experience and you just walk out and think  *“I didn’t learn anything”*. He said that happens time and time again … It’s down to teaching styles.

**Zoya: It is and I know that my teaching style doesn’t suit everybody and some people hate the way I’ve taught. I’ve had *“she doesn’t communicate, she can’t do this, and she can’t do that”* because it is person-centred and I work with them. I’ll say to them *“what do you think the answer is?”* I’m not going to give them the answer, and a lot of people say *“you’re the teacher - you tell us”* and *“I don’t work that way”.* So it’s a particular stance, it’s a particular style *[that I use].***

Katya: It is definitely, but he said *“I know there are definite differences from what I’ve been experiencing in the past”.*

**Summary**

I had not realised at the start of the research, but on reflection, through the conversations that they had instigated, participants became aware of how their thinking about learning had changed. In the conversations that took place, participants reflected on what and how they had learnt whilst studying maths and English, recalling moments from previous experiences that were significant to them. The two themes were drawn from these conversations.

The cameos allowed me to *“summarize a particular theme or issue in analysis and interpretation”* (Ely *et al,* 1997: 70). I chose these extracts because they were representative of the issues that had emerged as significant. These cameos bring out themes that helped me to reflect on my learning and teaching. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS**

**Introduction**

This chapter provides an account of my findings from the group interviews and cameos. It also provides some background to who I am in relation to my experiences of current and past learning. I see it as an account of my identity that aligns with my feelings of learning.

Although my methodology developed from autoethnography to focus on reflective practice, Sikes & Gale (2006) highlight that autobiographical research, of whatever variety and regardless of its focus, relies upon narrative. They stress that the way in which we gain access to people, whether tutors or learners, is through the stories they create and tell others. Sikes & Gale remind us that *“stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell our experience”* (2006: 3).

My intention was that stories would emerge from participants’ personal and social history. The aim was that they would share their feelings about and attitudes towards learning with me, and consider how these shaped their lives.

Apart from one of my participants, Sasha, the group did not consider themselves scholarly. There are no academic responses. The results may appear ordinary. It is from the simplicity of responses, however, that I began to understand what gave participants confidence in learning and how this was used outside the classroom.

Section 1 explores the themes that emerged from the research.

Section 2 examines how participants became confident - a theme that arose from the findings. I reflect on group and individual confidence, followed by considering Katya’s role in the research. Learner motivation and appraising if and how individuals became autonomous learners complete this section.

Section 3 focuses on teaching and learning, starting with the impact of my relationships with the participants. The tutor as motivator follows and the section continues by describing how situated learning, andragogy and scaffolding were applied.

For some participants the image of maths and English was demonised. This is examined in section 4.

The final section summarises, in brief, each chapter of the research.

**SECTION 1: THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

Good qualitative analysis is able to document its claim to reflect some of the truth of a phenomenon by reference to systematically gathered data … poor qualitative analysis is anecdotal, unreflective, descriptive without being focused on a coherent line of inquiry (Fielding, 1993: 155/173).

Before transcribing my data, I noted what themes I thought had arisen. Twenty-eight ideas emerged. Having read the interviews, I realised that my themes were based not so much on the research, but what I thought I wanted to know.

**Original ideas**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| AffirmationAbilityAchievementComfort zoneCritical incidentsDropping outEffortEnvironmentEvidence of learningHidden skills | HistoryIdentityNeeds and valueOther learnersInformationPerceptionPlace of studyPowerPre-enrolment and enrolment | PreferencesPressureSubject TestsTraditional learnerTransference of skills and knowledgeTransformationTutorsWhy learn |

Table 7

The data analysis procedures began once recordings were converted to transcribed text. Data reduction began with reading and re-reading the transcriptions, with themes beginning to emerge with each reading. I colour-coded words or phrases that appeared to connect to the themes. These were then combined so that I could see if there were connections, or if participants used the same words but interpreted them in different ways.

From the twenty-eight ideas, fourteen themes emerged, which then became eleven.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **14 Themes** | **11 Themes** |
| 1. Confidence – a. in your job; b. personally
2. Lack of confidence
3. Enjoying the course; achievement on the course
4. Wanting to learn - motivation
5. Needing to learn
6. The way people learn,
7. Opportunities to study - the environment they study in, positive and negative
8. Zoya’s personality
9. Teaching style
10. The group – positive, negative
11. Personal development
12. Management, mentors
13. IT and other negative issues, such as the location of the training; number of days – and what stops participants from learning
14. Miscellaneous
 | 1. Personal development
2. Confidence – a. in your job; b. personally
3. Lack of confidence
4. Wanting to learn - motivation
5. Needing to learn
6. Zoya’s personality
7. Working as a group
8. Management
9. IT
10. Teaching style
11. Two different levels studying in the same class
 |

Table 8

The reduction occurred by opting to ignore management issues and IT, because very little was said regarding these topics.

*Needing* and *wanting to learn* were combined, as were the *confidence* and *lack of confidence*. *Miscellaneous* was the catch-all for everything else. Enjoying the course was a theme that flowed into the other themes. Personal development, the way people learn and opportunities to study were linked.

Having repeatedly read the transcripts, the themes were condensed further to:

1. personal development
2. confidence/lack of confidence – a. in your job; b. personally;
3. wanting to learn – motivation;
4. my personality;
5. working as a group;
6. teaching style.

As can be seen from the charts in Appendix F, these came out of the data that I obtained from interviews, cameos, reviews and the conversations with Katya. Once these had been considered in more depth, two dominant themes emerged:

1. becoming confident learners;
2. teaching and learning.

A third theme emerged, which is reflective practice. As I realised that I was no longer developing an autoethnographic approach as much as I was considering how I teach and the impact my approach has on learners, this methodology also became a theme that permeated the other two.

**SECTION 2: BECOMING CONFIDENT LEARNERS**

**2.1 Becoming confident learners as a group**

The results of the research reveal that there is a depth of meaning that could be gleaned from what I thought were simple responses. Kitzinger (1995: 299) suggests that *“When group dynamics work well the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions”*. When I read my findings there was an intensity of emotion concerning participants’ experiences of learning that I did not anticipate.

As mentioned in the literature review, Norman & Hyland (2003) state that their research of student-teacher concepts of confidence is connected cognitively to the self, as well as having an emotional component and a performance association. My findings seem to confirm these outcomes.

They suggest that

although the individual learner can affect his/her own level of confidence, tutors, peers, mentors and workplace supervisors can help increase the learner’s confidence by providing support, encouragement, and constructive feedback (p. 13).

The idea that learning is influenced by engaging with others, as well as with the environment people are in, corresponds with my findings.

What affected participants and increased their skills and confidence was not group work, but positively relating to others in the same group.

Although some group work took place that I initiated, within a few weeks participants opted to support each other as and when they needed to. This seemed to answer my second research question - ‘*who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning?’*

Lydia explains:

Lydia: The group that we’re with makes you a more confident person in general, well it does me anyway because we discuss a lot of things as groups … and I think that improves your confidence.

There was a collaboration and a willingness to work together that promoted sharing and discussion. For example, Bertha highlighted that:

Bertha: If I struggle with things someone will always say, *“well, why don’t you try it this way?”* or *“this is how you do it”* or whatever, so that does help as well.

Lydia agreed with Bertha.

Lydia: I also feel the kind of course and the group that we’re with makes you a more confident person in general, well it does me anyway because we discuss a lot of things as groups.

This support seemed to occur due to the sharing of ideas. Participants wanted to pass their tests. They also, however, had the social skills to recognise that their study was their own individual academic path. This maturity made a difference to the group and how they worked.

Whether a group works well or not depends on a variety of factors, such as personality traits, motives, the environment, the organisation, community or social context in which the group is working and the goal the group is pursuing (Davis, 1969).

Even though the aim of each participant was personal, the variables defined by Davis would have affected the cohesion of the group and possibly their academic results. In part, the group may have achieved academic success because of each other, as well as through their own motivation.

Magritte: I think learning as a mature group is a lot better.

**Zoya: Why?**

Magritte: Because when you’re younger – well when you’ve got mixed age groups should I say - you’re a bit more embarrassed as an adult when you’re still learning the same as somebody who’s a lot younger, but here because we’re all learning *[together]* I think this has given us more confidence because we’re all adults and we’re all doing it together.

Luke had similar thoughts:

Luke: I do find it easier in a group like this to learn and I think it just creates the right environment.

… I think the support from everybody else as well in the group *[helps]* because they all seem a good group and they all seem to want to do it, and I think everybody is helping each other in a way as well.

… a more mature group has helped, definitely.

The age group of the participants varied from early twenties to mid-fifties. It is younger adults that participants are referring to when highlighting that the group was not mixed and that it was mature.

Wellington & Szczerbinski (2007: 108) state that it is important in research to look for *“irregularities, paradoxes and contrasts as much as patterns, themes and regularities”*. Bearing this in mind, I questioned whether it was not only the age of participants that might have made a difference to the group, but also their occupation. All participants worked in a caring environment for the same organisation and their jobs involved shifts. From other comments made, it appears that this also connected the group.

The following cameo suggests this. It comes from the second interview, when I asked, *‘is there anything that you think stops you from learning or gets in your way of learning?’*

Alex: Working shifts.

Luke: Management; *“how long are you having off for it?”*

**Zoya: Do they complain about the amount of time?**

All: Mine does, yes/all the time.

Luke: If they want us to learn these courses they should give us the time to do it.

**Zoya: So when you come here on the Monday there are complaints?**

Magritte: Some of them will just turn around and say *“you’re not working an awful lot; you’ve got your day studies because you’ve not only got your NVQ studies but training day studies as well”.*

Bertha: Is that your management or other people?

Magritte: It’s just other people where we work.

Maya: My day is a busy day at work on Monday, and I’m off Mondays. So they kind of think *“oh you’re not doing Monday’s anymore do [are] you?”*

Maya: Most people want to do maths and English and they *[management]* say *“no”.*

Kell & Corts (1980) highlight another element - that a mature group is cohesive in that there is a concern for members and their opinions; an atmosphere of trust and friendship and a willingness to adapt to a point of disagreement. They also state that the growth of a group leads to a high concept and competence – something that appeared to occur with my participants.

Learning was concerned with relationships between people and a sense of belonging (Schutz, 1958). They experienced the reality of Lave & Wenger’s social theory of learning (1991), which involves sharing experiences, creating a positive learning identity and, through these, developing a sense of belonging to a community.

In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 35).

Learning is not a separate process in its own right. Lave & Wenger highlight that learning as a community allows conversations to occur so that different perspectives can be heard, reflected upon and challenged. Without this social involvement, some people may struggle to learn. The participants perceived, interpreted and communicated their experiences through interacting with others.

This was not without difficulty, however. Bereiter (1994) suggests that knowledge is built by listening to each other and engaging in conversation where ideas are shared and opinions voiced. In that participants seemed to be sensitive to each other’s needs, knowledge and learning could occur because the environment was unthreatening. In other circumstances, however, such as in a class where clashes of personality may have occurred, Bereiter’s suggestions could be inaccurate.

Bereiter could also be mistaken when noise becomes an issue.

Magritte: We can talk about *“I’ve got to do this, and got to do this. Have you done that?”* so we can actually bounce off one another if we’re struggling and talk to one another.

In contrast, Sasha needed quiet, as did Vera:

Vera: Any classroom can be a bit noisy particularly with maths I suppose, where you have to try and concentrate a bit more.

There was also the concern about having different levels in the same class.

Luke: Because you’ve got two groups you’ve got two different levels; it’s hard to teach precisely what you need for each level.

In the same conversation, Maya agreed with Luke. Sasha, a Level 2 learner, also stated that different levels in the class seemed to affect her.

Sasha: I don’t know if it’s linked to having Level 1 and Level 2 people in the class, because the Level 1’s are flying through, it seems.

Some weeks later, however, she realised that this was no longer an issue, which Rose, a Level 1 learner, agreed with.

Sasha: I think the Level 2 and the Level 1 together hasn’t bothered me at all because it’s refreshed some of the stuff I did a few years ago.

Rose: We feel we get a little bit extra like pie-charts, they are on Level 2.

Even though these different concerns were present, participants showed the maturity that Kell & Corts (1980) highlighted, which did not adversely affect group relationships. If some wanted quiet and some needed to speak, the group decided on times for both, so that, as far as was possible, all needs were being met.

Changes in learner engagement may have an impact on learner achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Fredricks *et al*, 2004). The participants began to define and accept themselves as confident learners. This contributed to a sense of wellbeing via the groups’ common aim to attain academic achievement in maths and English. They experienced support that appeared to contribute to their confidence, which motivated them to want to succeed. Deci & Ryan (2000) suggest that intrinsic motivation increases when people have a sense that they belong and feel supported. My evidence suggests that this is the case.

This is in marked contrast to how I studied for this doctorate. Due to the nature of my job and the research I have undertaken, I have realised that the more I understood how necessary it was for some people to learn together, the more isolated I felt.

My study was not classroom-based and I was aware of the isolation that this created within me.

I noted in my journal:

When I was 8 years old, I changed schools … On the first day I had no pens or pencils with me. I was sat next to a boy who would not let me borrow any of his … I felt lost … Some time later … this same boy could not have been kinder to me … These encounters clearly made a huge impression on me … It affected my learning because I now realise that I needed to be part of a group to develop my learning.

I need to belong, and then I can learn. Does this mean that I cannot learn unless I have others with me? It is certainly more difficult for me to learn in isolation. I need to throw ideas around and to listen to others. Is this why taking exams was so nerve-wracking and my failure rate in this has been so high? My confidence comes from being with other people; my motivation seems to come when I work with others and my self-esteem appears when I am comfortable in a group.

At school I succeeded best in after-school clubs. This was not only due to my enjoyment of active learning, but it was also because I lacked the maturity to be able to study alone. It has only been through my reflections that I have realised what an impact studying alone has had on me and how important learning with others is for me.

Pearson (1990: 201) is adamant that social support is essential for human survival:

social support is a process basic to the development of humanness itself. Its presence or absence bears heavily on the development of and maintenance of personal effectiveness. Therefore, we should expect to find support-related issues and events surfacing in almost any area of human endeavour.

