

**PRACTISING WHAT WE PREACH:  
A STUDY OF PEDAGOGICAL INTERACTIONS  
IN THE CONTEXT OF TEACHER EDUCATION.**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Leicester**

**by**

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# **Practising what we preach: a study of pedagogical interactions in the context of teacher education.**

**Patricia Margaret Stafford.**

## **Abstract**

This thesis describes an investigation into the important process of communication between tutors and student teachers in the context of teacher education. In particular it investigates the learning dialogue which takes place in the context of 'whole class' talk, and considers whose authority is being called upon or deferred to, both implicitly and explicitly, in these contexts – that is to say, whose 'voices' are being heard.

The research takes the form of two case studies of individual tutors, each interacting with a student group as part of the taught sessions within their course. It adopts a broadly qualitative methodology and its data comprise transcriptions taken from video recordings of the whole class sections of these sessions, the analysis of which is guided by a framework drawn from the literature reviewed.

The studies identify a number of techniques and approaches used by the tutors in these contexts. Most importantly, findings indicate that friendly empathetic relationships with the students are actively created by the tutors and are a fundamentally important means of shaping the talk and attempting to support learning. Evidence indicates that the strength of the student voice varies, but that, notwithstanding the relaxed ethos in these classrooms, and despite the constraints of government control, it is ultimately the tutors' voices which prevail.

The thesis argues that personal relationships are an essential and integral part of the meaning created by these students; and that teacher educators must recognise emotional aspects of student teachers' lives to be inseparable from their learning and from their developing confidence as thinking professionals. It is suggested that nurturing these emerging student 'voices' carries with it a heavy responsibility, and that tutors should use these relationships, together with a passion for their subject, to encourage, enthuse, support and even persuade, but not to indoctrinate.

# **Practising what we preach: a study of pedagogical interactions in the context of teacher education.**

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale**

### **1.1 The background**

Extensive research into teaching and learning in schools has pointed to the need for skilful management of the communication process between teachers and pupils. In Higher Education, there has been much debate about the relative merits of learning in large and small groups and some consideration of the influence of general teaching styles and approaches; but little specific focus on the quality of interaction between tutors and students.

In the context of Initial Teacher Education for the primary sector, opinions about the kinds of knowledge and understanding needed by aspiring teachers vary. Tutors working in the sector may need to balance the requirement to conform to the government's view of them as *providers* of teacher *training* with the need to support student teachers in becoming reflective learners and independent thinkers. There may also be tensions between the need for student teachers to acquire the relevant subject knowledge for 'delivery' of the primary curriculum, and finding time for them to engage knowledgeably and confidently with professional issues.

A wide body of research evidence recognises the need for collaborative *construction* of such professional knowledge and understanding through talk, yet few studies have examined the tutor's ability to facilitate and support such talk.

### **1.2 Key lines of enquiry**

The project set out to investigate the complex process of communication between tutors and student teachers in the learning context and in particular the ways in which tutors attempted to create a supportive learning dialogue between themselves and their students.

Set within an Initial Teacher Education course for primary school teachers, this research examined the interactions between tutors and their students in the context of whole class teaching. It focused on the ways in which the tutors guided and shaped this talk in order to support the different learning demands offered by the requirements of this professional course. In doing so, it attempted to identify connections between the communicative practices of the tutor and the students' own use of talk for communicative and cognitive purposes. It is recognised that this was a small scale case study and that any potential for generalisation will therefore be

limited. Nevertheless, in seeking to answer the specific research questions for this study, my aim was to present a rich, detailed picture of interactions between tutors and students in this particular context, which might in turn support professionals in similar or related contexts who wish to ask similar questions of their own practice.

### **1.3 Aims and outline of the research.**

The research project focused on two tutors (including myself) and their student groups, and attempted to examine the interactions of these tutors with their students. The focus institution was a college of Higher Education, (since awarded university college status) which had a strong tradition of teacher education. Its brochure advertised, as one of its strengths, that its relatively small class sizes 'enable an interactive teaching style not possible in large lecture halls'. It was within these groups that the data for this study was collected, and indeed it was the nature and effectiveness of these interactions which were the focus of the research.

The specific aims of the study were:

- to examine and analyse the ways in which the tutors in this study shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in 'whole class' contexts;
- to attempt to identify patterns and connections between the communicative strategies of the lecturers and response from the students;
- to begin to explore the relationship between lecturers' communicative approaches and their students' potential learning;
- to consider whose authority is being called upon or deferred to, both implicitly and explicitly, in these whole class interactions – that is to say, whose 'voices' are being heard;
- To consider whether any generalisations are possible from the case study, and identify any findings which might be useful to the wider community of Initial Teacher Education.

These aims were met by asking the following research questions:

- Taken from a socio-cultural perspective, in what ways do the tutors in this study shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in 'whole class' contexts?

- Whose authority is being called upon or deferred to in this talk? Whose 'voices' are heard both explicitly and implicitly in the whole class dialogue?
- How and to what extent are these voices managed, guided and facilitated by the tutors in the context of this 'whole class talk' - and to what effect?

Using video evidence, two senior lecturers were studied (including the researcher) in teaching sessions near the beginning and the end of the students' course, with a view to achieving depth of analysis rather than attempting to make more generalisable findings from larger numbers of participants or teaching sessions. Transcriptions of the video-tapes were made which were closely examined and analysed using an analytical framework which had been devised in line with key features of classroom discourse distilled from the literature reviewed.

#### **1.4 The relevance of the topic.**

I would argue that the topic under consideration is of fundamental importance to the learning experience of student teachers and to their developing ability to enhance the learning of their pupils. There is a convincing consensus of opinion in the research literature reviewed, that both adults and children need opportunities to talk with others in order to secure understanding for themselves. The work of Vygotsky and Bruner will be cited, for example, to set out the view that ideas are first encountered on the social plane through interaction with others and, through this process, internalised as individual understanding. From this socio-cultural perspective, it follows that the tutors in this study have a vital part to play in mediating the student teachers' understanding. Gaining genuine insights into the effectiveness with which they guide and shape the talk between themselves and their students is therefore of crucial importance.

I will suggest, however, that government bodies take a more instrumental view of learning in relation to 'teacher trainees', laying claim to a view of 'best practice' which must simply be presented to them by their tutors. I will also argue that there are tensions between this view and the need for collaborative reflection in professional education recommended in much of the literature reviewed.

Moreover, repeated calls (Bullock Report, 1975; Wells 1986; Kingman Report 1988; National Oracy Project 1992; Barnes and Todd, 1997; Alexander, 2000, 2003, 2004; Mercer, 1995, 2000; Mercer and Littleton 2007) for oracy to be highly valued and fully utilised as a tool for *children's* learning in England have seemed, until recently, to fall on deaf ears. Government policy for Primary Education has traditionally focussed on raising standards in Literacy and Numeracy, and little government attention has been paid to improving communication skills. Attempts to raise the profile of learning through talk have, until recently, been eclipsed or even, according to Alexander (2000), deliberately suppressed, by successive governments attempting to convince voters of their support for a traditional emphasis on 'the basics' in primary education.

Meanwhile, concerns have been growing that children's communication skills are declining and business interests express the opinion that many school leavers do not enter their first jobs with the necessary ability to communicate effectively (Sage 2000, 2004). For these reasons then, if not in recognition of the vital connections between language and learning, there are moves at last to recognise the fundamental importance of Speaking and Listening in the primary school curriculum. The Rose Review (2006) has emphasised its importance, and the renewed Primary National Strategy for Literacy (2006) at last gives priority to this aspect of the curriculum by placing Speaking and Listening as the first two strands in its structured framework.

What then of the ability of our student teachers to support their pupils in this vital area of learning? I will argue that if teachers have not been encouraged in their own primary education to use talk to support their learning, it is unlikely that they will naturally be effective in helping their pupils to do so. I will also suggest that teacher education needs to provide a new and more effective model of this process for student teachers. The study will therefore propose that their tutors' ability both to communicate with them, and also to support their learning through dialogue and collaborative talk, will be vital at two levels. Firstly it will be important in terms of the quality of the students' own learning experience; and secondly in terms of their ability to develop effective dialogue with their pupils in order to support their learning.

## **1.5 Value positions**

The research project is situated firmly within the interpretive paradigm and adopts a qualitative methodology, which will be justified in Chapter Three.

As indicated above, my stance as the researcher is influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986, 1990) and broadly reflects a socio-cultural view of learning. Whilst acknowledging that students will expect to benefit from the tutors' more extensive experience in the field of teaching and learning, my approach to this study is predicated on the notion that participants will nonetheless be *constructing* knowledge and understanding together, rather than merely *transmitting and receiving* it. The study also recognises that both the tutors' and the students' beliefs about teaching and learning will be influenced by the wider cultural setting of the current educational world, both at the level of teacher education and also that of the primary school. It is acknowledged that as the writer of this thesis and the sole researcher on the project, I am also subject to the influence of this cultural context.

## **1.6 Broad issues and problems**

It is acknowledged that the central question underpinning this research encompasses a very broad field of enquiry and draws upon knowledge from a wide range of disciplines. The topic of human learning and communication is highly complex and the review of literature for such a topic is potentially vast.

It has also to be accepted that the practical and time constraints upon a lone, part-time researcher engaged in a comparatively small research project must necessarily limit the scope of the enquiry and make generalisations difficult.

It is my contention, however, that educational research is by definition wide ranging and interdisciplinary; and that my own broad experience and knowledge of both primary teaching and teacher education can help offset the difficulties and meet the challenges of this research project. My decision to participate directly in the study could also be seen as a drawback, as could the choice of a close colleague as a participant. However, this is by nature an exploratory study, intended to examine the issues in the immediate contexts of the case studies, and then to recommend possibilities for wider study. These issues and decisions will be discussed and justified in Chapter Three.

### **1.7 A brief description of the context.**

The research study is set in a College of Higher Education in the Midlands of England. This college was originally established in 1968 as a teacher training college, but has since diversified to provide, in addition, a wide range of other degree courses which do not confer Qualified Teacher Status. Notwithstanding this broader portfolio, the college remains one of the largest providers of newly qualified teachers in the Midlands. It has a Roman Catholic foundation, but draws its students from a wide range of religious, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. A high percentage of its student teachers are mature students. Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses are provided, which prepare students to teach in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage One; Key Stages One and Two; Key Stages Two and Three, and Key Stages Three and Four respectively.

The college brochure (2007) asserts that the college is a friendly institution where class sizes are small, and students will be given individual, personal attention. Most teaching for student teachers is therefore delivered in the context of groups of twenty-five to thirty students, and it is within such groups that the investigations for the research project take place. As a part of their courses, all Foundation Stage and Primary students attend Core English study modules which focus on the pedagogical aspects of English teaching, as well as supporting students in developing the relevant subject knowledge.

The two tutors who are the focus of this study teach predominantly on these modules, and the research focuses on their teaching in these contexts. The relevant groups comprise graduate students on a one year course leading to the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education. The tutors themselves have considerable previous experience of teaching in primary schools, as well as recent and current experience of supporting student teachers on school placements. They have both been actively involved in shaping the Core English modules of the students' courses and in designing and planning the individual taught sessions which they comprise.

### **1.8 Outline of the thesis**

The thesis will begin by reviewing the relevant literature in order to provide a context for later analysis and to justify the nature of the study. This will chart the development of different prevailing epistemological standpoints and consider their

influence on the educational establishment and hence, potentially, on the students' and tutors' own professional philosophies and epistemologies. It will be argued that the students' ability to reflect upon and evaluate the information presented to them, and to draw conclusions about its relevance to their own experience, is an important factor; as indicated by the work of Dewey, (1933) Schön, (1983,1987) Wells (1999) and others. It will go on to suggest that, given the role of talk in the learning process which has been established above, much of this reflection needs to be collaborative rather than solitary; and it will pay particular attention to the work of Alexander (2000, 2003, 2004) Mercer (1995, 2000) and Mercer and Littleton (2007) in discussing teaching and learning as a 'dialogic' process. It will again draw upon Mercer and Littleton's work (2007) and also that of Mortimer and Scott (2003) to suggest that teachers and learners will need to claim varying levels of 'authority' in different learning contexts and that such authority needs to be negotiated rather than imposed.

Chapter Three will comprise an explanation of the research design, including further justification of its position within the interpretive paradigm and the choice of a case study approach. The chosen research methods and data collection instruments will be described. This will be informed by the work of other researchers who have approached aspects of the topic, with particular reference to the work of Alexander (2004) Mercer (1995, 2000) Mercer and Littleton (2007) and Mortimer and Scott (2003).

Chapters Four and Five will present the findings from the two case studies and draw initial conclusions in relation to the aims and research questions described above.

Chapter Six will compare and discuss the findings from both case studies, and the last chapter will evaluate the study as a whole, draw some final conclusions and make recommendations regarding further possibilities for research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review.**

### **2.1 Outline of the review.**

The broad aim of this study is to investigate pedagogical interactions between tutors and their students in the context of teacher education. As justified in the introduction, it focuses, in particular, on the ways in which the tutors shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in the context of 'whole class' teaching. It also seeks to discover whose 'voices' are being heard and how these 'voices' are managed in the contexts studied. The literature review will therefore be fairly wide-ranging and to some extent interdisciplinary.

I will first examine changing perspectives on learning and cognitive development as discerned from the literature, and justify the socio-cultural perspective of the study.

The review will go on to establish the cultural context in which the research is set, explaining the constraints within which the tutors must manage their interactions with the students, with reference to the historical background of both primary and teacher education.

Next, I will consider what kinds of professional learning are valued within the particular context of teacher education and (since the students in the study are training to teach in the primary sector) within the primary school. The review will acknowledge and discuss the influence of these epistemologies and professional philosophies on the educational establishment and hence potentially on the tutors' and students' approaches to learning and teaching.

A degree of consensus among teacher educators regarding the importance of critical reflection in teacher education will then be identified, but it will be mooted that government agencies might merely be paying lip service to this approach. Given the social nature of learning established in section 2.2.1, I will then argue that talk is central to the learning process and therefore that much of this professional reflection should be collaborative rather than solitary. I will go on to consider the notion of education as a 'dialogic' process and relate this to the ways in which the tutors might support or inhibit the students' learning in these whole class contexts. The place of



feelings and emotions within this process will also be discussed, together with the need for students to tell their own professional 'stories'.

Finally, drawing on all the aspects of the literature reviewed, conclusions will be drawn concerning the important themes which should influence the generation and analysis of the data for this research.

## **2.2 Changing perspectives on learning and cognitive development.**

Considerable change has taken place in our understanding of the nature of teaching and learning over the last forty years and, perhaps unsurprisingly, given the complexity of the subject, the thinking within and between the different agencies involved in primary and teacher education is still very far from reaching a consensus. It will be important to understand that the participants studied, and indeed other agencies in the world of teacher education, may view the learning process from differing perspectives. The influence of such wider and more immediate cultural contexts is central to socio-cultural theory, which will be discussed below.

### **2.2.1 The development of a socio-cultural theory**

This section will consider the influential work of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky, in relation to our understanding of thinking and learning, and discuss their relevance to socio-cultural theory.

Wood (1988) charts the major influence of Piaget on practice in primary schools in the 1960s and 70s. A biologist by background, Piaget sought to discover more about the child's realisation of *logic* and took a very different view from earlier learning theorists who had promoted the idea that learning took place predominantly through conditioning. In Piaget's view, learning is not about the conditioning of responses, nor is it concerned merely with the transmission of knowledge or information, but is a process in which the child actively *constructs* his own understanding by physically and mentally acting upon the world around him. Piaget proposed a series of developmental stages through which children must pass before they construct the ability to perceive, reason, and understand in mature and rational terms. He saw the child's intellectual development as constrained by these stages; in that teaching

would not be effective until the child had reached the requisite stage of development, and was ready and able to assimilate what was being said and done. This theory, of course, had major implications for the design and structure of the school curriculum, a point to which I shall return later.

It was some years after writing that the work of Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, were translated, disseminated and understood in the western world, but his work continues to exert a powerful influence on theories of learning and thinking. Like Piaget, he acknowledged that biology has a part to play, but he argued that 'speech plays an essential role in the organisation of the higher psychological functions' (Vygotsky, 1978, p 23). Vygotsky believed that for human beings, speech and signs are used as a means of re-organising and transforming thought. He examined Piaget's concept of egocentric speech, but placed far greater importance on social speech in terms of its relationship to the problem solving process. He and his colleagues found that when solving a problem in experimental conditions, the quantity of a child's egocentric speech increased with the complexity of the task. He linked this egocentric speech with social speech, noting that, when children were unable to solve a problem, they addressed the adult experimenter in an attempt to solicit help. When the experimenter left the room, the child reverted to egocentric speech. Vygotsky suggests that later in the child's development, the socialised speech previously used to address the adult experimenter will be turned inward: hence language takes on an *interpersonal* function in addition to its *intrapersonal* use. Thus Vygotsky had established 'the functions of speech in re-organising perception and creating new relations among psychological functions' (Vygotsky, 1978, p 23).

In his view then, social interaction and culture are of paramount importance and *instruction* is essential to the development of thinking. According to Vygotsky, learning is a process which involves a transition from the social plane to the individual one. Ideas can be rehearsed and developed in any social context in which talk enables individuals to reflect upon and make sense of these ideas or concepts. Thus the social tool of language also becomes the means of individual thought and understanding: the learning begins on the social plane, but must always involve a personal step towards individual meaning making.

Bruner sought to analyse the development of adult reasoning, later applying this to children's thinking. He saw 'logic' as only one of several 'special' modes of thinking, and whilst he too emphasised the importance of action and problem-solving in learning, he placed an even stronger emphasis on the role of language, communication and instruction. His view of learning involved 'going beyond the information given' (Bruner, 1973, p 218) and encompassed creative thinking and a search for pattern, regularity and predictability. The processes underlying this adaptive thinking, Bruner believed, were the foundations of adult, as well as children's learning, and in both cases were communicated subtly, from the more mature to the immature. Bruner, then, whilst still acknowledging the influences of biology and evolution, also places *social interaction* at the heart of the learning process.

To summarise, Piaget's approach is a *constructivist* one, in which he sees the child almost as a lone scientist, actively constructing his own learning, whilst Bruner and Vygotsky take a *socio-constructivist* approach which emphasises the importance of social interaction as a fundamental aspect of learning.

Mercer and Littleton (2007) explain that such communicative events take place within a cultural and historical setting and that in order to take account of this, a field of research sometimes described as 'socio-historical' or 'cultural-historical', but more widely referred to as 'socio-cultural' theory has come into being. This approach builds on the work of Vygotsky and Bruner and proposes that communication, thinking, and learning are shaped by the cultural and historical settings in which they take place.

From this socio-cultural perspective:

humans are seen as creatures who have a unique capacity for communication and whose lives are normally led within groups, communities and societies based on shared ways of using language, ways of thinking, social practices and tools for getting things done.

(Mercer and Littleton, 2007, p 4)

It is this socio-cultural approach which underpins the current research project. In studying the interactions between students and their tutors in the context of teacher education, this research is predicated on the notion that such interactions are crucial to the students' intellectual and professional development; and that these interactions are strongly influenced by the wider culture of the English educational world, and by the more immediate culture of the classrooms within which the research takes place.

From this perspective, it will be important to understand the wider social context of the research, both in terms of the world of Teacher Education and the closely related world of primary school teaching and learning. The next section will therefore seek to understand the predominant epistemological perspectives of these worlds by placing them in their historical contexts.

### **2.2.2 Epistemology and practice in primary and teacher education: a historical overview.**

It could be argued that no study of education would be complete without first setting out its historical context. McEwan (1990) for example, asserts that a major shortcoming of much educational writing is that it fails to take this into account, treating teaching as a finite and definable 'slice of life' situated only in the present.

To understand teaching we need to delve into the past, and not just the past of individual teachers, but into the traditions of pedagogic practice within whose orb its teachers think and work.

(McEwan, 1990, p 173)

The next section will therefore examine the historical setting in the context of which the interactions between the tutors and students in this research study must be viewed.

#### **2.2.2.1 Early Autonomy**

From the 1940s until the end of the 1970s, universities and colleges could, to a large extent, decide for themselves the content and structure of their teacher training programmes. For the most part, the rationale behind these courses assumed the

existence of a body of accepted, objective, professional knowledge, which could be imparted to trainee teachers. In this model of professionalism:

professionals, through specialist and usually long periods of training, (were) taught to understand this research validated knowledge and to apply it constructively and intelligently, according to the technical rules governing the conduct of the profession. (Hoyle and John, 1995, p 46, quoted in Atkinson and Claxton (eds) 2000, p 17)

Underpinning this model was the assumption that theory and practice could be separated and that 'practical knowledge was context bound while theoretical knowledge was relatively context free' (Eraut, 1994, p 50 quoted in McDrury and Alterio 2003, p 20). Student teachers were expected to study what might be termed 'technical rationalist' forms of knowledge, mainly in the form of the four disciplines: Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, and History, and use this knowledge to guide their practice.

According to Furlong (2000) it was because of the widespread acceptance of the validity of this objective, scientifically verifiable professional knowledge that the teaching profession enjoyed a high level of autonomy from the 1940s to the 1970s. There was a general acceptance that the professionals, by virtue of their grasp of it, were the experts in their field.

On the other hand, voices within the teaching profession itself had for some time been questioning the existence of objective 'truth' in the field of teaching and learning. Alexander (2000) describes how curricular and pedagogical experimentation in England, drawing from a fairly eclectic pedigree in Europe and the United States, began to move away from the view of knowledge as something to be transmitted to pupils; and towards an approach, heavily influenced by the work of Piaget, which acknowledged the child's role in creating his own understanding through experimentation and play. This was endorsed by the Plowden report of 1967 and widely promoted in teacher training institutions.

However, it soon became clear that the general public were becoming uneasy about this departure from the teacher's traditional role. Alexander explains that, responding to public anxiety, the political right has often sought to demonise progressive educational thinking; and despite evidence that such approaches may be far from universal, newspapers make sweeping generalisations, for example claiming that 'the education of millions of primary school children has been blighted in the name of an anarchic ideology'. (The Daily Telegraph, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1991, quoted in Alexander, 2000, p 141)

### **2.2.2.2 Increasing central control**

In the same vein, Callaghan's Ruskin speech of 1976 had set developments in motion which were to herald a new era in teacher professionalism, set against a background of an increasing desire for control from those outside the profession. Alexander (2000) describes the Labour government's initiation in the mid 1970s of the centralisation of the English education system: a grip which was to be developed and tightened by successive Labour and Conservative governments.

In 1988, after a series of published reports, the government laid down legal requirements for curriculum and assessment for pupils aged 5 - 16 and thus the control of curriculum in schools passed to agencies appointed directly by central government. The extent of this control is made clear in Alexander's (2000) wide ranging comparative study of classroom practice in five different national contexts. Of the countries studied in this 'Five Cultures Project', English schools were found to be under by far the most aggressive and pejorative central control, both in terms of curriculum and teaching methods. In 1998, the government had taken an unprecedented step by intervening directly not just in *what* was taught in English primary schools but *how*. The National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching (1998) introduced a detailed term by term prescription for literacy teaching from the Reception year until the final year of primary education. It proposed that this should be delivered via the 'Literacy Hour': a highly structured daily literacy lesson involving a range of recommended timings, teaching strategies and approaches. The following year, similar 'guidance' appeared for Numeracy teaching in the form of the National Numeracy Strategy Framework for teaching (1999). These documents were not statutory, but schools were under considerable pressure to adopt them, not least

from Ofsted inspectors who expected them to be in place unless schools could demonstrate that they had implemented an approach which was more effective. Although, since Alexander's (2000) data was collected, the practice recommended by the original frameworks for literacy and numeracy has been allowed to evolve, and they have been superseded by the arguably more flexible Primary Framework for Literacy and Maths (2006), government influence continues to be exerted on the teaching of these subjects via a network of advisers and consultants and through the inspection regime.

Meanwhile, in line with weakening teacher autonomy in primary schools, the government had also sought to achieve control over teacher education. According to Alexander (2000) politicians sought to characterise teacher training institutions as hotbeds of progressive theory, and in 1991 Prime Minister John Major indicated his intentions by delivering scathing criticism of 'barmy theory' at the conservative party conference (Alexander, 2000, p 541). Later the same year, the Secretary of State Kenneth Clarke took up the theme in his speech to the public school Headmaster's conference:

We will take no lectures from those who led the long march to mediocrity through our schools.... I will fight for my belief. My belief is a return to basics in education. The progressive theorists have had their say, and, Mr President, they have had their day.

(DES 1991c, quoted in Alexander 2000, p 541)

Having thus thrown down the gauntlet, the government tightened its control and the Teacher Training Agency (later to become the Training and Development Agency) was established in 1994. This maintained, and still maintains control over teacher 'training' partly through the strict inspection regime carried out by OfSTED, upon which judgments student places, and hence funding, is allocated.

This, then, is the cultural context in which my research takes place. The tutors in the study must ensure that the curriculum they teach complies with government requirements, and the students must demonstrate, by the end of their course, that they have met the 'Professional Standards for Teachers in England' laid down by the TDA (2007). The next section, therefore, will examine a range of views as to what

professional 'standards' should be reached by student teachers and consider how they compare with those set out by the government.

### **2.2.3 What kind of professional learning is needed by student teachers?**

#### **2.2.3.1 The Reflective teacher**

As we have seen, during the 1980s, governments were seeking to undermine what they perceived to be a widespread preference for 'progressive' views of learning in schools. In contrast, many professionals within Higher Education were arguing for a move away from traditional forms of knowledge acquisition in professional training. Schön argued that professional practice is a form of 'artistry' so cannot be based on rational decision-making. His philosophy thus recognised that applied science and research-based technique are important, but maintained that its limited territory should be 'bounded on several sides by artistry' (Schön, 1987, p 13). He argued that some professions occupy not the 'high ground' of professional certainty, but the 'swampy lowlands' of 'messy, confusing problems' (Schön, 1987, p 3) which, though hugely important, are often unique, and defy solution by reference to an agreed set of rules.

What was needed instead, he contended, was an introduction to the experiences and thinking of successful practitioners, providing the opportunity to 'learn their conventions, constraints, languages and appreciative systems, their repertoire of exemplars, systematic knowledge and patterns of knowing-in-action' (p 37). He emphasised that practitioners are not absorbing incontrovertible facts, but transacting with these situations, framing and re-framing professional problems and constructing the world as they see it.

Schön (1983, 1987) presented his ideas as an antidote to the irrelevance of traditional forms of knowledge in professional practice. He argued that a new epistemology of practice needed be developed, based on what professionals *actually do*, and characterised as 'reflection'.



Boud, Kough and Walker (1985) exemplified for professionals what was then a recent trend towards applying a 'reflective' approach in educational contexts. They explained that Schön's notion of reflection was not a new one, probably even having its roots in Aristotle's thinking. It had been further developed by the influential figure, John Dewey (1933), who distinguished between impulsive action and action based on reflection. He affirmed the importance of 'reflective activity' as the second stage in a three part model of learning. A cyclical learning process is described, in which reflection enables the thinker to perceive relationships and connections between aspects of an experience, thus resulting in effective problem-solving.

Building on Dewey's work, Schön's influential model (1987) attempted to define reflection as a hierarchical process, proposing three stages in professional practice, characterised by:

- Knowing in action - which is entirely implicit;
- Reflection in action - in which our interpretative processes are brought to bear on a problem, but without stopping what we're doing; and
- Reflection on action, which occurs after the event.

This reflective model of learning was taken up and developed with enthusiasm by teacher educators and it had a major influence on initial teacher education in the United Kingdom. By the 1990s Barrett et al (1992) in their topography of initial teacher education in England and Wales, found that the majority of leaders in the sector claimed that their courses were influenced by the notion of reflection.

McDrury and Alterio (2003) examine this concept and suggest some interesting approaches to it within Higher Education, to which I shall return later. They suggest that the appeal of Schön's work for the professional is that it provides scope for personal application and 'offers one way to access what practitioners know and do intuitively, but cannot easily share' (McDrury and Alterio 2003, p 20). Schön affirms the value of this kind of knowledge, (1983, 1987) pointing us to Polanyi (1967) who refers to it as 'tacit knowledge'. Schön maintains that when a student is reflecting on his or her own experiences; supportive dialogue, relating to the student's 'knowing in action' and 'reflection in action' will help create a new form of understanding which will eventually be subsumed into the student's almost intuitive understanding - thus

becoming 'knowledge in action'. (This 'dialogue' is a central theme in the current research project, and will be discussed in detail in section 2.7.)

Schön (1987) explains that we first try to produce a good verbal description of our reflection-in-action and then to reflect on the resulting description. He emphasises the importance of this reflection-on-action:

As I think back on my experience,..... I may consolidate my understanding of the problem or invent a better or more general solution to it. If I do, my present reflection on my earlier reflection-in-action begins a dialogue of thinking and doing, through which I become more skilful.... These several levels and kinds of reflection play important roles in the acquisition of artistry. (Schön, 1987, p 31)

Pollard (2005) whose work is heavily influenced by Schön, applies the notion of reflectivity specifically to teaching, emphasising that reflection on practice should be done in a systematic way. He places this process within the action research movement, and emphasises that teachers must become competent in gathering empirical data within the classroom and then evaluating it, learning from it and adapting practice in a cyclical manner. He also emphasises the social aspects of professional learning and advises that collaboration with colleagues is an important part of this reflective process.

### **2.2.3.2 Other models of professional learning**

It would seem then, that the notion of professional reflection has much to offer those involved in teacher education and has been enthusiastically espoused by the majority of professionals in the field. However, it could be argued that this ubiquitous support for the notion of 'reflection' in teacher education, valuing as it does the development of individual, personal points of view, has provided fertile ground for the increasing government intervention charted above.

Atkinson and Claxton (2000) are concerned that such central control is increasing and they present contributions from writers in a range of different professions to

argue for the need to regain a respect for intuitive judgement in professional decision-making. Furlong's (2000) contribution discusses the concept of teacher professionalism and acknowledges that Schön's model of reflective practice is indeed an attractive one to most teachers. He expresses concern, however, that this vision of professionalism (situated as it is in the interpretive tradition and emphasising professional knowledge as essentially personal and relative) has done nothing to stem the tide of the government's 'ever more invasive control' (Furlong, 2000, p 24). He contrasts this with Hargreaves' (1994) call for 'evidence based practice' which he sees as being firmly grounded in the positivist tradition. Furlong disagrees with the notion that research can provide a blueprint for effective practice. He argues that:

the belief that through rational analysis we can come to know, even for a moment, what the best, the most rationally justifiable practices actually are and that these can then guide professional practice, is, I would suggest, problematic. Such an approach to professional knowledge apparently ignores the epistemological debates of the last 20 or 30 years.

(Furlong, 2000, p 25)

Furlong believes that neither the subjective approach implied by 'reflection' nor the positivist notion of 'evidence based practice' provide what is needed for aspiring teachers. Instead he examines 'critical theory' as a possible model for true professionalism. This approach accepts that both positivism and relativism lead to important forms of knowledge, but claims that their notions of 'truth', whether objectively or subjectively defined, are flawed. This theory holds that all forms of knowledge should be held up for public, collaborative scrutiny. Such scrutiny, critical theorists would assert, should comprise more than just conversations about professional knowledge, beliefs, values, practices and norms: they should entail critical debate in which these are carefully examined, and their validity called into question. Such 'discourses' must take place in what Habermas (1970, 1974, cited in Atkinson and Claxton, 2000, p 23) describes as 'ideal speech situations' where participants are equally free of internal and external constraints. Furlong acknowledges that such ideal situations are difficult, if not impossible to realise and that they depend on 'the commitment to create and maintain those spaces within

professional life (and perhaps most especially professional education) where critical discourse can flourish' (Furlong, in Atkinson and Claxton, 2000, p 27).

Despite his positive view of critical theory, Furlong argues that none of these three approaches ('reflection' 'evidence based practice' and 'critical theory') provides all the answers in the quest to define professional learning. He argues that our definition of professional knowledge should be broader than any of the models described above, and should also acknowledge 'intuition', which encompasses 'feelings, hunches, and ways of recognising complex patterns' (Furlong, in Atkinson and Claxton, 2000, p 28).

### **2.2.3.3 The government view**

It is clear then, that controversy continues, within and between teachers and teacher educators, about what sort of professional knowledge is needed by newly qualified teachers. However, it has also been shown that notwithstanding a level of professional debate, it is now the government who wields ultimate control over the 'training' offered to student teachers. To what sort of model then, does the government subscribe?

An examination of the most recent regulations for Qualified Teacher Status on the Training and Development Agency website (2007) seems to indicate a somewhat ambivalent view. Of the listed standards that newly qualified teachers must meet, 'Q7' requires them to be able to 'reflect on their practice and take responsibility for identifying and meeting their developing professional needs'. This would seem to facilitate an individual and autonomous approach for teachers, and endorse Schön's view of them as reflective practitioners.

'Q 8', on the other hand, requires teachers to 'have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation, being prepared to adapt practice where benefits and improvements are identified'. At a superficial level, this appears to encourage the genuine debate for which the critical theorists argue.

It is standard 'Q 14', however, which is probably the most telling. This requires that teachers 'have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects/ curriculum

areas and related pedagogy to enable them to teach effectively.’ This statement clearly presupposes that there is only one acceptable ‘pedagogy’ which teachers should ‘know’ and brooks no disagreement with the government view of what constitutes ‘effective teaching’.

One is left to wonder whether ‘Q8’ is not a call for ‘constructive criticism’ at all, but merely a requirement to conform to the government’s latest ‘innovation’.

#### **2.2.4 A cacophony of ‘voices’.**

The sections above have attempted to set out the wider professional context in which this research is set. From a socio-constructivist point of view, this wider climate will fundamentally influence the nature of the interactions within the ‘micro-climate’ which provides the context for my research study. The professional debates and wider public perceptions of teaching and learning, set out above, will influence not just the opinions expressed on the topics discussed, but also the ways in which the interactions which are the focus of this research are conducted.