As Pearson emphasises, for the majority of people, the more contact we have with others, the better we feel. Stress is often caused when people feel isolated. That the participants encouraged one another and recognised its value is, I believe, a significant result to come out of the research.

**2.2 Becoming confident learners as individuals**

Developing confidence in learning has been researched worldwide. Tinker *et al* (2012) highlight experiences of learning that they researched in Australia. They discovered how students’ learning self-concept strengthened their learning-based identities and increased their level of engagement.

The same was true for some of the participants. Sasha explained what helped her to understand herself.

Sasha: The thing that I think helped was when - you know when you kept saying that people are good at different things - and it sounds really awful - but seeing other people struggle with stuff I know I can do makes you feel a bit better.

**Zoya: I understand that, absolutely.**

Sasha: The whole segment on area this morning that we’ve re-gone over I didn’t need to go over that, I know it; whereas I can tell that other people do. Whereas when we did percentages I wanted to check that I’d got it right whereas other people knew how to do that, so that from a confidence point of view that’s a good thing.

Tinker et al (2012:1) suggest that *“Social identities are the self-referenced descriptions people have about themselves that are associated with particular contexts, situations, or roles”* and, in certain circumstances, such as at university*, “if a student’s perception of their learning identity is both positive and pronounced, then they are more likely to engage with that context and act in ways that align with expectations consistent with learning norms”* (ibid).

In, England, Crossan *et al* (2003), when exploring issues concerned with participation in further education, believed that social, economic and demographic factors such as educational attainment when young, socio-economic status, family influences, region and age made an impact on learning. On-going participation in education was linked to self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

My participants came from one area of the country and all had care roles. By implication, according to Crossan *et al*, both location and type of work may suit the personality of those who are empathetic which may have given them the sensitivity towards their learning that may not occur in other situations. I suggest that this is too easy an assumption to make, even when accounting for the other aspects that Crossan *et al* highlight. As my research suggests, there are additional factors that could have had an impact on the participants’ learning and response to it.

My experience has been that there are some learners involved in formal study who experience uncertainty about the process, especially at the start. School life may have given them little confidence. Like Crossan *et al*, the impact of this is that hostility towards educational institutions may have developed. People could be wary and engagement may take time. In that most of my participants had left school at sixteen, they were similar to the learners Crossan *et al* describe. As commented on in the cameos, Maya explained that she had concerns about attending maths and English courses due to the negative way she had been treated at school. Others in the group had similar issues.

Both Crossan *et al* and Bloomer & Hodkinson (2000: 41) also recognised learner fragility. They suggested that *“learners continually select, adapt, create and utilize learning opportunities under hugely diverse conditions, in response to their needs as they experience them”.*

Maya said that positive feedback made a difference to her and it developed her confidence. This external support enabled her to believe in herself, which became internalised. She was then capable of achieving more academically due to her self-belief.

Maya’s experience confirms other research findings, such as those from South Africa.

A case study was established as an ecumenical church initiative in response to the Soweto Uprising of 1976 to meet the needs of out-of-school youths who were in their late teens or early twenties (Rule, 2004).

The African research, describing an adult education project, is vastly different to mine. Apartheid issues, location and period seem irreconcilable to my research and yet similar themes occur. Both highlight how the courses helped them to develop their thinking. From the South African project a learner explains that *“It taught me to be able to look at myself as a person capable of thinking”* (p. 327), and a tutor states

*[it]* helped them to develop their own voices with which they could confidently engage the world beyond the projects; it equipped them as learners to further their studies; it enabled them to participate more actively and confidently in their own families and communities; and it broadened and deepened their awareness of one another and of their society (Rule, 2004 :329).

Katya, the owner/manager of the training company for whom I worked, explained how her anxiety when learning as a child enabled her to understand the fears that the participants discussed with her.

**Katya: As a child I was a very shy sort of child, and that had an impact on me as well; you don’t learn when you’re frightened. Equally talking to these people today it’s that sort of barrier that does get in people’s way, and I think it wouldn’t have happened for them if they’d have come into this experience and just found you as a ‘chalk n’ talk’ person, and that you didn’t find the time in your teaching session to actually sit down beside them and make them feel comfortable - it wouldn’t have happened for them. It’s that style of teaching that works - that they know they’re important.**

The young people in South Africa also expressed their feelings of importance from the style of teaching they experienced:

I was allowed to express myself for the first time, not being afraid of teachers or my peers (Rule, 2004: 327).

For some of my participants, I realised that this same need to express ideas without feeling ridiculed was a necessary part of growing in confidence that consequently led to a desire to learn.

**2.3 Katya’s role in developing confidence**

Katya needed to evaluate what was occurring in the classroom for her business. Her questions provided me with valuable feedback. I did not know what would be asked of the participants. Her concern was with the structure of the course. She had an agenda. She was running a business that provides courses including maths and English to industry. She wanted two things – for people to pass courses, but also for participants to enjoy the experience of learning so that she could advertise the successes.

Luke: I’m quite confident about taking my English exam. I’m more than confident I’ll pass.

**Katya: Good. This has been obviously down to some of the tutoring.**

**…**

**Katya: Has anybody got any more points that they would like to raise about the learning at all? Anything that you feel we could do better for you as a course?**

**…**

**Katya: But as it stands and I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but is it a positive experience for you?**

**…**

**Katya: Is it the teaching style, then, that might have made you feel a bit more comfortable?**

Katya wanted to know if my teaching was meeting needs. If it appeared that my teaching was successful, she could promote it as such. It was therefore important that participants could relate to me.

Lydia: It makes me feel terrific that I am learning so much from somebody over the space of a few weeks.

A connection with her, her organisation and my role within it might have developed a sense of loyalty. As highlighted in chapter five, it is interesting to note that Katya highlighted her dislike of maths and assumed others would, too. She tried to put herself on a par with the participants and she was keen to ensure that they felt comfortable to talk with her. To encourage them to do this, she placed herself as someone who also struggled, to enable participants to believe that they were not alone in what they were experiencing. This may have freed them to talk about their concerns. Katya’s role and attitude, however, may have influenced participants’ thinking.

For Katya, efforts to promote social engagement was essential. The participants needed to recognise that they were important. This then promoted a feel-good factor that may have also developed confidence within the group.

**2.4 Learner motivation**

Sasha had expected to understand maths. She was the only participant aiming to take a degree once this course was complete. Her motivation came from wanting academic achievement.

Sasha: When we’d done the assessments I knew that my maths was a problem … but in my mind that was because I’d not done it for a while and once I’d got my paperwork out from the other year and looked over it *[I thought I would be able to achieve it]* … but then coming into the class and then realising that maybe I did need to work more on certain areas than I thought, sort of knocks you down a little bit because then … I thought I’d just pick it straight back up basically and I didn’t. So as its gone on and it’s gone on for weeks and weeks my confidence has gone lower and lower, and then when you finally do get it, you feel better then but then I feel like I’ve got to catch up on everything else that I’ve not been concentrating on while I’ve been trying to work out the percentages for example.

Weeks later, when speaking with Katya, Sasha realised that she had improved:

**Katya:** **So over all the 14 weeks if you could sum it up thinking about how you felt that first morning when you came in, in comparison to how you feel now, how would you describe how you feel about the experience?**

Sasha: I feel more confident with maths. It’s been good.

**Katya: Do you feel as if it’s made any difference to you as a person at all internalising it in any way?**

Sasha: Possibly, because I want to do my degree and so it’s showed me that I can pick stuff up and I can learn it and how I’m best at learning stuff, what works for me and what doesn’t.

O’Kell (1986) claims that those who are really motivated can learn without pressure being applied. Although this may be the case in some instances due to a conscious yearning for knowledge, for others, something needs to be *“triggered”*.

Luke: To be honest at the start of the course it was just something I had to do and I was told I had to do it, so that’s the way I was looking at it and I wasn’t too happy about it to be honest. Since I’ve got here and since I’ve started doing the work then like I say something’s triggered. I now do find I want to learn it, I’m not just here because I’ve got to be here. Monday’s now are now coming to do some learning, which I thought maybe I was getting a bit old for because you can’t learn new things but you can.

My participants were invited to attend this course as part of their apprenticeship. The following quotes sum up the group thoughts.

Rose: I’m quite willing to do it *[the course]*; I need it.

Magritte: I think you’re looking at it *[the course]* in a different aspect; when we were at school you had to do it, this time we want to do it

Maya: We motivate ourselves and we want to learn so that’s a major thing.

Reece *et al* (2003) claim that adult students understand that time and effort has to be devoted to study, both in class and at home, on an individual basis: *“adults tend to be much more intense about their learning”* (p. 7). Although this was the case with my participants in this research, previous experiences have shown that this is not always the case, and, as can be read from Luke’s comments earlier, not all adult learners are keen to study, but they recognise that they have to do it as a job requirement. This puts pressure on people because they know they are expected to pass.

Deci & Ryan (1991) suggest that there are different motivating factors that encourage people. At its most basic, there is external and internal motivation. Deci & Ryan state that external motivation relies on a system of rewards and punishments. These become internalised as a set of rules to exert control on behaviour but are not accepted as one’s own; they could be recognised as one’s conscience. Eventually a sense of identified control occurs where people value the result and therefore accept the need to do it. An example may be to read set books to succeed in an exam.

My findings suggest that one of the internal motivations, such as to learn a new skill, had profound consequences on my participants, not so much on the short-term goal of completing a course and passing a test, but for their views of themselves, the manner of understanding of the material learnt and their commitment to achieve.

Maya: We’re doing the apprenticeship *[of which maths and English is a part]* so we can improve our skills, so now we’ll work better and be a better member of the team.

Participants considered how they thought, how they learnt and how they used what they had learnt. When they began to understand what they were studying, confidence developed in daily interactions as well as in the classroom. Kanter (2006: 6) suggests that this occurs because

On the way up, success creates positive momentum. People who believe they are likely to win are also likely to put in the extra effort at difficult moments to ensure that victory. On the way down, failure feeds on itself. As performance starts running on a positive or a negative path, the momentum can be hard to stop. Growth cycles produce optimism, decline cycles produce pessimism.

Having recognised how their learning was improving, participants developed their own momentum.

Theories of motivation can also be divided into process and content theories. Using Lawler’s process theory, which takes a humanistic perspective, Klyczek & Gordon (1988) assert that individuals determine their own learning needs, which they describe as deficits, and solve their own problems. This is based on applicability to real-life situations, rather than external expectations (Klyczek & Gordon, 1988; Sparling, 2001).

The participants, at the start of their time with me, may have recognised the need for extra study, but may not necessarily have completed any. What changed was that, due to their self-belief, they wanted to learn because they knew they could achieve. It became a win-win situation.

I am, however, aware that effective learning in the classroom does not always occur, despite best intentions. As has been mentioned earlier, learning in classrooms is influenced by peer and tutor interactions, socioculture and learners’ motivational beliefs about their current knowledge or the knowledge to be learnt (Pintrich *et al*, 1993).

**Katya: Are you finding that you’ve got a lot of work to do in your own time, or are you managing to do it within the group?**

Tanya: She *[Zoya]* said you can do it by your own choice if you do have time ... If you do have time then you can just do it - you don’t have to do it, so she gives you an option.

**Katya: Have any of you felt the need to want to do it, have you felt spurred on by it that you want to practise in your own time?**

Tanya: I’d wanted to, to be honest.

**Katya: You don’t feel pressurised?**

Magritte: I felt it was quite enjoyable as well although we can bounce off one another if we’re getting stuck … Doing some of the stuff at home I think it has helped a bit, it’s not classed as homework but wanting to do it and just trying your best.

**2.5 Becoming autonomous learners**

Wood (2001) explores how perspectives on learning influences student approaches to tasks and how that thinking makes a difference to them as individuals. Potentially this may cast them into a passive role that can imply a ‘transmission’ model of teaching and learning (Leseman & Sijsling, 1996). Bereiter (2002) warns that people are not merely vessels into which information is imparted. Participation is concerned with recognising learning as taking part in activities within a social context that has been explained as activity systems (Engeström, 2001; 2004) and also as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger *et al*, 2002).

I worked at encouraging questioning and challenging. I wanted the participants to find the answers for themselves. Initially, they were dependent on me to both ask the questions and find the answers. They wanted me to validate them. The dependency could have meant that their learning would have belonged to me, rather than them (Burton, 1987). I particularly supported participants in becoming autonomous through helping them to work through what they recognised as simple ideas, advancing to ones that were more complex. This made them more confident. Constructing learner autonomy involved me in re-negotiating discipline – *“the collection of rules by which the classroom community operates to everyone's satisfaction”* (Burton, 1987: 308). Paradoxically I also managed the learning by encouraging participants to take control of their learning rather than me dictating the approach they should take.

I wondered what it was that they gained as individuals as they became autonomous. As Tinker *et al* (2012: 6) also found out when researching how learners studied together and gained a sense of community, my findings reveal that participants felt more in control of what they were learning and they too *“developed a greater belief in their capacity to succeed in their learning, accompanied by an increase in the level of engagement with their studies”.* Their positivity came from the realisation that the stress and anxiety which had been associated with the study of maths and English, had been reduced.

Bertha is an example of this change in thinking. She discussed it both in our conversation and in the second group interview.

Bertha: When I first came onto the course … I was dreading it. Then we sat down that first morning and … I just thought *“I can’t do this”*. But then as the weeks have progressed with your teaching and learning it’s become easier. … I’m beginning to understand things more and I feel more confident.

Bertha: It *[the course]* makes you want to learn more because you start and get into it. You want to progress and you want to carry on.

Moore (1983: 163) suggests that

Autonomous learners – and this means most adults, most of the time – sometimes formally, often unconsciously, set objectives and define criteria for their achievement. Autonomous learners know, or find, where and how and from what human and other resources they may gather the information they require, collect ideas, practise skills and achieve their goals. They then judge the appropriateness of their new skills, information and ideas, eventually deciding whether their goals have been achieved or can be abandoned.

Not rushing to complete work is a learning skill. Negotiating time was central to developing learner autonomy. It demanded *“greater respect for the learner than for the subject matter”* (Burton, 1987: 308). I guided and suggested further work where appropriate and, where necessary, slowed participants down. Their ability to judge when they were ready and take on responsibility to follow through with a piece of work or take a test before the end of the course was, I discovered, something that occurs when the experience of learning means they are not afraid to fail. Participants began to see constructive criticism or not passing a test as a learning curve, rather than as a disaster. As with Burton’s findings, a non-threatening atmosphere and achievable, short-term goals helped to create confidence and enabled understanding to occur. Within the limits of the course time, therefore, participants learnt to study at the pace that suited them.

Watters & Ginns (1999) suggest that developing learning environments that support participants to study and learn independently needed both macro and micro levels of intervention to be considered. At the macrolevel, Watters & Ginns suggest that teachers help learners to establish rapport and social interaction, develop specific skills and provide opportunities for independent discovery to support them in elaborating their knowledge. They refer to teenagers in a school environment. My participants are adults. I did not consciously set out to develop a group feeling, even though the findings show that this is what seemed to take place. This sense of belonging may not have occurred with other situations and it is interesting to note how it may have been a factor in their learning.

Watters & Ginns also mention that for autonomy to be achieved, there is also a microlevel, where *“scaffolding processes”* (p. 5) are applied daily with students. As I reflected on my research I realised that this was something I attempted to do within the classroom.

Supporting learners to develop autonomy was accomplished most of the time, but this was not without difficulties. It is possible that I imposed that desire upon them. Was I a facilitator or a teacher? Perhaps I had to be both. Did I remove myself from the responsibility of teaching? If I did, then I would have to have taken myself away from the responsibility of the result, be it the test or the confidence gained. I was occasionally unclear when to intervene or offer support and when to enable participants to develop their thoughts, knowing that mistakes could occur but they might learn from them. Some of my responsibility was to support them to recognise what difficulties they had and help them to find strategies to manage them. I encouraged them to move from thinking as school pupils to thinking as adult learners.

**SECTION 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**3.1 Relationships with learners**

In order to teach effectively, I tried to consider the needs of each participant - their history, skills and personal situation. Their perception, in terms of considering if they are cared for by the organisation that teaches them, or their tutor, or classroom peers, is foundational for learning (Noddings, 2005). He states that educators have aims for those they teach, but at times they may not take the relationship aspect of caring into consideration. Tutors may consider themselves as being attentive to learner needs, but unless the individual feels cared for, the relationship is not helpful.

Not everything worked smoothly when I taught, yet the loyalty shown to me is worth noting. On a regular basis the IT resources did not work. The group seemed to empathise and almost feel sorry for me, even though it was their learning that was being hampered.

Alex: We’ve done work and we’ve not been able to get the marks off *[the Internet]*, it’s not Zoya’s fault ... and so she can’t mark them … It must be frustrating Zoya as well.

Mistakes, be they academic on the part of learners, or administrative errors that tutors or institutions may be responsible for, can then be openly discussed, as people are confident in knowing that they can learn from them and not be made to appear foolish or, to use the term that has pervaded this thesis, stupid.

Noddings (2005), and my findings concur, state that if people are listened to and valued, they are more likely to accept and achieve the standards brought before them as educational goals.

When Katya interviewed Luke, he expressed how my approach to teaching affected him.

**Katya:** **Just going back to Zoya’s teaching techniques, you feel that it’s that one-to-one support that makes the difference to you?**

Luke: It’s definitely the one-to-one, and the fact if you’re going to study and you can see that for the teacher it’s a job or it’s just teaching then you tend to be a bit disinterested; but the fact that Zoya takes her time, sits with you, discusses everything, gets the best out of you …

**Katya:** **She makes you believe in yourself.**

Luke: Yes, yes she gives you confidence, she boosts your confidence and she does try and get the best out of you, so that makes you want to try as well. We want to try and all pass for Zoya.

That participants wanted to pass for me was also mentioned by Katya in our conversation.

**Katya: It’s that style of teaching that works that they know they’re important and that it matters to you that they pass as well, and that feeling is transposed (sic) into them as well and they don’t want to let you down.**

This gave the participants another reason for wanting to achieve. They explained that because I had put the effort in for them, they stated that they felt appreciated, an aspect that Schutz (1958) suggests is important in interpersonal relationships.

Kanter (2004: 339) advocates that the confidence people most need is not self-confidence but confidence in others.

Leaders who guide winning streaks make a different set of choices, towards positive, inclusive, empowering actions that build confidence. By believing in other people, they make it possible for others to believe in them. Working together, they increase the likelihood of success, and of continuing to succeed.

Manen (1990) confirms my experiences and these findings when suggesting that most people need encouragement to achieve their goals, whatever they may be.

Developing understanding in learning can generate positive emotions, contributing to more effort and hard work. This can then reinforce the likelihood of confidence. This positive emotion may then cement relationships. When people feel positive about themselves, the tendency is to become more generous, supportive and tolerant of one another, which may reinforce teamwork (Manen, 1990).

These ideas that Manen encourages could have led me to become self-congratulatory. I could have claimed from my findings that my teaching methods were successful for learning to occur because participants were so positive. It was important, however, that I was aware of why I crafted my research questions.

As can be read from the following question I asked Maya, what I wanted from my first research question – ‘*what do adults in the workplace say they feel about classroom-based learning?’* – is, perhaps, what participants thought about the way in which they had been taught by me. This might also have been my unconscious intention in my second question – *‘who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning’*.

**Zoya: Is there anything in particular you’ve enjoyed the most? It’s because I’m going to be teaching Functional Skills again with a different group, and it’s just knowing what you think has worked particularly well.**

Maya: It’s you being very approachable. You are so approachable that when you first come in you’re thinking *“God”,* you know, *[Maya was dreading the sessions]* but you’re approachable and you get everyone’s confidence, you build up people’s confidence which is the good part. You’re positive to them even when you’re not good at maths or English *[thinking]* you’re positive and you build up on their confidence.

Although it was an affirmative comment, my supervisors warned me about *“blowing your own trumpet!”* Learners can transfer feelings about what they have achieved onto another person because they are so delighted with their own development. Robertson (1996: 42) explains that adult educators may be *“facilitators of knowledge”* as opposed to being *“disseminators of knowledge”* (ibid). Maya’s delight in my approach may have been because she and other participants were ready to learn and I was the catalyst they needed to encourage that to happen. We were all in the right place at the right time. What had occurred was *“a helping relationship with the learner”* (Robertson, 1996: 42), which was based on the trust that had developed by participants towards me and on my care for them (Brammer, 1996).

**3.2 The tutor as motivator**

My way of teaching is based on capitalising on the experience, interests and skills of learners. People learn in different ways and enjoy different types of activities, which means that it is important to offer a variety of tasks, performed both by the whole class and smaller groups in order to increase the level of interaction in the classroom. The key is their motivation. If they are not interested, then my style does not work. The motivation to learn can offer experiences that build confidence and a positive self-image. This potentially encourages learners to change their perspective and approach to learning. I attempted to present subjects as active, investigational and enquiry-based.

The task of the educator becomes that of encouraging adults to perceive the relative, contextual nature of previously unquestioned givens. Additionally, the educator should assist the adult to reflect on the manner in which values, beliefs, and behaviors (sic) previously deemed unchallengeable (sic) can be critically analyzed (sic). Through presenting alternative ways of interpreting and creating a world to adults, the educator fosters a willingness to consider alternative ways of living (Collins, 1996: pp. 112/113).

Collins encouraged me to consider how I could challenge, with care, the ways in which the participants approached their learning and their ways of life. They developed a critical awareness - a sensitivity about how they learnt - which they did not appear to have before.

Strategies that enable mastery of tasks for their own sake, whilst minimising pressure to make learners think that they have to prove their ability to preserve their self-esteem, would be ideal to encourage intrinsic motivation. Shifting emphasis from competition and grades to mastery of goals has been shown to enhance pupil’s self-efficacy and reduce self-handicapping (Anderman & Anderman, 2009).

I was aware that I could have damaged participants’ self-esteem (Dweck, 2002). I therefore needed to be specific in identifying and rectifying limitations through structured and targeted teaching. I worked at ensuring that my feedback was constructive and subject-specific.

Maya: You show the mistakes but you also show the positives, so it shows you’ve done this wrong, but you’ve done this right and if you do it like this again you’ll get the other one right. So that’s how you’re doing it; you’re showing the positives as well as the negatives, but you’re more focused on the positives but bringing in the negatives so you know where to go right but you praise at the same time.

Luke: It’s just having somebody to go to if you’ve got a query if you have a problem. Just somebody having the time to talk you through it and tell you where you’re going wrong, or where do you think you’re going wrong, and then working on them bits; that’s been the most helpful.

My concern lay in how learner motivation could be maximised to assure academic success.

The best motivators lead through their relationships with, rather than power over, others (McLean, 2003). Gagné (1977) identifies motivation as the first phase of the learning process. The role of the teacher, he claims, is *“to identify the motives of students and challenge them into activities that accomplish education goals”* (p. 206). Armitage *et al* (2007: 67) contend that *“It is essential to student motivation that the teacher identifies and communicates goals and objectives to students and generates expectations in them”*. If I had low expectations of my participants, that attitude might have been passed on to them, however subconsciously. It was my role to encourage.

Adults want to see results and be provided with accurate feedback. They have a wide range of existing experiences and knowledge and their ego plays an important part in the learning process: they want to be the origins of their learning and will resist learning which appears to be an attack on their competence or their current practices (Wijayatilake, 2012: 44).

Actively promoting goal mastery can be achieved by supporting risk-taking where learners are not embarrassed or criticised for mistakes. They can be viewed as an integral part of the learning process and not evidence of failure to learn, which can be achieved by placing the emphasis on the thinking process rather than the outcome, supported by ensuring learners are comfortable if they want to ask for assistance. This can take place by positively receiving questions and providing ways for private assistance such as support after class (Newman & Schwager, 1992), which is what I offered. Similarly, conveying a belief that success is possible, although perhaps not assured, has been shown to improve resilience and address fears of failure (Ames, 1992).

The results have significant theoretical and practical implications for learner participation in general (Tinker *et al*, 2012). *“Shifting self-concept or learning identities in positive ways has implications for student motivation and engagement by building a sense of autonomy, relatedness and competence, deemed fundamentally important to intrinsic motivation”* (Ryan & Deci, as cited by Tinker *et al*, 2012: 7).

Bereiter & Scardamalia (1992) contend that knowledge-building through autonomy is the most important focus in teaching, an aspect discussed earlier in this chapter. Through the development of autonomy, the perceived responsibility of the learner changes from the tutor to the student. The tutor therefore motivates the student to develop their learning (Fenstermacher, 1986). This type of environment recognises the importance of both situated cognition (Brown & Campione, 1989) as well as the importance of personal and community motivation.

Earwaker (1998), describing tutorial relationships, states that it is not only whether the tutor knows about empathy, but also whether it is shown. Rogers (1998: 201) describes *“how deeply appreciative students feel when they are simply* ***understood*** *- not evaluated, not judged, simply understood from their* ***own*** *point of view”* [bold words in original text].

As someone who was also studying and who appreciated how my supervisors worked with me, I tried to empathise with the participants. That perception of genuineness or of being *“a real person”* (Rogers, 1998: 198) meant that the participants were more open with me than they might have been. As highlighted in the methodology, however, this could have created difficulties in their being too open with me, and I had to be aware of this.

**3.3 Situated learning, andragogy and scaffolding**

A situated learning environment provides for coaching at critical times, and scaffolding of support, where the teacher provides the skills, strategies and links that the students are unable to provide to complete the task. Gradually, the support (the scaffolding) is removed until the student is able to stand alone (Herrington & Oliver, 1995: 6) *[brackets are in original text]*.

I used the theory of situated learning in my teaching. It put my participants into the centre of the way I taught. It encouraged them to develop higher-order thinking processes (Cohen *et al*, 1994), rather than obtaining facts that may have been irrelevant to their lives. The participants obtained and held on to ideas by connecting them to their personal situations, values and beliefs. Content situated in participants’ regular experiences let them share in reflective thinking (Shor, 1996). Remembering what they learnt by rote was not the goal. I was concerned with ensuring that they understood what they were doing and how it benefited them as individuals. I wanted them to absorb the learning. Participants were more likely to develop maths and English skills quickly if what they discovered had relevance to them. By placing content within daily living, I supported participants through providing opportunities to cooperate in investigating problem situations.

Through this research it has been my experience that taking an andragogical approach to teaching enables adults to benefit in terms of their own learning. Allowing individuals to consider carefully and with guidance their own work enables self-analysis to take place and stops personal opinion by the tutor to get in the way of their learning.

According to Knowles (1996: 90), because *“adults have acquired a large number of fixed habits and patterns of thought, and therefore tend to be less open-minded”,* recognising the discourse that people are coming from is important. With informed choice adults can develop a personal approach to learning. Knowles acknowledges that the tutor must be open and vulnerable, establish a supportive environment, allow the examination of ideas without being sensitive and be creative about how adults can explore their learning. The participants thought about how they could apply what they learnt. Talking about what they had learnt was not enough. Doing it was reflection-in-action. I attempted to encourage this approach to learning when teaching. Had they not reflected, the participants might not have applied what they had learnt. Chapter eight highlights more about changes in thinking.

I did not want my participants merely to pass tests. I wanted them to be able to use what they had learnt.

Schools and universities should become more like hubs of learning, within the community, capable of extending into the community … More learning needs to be done at home, in offices and kitchens, in the contexts where knowledge is deployed to solve problems and add value to people’s lives (Leadbeater, 2000: pp. 111/112).

The formal learning that took place in the classroom developed into informal learning in their homes and at work.