It is clear that in seeking answers to the question: ‘whose voices are being heard in these interactions?’ all these complex influences will need to be taken into account. Since he was not directly involved in the day-to-day business of educating student teachers, Alexander (2000) could afford to be highly critical of the fact that teaching had been reduced (by the then TTA) to a set of competences by which aspiring teachers must be measured. Student teachers, on the other hand, are in no position to critically evaluate these standards: they have little choice but to comply. Even the term ‘trainee’, used across all government documentation, implies unquestioning obedience to a ‘trainer’ and is arguably more appropriate at ‘Crufts’ than in an educational context. The case study tutors are also under considerable pressure to comply with government regulations and they live and work in the shadow of impending Ofsted inspections. The student teachers in the study bring their own experiences and epistemologies with them into their ‘training’ and will, one might reasonably assume, also wish to make their ‘voices’ heard. The tutors, then, are charged with the complex responsibility of orchestrating all these clamouring ‘voices’, as well as, presumably, giving expression to their own.

So far in this review, I have justified the socio-cultural stance of the current study, discussed the wider context for the research and considered the range of 'voices' which might be heard within the classrooms in the study. Since the major theme of the current research study is the ways in which talk is managed in these classrooms, the next sections will examine the place of talk in the process of teaching and learning and in particular what is understood about the role of the teacher in this process. The different levels of 'authority' which prevail in the relationship between 'teacher and learner' will be part of this discussion, and will add a further dimension to the discussion about 'voices' above.

### **2.3 Learning in a social context**

For the most part, Schön's earlier work (1983) seems to characterise reflection as a rather individual pursuit. Nevertheless, when discussing how best to support such individual reflection in his later work (1987) he recognises the important role of those who support new entrants to the professions. The most supportive environments for aspiring professionals, he argues, are those which are 'reflective' in the further sense that they depend for their effectiveness on a 'reciprocally reflective dialogue of coach and student' (Schön, 1987, p 40). In this thesis, I will argue that *collaborative* reflection on experience is more effective than its solitary cousin, and indeed that *individual* reflection is often first conceived within a social context.

As we have seen, Bruner's model of learning (1986) recognises the central role of social interaction. It also emphasises the role of the educator to encourage speculation and negotiation in order to transform, create and interpret knowledge rather than just receive it. Bruner refers to this as 'culture making' and contends that the learner must become 'an agent of knowledge making as well as a recipient of knowledge' (Bruner, 1986, p 127). The educator's role in this process is vital, he suggests, in that s/he should open up the topics under discussion and allow the learning to become a collaborative, communal activity. Bruner draws upon a very influential concept: that of Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development'. (Vygotsky, 1978, p 84) In this model, he suggests that every learner's existing competencies can be represented by a 'zone of actual development' but that there is, in addition to this, an area of competence and understanding into which the learner

can be supported by dialogue with others, that is the zone of 'proximal' (or in some translations 'potential') development. 'Human learning', he says 'presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them' (Bruner, 1986, p 86).

In Bruner's view, we each know the world in different ways. None of these perspectives has the exclusive claim to being 'right', but rather each has an internal logic which is 'principled', rather than verifiable in the scientific sense. As we become adult, he purports, we are able to see the same set of events from multiple perspectives or stances and to 'entertain alternative possible worlds' (Bruner, 1986, p 109).

He discusses the role of both language and society in helping us process such events and develop our thoughts, providing us with a 'toolkit of concepts, ideas, and theories' (Bruner, 1986, p 71) which enable us to do so. These:

provide a means for turning around upon one's thoughts, for seeing them in a new light. This is, of course, mind reflecting on itself.

(Bruner, 1986, p 73)

He concludes that the language of education, therefore, should invite reflection and culture-creating:

It must express stance and must invite counter-stance and in the process leave space for reflection, for metacognition. (Bruner, 1986, p 129)

From this socio-cultural perspective, therefore, the role of language is clearly a crucial one in the process of making meaning and constructing understanding. The next section will go on to examine this process in more specific terms and consider implications for the tutor-student interactions under focus in this study.

## 2.4 From the social to the individual plane

New ideas are first encountered in a social context, or as Vygotsky (1978) proposes, interactions occur on a *social plane* and, if learning is to take place, these ideas must be internalised, or transferred from the social to the *individual plane*. Thus, he explains, 'an interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one..... All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals'. (Vygotsky, 1978, p 57) Or, as Mortimer and Scott explain:

As ideas are rehearsed during the social event, each participant is able to reflect on, and make individual sense of, what is being communicated. The words, gestures and images used in the social exchanges provide the very tools needed for individual thinking.' (Mortimer and Scott, 2003, p 9)

This model of learning is not a process of knowledge transfer from teacher to learner, but one where the student must compare and check his understanding with the ideas being rehearsed, matching them to his growing individual understanding. Myhill et al (2006) in their book about talk in the primary classroom, provide clarification of this idea by drawing on Bartlett's 'schema theory' (1932). This proposes that learners develop an understanding of concepts which is sometimes challenged when new ideas are encountered. The learner must incorporate these new ways of thinking into their existing schemas, sometimes accepting that some adjustment will be necessary to their original understanding.

In the context of this study, these new ideas are encountered on the 'social plane' of the university, and the interactions are those between tutor and students, and between the students themselves. The students, according to this model of learning, are not passively receiving knowledge from the tutors, but actively processing it through these interactions and either incorporating it into, or challenging, their own understanding. Vygotsky's work also has implications concerning the *nature* of these interactions and the levels of thinking expected of the students. According to his model, the students' zone of proximal development 'defines those functions that will mature tomorrow but are in the process of maturation' (1978, p 86). Vygotsky describes these functions as being in an embryonic state, and as being the 'buds and



flowers' (1978, p 86) of development rather than the 'fruits'. It could be argued then, that the tutors in this study should be nurturing and stimulating these embryonic buds of professional thinking in order that they may later bear fruit.

Wells' (1999) theoretical model adds a further dimension to this process and also resonates with Schön's (1983, 1987) cyclical process of reflection on experience. Wells' model consists of four quadrants, the first of which is 'experience', which he defines as:

an individual's culturally situated, affectively charged, participation in the multiple communities of practice that constitute his or her life-world. (Wells, 1999, p 84)

Wells' other three quadrants are 'information', 'knowledge building' and 'understanding'. He makes the distinction between acquiring 'information', which essentially consists of other people's interpretations and meanings, and 'knowledge building' which is the collaborative, active process of transforming that meaning into personal and immediate 'understanding' of a more holistic and intuitive nature. His model is presented as a spiral, in which personal experience is amplified by 'information', which is transformed through 'knowledge building' into genuine 'understanding'. This newly established understanding in turn provides the frame of reference within which new 'information' will be processed, and in due course, transformed, in a continual 'spiral of knowing' (Wells, 1999, p 85.) This process is enriched, Wells asserts, when personal interpretations are questioned, debated and clarified in the public domain. Thus Wells' work brings together the key aspect of reflection on personal experience with the process of challenging one's own personal perspective in the context of public, collaborative discussion. This process of collaborative 'knowledge building' (resulting in newly integrated understanding and a personal frame of reference with which to approach new learning) should, I would argue, be fundamental to the interactions between student teachers and their tutors which are at the heart of this study.

It follows, then, that although there is no contention within this research that learning itself is being measured, the study will indeed throw some light on student learning, since the quality of that learning must, from this socio-cultural perspective, depend to a large extent on the ways in which the tutors manage these interactions in the very public domain of the university classroom.

Clearly, in this model of learning as a social construct, talk has a vital role to play. But it is reasonable to suppose that not *all* talk will necessarily support learning, and indeed that certain types of talk, or ways of interacting, might actually *prevent* or *inhibit* the vital internalisation of understanding which Bruner, Vygotsky and Wells propose. It is these issues which are central to my research.

The following sections of this review will therefore examine what research has to tell us about the nature of interactions in the specific context of the classroom, and consider what the analysis will need to consider if it is to provide genuine insights in relation to the research questions set out in Chapter One.

## **2.5 Talk between 'teacher' and 'learner'.**

A wide range of research has been undertaken into the features and patterns of interactions in the context of both children's and adults' learning. Piagetians would argue that children and adults learn in different ways, but from a Vygotskian perspective I would argue that the relative *experience* of the participants will be of more significance than their age since, in Vygotsky's view, it is the more experienced 'other' who will work with the learner in the Zone of Proximal Development, so that he or she will reach a new level of competence (Vygotsky, 1978, in Bruner, 1986). From a socio-cultural point of view, a range of factors will influence any spoken interactions; and different ground rules might underpin any social learning context, and hence influence the learning which is facilitated. I have therefore taken the view that although the current research takes place in an adult setting, research into adults' and children's learning will provide relevant insights, provided the contexts for such learning are taken into account. Indeed, the tutors and students in the study might be said to have one foot in the world of Higher Education and another in that of the Primary classroom, since they are studying in the former environment and preparing to work in the latter. Furthermore, as we shall see, the tutors themselves

have spent many years as Primary school teachers and could be reasonably expected to have brought with them, into the world of professional education, some of the cultures and expectations of the school classroom.

A succession of scholars (Flanders, 1970; Sinclair and Coulthard , 1975; Wells, 1986; Barnes and Todd, 1977 and 1995; Galton et al, 1980, 1999a, 1999b; Barnes, 1992; Mercer 1995 and 2000; Alexander, 2000 and 2004; Mercer and Littleton, 2007 and many others) have sought to throw light on these cultures and expectations and on the interactions which take place in the school classroom. This literature has grown out of the theories of Vygotsky and Bruner, and is therefore predicated on the notion that spoken communication plays a central role in the joint construction of meaning.

Flanders (1970) conducted extensive empirical studies in the USA into teachers' interactions with their pupils, which have been widely influential in the educational world. He found that very different rules of engagement underpinned interactions at home from those at school. Conversations at home were conducted on an equal and reciprocal basis, whereas in classroom interactions, teacher talk dominated. Flanders found that teachers' talk comprised approximately two thirds of the talk in classrooms, and that two thirds of that was in the form of questions, instructions and exposition. Wells (1986) drew similar conclusions when he examined conversations between parents and children at home, then following the children into the school environment and comparing their experiences. He too raised the alarm concerning the limited interactions with adults in school, which contrasted strongly with those at home. In this context, he suggests, parents who:

treat their children as equal partners in conversation, following their lead and negotiating meanings and purposes, are not only helping their children to talk, they are also enabling them to discover how to learn *through* talk.

(Wells, 1986, p 65)

Barnes and Todd (1977, 1995) carried out wide ranging research into communication and learning in schools in the 1970s which was later revisited and updated. They too found that teachers dominated talk in classrooms, and advocated the provision of

more varied opportunities for group work to help redress the balance. Barnes (1977, cited in Mercer, 2000, p 184) exhorted teachers to provide opportunities for what he called 'exploratory talk'. This was a tentative, negotiative style of talk, in which new experiences were explored, reformulated and reflected upon, helping the learner to modify existing knowledge and, in collaboration with others, move towards new understanding.

The wide ranging ORACLE projects (Galton et al., 1980, 1999a, 1999b,) studied patterns of classroom teaching in the UK, and returned to look at similar issues nearly two decades later. They endorsed Flanders' findings (1970) that two thirds of talk in primary classrooms was by teachers, leaving little scope for the kind of rich interactions necessary for learning which have been advocated above. What is more (as Burns and Myhill, 2004, explain) they found that teacher dominance went far beyond quantitative considerations, extending to a dominance of power and control. Alexander (2000) explains that this power imbalance is probably a product of the most basic asymmetry which prevails in school classrooms: the fact that classes comprise one teacher and a large number of children. He suggests that, although good teachers will hopefully engage in something more than crowd control, they will inevitably need to learn how to manage *individuals* within a crowd. Although the interactions at the heart of this research take place in university, rather than school classrooms, similar group numbers are involved; so it can reasonably be assumed that the university tutors under scrutiny are facing similar issues in terms of their interactions with large groups of students. In analysing the data, it will be important to consider not just the balance of tutor–student talk, but the relative power balance that exists, the ways in which this is established and maintained, and the extent to which it might influence classroom interactions and learning: a point to which I shall return later.

Edwards and Mercer (1987) take up the theme that, shaped by the more dominant influence of the teacher, patterns of conversation in the classroom also seem to be in strong contrast with those evident at home. They found that teachers and children both seemed to accept that the teacher's questions were unlike those uttered in everyday conversations: teachers already knew the answers, and children's

responses were often restricted to guessing what was already in the teacher's mind. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) in their seminal work on patterns of classroom interaction, found that a three part sequence involving initiation, response and feedback, dominated teacher-pupil dialogue; and that longer exchanges, where ideas were built upon and developed, were rare. Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 191) call this triadic form of classroom discourse 'the recitation script' and explain that, in its typical form, it comprises an initial question from the teacher; a response by one of the students who attempts to answer the question; then a follow-up move by the teacher which provides some kind of feedback, usually in the form of an evaluation of the student's response. Mroz, Smith and Hardman (2000) in their article about recent changes to patterns of interaction in the classroom, cite a range of classroom studies (Mehan, 1979; Dillon, 1994; Edwards and Westgate, 1994; Hardman and Williamson, 1998) as evidence that this form of exchange is prevalent in classroom talk across all phases of schooling in the UK and North America. Edwards and Westgate (1987) describe other ways in which patterns of classroom discourse differ from everyday conversations. They find that the teacher controls the interactions by allocating turns, interrupting contributions considered to be irrelevant and providing a running commentary on what is being said and learnt.

However, Wells (1999) in his extended analysis of what it means for teachers and learners to work together in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, points out that, though 'IRF' sequences certainly impose limitations, they can be more productive than Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) suggest. Wells argues that *purpose* and *context* are important considerations; and that when these are taken into account, it is clear that this triadic form of dialogue can support the development of children's thinking by helping them to identifying and solve problems. He contends that the *type* of feedback offered by the teacher is crucial, and that effective feedback can be thought provoking; encouraging pupils to co-construct meaning and develop new insights. For the teacher, it can also help to provide a platform from which to select and propose new problems which will take pupils' learning in new directions.

Mortimer and Scott (2003) in their study of science teaching in secondary classrooms, distinguish between an 'I-R-E' exchange (Mortimer and Scott, 2003, p 40) in which the teacher merely 'evaluates', indicating whether the pupil's response is the one which was required; and the 'I-R-F' sequence, in which the teacher gives useful *feedback* or *elaboration* to the learner. They illustrate that such interactions can sometimes build into an extended series of exchanges, where the teacher's elaborative feedback evokes a further response from the learner - which in turn evokes further feedback from the teacher, and so on; thus producing an I-R-F-R-F pattern, which supports the pupils in developing their own points of view. The importance of giving appropriate feedback, having probed the child's response to uncover misconceptions, is also discussed by Clarke (2001, 2003) and Black and Wiliam, (1999). They suggest that acknowledging mistakes is crucial to children's learning, and that using 'wrong' answers as a spring board for further discussion is far more constructive than the over use of praise.

## **2.6 Thinking together.**

In contrast to the literature about pupils' learning in school, a search of recent literature with regard to the student learning experience in Higher Education revealed discussions of the relative merits of lectures, and action-based approaches (Jones, 2007, Clouston and Whitcombe, 2005), but little discussion about the way tutors manage the talk between themselves and their students. Commentators often seem to advocate an active, collaborative approach to learning, promoting the emphasis on student centred, rather than teacher centred learning (Elliot, 1993; Race and Brown, 1993 and 1997; Bess, 2000; Beaty and McGill, 2001) Thus the *value* of interaction seems widely accepted. However, such writers focus predominantly on organisational processes, approaches, activities and innovations which might provide useful *opportunities* for such collaborative learning. There seem to be very few attempts to analyse or evaluate the *nature* of these interactions between tutors and students, as intended in the current research study. This seems surprising, given the plethora of research into such interactions in school and the weight of evidence (discussed above) that the *quality* of such interactions has a direct and very profound effect on the nature of thinking and learning. However, Mercer's (1995, 2000, 2007) studies do examine the way understanding is constructed by both adults and children, through talk; analysing this process both in

the primary classroom, and also across a wide range of adult professional and social contexts, in both small and large groups. Such breadth of study will surely provide relevant insights and allow links to be made between the school studies cited above and the adult world of teacher education, which forms the context for the current research.

Mercer (1995, 2000) finds examples, in adult interactions across a range of business, social and learning contexts, of collaborative talk in which participants operate on a far more equal basis than those described in the classroom studies cited above. He introduces the concept of 'interthinking' (Mercer, 2000, p1) in which knowledge is *jointly* constructed and a depth of understanding can be reached which far surpasses anything which each individual could have achieved alone.

He proposes that for this type of thinking to take place, talk must be *genuinely* interactive, that is to say:

not really reducible to the form and content of individual statements, but more to do with how the discourse as a whole represents social, shared thought processes. (1995, p 105)

Mercer (1995, 2000) builds on the influential work of Barnes and Todd (1977, 1995) to examine the different types of collaborative talk that are encouraged in school classrooms, and their effect on learning. Mercer identifies three types of talk which are commonly used in collaborative activity, which he calls 'disputational', 'cumulative' and 'exploratory' talk.

Disputational talk (in which participants are more interested in their individual interests and work to keep their identities and opinions separate) is, according to Mercer, not very productive in terms of learning. 'Cumulative' talk, on the other hand, occurs when speakers work actively towards a common agreement, building on each others' comments, rather than seeking to challenge them. In this mode of talk, speakers act in an uncritical, mutually supportive way, adding information of their own, and supporting each other in order to construct shared knowledge and

understanding. Mercer sees *some* potential for building learning in this kind of talk, but it is the third type of talk, 'exploratory' talk which he considers to be the most productive. This term was first used by Barnes and Todd (1977) when reporting on their empirical research into classroom interaction and its relationship to learning. Drawing upon this work, Mercer defines this type of talk as follows:

Exploratory talk is that in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas. Relevant information is offered for joint consideration. Proposals may be challenged and counter-challenged, but if so, reasons are given and alternatives are offered. Agreement is sought as a basis for joint progress. Knowledge is made publicly accountable and reasoning is visible in the talk.

(Mercer, 2000, p 153)

Mercer goes on to consider the role of the teacher in encouraging and supporting useful talk in the classroom. He identifies a number of oral techniques which are commonly used by teachers in exchanges with their learners.

These are summarised in Figure 1, below:

*Recap:*

A brief review of something which happened earlier in the joint experience of the class.

*Elicitation:*

An attempt by the teacher to obtain information from students gained in past classroom activity.

*Repetitions:*

The teacher repeats the pupil's answer in an affirming way, 'holding the answer up' for other pupils to see.

*Reformulations:*

The teacher paraphrases the pupil's response, clarifying it or making it more relevant to the current theme.



*Exhortations:*

The teacher emphasises the value of past experience for the success of current learning activities by exhorting pupils to 'think' or 'remember'.

**Figure 1: Oral techniques commonly used by teachers - summarised from Mercer (2000) pp 54-55.**

Of these five techniques, the first four (recapitulation, elicitation, repetition and exhortation) are part of the process of identifying and summarising what learners know, and creating a base of common knowledge and experience - ideas to which I shall return in section 2.9.

Alexander (2004) considers the common techniques identified by Mercer, and believes that only the fourth (reformulation) has any potential to really move learning forward. Alexander sets out to re-think classroom talk and help teachers find ways to manage it so as to more effectively support pupils' learning. He is one of several scholars who argue for a more 'dialogic' approach to classroom teaching, the case for which will be examined in detail in the next section.

## **2.7 The case for 'dialogic' teaching.**

Any discussion of the concept of 'dialogue' would be incomplete without a consideration of the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986). His thinking has achieved recognition in a number of fields. Although much of his work relates to the world of literary studies, he is also renowned as a social thinker and a philosopher of language.

Bakhtin (1981) sees dialogue as a fundamental element not just of discourse, but of human existence. He maintains that no utterance has an absolute fixed meaning of its own: rather it lies within the power of the particular context in which it is made, which can add to it, subtract from it, obscure, change or colour it. Utterances are made, argues Bakhtin, not just in particular linguistic dialects, but also in socio-ideological languages – languages, for example, of professions and generations. Each of these is further stratified into 'the fleeting language of a day, an epoch, a social group, a genre, a school and so on' (1981, p 272).

Moreover, Bakhtin sees words and utterances as part of a much wider, ongoing dialogic interaction:

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. (Bakhtin 1981, p 280)

As Holquist, 1990, (in a comprehensive study of Bakhtin's work) explains, dialogue is not, as is sometimes thought, a dyadic phenomenon, but a manifold one, and for schematic purposes can be represented as comprising three elements: the utterance, the reply and the relation between the two. From a Bakhtinian point of view it is the last element which is most significant. Wegerif (2008) explains that from a dialogic perspective, education usually takes place within relationships in which students learn to see things from at least two perspectives, their own and that of the teacher; but that Bakhtin's view of dialogue takes us a step further. In dialogue as he perceives it, there is no hard demarcation line between the two voices being expressed, but an 'inclusive 'space' of dialogue within which self and other mutually construct and reconstruct each other' Wegerif, 2008, p 353).

Holquist (1990) coined the term 'dialogism' to refer to Bakhtin's particular view of dialogue and its place within human existence, and this work is taken up and employed by a number of researchers as a means of examining the process of teaching and learning. Both Alexander (2004) and Mercer and Littleton (2007) believe that 'dialogue' is an essential pre-requisite for progress in formal learning contexts, and refer to Bakhtin's maxim (1986) that if an answer does not give rise to a new question, it falls out of the dialogue.

Skidmore (2000) in his empirical study of classroom interactions in two English primary schools, draws on the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1984) and also Nystrand (1997). Skidmore argues that too much classroom talk is 'monologic' in Bakhtin's terms: that is to say, the teacher presents ideas which are not open to debate. Such

talk is in direct opposition to what Nystrand calls 'dialogically organised instruction' which encourages evaluation of ideas and allows pupils to modify the topic of discourse. Skidmore emphasises that teachers need to abandon the traditional 'expert' role and instead listen and respond to pupils' contributions, encouraging them to consider and discuss different points of view, so that this collective enterprise can become a resource to support individual reflection. He quotes Bakhtin's assertion that:

truth is not born nor is it found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for the truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.

(Bakhtin, 1984 p 110, quoted in Skidmore, 2000, p 292)

Bakhtin calls this type of interaction 'internally persuasive discourse' (Bakhtin, 1981, p 342) and contrasts this with 'externally authoritative discourse'. Such authoritative discourse, in Bakhtin's terms, is that in which the speaker 'demands our unconditional allegiance' (Bakhtin, 1981, p 343). Rather than seeking to engage with us and persuade us of its validity, this type of 'authoritative word' brooks no argument or discussion. 'It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse' (Bakhtin 1981, p 342) and it must be either totally accepted or totally rejected.

Internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand, is affirmed through assimilation with one's own understanding and is borne of a struggle to relate one's own thinking to that of others. Bakhtin suggests that the internally persuasive word is 'half ours, half someone else's' (1981, p 345). It is creative and productive, awakening new meaning, rather than remaining static and isolated. It is 'able to reveal ever new ways to mean' (1981, p 346).

Both Alexander and Mercer assert the importance of this 'dialogic' approach to learning and teaching. Alexander believes that, in the context of classroom learning, dialogue 'becomes not just a feature of learning but one of its most essential tools' (Alexander 2004, p 19). Both Mercer and Alexander examine ways in which teachers

might support this kind of dialogue, referring to the work of Vygotsky and Bruner, discussed above, and exemplifying this for teachers in terms of their own classroom practice.

Mercer develops Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development into a model which specifically links to his notion of 'interthinking' (Mercer, 2000, 2007). In this conception, he proposes that learners can create an 'Intermental Development Zone' (Mercer, 2000, p 141) – a shared communicative space which is constantly re-negotiated as the dialogue proceeds. There are echoes here too, I would argue, of the shared space which Bakhtin (1986) sees being opened up and negotiated between the different voices expressed within a dialogue. Both Mercer's and Bakhtin's models differ then from Vygotsky's in that they emphasise *variable* contributions from teacher and learner and *joint* achievement within a continually contextualised activity.

Wegerif (2008) explores these differences, challenging the views of Wertsch (1991) who elaborates a learning theory which synthesises the views of Vygotsky and Bakhtin. Wegerif draws a distinction between 'dialectic' and 'dialogic', claiming that Bakhtin's 'dialogic' perspective was in fact developed as a *contrast* to Vygotsky's 'dialectic' approach. This adds a further perspective to the notion of negotiation and re-negotiation of meaning between 'teacher' and 'learner'. Both Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's models acknowledge the interplay of multiple 'voices' in the learning process (including the cultural ones which underpin all the thoughts and assumptions expressed) but Vygotsky's model seems to emphasise the 'dialectic overcoming of participatory thought' whereas Bakhtin's dialogical perspective 'assumes such 'participation' as the ineluctable context of thought' (Wegerif, 2008, p 355). In a dialogic world as Bakhtin sees it, individuals can never have their own way completely, but are thrown into constant interaction with others and with themselves. In summary, explains Holquist (1990) 'dialogism is based on the primacy of the social, and the assumption that all meaning is achieved by struggle' (Holquist 1990, p 39). This seems to suggest, as Mercer's flexible 'IDZ' implies, that to be truly effective, the 'dialogue' maintained by 'teachers' and 'learners' must be a dynamic one in which participants defend, challenge and explore points of view, and in which

difference is not just tolerated but actively encouraged and accommodated, leaving room for uncertainty, and offering the potential to generate new meanings and interpretations.

Mercer suggests that even in traditional learning contexts where the teacher remains very much in control of the learning agenda. 'if the dialogue fails to keep minds mutually attuned, the IDZ collapses and the scaffolded learning grinds to a halt' (Mercer, 2000, p 141). This concept of 'scaffolding' within the teacher-learner dialogue is a relevant and interesting one. This metaphor was introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976, cited in Wood, 1988, p 99) and further developed by Bruner (1978). Mercer explains that it encapsulates the process by which an adult or more capable peer might control the more difficult aspects of a task and enable the completion of those aspects within the child's range of potential competence. Just as scaffolding is needed only temporarily during a building's construction, so support for the learner will no longer be required once understanding is achieved. As Mercer and Littleton (2007) explain, the term 'scaffolding':

captures the sense in which, through encouragement, focusing, demonstrations, reminders and suggestions, a learner can be supported in mastering a task or achieving understanding.

(Mercer and Littleton, 2007, p 15)

Myhill et al (2006) examine this concept in the context of an extended investigation in UK primary schools, known as the TALK project. Their research is particularly relevant to the current investigation since it considers teacher discourse in the context of 'whole class teaching'. They find evidence that although the term 'scaffolding' is much used by teachers, a vital aspect of this kind of support is often forgotten, that is to say its temporary nature. The teacher's sensitive support, they argue, must move the pupils towards independent thinking and the ability to make meaning for themselves, so that what Edwards and Mercer (1987) call 'principled understanding' can be achieved. They challenge the notion that 'interactive whole class teaching' of the kind recommended by the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy strategies in the UK, necessarily supports such understanding. Instead, they believe that:

to enhance the role of talk in shaping and developing learning requires interaction patterns which reduce the teacher's role as orchestrator or controller of classroom talk, and instead reposition the teacher as an enabler of talk for thinking'.

(Myhill et al, 2006, p 21)

This research involved the analysis of video footage taken from the whole class sections of primary school lessons and revealed that all too often, at critical moments in the whole class dialogue, teachers failed to listen to what children's responses indicate about their level of understanding, and miss opportunities to help the child towards independence. Myhill et al acknowledge the difficulty for the teacher in recognising these spontaneous opportunities, but find that, on the comparatively rare occasions when they are used effectively, they 'generate interactions which are more concerned with process and understanding than with product and knowledge'. (Myhill et al 2006, p 119)

Skidmore (2000) also notes the importance of the teacher's response at such pivotal moments of teacher-pupil dialogue. At such crucial moments, he explains:

the lead offered by the teacher can have real and educationally significant consequences for the course of the subsequent talk: it may tend to retrace the familiar certitudes of authoritative teacher-controlled discourse; or it may invite pupils to engage in the riskier, more taxing, but more fulfilling enterprise of formulating and being answerable for their own thinking. (Skidmore, 2000, p 295)

Skidmore is disappointed to find, however, that 'authoritative teacher-controlled discourse' is far more common than support for genuinely independent pupil thinking.

The notion of 'interactive whole class teaching', much vaunted by the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in the UK (1998, 1999) deserves examination here, especially since the tutors in the study will be very familiar with this expectation in

terms of primary school practice, and the current research focuses on interactions during whole class teaching, albeit in an adult context. At a superficial level, the term 'interactive' would seem to imply some degree at least of independent thinking on the part of the pupils, especially when combined with the expectation that such whole class teaching would be 'discursive' and achieve a 'fast pace' (DfEE, 1998, p 8). English et al (2002) point out however that there are contradictions between lessons in which there is 'a sense of urgency, driven by the need to make progress and succeed' but in which 'pupils' contributions are encouraged, expected and extended' (DfEE, 1998, p 8). They point out that the same contradiction is inherent in the advice to teachers given in the National Literacy Strategy 'fliers' (DfEE1999b), which require teachers to move relentlessly towards their stated teaching objectives, but at the same time remain open to pupils' ideas and allow them to affect the course of the discussion. English et al suggest that simply expecting a high level of pupil participation does not necessarily allow pupils' ideas to be valued and extended, and might well mitigate against this. Such factors also lead Myhill (2006) to conclude that 'interactive teaching' is an over used and unhelpful term, since the notion of 'interactivity' can be viewed from very different perspectives and imply a range of widely disparate levels of communication.

Alexander's (2000) penetrating cross-cultural study of education in England, Russia, France, India and the United States of America adds a further perspective to this discussion. In this study, he observed that although there were many superficial similarities in the ways teacher-pupil interactions were managed in classrooms across these different countries, at a deeper level, there were significant differences, both between the countries studied and within and between individual classrooms.

He found that subtle variations pertained in the underpinning ground-rules for talk and in the ways that teachers set up these different expectations. These differences were evident, not so much in the ways teachers used questions or other speech acts, but in the extent to which they valued the development of the pupils' own ideas, and encouraged them to engage in extended dialogue concerning their own understandings and misconceptions. In England and America, for example, children would bid for the opportunity to speak, and teachers would typically allocate turns to

as many different pupils as possible. In contrast, French and Russian teachers would often encourage extended contributions from one individual pupil for the benefit of the whole class; prompting and supporting the pupil to help him or her develop a line of thought, clarify a misconception, or work out, with the help of his peers, the detailed solution to a problem.

Alexander argues that when pupils' ideas are valued in this way, thinking is more reflective and understanding more secure. He therefore suggests (2004) that the most effective teaching is 'dialogic' and that learning is best supported where the scaffolded dialogue is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful. His explanations of these essential features are summarised in figure 2 below:

Dialogic teaching is:

*Collective*

Learning is addressed together, rather than in isolation.

*Reciprocal*

Teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints.

*Supportive*

Ideas are articulated freely, without fear of giving the 'wrong' answer and pupils help each other to reach common understandings.

*Cumulative*

Teachers and children build on each other's ideas and chain them into coherent lines of enquiry.

*Purposeful*

Teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view.

**Figure 2: Features of dialogic teaching, summarised from Alexander 2004, pp 22-23.**

Such recommendations are supported by Rojas-Drummond (2000), Rojas-Drummond et al (2001), Rojas-Drummond and Mercer (2004), all cited in Mercer and Littleton's (2007) recent work. These studies focused on a group of teachers whose pupils gained high marks in reading comprehension and mathematics, and found that they held certain qualities in common, which could be grouped into three important areas.



Firstly they used questions not just to check understanding, but to guide and develop it, adjusting their teaching accordingly and encouraging pupils to justify, reason and reflect. Secondly, as well as teaching 'subject content' they taught pupils (both by demonstration and by encouraging pupils to make their thinking explicit) how to solve problems and make sense of their experience. Thirdly, learning was treated as a social, communicative process: pupils were encouraged to take an active, vocal role in a supportive interchange of views and ideas.

These factors resonate strongly with the features proposed by Alexander (2004) discussed above. Mercer and Littleton (2007) acknowledge this 'positive convergence of research findings' (p 42) citing also the work of Wells (1999) on 'dialogic inquiry', Nystrand's 'dialogic spells' (2003) and Brown and Palinscar's 'reciprocal teaching' (1989).

Mercer and Littleton (2007) draw on this unusually high level of convergence, summarising key points of agreement to compose a definition of 'dialogic teaching' which is presented below:

1. students are given opportunities and encouragement to question, state points of view, and comment on ideas and issues that arise in lessons;
2. the teacher engages in discussions with students which explore and support the development of their understanding of content;
3. the teacher takes students' contributions into account in developing the subject theme of the lesson and in devising activities that enable students to pursue their understanding themselves, through talk and other activity;
4. the teacher uses talk to provide a cumulative, continuing, contextual frame to enable students' involvement with the new knowledge they are encountering.

**Figure 3: Definition of 'dialogic teaching' by Mercer and Littleton (2007, p 42)**

## **2.8 Communicative approaches and the notion of 'interactivity'.**

The case for such dialogic teaching, then, would seem to be a very strong one, but Mercer and Littleton (2007) argue that it is not always appropriate. They suggest that the teacher will need to cultivate a varied repertoire of ways of using language and select from these the most appropriate approach for the task in hand. Mortimer and Scott (2003) consider the nature of such discursive variety in the context of their empirical research into secondary science teaching. They conclude that in order to achieve a range of different aims and purposes, teachers draw on different approaches, interventions and patterns of discourse. They refer to the way in which teachers select from and orchestrate these as 'the staging of a public performance on the social plane of the classroom' (Mortimer and Scott, 2003, p 28). In order to gain insights into the ways in which a teacher might direct this performance, they propose a framework to support analysis of the science teacher's interactions with his/her students.

Central to this framework is the concept of *communicative approach*, which concerns the extent to which the teacher takes turns with the students in the process of the discourse, and takes account of and develops the students' own ideas.

They suggest that the dialogue between teacher and students can be characterised along two dimensions: *dialogic - authoritative* and *interactive – non-interactive*.

Placing the teacher's approach somewhere on the first of these dimensions (*dialogic - authoritative*) will describe the extent to which the teacher attempts to present or recognise other points of view. A teacher placed at the *authoritative* end of this continuum would be moving the talk firmly in a particular direction, considering only one point of view, and adopting the position of the expert. On the other hand, a teacher at the *dialogic* end of the spectrum would be facilitating a genuine exploration of a range of different ideas and attending to a number of different 'voices'. This teacher might comment on students' contributions, possibly encouraging them to elaborate, but would not evaluate their ideas in terms of their correctness. Mortimer and Scott (2003) acknowledge that examples of classroom discourse may not always be clear-cut in terms of this dimension, but they suggest

that examining them in relation to this spectrum will give valuable insights into the underpinning ground rules tacitly accepted by the participants.

The second dimension (*interactive - non-interactive*) indicates that talk can either include a number of people, or be produced by a solitary individual. A teacher placed at the *interactive* end of this continuum would be encouraging a range of participants to engage in the talk, while a teacher who adopted an extremely *non-interactive* approach would be preventing the students from taking any part in it.

Mortimer and Scott thus suggest that interactions in the science classroom can be located between *dialogic and authoritative* on the one hand and *interactive and non-interactive* on the other, and they combine these dimensions to produce four classes of communicative approach, suggesting that these can be useful both for planning science teaching and also for analysing it after the event. This combination is illustrated below:

	<b>INTERACTIVE</b>	<b>NON-INTERACTIVE</b>
<b>DIALOGIC</b>	<b>A</b> Interactive/dialogic	<b>B</b> Non-interactive/dialogic
<b>AUTHORITATIVE</b>	<b>C</b> Interactive/authoritative	<b>D</b> Non-interactive/authoritative

**Figure 4: Four classes of communicative approach, proposed by Mortimer and Scott (2003) p 35.**

Thus the four classes of communicative approach can be described as interactive/dialogic; non-interactive/dialogic; interactive/authoritative; and non-interactive/authoritative. This framework for analysis is derived from Scott's thesis (1997) and is influenced by the work of Lotman (1988) and Bakhtin (1934). Scott explains that Lotman, studying both written and spoken texts, distinguished between those which aimed to *convey* meanings and those which attempt to *generate* new meaning. As previously discussed, Bakhtin views authoritative discourse as that with a fixed and non-negotiable meaning, which 'demands our unconditional allegiance'; whereas an internally persuasive discourse 'is able to reveal ever new ways to mean' (Bakhtin 1934, pp 343-346). Scott explains that most sections of classroom

discourse can be expected to contain features of both these types of text, but that one approach will often predominate.

These ideas resonate with suggestions (English et al, 2002; Myhill, 2006) that 'interactive' teaching does not necessarily support development of thinking, or encourage consideration of differing points of view. Scott and Mortimer's model seems to go one step further by suggesting that the teacher's approach can be 'dialogic' without any interaction taking place at all. This is rather different from both Alexander's and Mercer and Littleton's representations of 'dialogic teaching' (2004 and 2007 respectively) for which in both cases, spoken interaction between teachers and students is an essential pre-requisite. However, Mortimer and Scott point out that coming to understand something that is being said is in itself a dialogic process, since it involves the individual listening to another person's utterance; formulating, in some way, their own 'answer' to it; and anticipating the response of others. As Voloshinov puts it:

Any true understanding, or meaning making, is dialogic in nature, because we lay down a set of our own answering words for each word of the utterance we are in the process of understanding' (Voloshinov 1929, p 102, cited in Mortimer and Scott, 2003, p 121.)

Thus, although a teacher who takes (in Mortimer and Scott's terms) a 'non-interactive / dialogic' approach is not facilitating a *spoken* dialogue between herself and the students, she is, in a sense, rehearsing the individual, *internal 'dialogue'* which she wishes each student to undertake. Such teaching would not be considered 'dialogic' at all, measured against Alexander's indicators (Figure 2) or against Mercer and Littleton's definition of dialogic teaching (Figure 3). However, adopting what Mortimer and Scott would call a 'non-interactive/ dialogic' approach might, I would argue, present students with a useful model for the process of challenging their existing understanding and assimilating new ideas, which has been discussed above. Given the essential place of spoken dialogue in the learning process already established, such a 'non-interactive/ dialogic' approach would not, if used exclusively, be sufficient to challenge and develop understanding. However, used in combination with other approaches, it might well sow the seeds for independent thinking.

I would argue, therefore, that this model allows us to recognise another aspect of the complex process of teaching and learning and to differentiate between two types of teacher-talk: that which is simply designed to transmit information, and that which is likely to stimulate and provoke the kind of internal dialogue implied by Vygotsky's (1978) notion of 'inner speech', thus facilitating the successful assimilation of ideas from the social to the individual plane. As Wells explains it:

Language not only functions as a mediator of social activity, by enabling participants to plan, co-ordinate and review their actions through external speech; in addition, as a medium in which those activities are symbolically represented, it also provides the tool that mediates the associated mental activities in the internal discourse of inner speech.

(Vygotsky 1987, cited in Wells, 1999, p 7)

Put another way, such an approach, despite not involving students directly in spoken dialogue with the tutor or indeed with each other, could be said to be providing 'food for thought' rather than simply telling students what to think.

I would also argue that the model takes into account the issues raised above about 'interactivity'; recognising that not all interaction encourages the construction of meaning, and also that conversely, the lack of spoken dialogue between teacher and students need not necessarily imply that the teacher's approach is one of traditional 'transmission' teaching. It also acknowledges that a number of 'voices' are at play within the process of learning and understanding, and that at different times and in different situations, they may speak with varying authority. The latter point is central to the current research questions, particularly the one which asks: whose authority is being called upon or deferred to in this talk? Whose 'voices' are heard both explicitly and implicitly in the whole class dialogue?

The research of Mortimer and Scott relates to science teaching, and the authors consider subject specific issues which are not relevant to this thesis, but nevertheless I have argued that the ideas presented in their model are helpful in the context of

the current research. However, it is important to note, as already indicated, that the term 'dialogic' is used rather differently here than in the concept of 'dialogic teaching' promoted both by Alexander and by Mercer and Littleton. In Mortimer and Scott's model, the term 'dialogic' relates to the number of 'voices', both explicit and implicit which are acknowledged in the talk, whereas 'dialogic teaching' emphasises the dynamics of the spoken dialogue between teacher and students, and between the students themselves.

Certainly, Mortimer and Scott's (2003) model serves to illustrate the complexity, within the case study contexts and beyond, of the tutors' role in encouraging independent thinking and personal reflection, which I have argued is essential to professional learning. Mercer and Littleton (2007) discuss both the work of Mortimer and Scott, and that of Alexander (2004) and argue that good teaching need not necessarily adopt the interactive/dialogic approach, nor does it always need to be 'dialogic' in Alexander's terms, but that the teacher will wish to select from and adopt *each* of the approaches, depending on what is hoped will be achieved and what sort of subject matter is being tackled.

The classroom research reviewed above makes it clear that in formal learning situations it is usually the teacher or tutor who holds ultimate responsibility for establishing ground rules for talk in the classroom. By definition, the 'whole class' contexts at the heart of this research place the tutor firmly in control of guiding the talk and establishing the rules of engagement. In this respect, the situations under study may have more in common with the school classroom than many of the adult, every day social and work situations considered by Mercer (2000). However, it will be pertinent to consider whether research which studies adults in their everyday conversations might offer insights into the way adults do – or might – interact in the more formal world of Higher Education. Research suggests that there are similarities in the ways that any groups of people who regularly talk or work together create and maintain a 'context' for their talk. The next section will consider how they do so and discuss implications for the current study.

## 2.9 Common contextual tracks.

Mercer's work (2000) suggests that specific *frames of reference* exist for talk in different contexts, which might only be apparent when someone ignores them. In most language events, he asserts, participants draw on a common understanding of what words mean, what values are tacitly accepted, and what kinds of interaction they are involved in. In situations which involve counselling, interviewing, or making a sale, as well as interactions between police officers and the general public, for example; patterns of interaction and the balance of power are quite different from each other. In turn, they differ from everyday social conversations or interactions in the school classroom. For the most part, participants seem to be implicitly aware of these differing expectations. Communication breaks down, however, when a novice in any particular context misreads the ground rules or is not made aware of them. For example, Mercer suggests that problems are caused in medical consultations and in the justice system, when such misunderstandings occur.

This implies that the 'context' in which any interactions take place is an important notion and will have a bearing on the quality of learning in the classrooms in this study. Though many people in the field of language studies have attempted to define 'context', there seems to be no common agreement. The most obvious interpretation of the term might refer to the *physical* environment in which the interactions take place. Whilst there can be no doubt that the facilities in the classrooms in this study (in particular the physical arrangement of the furniture) will have an effect on the interactions taking place, such considerations fall outside the remit of this research. Of more relevance is the definition which Mercer proposes. He suggests that:

'context' is a mental phenomenon, and ..... consists of whatever information listeners... use to make sense of what is said.

(Mercer, 2000 p 20)

According to Mercer, speakers have a responsibility to provide prior knowledge of the information that listeners need to know, in order to make sense of what is said – or at least to provide hints or clues which will help the listener access or remember it.

In most adult conversations, he suggests, effective meaning making will depend on the way in which participants build upon this common knowledge.

One aspect of this contextual resource is shared past experience. Barnes and Todd (1977) in their influential work on children talking together in groups, explain that in conversations, meaning comes not just from a particular utterance itself, but from cycles of such utterances. Moreover, they explain that for the children in their study:

the meanings which participants made were not stable. They were fluid and changing, built up out of the existing knowledge and expectations which they brought to the situation, along with their implicit summary of what went on in the conversation, and their reaction to that summary. Meanings change in response to on-going events in the conversation, which lead to a re-interpretation of what has gone so far. (Barnes and Todd, 1977, p 17)

Maybin (1994) reports on her empirical research into children's informal talk during the school day. She argues that such informal talk can add a further important dimension to the on-going classroom dialogue. She suggests that when teachers and learners work together regularly over a period of time, their talk can be seen as part of a 'long conversation' (Maybin, 1994, p 136, cited in Mercer 1995, p 70) which is a key factor for developing the relationship between teacher and learner, and hence for supporting learning. Mercer too emphasises the importance of this on-going process and of the implicit and explicit information which participants of a conversation use to make sense of the talk. He explains that:

like the operators of some strange, dual controlled, track-laying vehicle called 'language', conversational partners build the contextual foundations for their own communication as they go along. Conversations run on contextual tracks made of common knowledge.

(Mercer, 2000, p 25.)



It seems that there are clear parallels between informal conversations and their more formal classroom counterparts. However, Alexander (2000) citing Bakhtin (1986) emphasises that there is a distinction between 'dialogue' and 'conversation'. Dialogue, he explains, is characterised by a more purposeful use of questioning in a particular direction of enquiry, as opposed to the less structured nature of a conversation. It will be important to notice both the style and power balance of the tutor-student interactions in this study, and consider whether they have more in common with some of the friendly, informal adult conversations studied by Mercer, or with the learning dialogue advocated by both Mercer and Alexander for effective learning in the school classroom. It will also be important, in the context of the current research, to consider the extent to which tutors and students, both implicitly and explicitly, build, maintain and use such common contextual tracks, and whether shared past experience does indeed support the making and re-making of meaning, as Barnes and Todd (1997), Maybin (1994), and Mercer (2000) suggest.

This implies that the individual taught sessions under scrutiny in this study cannot be treated as isolated events, but must be seen as part of a gradually developing social learning relationship between participants. It seems clear then, that the nature of this relationship will have some bearing on the quality of the learning dialogue (or 'conversation') and that feelings and emotions are inevitably a factor in such relationships. The next section will therefore consider some aspects of these personal feelings and relationships and discuss their potential influence on the quality of the students' learning. It will also link these discussions with the key theme of reflective learning, outlined above.

## **2.10 The affective dimension of thinking and learning.**

Vygotsky (1987) argues that learning and feeling are inseparable, and that 'there exists a dynamic and meaningful system that constitutes a unity of affective and intellectual processes' (Vygotsky 1987, p 50, quoted in Skidmore 2006). Bruner too (1986) sees our emotions, cognitions and actions as a unified whole. He believes that:

Emotion is not usefully isolated from the knowledge of the situation which surrounds it. Cognition is not a form of pure knowing to which emotion is added (whether to perturb its clarity or not). And action is a final common path based on what one knows and feels.

(Bruner, 1986, p 118)

McDrury and Alterio (2003) draw on the work of a number of scholars to argue that students' personal experiences and feelings must be recognised. They cite Witherell (1991) who contends that context and relationships with others effect changes in personal meanings. They even express the view that the most significant learning often happens during or after emotionally charged events. McDrury and Alterio (2003) further maintain that in Higher Education, students' realities are central to the learning process and that their cultures, values and knowledge must therefore be recognised supported and maintained. They refer to the view of Kalantzis and Cape (1999) who state that:

Learning processes need to recruit, rather than attempt to withdraw and erase, the different subjectivities students bring to learning.

Kalantzis and Cape. 1999, (p 27)

Boud et al (1985) address teachers and trainers who want to use their students' experiences as a basis for learning, and they assert that we need to be aware of the effect emotions are having on the learning process, so that we can either work with our emotional responses or set them aside. Positive emotions can thereby help us see events more clearly and process them more effectively; while negative feelings may cloud the issues, thus raising a barrier which will impede the reflective processes. 'Denial of feeling' they assert, 'is denial of learning'. (Boud et al, 1985, p15). They urge us therefore to value and utilise the realities of students' lives.

Broadfoot (2000) advises that we should value intuition as a part of learning and assessment. She cites Sylwester (1995) who makes the following plea for the recognition of emotion in relation to classroom learning:

By separating emotion from logic and reason in the classroom, .....we have separated two sides of one coin and lost something important in the process. It is impossible to separate emotion from the important activities of life. Don't even try. (Broadfoot, 2000 p 215.)

This theme is also taken up by Skidmore (2006) who argues that the affective conditions for learning deserve more attention from the research community. He links the emotions specifically to classroom talk, arguing that 'the conceptual content and the emotional colouring of classroom discourse cannot be dissociated' (Skidmore, 2006, p 512). He cites the work of Damasio (1994) who argues that for real-world decision-making, what is needed is a partnership of head and heart. Skidmore also concurs with the opinion of Hargreaves (1998) who argues that teaching should involve an emotional understanding of the learner's position and the recognition that emotions are central, rather than peripheral to the purposes of education. Skidmore therefore concludes that:

We have no choice but to evoke emotion as an aspect of learning, for feeling is incorporated within knowing. The question is rather whether our habitual modes of interaction with students are directed towards channelling their emotions within the comfortable and narrow bounds of transmission approaches to pedagogy, or whether we are willing to explore a wider repertoire of possible emotional responses when stimulating and guiding others' learning.'

(Skidmore, 2006, p 512)

Notwithstanding the relative lack of research into the affective aspects of the learning process which Skidmore identifies, there has been some interest in the idea of 'emotional intelligence', as proposed by Goleman (1996, p 34) in his book under this title. The term refers to our ability to acknowledge and handle our emotions and those of others, and has spawned a number of practical books for teachers designed to support the application of emotional intelligence in business and school contexts. Mortiboys (2005) argues that tutors in Higher Education also need to recognise this form of intelligence and apply it to their work, recognising their own feelings and those of their students, and 'encouraging an emotional state in their learners ...that

is conducive to learning' (Mortiboys, 2005, p 8). He cites an extensive survey carried out in Orlando (Carson, 1996), which asked former students to recall their most effective teachers. This found that the single quality most often associated with effective teachers was their special attitude towards and relationship with their students. The respondents:

Connected their transformative experiences .... with a complex and personal encounter linking professor, student, and subject matter in an exchange as much affective as cognitive.

(Carson, 1996, p11, quoted in Mortiboys, 2005, p 9)

There are strong links here with Goodman's views (1978) and those of Bruner (1986) discussed above, on the multiple realities or world views which they believe we create for ourselves and which in turn influence our thinking and help us create new knowledge.

Research into reflective learning also seems to reach a consensus that feelings and emotions are a crucial aspect of the reflection process, and that they should be recognised, respected and utilised to help create meaning. Schön (1983, 1987) believes that reflective practitioners must seek out and recognise connections between thoughts and feelings. Boud, Keough and Walker (1985) express the view that the affective dimension has to be taken into account when tutors are planning and supporting activities to encourage reflection and that feelings and cognition are a closely related and interactive part the reflective process. Whereas negative feelings can distort interpretations and impede learning, they suggest, positive emotions can greatly enhance and support it.

McDrury and Alterio (2003) suggest that one very effective way to link emotions, reflective learning and collaborative talk, in the context of professional education, is through story telling. They propose a model for reflective learning, in which stories relating to students' profession practice are told, expanded, processed and reflected

upon, in order to help them gain new insights into profession issues. They persuade us that stories are a natural human propensity and that, as Hardy (1977) explains,

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and live by narrative,

(Hardy, 1977, p 13, cited in McDrury and Alterio, 2003, p 31).

They recommend that stories can be used as a reflective tool – that, as Mattingly (1991) puts it:

Story telling and story analysis can facilitate a kind of reflecting that is often difficult to do, a consideration of those ordinarily tacit constructs that guide practice. Stories point towards deep beliefs and assumptions that people often cannot tell in propositional ways or denotive form, the 'personal theories' and deeply held images that guide our actions.

( Mattingly, 1991, p 236 in McDrury and Alterio, 2003, p 185)

Mercer (1995) makes the point that teachers often use narratives to make knowledge memorable; and that interesting stories can help learners to re-construct their understanding when returning to similar issues at a later date.

Personal stories then, told by both tutors and students within the context of this study, may well form an important part of the talk for learning which this research considers. It will be important to examine for what purposes and to what effect they are used in the contexts observed; and to consider whether they are, indeed, used effectively to encourage and reveal new insights and incorporate feelings and emotions in a positive and productive way into the reflective learning process.

There may be connections to be made, when analysing the data, between the theme of story-telling; the importance of personal experiences in learning; the notion of a 'long conversation' between teachers and learners; and the ways in which tutors

shape dialogue with their learners. Mercer's explanation (2000) serves to sum up these links:

We use language to make the future from the past and we use the resources of past experience to make joint knowledge and understanding. Using language, we can transform the raw material of our shared life experiences into stories which have continuity and coherence.

(Mercer, 1995, p 47)

According to Mercer (1995) another way in which teachers can often be seen to capitalise on learners' feelings is by evoking laughter, but very little research has been done to investigate this. Edwards and Westgate (1987) suggest that humour and repartee is an important aspect of the ongoing relationship between teachers and pupils, and one which is dependent on past experience; frequently referring back to particular events and past encounters. Sage (2000) suggests that laughter supports our thinking, particularly where creative problem solving is concerned and she also emphasises the need for humour, warm smiles and open body posture if communication in the classroom is to lead to effective learning. Pollard (2005) also suggests that para-verbal aspects of communication (tone of voice, pace and pitch) between teachers and learners and other non-verbal aspects (such as gestures and facial expression) are key to the success of their learners. Sage (2000) maintains that eye contact and smiles are crucial ways in which teachers establish the positive contact with their students on which learning must be predicated. She points out that eye contact is often a key factor in establishing control of a social situation – and suggests that it can also be an important indicator of the power relationships at play in educational settings.

Awareness of these key features of communication may therefore reveal something of the part that feelings and emotions are playing in the ways the case study tutors support and guide their students' talk and make their own talk effective and memorable. They will clearly also be key factors in the way in which relationships which are established and developed between teachers and learners who meet

regularly as a learning community. This relationship between our learning, our emotions and our actions may constitute an important issue within this study, and analysis of the data may throw some light upon the ways in which the participating tutors and students recognise, contrive or construct these links in the contexts observed.

One final question, then, will need to be answered if a rich and informative picture is to be painted of these classroom interactions: what evidence is there that tutors seek to involve students' feelings and emotions in the learning dialogue; and to what extent are personal stories a part of this learning dialogue?

### **2.11 Summary.**

In summary, this chapter has developed three main arguments, drawing from the literature reviewed.

Firstly, I have argued that learning is a social construction, rather than the transmission of knowledge - a jointly created *process* rather than a *product*.

Secondly, I have maintained that the case for providing a genuinely interactive dialogue, to support and develop a reflective and critically evaluative approach to learning for our student teachers, seems overwhelming. However, I have also argued that dialogic teaching is not always appropriate; and that tutors will need to maintain a wide repertoire of communicative approaches, selecting, applying and adapting these to the particular purpose in hand.

And finally, I have presented evidence that personal perspectives and emotions; as well as the relationships and shared history of the participant tutors and students; influenced in their turn by the immediate learning contexts and the wider cultures and philosophies of the educational world; are inseparable from the learning process. I have suggested that these may prove a catalyst for reflective learning; an important means of gaining new insights; and the means by which students begin to 'tell their own stories' and develop their own personal and professional views.

This review has therefore served to validate the aims of the current research study and identify key themes which will guide the collection and analysis of the data.

Ensuring a high quality learning dialogue between tutors and students is clearly of paramount importance in preparing student teachers effectively for their professional roles.

The review also endorses the views of scholars such as Alexander (2000, 2004) and Mercer (1995, 2000) who are calling for an approach to teaching in our primary schools which values talk, both as a means of learning and of demonstrating learning. In turn, this adds weight to my own view that it is important to support a similar approach in teacher education. How, after all, will these aspiring teachers encourage and develop such a culture in their own classrooms, if they do not experience it for themselves?



## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology.**

This chapter will justify the paradigm within which this research is set, then explain and justify the approaches and methods used, outlining the sequence of research activity which has contributed to this thesis. Issues of reliability and validity will be considered in the relevant sections of the discussion of methods and methodology, as well as in section 3.7.2 and 3.7.3.

### **3.1 Overall Approach**

Proponents of a positivist approach would maintain that the aspect of the social world under study here, like the world of natural phenomena, has a real, objective existence independent of the individual, which can be measured and defined precisely and objectively by the scrutiny of quantitative data. However, one of the criticisms of positivistic social science, as explained by Cohen et al (2000) is that it 'fails to take account of our unique ability to interpret our experiences and represent them to ourselves' (Cohen et al 2000, page 19). My research concerns the teaching and learning process as seen in the context of human communication, and aims to acknowledge, examine and throw light upon the complexities of the interactions between tutors and students. I therefore intend to explore possible interpretations of the experiences of tutors and students, an approach which clearly does not sit well within the perspectives of the normative paradigm.

On the other hand, to adopt an extreme interpretivist view would be to suggest that each incidence of social interaction is unique. Seale (2004) explains that Lincoln and Guba take this view in their earlier work (1985) and claim that not one, but many realities exist. This might suggest that any conclusions drawn about the specific reality in the context under scrutiny in this research would not be relevant to other professionals in the world of education.

Seale (2004) goes on to explain however that some commentators adopt a middle position between these two extremes, and that Hammersley (1992 p 50) for example, has coined the term 'subtle realism' in which the existence of an externally real social world is accepted which is independent of the researcher's interpretation, but which cannot be known conclusively in any sense of finality or certainty. This middle view seems to best represent the stance taken in relation to the current

research project. The review of literature has set out a socio-cultural view of learning, which acknowledges the influence of social and cultural contexts on the ways in which human beings behave. This must imply, of course, that in one sense the particular 'social reality' under study is unique, and that my interpretation of it will inevitably be influenced by my own values and past experiences. This is accepted, and indeed explicitly informs my examination and discussion of the situations under study; but it need not preclude the search for patterns within the talk between tutors and students; nor the discussion about what this might indicate about other talk, employed for similar purposes, and in similar contexts within teacher education. My research does not attempt to discover 'the truth' about the ways talk is used for learning in these particular social situations; but it does aim to explore some possible interpretations of, and provide some insight into, the situations observed. It also aims to draw some conclusions about the ways in which the process of talking for learning operates here, and might be operating in other contexts within teacher education.

Having set out the broad philosophy which underpins this research, in the following section I will describe sources of inspiration for the topic itself and acknowledge the influences of certain key researchers in the field.

### **3.2 Influences on the choice of topic and research design**

My interest in the topic, as well as the design of my research project, was inspired by the work of a number of prominent scholars. The first of these is Mercer, whose empirical studies (1995, 2000, 2007) of the naturally occurring talk of adults and children in social, work and learning contexts have heavily influenced both my overall approach to this study and the analytical framework used to support analysis of the data.

The second influential figure is Alexander, whose work on 'dialogic teaching' (2004) also informed the analytical framework for this research. His UK based research project (2003-2007) which took place across a large number of primary schools in North Yorkshire, was also influential. Known as the 'Talk for Learning Project (2003 - 2007)', its aim was to 'harness the power of talk to improve the quality of teaching and learning' (Alexander, 2003, p 3) in a cross-section of the local authority's primary

schools. Teachers from the schools concerned were asked to keep video evidence of their own teaching and discuss these recordings on a regular basis, setting targets for improvement with reference to Alexander's 'indicators of dialogic teaching' (2004, p 27). This project was not completed until after my own research commenced, but early evaluations have influenced decisions about my research design, and Alexander's account of practical and technological problems, encountered during the early years of his project, have been useful in attempting to avoid similar difficulties in my own context.

Finally, I acknowledge the influence of the work of Scott (1997) and Mortimer and Scott (2003). This work studied pedagogical interactions between teachers and pupils within secondary Science lessons in England and Brazil, from a Vygotskian perspective. In particular, my own study draws on Mortimer and Scott's model of two dimensions (authoritative/dialogic and non-interactive/ interactive) to teachers' communicative approaches in the classroom. This work has been discussed in the literature review and the notion of the two continua also informs the analytical framework used to support data analysis in the current research project.

These studies inspired my interest and influenced my broad aim to contribute to the body of knowledge and understanding about the ways in which teachers and learners construct knowledge together, by considering this within the particular context of teacher education. They also informed practical aspects of the project and the theoretical thinking behind the data collection and analysis in this research.

These three influential figures and my wider reading of the relevant literature, together with my own experience in the primary classroom and in the role of teacher educator, convinced me that the ways in which tutors interact with student teachers will make a crucial difference to the quality of their learning and that research was needed to help teacher educators 'practise what they preach' by supporting their students' use of talk for learning effectively. Moreover, Alexander (2000) found that external bodies exert a very strong influence on what student teachers in England are taught during their professional course. The issue of 'authority' in relation to professional knowledge and opinion is therefore an important aspect of the meaning being created and also needed to be reflected in the research focus.

### **3.2.2 The choice of 'Case Study' as a research strategy.**

There were two main reasons why a case study approach seemed the most appropriate way to meet my research aims.

The first relates to the notion of 'context'. My aim was to investigate the complex process of communication between tutors and student teachers, and in particular to throw some light on ways in which tutors might create a supportive learning dialogue between themselves and their students. I also wanted to explore the extent to which tutors, in the way they shape the talk between themselves and their students, might offer them a 'voice' in their own professional learning. Placing the specific learning context at the heart of these research aims precluded other research strategies from the outset. For example, as Yin (2003) explains, an experiment deliberately removes the phenomenon under study from its natural situation and a survey designer has to limit the number of contextual aspects to be studied in order to facilitate the use of a large number of respondents. The socio-cultural perspective underlying this research (as justified above) emphasises the context as a fundamental aspect of any learning and teaching, and a constructivist view of learning pre-supposes that the tutors and students are actively engaged in constructing and then drawing upon their own cultural context. It follows then that the chosen research strategy needed to accommodate both these perspectives. One of the strengths of case studies, as Cohen et al (2000) explain, is that they facilitate the observation of effects within real situations, recognising the context as a powerful determinant:

Contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex, dynamic, and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance  
(Cohen et al, 2000, p 181).

Since the literature review has established teaching and learning as just such a dynamic and complex phenomenon, the choice of research strategy therefore seemed an obvious one, since Yin (2003) recommends that a case study is appropriate when the researcher makes a deliberate choice to cover contextual conditions.

The second reason for the choice of this research strategy pertains to the nature of the research questions. As Yin (2003) again advises:

'In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (Yin 2003, p 1).

A rich and detailed qualitative study of interactions between student teachers and their tutors within one institution could, I believed, add significantly to knowledge in the field, and perhaps pave the way for larger scale projects in the future, and since Yin's (2003) description seemed to match the situation exactly, the decision was made to conduct two case studies and to aim for a substantial depth of analysis within them, in order to study the ways in which the tutors shaped and guided the talk between themselves and their students and to what effect.

### **3.3 Aims and research questions**

Within the broad aims of the study, a specific focus needed to be identified for the case studies. My reading of the literature had led me to be particularly interested in certain aspects of the tutor-student talk. Given the emphasis on the construction of meaning which has been justified in the literature review, it was decided that as far as possible, the 'teaching narrative' (Scott, 1997, p 33) should be kept intact, so that the meaning made by the tutors and students could be tracked across each session as a whole. The research was also to focus on the ways in which each tutor supported, shaped and guided the talk in her sessions, which would potentially include her interactions with small groups as well as those with the whole class. However, to attempt to study discussions held in small groups as well as those in the whole class context would have proved very complex, and it would also generate a set of data which would be far too unwieldy for the context of a small scale study. Since my particular interest was in the tutors' management of this talk, this lent itself to a focus on those sections of the sessions in which the tutors took a leading role. I therefore decided to analyse the whole class elements, but to present a summary of all aspects of each session, so as to maintain the 'story' that each session was telling. Specific aims were therefore defined as follows:

- to examine and analyse the ways in which the tutors in this study shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in 'whole class' contexts;
- to attempt to identify patterns and connections between the communicative strategies of the lecturers and response from the students;
- to begin to explore the relationship between lecturers' communicative approaches and their students' potential learning;
- to consider whose authority is being called upon or deferred to, both implicitly and explicitly, in these whole class interactions – that is to say, whose 'voices' are being heard;
- to consider whether any generalisations are possible from the case study, and identify any findings which might be useful to the wider community of teacher education professionals.

These were then reformulated into the following research questions:

- Taken from a socio-cultural perspective, in what ways do the tutors in this study shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in 'whole class' contexts?
- Whose authority is being called upon or deferred to in this talk? Whose 'voices' are heard both explicitly and implicitly in the whole class dialogue?
- How, and to what extent, are these voices managed, guided and facilitated by the tutors in the context of this 'whole class talk' - and to what effect?

### **3.4 The setting for the case studies**

Having acknowledged some of the ways in which early decisions about this research originated, this section will go on to describe and justify decisions made about the project itself and the research methods and strategies which were adopted.

The chosen context for the research was my own place of work, a college of Higher Education in the Midlands of England, and the case studies focus on two particular tutors and the ways they support their students' learning and thinking through talk. Thus the research took place in its natural occurring situation, rather than one generated specifically for the research purpose; and took advantage of my intimate

knowledge of the setting, providing a rich and informative picture of the relationships and processes under scrutiny. It comprised two case studies, each one focusing on a particular tutor and a particular group of students during their year long course in preparation for a career in teaching.

Given the obvious convenience of this location for me as the researcher, it is important to justify, as Denscombe (2003) suggests, that these particular cases represent a suitable context for pursuing my aims and examining the identified research questions. One way to do so would be to suggest that the institution and the particular teaching and learning situation under study is typical of others, at least across England, and that the findings from this study would therefore apply elsewhere. In the complex field of human communication and learning, however, and more specifically in the world of education, it would be difficult to claim that any interaction was typical of others, though similarities and differences between observations made here, with those from other studies referred to in the review of literature, will, of course inform, the discussion. Furthermore, the institution itself, though constrained by similar regulations and government expectations as other providers of teacher education, might not be considered typical in a way which would justify generalisation to others. Indeed the college brochure is at pains to suggest that this institution is anything *but* typical; implying that it offers a more personal education than some larger institutions, and emphasising the benefits of the small class interactions that are the focus of this study.

As far as the analysis of the interactions themselves is concerned, however, the validity of this research lies not in any claims to typicality. One of its main aims is to understand the nature of the interactions in this particular context and in this specific set of circumstances. This resonates with Stake's (1995) advice that:

The real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others, but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (Stake, 1995, p 8).

It has been strongly argued in the literature review that individual contexts *do* provide varying opportunities for communication and learning to take place. The notion that these individual tutors can and do make a difference to the students' learning is, after all, fundamental to the research itself. The intention then, is that by being helped to understand and interpret what is happening in these specific circumstances, the reader might also be helped to gain specific insights into what is happening in others. The contention is not that findings from this research can be used directly to guide practice in others, but rather that it will raise questions which could usefully be asked by others of the practice of teacher education in other contexts. Tentative suggestions will be made concerning the way these insights might cast their light into other situations, but I will take care to recommend that further research in a much wider context would be needed to ensure the validity of any such claims.

### **3.5 Selecting the participants.**

#### **3.5.1 The tutors.**

The case studies focus on myself and on a colleague. In the selection of the participants, a degree of pragmatism must be acknowledged, since the time and resources available to a lone researcher are inevitably limited. However, as Denscombe (2003) explains, convenience need not be a concern where it is only used to influence a choice between equally suitable participants and contexts. Valid discussion of the research questions is not precluded by familiarity with the participants or the contexts in this case. Indeed it will be argued that this is an advantage in understanding the behaviours to be studied and that this close involvement of the researcher in the world of the participants will therefore enhance, rather than detract from the credibility of findings and conclusions.

There were other factors which influenced the selection of a close colleague and of myself as a participant, and these included ethical considerations. Firstly, a considerable commitment was required from any participating tutors in terms of their time and good will. For this to be maintained, they would need to be convinced of the usefulness of the project for their own professional development and hence for the enhancement of provision for their students. They would also need to invest a



considerable element of trust in me that my scrutiny of their practice, though it might be critical, would be constructive, sensitive, accurate and non-judgemental. I would argue that my willingness to hold up my own professional practice for scrutiny was helpful from an ethical point of view, in order to assure my colleague of the integrity of my intentions. Other ethical considerations will be considered in section 3.8, but I would argue that provided these relationships are acknowledged, any disadvantage in my own involvement as, in effect, a participant observer, are outweighed by positive elements, both ethical and methodological.