It could be suggested that educational approaches in the United Kingdom have changed from *“valuing the dissemination of learning and knowledge as an end in itself, towards giving priority to the development of the individual”* (Bond, 1998: 10). Some of Luke’s development began with experiences whilst studying maths and English. He explains how the course helped him to express himself, looking beyond the parameters of work:

Luke: I enjoy writing but I haven’t done for a long time. Now I’ve started writing and find myself writing poetry and stuff now, I don’t know why. I’ve always liked writing, I’ve always liked the written word but because you’re doing your job you find you don’t have time and it kind of stops, but now it’s been triggered again so that’s good because I enjoy that.

It had always been an aim of mine when teaching that people would take their learning outside the classroom and use it in their daily lives, as connected with research question three – *‘does classroom-based learning make a difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?’* I had not expected the answer to be experienced in this way.

McGivney (1999: 99) explains her understanding of informal learning as

Learning that takes place outside a dedicated learning environment and which arises from the activities and interests of individuals and groups, but which may not be recognised as learning.

She also highlights the notion that learning activities, such as discussion, talks or presentations that are not course-based may come under this umbrella. In addition to this, structured learning can also be included. Whereas my teaching was formal, it enveloped elements of this learning in that it encouraged participants to consider how they could apply what they had learnt.

Scaffolding took place in a variety of ways. I asked questions, prompted, probed, provided reminders, gave systematic instructions, demonstrated and delivered feedback. In essence, I did what I was trained as a tutor to do.

Scaffolding was not only delivered by me. Participants supported each other. This emphasises Vygotsky’s belief that learning is a social, as well as an individual activity (1978). Such peer-provided scaffolding is motivating and meaningful. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, collaborative learning enhanced knowledge which occurred as my participants talked to each other about the topics they were learning.

This teaching approach is not unique (Cohen *et al*, 2005; Armitage *et al*, 2007). I used small group discussions, question and answer, one-to-one and paired support. These methods helped participants to share thoughts and create sensitivity, understanding and appreciation of each other. These approaches seemed to help participants to develop a more positive self-view (Ginsburg-Block *et al*, 2006).

An example of this can be recognised in Maya’s school experiences, whose history of failure in formal education had haunted her life.

Maya: When I was at school I got told I was “thick”. In previous jobs I found out I’m dyslexic, slightly dyslexic, which they didn’t tell me at school and that’s always knocked me back.

I was put in the bottom classes, regardless of everything else. Maths I was put in the bottom class because my English was bad and so I got penalised because of my dyslexia. At school I got penalised all the way through and basically I got told all the way through that I was thick and not to try.

Hearing these comments made me want to re-define her ideas about learning and try to encourage curiosity and experimentation. Developing different attitudes towards learning could, I thought, establish a basis for Maya to understand how she learns. If I was to do this, however, could it be seen to be imposing my ideas of learning on her? What if she did not want or need to develop the kind of curiosity or experimentation that I thought she should seek? It was not my job to change how people felt. I am not a psychologist, a counsellor or a hypnotist. The validity of encouraging an alternative approach to learning was dependent upon my sensitivity and intuition towards Maya as her tutor, rather than trying to apply any desire in her to acquire knowledge in the way I wanted or expected her to.

Trying to cultivate learning, when information is integrated into an individual’s knowledge base (Hogan & Pressley, 1997), is different to the desire to impose an opinion of learning. The scaffolding that was required with Maya was to *“help bridge the gap between what [the learner] know[s] and can do and what [he or she] need[s] to accomplish in order to succeed at a particular learning task”* (Graves & Braaten, 1996: 169). Once this occurred, Maya could connect what she knew before with what she was now learning. I think that the use of scaffolding helped this to occur. It allowed me to interact with her through asking questions and providing support to help her discover information she needed to successfully complete a task (Graves & Braaten, 1996). The activities I developed in class were designed to build on the strengths of each learner.

I wanted participants to use the tools of maths and English to wrestle with their experiences of daily life. For some, measuring in millilitres and writing reports are inherent in their job. Understanding how to complete these successfully is more than theory. Lives are dependent on their ability to use numbers accurately and write detailed articles that make sense to others. Learning in a practical way teases out and solves problems. The activities I involve participants in may appear informal. I believe that they are, however, authentic endeavours that are informative in a way that textbook examples and declarative explanations are not (Seely Brown *et al,* 1989).

This approach to teaching developed from my experiences. When learning to drive, my instructor told me that he would teach me how to drive, not how to pass the test. That way of thinking changed my life. It was an andragogical approach that I would learn about in my teacher training course. When I began to teach, that mentality stayed with me. Application, rather than retention, became the mark of my teaching.

Sasha: She did stuff that you didn’t necessarily need her to do in the exam because we’ve got a dictionary, but from outside it helped anyway because it was nice to learn stuff that you didn’t necessarily need to pass the exam, just to make you feel a bit better and a bit more confident.

Supporting learners in distinguishing and developing surface and deep learning (Marton & Saljo, 1976; 1984; Gibbs, 1994) is a possible way to develop academic skills.

These terms describe the difference between learning as an end in itself and gaining knowledge. The surface learner looks at the goals that need to be achieved that have been imposed from exterior sources. Memorising information is key to how learning occurs. The deep learner focuses on what they need to do to achieve. Their motivation is personal. The focus is understanding what is being learnt.

As with my learning to drive, I wanted to ensure that participants understood what they had studied as opposed to learning by rote in order to pass a test. The impact of this way of learning is that, when tests occur, knowledge can be transferred between situations. In part it was this way of learning that created confidence in the participants.

They were given the opportunity to gain confidence in their abilities through scaffolding their knowledge. I sensed that the confidence they began to achieve occurred within the context of practice. What emerged were increasingly intricate forms of thought as their knowledge developed and they began to understand their potential.

By experiencing the successful completion of tasks that stimulated them, participants gained increased confidence and motivation to embark on challenges that were more complex (Vygotsky, 1978). Maya explained how this worked for her.

Maya: She places us at the right level and goes over and over until you understand it all, and then builds it up to the next level, so you’re going up in your little stages until we’ve all got our confidence.

Vygotsky defined scaffolding instruction, which was temporary, as the *“role of teachers and others in supporting the learner’s development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level”* (Raymond, 2000: 176). As participants’ abilities increased, so the scaffolding I provided was gradually withdrawn. Participants were eventually able to complete tasks or understand ideas by themselves. My aim, therefore, when using the scaffolding teaching strategy, was for participants to become independent and self-regulating learners and problem solvers (Hartman, 2002).

Scaffold instruction was individualised to benefit each participant. The disadvantage was that developing the supports and scaffolded lessons to meet the needs of each individual was time-consuming. I had only eleven participants in my class and I struggled. Scaffolding also requires tutors to give up some control and allow students to make mistakes. As chapter eight will highlight, I realise that perhaps I was more directive than I realised.

I tried to encourage and sustain self-directed aspects of study to ensure that participants acquired an increased ability to learn independently. External scaffolds provided by me were removed because the participants, as predicted by Vygotsky (Raymond, 2000: 176) developed *“more sophisticated cognitive systems”*. He also suggested that *“related to fields of learning such as mathematics or language, the system of knowledge itself becomes part of the scaffold or social support for the new learning”* (ibid).

Magritte: The spelling tests gives a bit more confidence. I think as the weeks have gone on, we can tell because at first *[with]* the spellings nobody was calling out how to spell it on the board and now we’re getting a bit more *[thinking]* a few of us will spell it even if it’s incorrect; we’ll all have a go at doing it.

Schön (1996) explains that a practitioner (in this case, the learner) may develop a repertoire of expectations, images and techniques. This practitioner learns to look for and respond to what is found. The style of study could become automatic. A specialisation of one type of study may narrow the vision of what different situations require. For example, learning how to write a formal letter does not necessarily mean that someone can transfer that skill to other forms of writing, such as a supporting statement in a job application.

Due to this specialist perception, patterns of error may occur. I had to ensure that participants understood how and why they were writing in a particular manner so that it could be adapted for other tasks. At one time, participants seemed oblivious to their single-minded thinking and I needed to show them where they were making errors. Practice and understanding built self-assurance that then enabled learning to be used in the workplace.

Lydia: I’ve noticed with my English with my writing of notes and things that I have to fill in *[at work]* that you’re actually making sure that you write it all in the correct grammar.

**SECTION 4: MATHS AND ENGLISH**

**4.1 Challenging the image of maths**

For some participants, the image of maths was demonised. It was presented at school as mechanistic, impersonal and absolutist. Perry (1970) and Benn (2002) confirm this image projection. In their research, they found that those who are required to study maths were perturbed by its depiction as a difficult subject with no room for manoeuvre.

My aim was to replace participants’ experiences of formalised, codified and lifeless maths. I wanted to give them an opportunity to enjoy subjects. Having experienced the demonising of maths myself, I now believe that, if it is referred to as numeracy, it can be understood to be creative and experimental and not to be feared - simply something that can be used in daily life. The participants began to see maths as creative, but for some, the experience of it at school still made them think that this was not the case. Using the word numeracy instead of maths helped some participants as it distanced them from negative experiences that the term maths implied. The way I explained the term numeracy was that people needed to have a grasp of the arithmetic necessary for everyday life. Using money on a daily basis, reading timetables or following a recipe are all numerically based - these were aspects that were understood, but taken for granted. I tried to put numeracy into their world - the very role of Functional Skills. We explored mathematical concepts using daily activities such as recipes and transport.

The way I taught both maths and English was an attempt to enable participants to encounter learning as an active, investigational discipline, built upon imagination, speculation and experimentation. Within the group, the style of teaching seemed to have had an impact on how some learnt. Participants were given opportunities to explore ideas after which they would feed back their findings. I reminded them, in a roundabout way, that *“mathematics [is] a creation of the human mind, with no existence other than in the minds of people and characterised by some typical human mental activities”* (Plunkett, 1981: 46). Once they accepted that idea, they were ready to rid themselves of the notion of not being able to ‘do’ maths. The fear began to be removed and the relevance of maths started to enter their mentality. They then began to encounter numeracy in a manner more closely resembling mathematicians than learners in school (Burton, 1987).

Studying student involvement in mathematics, Turner *et al* (1998: 731) define the word ‘involvement’ as a *“psychological state that is concerned with the quality of experience during learning”*. This way of thinking differs from being engaged in the study and showing interest. Engagement is actively taking part in the learning. Interest provides the motivation to do so. Being involved needs concentration and an understanding of what needs to be learnt. Turner *et al* suggest that characteristics of student involvement mean that there are feelings that time passes quickly, they have an emotional investment, and there is evidence of the determination to continue with tasks. My findings concur with these ideas.

Over time, some participants began to understand how to monitor and recognise their own progress:

Rose: I feel my maths is – I think I’m doing fine with it; there are obviously probably a few little bits I do need to brush up on especially with having a few weeks off as well. I’ve just done another mock test and I feel I did fine on it, a couple of questions that did get me … well they weren’t wrong. I didn’t read the full script.

**4.2 Challenging the image of English**

For some participants, English produced a similar negative reaction as maths.

A few explained how learning English in the past affected them away from the classroom. I initially believed that it was my responsibility to create a positive atmosphere. If I was to challenge understanding and thinking, however, a certain amount of discomfort was almost certain to arise that would confront current ways of knowing. My intent was to stimulate curiosity, whilst also encouraging participants to try new ways of thinking about familiar issues and content. When discussing the course with Katya, Rose noticed that:

Rose: You write things down every day and you don’t realise, you just write it down and you don’t *[thinks]* you just don’t seem to do it as you should; you just do it without thinking. I think when you’re writing things down now you’ll be able to do it with thinking and do it the right way now, whereas before it was just scribble it down and that was it and not thinking about it!

**Katya: But now you go back over it?**

Rose: You can think more and do it right.

**Katya: It’s changed your thought process, that’s good.**

I understand learning to be a situated process influenced by the social and cultural context in which it occurs. Guile & Griffiths (2001) suggest that accredited learning in the workplace does not result in context-free, easily transferable knowledge and skills. My findings, however, suggest that, given the right circumstances, learning can be transferred to home or work situations. Other researchers have had similar findings.

In the United States, Coles & Wall (1987) write about adult learners attending a basic reading and writing seminar in their university's evening college. The learners used their personal history to relate to the books they were studying. Coles & Wall used this information to understand more about how some individuals thought. They record a learner who had begun to realise that through reading, her confidence was developing beyond the classroom:

I now have a better understanding of the importance of being able to take what I have learned and sought out what I can use and applied it to some of my past knowledge and experiences. So far the reading and writing assignments have increase my curiosity and help me to compare all situation, before reaching the final judgment, and also learned more about subjects that will enable me to do a better job, which could be my work on my job, or either the work that is required of me when I'm taking college courses (p. 307) *[spellings and grammar in original]*.

My learners had similar experiences, which Luke sums up:

Luke: I usually get a paper on a Sunday and sometimes you’ll get The Sun, it’s easy to read. Now I’ll get The Sun and The Mail and now I find myself reading The Mail more than I am The Sun because it’s written better, it’s more words rather than pictures ...

**Zoya: Great, so you trust in things.**

Luke: Just because I’m beginning to think.

**Zoya: Yes it’s a different mentality. What has caused that change do you think?**

Luke: I think it’s just because of years of not doing anything like this. Now I’ve been triggered.

The participants took an active role in learning by engaging with case studies or scenarios that called for sustained analysis and enquiry. When teaching, I did not want participants to be bored – I wanted them to be interested and to recognise their part in the discovery of ideas. My experience has been that a classroom in which there is a struggle for meaning contains intensity of thought, frustration in the attempt to understand, and a sense of achievement once it has occurred. The struggle is a personal one.

**Summary**

People are likely to adopt the values of others who help them meet their needs to belong (McLean, 2003). My findings include the realisation that, when learning in a classroom, stress can be alleviated, and confidence developed, by the support of other learners. People need to be valued by others, surrounded by a cohesive peer group, given a sense of belonging and control, the stimulation of clear and challenging goals and recognition for whatever they achieve.

I always attempted to treat the participants as adults. Their realisation of this enabled them to want to learn, for me as well as for themselves. They studied away from the classroom and used their learning in their lives. This consequence resulted in all but three participants, completing – and passing – their maths and English tests before the fourteen weeks had concluded. Two took and passed tests in the final week and one left due to illness.

Confidence issues hindered my research. Even though I had worked on a number of pilots, the experience of the actual research was quite different. I noted in my journal:

Exhaustion, feeling I will never complete, lethargy, not seeing an end, working for too long … What’s the point? What will I gain? Why am I doing this?

The research let me challenge my and the participants’ notions of who they were and how they saw themselves. It was essential that in my questioning and discussions with them I recognised the danger of transferring my feelings, ideas and expressions of my experiences of education and inadequacy. The research might have become so specific to my development that it was irrelevant to anyone apart from me. The advantage, however, was that I appreciated the frustration of learning, which in turn affected my approach to teaching.

The next chapter concludes my thesis. I begin by questioning whether I answered the research questions and look back briefly on each of the chapters. I then discuss aspects of my findings, examine workplace and lifelong learning and reflect on what I have learnt from this experience of study.

**CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Introduction**

I was drawn by what may have influenced the perceptions, beliefs and values that shaped the learning of the participants. Did my teaching affect their learning? This chapter reflects on the findings and looks at aspects of workplace learning.

I begin by discussing how well I answered the research questions, which is followed by briefly reviewing each of the chapters.

Section 2 reflects aspects of me as a tutor.

Lifelong learning (LL) pervaded my research. Section 3 deliberates on its effect in the workplace and considers educational needs.

Section 4 discusses changes in thinking that seemed to have occurred from this research.

Section 5 considers aspects for further research, contributions to education and recommendations for workplace learning (WPL).

Section 6 completes the thesis with final considerations.

**SECTION 1: SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH**

**1.1 Research questions**

Were my research questions answered? As highlighted in the methodology, I struggled with separating these questions from those I had planned to ask participants. Question one - *what do adults in the workplace say they feel about classroom-based learning?* - was answered through the cameos. Participants expressed their thoughts. They highlighted that working in a like-minded group was an important aspect of their experiences. This question, however, could have been – what are adults’ *experiences* of classroom–based learning within the workplace? The results could have been equally as interesting and could have encouraged more thought from those who replied.

Question two - *who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning?* – could have been answered with the change of question mentioned above, combining the two questions. As well as studying alongside their peers, participants stated that my approach to teaching them made an impact, as did my personality. This has been useful to be aware of, although I am acutely conscious that, although in this instance, how I taught and who I am affected participants in a positive manner, personality clashes could have occurred which could have negatively affected both the learning and my teaching.

The third and final question - *does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace?* – is the one that surprised me. The answer was ‘yes’. The cameos reveal how participants used their learning when shopping, reading, and writing notes at work. Although this had been my hope, I was delighted to hear how useful maths and English became.

What I did not do was to design a question for myself. I had planned to write in an autoethnographical style, then became reflective. At no point did I consider a question that would include me. What did I want to learn from this doctoral experience? As will be read later in this chapter, I realise that I was seeking to understand if my approach to teaching created a positive impact on people, how and why this did or did not take place, and how I could improve my practice.

**1.2 Chapter summaries**

The introductory chapter provided the background to the research and my reasons for selecting this particular topic. My interest in people, self-development and learning were the hooks upon which I hung my thoughts.

The literature review was divided into two sections – aspects of learning and comparative research. The first section considered authors who, like me, were interested in lifelong and WPL. My third research question – *‘does classroom-based learning make any difference to people’s lives, both in and out of the workplace’* – was the basis for this section.

Until I explored in what ways I taught, I had not realised that I used scaffolding and situated learning in my teaching. Once I had noticed this, however, my interest in these topics took precedence over other approaches. I had to be careful not to hero-worship Vygotsky.

The second section was more reflective. It explored teaching and learning, autoethnography and reflective practice. At the start of my research I had not realised that my second research question – *‘who or what influences their experiences of classroom-based learning’* – was because I wanted to know if any of the influences had anything to do with me.

I had never been involved in research before I began this study. My learning curve, therefore, has been immense. Aspects of methodology that other researchers might have taken for granted were completely new to me. At times, this meant that I misunderstood the approach to methodology, which was chapter three, including the language and expectations of how to conduct research.

I considered it vital to complete pilot research, due to this lack of experience, which became chapter four. I used it to test how I would approach participants, ask questions, work with a group and interview individuals. In particular, the volunteers experienced the excessive number of questions I wanted to ask. It was necessary to work through these pilots so that I could learn about the research process.

I may have assumed that these experiences would imitate the research. The three pilot group interviews took place with learners I had known for several weeks. The research group, as described in chapter five, was unfamiliar to me. The first interview, therefore, was uncomfortable. This contrast is noticeable between the pilot and the research group.

Chapter five also contained the interview that Katya completed. Her participation was unexpected and useful because it gave the research another dimension that I had not anticipated.

The cameos that are described in chapter six took place after the group interviews. I could not conceive that my one-to-one interviews would emerge so differently to my planned, formal approach. I think the research was enhanced because I felt confident enough to risk recording those participants who wanted to share their thoughts.

Chapter seven presented my findings and explored the themes that developed from the research. It is here that I considered how each of the research questions were being answered.

This chapter discusses and reflects on the findings from the previous three chapters. As will be read, reflections of being a tutor, educational needs in the workplace and the relationships between education and the British economy are elements that are discussed. These are in relation to LL in the context of the workplace.

To complete the research, I explore educational needs in WPL, ways in which participants seemed to change their thinking and ideas for further research. Final considerations reflect personal thoughts and conclude the thesis.

**SECTION 2: MY REFLECTIONS AS A TUTOR**

Harrison (2009: 1) considers herself to be *“a tinker-thinker”*:

The word ‘tinker’ refers to an itinerant, a gypsy, or one who enjoys experimenting with things, or a travelling repairer of useful items. The word also refers to random unplanned work or activities.

Before starting this doctorate, I thought that I was also a tinker-thinker. I enjoy experimenting and reflecting on what I need to do. My teaching, however, is not random or unplanned. Alongside Harrison though, I have

drawn on whatever theory seems to concisely suit the message or behaviour I want my learners to learn (ibid).

As well as reflecting on my teaching practice, I was exploring my relationship with the participants. Had I been an outside researcher, I would have had a defined, recognised role. In trying to be a reflective practitioner, I tried to develop insight into my approach to teaching. My research put me in the midst of the encounter.

Swallow & Coates (2004) examine issues teachers may experience in their attempt to take on board non-traditional roles and explore teaching and learning with their students, helping them to be realistic about what they can achieve in the time they have. They also recognise that reflection, both by learners and teachers, is an important part of academic development. Drawing on learners’ own understanding, knowledge, circumstance and experience can be transformed to be practically administered in the workplace. It is important, however, that reflections enable change to occur both in study and, essentially, within the individual.

The experience of collecting, analysing, and organising data enhanced my understanding of teaching and learning. Occasionally separating myself from the data let me take a more objective look at the work. A positive emotional atmosphere seemed to encourage participants to problem-solve. I gave people space and quiet to think and speak. *“This conscious reflection is directed at building confidence in two ways: by encouraging recognition of … thinking skills … and then by promoting the use of these skills to encourage a problem solving style of learning”* (Burton, 1987: 311).

I wanted to make learning as straightforward as possible for participants. Part of me wanted to take away their struggles and make it easy for them; part of me wanted them to struggle more, so that they could learn independently of me.

I tried to facilitate learning. I worked at encouraging participants to understand what they were learning so that they could absorb it. This approach may have resulted in people taking longer to learn particular topics, but my aim was that what they had learnt would remain with them and not solely to be used to pass tests. *“learning is, in fact, a tool-mediated, participative practice, understood as engagement in a zone of proximal development that is primary to higher mental functions”* (Sawchuk, 2003: 638).

I have found that giving people the means to learn and applying that knowledge to different circumstances takes time. Occasionally I have observed learners being taught to pass an exam or to write a piece of work, rather than being taught to understand what they were learning. It is like learning to drive a car – we can be taught to pass the test, or taught how to drive in different situations – one can take far longer than the other and involves different tutoring skills.

I see my role as helping people to develop skills beyond test-taking. The difficulty is that there is government guidance on the number of guided learning hours – the number of hours a tutor has face-to-face contact with their learners – depending on the subject taught (unionlearn with the TUC, 2012). Funding issues could be at stake if these hours are not enough for all learners to understand what they need to complete a course.

Ecclestone (2008: 3) is concerned with how learners depend upon emotional support to study.

Increasingly, ‘learning’ is about dispositions, feelings and attitudes … the main focus becomes someone's subjectivity, their feelings about their sense of self and their relationships with others.

She continues by stating that these attitudes mean that what the tutor also has is the role of

supporting and mentoring, coaching, nurturing and enabling, engaging and motivating, building esteem, creating safe spaces. Facilitators of learning become nurturers or enablers of learning (ibid).

I see these roles as part of my teaching. If I want to excite and engage learners, then I believe that I have a responsibility to develop a rapport with them.

I realise that participation in learning leads to raised self-esteem and confidence that extends into other areas of lives. Learners may experience a growth in self-esteem as learning impacts on certain elements of confidence, such as a greater sense of fulfilment, sense of purpose or sense of efficacy. Even if learners do not progress academically, it could be seen to have wider social benefits (James & Nightingale 2006: 8), as it did with the participants.

Glasser (1997) describes four needs that are apparently inherent to every person: the need to belong, the need for power, the need for freedom and the need for fun. I believe that fulfilling any of these four driving forces, when learning, brings confidence. Learning is concerned with social development. If it cannot be used or enjoyed, I question its relevance in life.

The charity known as the Campaign for Learning (2013) suggests that

In the 21st Century, the new disadvantaged will be those who do not have the capacity to learn. They will sink, unable to change and adapt as they are flooded with ever more information and change. But learning is about more than just getting by in a changing world. Our ability to learn is what makes us human: we are born curious and our ability to continue learning is what defines us - as individuals, as communities and as societies.

A good educator *“is the ultimate salesperson”* (Harrison, 2009: 10). Using Harrison’s language, I realise that I could have been seen to be selling notions, aspirations and ideas. I could have sold excitement, self-belief, convictions and motivation. I could have manipulated participants. I could have given them unrealistic confidence without the skills to achieve their goals. I persuaded them to believe that I knew what was best for them. I realise I was playing a potentially dangerous game. This also led me to realise that learning has both a political and personal dimension that are discussed later in this chapter. The concepts of power and authority whilst learning has been questioned for many years (Thompson, 2010). Learning as a social activity, where it may or may not be acceptable to question those in authority, emerged not only from my reading of Vygotsky and Lave & Wenger, but also from school and family influences, as well as my reading of how adults are taught in other parts of the world.

Foucault (1998) rejected common notions of people having some form of implicit power, replacing this with the idea of power as a technique or action in which people engage. Power, he claimed, is thus exercised but not possessed. Although unconscious, I guided participants through my style of teaching. The notion of empowerment could be perceived as a smokescreen so that I could influence them to follow a path that I believed would enhance their learning.

In my journal I noted:

What assumptions am I making about confidence and learning? Through questioning and attempting to answer my own issues concerning these ideas, I have tried to become more critical of my own thoughts. I have also started to recognise that I may have constructed and sold the concept of confidence to my participants, the potential consequence being how they now feel about themselves.

Wood (2001) highlights that the tutor’s actions and reactions take place in response to the learner. He also states that there is thinking that promotes an active view of the learner and that learning is a collaborative, constructive process. My approach to teaching is connected with active learning. I encourage curiosity, as opposed to people leaning back and saying ‘teach me’.

There is no accepted scheme within which we can adequately capture and conceptualise the interplay between the actions of the learner and the tutor as the processes observed in their interactions emerge. Intervention studies into the impact of different tutorial strategies on learning outcomes … may establish a causal influence of specific features of tutoring on learning. However, they do not provide a framework for understanding how, when and why such features of tutorial interactions do or do not emerge in a given learner-tutor interaction (Wood, 2001: 281).

Having considered Wood, I wrote in my journal:

Self-directed learning – is that what I was doing? It seemed to have empowered the learners. Did I have any part in teaching them how to study independently, or in a group, or did they do it naturally?

I know that ‘learning how to learn’ is important. The subject to be studied is key in the way the learning is approached. The way we learn something needs to be done in context. It’s no use being a theoretical learner if you have to learn to swim. The theory may help, but the practice is the key. Discovery learning, instinctual learning, come into their own. You don’t have to understand why you can swim to be able to do so. You simply have to know how. It’s the same with maths. The theory is fine, but it’s only useful when it’s practised. In both cases the learning can be enhanced and extended if we understand the theory. Then what has been learnt can be expanded to other things - different strokes, different types of maths.

Schön (1996), when considering knowing-in-action, describes how jazz musicians improvise together. They have a ‘feel’ for each other, for their music and consequently the atmosphere that they create. They can make on-the-spot adjustments to sounds that they hear. Who taught them to do this? How do they know what to do? The music they play becomes instinctual, but they had to learn how to develop this skill. Could I, as a tutor, teach ‘feeling’ about the way something could be written, or the way a maths problem could be calculated? Could I help participants realise that experimenting is essential for learning and that making mistakes is part of the process? It is possible to think about something whilst doing it, after which it can become instinctual. The problem arises when ‘instinct’ becomes ‘habit’. Schön continues his thoughts by saying that much reflection-in-action is linked to surprise. Tutors may help learners by ensuring that they understand why something works in one circumstance and not in another. Tutors could then support learners to reflect on what preconceived ideas they may have about what they are doing.

Collin (1998) also used a musical analogy, where the consideration of imagining and exploring alternatives, engaging in reflection and developing research skills, could enhance personal development. Using my experience, study, observation and instinct, I want to develop a depth of understanding that will allow me to support people within, and beyond, my professional life. I want to develop alternative styles of working to broaden my ability to teach a variety of people.

This aspiration has long been with me. As stated in my positionality in chapter one, the research drew on personal experiences. My desire to include people in learning, whatever their perceived academic ability, is my motivation to teach.