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that my personal involvement could be seen as unorthodox, and even risky, in terms of ensuring the validity and reliability of my findings. The following stringent measures were put in place, therefore, to address this:

Firstly, the provision of 'low inference descriptors' (Seale 1999) was facilitated by the use of video footage as the source of data and by careful, accurate transcription. (Methods of achieving this are discussed in section 3.7.2.)

Secondly, the participating colleague was asked to check the accuracy of the first summary of data (pertaining to her own sessions) as will be described in section 3.7.3. Again, she was asked to read and comment upon the accuracy and validity of findings, as presented in the finished chapter, concerning the case study of her practice. This measure was designed to balance, as far as possible, the fact that when presenting and analysing data of my own practice I would inevitably have first hand knowledge which would not be available to me when presenting the case study of my colleague. It is acknowledged that such respondent validation is not without its critics and that as Abrams (1987) would suggest, my colleague's comments may well be influenced by the extent to which my results concur with her own self image. However, I would argue that it still has value, in that it might serve to point out other possible interpretations of events, which can in due course be considered.

Thirdly, my colleague was involved in decisions about the rooms in which the focus sessions would take place and the positioning of the camera, so as to ensure that the

recording apparatus and physical properties of the room allowed her to function as naturally as possible within the sessions.

Fourthly, where there was a danger of subjectivity in the interpretations and the analysis of findings, this was openly acknowledged and alternative interpretations discussed and evaluated.

Finally, the detailed analytical framework and the reiterative nature of the analysis, outlined in section 3.7.5 and summarised in table 3.3 ensured that the focus for the analysis and discussion in each case study was consistent between the two studies.

It should be noted that both case studies are written in the third person in order to provide consistency for the reader, and to facilitate a coherent style when comparing the two studies. Given the open acknowledgements above, it is clear that this was *not* intended to obscure my own first hand participation in Case Study Two.

These then are the methodological strategies which allow me to argue confidently that despite my own close personal involvement, the findings from this research project and the arguments put forward in this thesis are valid. Further discussion of this issue is to be found within Case Study Two.

### **3.5.2 The student groups**

The selection of student groups was less contentious. Rather than being made with any intention to control variables, the selection was made for largely pragmatic reasons concerning timetabling and the suitability of available rooms for the filming process, so as to cause the minimum disruption to the normal behaviour of all participants, as discussed above. However, since at the beginning of the research these groups were not known to me or to the second participating tutor, this represents a valid mode of selection, which would be free of any bias in terms of the outcome of the research. Alexander (2000) discusses the issue of pragmatism in the context of his large scale international research into primary education. Indeed he asserts that:

The education research literature is littered with small-scale studies which cite the virtues of ethnography or case study to dignify work which is small-scale out of necessity rather than choice.

(Alexander, 2000, p 166)

Such an accusation would need to be taken seriously here, but Alexander goes on to suggest that researchers should hold onto 'insight' as the most desirable outcome of educational research.

It is, of course, acknowledged that there are a large number of variables at play which might determine differences in the pattern of interactions. It is likely that opportunities for interaction varied from session to session, according to the time of day; the position of the session in relation to the length and stage of the college course; the social dynamics of the groups; the topics under discussion; and the differing physical environments in the various teaching rooms. All these variables are important, and may well affect the interactions under study, but they would be impossible to control within any study of 'real life' learning and teaching. Indeed, as discussed in the literature review, they are fundamental to the whole process of communication and learning. Hence, they are an integral part of the 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973, cited in Robson, 1993, p 404) provided by the data and are explicitly addressed in the analysis and discussion. Moreover, the variables encountered are a part of everyday life in any educational institution, and the description thus generated is therefore likely to paint a realistic and possibly recognisable picture for the reader, thus providing useful insights, as Alexander (2000) recommends.

### **3.6 Selecting the sessions to be studied**

The decision was made to study sessions near the beginning and end of the students' course, and with the same student group on both occasions for each tutor. Thus the two sessions would represent two 'snapshots' in the learning and teaching relationship between tutors and students. (As far as this particular module was concerned, these groups were to be taught by the same tutors throughout the one year course.) The decision not to study sessions at the very beginning for the course was made to facilitate a level of trust by the students in the integrity of the tutors' intentions, and to allow relationships and student confidence to have developed to a

point where participants' behaviour would be as natural as possible in the circumstances. The subject matter being taught comprised (as far as possible) a range of topics, the nature of which will be expanded upon in the case studies themselves.

In this section I have laid out the context and the focus of the case studies. The next decisions concerned the nature and the means of data collection, and the methods of analysis.

### **3.7 Collecting and Analysing the Data**

In order to answer the research questions identified above, the provision of a detailed and accurate record of the talk in these university classrooms was, of course, essential. The following sections, therefore, will explain and justify the decisions made about data collection and analysis, as well as the measures taken to ensure the reliability and validity (or put another way, the credibility) of this research.

#### **3.7.1 Summary of data collected.**

The data collected for both case studies is summarised in Table 3.1 below.

## Video footage and transcriptions.

	<b>Pam &amp; Group 1</b>	<b>Louise and Group 2</b>
<i>Early in the course.</i> <i>(End of first term)</i>	Session 1: 'Reflection on School Placement' and 'The Reading Process'.	Session 1:  'The Reading Process'.
<i>Later in the Course.</i> <i>(End of last term)</i>	Session 2:  'Talking about Books'	Session 2:  'Talking about Books'.

**Table 3.1: Summary of data collected**

Each taught Session is approximately one and a half hours in length. Where the session numbers coincide, the curriculum content is broadly similar, though some differences pertain which will be explained within the relevant case study chapters. The timing for parallel sessions was also broadly similar: thus 'Session 1' was taught by each tutor to her group in the same week, as was 'Session 2'.

### **3.7.2 Reliability of the data**

Seale (1999) provides advice about methods of recording naturally occurring talk, and exhorts researchers to provide 'low inference descriptors.' This involves:

Recording observations in terms that are as concrete as possible, including verbatim accounts of what people say, for example, rather than researchers' reconstructions of the general sense of what a person said, which would allow researchers' personal perspectives to influence the reporting. (Seale, 1999, p 148)

The provision in this case of video recordings ensured the integrity of the data by providing a means of very accurate transcription, and all the video footage would be transcribed by one person, to ensure consistency. A copy of the video footage was made onto DVD so that this could be watched simultaneously on the computer screen during transcription. The transcription conventions employed were adapted from those employed by Mercer (2000) in his presentation and analysis of language use in a wide range of different contexts, and were intended to provide all the information required by the framework for analysis (see section 3.7.5) without being over-complex. (These symbols are shown in table 3.2. at the end of this section.) Thus, for example, pauses were recorded, but their length was not measured precisely, and gestures and intonation were indicated where they contributed significantly to the meaning or emphasis of the speech. Where possible, conventional punctuation was used to ensure clarity for the reader.

I worked closely with the transcriber in the early stages of this process to ensure consistency, and we maintained regular contact throughout to iron out any difficulties. I then checked each of the transcriptions using the DVD recordings and made minor adjustments where necessary. This also provided me with an initial opportunity to familiarise myself with the data. A further opportunity to check the accuracy and consistency of the transcripts was built into the analysis stage, since the DVDs were again available for reference.

The transcription symbols used are set out below.

Pauses are indicated thus, with the length of the pause roughly differentiated by the length of the ellipsis:	..... .....
Simultaneous speech is recorded thus:	<b>Pam:</b> Mmmm That does {sound like – <b>Student:</b> {it was very good
Emphatic speech is shown underlined:	<i>I think it <u>can</u> be much more creative but y'know as we've said before,</i>
Inaudible words or utterances are shown thus: or thus:	[.....] [....inaudible....]
Gestures or other non-verbal actions are indicated in brackets	<b>Pam:</b> (nodding) Right

**Table 3.2: Transcription symbols adopted in this study.**  
(Adapted from Mercer, 2000, p xii – xiii.)

### 3.7.3 Validity of the analysis and interpretation.

The presence of the video camera offered the opportunity to re-visit the behaviour being studied and provided a further means of triangulation, as advocated by Denzin (1978) since each tutor viewed the entire footage of herself and 'Louise' was also asked to comment on my interpretation of the events. This added an element of 'respondent validation' (Cohen et al, 2000, p 189) going some way towards endorsing the validity of the researcher's interpretation of the data, by ensuring that it appeared so from the point of view of the participant tutor herself. In order to replicate this process as far as possible in relation to the analysis of my own teaching, the other participant was again asked to comment on the validity of the analysis.

The disadvantage of having the camera present must also be acknowledged, however; since this might reasonably be expected to make all participants self conscious and to affect their behaviour. Having decided to use video footage as evidence, it was necessary to consider the relative merits of using either a fixed or manually operated camera. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. It

was decided that the use of a fixed camera would considerably inhibit the behaviour of the tutor, since movement would be restricted by the range of the camera. Whilst the presence of a camera operator might also change behaviour, it would nevertheless allow the tutor to move about the room in a more natural way and also hand over responsibility of the technical aspects of the filming to the camera operator, thus freeing her to teach without unnecessary distractions. The latter option was chosen as preferable, and the effect of the operator's presence would be reduced as far as possible by the positioning of the camera and its operator in an unobtrusive part of the room - and where practical, selecting rooms where this could be achieved most effectively.

It is argued that, although some change in behaviour is almost inevitable, this will be offset by the advantage that all interactions can be faithfully recorded in a way which would be impossible by any other ethical means. Unlike the use of audio-recording which might arguably be less obtrusive, it would also provide the transcriber with access to visual and contextual information which might help clarify any parts of the dialogue which were difficult to decipher, and also support the analysis by making meaning clear. Furthermore, it could be argued that *any* means of data collection will carry with it the possibility of altered behaviour when the participants know they are being scrutinised.

The next important decision concerned the way in which this data would be analysed. The following section will describe and justify the decisions that were made in this respect.

#### **3.7.4 Method of analysis.**

Some research into interactions between teachers and learners adopts quantitative methods of data analysis. Hughes and Westgate (1998) for example, in a small research project building on their previous work (1997), studied one teacher's interactions with a small group of pupils. This work was unlike the present study in that the context was contrived specifically for the purposes of the research, but was nevertheless similar in its focus, aiming to make some tentative suggestions as to teacher discourse moves which seemed to be linked to, and supportive of, more interpretive and speculative talk from her pupils. Hughes and Westgate (1988) made



use of a scheme of analysis originally developed by Barnes and Todd in 1977 and revalidated in their more recent work (1995). This is based on two 'inter-active and cognitive frames', each operating at two levels. Using these as a means of categorisation, the discourse moves and cognitive strategies of teacher and pupils can be quantified and compared. This analytical framework was considered as a possibly useful tool in the current project. However, the aim of this study is to track the development of meaning created and supported by the tutors with their students, across and between the taught sessions and within the smaller teaching 'episodes' which make up the sessions. Such an enterprise will self-evidently require the analysis to follow the chronology of the session and avoid the fragmentation of the dialogue which Hughes and Westgate's, and Barnes and Todd's methods would involve.

Other quantitative aspects of the talk in the case study classrooms were considered for possible measurement, in order to inform answers to the research questions. A simple comparison of the number of words spoken by tutors and students, for example, might have offered information about the balance of power in these interactions. However, it has been argued that different types of talk are appropriate for different curriculum purposes, and that in some instances, as in Mortimer and Scott's (2003) 'non-interactive/dialogic category of teaching, a long period of talk generated by one individual need not necessarily indicate an authoritative approach. Measuring quantities of talk within smaller 'episodes' (designed for different curriculum outcomes) might overcome this, but these divisions could be considered fairly arbitrary, and it could also be argued that such a system would be open to manipulation in order to present findings which match the researcher's pre-conceptions. Such quantification might therefore represent what Silverman calls 'counting for the sake of counting' and might be seen as an attempt to 'give only spurious validity' to this research (Silverman, 2001, p 36).

Mehan's warning (1979) is also pertinent here:

The quantitative approach to classroom observation is useful for certain purposes..... However, this approach minimises the contribution of students, neglects the inter-relationship of verbal to non-verbal behaviour, obscures the

contingent nature of interaction, and ignores the (often multiple) functions of language.

(Mehan, 1979, p 14, quoted in Silverman, 2001, p 36.)

For these reasons, a more holistic approach to analysis was sought for this project. After all, if Mercer is right that, in order to support effective collaborative thinking, the talk must be:

not really reducible to the form and content of individual statements, but more to do with how the discourse as a whole represents social, shared thought processes

(1995, p 105),

then clearly such separation of individual utterances from the context of the 'teaching narrative' (Scott, 1997 p 33) would do nothing to support the aims of this particular research project.

What was needed then, was a thorough, systematic way of categorising and analysing the discourse, which would help to answer the research questions above, whilst maintaining the integrity of the teaching narrative. Such a system would need to go beyond individual utterances and examine how these are arranged, sequenced and inter-related. It would also need to represent and clarify the way in which meaning is established, developed, elaborated and secured between speakers, and help identify ways in which this process is impeded or prevented.

On the other hand, it is self-evident that such overall meaning is influenced, indeed created, by the different ways in which utterances are constructed, and in which individual words are selected and nuances of meaning implied. Thus, although fragmentation of the discourse is to be avoided, none of these levels of analysis should be neglected.

Mercer's (1995) advice concerning the analysis of such talk is particularly pertinent here. He suggests that to be effective, any such analysis should take place at linguistic, psychological and cultural levels.

The first of these levels (that is to say linguistic) would indicate what kinds of *speech acts* were being performed (So, for example, do the speakers assert, challenge, explain, request?). It would also concern what kind of conversational *exchanges* take place and what *topics* are covered.

The second level (that is to say psychological) would try to link thoughts and actions. Mercer suggests that one should consider: the underpinning *ground-rules* for the talk; how the topics introduced by the speakers reflect their *interests and concerns*; the extent to which we can discern *reasoning being made visible*; and what kind of *communicative relationships* are being acted out.

The third level (the cultural one) would indicate *the kinds of reasoning which are being valued* and encouraged in the particular context of the talk.

I therefore decided to draw upon this advice, and upon key pieces of the research literature reviewed, in order to construct a framework for the analysis of the data, which is set out in section 3.7.5 and summarised in table 3.3.

To facilitate this analysis, the taught sessions would be divided into 'episodes' as Scott (1997) recommends, so as to provide manageable 'chunks' of data, both from the point of view of the researcher and the reader. The divisions between these 'episodes' would fall where there was a natural change in activity or emphasis, for example when students moved from 'whole class' to small group activity.

The initial analysis would take the form of hand-written annotations, led by the prompts and questions in the framework below. (An example of a section of transcript annotated in this way is provided in Appendix 1) These would be written up in the form of a summary of the way these features presented themselves in the context of each taught session - and of the way each episode contributed to the teaching narrative (Scott, 1997). Thus the entire body of data from the taught sessions would have been processed, and the framework could be evaluated to see whether the headings and prompts are relevant, comprehensive and useful. (Are there, for example, strategies used by the tutors which do *not* seem to fall into the categories defined? Does the analytical scheme itself need to be expanded, so as to include *all* relevant elements of the teaching narrative?) If necessary, the headings

and prompts would then be refined and adjusted and the data examined again in the light of this expanded version of the framework.

This approach addresses the charge of 'anecdotalism' (Silverman 2001) that is sometimes made of studies which analyse naturally occurring talk. Fielding and Fielding (1986) identify two pitfalls which researchers must avoid: one is the tendency to select data to match the researcher's pre-conceptions; and the second is the tendency to select the more interesting sections of data and neglect less dramatic, but perhaps more significant parts. The measures described above, therefore, give the reader the opportunity to see for him/herself that sections have not been chosen on an anecdotal basis. A summary is available of the whole corpus of data; the criteria for selecting each extract for further study are made explicit; the analytical framework identifies what is considered noteworthy; and the analysis of each selected item includes careful justification for its selection. Furthermore, full copies of the video footage and transcripts have been retained, and would be available for inspection by the reader if required.

### **3.7.5 Framing the analysis**

Examining the interactions in these classrooms then, is a complex business and I have argued that to oversimplify it would seriously distort the process under scrutiny and undermine the validity of any conclusions. It is therefore posited that the following three aspects of classroom talk emerge from the literature as factors which are important to communication for learning. They will therefore need to be noted, acknowledged and taken into account in the analysis, and together form the framework which will guide it.

#### **i) The curriculum aims and purposes of the talk.**

It seems reasonable to assume that the learning outcomes intended by the tutors will influence the ways in which they guide the talk in this context, just as Scott and Mortimer found in their research into school science teaching (Scott, 1997; Mortimer and Scott, 2003). In framing the analysis of the data in the current study, an important consideration will therefore be the 'curriculum content' of the discussion, that is to say, the learning outcome which the tutor appears to be moving towards, in each section of the discourse. For example:

- Is the focus on theoretical subject knowledge, and if so, on whose authority does the validity of this 'knowledge' seem to rest?
- Alternatively, is the focus on the pedagogical aspects of the subject and if so, does the tutor seem to be encouraging autonomous professional reflection on this (drawing on first hand experience as Schön, 1987, and Pollard, 2005, recommend)? On the other hand, is the tutor promoting particular answers to the problems posed, from her own view-point? Or is she perhaps deferring to a 'higher authority' in respect of recommendations drawn from research or the advice and requirements of government-controlled agencies?

**ii) The 'power balance' and overall ethos which prevails, including the kinds of reasoning which are seen to be valued.**

This aspect relates to the 'ground-rules' which seem to be underpinning the talk, and the kinds of communicative relationships which are being played out (Mercer, 1995, 2000). It will be important to note how these seem to be linked to the reasoning which takes place, and to the kind of thinking which is valued and encouraged. The following questions will guide this aspect of the analysis:

- Does the *style* of language used reflect the distinctive teacher–learner relationships which (as previously established) many classroom studies identify, or is a less formal conversational style adopted, as in some of the adult contexts studied by Mercer (2000) outside the school environment? What does this seem to indicate about the 'classroom ethos' created by each tutor and the implicit 'ground rules' which underpin the classroom interactions?
- *Who* raises the topics for discussion and whose interests and concerns do they reflect? To what extent is the direction of the talk purposeful and importantly, *whose* purpose is being pursued? Who is responsible for continuing a topic or proposing another direction for the talk?

- What *patterns* of initiation and response can be discerned, in terms of who initiates each exchange and what form the responses take? For example, do Initiation – Response – Feedback patterns predominate, as in the classroom studies of Sinclair and Coulter (1975) and if so, what form does the tutor's feedback take? Is it simply an evaluation of the 'correctness' of the answer as perceived by the tutor; or does the tutor select and propose new problems, or provide constructive feedback or elaboration? (Wells 1999)
- What kinds of *reasoning* are being valued here? Is the talk 'reciprocal' (Alexander, 2004) in the sense that participants listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints? Is a critically evaluative stance taken to these ideas?
- To what extent does the tutor seem to '*scaffold*' the students' thinking (Wood, Bruner et al, 1976) by tuning into their (apparent) current stage of understanding, selecting and building on this to develop understanding? If such scaffolding is evident, is it the tutor who decides what constitutes 'understanding', or what conclusion is valid in each particular context; or does she again, defer to another authority?
- Is there evidence of thinking that is genuinely *cumulative*, in the sense that participants 'build on their own and others' ideas and chain them into coherent line of thinking and enquiry' (Alexander, 2004, p 23)?
- Whose authority seems to be implied in the communicative approach selected by the tutor? In Mortimer and Scott's terms (2003) where does the approach seem to fall on the dialogic – authoritative, and interactive – non-interactive continua?

### iii) **Common contextual 'tracks'.**

This aspect of the analysis focuses on the 'contextual' information (as defined earlier) which students and tutors establish and draw upon, in order to process and understand the information which is being presented or discussed. It also relates to the personal and professional experiences of the tutor and the students and the

ways in which these are used to inform and validate the reasoning, as far as this is visible. The following questions will serve to inform this consideration:

- To what extent do tutors and students establish and draw upon a common body of previously constructed knowledge, both to make sense of what is being said and to exemplify and give authority to their opinions or conclusions?
- Does this 'knowledge' include first hand personal and professional experiences, and if so, how are these individual perspectives integrated into the 'contextual tracks made of common knowledge' Mercer (2000, p 25) which support further knowledge building? Is this 'common knowledge' genuinely consensual, or is it implied by tutors or students to give credibility to the point of view they wish to put forward?
- Are the tutors' and students' feelings and emotions woven into these contextual 'tracks', as many scholars suggest (Bruner, 1986; Vygotsky, 1987; Boud et al, 1993; Sylwester, 1995; McDrury and Alterio, 2003) and if so, do the tutors seem to actively engineer this? To what extent are such feelings seen as adding the weight of authority to an argument, opinion, or conclusion?

This framework for analysis is summarised in the table below:

<b>i) The curriculum aims and purposes of the talk.</b>	The 'curriculum content' of the discussion, that is to say, the learning outcome which the tutor appears to be moving towards, in each section of the discourse.
<b>ii) The 'power balance' and overall ethos which prevails, including the kinds of reasoning which are seen to be valued.</b>	The 'ground-rules' which seem to be underpinning the talk, and the kinds of communicative relationships which are being played out (Mercer, 1995, 2000). How these seem to be linked to the reasoning which takes place, and to the kind of thinking which is valued and encouraged
<b>iii) Common contextual 'tracks'.</b>	The 'contextual' information which students and tutors establish and draw upon, in order to process and understand the information which is being presented or discussed. This includes the personal and professional experiences of the tutor and the students and the ways in which these are used to inform and validate reasoning.

**Table 3.3: Summary of the analytical framework.**

It is recognised that the categories identified above are not mutually exclusive, and it is argued that none of them operates in isolation. Rather it is suggested that they are indicative of the complex nature of communication in the context of learning and teaching. These themes will be used to direct and draw together findings from the analysis and inform the conclusions drawn from this complex data.

### **3.8 Further ethical considerations**

Some of the important ethical issues have already been discussed in the relevant sections: the issue of maintaining confidentiality for the participants, however, needs further comment.

The second tutor involved was a willing volunteer, and within this thesis her name has been changed for reasons of confidentiality. However, her anonymity would be impossible to maintain within the institution concerned if the work is disseminated to other colleagues as planned. Furthermore, given the essential details provided about the context, anonymity would be difficult to ensure once the work was submitted for examination, and particularly so if it were published more widely in another form. It was therefore important to provide written guarantees that such wider publication would only be effected with the participating tutor's full consent, and that she would be invited to support any such presentations or further publication of the work



herself, thereby maintaining a degree of control and the right of veto on any sensitive issues. All the procedures and the likely form of the final written record of findings and conclusions were also made clear to her before the research was carried out. She was provided with a written agreement to this end which was signed both by herself and by me. My own name was changed within the case study, so as to be consistent with the approach taken to the data about 'Louise', and as part of the process of distancing myself as far as possible, from the analysis of my own practice.

As far as the participating students were concerned, the purpose of the research and the ways in which findings might be published were also made clear to all groups ahead of filming. Students were also asked to sign a document agreeing to take part, on which procedures for maintaining their anonymity were set out and guaranteed. This document also assured them that the video data would only be used for the purposes of this specific study, unless specific written consent was later obtained from all participating students. It was anticipated that some re-adjustment might be needed in terms of the groups to be filmed in order to accommodate those who had reservations about the process. In the event this was not required (as will be discussed in Chapter 7). Students were also given the right to withdraw from the filming at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the process, and the offer was made of alternative teaching provision if necessary. In the relevant case study chapters, student names were replaced with numbers, except in some cases where the use of names was integral to the meaning as it developed; and in these cases the names were changed.

### **3.9 Summary of research activity.**

The preceding sections have set out, explained and justified the decisions made in relation to the focus and chosen research methods for this study. To ensure clarity for the reader, this section provides a summary of the research activity relating to this project, in chronological order.

- Broad aims of the research identified.
- Decision to construct two case studies.
- Nature of studies decided.
- Research aims and questions defined.
- Context and participants selected.

- Decision to use video evidence and transcripts as data.
- Discussion with participating tutor and written agreement obtained.
- Decisions about timing and selection of participants.
- Discussion with student participants and written consent obtained.
- Filming of first sessions.
- Transcription of first sessions.
- Video footage viewed by researcher and transcripts checked for accuracy. Some minor corrections made.
- Video footage viewed independently by second participating tutor.
- Filming of second sessions.
- Transcription of second sessions.
- Video footage viewed by researcher and transcripts checked for accuracy. Some minor corrections made.
- Video footage viewed independently by second participating tutor.
- Transcripts of all sessions divided into 'episodes'.
- Annotation of first sessions according to analytical framework.
- Cross checking of first sessions to ensure consistency and identify any gaps in the analytical framework.
- Summary of teaching narrative for first sessions.
- Second participating tutor asked to check summary for fairness and accuracy.
- Selection of significant sections for further analysis and discussion using same framework.
- Further cross checking to ensure consistency and accuracy.
- Summary of teaching narrative for second sessions.
- Second participating tutor asked to check summary for fairness and accuracy.
- Selection of significant sections for further analysis and discussion using same framework.
- Further cross checking to ensure consistency and accuracy.
- Second participating tutor asked to comment on own case study in terms of fairness and accuracy.
- Final comparisons made, conclusions drawn and recommendations made.

***Table 3.4: Summary of research activity.***

### **3.13 Conclusion**

Overall, it is maintained that the approach taken and methods used have produced reliable insights in relation to the research questions, within the limits of expectations described above. The inevitable complexities in studying interactions of this kind have been acknowledged and the advantages and disadvantages of the scale and nature of the study considered. Notwithstanding the latter, it is argued that this study will usefully contribute to the body of knowledge in this field.

## **Chapter Four - Case Study of Louise (Case Study 1)**

### **4.1 Key information**

#### **4.1.1 Introduction**

This case study focuses on one tutor, teaching two 'Primary English' sessions in the first and last terms of the Professional Graduate Certificate of Education course at the focus institution.

To provide the necessary contextual information for the reader, this chapter will begin by providing background information (which applies to both parts of the case study) about this specific tutor and the student group.

#### **4.1.2 The tutor**

Louise had twenty-six years' teaching experience in local primary schools before joining the focus institution as a Senior Lecturer in Primary English. She has, therefore, experienced many changes of government advice and prescription for primary education at first hand, including, as English co-ordinator within a primary school, being responsible for the school's implementation of 'the Literacy Hour' in her school from 1998 onwards. This was a government initiative, designed to enhance standards in Literacy teaching and learning, and to improve pupils' results in the national 'Standard Attainment Tests' for English. Whilst ostensibly not compulsory in schools, its implementation was forcibly encouraged through the inspection regime and supported by Local Education Authorities. The latter offered a range of centre based training for teachers (some of which Louise attended) and support for selected schools from 'Literacy Consultants', who were jointly funded by local education authorities and the National Literacy Strategy. The 'Literacy Hour' was later allowed to evolve and develop; and, since Louise's move into Teacher Education, rigid guidance has been replaced by more flexible recommendations about lesson structures, new advice about the teaching of early reading, and a Renewed Framework for Literacy Teaching (2006). Such experiences form the backdrop to some of the discussions orchestrated by Louise in this session.

### **4.1.3 The group.**

The group comprises 24 students, who already have a first degree and are enrolled on a year-long course, leading towards the conferment of Qualified Teacher Status.

All the students in this group are specialising in teaching the primary age group, and, over the academic year, will undertake teaching placements in Key Stage One (for pupils between the ages of five and seven) and Key Stage Two (for pupils between the ages of seven and eleven.)

## **4.2 Case study One, Part One - The Autumn Term**

This section will focus on one session, taught to these students by Louise at the end of the autumn term. It will describe how the session was planned, how the 'story' of the session unfolded, and how it was structured in terms of group composition.

The transcript of the session will then be analysed in detail, guided by the research questions and the themes identified in Chapter Three.

### **4.2.1 Planning the Session**

This session takes place at the end of the first term of a year-long course and students have recently undertaken a three-week teaching placement in a primary school.

An introductory section had been planned for this session, asking students to reflect upon aspects of the English teaching observed on their recent school placement. Louise took the decision not to go ahead with this reflection, as her group had already been given a very similar opportunity by another tutor. In other respects, the content of the session is substantially similar to the session of the same title, conducted by Pam with Group 1, which will be discussed in Case Study 2. The video which the students discuss was produced by the National Literacy Strategy and shows a small group of children from Year Five in a guided reading lesson with their teacher.

The session represented in the transcript had been designed by Pam and Louise to reinforce and further develop earlier work on 'the reading process'. (Further detail about curriculum content is given in section 4.2.4.1).

#### **4.2.2 The Teaching Narrative**

This section will comprise a brief description, as revealed by the transcript, of the way the first of the taught sessions in this case study unfolds. 'Episodes' are referred to by number to facilitate reference to the different stages of the teaching narrative in the analysis which follows. The purpose of this section is to provide a context for the reader in which to understand this analysis.

The session was designed:

- to help students understand how their pupils' use of reading strategies might change as the child's reading skill and experience develop;
- to consider implications for teaching and assessment; and
- to develop the students' understanding of 'guided reading' as a teaching strategy recommended by the government body known as the National Literacy Strategy.

Louise introduces the topic (**Episode L1:1**) by recapping on previous learning concerning the reading process from an earlier session. She explains the broad direction of the session, in the context of the year-long learning journey which the students are undertaking under her guidance.

She then introduces and supports a small group activity in which students are required to discuss what they already know about the reading process, as represented by a diagram of 'the Searchlights Model', DfEE, 1998 (**Episode L1:2**). Louise circulates the groups, listening and occasionally interacting with them. Next (**Episode L1:3**) she takes feedback in a whole class context. Guided by a diagram, she begins with a fairly open request for students to demonstrate their knowledge, and an exchange follows in which Louise receives and comments upon the students' responses. This episode ends with a short summary from Louise of all the responses in relation the 'Searchlights Model'.

A short episode follows (**Episode L1:4**) with no interaction, in which Louise gives a brief exposition to the whole class of the 'Simple View of Reading', a new model of the reading process, recommended by the National Literacy Strategy (DfES, 2006, p 77) and refers students to previous discussions about it.

The next collaborative small group task (in which students are required to match statements of reading strategies to categories on a diagram) is explained (**L1:5**) and facilitated (**L1:6**) by Louise. She then takes whole class feedback (**L1:7**) in the form of a question and answer sequence, in which students are encouraged to display and sometimes justify their conclusions.

At this point (**L1:8**) Louise reiterates the purpose of the previous activity and explains how the session will proceed, then talks students through some key points about reading assessment from the PowerPoint slide. She sets and supports another collaborative task, this time to discuss experiences of reading assessment on school placement. Louise then elicits students' responses in a whole class context (**L1:9**) at one point encouraging, prompting and supporting an extended contribution from one student about her particular experience of assessment. Another student continues on the same topic, offering an experience and commenting on her own emotional response to this, with which the tutor empathises. Louise presents some data from her own previous classroom experience (**L1:10**) using it to make a point concerning the purpose of reading assessment, which she clarifies on request. She then proposes a model for group reading (**L1:11**) and introduces a video clip which the students watch (**L1:12**). They are encouraged to provide comments (**L1:13**) in a whole class context, which Louise evaluates positively. Finally, she sums up the session with one key message which she wants the students to draw from it.

#### **4.2.3 The structure of the session.**

In terms of group composition, the structure of this session comprises a mix of whole class episodes and small group collaborative tasks. Whole class episodes are in some cases an exposition from the tutor giving new information to the students; sometimes an opportunity for students to feed back to the whole class the conclusions or contributions from their small group discussions; sometimes an

interaction between the tutor and the students; and at other times an opportunity for the tutor to show examples from her own practice, or video examples of other practice. Small group tasks take place at the students' tables, so tend to be between friendship groups, and an indication of what these entail is given above. Although this research focuses on the whole class sections of the sessions, where relevant, brief reference will be made to the small group activities in the analysis.

The analysis will consider *all* the whole class talk, in establishing the overall ethos of the classroom and 'ground rules' for the talk - and in relation to some aspects of 'authority' as defined in the research questions. Otherwise it will focus mainly on those whole class episodes in which there is some form of interaction between the tutor and students, in order to investigate those aspects of the research questions which focus on the tutor's management this talk.

#### **4.2.4 Analysis of the transcript of Session 1: Louise teaching in the autumn term**

In this section the transcript of the session will be examined for evidence to support conclusions in relation to the main research questions, which as previously stated are:

- Taken from a socio-cultural perspective, in what ways do the tutors in this study shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in 'whole class' contexts?
- Whose authority is being called upon or deferred to in these interactions? Whose 'voices' are heard both explicitly and implicitly in the whole class dialogue?
- How and to what extent are these voices managed, guided and facilitated by the tutors in the context of these whole class discussions – and to what effect?

Short quotations, comprising one utterance, will be referenced to the teaching 'episodes' identified above (in section 4.2.2) so that the reader has a sense of where

these occurred within the overall teaching narrative. Longer extracts will also be identified in this way, but in addition, will be given an extract number.

#### **4.2.4.1 Curriculum 'content'.**

This section argues that the subject matter of the session influences the nature of the discourse. It also argues that a range of different authorities are referred to, in order to validate the particular stance taken or information given.

The transcript provides a record of a session taught by Louise which tackles both subject knowledge (concerning the reading process and the use by children of a range of strategies to decode and understand text); and pedagogical aspects, in terms of the ways these strategies can be taught and assessed - including through the vehicle of 'guided reading' as recommended by the National Literacy Strategy. The consideration of 'the Searchlights Model' (DfEE, 1998) and the 'Simple View of Reading' (DfES 2006) sets this session at the centre of a controversy within the teaching profession and within Teacher Education. The 'Searchlights Model' was the original model of reading strategies exemplified in the National Literacy Strategy materials (DfEE,1998); and the tutors concerned in this study had found it a useful model to share with student teachers. The Rose Review (2006) into the teaching of early reading however, had recommended the transition to a new model 'The Simple View of Reading' (Page 77) about which the tutors in this study still had some doubts. These student groups had been exposed to the original model at the very beginning of their course, but government affinity had now changed, leaving tutors to decide how, when and to what extent to introduce and recommend the new approach to this particular group of students. This typifies, as highlighted in the Literature Review, the complexity of decisions which teacher educators must make in walking the 'tightrope' between their own professional opinions and the constraints of government requirements. These dilemmas then, must underpin Louise's decision-making processes during the teaching of this session.