Due to lack of confidence, or society’s expectations, some people may think they will not be able to achieve academically. This perception could have led me to accept this view and not challenge individuals to realise their potential. *“Inclusion demands major changes within society itself and should not be viewed in a vacuum”* (French & Swain, 2004: 169).

Hunt (2013) describes his experiences of disability, how society perceived him and the impact this had on the way he thought of himself.

Some of my participants experienced inadequacy, which, although in comparison to Hunt was less severe, nevertheless had similar, damaging effects on how they saw themselves. This made some feel excluded, as did my participant Maya when she spoke of being *“thick”*.

Consciousness of my inadequacy has, perhaps, helped me to recognise vulnerability in others and to value people beyond the physical, emotional or mental impairments that may be initially observed.

Hunt (2013: 3) states that, historically, the five words *“unfortunate, useless, different, oppressed and sick”* have been used by society to describe those with some form of disability with the potential to exclude.

I do not take pity on people, as the word *“unfortunate”* appears to imply. I have learnt as a tutor that everyone needs time and attention and should be taught according to their needs. My experience of working with people with learning difficulties gave me the challenge to teach. How do I clearly put points across? How do I help people to understand an idea? In what ways can I break down what I know so that others may also identify with it? Scaffolding, I learnt, can be used at its best if I teach from basics, without assuming knowledge and without patronising.

No-one is *“useless”* (p. 4). The economic value that learning can give to society is enormous. I have seen my role as drawing out potential so that people can use their knowledge. Supporting perspectives that allows individuals to think outside the box and thus offer ideas to society is an aspect that I have learnt from those I have taught.

I am conscious that I have occasionally oppressed learners. As Hunt states, it is the subtlety of oppression that may be most damaging. I cannot say I will not do so again, but, as with Bertha, when I believed that my skills with maths implied that she could achieve what she did not think she was capable of, I am learning not to assume.

Hunt’s description of his final word - *“sick”* (p. 5) – highlights not only physical disability, but also that of the mind. My self-pitying has often been challenged by people who have achieved great things in the face of seemingly hopeless odds. The resilience, fortitude and passion that I have observed in those where opportunities have appeared so limited, has prompted me to use the skills I have to encourage the development of others.

Teaching has given me tremendous rewards. Appreciation, being made to feel needed, friendship and being showered with affection have been a few privileges I have gained. As stated in chapter seven, however, I realise that it is not me, but the skills I have learnt, that have enabled me to act as a catalyst for learning. As with my participants, when people with similar needs come together, there is the possibility for them to learn from each other and to use that knowledge in a wider context.

I am not a specialist in inclusive education. An example that Moore (2013) provides, however, of a teacher who tried to understand and dismantle barriers that pupils experienced due to the society they were living in, confirms the importance of my attempt *“to make inclusive education happen wherever we are and with whatever resources we happen to have at hand”* (p. 193). Although she highlights issues of inclusion with children, its relevance is equally significant for adults.

Holik *et al* (1980: 3) emphasise the importance of knowing ourselves so that we can know others:

All of us try to understand the behavior *(sic)* of other people, but such understanding is particularly important for those in leadership roles. The group leader, teacher, parent … can benefit by having a better understanding of why people do what they do …

One means of gaining this ability is to gain an understanding of one’s self.

This research, therefore, has said as much about me as it has the participants I taught. Understanding my approach to teaching and learning was essential if I was to support others. For the purpose of this thesis, sharing some of my story was necessary for this to occur. I wanted to become aware of the thinking behind my learning so that I could appreciate how some participants might feel when put in an academic situation, which, I hope, changed my approach to the way I taught.

**SECTION 3: THE WORKPLACE**

Teaching maths and English for Creative Care was to enable participants to enhance their job role. This section considers some of the background that enabled learning to occur in the workplace.

**3.1 Lifelong learning (LL)**

An understanding that the ability to learn does not peak at adolescence, but develops throughout life (Maslow, 1943; Knowles, 1980; Rogers, 1983) has resulted in the advocacy of increased public participation in LL in the workplace. Its aim is to enable individual development and fulfilment of potential (Aldridge & Tuckett, 2004; 2010). In the 1990s, the government (DfEE, 1998; Gibson & Asthana, 1998; Sylva, 2001) believed this created opportunities that would benefit families, neighbourhoods and the nation. This belief was considered to have credence twenty years later (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2012). Dave (1976: 36), one of the earlier advocates of lifelong education (LE), defines these benefits as *“a process of accomplishing personal, social and professional development throughout the lifespan of individuals in order to enhance the quality of life of both individuals and their collectives”*.

Field & Leicester (2000: 18) believe that

when either term (‘lifelong learning’ or ‘lifelong education’) are used they are almost always used approvingly. There is, therefore, a normative dimension ... it may be that it is because ‘lifelong learning’ carries approval, and suggests a learning throughout life which is worthwhile, that it tends to be used interchangeably with ‘lifelong education’ though the latter term may, perhaps, be less likely to include non-formal and informal learning *[brackets are in original text]*.

It is interesting that Field & Leicester are of the opinion that both LL and LE are almost always used approvingly and interchangeably. That has not been my experience when researching this topic. My understanding of LL is that it is not normative and there are many areas of society where it does not carry approval. The idea is contested, as some do not see its value. Jarvis (2004: 62) for example, explains that education is seen as institutionalised learning:

every institutionalized learning opportunity, having a humanistic basis, directed towards the participant’s development that may occur at any stage in the lifespan. This development might refer to knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and the senses – the whole person.

I cannot see from Jarvis what difference there is between LL and LE and so perhaps Field & Leicester have made a convincing point in not differentiating between the two terms.

It has been contested (Coffield, 1997; Brine, 2005) that LL fulfils an agenda of social control, rather than liberatory possibility. For the purpose of my research, however, I acknowledge that, without government ideals surrounding LL, participants may not have had the opportunity to study in a formalised setting as adults and therefore may not have benefited themselves or society.

The participants were not people who came from academic backgrounds. One wanted a degree, but others told me that they had left school and entered the world of work without being overly concerned about furthering their academic careers. Some were married and had children. Creative Care wanted these people to improve their skills. Most participants had little knowledge of formal learning. Whilst individuals can become lifelong learners even if used to traditional teaching methods, this is a gradual, time-consuming process (Fleck & Fyffe, 1997; Hinchliff, 1998). Not being socialised, cultured, and conditioned to LL can leave people feeling daunted (Gopee, 2001), which is what participants said occurred with them.

There is a growing recognition that the quality of learning support and guidance for adults who may be marginalised in the workplace needs to be enhanced (Norman & Hyland, 2003). Factors often cited within this sphere are anxiety, low self-esteem and a general lack of confidence (Council, 1997). This “*lack of confidence”* (DFES, 2002: 1) was cited specifically in policy documents concerned with the drive to improve basic skills. As Norman & Hyland highlight (2003: 7):

It is, without doubt, a crucial factor in learning – at all levels, not just in relation to basic skills – but discussions of the role of confidence are often conceptually imprecise, psychologically naïve and, consequently, of little practical use to teachers and lecturers.

It is this area of confidence in learning that my research findings discovered and that I discuss later in this chapter.

**3.2 Educational needs in the workplace**

Dewey (1916: 47) believed that mass education could only occur in societies where there is an affinity between people, and where there is *"adequate provision for the reconstruction of social habits and institutions by means of wide stimulation arising from equitably distributed interests."* His vision of education was linked with preparing people for active citizenship in a participatory democracy.

Dewey constantly supported the need for minds to be inquisitive and critical, so that education in the 20th century could provide both economic success and a democratic workforce. Those who were compliant and uncritical would not be able to support new approaches to work that were starting to emerge. Whilst not defined as WPL, the *“experimental method”* (Hook, 1940: 295/96; Dewey, 1963: 89) share similar characteristics and can be seen as one of its forerunners. Real experiences were used to teach. This method encouraged people to examine and research what was occurring in their lives, in order to develop a technical and critical understanding of their environment (Wagner & Childs, 2000).

Fuller & Unwin (2005) attempt to identify notions of work as opposed to views of learning on a job. Work, they claim, is a challenging experience, can be personally empowering and is a structure in life. Learning, they contest, has been identified as obtaining skills to survive, is a continuous lifelong process and enables people to change. Interestingly, they do not mention in what ways a person changes, or how both work and learning, the whole concept of WPL, can become a combined experience so that the sum is greater than the parts, potentially enhancing personal, job and learning activities. Although tests had to be taken and a national standard was being worked towards, my participants changed their thinking about their learning from needing it for their job, to personal development. They knew, however, that there was pressure to complete formal learning:

**Zoya: And the company is saying you’ve got to do this course … What do you think they will get out of it from you? Why are they getting you to do the course?**

Luke: I’ve been doing the job which I do at Level 3 *[a level concerned with his job role]* for 7 years anyway. I started the NVQ 3 a few years ago and then had a family bereavement … and I ended up coming off the course because I couldn’t cope with it at the time … I’m still doing the job but … they’re insisting I do the course now …

 when I originally became a 3, I was taught on the job. Times change. Now everybody needs a piece of paper …

 And I can understand that, don’t get me wrong, I can understand that.

**Zoya: Right, they want the evidence for it.**

Luke: Yes, even though the evidence is there the day I came into the job. I understand you need paperwork and it’s important these days.

Without the piece of paper, participants would struggle to improve their opportunities for job advancement or have the opportunity to move jobs. In some instances jobs may even be downgraded (Unison, 2014).

There are other issues to this change, however. It is possible that through this learning there could be a demarcation of class. Field (1996) quotes Bourdieu’s discussion about taste creating a message of social position and worth. The more people study, it seems, the more important and valuable they are to society. Knowledge can isolate people and by implication create a two-tier society. It may stop people from belonging to their community and a sense of isolation might occur as they challenge previous assumptions. Rather than enabling learning to bring people closer together, it could ghettoise our society (Jansen & van der Veen, 1996). Harrison (1996) is more positive. He abounds in ideas about what learning for life actually is. He links education to personal skills that can be developed in order to create transferable qualities that can then be used in industry, leisure or at home. Learning can be enhancing in that a critical awareness allows for a deeper perception to evolve. The problem with this idea is that, although skills may be developed, friends, family and colleagues may experience a sense of inadequacy in their presence. Conflict in the workplace may also occur if some develop at a faster academic rate than others.

A learner in the workplace is exposed to conflicting political agenda and has multiple reference points as an individual, a worker and a member of society (Tennant, 2000).

**SECTION 4: CHANGES IN THINKING**

**4.1 Confidence in learning**

By the end of their maths and English course, confidence appears to have increased with all participants. Is it possible, however, to assess the growth of confidence? I hope that this research does so in some way.

According to Vygotsky, when adults undergo a dramatic shift in their notions of confidence, they experience a change in their belief structure, which can be developmental (Vygotsky, 1987; Vygotsky & Luria, 1994). As with any significant transformation in perspective, however, it can also be accompanied by uncertainty, adversity and resistance. Challenges to the way we think is unsettling (Atherton, 1999), and, as highlighted in the previous section, community responses may vary.

Burton (1987: 314) used the following table as her example of how the learning mentality changed in her class when teaching adults mathematics using a teaching/learning model that included learner autonomy.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Initial feelings** | changed to | **Subsequent feelings** |
| Emphasis on competition |  | Collaboration |
| Individual work | Group work |
| Knowing | Enquiring |
| Emphasis on answers | Questions |
| Formalisation | Informality |
| Substantiation | Conjecturing |
| Replication | Creation |

 Table 9

Like me, she realised that emotional changes took place whilst studying. Although she briefly highlights the benefits that her students gained outside the classroom, the emphasis is what takes place in class.

From an assessment viewpoint it is more evident where change occurred from the start to the end of the course.

The changes that I found with my participants were more indirect. The differences needed to be shown more clearly than with Burton, which is what I attempted to do in this thesis. Based on what the participants told me, my findings show the changes that seemed to have occurred at work and at home.

The following table is what appeared to take place with my participants.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Initial feelings** | changed to | **Subsequent feelings** |
| Lack of confidence |  | Confidence |
| Perception of stupidity |  | Believing they could achieve |
| Wanting answers | Asking questions |
| Learning takes place in a classroom | Learning can occur anywhere |
| Learning is to pass tests | Learning provides opportunities at home and at work |

 Table 10

The participants realised that they absorbed information through varied approaches. It was therefore important to offer an assortment of tasks for the whole class, groups and individuals, in order to increase the level of interaction in the classroom. It was their motivation to learn, however, that built confidence and a positive self-image. This attitude encouraged them to change their perspective and approach to learning. Had the group not wanted to learn, then my teaching style may not have stimulated interest. Whereas I attempted to present subjects as active, investigational and enquiry-based, it was up to the participants to take them up as a challenge. My aim was that it enabled them to reconsider their image of study and of their relationship to it.

I could surmise from this research that tutors and learners enter into a symbiotic relationship when learners’ discover more about themselves and the way they learn. Confidence is built. I could have highlighted aspects that may show the tutor – me - as all-important. It is not, however, about the tutor. It may even be despite the tutor that confidence develops. Education is not a top-down process of change in the cultural behaviour and thinking of a learner simply due to their contact with their tutors. I do not believe that one person can impose confidence on another, although they can be influenced. From this research it seems that individuals discover who they are and how they feel by experience.

**4.2 Personal reflection of maths**

I failed my maths “O” level three times, obtaining ungraded on each occasion. My appreciation of the fear of failure, not understanding the ways I was taught and the inability to perceive the relevance of maths in my life, enables me, perhaps, to empathise with learners’ concerns with maths. Does my background however, qualify me to be a teacher or facilitator of learning who can enable others to understand and pass maths tests? It’s more than my background – it’s about the passion I have about learning – that’s what I bring (from journal).