In her introduction, (Episode L 1:1) Louise makes no reference to the source of 'the searchlights model' (though she does so later in episode L 1:3). At this point she refers to the 'Simple View of Reading' (Rose, 2006) by implication only, as being the



government's recommended replacement. She refers to 'research' but does not specify any in particular.

Louise:

So .... the search lights has a lot to offer young readers as being the model in the NLS.

Let me please remind you before we go on to the task linked to that, of the 'Simple View of Reading' - how research has drawn us to reshaping that model into that particular new 'Simple View of Reading.' And the Simple View of Reading is quite simply is saying, once the children have learned to read by the phonic approach they then use their skills to read to learn - to develop their knowledge and understanding of what they were reading. I've probably told you what I feel about that model before, so I want to go back to the Searchlights Model.

As one of Louise's close colleagues, I have myself been present at discussions where misgivings have been expressed about the new 'Simple View of Reading'. Indeed, both tutors attended a heated debate about its validity at a meeting between tutors from a range of institutions and representatives of the Primary National Strategy (the replacement title into which the National Literacy Strategy has now been subsumed). One can reasonably assume therefore, that the opinion Louise has previously given to the students about this model has not been an unequivocally positive one.

Moreover, all teacher training institutions have been required to submit to Lord Adonis (Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Schools and Learners, at the time of writing) an action plan specifying, among other things, how and when each institution proposes to introduce 'the Simple View of Reading' to their students. One might further speculate, given the pressure thus exerted by this particular government authority, about the possible effect of the presence of the camera here - and whether Louise was being more reserved in her comments because of it.

In the brief extract above, Louise seems to defer to the authority of the National Literacy Strategy, in relation to the 'Searchlights Model' which she herself has found useful, whilst hinting at a less positive view of its recommended replacement. She

recommends the Searchlights Model on her own authority (episode L 1: 7) by asserting:

That's why the searchlight model – I think it's very effective, because it gave us aspects to look at and compare...

The session goes on to tackle aspects of assessment. Here Louise several times uses the term 'assessment *for* learning' (Episodes L1:1 and L1:8) emphasised in a deliberate way. Thus she makes oblique reference to the DfES recommendations contained in a document, *Excellence and Enjoyment – Learning and Teaching in the Primary Years* (2004) through which the term 'assessment for learning' has become common currency in the world of primary school teaching. This phrase would therefore be a very familiar one to the students in this group, and Louise is implicitly appealing to the authority of this document by adopting its terminology.

At a superficial level, then, Louise defers to government bodies to provide the authority for much of the 'information' for this session. However, there is evidence that other 'authorities' play a part in the process of professional learning in which these students are engaged. The next section goes on to suggest what these influences might be, and show how they seem to play a part in the dialogue between the tutor and her students.

#### **4.2.4.2 The 'power balance' and overall ethos**

This aspect relates to the 'ground-rules', both explicit and implicit, which seem to be underpinning the whole class interactions, and the kinds of communicative relationships which are being played out. This section will, therefore, examine the ways in which these ground rules are established and maintained, with particular reference to whose authority seems to prevail in the direction and nature of the talk, and to the kinds of reasoning seen to be valued and encouraged. It will argue that the tutor uses a number of different ways, both explicit and implicit, to establish and maintain these ground rules.

#### 4.2.4.2.1 The use of humour.

One important way revealed by the data in which the overall ethos of the sessions appears to be created by Louise - and hence the 'ground rules' for the talk established - is the way in which she uses humour. This is difficult to quantify and, as explained in the methodology, such difficulties constitute one reason for using video (rather than audio) recordings from which to derive the transcripts. Thus, although gesture, tone of voice and body language in general are not being analysed in detail; they are sometimes referred to (in this section and others) in order to interpret the meaning expressed by both tutor and students.

Several light-hearted asides, taken from the transcripts, will serve to provide evidence of the relaxed ethos Louise seems to be creating through the use of humour. The first occurs when Louise takes feedback about the students' knowledge of the Searchlights Model (DfEE 1998):

**Louise:** And so what do we know about any of those searchlights (*Louise returning to the interactive whiteboard*)? Who would like to put their neck on the chopping block and say 'Yes, I know about that!' (*Pause – Louise looking at class member*) It's terrible you're always pointing at people. (*pointing at the student*) The finger of fate.... The finger of fate came to you then. (*Another pause*). Okay, come on - so what do you know? (Episode L1:2)

The next can be seen when Louise is preparing to show the video clip:

Sit back, enjoy the show, and we'll think afterwards of the strategies that are being deployed both by erm, teacher and children. (*Louise beginning to set up video*). I know what...You can shuffle around a bit y'know, get the popcorn out! (*Pause while waiting for video to begin*).

(L1:12)

And another occurs later, when the teacher shown in the video clip is being discussed:

Y'know, we can be tongue in cheek about how the session worked, we can be tongue in cheek about whether – (*Louise looks towards one small group of students. Laughter is heard from the students in that group*) – Louise places hand on one student's shoulder,) – She wanted to crumple him up. He was too smooth, didn't have any creases in him!

But we can, y'know we can be critical about the way something might be delivered but I think we can take from that kind of errm demonstration, things that we can focus on. (Episode L1:14)

Thus humour seems to be an important aspect of the discourse, and one which Louise uses to 'oil the wheels' of discussion and create an atmosphere in which it can flourish.

#### **4.2.4.2.2 Language choices.**

Another way in which Louise seems to be establishing such an atmosphere is through her choice of language. Examples of these choices will now be presented and examined.

Throughout this session, Louise's language choices seem to imply an element of equality in the relationship between herself and the students, in terms of influence over the content and direction of the talk. This is implied by the use of the first person plural, evident in the utterance from Louise's introduction to the session, (Episode L 1:1) transcribed below:

So, let me ask you to have a look at the Searchlight model. (*Louise uses the interactive whiteboard*). I'll bring all the bits in. Let's start off by activating some prior knowledge. What do we already know – what do you remember about when we looked at this model in relation to children's early reading?

It can be seen again in the utterance below that Louise reminds students of an experience at the very beginning of their course, asking them to recall a video 'we watched'.

You might remember, way back in September or in early October, we watched a video of some guided reading - some Year One children reading a story called 'Frog and Toad' - and they were involved in a guided reading session.

This use of the first person plural occurs several times in the next part of the transcript, for example:

So we want to put this assessment in the context of guided reading, but moving more from Key Stage 1 progressing into Key Stage 2, and looking really from early reading strategies to inference and deduction - reading between the lines. ....(L1:1)

Indeed the use of the pronoun 'we' in this way occurs frequently throughout the transcripts of Louise's sessions. In many cases, as in the example above, this choice of words masks what are, in effect, authoritarian statements.

Despite the fact that the overall purpose, structure, content and activities of the session are in the hands of the tutor rather than the students; Louise often presents them as optional:

'So let me *ask* you to have a look at the searchlights model' ( L1:1)

'I'm going to *encourage* you to talk to each other' (L1:1)

'May I *invite* whoever it was to make a comment?' (L1:3)

In a similar way, Louise often represents instructions as if they are joint choices or decisions:

'okay, what we've got to do is work in twos or threes' (L1:5)

'those deliberations are certainly what we need to talk about' (L1:7)

Thus Louise seems to be trying to create a sense of a collegiality - a friendly, equally balanced relationship, rather than a very formal tutor – student one. However, there is clear evidence that beneath this impression of joint decision-making, Louise herself is very actively guiding and shaping the talk:

‘ OK. we’ll come back to that point in a moment’. (L1:9)

and in one example, Louise explicitly acknowledges this role:

‘I know what you are going to say to me after the video clip’s been played, and I know what kind of way I’m going to steer you into thinking.’ ( L1: 12)

(The comment above relates to a previous conversation held between the tutors, concerning the unusually compliant nature of the children in the video clip. When previous student groups had viewed the video, this topic had dominated the feedback, preventing the possibility of more constructive and useful discussions. On this occasion the tutors had agreed to actively encourage the latter.)

There are also examples where Louise incorporates the pronoun ‘we’ into statements which are clearly meant as fairly assertive advice:

‘We need to know what they can do well.’ (L1:8)

‘As teachers we need to think about what comes next’ (L1:8)

‘We need to have that – real effective ways to support children’ (L1:10)

‘those kind of questions we need to feed into our guided reading sessions’  
(L1:11)

Only occasionally does Louise make statements in which she takes her place unequivocally as the expert:

'Effective assessment should cover those points' (L1:8)

Thus it is argued that Louise's choice of language is designed to give the *impression* of informality, and of equal status in terms of decisions made and opinions held, but that this first impression can be deceptive: in reality, Louise is very much in charge of the direction of the talk, if not always (as will be argued below) in shaping the students' opinions.

#### **4.2.4.2.3 Explicit validation of collaborative talk.**

In addition to this impression of informality given in setting the ground rules for talk, it is noticeable that where small group discussion is requested, Louise encourages a conversational approach, and overtly places a high value on collaborative talk as part of the learning (and hence reasoning) process:

'Let's pool what we know' (L1:1)

'What I'd like you to work on together and talk about is....

'Discuss it with one another, decide where you want it, argue!.... Don't fight about it! (L1:5)

'So again, let's do a bit of chatting to each other.....'

'Talk to each other about.....' (L1:8)

'Tell each other – convince each other you could do similar things' (L1:14)

Sometimes she gives explicit justification for this, as in the following extract:

'You might be going 'Uhh! guided reading, Can't remember anything' but if you errr y'know point at somebody else's memory, latch onto somebody else's thought you might just say oh yes! So can you take each of the search lights in turn and remind each other what you *may* remember about them.' (L1:1)

Thus, where students collaborate in small groups, it would seem that Louise recognises and validates the importance of a more equal power balance than that

which seems to prevail in a whole class context. (Possible reasons for this will be proposed later.)

#### 4.2.4.2.4 Patterns of interaction.

As has been seen in the extracts above, Louise gives an impression at least, of the informality one might expect in everyday conversation, and one might therefore predict that the overall patterns of interaction would reflect this. However, there are a number of examples, within the whole class parts of the session, of talk that has much more in common with patterns of exchanges which (as argued in the literature review) are typically found in school classrooms.

The following extract (from Episode L1:7) exemplifies a question and answer sequence in which Louise, encouraging a number of different students to display and justify their conclusions, uses a pattern of elicitations, repetitions and reformulations which is often (as argued in Chapter 2) seen in exchanges between school teachers and their pupils.

#### Case study 1: Extract 1

##### Transcript

**Louise:** *Okay, come on - so what do you know?*

**Student 1:** *[...inaudible....]*

**Louise:** *Sonia - I can always rely on you. Thank you, go on.*

**Student 1:** *Erm, it's about when you chop words down into tiny bits and build them up again.*

**Louise :** *(Nodding) You've had phonic subject knowledge sessions. Two whole sessions on working at identifying ----- looking at the match between your letters and your sounds. Children will need to be taught that as their first strategy. Can I recognize the letters, do I know the sounds that they make, have I taught them about more than one letter, do they make particular sounds, two letters making one sound, strings of consonants making individual sounds,*

*remember consonant clusters? digraphs, trigraphs? (Louise nodding vigorously). You should all be going, yeah we remember yeah. I've got these certificates to write for next week, we should all remember those shouldn't we? (Louise laughing)*

*So all of those – that work about matching letters to sounds, accessing the alphabetic code, and that is the first strategy that we need sort of to draw on, along with (pointing at the whiteboard) word recognition, and graphic knowledge.*

##### Commentary

Elicitation

Presumably the student has indicated that she is willing to reply  
Response

Feedback and elaboration

Louise exhorts students to activate prior learning

Further elaboration



*Can anybody throw any light, excuse the pun, can anybody throw any light onto what that is involving, what will the children be doing if they are accessing that particular strategy?* Initiation

**Student 2:** *Is it when .... When they read round the word... in the context?* Response

**Louise:** *Not, not exactly. We will look at that in relation to one of the other searchlights because that is sort of a very focussed strategy that children do use.* Feedback, involving negative evaluation, but couched in conciliatory terms. Louise seems reluctant to openly recognise this answer as incorrect.

**Student 3:** *It's the shape of the word They recognise the shape of the word - they can read it – not reading it... but they can recognize it.* Response, with some tentative exploration

**Louise:** *Recognize – they can recognise the word. Certain words have a graphic representation, and we read them because we know what they say. The kind of words in Reception and Year 1, that we teach the children to recognize by sight - 'sight vocabulary'. They can see this word it doesn't necessarily fit with phonic patterns so therefore you need to teach them those particular words, so [...] the shape of the word, the way the word's made up. It can be erm words within words seeing the word 'hen' in the word 'when' for example. So identifying words that have units of meaning. It's also about things like prefixes and suffixes, beginnings and endings of words and recognising that they have a particular part to play. So it focuses on all those particular aspects of word knowledge and helps children to spell, and helps with decoding, for reading and encoding for spelling. (using the interactive whiteboard). Okay so we can tick off phonics and we can tick off word recognition. Great!* Feedback, involving repetition and considerable elaboration

*Grammatical knowledge? knowledge of context? knowledge of text? What are children doing when they are accessing these strategies? Any thoughts?* Initiation

**Student 4:** *Making sense of it?* Response

**Louise:** *Absolutely! Making sense of it.* Feedback, involving affirmative evaluation and repetition.

Louise clearly holds the reins here, shaping and directing the pattern of interaction in a way typical of teacher-pupil contexts rather than casual conversational contexts in which the 'power balance' is usually more equal.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Wells (1999) discusses Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) doubts about the effectiveness of the 'Initiation Response, Feedback' pattern so common in classroom discourse; and makes the point that the *nature* of the feedback given by the teacher is crucial in influencing the pupils' potential learning

outcome from the exchange. This distinction becomes relevant here, since the sequence above is far more than a simple 'guess the right answer' exchange. Louise is clearly scaffolding the students' learning:- reminding them of what they already understand; tuning into each particular student's understanding; and using this awareness to help provide platforms from which all the students can build and further develop their own knowledge and understanding of the concepts in hand.

The extract below (from Episode L1:9) shows an exchange of a rather different kind in which, rather than encourage feedback from a number of different contributors, Louise supports, prompts and encourages an extended contribution from *one* individual student about her particular experience of assessment. (The references to 'student' contributions in the extract below are thus all from the same, individual student.) The tutor uses a combination of affirmation, reformulation and requests for clarification; and the student is encouraged to offer and explain her own opinion:

*(Louise calls the students together from group discussions, to ask them to feed back to the whole class. In their small groups, students have mainly adopted a rather pejorative tone, being fairly negative about practices observed on school placement.)*

### Case study 1: Extract 2

#### Transcript

**Louise:** *Can I just - Can I just interrupt? Perhaps pick on one or two, draw together one or two things that you have seen, I mean I'd like to say in relation to effective reading assessment. What have you seen that's been going on? (Gesturing with hands to encourage response). Come on somebody, there must be some good things!*

**Student:** *I was in Year 1 and errrm I noticed that they used to ... once they knew all their phonics, they were given the words, different words out of their reading books and they had to learn to read the words*

**Louise:** *Right,*

**Student:** *and then, right, they were given the books to read, so they would be able to read the whole book.*

#### Commentary

Louise encourages the student to continue, without offering an opinion.

**Louise:** *Okay, so the assessment there is based on words that can be recognised and [...inaudible...] and then move on.* Reformulation.

*That's quite a common reading practice erm and certainly we may have talked about this previously. I remember having words in an old tobacco tin (Louise grimaces -general laughter). Not that I had tobacco. Obviously wasn't a tobacco freak but errrm our teacher used to put words in a tobacco tin, saying you learn those words and we got the next book. That just follows on in some ways from what - what you were saying about --- it's one thing to be able to mechanically read but to understand is a huge, huge step.* Louise elaborates from her own personal experience and helps students link this comment to previous sessions.

**Student:** *Erm - Another thing I noticed was, we had one really quite gifted child [...] and he can read [...] but when you were teaching the other children phonics, the teacher made sure that he was there because he errr because he needed to understand the method.* The same student continues with another example from her experience.

**Louise:** *Right (nodding)* Louise again encourages without offering an opinion.

**Student:** *You know - how phonics work and how to read words, perhaps when he's reading bigger words [...inaudible...] understanding, he needs to have the knowledge of phonics as well, You know, at first I didn't understand this but when she explained [...] I realised it. Yea* The student concludes her point.

**Louise:** *So that kind of assessment really is based on word recognition and phonic understanding and a lot of schools will give graded reading books accordingly like that. Y'know, read certain words in a certain scheme of books and then you have new vocabulary for a new set of books and so on. Okay, so that's, that's one method.* Louise adds further explanation and exemplification. But does not evaluate the response.

In the extract above, Louise still directs the dialogue in a way which would be unlikely to happen in an everyday conversation, but in contrast with the exchanges in Extract 1, here she is prompting one student to continue and elaborate upon her (the student's) individual contribution.

Thus, the comparative contributions between Louise and the student are more balanced, with both giving fairly extended examples from their own experience. There is no real evaluation, here, although Louise nods vigorously to encourage the student to continue. Louise has asked for 'good' examples of reading assessment,

and those offered meet few, if any, of the criteria displayed on the PowerPoint slide, but Louise does not express a judgement about this. She seems to be shaping the talk, but not, at this stage, attempting to influence the students' opinions.

The next extract (from episode L1:8) is one in which, given the open question with which it begins, one might expect Louise is again offering the student freedom to offer her contribution without evaluation or 'correction'.

(Each contribution attributed in this extract to 'student' is made by the same individual.)

### Case study 1: Extract 3

#### Transcript

**Louise:** *What else goes on out there in schools?*

**Student:** *Our school had a guided reading half an hour specifically every day. Rather than doing it just in the literacy hour*

**Louise:** *Fantastic, yeah*

**Student:** *but it wasn't used,*

*I don't think it was used as effectively as y'know you got a half, a whole half an hour every day to concentrate on assessing them an' it, it was designed so that a different group would be reading together each day and assessed.*

**Louise:** *By ability level?*

**Student:** *Yeah, that's right yeah. But it, I think it wasn't so good for the rest of the groups who, it gives chance for them to say they've read a book, but they may not have read it properly or understood and it just means for like one day a week children get assessed an' corrected on their reading.*

**Louise:** *Right, so as a principle it was working - in practice - but maybe the effectiveness of the assessment didn't quite look to moving children on. What shall we do next, what have they learned so far. So the principle is there, the practice is there, it perhaps just needed a little fine tuning.*

#### Commentary

Open question used to elicit comments

Straightforward response, describing experience.

Strongly evaluative, indicating Louise's positive opinion very clearly..

but the student persists with a negative view of this practice...

albeit adjusting to a slightly more tentative tone.

Louise makes a genuine request for clarification

Student provides this, then justifies her opinion

Louise slightly modifies this view, by elaborating on the student's justification whilst adding her own slant.

<b>Student:</b>	<i>Yeah, cos some children were like reading words wrong for like nearly a week before they got, they were listened to.</i>	Student adds further exemplification to justify her view.
<b>Louise:</b>	<i>Right, so was there no intervention then, within that group that were reading, when they were reading things wrong all week?</i>	Louise appears to be asking for further explanation.....
<b>Student:</b>	<i>Yeah, but because it was designed so different groups were sitting around together reading books, and only one group was assessed a day. So for the rest of the week, other groups would be would be reading without assistance</i>	....which the student provides.
<b>Louise:</b>	<i>Yes</i>	Louise encourages her to continue....
<b>Student:</b>	<i>so they could be reading something wrong all week,</i>	which she does.
<b>Louise:</b>	<i>I see what you mean</i>	Louise offers further encouragement and appears to endorse the student's view.
<b>Student:</b>	<i>And not be corrected or helped an' that until they get a test on their chosen day.</i>	Student concludes her contribution....
<b>Louise:</b>	<i>Right, so at least then there is something monitoring them on a fairly regular basis. If only once a week. Which is no bad thing really in, in one sense. So ... using a high focus reading group [...inaudible....] can be effective in the way that we assess children and we are going to move into that area in a moment.</i>	but Louise has the last word and maintains her more positive opinion of the practice being discussed

First impressions of this exchange then, might be of an open opportunity for the student to promote her own opinion to the whole student group. As compared with Extract 1, there is a definite difference in the power balance in favour of the student, since it is she, and not Louise, who is initiating most of the exchanges; nevertheless, it is Louise who is, in this extract, maintaining control over the direction of the thinking. Indeed, in her last statement to the whole class audience, Louise ensures that the final word rests with herself, by modifying the student's negative opinion, in favour of a her own more equivocal view.

So far, then, the extracts examined show a number of different patterns in the ways in which Louise shapes and guides the talk in these whole class contexts. These are summarised in the table below:

**Table 4.1: Comparison of extracts 1-3**

<b>Case study 1: Extract 1.</b>	An 'IRF' exchange with pre-determined answers, but with supportive scaffolding provided by Louise. Louise looks for answers from a number of different respondents.
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 2.</b>	Louise supports an individual contribution from a student, but offers no evaluation of the student's opinion
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 3.</b>	Louise encourages another long contribution from an individual student, but this time she subtly alters the conclusion presented to the whole class.

#### **4.2.4.2.5 Levels of challenge.**

Although extract 3 shows the student developing an argument, prompted and possibly 're-directed' by Louise, there is little evidence of genuinely cumulative thinking in these extracts (or in any other part of the transcript of this session) in the sense that participants genuinely think *together*, building on each other's ideas and chaining them into a coherent line of thought.

Nor does there seem to be any real debate about the issues, or open challenge offered, either by tutor or students. In Case study 1: Extract 3, for example, Louise and the student do not openly disagree. Instead, as we have seen, there seems to be some manipulation by the tutor in order to steer the conclusion to her way of thinking; and the student at one point adjusts her language style to one which is less assertive. There is evidence of Louise seeking to subtly manipulate the views expressed, but *not* of a dynamic and challenging exchange of views by the participants.

In this whole class context, the interactions transcribed have so far had much in common with those seen in many classroom studies. Some exchanges are between Louise and a series of individual students, selected by herself; with no attempt by others to interject or challenge what is said, as in Case study 1: Extract 1, above. The other examples shown in extracts 2 and 3 show that extended contributions from individual students are also encouraged, but, in all these cases, Louise is in control: she decides who will talk and when; and she decides whether to accept a contribution or re-shape it in some way.

As one might expect (given Louise's role as tutor), in the episodes where subject knowledge is the focus, the students seem happy to defer to her authority; even though Louise seems anxious not to undermine the student's confidence by openly evaluating an answer as incorrect.

Louise actually makes explicit reference to this dilemma in the extract below, when she explains that there is really no correct or incorrect answer, even though it could be argued that (notwithstanding some overlap in the expected responses) there were times when students' answers *were* actually incorrect:

**Case study 1: Extract 4.**

- Louise:** So if it was a word, where would you like it to be placed - 're-reading the word'?
- Student:** Phonics
- Louise:** (*Nodding*) By checking the sound that they hear, and so on. If it was a sentence?
- Student:** Grammatical knowledge?
- Louise:** (*rocking, to indicate a balance.*)  
No, no? You're looking at me as if there is a right or wrong answer. It's not about making right or wrong answers. It's about making that judgement about where is most appropriate, and [*..inaudible..*] the learning of that is those deliberations you [*.....*] There are popular strategies used that may have fitted into grammatical knowledge, or it may have fitted into knowledge of text, depending again more on the context of what is being read. And there is an overlap and that's why the searchlight model had what - I think it's very effective because it gave us aspects to look at and compare.

It seems so far, that there is an absence of genuine challenge and debate. However, different viewpoints *are* expressed and there are differences between the exchanges, in terms of whose 'voice' ultimately prevails. In this respect, exchanges in this session can be placed along a continuum, regarding the balance of authority between tutor and students. This extends from a point where both Louise and the students seem to accept the tutor's authority, to a point where different viewpoints are expressed and some negotiation is expected about their validity.

It may be that Louise makes conscious choices to manage the talk in whole class contexts, such that it is situated at various points along this continuum. This point which will be considered and developed later.

#### **4.2.4.3 Common contextual 'tracks'.**

The evidence suggests then, that at this stage in the course, students and tutors are not actively *challenging* each other or openly expressing *disagreement* over professional issues. However, the Literature Review indicated that teachers often actively draw together a store of *collective* memories and experiences. This section of the analysis will argue that through the opportunities for talk which Louise provides, these personal and professional experiences, together with the feelings and emotions evoked by them, are not only validated, but also integrated into the students' professional knowledge and understanding.

##### **4.2.4.3.1 Previous learning**

One aspect of these 'contextual tracks' (Mercer, 2000) relates to previous classroom learning experienced within the students' current course. Louise begins the taught session by making explicit reference to a previous joint experience within the course:

'You might remember, way back in September or Early October we watched a video.....' (L1:1)

and when she sets the first small group task she tells the students that they are

'activating prior knowledge'. (L1:2)

There are a number of other explicit references to activities or discussions which have been previously experienced in the sessions, which Louise links to the topic in hand. These are listed below:

(exhorting students to remember previous phonics sessions when discussing terminology)

'we should all remember those, shouldn't we?'. (L1:2)

(referring to the 'Simple View of Reading')

'I've probably told you what I feel about that model before' (1:2)



(and again)

'Let me please remind you of the Simple View of Reading' (L1:4)

#### 4.2.4.3.2 Reflecting on experience.

There does seem to be evidence that the tutor is actively creating and referring back to a bank of joint experiences, shared by the tutor and students within the taught sessions of their course. But she also makes reference to her own professional experience, and to the students' first hand experiences on school placement. This section will argue that these too are discussed, and evaluated, in order to integrate them into the 'contextual tracks' which are being built. It will also demonstrate that relating such first hand experience can be a very powerful way of expressing a point of view, and that both tutor and students consider this a valid way of discussing professional matters.

In extracts 2 and 3 above, students were encouraged to share their experiences of school placement with the whole class, though there was no explicit evaluation of these.

In contrast, the extracts below (taken from Episode L1:9) show a student and Louise comparing experiences before the whole class audience, and this time both seem to be taking an openly evaluative stance.

#### Case study 1: Extract 5.

##### Transcript

**Student:** *We had assessment week in our final week, so I didn't get to do much actual teaching in the final week because all literacy and numeracy was cancelled for assessment tests. And one of the tests was a reading test, which I wasn't in the room for..*

*but a few people that she'd given a paper to, found it a little too hard, so she wanted me to have a go at the lower one, or the opposite way round. I took it to the library to do on the one day and sat with them all while they were doing this reading test.....*

##### Commentary

Here she adopts (perhaps unsurprisingly given the personal and emotive nature of the student's experience) an informal style very reminiscent of oral story telling. Although the 'story' does not have a definitive ending, there is clearly an attempt here to set the scene when she begins.

Here the student goes on to relate the main event.

She is using a temporal connective typical of this genre ('on the one day....')

*I felt really sorry for them 'cos a few of them were like 'I just can't read this one word' an' I was like, 'I can't help you!' It was really frustrating because you really wanted to remind them of the strategies and how to do it...*

She then describes the feelings of the main character, that is to say, herself, in order (one could speculate) to increase the impact of her 'story' by engaging the empathy of her audience.

**Louise:** *That brings a point to my mind about how important it is that children can access lots of reading strategies, so that when they're put under these test conditions they, they are secure, they can draw on them...*

Upon hearing the story, Louise is prompted to make a point from her own experience.

*and it's terrible standing, or sitting or invigilating, with a Yr 6 reading test, y'know SATS - and knowing that, okay, a lot of the children can access those - but they have to be level 3 readers in order to partake in these Yr 6 SATS - and some of those children might be very sort of borderline - coming in to level 3*

She now picks up on the theme concerning the children's feelings of anxiety.

*and they'll look at you with those pleading eyes and say, you know, 'what's this word say?' and you think, it's a reading test and I really can't help and you feel awful ....*

and here the emotive language becomes even more extreme.

*because as teachers we always want to support errm y'know give them frameworks to sort of work from.....*

Louise then appears to be attempting to capitalise on the 'collegiate atmosphere', commented upon earlier, with another use of the first person plural; and as with the student's story, to engage empathy from her audience, as well as acknowledge her own strong personal feelings.

*So - it is difficult but as much as I hate the fact that SATS drives an awful lot of errm reading - Yr 2, Yr 6 -*

*there are those statutory end of Key Stage Tests where we have to measure the level of the children, and like it or not, and I can stand on my soapbox and pontificate about errm SATS results, scores, league tables, y'know positions etc. it's a fact that at the moment they are with us. So we do have to assess [.....] assessment of their learning. Assessment for their learning should be very, very different!*

She follows this emotive section however, by acknowledging the inevitable reality of government regulations, and she suggests a pragmatic approach in terms of classroom practice.

Having painted a fairly grim picture of the children's experience of statutory summative assessments, she introduces the next topic, which tackles the theme of formative assessment with a statement which, in contrast to the previous ones, is short and (perhaps deliberately) 'punchy'.

Thus, in the example above, a student gives a very emotive and evaluative example of experience, using an engaging narrative style, and Louise validates this way of justifying professional opinions by doing the same.

The next section of the transcript, (from Episode L1:10) sees Louise in less emotive mode, but again sharing her own experience to illustrate and validate the points she wishes to make. She uses the overhead projector to show the students a grid which presents children's names and some columns of figures:

### Case study 1: Extract 6.

#### Transcript

#### Commentary

**Louise:** Errrm we talked about reading tests earlier, now, I know you won't be able to see (switches on the overhead projector) very much of that, but I thought I would give you an example of a set of data. ....

Errrm that was my class a couple of years, a few years ago and that represents (pointing at slide) information about their reading. What kind of information is it?

Louise initiates this exchange with a closed question.

**Student:** Expected reading age

Correct response

**Louise:** Yes

Evaluated as correct

**Student:** [...] the difference between the two.

Student elaborates without being prompted to do so.

**Louise:** Okay, it's using QCA tests, giving them a level. It's also using an NFER reading assessment to work out their reading age. So there is a QCA test that came up from Yr 4, there's - September 02 was the NFER test, chronological age - CA - chronological age, their reading age - that was worked out on a huge grid that used to make your eyes go absolutely boggled, so y'know they've got, they've scored 38 on the reading test, and actual age is 10 yrs 4 months (using hands to illustrate imaginary lines)

Straightforward explanation.

right that's the reading age - (laughing) science, if you like - statistics!

And the difference between the chronological age and the reading age.

(Next two sentences delivered in a very dismissive tone).

When we look down that difference column we can see that some are above their chronologically age and some of them are desperately below. And then we do it again in June and then we compare September's results to June's results.

So what did that tell me about those readers?  
(Short silence as no response from students).

If we are just sort of looking at data like that?

**Student:** [...inaudible...]

**Louise:** It tells me how well they scored or not on a particular test.

Presumably Louise is validating the correct answer given by the student.

<i>Does it tell anything about what they can do or not do as readers?</i>	Heavily cued elicitation. Louise indicates clearly what response she is expecting.
<b>Student:</b> <i>It doesn't tell you where they're struggling or where they're good or –</i>	Student obliges with the expected response.
<b>Louise:</b> <i>I love your facial expression there because you can see it, yeah it's a set of data.</i>	Louise indicates her approval.
<i>Its assessment <u>of</u> their learning but it's <u>not</u> telling you anything at all, is it? about whether they're good readers or not.</i>	Louise uses a tag question to encourage agreement from her audience.

Thus Louise is giving an example to prove a very definite point – and there is no room for disagreement here. Throughout the exchange, she indicates very clearly what she expects the answers to be, and where the argument is heading; and she uses her considerable experience to persuade students of the validity of her own viewpoint.

A grid, giving indications of what each extract indicates so far, can now be completed thus:

**Table 4.2: Comparison of extracts 1-6**

<b>Case study 1: Extract 1.</b>	An 'IRF' exchange with pre-determined answers, but with supportive scaffolding provided by Louise. Louise looks for answers from a number of different respondents.
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 2.</b>	Louise supports an individual contribution from a student, but offers no evaluation of the student's opinion
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 3.</b>	Louise encourages another long contribution from an individual student, but this time she subtly alters the conclusion presented to the whole class.
<b>Case study 1: Extract 4.</b>	Louise is reluctant to identify incorrect answers.
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 5.</b>	A student gives an emotive account of an experience in school and Louise responds in similar vein, thus validating it.
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 6.</b>	Louise illustrates her opinion from her own experience and brooks no disagreement.

#### **4.2.5 Summary of key findings - Case Study 1, Part 1.**

From the data examined, there emerge a number of key findings which relate to the research questions. These are summarised below:

- Firstly, evidence from the transcript indicates that Louise attempts to create a relaxed atmosphere by the use of humour, by her choice of language, and by her reluctance to be negatively judgemental in dealing with the students' responses.
- Secondly, although Louise provides implicit and explicit validation of a collaborative and equally balanced approach to classroom talk for learning purposes, her management of the whole class talk varies in approach, and seems to fall at various points along a continuum. This continuum extends between a free expression of viewpoints at one extreme (albeit without the participants explicitly challenging each other's stance) - and a ruthless pursuit of a single agenda by the tutor, at the other. There are times when Louise accepts students' contributions without offering her own opinions, and others where she either subtly, or very explicitly evaluates them. There are also times when she exerts her authority unequivocally by expressing her opinion and brooking no disagreement or challenge. There are no examples within this session, however, of a really frank and open debate between the tutor and students about the issues tackled.
- Analysis of the data also shows Louise constructing 'joint contextual tracks' (Mercer, 2000) to guide the talk and contribute to the students' learning, by reminding them frequently of previous learning experiences from the course. She actively and explicitly weaves these into the discourse, and uses previous discussions as starting points for the next. Thus she seems to view the students' learning 'journey' as a cumulative process, and consciously encourages them, through opportunities for talk, to consolidate their previous understanding, and reconstruct their knowledge in a new context.
- Another key element of these 'contextual tracks' are the first hand professional experiences of both tutor and students. Analysis shows that they

are being drawn into, and incorporated within, this body of joint experience. Louise encourages the students to articulate their own experiences of school placement and also presents her own experience: sometimes to corroborate an idea proposed by a student; sometimes to mediate the discussion; and on one occasion to validate a strongly held opinion of her own. Thus students are encouraged to talk about, reflect upon, and value first hand experiences as a significant and useful part of professional learning.

- Finally, the data demonstrates the emphasis placed by both tutor and students on feelings and emotions – both their own and those of their pupils - as important considerations in the teacher's decision-making processes. Both the students and the tutor use story- telling techniques to engage the empathy of their audience and validate the opinions being expressed. The affective aspects of their personal and professional experiences are thus being compared and integrated into the joint contexts which, in their turn, may be recalled and drawn upon by the tutor and students to support future learning. Thus, Louise uses talk to promote a model of learning which not only places a high value on reflection and on first hand experience, but also on the affective elements of such experience.

#### **4.2.6 Initial commentary on Case Study 1, Part 1.**

The research questions seek to explore the ways in which tutors shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in whole class contexts. The data for the first session in Case Study 1 indicates that the tutor, Louise, seeks first to establish an overall ethos in which discussion can operate productively and in which collaborative talk is highly valued as an important part of the learning process. It seems clear that her intention is to create an atmosphere in which students can contribute confidently to these discussions, and in which reflection on first hand experience, both of herself and her students, is seen as an important and valuable aspect of professional learning. The analysis also shows that Louise uses a wide range of strategies, typical of those prevalent in many studies of interactions in school classrooms, to shape and guide such discussion in ways which are influenced by the subject matter and curriculum aims.

The research questions also relate to the voices of authority which can be discerned in the data. As has been discussed, the materials and guidance presented in this session are mainly derived from the National Literacy Strategy and it is therefore unsurprising that the voice of this 'official' body is clearly discernible. However, Louise herself has worked within the guidance of the NLS in the primary classroom; so this government-sanctioned 'voice' is filtered through, and mediated by, her own voice of experience. It is also clearly mediated by the strong feelings and emotions associated with these experiences, as in the case of the exchange of stories about SAT's tests in Extract 5.

I would therefore argue that throughout the session, Louise maintains overall control over the direction of the thinking: that it is her 'voice' which is the most powerful. Where subject knowledge is concerned, as in the question and answer sequence about terminology for aspects of the reading process (Extract 1), the students seem happy to defer to this greater authority, though ironically, Louise herself seems reluctant to exert it.

However, to varying degrees, the students 'voices' can also be heard in the session; albeit, as it were, with Louise's 'permission'.

There are times when opinions are not requested and the students are simply encouraged to share their experiences with the whole group, with little evaluation, or mediation from Louise, as in Extract 2. Where opinions are sought, and they are in agreement with the tutor's view, as in the SATs discussion (Extract 5), the students' views are clearly and assertively expressed. On the other hand, where this opinion differs from the tutor's (as in the discussion about guided reading and assessment in extract 3) whilst she does not openly challenge the student's view, it is Louise's voice that prevails. Louise presents her own view in the summary presented to the whole class, although there is no evidence that the individual student has actually changed her mind.

Louise faces some difficult decisions here. The evidence gives clear indications that she holds a socio-constructivist view of the students' learning: she wants the students to be actively involved in building their own knowledge and in supporting its

construction through collaborative talk. She also values, and encourages the students to value, their first hand experiences and the feelings and emotions evoked by them. She seems to want to actively promote joint reflection on these experiences in order to encourage the students to develop their own professional opinions. However, she is also acutely aware that for the students, such experiences are as yet very limited in comparison with her own. At this stage of the course, their experience of professional classroom practice is somewhat embryonic, in contrast with Louise's long career in teaching: her position as a tutor is, after all, predicated on that supposition. This makes decisions about when and how to offer students a voice, rather difficult. This could explain Louise's approach in Extract 3, when she encourages the student to express her view, but changes it subtly before the final version is presented to the other students.

In providing opportunities for collaborative reflection within the small peer groups, she is making ample space for talk of a conversational nature, where the ground rules are likely to endorse a relatively equal balance of power in which views can be freely exchanged. In orchestrating feedback from these small groups to the whole class however, Louise creates an inevitable shift in the dynamics. By definition, as the leader in this whole class discussion, she has ultimate control over who speaks and to whom, even if not necessarily over the conclusions reached. By virtue of their respective roles, one could also reasonably assume that the students themselves are expecting Louise to take an 'expert' role. What is more, the evidence shows that her own professional opinions are strongly held and that she also wishes to assume this expert role in certain circumstances.

Add to this the controversial topic which is being discussed; and the sometimes conflicting influence of government edicts and personal or professional opinions; and the web of factors influencing Louise's management of this discourse becomes even more complex. In this regard, getting the balance right as a university tutor is clearly no easy matter!

Having examined this 'snapshot' of Louise teaching her group near the end of their first term, the next section moves the reader forward to a session in the summer term, near the end of the students' year long course.



### **4.3 Case study One, Part Two - The Summer Term**

This section will focus on a later session, taught to these students by Louise at the end of the summer term, thus very near the end of the taught part of their course and preceding their last school placement. As with Part One, this first section will provide information about how this session was planned; how the 'story' of the session unfolded; and the background to some of the decisions made when planning the session.

As with Part One of this case study, it will go on to analyse the transcript of the session in detail, guided by the research questions and the themes identified in Chapter Three.

#### **4.3.1 Planning Session 2.**

The notes for this session have been developed by another tutor, Christine, not featured in these case studies. (These are used as guidance by the tutors in the final taught session in both case studies.) The content is drawn from a much more detailed examination of the reading curriculum which comprises an entire undergraduate module from another course, taught by Christine. Thus, in this instance, Louise is presenting a session which, in its initial conception, was 'owned' by another tutor.

#### **4.3.2 The teaching narrative**

This section will give an outline of the whole session, so that the reader has a clear context in which to understand the analysis.

The session was designed:

- To help students consider ways in which children can be encouraged to become enthusiastic readers;
- To introduce students to a specific approach, developed by Chambers (1993) which supports children in talking about books.

Louise begins the session (**Episode L2:1**) by making explicit reference to the 'journey' that she and the students have undertaken together, outlining some of the

key aspects of the course and explaining that they are returning 'full circle' to the aspects with which the course began. Next, **(Episode L2:2)** she relates some of her personal childhood experiences of reading and explains the influence these had on her as a reader and a writer. She then asks the students **(Episode L2:3a)** to 'explore', in small groups, their own early experiences as readers. Visual evidence shows her facilitating this by visiting and interacting with each group. Louise then asks the groups **(Episode L2:3b)** to evaluate their reminiscences and decide on significantly influential factors in terms of themselves as readers. This time, Louise observes the groups from a distance. She then asks for students to share their discussions with the whole class **(Episode L2:4a)**. She manages these contributions and summarises them, adding a further example from her own experiences as a child. Having given the students a few more minutes' talking time, to focus particularly on the *influence* their experiences may have had on them, Louise asks them to share these with the whole class **(Episode L2:4b)**. She draws out and summarises the students' contributions and then relates them to possible implications for the classroom. In a brief exposition, **(Episode L2:5)** she outlines the back drop against which teachers make decisions about the reading environment, telling a brief personal story from another colleague's experience. She sets the students another collaborative task, **(Episode L2:6)** this time responding to scenarios from school life written on cards placed on their tables and moves to join each group in turn. She asks the students to feed back to the whole class **(Episode L2:7)** asking for their 'thoughts and feelings' about the given scenarios, listening and responding with some comments of her own. Louise presents and explains the recommended approach, without any interaction **(Episode L2:8)** then gives out copies of a children's picture book by Anthony Browne, (2001) asking the students to read them in pairs. **(Episode L2:9)** When most of them have done so, she stops the class for a moment and explains what she requires them to do next - which is to discuss the book, guided by the set of questions they have been given, which constitute a key part of the approach to be recommended. As the groups discuss **(Episode L2:10)**, Louise again circulates the room, joining several groups in turn. She asks for comments about the approach which they have just sampled in their small group discussions **(Episode L2:11)** and a whole class discussion ensues. Finally, she asks for a comment about the children's book itself and one student responds very positively.

### **4.3.3 The structure of the session**

The structure of this session is substantially similar to Session 1, in that it comprises a mix of whole class episodes and small group collaborative tasks. In whole class episodes, there are fewer cases of exposition from the tutor than in Session 1. There are more opportunities for students to feed back to the whole class the conclusions or contributions from their small group discussions; and more episodes of interaction between the tutor and the students. There are more instances of the tutor sharing examples from her own experience. As with session 1, small group tasks take place at the students' tables, so tend to be between friendship groups, and an indication of what these entail is given above.

### **4.3.4 Analysis of the transcript of Session 2: Louise teaching in the summer term.**

#### **4.3.4.1 Curriculum 'content'**

This session contrasts with session 1 in that it is more strongly focussed on pedagogical issues. Theoretical terminology and controversies about the way children make sense of the print on the page are left behind, and the tutor and students are considering the reading environment in its wider sense – that is to say the factors which contribute to a child's *attitude* to reading.

It has been argued above that the nature of the topic being considered has an influence on the way the discourse is managed by this tutor. If this is the case, one could expect that this session will be managed in a different way from the previous one: that there will be more scope, perhaps, for a free exchange of views, and that the 'power-balance' between tutor and students will be more equal. This will be considered later.

Much reference is made in this session to a particular approach to talking with children about books, recommended by Chambers (1993). This was not a government initiative, but an approach which Louise's colleague recommends from her own professional studies and first hand experience in the classroom. Whilst this approach very much embodies the personal philosophy which underpins Louise's beliefs about teaching reading, and much which is recommended in Chambers' books

is indeed indicative of the way she has approached her own provision for the reading environment in school, she had not been guided by Chambers' work per se when working within her own school classroom.

The structure of the session is such that the students' own personal and professional experiences are explicitly acknowledged as the validating factors in discussing the approaches to reading experienced in school. Students are first told about some of Louise's personal experiences in this regard, and are then asked to consider their own. Next they are introduced to Chambers' work; and encouraged to 'sample' his approach at first hand, by using some of the recommended techniques to guide their own discussions about a book. The 'constraints' of the curriculum are only mentioned in passing, when Louise refers to the fact that 'as teachers we've got so many things to juggle' (Episode L2: 7). She asserts that the renewed National Literacy Strategy framework (DfES 2006) gives teachers 'permission' as it were, to use the approach recommended by Chambers (1993):

Louise: We've just sort of let go of the original framework [.....].The new framework puts speaking and listening as the first two strands. Speaking and listening, group interaction and drama as the first four strands, so the shift has changed. So as teachers we can then say 'well I want to use my class time to develop this approach, or develop certain aspects of this approach, to engage children to engage children in good quality talk about books.'

The only other authority explicitly mentioned is the Office for Standards in Education ('Ofsted') when Louise briefly tells the students that:

'a comment Ofsted has said is: 'Do children really enjoy reading?' Very few children have commented to Ofsted when they've talked about the books that children read said 'Oh I really wanted to read this – I really enjoyed it'.  
(Episode L2:5)

Thus the most prominent authority to which Louise explicitly defers, in terms of the curriculum 'content' for the session, seems to be the first hand experience, both in childhood and also as professionals in the classroom, of herself and the students.

The secondary source of authority seems to be the work of Chambers (1993); and in terms of their influence on the topics discussed, and approaches recommended, 'official' bodies seem to be relegated to third place.

Having acknowledged the influences which seem to have shaped the curriculum 'content', the next section will go on to analyse the interactions shown in the transcript, again in relation to the research questions.

#### **4.3.4.2 'Power balance' and overall ethos**

This section will examine ways in which the overall ethos of the classroom, and hence ground rules for its discourse, are maintained or altered in this session as compared to Session 1. Where evidence to validate a point has already been given at length in relation to session 1, it will only be considered necessary to provide a few corroborative examples from Session 2. It will argue that there are some similarities but also some differences in the 'power balance' and overall ethos which prevails in this later session.

##### **4.3.4.2.1 The use of humour.**

As one might expect, Louise continues to create a relaxed atmosphere through the use of humour, as when she jokes with the students about their comparative ages in Episode 2, and acts out her childhood ambition to be a librarian in episode 4a.

##### **4.3.4.2.2 Language choices.**

Louise's style of language also remains an inclusive one, with the continued frequent use of the first person plural:

'I want just to explore how we can sort of capture and engage any of our children Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2, into really enjoying texts.' (Episode L2:1)

and of informal vocabulary:

'I want to take you on another journey folks' (Episode L2:1)

Also continued in Session 2 is the presentation of tasks as optional, when they are in effect compulsory:

'So why don't you think about school for a moment?' (Episode L2:6)

#### **4.3.4.2.3 Explicit validation of collaborative talk.**

Explicit validation of and justification for collaborative talk (as an important part of the learning process) is only occasionally given in this session, as in Louise's exhortation to 'say what you're thinking' in episode 4a. It could be argued, however, that such explicit statements of the ground rules are no longer necessary at this advanced stage of the course, and given the students' familiarity with Louise's style of teaching and her expectations of her students.

#### **4.3.4.2.4 Patterns of interaction and lines of enquiry.**

Thus far the conclusions drawn from session 1 in this case study are still applicable to session 2. In terms of the patterns of interaction, however, there are some differences, in that they seem to indicate an approach from the tutor which, overall, is less authoritative and more 'dialogic', in Alexander's terms (2004) than they were in Session 1. This conclusion about the *overall* tendency of Louise's approach is made on the basis that exchanges again follow a variety of approaches, but that these fall further along the authoritative/ dialogic continuum, (Mortimer and Scott, 2003) towards, though not reaching, the 'dialogic' extreme. This range of approaches will be demonstrated below.

A number of 'IRF' style sequences (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) can be identified in session 2, and as with session 1 the nature of the feedback varies. In Session 2, however, there are *no* examples where Louise's questions are completely closed and the answers all pre-determined. Nevertheless, in the example which follows, (Episode L2: 11) the IRF pattern is clearly discernible, and although the questions do not appear to have a pre-determined answer, Louise is clearly looking for specific responses, since she expresses her surprise when one student's response is not the expected one.

(Each utterance attributed to 'student' in this extract, is made by the same individual).

## Case study 1: Extract 7.

### Transcript

**Louise:** Can I ask one of you at the back table just to read your scenario? and tell us what you thought and felt?

**Student:** *(reading) "After every book you've read, you had to write a book review'. And we thought that would be a sort of punishment, and also we felt that you would feel obliged to finish the book and be positive about it*

**Louise:** Really? I only say 'really' because my daughter was in that sort of same scenario. Whenever they'd read and finished a book they had to write a book review, and that book review was, Title of the Book, What I Enjoyed, What I did not Like, What I enjoyed the most, the part I erm the part I enjoyed the most and would I recommend this book? And my daughter stopped reading, - because she didn't want to fill that in time and time and time again. So she felt quite different, she didn't feel that she could read because you know - 'If I don't read this book, I don't fill in this form' but it may be - it was quite different feelings.

**Student:** We said that you shouldn't feel under pressure to finish a book.

**Louise:** *No, I agree with that.*

### Commentary

An open invitation to the students to express their views.....

The first of several responses.

Louise disagrees and explains her reasons, giving an example of her own

Student clarifies what she meant – or perhaps re-phases it so that it would be more acceptable to Louise?

Louise, perhaps, has misinterpreted the students response, so now concurs. (She then goes on to give another example, this time to endorse the point.)

It is clear in this extract, that even after an invitation which appears very open, Louise evaluates the response and either agrees or disagrees, thus ensuring that the impression left upon the whole class concurs with her own. There are other examples in which Louise cites her own experience in order to endorse or challenge the views expressed. In Episode L2: 4a, for example, Louise provides an implicit endorsement of a student's contribution (concerning positive encouragement for reading from children's parents) by giving an example of parental support from her own experience.

In the example, transcribed and commented upon below, however, Louise is managing responses in a slightly less authoritative way. Despite the clearly discernible 'IRF' pattern, Louise's purpose seems not to *evaluate* responses, but

simply to *identify the ideas* expressed in them. This seems to resonate with Scott's (1997) findings that the science teachers in his study often shaped their pupils' talk by 'marking key ideas'.

### Case study 1: Extract 8.

#### Transcript

**Louise:** *Isobel can I drop back on you and what you said about the books that you read as a youngster?*

**Student 1:** *Errrm I remember reading Janet and John books which I think were all from, erm from my grandparents. I suspect I was reading the school ones. I'm not very sure about that [.....] I don't know if I enjoyed them that much. I have very mixed feelings about Janet and John.*

**Louise:** *(laughing) I'm not surprised, really. 'Cos I said to Isobel was that something you chose yourself?*

*What got you into Janet and John books?*

**Student 1:** *[...inaudible...]*

**Louise:** *Parent, parental choice.*

*And I was talking over here with I think it was you Jo who said about the books that you were reading and why.*

**Student 2 (Jo):** *Erm. I think it was my parents who got the first one but then they knew I liked animals, so they picked one that had animals as the main characters an' I was away with that. Great.*

**Louise:** *So parental choice again, but quite a different feel has come from that.*

*Anything on this table that's influenced the choice of what you read when you were younger?*

**Student 3:** *There were plenty of boy/girl books as well, so immediately when you went into the library, you know, you couldn't be seen reading whatever Nancy Drew whatever, it was all*

#### Commentary

**Initiation.** Louise wants to present a point to the whole class that she has heard raised in the small group discussion.

**Response.** The student duly shares this point with the class.

**Feedback** – Louise gives a personal response.....

.....then asks for clarification (although she had already sought it in the group interaction) for the benefit of the whole class. (**Initiation**)

#### Response

**Feedback.** Louise identifies another contribution to the list of ideas she wishes to compile jointly with the students, and gives it a 'label'. She asks for another specific contribution – **Initiation**.

#### Response

**Feedback.** Louise again marks and labels the idea, contrasting it with a previous example

#### Initiation

#### Response



*detectives kind of thing. Boys stuff, you know. That's all you wanted to read.*

**Louise:** *That's an interesting reflection isn't it? Now was that, that you were steered to a particular part or ...*

**Initiation.** Louise asks for clarification or elaboration.

**Student:** *Yeah, from your friends y'know and whatever. The toys you played with, the macho thing I suppose. Y'know, you were only young. [...]*

Which the student provides.  
**(Response)**

**Louise:** *And we think now about the choice of books in our classrooms, we've got, just think about y'know, a whole range of different texts that will appeal to different readers and we have to accept that there are certain books that do appeal to certain readers. Just William, (gesturing towards a particular student) 'cos Dad read Just William, y'know.*

Louise reveals the reason for assembling her list, linking it to implications for the classroom.....**(Feedback)**

*So the diet that we've been brought up on has an influence on what we read, probably now.*

.....and reiterates the point.

*Were there any particular influences that came from this group as to what books you chose?*

**Initiation**

**Student:** *For me it was, more - I always thought my sister was boring, so anything she chose I refused to read and I'd choose something completely opposite until she started reading Judy Blume. And then she had to put a library system in her books because I would pinch all her Judy Blume books. I don't think I - 'cos I was so young, I don't think I really understood what I was reading[.....] It was so ..... so naughty.*

**Response.**

**Louise:** *Yes! It was quite different wasn't it? So therefore there was an appeal to reading something a little different*

**Feedback** – Louise indicates her agreement

*Ooooh right. Okay, well again just think about how that has modelled us and influenced us as readers. A lot of research says the experiences we have as youngsters will influence the way that we choose to read, what we feel about ourselves as a reader, what types of books we choose to read, and the ones that we might put to one side, because of those early stimuli.*

Louise sums up and validates her point.

In the exchange above, as far as Louise is concerned, there are no 'correct' answers: she has asked a genuinely open question concerning the students' own experiences. Her concern is to *categorise* these responses, rather than *evaluate* them and to use these categories as a starting point for the next topic for discussion, which concerns children's experiences in school. This then, is an IRF sequence of a different kind, in that any answers are considered acceptable. Nevertheless, it is *not* an example of cumulative talk, in the sense that participants think together, building on each others' contributions; since at this stage, the aim is to collect a list of categories, rather than to build an argument or develop a line of thought.

Ultimately, as far as Louise is concerned, there *is*, of course, an argument to be built, since she is trying to establish a rationale for adopting the approach to 'book talk' which Chambers (1993) recommends. But for now, she is content to collect information which will serve as the raw material with which to build her case. Thus this extract shows Louise allowing a considerable degree of freedom of thought as far as this particular discussion is concerned, but nevertheless still maintaining overall control of the direction of the thinking and the conclusions which will ultimately be reached.

The final extract to be examined does seem to show enquiry of a rather different kind and occupies a position on the authoritative/ dialogic continuum (Mortimer and Scott, 2003) which is further towards the 'dialogic' extreme. This is *not* however, an example of dialogue in which participants are openly challenging or disagree with each other. Rather it seems to be one in which Louise ensures that a range of opinions are heard and a consensus is reached. Thus it seems to be an interesting example of cumulative talk of a very particular kind, as will be illustrated in the commentary below:

#### **Case study 1: Extract 9.**

##### ***Transcript***

***Louise:*** *What did you think about the approach in that there are certain questions. Do you think they would enable children to engage in book talk. What - What were your thoughts about it, y'know just sort of having a test, you know, a little delve into that. Any particular thoughts?*

***Student 1:*** *Well if you gave them books like these – they would be really excited and wanting to talk anyway without having to*  
[...inaudible...]

##### **Commentary**

This opening by Louise requires an *evaluative* response.

This response is very positive in terms of the children's book the students have just been reading and discussing, but is suggesting that the questions used in Chambers' approach to 'book talk' are unnecessary.

**Louise:** *So, that's about giving children a selection of books that would appeal isn't it? That's about our choices our selection. So you think I just talk about it anyway. Okay, that's an interesting reflection. Any other thoughts about using certain questions or types of questions.*

Louise responds to the positive evaluation of the books, by reformulating it. She then restates the less positive view of Chambers' suggested approach, and affirms it as an interesting idea.

She asks for other contributions....

**Student 2:** *[.....its hard to say, coz I think, like, with younger children, if they want to read they'll probably be, like, they'll be thinking [...] as they're reading, anyway. People, well, children who want to read will be asking these kind of questions anyway.*

...and receives one from this student who is concurring with the negative view suggested by Student 1,

*[.....] perhaps won't be necessary[.....] – possibly?]*

although the student makes the argument very tentatively. She seems to want to reach agreement.

**Louise:** *Hopefully! Hopefully, we can engage the children in that kind of talk.*

*One of the things that Chambers says is about what he calls 'honourable reporting', that we value everything that a child has to offer about what they think about the story, what they liked or disliked. So that we respect their comments and that we encourage the children to respect each other's comments. So that they can feel that they can make those comments without feeling sort of threatened or anxious or 'is this the right answer?'. So the types of questions are enabling us to enable the children to do that, and I think that's a really important point.*

Louise, perhaps responding to the student's tentative tone, does not openly challenge this view but *accommodates* it. She is implying that this kind of talk *is* achievable naturally, but that it is more *likely* to happen if the recommended approach is taken.

She explains a little more about the approach to illustrate and justify what she has said.

*I can't remember what the points were that I said 'I'll come back to you' and 'I'll come back to you.'? (looking around for responses.)*

She asks for the students' help in shaping the dialogue. Clearly some points have been made during the group discussions which Louise is eager to share with the whole class. She perhaps knows that there are those who will support the recommended approach to 'book talk', and wishes to give them a voice.

**Student 3:** *I said it's a good, a good, if you haven't got children automatically asking these questions [...] I know if somebody said to me 'what do like about this book? What was good about this book?' I'd start telling you about the plot, I wouldn't automatically think to go any deeper than that. I'd need you to ask me something to get me triggered to do that, so I think that book is a good method of doing that if you haven't got a child that's naturally questioning everything and doing that.*

This student obliges with a comment which justifies Louise's view, but without devaluing the opposing view taken by the other students. Rather she accepts that both views are acceptable in different circumstances.

She justifies her view with an example of personal experience...

...and restates her case, whilst still being careful to accommodate the argument given by students 1 & 2.

**Student 4:** *I think it's the directness of the questions as well. If you asked me the question [.....] if it's a closed question* This student takes up and concurs with the argument of student 3, taking it on and adding a further reason for this positive view.

**Louise:** *... a specific direction, yes ...* Louise is encouraging the student to continue, but helping to make the argument clearer. (She realises the student isn't really referring to a 'closed question', but rather to a specific prompt.)

**Student 4:** *... then it's a lot easier for them to respond to that.* The student continues

**Louise:** *(nodding) to respond to that. We were talking about that at the different levels, I think I was talking to that group there about it (indicating with hand) you can read the story at one level and talk about the plot and the characters with Key Stage 1 children, but you can take this kind of story into Key Stage 2 and develop those deeper areas of underlying issues, themes, errrm puzzles,- comparisons – those sort of - by exploring them with certain questions. So these questions are not saying, so you must use this, this and this but they're an enabling tool to help us open up children's talk. And I think there's a comment on that table about it was better, it would be better then children trying to write about the book, the fact that you could talk about it.* Louise affirms the student's argument. She now takes up the topic of different levels of questioning and tells the whole class about relevant conversations held in another of the small groups.

She introduces another point about the value of talking, as opposed to writing, about books.

Before the exchange above, the students had been discussing these issues in their small peer groups, and it appears that at least two of the groups had reached a consensus (though interestingly, a different consensus); since student 1 and 2 are from the same small group, and similarly, student 3 and 4 are both from *another* small group.

Students 1 and 2 put one side of the argument: that the approach suggested by Chambers is unnecessary. But Louise has previously joined each small group in turn during the discussion task, and knows that there is *support* for Chambers' ideas in other groups. She has clearly been 'marking' these 'key ideas' (Scott, 1997) as she visited each group - gathering, as it were, useful points to put before the whole class. She doesn't quite remember where this support is to be found, however, so she asks the students for help. Those students whose arguments she has previously affirmed, duly oblige by putting the other side of the argument. At this point, Louise takes up the arguments given, by describing two other group's conclusions.

This extract shows Louise consciously and skilfully orchestrating a fruitful discussion and developing a line of enquiry. Arguments are made, counter-arguments given and a consensus of agreement is reached. Louise supports and prompts this process, having used the small group discussions as an opportunity to gather key points and arguments, later ensuring that all these views are represented in the whole class discussion. Clearly she does not agree with the first points made, but she accepts them as 'interesting reflections' later ensuring that other voices are heard. This is not a discussion which is arising naturally: it is being constructed by Louise from previously expressed opinions. However, the result is a sequence of interactions in which the students genuinely explore the issues concerning 'book talk', under Louise's guidance and, as Alexander (2004) exhorts in promoting his particular view of 'dialogic teaching', 'they strive to reach common understandings and agreed conclusions, yet they respect minority viewpoints' (Page 31). Findings from the extracts most recently considered are summarised below:

**Table 4.3: comparison of Extracts 7-9**

<b>Case Study 1: Extract 7.</b>	Although enquiry appears to be open ended, Louise evaluates the contributions in the light of her own experience
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 8.</b>	Louise categorises, rather than evaluates the students' ideas, listing them ready to build into an argument later.
<b>Case Study 1: Extract 9.</b>	Having noted key points made by the students in their small groups, Louise ensures that a range of opinions is rehearsed in the whole class context.

In two of these examples, Louise still wishes her own 'voice' to be heard, either directly, as in Extract 7, or indirectly, as in Extract 8. However, in Extract 9, she carefully and deliberately lays out the arguments for and against the case. Thus, it is clear that Louise varies her handling of the discourse, depending on the nature of the topic and her underlying purpose for each exchange.

Having examined evidence concerning the power balance and overall ethos of the session, the next section will consider the construction of joint contextual information by Louise and the students.

#### **4.3.4.3 Common contextual tracks**

In Session 1, it was apparent that previous learning, as well as personal and professional experiences formed part of the common contextual tracks (Mercer,

2000) upon which Louise and the students made their learning journey together. This section will examine whether as part of the way she shapes and guides the talk between herself and the students in session 2, Louise continues to build up this store of collective experience which the students can draw upon, as she did in Session 1.

#### **4.3.4.3.1 Previous learning.**

At the beginning of Session 2, as seen in the extract below, Louise makes explicit mention of the 'journey' which she and the students are taking together.

##### **Case study 1: Extract 10.**

**Louise** I really want to take you on a journey - on a journey, in one way, back to the very first session that we had together, where we were involved in thinking about speaking and listening, thinking about story telling, and thinking about us as story tellers. And then last week's session with the – with Sue from the Library looked further at exploring texts, developing strategies and techniques and so on to engage the children in stories, fiction, listening, responding, really being engaged in a whole range of different sorts of books. So continuing with that theme, so hopefully we've made a full circle to come back to that in the end.

In the beginning part of our sessions we have read a story to you, recommended a book, talked about how it may be used in Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2, thought about those links between reading and writing, and how reading has such a powerful effect on writers and that writing process and taking that on a bit, I want just to explore how we can sort of capture and engage any of our children Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2, into really enjoying texts.

Thus, as she did in Session 1, she is making the students aware of the way in which previous learning experiences are forming the foundations for the learning to take place in this session. Furthermore, in this session near the end of the course, she is showing how experiences from all of the previous sessions relate to each other, and are drawn together in this one.

#### **4.3.4.3.2 Reflecting on experience.**

When establishing contextual information in Session 1, it was evident that Louise also placed a high value on personal and professional experience as a vital part of professional learning; and, in particular, as a way in which professional opinions could be validated, or from which they could be established and developed. As part of this, it was also clear that the feelings and emotions evoked by these experiences were considered important, and were therefore frequently woven into the opportunities for talk which Louise provided and supported.

In Session 2, Louise takes this emphasis a step further, and uses personal feelings and experiences as the basis on which the whole session is predicated. In order to develop a rationale for the approach to 'book talk' which she is recommending, she first gives students a personal account of her own reading experiences as a child, and reads the students a favourite story from that era. As in session 1, she uses emotive language and a nostalgic style reminiscent of traditional oral story telling to engage the empathy of her audience:

'You'll not find this in Waterstones or Smiths or on any y'know, erm online book list. Eight tiny stories for Tiny Folk. And why I loved this was because the pictures are in colour and when I was a little girl, there was no colour in the world it was all black and white. So these pictures really had an impact on me.'

(Episode L2:2):

Having provided the model for the personal reminiscences which she wishes the students to exchange, she asks them to follow suit in their small groups. Once memories have been retold, students are asked to evaluate their reminiscences and decide on significantly influential factors in terms of themselves as readers. It is these very personal viewpoints which are then used as a starting point to discuss implications for classroom practice. When she describes for the students the backdrop against which decisions about the reading environment are made, Louise again uses a personal anecdote to illustrate her point, this time from the experience of a colleague. The next activity is a group collaborative task, based on scenarios concerning reading to which the students are asked to respond. Each of them begins 'How would you feel about reading if.....'. Thus this activity again uses feelings and emotions (this time in the context of scenarios which are designed to reflect practice in some schools) as the basis of professional decision-making. After a short presentation about the recommended approach to 'book talk', Louise again uses first hand experience to help the students evaluate it: she gives them a 'taster' of the approach by asking them to discuss a children's story, guided by some sample questions drawn from Chambers' book. Again, these first hand experiences form the basis for the whole class evaluation which follows.

It is clear then, that first hand personal experience is used throughout this session to provide both the rationale for the recommended approach and the criteria by which to evaluate its effectiveness. Louise, of course, defers to the authority of the author, when explaining how Chambers' approach works, and she makes one very general reference to 'a lot of research' (Episode L2:4). Other than that, she recommends the approach entirely on her own personal, and sometimes professional, experience. There is little mention here of the government bodies which created such difficult dilemmas for her in session 1: Ofsted is mentioned only briefly, (in Episode L2:4) and the National Literacy Strategy is given a cursory 'nod' in the comment already quoted in from Episode L2:8, where Louise explains that Chambers' approach can be justified by reference to the emphasis in the new NLS guidance on speaking, listening, and group interaction.

In both these cases, the feeling is not of these bodies being cited as an authority, but rather that this approach has already been validated as described above, but that fortunately, these 'official' bodies will also permit its use. It could be argued that there is indeed a feeling of freedom from constraint here: the message seems to be that intuitive decisions are at least as valuable in the professional context as those justified by other means, including the curriculum authorities.

#### **4.3.5 Summary of key findings from case study 1, part 2.**

In Session 2, sequences are to be found in which Louise takes a range of approaches. In terms of Mortimer and Scott's (2003) continuum from 'authoritative' to dialogic', the extracts overall are placed further towards the 'dialogic' end of the continuum; and in Alexander's (2004) terms there is some evidence of genuinely dialogic teaching, albeit in a rather 'stage managed' version.

There are, of course, a number of factors which might be influential here.

Firstly, the nature of the topic in session 2 lends itself very much more to an open-ended discussion and debate; whereas aspects of terminology, which are the focus of some sections of session 1, almost inevitably point Louise towards adopting the more closed approach which was evident in some parts of that session.



Secondly, the relationship between Louise and the students is at different stages of development in the two sessions, which will almost certainly influence the ways in which Louise manages the talk.

Thirdly, personal and professional experience have been shown to be valued by both tutor and students, but the extent of these experiences will be different for the two sessions, placed as they are in the first and last terms of the students' course.

It seems reasonable to suggest that all three of these factors will have combined to create a context in which the opportunities for genuinely open dialogue are more apparent in Session 2 than in Session 1.

Nevertheless, whatever the reasons, it is clear that overall the students' voices seem stronger in Session 2 than in Session 1. There are, after all, *no* examples in the later session of very closed questioning by Louise and there *are* times when Louise seems to be facilitating the students' voices, with very little attempt to superimpose her own.

The foundation for this more equal dialogue between tutor and students seems to be a very much more explicit validation of personal, first hand experiences, indeed the whole session is based on the value of these experiences and all the conclusions drawn are based on its validity.