My relationship with maths was destructive. I did not think that I understood mathematical ideas. I now wonder whether it was not so much the lack of comprehension that affected my approach to life, but my resistance to the topic due to a fear of maths. Wedege & Evans (2006) consider mathematical resistance and they highlight issues that are pertinent to me. Their comments also proved to be relevant to the participants. Whereas other researchers I highlight are significant to the research, Wedege & Evans strike a particular chord within me. The feeling of inadequacy and confidence appear interlaced in their research, as in mine.

education is experienced by adults as a field of tension between felt needs concerning what one wants to learn - or has to learn - and various constraints ... This set of conflicts is a background to adults’ learning processes (Wedege & Evans, 2006: 29).

Although Wedege & Evans state that resistance to learning maths is often quoted as being linked to motivation, they challenge that idea. They explore the needs and conflicts in adults’ lives. They examine maths in the context of work. Their research encompassed *“people’s resistance … as interrelated with their motivation and their competence and thus as containing the potential to be a crucial factor in all types of learning”* (2006: 28).

Wedege & Evans produce two accounts of interconnected motivation and resistance to learning mathematics in two adults’ lives. My concern with what motivated adults had similarities to their findings, but I probed more into how participants articulated their feelings about their learning experiences.

My experience with learners has been that, when an individual struggles with a particular subject, barriers are created against which further learning cannot seem to occur. Whatever the subject an individual struggles with, formal school learning could have created those barriers. This was so with Bertha, in maths, and Maya, with English. At school, they had constantly been told that they were stupid and this judgement of themselves carried through into adulthood, as it did with me.

This inability to learn due to feelings of inadequacy can be interpreted as a lack of motivation or laziness and the symptom described as non-learning (Wedege & Evans, 2006), where people do not absorb information.

When thinking about maths, the issues that Wedege & Evans highlight about fear and uncertainty come to the fore. When I compared my experiences with those of the participants, I realised that the qualifications I had gained as an adult were important achievements because it broke the perception of academic inadequacy that I had carried for years. My experience of accomplishment when gaining a maths qualification, however, was somewhat different. I had overcome a mental block because it was in this area that I believed I was particularly incompetent. Despite now teaching maths, prior to studying for this thesis, this view of stupidity predominantly rested on my conviction that I was incapable of understanding even the most basic mathematical ideas.

**SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS**

**5.1 Further research and contribution to education**

The research has given me an appreciation of learner experiences in the workplace.

Longworth (1999) stated that education providers at all levels had to start focusing on the needs of people as learners. I believe it is important to find out why, when, what and how people prefer to learn. Researchers could discover new learning methods, identify the basic skills that people need in order to improve their learning and use varied education delivery technologies and tools to provide different ways of learning.

The Skills Strategy White Paper, launched in July 2003 and adapted in 2010 (Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2010), committed the British Government to meet the skills challenges required for the 21st Century for the United Kingdom. This initiative was used to encourage employers to develop the necessary skill sets in their businesses to help them to compete with other similar organisations throughout the world. Success was defined both fiscally and emotionally. For this to happen, businesses were being encouraged to help employees develop maths and English skills.

Established by Government in April 2008, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) provides various reports and policies, including employee demands for skills (2009). This and other reports, such as those written by The Committee of Public Accounts appointed by the House of Commons (2009), on the progress made by the Government's Skills for Life Strategy, admits that research into the benefits to the country of developing academic skills in the workplace is still in its infancy:

Lack of up to date information on the skills of the population nationally, and by region, means that the Department cannot be sure that its programmes are equipping people with the skills that the UK economy needs to remain competitive (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2009).

Research could take place to find out if staff performance, for companies such as Creative Care, improves due to the teaching of maths and English in the workplace. If so, could this change ensure survival in a competitive world?

There are also challenges for tutors that could be pursued as further research. My findings could be tested with different sized groups in locations around the world. My participants came from a care background who needed to update their maths and English – would this approach suit people in other jobs, in other countries, with different skills, cultural backgrounds and academic abilities? Would my findings still be feasible had I used a college, rather than a private training company?

What builds confidence in adult learners? What are the perspectives of those being taught? Tutors may be able to appreciate the struggles learners experience and help them to recognise that those struggles are part of their development. How influential is the tutor in the way people gain confidence when learning through the workplace? Is attempting to encourage autonomous learning preferable to other forms of teaching?

This leads me to suggest that organisations such as private training companies, further education colleges and the Workers Educational Association (WEA) could reflect on the impact their teaching or management approach has on those they teach. It has been suggested that learning varies considerably between individuals, causing frustrations and boredom when intervention instruction is delivered in a one size fits all manner (Balfanz *et al*, 2004). My experience has helped me to realise that I need to be careful who and how I teach, as my approach does not meet everyone’s needs. Other tutors could explore the impact they have on learners by considering their own needs and their teaching approach. Exploring autoethnography and reflection might enable that process.

If people need to improve their maths and English skills as part of a vocational course, as did my participants, then I suggest that these subjects are more heavily incorporated into vocational study than they already are (Reece *et al*, 2003). Context is crucial for learners of any age. If this does not occur, then for adults, the sense of being back at school might put them off wanting to learn in a formal environment (Wedege & Evans, 2006). In that individuals are now regularly asked to improve their skills for the jobs they do, I think it is important that teaching takes place with this in mind. If not, *“An explicit rejection of education may form a deeply rooted and recurring component of some individuals' sense of themselves and their place in the world”* (Crossan *et al*, 2003).

I want this research to contribute to knowledge relating to adults at work who attend short courses. The findings could be of significance to organisations that consider the design and delivery of formal courses. These may include the WEA and NIACE. The results could add to a *“growing bank of research and knowledge that advocates for the effectiveness and importance of student participation, connection and a sense of belonging as antecedents to positive learning outcomes”* (Tinker *et al*, 2012: 8). I hope it advances the understanding of participant perceptions of the ability to learn and succeed academically.

**5.2 Recommendations for WPL**

I do not think that employers are in need of employees who can merely pass tests. They need people who work effectively. It would be more profitable to measure employees’ abilities to adapt and evolve as conditions change, rather than see what tests they passed. Quantifying these improvements, however, is difficult.

Performance indicators for tracking progress is favoured by OFSTED (2015), but should be used sympathetically. It can become too easy for tutors and companies employing them to focus exclusively on exam success, rather than exploring how to develop the whole person. This thinking can also override any consideration of promoting self-efficacy, with tutors failing to provide challenging lessons, but spoon-feeding learners to help them pass tests (Fuller & Unwin, 2005).

In many ways, WPL appears feasible and reasonable. There are, however, several issues that I suggest need to be addressed for it to work successfully for both employers and employees.

For those at Creative Care and other organisations interested in continuing the promotion of learning opportunities for their employees, I think it is necessary to ensure that the teaching selected is flexible, relevant, authentic and closely related to workplace needs. Empowering employees in ways that enables them to be more skilled, knowledgeable, autonomous and self-directing is important (**Garrick & Usher,** 2000), as self-perception may change which could have beneficial effects on the workplace.

Employees could suggest how they, as individuals, could be used in their jobs. Companies could provide a framework in which they are comfortable to help this to occur. Analysis of what has been learnt and how the knowledge could be used may provide other learning opportunities.

Fuller & Unwin (2005: 24) considered study in the workplace as recognising that *“learning is not the primary goal… but a by-product of engagement in the activities and relationships involved in the production of goods or services”*. As a consequence, *“any analysis of learning at work should be located within a wider analysis of the organizational context within which it is embedded. Basic questions relating to who is learning what, why and how, can then be more effectively addressed if there is a backdrop of knowledge about the organisation”* (ibid). As Fuller and Unwin contend, understanding its purpose, the way in which work is organised, how skills are distributed and jobs are designed, as well as how staff inter-relate and are managed, might help some employees to understand how they may best be able to contribute. No matter who delivers WPL, experience has taught me that it needs to be a service that is fit for purpose, meeting the needs of both employees and employers.

The government, businesses, colleges, independent training organisations, the WEA, NIACE and those participating in WPL need to be continually reminded that individuals require time to develop, which can have both a financial and emotional implication. Differentiation takes time and effort. Ticking boxes to say that study is completed is not the same as someone actually learning and using it.

As will be read, financial problems, and teaching maths and English, are problematic for organisations involved in WPL. With a recommendation at the end, the next part highlights current issues that some companies and tutors may be facing.

**5.3 Concerns regarding WPL for maths and English**

Having changed from Key Skills to Functional Skills in 2012, tutors teaching maths and English are now being told that this qualification may be removed for some apprenticeships. This has already begun within early years provision (Pearson, 2014):

With maths & English skills provision remaining firmly in the educational spotlight the debate continues over which qualifications are best suited to meet the needs of the next generation of learners.

The biggest question remaining in this debate is whether GCSEs or Functional Skills should be used to deliver maths & English training within Apprenticeships. As things currently stand, a recent GCSE at grades A\*-C serves to exempt a learner from further study as part of their apprenticeship. If further study is required, however, then Functional Skills are the preferred option for many providers, as their focus on practical application often appeals to learners in a way that the academic qualifications fail to manage.

The implication for tutors is that courses will need rewriting. The major concern I have, however, is that currently, as stated above, GCSEs are more theoretical than practical and applying the knowledge to the workplace could prove to be a challenge. GCSEs may not meet the needs of the learner, but tutors will be required to try to ensure that they do. A discussion held by Butler *et al* in The Guardian (2014) supports the suggestion that this type of change could have a significant negative impact on apprenticeships (Industry Qualifications Ltd, 2014; tesconnect, 2014).

An ongoing concern for tutors is that the money given to companies and educational establishments to teach Functional Skills is being reduced (Industry Qualifications Ltd, 2014) and the number of teaching hours are consequently being cut back. The impact is that some colleges do not find these courses financially viable and so their business departments are being closed down, with staff being made redundant. This occurred to me with two colleges I worked with in the north of England within three years of each other.

Even private training companies like Katya’s are affected. She asked me to work for Creative Care once again. I turned her down. This extract from my email to her explains why.

I am uneasy that Creative Care *[some of whose staff have been my participants in this research]* has chosen to override the recommendation that the government has made for learners to have 45 guided learning hours per qualification. Reducing the teaching time to 30 hours – 1/3 less time than suggested - is substantial …

Building confidence in adult learners who are studying maths and English in the workplace has become my area of expertise over the past two years and I am passionate about people being given the best learning opportunities possible. I am also realistic enough to know that the government does not pay for what it says it wants and I can understand where Creative Care may be coming from.

The company wants two tutors, which meets their needs. Sadly, it does not meet mine.

Take travel at around £20, a three-hour round trip, tax and national insurance out of the £85 fee *[half-day rate]* and what I would earn is minimal. If I was a new tutor who needed the experience, I would have considered it. I am no longer that person.

If tutors are to continue to teach Functional Skills or GCSEs to adults in the workplace, I suggest that governments address issues concerned with time, money and a realisation that some adults, who attend formal courses, may lack confidence in learning. To enable adults in the workplace to succeed academically, as the government claims it wants people to do (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2010), then I think learner needs have to be addressed. As Crossan *et al* (2003: 58) highlight, there is an *“interplay between the social and economic structures which shape people's lives, the educational institutions which determine the processes of engagement with learning, and the learners themselves”*. For British society to work effectively, I suggest that all three threads need to be addressed when formal learning in the workplace is considered.

**SECTION 6: FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

I hope the research is seen as being rich with descriptions. I was keen to avoid the research being *“devoid of human emotion and self-reflection”* (Krizek, 1998: 93)*.* Both the approach and my analysis of the thesis changed as confidence and clarity developed about what it was I needed to write about. My voice emerged over several years and I slowly began realise what I wanted to say. My objective has been to use that voice to enable others to realise some of their potential. *"The teacher's role is to provide the path to independence – a goal of all educators"* (Bodrova & Leong, 1996: 3).

I cannot hope to get inside someone’s mind. What I can do, however, is to listen, question and create a safe space for people to develop. McLeod (1998: 256) states that *“Often the first steps in initiating change involve not direct action but creating a framework for understanding what is happening, and how things might be different”*. Encountering a rigorous re-evaluation of who I am and how I have learnt through this doctorate has enabled me to consider how others might feel when confronted with learning situations that seem beyond their capability.

I hope that this research will enable tutors to become more sensitive to learner perspectives. I also hope that my teaching will become more effective, having listened to participant needs and examined my own.

researchers want to have a look around at what people in some other group are doing, or what people in their own group are doing, and sometimes even at what the researchers themselves are doing and feeling (Wolcott, 2003: vii).

The perspective on my thesis changed and the scope of the study developed in a different way than I had originally thought it would. The struggles I experienced, because I felt I could not achieve this doctorate, slowly diminished. I never considered myself to be an *“academic”* (The Chambers Dictionary, 1998: 7) which can be described both as *“theoretical only, of no practical importance or consequence”* (ibid) and *“scholarly”* (p. 1476) – *“someone whose learning is extensive and exact”* (ibid). I never wanted to be the former and I hope I am in the process of being the latter. I love learning, in whatever form that may be, and it is this passion that has kept me going. The meanings that surfaced from my reflections have provided me with new understandings and viewpoints.

In my work I have become more confident because of researching educational ideas. I have developed a depth of knowledge. Knowing a little brought me little confidence. Ignorance made me vulnerable. I am now able to back up my feelings and thoughts with the theories and experiences of others. Comparing and contrasting my knowledge to theirs has made me a more rounded person. The impact this has had on me as a trainer and tutor is that it has, I hope, made me more able and more sensitive to learner needs.

It has taken me more years than I had anticipated to write this thesis. My understanding of concepts, the academic approach I have had to learn, illness and isolation in my work life have been both difficult and enriching. I have continuously reconsidered my ideas about how both teaching and learning affect confidence. Butler (1990: 30) highlights that learning is not a simple, straightforward or linear process, but rather *“an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete”.* Understanding elements of my educational background and attitude to confidence helped me to appreciate contrasting ways of approaches to learning. These experiences have also given me time to develop my professional life as a trainer and tutor, deepening my support of those I meet on a professional basis. The person I have become is mentally and emotionally different from the one I was when I began. As Oscar Wilde apparently said, experience is one thing you can't get for nothing.