#### **4.4 Overall commentary and initial conclusions from Case Study 1.**

Across the case study, a picture emerges of a tutor who selects a range of approaches to managing and shaping the talk in whole class contexts, according to different aims and curriculum contexts. Effective scaffolding is provided where defined subject knowledge is the focus, although the tutor has some difficulty reconciling her aim to provide a supportive, sensitive atmosphere, with the need to identify students' errors in a whole class context. A dialogic approach, in Alexander's terms (2004), is taken where the issues discussed are less constrained by a predetermined outcome, or by a particular stance defined by authoritative external bodies such as the National Literacy Strategy. Between these two extremes, Louise manipulates students' responses so that the conclusions match her strongly held

professional opinions and are consistent with her wide classroom experience. Where this conflicts with advice from powerful external bodies, she presents the obligatory view, but also ensures that the students are aware of her own.

The evidence shows clearly that Louise's relationship with the students is a friendly and relaxed one. Inclusive language, humour, smiles and friendly gestures are woven through the transcript and give an impression that the students' professional confidence is being carefully nurtured. Underpinning the discourse in Louise's classroom then, there is a pervasive ethos, whether consciously or unconsciously established, which implies that the students' voices will be heard. In reality, as has been demonstrated, the aims and curriculum 'content' have a strong influence over the extent to which this is the case. However, where the issues under discussion are considered to be a matter of personal and professional opinion, it seems that the students' and tutors' personal experiences, both inside and outside professional contexts, are valued as a means of gaining and evaluating professional knowledge. In such discussions within this case study, the students' 'voices' are relatively strong.

But there are voices other than the students' vying for attention here and Louise's own is probably the strongest overall. She is seen orchestrating, and attempting to harmonise, a range of sometimes conflicting influences and has strong convictions of her own with which she sometimes seeks to shape the students' views. As one might expect in a whole class context, Louise ultimately controls whose 'voice' will be heard and how powerfully. She also to some extent mediates the 'voices' of government bodies and curriculum authorities within this context.

In these whole class contexts, there is little evidence of the students directly challenging each other's contributions, though there are examples of Louise encouraging the students to air a range of conflicting views already expressed in small group contexts. Although such exchanges demonstrate many of the features of the 'dialogic teaching', which Alexander (2004) recommends, there is a sense in which this dialogue is not a real one, in that it is carefully 'scripted' by Louise, using ideas already expressed within small group collaborative discussion. However, I would argue that a style of dialogic enquiry is being exemplified which could serve as

an effective model for the students' own small group discussions, and indeed for their own individual thinking.

It could be argued that this is the best which could be expected, given the inequality inevitably created by the tutor's and students' respective roles; and that this can be balanced by genuinely open opportunities for collaboration within the smaller peer groups. Perhaps talk which reflects the 'interthinking' which Mercer (2000) recommends is difficult to achieve in these whole class contexts and should only be expected in the smaller groups where there is no direct intervention from the tutor. It might also be argued that by virtue of the tutor's experience and expertise, her voice should always be the strongest.

However, I would argue that whole class interactions which include a lively level of debate between the pupils themselves, have been seen to be achieved in school projects such as the 'Talk for Learning' (Alexander, 2003) project discussed in Chapter 2, and that whole class interactions in which students and tutors actively challenge each other's opinions, and confidently argue their respective cases, are certainly desirable in the adult context of teacher education. As has been demonstrated, such opportunities are a vital part of the students' own professional learning; and the skill to provide a model of genuinely collaborative thinking for their pupils is also of prime importance. If Louise's students are to acquire this, they will need to experience it first hand. Having viewed the video footage from this study, she has already begun to investigate possible ways in which this might be achieved. Such is the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the world of educational research, and such indeed is the exciting nature of teaching.

## **Chapter Five: Case Study of Pam. (Case Study 2).**

### **5.1 Section 1: Key Information.**

#### **5.1.1 Introduction.**

This case study again focuses on one tutor (for the purposes of this study named 'Pam') who is teaching two 'Primary English' sessions in the first and last terms of the Professional Graduate Certificate of Education course at the focus institution.

#### **5.1.2 The tutor.**

##### **5.1.2.1 The possibility of bias.**

The case study examines my own practice, so specific dilemmas had to be faced in terms of the way in which it would be written. The decision to include this data in the study at all is justified in the methodology section; but the writing style needed to preserve, as far as possible, the reliability and validity discussed therein, whilst also ensuring that information which would be useful for later comparisons, remained clear and accessible to the reader.

As explained in the methodology, it is *not* claimed that analysing one's own practice can ever be entirely objective, and it is accepted that the additional knowledge available to the researcher (for example the reasons behind certain decisions, and the intentions underpinning the ways in which the taught sessions were planned and executed) might inform and therefore influence the analysis. However, it is argued that this is *not* a problem when analysing the data from this case study: the inevitably personal stance can simply be acknowledged, and indeed turned to the advantage of the participant observer, by adding useful personal insights which will enhance the rich description of the data. In addition, just as 'respondent validation' (Cohen et al, 2000) has been used as a means to ensure the accuracy of analysis in the other case studies, so the tutor from the other study was asked to scrutinise and verify the transcriptions and analysis for this one.

With all these considerations in mind, I have made the decision to record the majority of this case study in the third person. This might be seen as an attempt to obscure, or indeed to deny, the identity of the participant; but given that this has been explicitly acknowledged, such an argument can be easily discounted. Rather, my purpose in adopting this viewpoint is to keep the reporting of the two case

studies similar in format; in order to facilitate comparisons, but nevertheless be able to take advantage of any personal insights which arise. As Robson advises (1993), the awareness of the researcher to the possibility of personal bias is the important factor; and therefore any personal insights which I might have as the participant researcher are taken account of in the analysis.

It has to be said, however, that many of the decisions concerning the facilitation of discussion and the management of students' responses, by definition, had to be made within the dynamics of a fast-changing classroom context. Looking back after a minimum of five months, it was therefore difficult, and in many cases impossible, to remember the thinking that lay behind such decisions. Indeed, these decisions may even be made at an intuitive, rather than a conscious level, a point which will be considered in the conclusions for this case study.

Furthermore, the study has been written with an awareness that the subject of the other case study will be reading it; so I would argue that this, together with the more detached stance offered by writing in the third person, helps to militate against a possible personal bias in favour of my own effectiveness as a tutor.

Having written this introductory section in the first person, the next section will, therefore be written in the third person and will go on to provide useful background information about myself.

#### **5.1.2.2 Background information.**

Before coming into Teacher Education, Pam spent seventeen years as a class teacher in primary schools, taking additional responsibility in two different schools as English co-ordinator, as well as other roles which involved being a member of the senior management teams.

Following this, she spent three years as a 'Literacy Consultant' with a unitary educational authority in the Midlands, supporting and advising schools in their implementation of 'the Literacy Hour', as recommended by the National Literacy Strategy. As such she was employed jointly by the Local Authority and the National Literacy Strategy, a national government body. The role involved providing centre-

based and school based training for teachers and senior managers. In implementing training designed by the National Literacy Strategy, strict adherence to the prescribed 'script' was forcibly encouraged by line managers; but for those courses designed and delivered on behalf of the LEA, a considerable degree of autonomy was exercised. A major part of the role involved supporting and advising class teachers and Literacy Co-ordinators in specific groups of schools, and teaching Literacy in those schools in order to model 'good practice'. Some personal classroom experiences cited by Pam in the course of the session may not therefore be in her own classroom, but in those of the teachers whom she supported.

### **5.1.3 The group.**

The students in this group are enrolled on the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education, specialising in teaching children in the Foundation Stage (ages 3-5) and Key Stage One (ages 5-7). The sessions which were recorded and transcribed are from the Primary elements of the course (as with the groups in the other case studies), but in addition, the tutor has in mind that these students also need to understand the key issues discussed in relation to a younger age group of pupils.

## **5.2 Section 2: Case Study Two, Part One – Autumn Term.**

This section will focus on one session, taught to Group 2 by Pam at the end of the autumn term. It will describe how the session was planned, how the 'story' of the session unfolded, and how it was structured in terms of group composition.

The transcript of the session will then be analysed in detail, guided by the research questions and the themes identified in Chapter 3.

### **5.2.1 Planning the session.**

The session takes place at the end of the first term of a year-long course and students have recently undertaken a three-week teaching placement in a primary school.

This session is made up of two main parts. The first is an introductory section, (which does not have a parallel section in Case study 1) in which Pam asks students to reflect upon aspects of the English teaching observed on their recent school

placement. In the second major part, the content of the session is substantially similar to the session of the same title, conducted by Louise with Group 1, which was discussed in Chapter 4. Thus, Pam's session is again at the centre of the controversy about the teaching of reading described above; and is set against the same period of transition in schools, in terms of changing 'guidance' from the National Literacy Strategy. The main difference in design is that the session has been adapted, so that it is geared towards students who are training to teach younger, rather than older children. Having just completed a school placement in Key Stage One, this group will be placed in the Foundation Stage in the following term. They need therefore to consolidate understanding of the reading process in relation to Key Stage One children, but then consider reading strategies which might be employed by younger readers. Rather than consider progression beyond basic strategies to more sophisticated approaches to texts (as Louise does, in her similar session with students specialising in teaching in Key Stages One and Two), this group therefore discusses an example of guided reading with children in a Reception class. However, this video *is* part of the materials provided by the National Literacy Strategy, as was the one discussed by the students in Louise's group.

### **5.2.2 The Teaching Narrative.**

As in Case study 1, this section will comprise a brief description, as revealed by the transcript, of the way the first of the taught sessions in this case study unfolds. 'Episodes' are numbered in a similar way to facilitate reference to the different stages of the teaching narrative in the analysis. This section again provides a context for the reader in which to understand this analysis.

The session was designed:

- To provide an opportunity for students to reflect upon their recent school placement, in relation to the English teaching which they have both observed and experienced;
- to consolidate and extend the students' existing understanding of the reading process and help students understand how they might support younger pupils' use of early reading strategies;
- to consider implications for teaching and assessment; and

- to develop the students' understanding of 'guided reading' as a teaching strategy recommended by the government body known as the National Literacy Strategy.

In **Episode P1:1**, Pam asks for and facilitates a reflection, in small groups, upon the English teaching the students have observed and employed on their recent school placement. Then she gives an open invitation to begin the whole class discussion process. The first topic (the 'topic based approach') is proposed by a student (**Episode P1.2a**) and several contributions are made to the discussion. Pam asks one group (**Episode P1: 2b**) to propose a different topic (the lack of phonics teaching), already raised during the group collaboration, and discussion continues. She then summarises key points and comments on a wider issue concerning students' autonomy on school placements. One student then gives an extended account of her own experiences of 'Visual Literacy' (**Episode P1.2c**). Pam replies, also at length, and provides some strongly worded advice. She links these issues to previous learning and indicates where they will be tackled again in later sessions. Another group expresses a concern already raised in their group (**Episode P1. 2d**) indicating problems with planning to 'objectives'. Pam promises some advice and explains some differences between requirements for planning in Key Stage One and for the Foundation Stage. She invites contributions from another table and students report a range of experiences relating to parental support for reading (**Episode P1.2e**). Pam contributes an experience of her own, then introduces the next part of the session (**Episode P1.3**) and explains its curriculum content and aims. She sets (**Episode P1.4**) and supports (**Episode P1:5**) a small group collaborative task for the students in which they discuss what they can remember, from a previous session about the reading process. She takes feedback (**Episode P1: 6**) in a whole class context about 'The Searchlights Model' (DfEE, 1998) linking these explanations with some of the topics raised by the students in the previous reflective discussions. Pam sets procedures (**Episode P1: 7**) for another small group collaborative task (matching children's reading strategies to a diagram of the 'searchlights model') and then supports and facilitates it (**Episode P1: 8**). Pam takes whole class feedback (**Episode P1: 9**) using a question and answer technique; and providing elaborations, explanations, examples from her own experience and advice, following many of the students' responses. This is followed by a section with no interaction



**(Episode P1:10)** where Pam gives advice as to how the students might use the strategies they have just explored in the classroom. Pam then moves into an exposition about effective reading assessment **(Episode P1: 11)** and sets another collaborative task, this time relating to the students' recent experience in school **(Episode P1: 12)**, circulating the groups and commenting occasionally. In the whole class context, Pam invites and encourages students to describe and evaluate what they have seen happening in school **(Episode P1: 13)**. She facilitates long, evaluative responses from the students and then sums up the discussions **(Episode P1: 13b)** by drawing out the issue of parental support. Next, drawing on the PowerPoint slides, Pam provides an exposition **(Episode P1: 14)** explaining the National Literacy Strategy model of 'guided reading' and its benefits. In the next section **(Episode P1: 15)** Pam introduces the video clip which the students are about to watch and indicates what she would like the students to note in particular. She asks students to respond to the video **(Episode P1: 16)** and comments at length on most of the responses. In response to one issue raised, she asks the whole group whether anyone would like to comment, and one student gives her opinion on the matter, which Pam endorses strongly. She concludes with a very brief exposition **(Episode P1: 17)** about the observation cycle in the Foundation Stage.

### **5.2.3 The structure of the session.**

In terms of group composition, the structure of this session comprises a mix of whole class episodes and small group collaborative tasks, similar to that in the sessions for Case Study 1. Again, small group tasks take place at the students' tables, so tend to be between friendship groups.

It is suggested that by the very structure of the session, the tutor is both offering, and validating, opportunities for peer group discussion; and that these might be supported by ground rules which offer relatively equal opportunities for the students' voices to be heard. However, it is the extent to which these 'ground rules' are apparent in the whole class sections which is the main focus of this study.

Therefore, as before, the analysis will consider *all* the whole class talk, both in establishing the overall ethos of the classroom and 'ground rules' for the talk, and in relation to some aspects of 'authority', as defined in the research questions.

Otherwise it will focus mainly on those whole class episodes in which there is some form of interaction between the tutor and students; in order, as before, to investigate those aspects of the research questions which focus on the tutor's management of this talk.

#### **5.2.4 Analysis of the transcript of Session 1: Pam teaching in the autumn term.**

The research questions remain the same as those for case Study 1, but for ease of reference they are repeated here:

- Taken from a socio-cultural perspective, in what ways do the tutors in this study shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in 'whole class' contexts?
- Whose authority is being called upon or deferred to in these interactions? Whose 'voices' are heard both explicitly and implicitly in the whole class dialogue?
- How, and to what extent, are these voices managed, guided and facilitated by the tutors in the context of these whole class discussions – and to what effect?

Short quotations, utterances and teaching episodes will be referenced in a similar way to those in Case Study 1, as explained in the methodology. The themes which emerged in Case Study 1 are used as a starting point for the analysis of this new set of data, and headings are kept similar to those in the previous case study, where possible, to facilitate comparisons later. Where new perspectives emerge, however, headings have sometimes been altered; and where arguments develop differently, similar headings sometimes appear in a new sequence.

##### **5.2.4.1 Curriculum content.**

This section argues that the subject matter and curriculum aims of the session influence the nature of the discourse between Pam and her students in this session; and that a range of different authorities are explicitly and implicitly referred to by the tutor, in order to validate the stance she takes and the information she provides.

The transcript provides a record of a session which has two major parts, each of which has rather different aims and curriculum topics.

#### **5.2.4.1.1 Curriculum content for Session 1, Part 1: Reflections.**

The first part of the session, as Pam explains, is designed to 'give you an opportunity to share your experiences out in school' (Episode P1:1) and she adds that, as their course is only a year long, and therefore the range of practice they will encounter limited accordingly, it is important to learn from each other's experiences as well as their own individual ones. She asks them to discuss the positive and negative aspects of the English teaching they have seen and experienced while on school placement. Thus it is explicitly indicated that this is an opportunity for personal reflection and that first hand professional experiences should influence, and be influenced by, the learning within the university classroom. (The patterns of interaction during this part of the session also support such values, as will be discussed in the relevant section below.)

Pam acknowledges the same controversy as in Case study 1, over the new recommendations from the Rose Review (2006) into the teaching of early reading, and the newly recommended model of the reading process, known as 'The Simple View of Reading' (Page 77). She will therefore be confronted by the same dilemmas as those faced by Louise during the teaching of this session, regarding the accommodation of new 'guidance' from government sources at this 'transition' stage.

Pam anticipates this focus when in this first part of the session she makes explicit mention of the changes concerning phonics teaching, responding to the students' reports that there was very little of such teaching going on in school:

'That's quite different isn't it, from the model that's recommended, certainly by the Strategy and by the, kind of all the new initiatives at the moment? And it will be interesting to see whether this is the same in another year's time, because the whole push at the moment is to change all of that and to make phonics much more errm upfront and

much more frequent, and regular, and a ten or fifteen minute slot each day, as we were saying.' (Episode P1:2)

Thus she explicitly acknowledges the ever changing climate in which teachers make decisions about their classroom practice, and the range of authorities which influence those decisions and have a bearing on personal reflection.

For these student teachers, this is further exacerbated by another dilemma, concerning their developing levels of autonomy. This is exemplified when Pam discusses the fact that when on school placement, students will be making decisions under the guidance of the class teacher (Episode P1:2b). She advises that when they reach their final placement, there will be a little more scope for innovation and autonomous decision-making. Thus, not only are student teachers subject to a number of different voices of authority, in terms of the models of 'good practice' which they are expected to adopt; but in addition, they are negotiating their own changing levels of authority in terms of personal autonomy in the classroom, as their professional experience develops.

Nevertheless, in this early part of this session, it is the students who lead the discussions and initiate the exchanges. Pam offers them an open opportunity to share their experience and indicates that she expects them to take an evaluative stance, reporting on the 'positives and negatives' of the practice they observed. Even at this early stage of their course, there is no evidence that they are reluctant to do so. Students give their views confidently and uncompromisingly to Pam and to the class and (as will be demonstrated in later sections) Pam needs to do little more than facilitate this process and offer her own experience as part of the dialogue. The following examples of some of the students' contributions give an indication of this confidence:

I found it really positive really, 'cause we were doing World War 2, so in my Literacy week I used just one text which was an autobiography of a boy called John. He was the same age as the children in the class and so we used that text throughout all of the activities for the whole week, so they built up a good understanding of what it was like for John in World War 2.

We used story structure as well and so we extended it as well into other activities [...inaudible.... ] and we incorporated punctuation. It worked very well.

(Episode P1:1)

The topic base, like I say, was really good but one of the biggest concerns we had was there was very little phonics.

(Episode P1:2b)

I found, with the writing of the children, the strategy that the literacy co-ordinators had devised, I found was hindering children because their policy is .....

(Episode P1:2c)

As has been discussed, the climate for English teaching in which this session takes place is one of some controversy, in which the voices of teachers, government bodies, and university tutors are all attempting to make themselves heard. At this stage of their course, the students' professional experience is limited, relative to that of their tutors and their class teachers. Yet the students in this group seem ready to add their voice clearly and confidently to these professional debates.

#### **5.2.4.1.2 Curriculum Content for Session 1, Part 2: Teaching and assessing reading.**

In the second, more lengthy part of the session, the focus narrows, and Pam is very much in control of the topics discussed and the ways in which they are tackled. As with case study 1, session 1, this session deals both with subject knowledge (relating to the reading process) and pedagogical aspects (in terms of the ways in which reading can be taught and assessed). The emphasis, however, is slightly different from Louise's session, so as to accommodate the needs of students training to teach a younger age group. Thus guided reading is still discussed as a teaching strategy, but this time in relation to younger readers. Nevertheless, many of the concerns expressed by students in their earlier reflections are still at the heart of these

discussions. Again a range of voices is heard bidding for authority, and on different occasions, Pam seems to authorise her recommendations with reference to all of them.

The model proposed for guided reading, for example, seems to be recommended on Pam's own authority as well as that of the National Literacy Strategy:

The structure for that group reading as I've said can be kind of good. A good way of using your time is to do group reading in a particular format, err, with some independent reading in the middle. And the structure for the guided reading that the NLS recommends is just such a model.

(Episode P1: 14)

In the same episode, Pam also appears to validate both her own professional experience and that of the students:

Neil was talking about, in his class, that the errrm the groups rotate so that one group is reading within the literacy hour every day. The problems about that are kind of organisational ones in a way.....

(Episode P1:14)

She then goes on to give advice on her own authority about the procedural aspects of guided reading in schools.

In an earlier episode, Pam speaks purely from her own authority, listing the criteria by which she herself advises that good practice in reading assessment can be identified, and here she gives no opportunity for these to be challenged:

Let's think about if we're assessing reading, how do we know whether it's effective or not? (*Gesturing towards the interactive whiteboard*) Some key points there, your reading assessment really needs to do for you. It needs first of all to tell you what the child's strengths are, not just the things that the child can't do. It needs to tell you, as we've just looked at, which are the

reading strategies that the child is using effectively, and also - what does the child still need to know about reading? (Episode P1:11)

In a further example, Pam can be seen mediating the authority of the 'guidance' given in the recent review (Rose, 2006) of the teaching of early reading, by expressing her own concerns about *balance* in these curricular decisions:

(Having asked a question, Pam is evaluating a student's response)

Yes, that's probably about knowledge of text, about questioning the text at text level isn't it? Because children can often use phonics - or can sometimes use phonics and pronounce the words properly but not actually understand what they're reading. That's my big concern about the big push for phonics at the moment (which I completely support) but if you only do phonics (and I have seen children like this), you can get children who painstakingly decode their way through text from a phonics point of view, and at the end of the sentence, they don't know what they've read, they don't understand what they've read. That's about text level - making sense.

(Episode P1:9c)

It is clear then, that Pam refers to a number of different authorities in terms of the information and advice that she presents in both parts of this session. As part of this, she also mentions 'controversies', and 'concerns', and indicates her own reservations about some of the current 'guidance' which teachers are being offered. Thus, although many 'official' voices are heard, Pam's own professional experience and opinions are also presented with some authority.

The following sections will go on to analyse the specific ways in which Pam shapes and guides the talk in this session and to consider how this relates to these various influences.

#### **5.2.4.2 The 'power balance' and overall ethos.**

As in Case Study 1, this section will examine the ways in which the ground rules for talk are established and maintained by Pam in this session, with particular reference

to whose authority seems to prevail in the direction and nature of the talk, and to the kinds of reasoning which she values and encourages. A number of different ways will be identified, both explicit and implicit, in which Pam establishes and maintains these ground rules.

#### **5.2.4.2.1 The personal approach.**

The first evidence to be presented concerns Pam's general demeanour towards the students. The data seem to indicate several ways in which she is attempting to create a context where students feel secure and able, confidently, to take part in the opportunities for talk which are presented.

There is some use of light humour to this end, for example when she jokes about the 'vaguely depressing' background colour to the PowerPoint slides (Episode P1:4) or the 'rather gruesome' approach to storytelling exhibited by the teacher on the video (Episode P1:15). Like Louise, she also tells several personal stories which are indications that she does not wish to set up an over formal or distant relationship with the students. However, these will be considered in a later section.

There is one strategy which, although similar to that seen in the first case study, is more predominant here: that is the frequent use of students' first names. It is noticeable that Pam not only repeats the student's name immediately after his or her contribution:

'So errm as Hannah said, we've got, if it's a fairy story and it says 'once upon a', you're going to know that that word's going to be 'time'.'

(Episode P1:5)

but also refers back to them, by name, in later discussions or expositions:

'They also need to be able to segment and blend so they need to be taught those skills. So that comes back to Sharon's concern, really, about the lack of frequency of phonics teaching in her school.'

(Episode P1:5)



'You must find a way around that horrible scenario that Tamara described'  
(Episode P1:13).

Thus although there is rather less humour than in the parallel session in Case Study 1, the evidence suggests that Pam's style of interaction with the students overall is a friendly and relaxed one, in which the frequent use of names indicates that individual contributions are important. It is argued that this has an important bearing on the nature of the dialogue between tutor and students and would indicate to students that their 'voices' will be heard.

#### **5.2.4.2.2 Language choices.**

In Case Study 1, it was argued that language choices were indicative of the friendly ethos which the tutor wished to create. This source of evidence is again useful here, though in Pam's case it is her choice of a fairly colloquial style of language which seems to be used in this way.

As with Louise, there is occasional use of the first person plural to create a sense of collegiality and to frame advice in a less direct way:

'We do a lot in school (don't we?) to try and build up that visual recall – to train visual memory' (Episode P1:6)

'So what we need to do with children.....' (Episode P1:7).

and a few of Pam's procedural interactions with the students are couched in similar terms:

'If we could all tune in, that would be great, thanks' (Episode P1:1)

but most instructions and advice is more direct than Louise's:

'what I'd like you to do now.....' (Episode P1:4)

'If you're doing it (guided reading) like that, you've got to keep tabs on what the children are doing'

(Episode P1:16)

What emerges more prominently from *these* data, however, is the way Pam's use of fairly colloquial language structures, and a style reminiscent of casual conversation, contributes to the informal ethos of the session:

'I was just talking to Louise this morning....'

'Yes that whole..... play based thing will be interesting to you as Key Stage One/ Foundation Stage practitioners' (Episode P1:2a)

If children can't do that, and they haven't got the knowledge of the letters, you can do all the 'Big Writing' in the world and all the inspiration in the world, and have lovely background music, but if they haven't got the skills - the tools if you like, to get the words down on the page - you're on a loser before you begin aren't you?

(Episode P1:2b)

'Gosh! That's pretty amazing, really'

(Episode P1:2e)

These examples give an indication of Pam's style of communication with the students throughout the session. There is evidence then, of the *implicit* indication given to the students by this rather casual language style, that their contributions will be welcomed, and that their communicative relationship with the tutor is to have some of the hallmarks, at least, of casual conversation.

The next section will argue that there is also *explicit* encouragement for open and frank exchanges of views.

#### **5.2.4.2.3 Explicit validation of collaborative talk.**

In considering the explicit validation of collaborative talk, it must of course be acknowledged again, that as *both* the tutor who is the focus of this case study, *and* the writer of this thesis, Pam is acutely aware of its research focus. Some discussion, between Pam and the students, about collaborative thinking, and reflection on teaching experience through talk, is therefore to be expected, and indeed the broad focus of the research had been explained to all the students (as discussed in the methodology) in order to justify, and ask their permission for, the presence of the camera. This is clear in the following example, where Pam and the students are discussing the teacher seen on the video clip:

Okay, so he was doing all the talking and not doing much of the listening. *I* do a lot of that. It's a very - it's a big temptation for teachers isn't it? We all kind of, like the sound of our own voices, really, and the temptation is to dominate the dialogue. It's what this (*pointing at the camera*) is all about really. The temptation is to do all the talking, and not really listen, and not build on what the children are saying, and that's my - erm, the same with me and, and these groups.

(Episode 15)

There is no pretence here that the camera can be completely ignored. On the contrary, it is argued that this is, in itself, an example of the explicit validation of collaborative talk which this section seeks to discuss, and that it also presents to the students a clear justification for the reflective discussion which the tutor is seen to be encouraging.

There are other examples of the way Pam gives an explicit message about the value of collaborative thinking:

'So let's draw our thoughts together'

(Episode P1:9)

'That group's still discussing and disputing, which is good!'

(Episode P1: 9)

and acknowledging her role in the process:

'So, thanks for that feedback. It will be useful for me. It will be useful for me when we're talking about these issues, to know the kind of experiences you've had'

(Episode P1:2e)

#### **5.2.4.2.4 Patterns of interaction.**

The examples above demonstrate that there are a number of ways in which Pam endorses the value of collaborative talk where participants hold equal power, both in terms of the balance of talk and the direction of the thinking. But can these principles really apply in the context of 'whole class' talk? This section will examine the patterns of interaction in such contexts within this session. It will argue that the Pam is very much in charge of managing and orchestrating the talk, and that even in this university setting, these patterns still reflect those which are typical of many school classrooms. Within these 'classroom patterns' of interaction, however, it will show that, in this session, there is still considerable variation in terms of who controls the thinking and how conclusions are reached.

The first question posed in the extract below might lead us to expect an 'IRF' exchange (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) in which the tutor's feedback is simply designed to distinguish 'correct' from 'incorrect' answers. However, it is clear that the tutor is scaffolding (Wood, 1988) the students' learning, and that there is an element here of collaborative thinking.

#### **Case Study 2: Extract 1.**

(The students are feeding back their conclusions in the whole class context. They have been collaborating in a small group activity, which required them to match reading strategies (printed on cards) to categories on a large diagram. The topic of discussion concerns subject knowledge of the reading process, and there are some strategies which actually relate to more than one category, which is the case with the first card chosen by Pam.)

## Transcript

## Commentary

**Pam:** *Okay folks, let's errr, let's draw our thoughts together on that one shall we? Let's see what people have got. (Pauses for attention. Some talking still continues) Okay, that group's still disputing and discussing, (smiling) so that's good. (laughs but makes eye contact with the group for whom she is waiting.)*

*Okay let's have a look then. What about (reading from one of the cards) 'drawing information from the illustration'. Which category would you put that one in?*

**Student 1:** *Word recognition / graphic knowledge [....]*

**Pam:** *Okay, explain to me why its –*

**Student: 1** *(interrupting) [ ...inaudible.....]*

**Pam:** *Okay, no it's fine, it's fine. Don't worry about it!, It's fine, it's fine. Tell my why. - What it's got to do with word recognition. How would you use the illustrations to support word recognition? (Nodding in an encouraging way)) You could well do that.*

**Student 1:** *I was going on more of the graphic knowledge.*

**Student 2:** *I've done that! When I was doing guided reading and the children got stuck on a word, I'd say to look at the picture and see if you can see anything that might help you,.. might help you know what that word is.*

**Pam:** *Absolutely - So actually you're kind of trying - you're using the picture as a kind of trigger aren't you? To try and support that instant recall.....*

*So one of the things it might support is word recognition.*

*What else might it support then? What other category might it belong in?*

Pam initiates the exchange. She could potentially use this just to check whether students have the correct answers.

Response

The expected 'correct' answer was that the picture supports use of *contextual* knowledge, but there is another valid line of thinking. Pam's request will help her understand the derivation of the answer given. Presumably the student's response indicates some nervousness about his answer.

Pam tries to reassure the student that he could well be on the right track.

'Word recognition/ graphic knowledge' are presented thus together on the card. Is the student looking for a way out - still thinking this might be an incorrect answer?

Another student comes to his rescue, with an example which endorses his first answer.

Pam affirms this line of thinking and elaborates to clarify.

Pam repeats the answer and initiates another exchange which will reveal the other 'correct' line of thought.

*(Later in this same exchange, Pam receives another student's answer, and then again asks a student for elaboration):*

'Yes, knowledge of text. Tell me how. Tell me how it's useful for knowledge of text.

.....And this time the student offers elaboration with none of the reticence of the student above.)

The extract above is revealing in the following ways.

Rather than give a straightforward 'yes' or 'no' response, Pam asks the student to justify his answer, presumably so that she can understand the logic which underpins this response. However, this seems to unnerve the student who now thinks his answer is incorrect. Pam senses this and tries to reassure him, but he still appears to be looking for a way out of the potential embarrassment which an incorrect answer might afford. The first student's answer has triggered a memory in another student's experience. She offers this to the class and it is taken up and elaborated upon by Pam, thus affirming the validity of the first student's answer, even though it may not have been the 'correct' one provided in the National Literacy Strategy materials that Pam is using.

There are resonances here with the dilemmas faced by Louise in the first case study. The anxiousness felt by these students, when they are concerned that they may get an answer 'wrong', might simply be an understandable issue of self-confidence. But it might also be a product of many years spent in classrooms where the ubiquitous 'IRF' exchanges (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) were used in a less supportive way, and where a wrong answer might well be a source of embarrassment or even humiliation. There are two possible perspectives, then, from which Louise and Pam are well advised to handle these exchanges with care:

The first concerns the students' *own* learning, and the need to encourage, as has been discussed earlier, an ethos which will support the students in openly and confidently sharing, justifying and debating their conclusions.

The second reason relates to these students' professional practice in their *own* classrooms. Louise and Pam will be anxious to present (to these aspiring teachers) a

model for their own teaching which will, in turn, be supportive of *their* pupils' learning.

In Extract 1 above, Pam is seen carefully probing the students' responses and seeking to understand them, so that she can use them as platforms from which to scaffold the students' learning. But not all exchanges in this session are handled in this way. Even later in the same episode, Pam seems to make the decision to move the feedback on more swiftly, by using a very quick 'IRF' exchange, this time receiving collective answers from the whole class and with no evidence of any developmental feedback.

## Case Study 2: Extract 2

### Transcript

### Commentary

**Pam:** *Okay, (reading from a card and then scanning the whole group)*

Initiation. Pam indicates by gesture that she wishes the students to answer communally.

*'use their knowledge of high frequency words? Fairly easy one isn't it?*

**Several Students:** *word recognition.*

Response

**Pam:** *Yes, that's your instant word recognition.*

Pam evaluates the answer as correct.

*Okay, er.. 'use letter sounds and blends to build a word ..or to word build?'*

Initiation.

**Student voices:** *Phonics*

Response

**Pam:** *(Nodding) That's your phonics.*

Pam evaluates the answer as correct.

*'Look for words within words?'*

Initiation.

**Student voices:** *Graphic knowledge*

Response

*(Nodding again) Graphic knowledge, we talked about that instant recall of bits of the words.*

Pam evaluates the answer as correct. Some elaboration – exhorting students to remember previous discussion.

*' Break down large words into syllables?'*

Initiation.

**Student voices:** *Phonics*

Response

*(pause)*

<p><b>Pam:</b> (pause) Okay, tell me a bit about how that's to do with phonics then, just say a little bit more. You're absolutely right, but just explain to me how.</p>	<p>Pam changes tack again and asks for justification / elaboration. Perhaps mindful of the earlier incident, Pam is at pains to reassure, <i>before</i> asking for a response.</p>
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There are a number of possible reasons for Pam's decision to establish a very different pattern of exchange here from the earlier one. This may simply be to do with pressure of time; or Pam might be protecting students from embarrassment by enabling them to answer *en masse*; or (as she seems to indicate) it may be because she considers some of the answers are fairly obvious; or indeed, it may be a combination of all these reasons.