*“Completed”* is the term used when a learner has achieved an academic qualification in workplaces I have taught in. Success is concerned with the completion of a course that is quantifiable in recognised academic terms, as completions bring in funding for organisations. Whereas I appreciate that a recognised qualification is valuable and commendable, my way of working and my mentality is not immediately concerned with academic and monetary issues. I view courses - opportunities for formalised learning - as a kick-start to new opportunities. I see success as the change in individuals' self-perception and their ability to learn. If people gain confidence, find skills to manage their work and life, or develop abilities that they had not realised they had, then I think that an indefinable, incalculable qualification – potential being realised – is as important as any piece of paper.

Confidence consists of positive expectations for favourable outcomes. Confidence influences the willingness to invest - to commit money, time, reputation, emotional energy, or other resources - or to withhold or hedge investment. This investment, or its absence, shapes the ability to perform. In that sense, confidence lies at the heart of civilization. Everything about an economy, a society, an organization, or a team depend on it. Every step we take, every investment we make, is based on whether we feel we can count on ourselves and others to accomplish what has been promised. Confidence determines whether our steps – individually or collectively – are tiny and tentative or big and bold (Kanter, 2004: 8).

The learning continues…

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

Participant Information Letter

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a small-scale, University of Sheffield research project that will take place between July 2014 and December 2014. Its working title is:

**Workplace Learning: Telling Stories, Exploring Confidence**

Before you make a decision, it is important for you to understand why I am doing the research and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information that follows. Talk with others if you would like to. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please talk to me. Take time to decide if you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

I am a freelance tutor who works for both colleges and private training organisations to support adults who are returning to formal learning whilst still at work.

You have been chosen for the research because I want to understand how people like you, in full-time work and who are studying maths and English, feel about learning in a classroom environment. I want to understand what helps you to learn and how the way I teach has an impact on you. I will also examine my own feelings about learning and compare some of your experiences with mine.

The research will take place with your group, which will consist of up to 15 people, where you study. Semi-structured interviews will be arranged over the five months of your course, which takes place for one day a week. I plan to spend approximately ½ hour at a time with you on up to three separate occasions.

You may decide to speak with me privately afterwards about anything that has been discussed on a one-to-one basis. This may then form part of a vignette. If you are unhappy with any of the questions or answers you have provided, they will be not be included in the research.

I want to audio record the sessions to make sure that I have been accurate when writing about what you have said. The data will be kept on an encrypted secure area of my personal computer and deleted once I have written confirmation that my viva and thesis have been successfully completed.

I hope you will feel that you will be able to talk freely. Your words will be confidential and no-one will know your identity. Pseudonyms will be used from the start. Dates, times and locations will be changed. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. The project, which will never contain identities, will be written confidentially and kept in the University of Sheffield Library. The data may also be used in publications in journals and at conferences.

As I continue to write up the project, you will be able to listen back to the recordings and you can ask me to show you my work at any time. You can change or ask to have removed any part of my work that you have been involved with. I will ask you for your reasons so that I can understand your thinking. I may ask you to let me use my thoughts in the research, but add your comments which show your thoughts. You will always have the final say and if you are not happy with anything, I will remove it permanently.

There are no known or anticipated physical or psychological risks to taking part in this study. It is possible, though, that you might become unsettled due to thinking about your learning experiences and you might find the need to relax after the interviews.

I assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Sheffield. In addition, the University’s Research Committee has approved it. By this, I mean that the University of Sheffield has checked that everything is fair.

If you have any questions about the study, or if you would like more information to help you in reaching a decision, please feel free to contact me at the University of Sheffield: xxx

If you want more information about anything that I am doing, or you are concerned in any way about your participation in this study, or wish to make a complaint, please contact my supervisors:

Dr. Jerry Wellington and Dr. Anita Franklin

Email or phone: xxx

If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, please contact the university registrar: xxx

You decide if you want to take part. There is no pressure to do so and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time. Let me know in writing.

Please complete the attached consent form. You will be given a copy and I invite you to keep this letter with it.

Thank you for your interest and support of this research.

Yours faithfully,

Zoya Zuvcenko

**APPENDIX B**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Participant Consent Form

|  |
| --- |
| **Title of Project: Workplace Learning : Telling Stories, Exploring Confidence**Titles**Workplace Learning: Telling Stories, Exploring Confidence****Name of Researcher: Zoya Zuvcenko**Participant Identification for this project: **Please initial box**1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information letterdated *[insert date]* for the above project and have hadthe opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason to: xxx
3. I understand that whatever I say will not be able to be identified as me.
4. I agree to be recorded.
5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Name of Participant DateSignature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Researcher DateSignature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  |

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**APPENDIX C**

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| --- |
| **Initial thoughts**I hope to discover what affirmations, if any, my participants experience and recognise from their learning. This challenges me to consider whether I should ask direct questions about my learners’ feelings, as I am interested to know their thoughts on this. Alternatively, should I leave it to be discussed should it occur? How much will I influence the thinking? How much will I draw out thoughts that I want to hear in my approach to the discussions?**Questions**Is it important to be encouraged? What makes you feel good about your learning? What makes you think that? |
| What are you good at? Does study every help you to improve those skills? How? Do you want to develop your abilities? What impact do these skills have on your life? What impact do they have on others – family friends, local community, country, international? |
| Do you feel you have achieved anything by studying? If so, what? If not, why not?Have you ever thought about these words: self-esteem, confidence, motivation?What is your perception of success as linked to adult education? |
| What is their comfort zone as far as learning is concerned? What makes them feel uncomfortable? Where does this come from? I want to know what makes them comfortable or uncomfortable in their learning and the impact it has on them as learners and on their lives. |
| Are there any critical incidents that you are aware of that have affected your study? *Do learners understand what this means? What could I use instead?*Did these incidents encourage you to continue studying? Are there any events (critical incidents) that encouraged you into formal learning? |
| *Did any of the learners drop out of a course? If so, what and why? What might have encouraged them to complete?* |
| How much effort do you put into your learning? How much time do you give your learning? What stops you from studying more? Who decides how many hours a week you study for? Has this ever varied? How? Why? What might be the impact of spending more time studying – to you, your family, other parts of your life? |
| Can you show that you have learnt, rather than just passing a test, which may be a memory game? – *Assumption!*Does the time regarding when you last studied have any impact on your confidence? |
| Do you understand what hidden skills you have? Do you believe you have any hidden skills? Do you understand the meaning behind having tacit skills? What might they be? Why are they hidden? What has stopped you from showing these skills? |
| *What impact does parental qualifications have on these learners and confidence? Background of studies since leaving school. Brief background of the learners – age, perceived class currently and previously, ethnicity, gender, current job. What impact have past and present experiences had on the way individuals learn now?* Since leaving school, have you done any form of AE? Why? When? What was it? |
| How much has your learning expanded your role and identity beyond the classroom?How do you describe yourself? E.g., pupil, student….*Do they see themselves as a student, trainer.....?**What are they good at doing? What makes them think this?* *My questions will ask them if they’re motivated to develop those skills if so, why, if not why not.* |
| What are you studying? *Or choose other words according to how they describe their studies.*  Why are you taking this course? For how long have you been studying this course? When did you last do any study before what you are doing now? What was it? When was it? When you have completed this course, would you like to continue studying? Why? To do what? If you had not been invited to do so, would you have considered studying? Why? Would you like to continue with learning? Why? To do what? |
| What are the needs and values in their lives? |
| How important are the peer groups and the relationships you have with other learners? |
| *How do they view education and training? Do they have any antipathy? If so, what caused it? What impact might this have had on their secm (self-esteem confidence and motivation)? Has their adult experience of formal study been ongoing or have there been long stretches when they have not studied? Does being away from it or being familiar with it make any difference to secm? What assumptions and expectations do learners have about their learning? How do I find this out?* What has been the difference between learning as a child and learning as an adult? Do you think of your studies as learning, studies or do you give it another word? Do you think that what you are studying/learning now as an adult has more, less or the same importance as when you were learning at school? What makes you think this? Has anything stopped you from learning? Y/N. Who? What? Has anything or anyone helped you to learn? Who? What? e.g., family, friends, work, hobby. What do you think successful means? Do you think that studying will make you more successful? If you had not been invited to do so, would you have considered studying? Why? Would you like to continue with learning? Why? To do what? What would help you to learn now? How do you learn? |
|  |
| *Coles and Wall describe the sense of powerlessness their participants feel regarding their position in life. How much do my participants feel the same?* Has anything prevented you from learning? What do you think this is? |
| An issue around pre-enrolment and enrolment - how important was it to be prepared/have been given information/that people checked that you knew exactly what you were letting yourself into before studying? (Grace & Smith). |
| Do you like classroom study? Why? What kind of study would you ideally do? Preference? What do you dislike about learning? Why? What's your favourite number of learners in a class? Why? *Now irrelevant to my studies?* |
| Have you had any experience of being pressurised to succeed at school, or as an adult? What does pressurised mean to you? What kind of pressure did you experience? What causes anxiety and tension in learning, if anything? |
| Does the subject matter make a difference to self-esteem, confidence and motivation? If so, how? |
| *I am interested to know how my participants feel about taking tests and from where this feeling has originated.* Is it different now to when you were a child? Yes/no? How? Why? |
| Are you a traditional learner? *What defines this?*  |
| *How important is it to be able to transfer skills and knowledge? Is it something that my participants can do? Is it relevant to them? What are they good at doing? What makes them think this?*  |
| Has your study transformed you in any way? How? Do you feel you have achieved anything by studying? If so, what? If not, why not? |
| *Impact of tutors/teachers on their learning.* Has a tutor ever used what you are good at to help you to learn your skills to enhance CHANGE TO HELP WITH your learning? For example, if you enjoy cooking, has a tutor ever explained how maths is used in cooking? If the tutor has used those skills, how were they used? How did it made you feel? If the tutor has used those skills, how were they used? Have you ever been given a learning styles questionnaire? If so, how was it used? Does being graded make a difference to you? Has a tutor ever used your skills to enhance your learning? How? If the tutor has used those skills, how were they used? How did it made you feel?Do you prefer to have a grade for your work/exam? Why? why not? How does a grade make you feel? Why? What might that feeling depend on e.g., subject, tutor, nothing in particular. |
| What are your reasons for learning? Are they bound up with other parts of your life? As well as doing something for yourself, are you doing it for anyone or anything else? Does the learning have any relevance to your life? What do you enjoy about your learning? Why do you learn? |

**APPENDIX D**

**Second selection of questions**

1. What was your schooling like?
2. What education have you had as an adult?
3. What has influenced your experiences, perceptions, beliefs and values regarding learning?
4. What has affected the way you learn?
5. What is your perception of success as linked to adult education?
6. Talk to me about past learning experiences.
7. What makes you feel good about your learning? What makes you think that?
8. What do you enjoy about learning? Why?
9. What do you dislike about learning? Why?
10. Has anything stopped you from learning? What do you think this is?
11. How confident do you feel about learning?
12. Has a tutor ever used your skills to enhance your learning? How? If the tutor has used those skills, how were they used? How did it made you feel?
13. How important is the recognition of previous skills by the tutor to you? Why?
14. Do you think that studying will make you more successful?
15. What does the word successful mean to you?
16. Do you feel you have achieved anything by studying? If so, what? If not, why not?
17. What's your favourite number of learners in a class? Why?
18. Have you ever been given a learning styles questionnaire? How has it been used?
19. Why has the company allowed you time to study?
20. Benefits from the course you took?
21. What counts as worthwhile knowledge?
22. What ambitions did you have as children?
23. Cultural background?
24. What does learning mean to you?
25. What affects the way you learn?
26. Do you prefer to have a grade for your work/exam? Why? why not? How does a grade make you feel? Why? What might that feeling depend on e.g., subject, tutor, nothing in particular
27. What would help you to learn now? How do you learn?
28. How do family and friends feel about your learning?
29. What learning do you do at home? How do you achieve it?
30. Who agreed to you taking time off to study?
31. Is there any kind of control that you felt the company had over you and your learning?
32. Any future plans for learning?
33. How do you describe your time at work?

**APPENDIX E About Levels**

The table below illustrates where the curriculum framework fits alongside standards for Functional Skills and national qualifications. While qualifications can have similarities in terms of expectations on the learner, they can vary greatly in terms of content and duration.

**This table shows the relationship for comparative purposes. It does not imply that all learners will progress incrementally from one milestone to the next. It should not be seen as promoting incremental (or vertical) progress; lateral progress or maintenance of skills may be the most appropriate forms of progress for a learner.**

**Although difficult to make comparisons, generally P is for pre-16 and E is for adults.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   |   |   |  | Functional Skills Level 5 | National qualificationsframeworkLevel 5 |
|   |   |   |  | Functional Skills Level 4 | National qualificationsframeworkLevel 4 |
|   |   |  A Level | NVQLevel 3 | Functional Skills Level 3 | National qualifications frameworkLevel 3 |
|   | Literacy/NumeracyLevel 2 |  GCSEGrades A-C | NVQLevel 2 | Functional Skills Level 2 | National qualifications frameworkLevel 2 |
| NationalCurriculumLevel 5 | AdultLiteracy/NumeracyLevel 1 |   GCSEGrades D-G | NVQLevel 1 | Functional Skills Level 1 | National qualificationsframeworkLevel 1 |
| NationalCurriculumLevel 4 |
| NationalCurriculumLevel 3 | AdultLiteracy/NumeracyEntry 3 |   |   |  | Entry and P Levels |
| NationalCurriculumLevel 2 | AdultLiteracy/NumeracyEntry 2 |
| NationalCurriculumLevel 1 | AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Entry 1 |
|   | AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 8 |   |   |  | Pre-entry Level |
| AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 7 |   |
| AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 6 |   |
| AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 5 |   |
| AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 4 |   |
| AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 3(b)/3(a) |   |
| AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 2(b)/2(a) |   |
| AdultLiteracy/Numeracy: Milestone 1(b)/1(a) |   |

APPENDIX F CHARTS

Themes – group

**Themes – Katya**

**Themes – cameos with Maya**

Themes – cameos with Luke

Themes – cameos with Sasha

Themes – cameo with Bertha