Whatever the explanation, there is evidence that Pam is selecting from a range of options for handling such exchanges, and that she makes different decisions at different times, to suit the circumstances.

Extract 3, below, shows Pam making a decision which could be considered less supportive of the students' learning. Here she uses similar questioning techniques, but this time as a means of introducing quite lengthy explanations:

### Case Study 2: Extract 3

#### Transcript

**Pam:** Okay grammatical knowledge is a bit trickier, I think. Errm, what are your thoughts about grammatical knowledge and how it might support reading? Let's put the bits together as it were.

**Student:** [.....inaudible.....] so the child would know that if it's like 'I' – you wouldn't have 'doing' as the next word.

**Pam:** Excellent, that's brilliant. It's about the kind of instinctive feel for grammar and the kind of word that might come next. So it's predicting the right sort of word that will come next in the sentence. So as you rightly point out, if you say 'I' at the beginning of the sentence the child isn't going to predict, if they're using grammatical knowledge, they're not going to suggest that the next word might be doing 'cause it doesn't make sense in a - from a

#### Commentary

Initiation.  
Pam asks the question in a fairly open-ended way, perhaps to avoid implying that there is a right or wrong answer.

Response.

Pam evaluates the answer as correct.... and goes on to elaborate...

and elaborate further....

(those students who are visible in the video are looking down at their own notes from here on)

and reformulate the students' answer..



*grammatical point of view the structure isn't right and the meaning isn't right, so the syntactic bit that's the structure from the grammar point of view isn't right and the semantic bit isn't right, doesn't make sense, it doesn't make any real sense, it doesn't mean anything. So what we need to do with children is to encourage them to use that kind of instinctive knowledge of grammar to predict what the words might be,*

and then goes on to introduce some technical vocabulary

and explain it ...

and then she explains the practical implications.

*okay on your tables then, you've got,*

Perhaps feeling she has lost the students' attention, Pam moves on swiftly to the next activity.

The balance of talk here is quite firmly in the tutor's hands, as is the direction of the thinking, but one might question whether (once the students' answers have been affirmed as correct) they are really concentrating on this rather long exposition. Perhaps instead, they are merely waiting for the next question, and possibly even preparing their answers. The data does not provide the extensive evidence which would be needed to draw definitive conclusions about this. However, such visual evidence as *is* available for this exchange, does show that students stop making eye contact with the tutor during these explanations, and that they are visibly more engaged when the next activity is being proposed. Perhaps this is an example of exactly what Pam feared in her comment to the students (quoted above from Episode 15) about doing too much of the talking! Nevertheless, this example does provide further evidence that Pam is selecting from a range of strategies for orchestrating feedback in these whole class contexts; though it seems to indicate that some are more successful than others.

Conclusions drawn so far from the patterns of interaction are now summarised in Table 5.1 below:

**Table 5.1: Comparison of Extracts 1 – 3.**

<b>Case Study 2: Extract 1</b>	Pam deals with a potentially incorrect answer by probing the student's response
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 2</b>	An 'IRF' exchange in which Pam's 'feedback' is simply an evaluation – an indication as to whether the student's responses are correct or incorrect.
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 3</b>	Pam uses an individual response as a platform for a rather long explanation, and seems to lose the students' attention.

These extracts confirm, as I have argued in Case Study 1, that 'getting the balance right' in Teacher Education between the many 'voices' clamouring for attention is not

easy. In order to scaffold the students' learning, a degree of probing is clearly necessary: but conversely, this might discourage the students from revealing their thinking to the tutor, and to the class. Too *little* helpful feedback might mean that students only focus on the 'correctness' (or otherwise) of the answer: too *much* might mean that they simply stop listening until the next 'answer' is revealed.

In the extracts considered so far, these delicate decisions are being made in the context of talk relating to subject knowledge; and it is Pam who quite clearly initiates and controls the exchanges, in a way typical of many school classrooms. In the extracts discussed below, however, the topics are selected by the students; and although the tutor maintains overall control of the dialogue, a very different pattern is discernible.

In Extract 4, Pam encourages an extended contribution from one individual student:

#### Case Study 2: Extract 4

##### Transcript

**Pam:** *Okay, erm have we had – is there any more feedback from that table, anything? High points or concerns that you wanted to express?*

**Student:** *We were talking about erm the objectives that we were doing, like, word level, sentence level. I sometimes found [...] I sometimes having objectives, having to have an objective for each part of your lesson, maybe a bit rigid? 'Cause I was doing instructions one of the weeks and I wanted to make a jelly with them,*

**Pam:** *Right*

**Student** *so trying to find an objective to fit around practical kind of issues [.....]*

**Pam** *Right*

**Student:** *'cause I wasn't using text because I had the Foundation class and they couldn't read sentences or anything and it was quite hard trying to fit things round the objectives.*

**Pam:** *Right, okay, we'll come back to that when we look at planning for your Key Stage 1 practice. Remind me about that issue of objectives and we'll talk about that because there are some things we can come back to on that and there's, there's the new framework and the old framework so there may be some differences there. So it may be that when you start to work with the new framework at some point you may find that that's kind of easier. Certainly in terms of 'objectives' in the foundation stage, it's much easier because*

##### Commentary

An open opportunity to contribute, which expects opinions to be expressed.

The student explains the problem at length. The questioning note in her voice might indicate that she is a little tentative, or it may be a genuine request for others to offer and opinion

Pam encourages her to continue...

which she does.

Pam again encourages her to continue.

She continues and concludes her point.

This is quite a big issue, which Pam recognises as important, but which needs more detailed consideration than time will allow here.

Pam indicates that she will be able to offer advice at another time.

In this example, Pam encourages the student to explain and exemplify the problem at length. The students have been provided with planning requirements for lessons which are based on the original National Literacy Strategy Framework for teaching, so the tentative tone adopted by the student may indicate a reluctance to sound too critical of college requirements. Alternatively, it may be an implicit request for the tutor's or her peers' opinions on the matter. The issue raised is due to be considered in a later session, and Pam knows that there is a lot more to say on the matter, and that the requirements of the 'new' framework are more flexible with regard to objectives for lesson planning, and that guidance for the Foundation Stage will also be relevant. She therefore demonstrates clearly that she feels the student's concern is a valid one; encourages the student to feel that there *is* a solution to the problem; and indicates that she *will* give the topic the consideration it deserves in due course. Although technically Pam has initiated the exchange, the role she adopts is very much a facilitative one to begin with, and the student is really in control of the agenda. Here Pam's response is again quite lengthy (it continues beyond the extract shown above) but it is very much at the student's bidding and in response to *her* concerns. This is a very different 'balance of power' from that seen in Extracts One, Two and Three above. It is unclear whether in this situation the student is challenging the guidance given previously by the tutor, or whether she is happy (ultimately) to defer to the tutor's authority, and genuinely requires some guidance on the subject: perhaps there is even an element of both. However, it is certain that the student is given time to explain the issue at length and that the tutor acknowledges some of the difficulties she expresses and seeks to provide reassurance.

One further example will serve to illustrate the discursive variety which is provided in this session. Extract 5 is again part of the reflective section with which the session begins.

### **Case Study 2: Extract 5**

#### **Transcript**

**Pam:** *Okay, do you want to start us off there at the back table? Can somebody be the spokesperson?*

**Student 1:** *A negative thing was erm my school did*

#### **Commentary**

There is some hesitance here, in terms of who would speak for the group.

One student eventually accepts

<p><i>their literacy hour <u>topic</u> based, and I found that by Wednesday - after Wednesday, everything was just starting to repeat itself</i></p> <p><b>Pam:</b> (nodding) Right</p> <p><b>Student 1:</b> so that were a little bit boring.</p> <p><b>Pam:</b> OK That's interesting, because the whole point of the topic based approach is supposed {to be..</p> <p><b>Student 1:</b> {But then again I had some really dull topics where you couldn't really [...inaudible...]</p> <p><b>Pam:</b> Right, yeah. I think that the, the topic based approach has been a kind of erm suggested as the way to be much more creative. I think it <u>can</u> be much more creative but y'know as we've said before, that y'know the sort of the dire-est of initiatives in a good teacher's hands can be good and vice versa: a dire teacher can actually kill off, y'know a really useful planning or teaching strategy. And erm, and I think the topic based stuff <u>can</u> be really exciting, but that depends again on the practitioner and perhaps as you say on the topic. Erm any other, any other, (looking around the room) anybody else encountered topic based stuff in, in ...</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> We did</p> <p><b>Pam:</b> Okay what were your thoughts on ....</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> I found it really positive really, 'cause we were doing World War 2, so in my Literacy week I used just one text, which was an autobiography of a boy called John. He was the same age as the children in the class and so we used that text throughout all of the activities for the whole week, so they built up a good understanding of what it was like for John in World War 2.</p> <p><b>Pam:</b> Right</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> And then when we moved on to their erm topic base in the afternoon, their history and geography and things, we used the same book so they were building on it.</p> <p><b>Pam:</b> Mmmm</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> Y'know they were making air raid shelters and they were packing their suitcases, for being evacuated and making name labels and we were able to incorporate that into the literacy hour.</p> <p><b>Pam:</b> Yes. That sounds, that sounds a much more positive sort of, that really sounds how topic based stuff is supposed to be.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> yeah. And ours was 'story structure' as well for their, for the text level, and they had to write a story that - in a similar vein - so they all wrote an autobiography</p> <p><b>Pam</b> Mmmmm</p>	<p>the role, and begins with his own experience.</p> <p>Pam encourages him to continue.. ...which he does, concluding his point. Pam begins her response..</p> <p>But the student has thought of something else he wants to say and presents another point.</p> <p>An extended contribution in which Pam states some of the pros and cons, in her opinion, of this approach.</p> <p>Pam asks for any other experiences on the same theme. One student bids to speak..</p> <p>..and Pam encourages her to continue. The student begins an extended description and evaluation of her experience.</p> <p>Pam encourages her to continue... ..which she does.</p> <p>Pam encourages her to continue. And she provides further exemplification.</p> <p>Pam identifies this response as being one which presents the opposing point of view. The student continues.</p> <p>Again Pam encourages her to continue</p>
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- Student 2:** ... but it was, it was nice to have like a central theme that you could branch everything else out of ..which she does
- Pam:** Yes, yes, (making eye contact with another group of students and gesturing to invite them to speak) and that was the same for you was it? You found it a positive thing? Pam encourages another group to speak
- Student 3:** Yes, ours were being evacuees again and we were thinking about what they were taking with them as well. We used story structure as well and so we extended it as well into other activities [ ] and we incorporated punctuation. It worked very well. One student gives an example.. and gives her positive opinion.
- Pam:** Right, so what were the pluses for you for the topic based approach? It worked very well in what sense? Pam prompts her to justify and explain this view...
- Student 3:** You could extend it into other areas of the curriculum your history, your geography [...inaudible...] your role play activities you could use those topics [... ] ...which she does.
- Pam:** Yes, that whole topic based thing and play based thing would be interesting for you as Foundation/Key Stage 1 teachers 'cause you'll have the advantage of being able to make the connections between the philosophy of the Foundation Stage and the, and the approaches in Key Stage 1. And there is quite a push in certain areas now, to move to that kind of much more holistic view of learning, which the Foundation Stage holds dear, into Key Stage 1. So it will be interesting to see what you feel about that. Errrm I think you're kind of uniquely privileged in that respect because you can see the best of both worlds and you, as professionals then, can make your mind up between errrm which elements of Foundation Stage practice are worthwhile in Key Stage 1, and vice versa really. Pam explains the professional climate within which this discussion sits.. ...and encourages the students to form their own opinions about it.

This exchange bears some of the same hallmarks as the one considered in Case Study One, Extract 9, and as with that extract, meets many of Alexander's (2004) criteria for 'dialogic' teaching. Again, the topics for discussion are very much in the students' hands, and this topic has been proposed by one of them. Pam acts both as a facilitator and a participant in the discussion, but again encourages an extended contribution from a student before she puts her point of view. She then asks for other contributions, prompting students to explain and justify their conclusions; before she starts to sum up, by explaining some of the current thinking and putting that in the context of these particular students' training. Thus, Pam seems to be giving her own opinion; whilst also encouraging the students to make up their own minds on the issue, and providing some useful contextual information which will help them to do so. The pattern of interaction here then, is one in which Pam is still

orchestrating the talk, but where the thinking is genuinely exploratory and collaborative (in the sense that a range of viewpoints are presented and are given equal consideration) and where the ultimate conclusions to be drawn are left in the students' hands.

A grid, summarising patterns of interaction discerned in the extracts from this case study so far, can now be completed thus:

**Table 5.2: Comparison of Extracts 1-5**

<b>Case Study 2: Extract 1</b>	Pam deals with a potentially incorrect answer by probing the student's response
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 2</b>	An 'IRF' exchange in which Pam's 'feedback' is simply an evaluation – an indication as to whether the student's responses are correct or incorrect.
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 3</b>	Pam uses an individual response as a platform for a rather long explanation, and seems to lose the students' attention.
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 4</b>	Pam facilitates an extended contribution from one individual student and offers to return to the topic at a later date.
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 5</b>	Pam facilitates and participates in a discussion giving a range of opinions, leaving the ultimate conclusions in the students' hands

#### **5.2.4.2.5 Levels of challenge.**

Clearly, as in Case Study 1, the patterns of interaction between Pam and her students are varied, and Pam seems to be selecting from a range of techniques for shaping and organising the talk. The relative levels of 'authority' exhibited by the students and the tutor also vary between, and even within, the different teaching episodes, though again, as one might expect, Pam seems to be more willing to hand over such authority in the context of discussions about general professional issues, than when dealing with subject knowledge. (There is one exception to this, which will be considered in Extract 6, below.)

In Extracts 1 and 2 above, Pam's authority is paramount, and both the students and the tutor seem to accept this. However, these extracts present the same dilemma that Louise faced in Case Study 1 - namely the delicate business of dealing with 'correct' or 'incorrect' answers given by the students. Evidence has suggested that Pam wishes her students to feel they can answer confidently; but, putting aside for a moment the controversies about the validity of the 'Searchlights Model' (DfEE, 1998), the activity which asks students to categorise certain reading strategies *does* have

correct and incorrect answers, and Pam is aware that these do need to be identified if the students' subject knowledge is to be further developed. Being aware that there was a legitimate alternative to the 'correct' answer identified in the materials she is using, Pam was able to uncover the logic behind the response and affirm the student's answer; but the experience does seem to unnerve the student. It is not easy to reconcile the need to correct misconceptions in relation to subject knowledge with the attempt to encourage a challenging level of debate about professional issues!

In Extract 3, whilst there is no overt challenge offered to Pam's authority, it appears that the students may not be interested in the extended explanation which she gives, so that whilst she is still exercising control over who is doing the talking, she may no longer be exerting any influence on the students' thinking.

As has been discussed, Extract 4 is more open to interpretation, as to whether the student is challenging the status quo, or asking for advice; but despite what may be a tacit acceptance of the tutor's greater experience, there is still a considerable level of freedom offered for the student to express her concerns.

Finally, Extract 5 seems to represent a genuine exploration of ideas, which offers the opportunity, at least, to consider a range of views. There *is* some level of debate here, in that these different views *are* expressed, and that Pam lays out for the students issues which have still to be resolved within the profession. However, Pam has to work hard to orchestrate this, and the students still do not spontaneously challenge or disagree with each other, or with the tutor, in this whole class context.

#### **5.2.4.3 Common Contextual Tracks**

Notwithstanding this lack of open disagreement, the students in this group do seem to have the confidence to express their own views and opinions, particularly in the context of discussions about professional issues. It has been suggested in Case Study 1 that one way of building such confidence and of supporting the gradual development of understanding, might be for tutors and students to build together a bank of common knowledge and experience from which to draw. The next section

will argue that there are a number of ways in which, like her colleague, Pam establishes and draws upon such joint contextual knowledge in this session.

#### **5.2.4.3.1 Previous learning.**

There are a number of occasions in which Pam makes explicit mention of previous learning and the way in which students need to consciously activate it and incorporate new learning into it. When concluding the reflective section at the beginning of session 1, she explains that the comments she has heard will enable her to build on their previous learning; and when introducing the second main part of the session, she explains its place in relation to previous sessions and the relevance of this to the next stage of their course (Episode P1:3).

There are also many examples within the teaching episodes when she exhorts the students themselves to remember previous learning in this way:

'Depends on that business we talked about do you remember? of segmenting and listening to each sound in the word.....'

(Episode P1:2b)

'We talked quite a bit about it when - we talked about it in the phonics session, do you remember?' (Episode P1:4)

'I don't know whether you remember but quite early on we had that exercise where we read a text called 'The Tre Berese', do you remember?' (Episode P1:4)

'Lots of schools have taken their group reading, their guided reading, out of the Literacy Hour.....as I think we've talked about before.'

(Episode P1:14)

In addition, there are also examples of Pam pointing students ahead to the session in which they will return to an issue or topic:



'We'll come back to that, when we look at planning for your Key Stage One practice' (Episode P1:2d)

Furthermore, Pam refers students back to previous contributions made by individuals within the current session:

So that comes back to Sharon's concern, really, about the lack of frequency of phonics teaching in her school.'

(Episode P1:5)

'And using initial sounds and letters we've talked about that .....someone, Tamara I think, talked about using pictures to help children do exactly that didn't she?'

(Episode P1:14)

Lastly, there is one occasion where, rather than answer a student's question directly, Pam exhorts them to remember previous discussions, in order to address the issue for themselves:

### Case Study 2: Extract 6

(In this extract, the letter *name* is denoted thus: 'k' whilst the *phoneme*, or 'sound' of the letter is denoted thus: /k/.

#### Transcript

**Student 1:** *I think it was interesting how he was getting them to sound every word like 'look- ing' but obviously for their school they used like 'l' but 'l' isn't the sound for /l/*

**Pam:** *(nodding) Right*

**Student 1:** *And he used 'k' for kingfisher but the sounds in it, he was getting the children to sound it, but it, he was saying it the other way.*

**Pam:** *That's this whole issue of letter names and letter sounds isn't it? D'you remember we talked about that in the phonics session? Anybody got any other thoughts about that?*

**Student 2:** *I think you should teach them both ways. Certainly when I, when I was teaching last week it became an issue where somebody had said to them, I was doing something with phonic sounds and somebody said about*

#### Commentary

Pam recognises this as an issue which has been tackled before. She puts her trust in the students here, and asks whether one of them can advise Student 1. Student 2 obliges by giving the advice for which Pam was hoping, and then discussing this in practice.

*the letter, they told me what the letter name was and like, so, we addressed that there and then like: 'Yes that's the letter name but the letter sound is ?' ....*

**Pam:** *Yes, absolutely. I think it's absolutely right because a letter 'k' is always a letter 'k' but it doesn't always make a /k/ sound. That's the issue.*

Here it could be said that Pam's policy of frequent recaps on previous learning can be seen to be bearing fruit: this student has not only remembered the previously given advice, but can give an example of putting it into practice.

#### **5.2.4.3.2 Reflecting on Experience.**

As well as building on and developing subject and pedagogical knowledge in this way, Pam can be seen to place a very high value on the students' first hand professional experiences. The first major part of the session is, after all, dedicated entirely to providing an opportunity for students to share and reflect critically upon such experiences, both in small groups and in the whole class context. (Examples of such reflections have been discussed in Extracts 4 and 5 above.) What is more, Pam makes comments which clearly expect that students will develop their own professional opinions, based on this experience:

'It will be interesting to see what you feel about that'  
(Episode P1:2a)

She also discusses and advises students about dilemmas to be faced and decisions to be made while on school placement:

'Another concern I think it's worth picking up on, is this issue of what you do in the classroom compared to what the school policy is. Did anyone else feel there were things they would like to have done, but they were, sort of, constrained by the system?' (Episode P1:2b)

It is noticeable that in this session, some of the longest contributions from students occur when they are giving opinions about their own professional experiences. Extract 7 below is a particularly striking example:

## Case Study 2: Extract 7

### Transcript

### Commentary

**Student:** *I thought ours was very good. She did, the teacher or the TA would have erm individual readers every day, but like about five or six pupils a day, so they were spread out, so they were given plenty of time and she would sit with them, and she would, she had a big recording board where she would write specific things - what they need to improve on, like targets*

The student begins with a confident, evaluative statement.

**Pam:** Right

Throughout this exchange, Pam is nodding and making eye contact with the student

**Student:** so if they were just, like, relying on sight reading and they needed to build up their phonic awareness

**Pam:** Right

Continuing to encourage

**Student:** *she would write that down and then at the end of every day she had a guided reading session away from the Literacy Hour and she would pull out four or five pupils with the same sort of specific targets*

**Pam:** Right

Continuing to encourage

**Student:** and follow those targets through within the reading – within the guided reading

**Pam:** Mmmm That does {sound like –

Pam begins to give her opinion..

**Student:** {it was very good

but the student does so first.

**Pam:** that does sound like a really good model.

Pam agrees

**Student:** And they sent books home and parents had little records to fill in, and some parents did, but invariably many parents didn't, unfortunately. But she would put targets in their book as well and , instead of just saying, 'so and so's had a new book' she would specifically say 'so and so's had a new book and he should read to page whatever and he needs to build up his phonic awareness – but she would put it in..you know

but the student still has more to say...

**Pam:** Yea yeah

Pam continues to encourage

**Student:** ....parent language, sort of thing

**Pam:** Yes, Mmm

Pam continues to encourage

**Student:** so that was very was good.

The student seems to be concluding her contribution

**Pam:** Yes that does sound really good , it kind of ticks most of those boxes (pointing to the whiteboard)

Pam refers to the criteria by which the students were

doesn't it? It really does inform the planning.

asked to judge good practice and then sums up.

**Student:** *Yeah. There was one drawback though.....*

After this extract, the student goes on, at length, to tell the group about the 'drawbacks'.

The confidence and persistence with which this student explains, exemplifies and gives her opinion (about the system of reading assessment she has encountered on school placement) is clear. Pam values this contribution by continually encouraging and also by indicating her approval of the system described. (The video evidence shows her nodding, smiling and making eye contact throughout.) One could question whether she would have supported such a long contribution, if she had disagreed with the student's opinion; but it seems doubtful, in the face of this level of enthusiasm, that she would have had any choice but to do so!

In addition to valuing the students' experience, Pam often gives examples from her own. Sometimes these are chosen to illustrate what she recommends, and at other times to show that practice has moved on from the days when these students were themselves at school:

'but if you only do phonics (and I have seen children like this), you can get children who painstakingly decode their way through text from a phonics point of view, and at the end of the sentence, they don't know what they've read, they don't understand what they've read.'

(Episode P1:9c)

'We used to do that with spelling. We used to have word books, and the children would line up with their word books, and the teacher would give them the word. - Nothing wrong with that, but if you only *ever* use that strategy, then a child is never going to learn to spell independently. They're always - the first thing they do when they need to write a word is to ask *you*. Well, that's all very well, but where does the independence come in when you're not there? How are they going to be able to write those words?'

(Episode P1:6)

As with Louise in Case Study 1, it can be seen that personal, as well as professional experiences form an important part of the discussions between tutor and students, and thus comprise an aspect of the joint contextual information used by the students to inform understanding and decision-making. Like her colleague, Pam tells the students personal anecdotes:

'I mean the school (our children) were in, a lot of the parents were so pushy it wasn't true - and I remember waiting outside the school gate one day for my girls, and the parents were comparing not just which level of the reading scheme their child was on, but what book and what page! And then the following day.....' (Episode P1:2e)

Again, as noted in Case Study 1, personal feelings and stories are used by Pam to evoke empathy from the students and also to justify the professional advice she is giving:

'Not all the parents are going to support that at home, and with the best will in the world, certainly we're all guilty of that. I can remember that vividly - the kind of Sunday night scenario: (Spoken in a dramatic tone with accompanying actions): *'Where are the spellings?'* and *'We should have been doing these every day - and we haven't been - and here am I a teacher and I should be keen on all this kind of stuff and I can't even find these wretched spellings! (laughter)* It's not always about *wanting* to give the support - it's all about the whole issue of trying to get a life and that kind of thing. So you've *got* to have systems in place .... (Episode P1:13)

Thus Pam, like Louise, endorses the importance of both professional and personal experience when discussing pedagogical and professional issues with the students, and this plays a major part in the way she shapes, guides and orchestrates the 'whole class' talk in this session.

### **5.2.5 Summary of Key findings, Case Study 2, Part One.**

Summarised below are the key findings from Case Study 2, Part 1.

- There is evidence that Pam's general demeanour towards the students is a relaxed and supportive one, created in part by her choice of a colloquial language style, and by a recognition of students' contributions throughout the session, with the frequent use of their first names. This implicit indication that students' contributions to the talk are considered important is backed by some explicit validation of collaborative talk as an important part of learning.
- Pam manages the interactions in a wide variety of ways, and these approaches seem to fall at various points on a continuum. At one extreme, although Pam maintains overall control of turn taking, it is the students who lead the discussion, by choosing the topics for discussion; telling their own stories from their experience on school placement; and confidently expressing their opinions. In these exchanges, Pam takes an active and relatively equal part in the discussion, by offering her own examples and professional opinions. At the other extreme, Pam chooses to use a short, sharp question and answer routine to evaluate the correctness of students' responses. In between these two extremes, Pam selects from a variety of approaches: sometimes encouraging long contributions from the students; sometimes herself giving extended feedback as part of these exchanges, as well as in the planned non-interactive sections of exposition. There are examples of interactions in which Pam seems to be successful in scaffolding the students' learning, and others where she is less so.
- The curriculum 'content' seems to have a direct relationship with the type of response given by the students. In this session, when students are sharing experience, either by direct request or as way of justifying an opinion, responses seem to be longer and more confident.
- Pam seems to be building a common bank of knowledge and experience with the students from which she frequently draws, both during interactions with the students and during non-interactive expositions, either to support learning or to justify advice. This contextual information relates to subject knowledge and to professional and personal experience; and Pam makes frequent mention of it throughout the session, often recalling previous individual

contributions from students and weaving them into the talk. Overall, a high value seems to be placed on professional experience by both tutor and students, and to a lesser extent, personal experiences outside the professional context are also retold to illustrate or justify opinions given. Pam seems to integrate all these experiences into the opportunities for talk which she provides, thus endorsing reflective collaborative discussion as a tool for professional learning.

#### **5.2.6 Initial commentary on Case Study One, Part One.**

In this session, there is strong evidence that Pam maintains overall control in terms of the management of the talk. Even in the first part, where the students are being encouraged to share and evaluate their own professional experiences, the discussion does not evolve naturally (as would conversations in less formal contexts) but is actively managed and orchestrated by Pam.

Nevertheless, the students' voice is relatively strong, and where professional and pedagogical issues are concerned, Pam exerts her authority in order to ensure that a range of 'voices' are heard, rather than to direct the students' thinking. This range of voices includes those of government approved bodies such as the Primary National Strategy, as well as school placement personnel and college authorities; though Pam ensures that these voices are always moderated by her own, or indeed by the students' own voice of experience. Where subject knowledge is concerned, the students seem to be more than ready to accept the tutor's authority, although, like Louise, we see Pam dealing with the delicate issue of responding to possible misconceptions expressed by the students. Pam seems anxious to develop students' knowledge by building on their responses, but sometimes the balance of talk swings too far in the tutor's favour, resulting in an apparent lack of engagement from the students.

There is some evidence of debate, particularly in the earlier part of the session, but this is always 'stage managed' by the tutor: students wait to be 'invited' by Pam to express an opposing view. However, the opportunity, at the beginning of the session, for students to reflect on recent experience and offer their opinions, does seem to provide the tutor and the students with a very useful starting point, providing the

means for the tutor to support reflective discussion on a range of issues throughout the session.



### **5.3 Section 3: Case Study Two, Part Two – The Summer Term.**

This part of the case study will focus on a session taught by Pam to the same group, in the summer term - that is to say towards the end of their year-long course.

#### **5.3.1 Planning Session 2.**

This session is the parallel session to that featured in Case Study 1, Part 2 and the tutor is guided by the same notes, developed by a colleague not featured in these case studies. Thus again, Pam is presenting a session which, in its initial conception, was 'owned' by another tutor with a particular enthusiasm for the approach to be discussed. Like Louise, she has no experience of this approach *per se*, though much of what it recommends has underpinned her approach to 'book talk' during her career in the primary classroom.

#### **5.3.2 The teaching narrative.**

This section will give an outline of the whole session, as taught by Pam, so that the reader has a clear context in which to understand the analysis.

The aims of the session are as they were for the parallel session in Case Study 1, but for ease of reference are repeated here.

The session was designed:

- To help students consider ways in which children can be encouraged to become enthusiastic readers;
- To introduce students to a specific approach, developed by Aidan Chambers (1993) which supports children in talking about books.

Pam introduces the session (**Episode P2:1**) and explains that it is an opportunity to 'share our thoughts about books and reading'. She recalls some of the previous discussions on this topic that she and the students have had during the course. She announces that she will be introducing the students to a way of talking about books which might help children to become enthusiastic readers. Pam explains the first small group task (**Episode P2:2**), which is to discuss their own first hand experiences of books and reading, both at home and at school; and as they begin to do so, she joins one of the groups. Pam then asks the students to share their experiences with the whole class (**Episode P2: 3**) and shapes and selects the

responses in a number of ways. She then gives a brief introduction to the next task **(Episode P2:4)**, asking each group to consider three scenarios and discuss how they would feel in the given situation. The groups begin to do so and Pam again joins one of the groups. Next, she asks the groups to feed back to the whole class **(Episode P2:5)** by saying what they thought and felt about each scenario. Pam facilitates this in a number of ways, shaping the responses by drawing them together into themes. She then moves into an exposition **(Episode P2: 6a)** in which she persuades students of certain key principles relating to encouraging children to become enthusiastic readers. Then **(Episode P2: 6b)** she explains the 'Tell Me' approach (Chambers, 1993), linking it to some of the previous discussions and to her own experience. She continues **(Episode P2: 6c)** with a section which includes a brief exchange with one student, but is mainly led by Pam, who links more of Chambers' ideas with key principles already discussed. The next section comprises another small group task **(Episode P2: 7)** which is to read and then discuss a children's book (which Pam supplies), with a particular focus on the illustrations and guided by the suggested questions on the handout. Pam moves from group to group and then takes feedback in the whole class context again **(Episode P2: 8)**, beginning by acknowledging that there was at least one student who disliked the book. Rather than encouraging a discussion about this, Pam uses it as a starting point to discuss a similar dilemma which might arise in the classroom. Finally Pam exhorts students to find out more about the approach they have been discussing and its author; and thanks the group, expressing the hope that they will always find time as teachers to enjoy books with their pupils.

### **5.3.3 The Structure of the session.**

The structure of the session is substantially similar to Louise's parallel session, in that it comprises small group activities and linked whole class sections, and that the latter features more discussion and less formal exposition than in Session 1. Small group activities again take place in friendship groups, though low attendance meant that some of these groups were as small as two students and the 'whole class' comprised a much smaller group of 10 students. It is acknowledged that this might have substantially affected the dynamics of the group, and this will be taken into account in the analysis and discussed in the overall conclusions. Because this low attendance was due to external factors, Pam was not aware beforehand that this would be the

case, and the session had been planned for a larger group. This will also be taken into account when conclusions are drawn.

#### **5.3.4 Analysis of the transcript of Session 2: Pam teaching in the summer term.**

This section will present an analysis of the transcript for Session 2 guided by similar headings to those used previously, as already justified. It will begin by discussing the nature of the topics discussed and considering the authorities which seem to underpin the planning of the session.

##### **5.3.4.1 Curriculum 'content'.**

As with Louise's second session, this one is strongly focussed on pedagogical issues, relating to the teaching of reading, and in particular on the ways in which teachers can encourage 'book talk' (Chambers, 1993) in the primary classroom. Thus, although there is some relevance to the controversies, and to the subject knowledge, discussed above, this session potentially offers the students and the tutor the opportunity to discuss wider issues relating to children's attitudes to reading. As with Louise's session, there is perhaps more scope here for a free exchange of views and a more equal power balance between tutor and students.

Again, the structure of the session itself could be seen as endorsing the validity of first hand experiences and their influence on teachers' decisions in the classroom; though Pam does not begin the session by modelling the process of personal reflection as Louise does. Pam does, however (guided by the same notes as Louise), mention the National Literacy Strategy, though she refers to this in a rather more pejorative way:

With the original constraints, I think, of the literacy strategy, there was a temptation for some teachers to analyse and to look at their big books in quite a dry way.  
(Episode P2:1)

Unlike Louise, Pam does not cite 'Ofsted' as an authority, but she does explain that the session is an opportunity for collaborative thinking:

So I want us today to share some of our thoughts about books and about reading, and about the important aspects about making that kind of provision in the classroom, and about providing children with a love of literature that's going to last erm a lifetime.

Thus she seems, from the outset, to be endorsing the authority of the students' own professional opinions. Of course, Chambers (1993) as the author of the approach being considered, is again cited as an authority; but he seems to take second place to the students' own voice of authority, since they are asked to 'discuss' and 'have a look at' his recommendations, which are presented as 'suggestions'. As with Louise's session, 'official' bodies are only briefly mentioned.

Thus the curriculum content for this session is not prescribed or recommended by any government authority. Rather, Pam hints that some teachers' interpretation of the National Literacy Strategy guidance resulted in practice which is not to be recommended, and that Chambers' approach might be a useful alternative.

Having acknowledged the authorities which seem to be behind the planning of the session, the next section will go on to analyse the whole class talk evidenced in the transcript for this session and the ways in which this is supported by the overall ethos that Pam creates for learning.

#### **5.3.4.2 The 'power balance' and overall ethos.**

As before, this section considers, under a range of subheadings, the ways in which Pam sets the ground rules and overarching ethos which support the talk in this session.

##### **5.3.4.2.1 The personal approach.**

Although students' first names are used less in this session, Pam's relationship with the students continues to be characterised by friendly, light hearted exchanges, sometimes initiated by the students themselves:

**Student:** *(In an exaggerated manner, indicating dislike)* Danny the Champion of the world *(Laughter)*

**Pam:**           *(laughing)* We're getting that feeling – she's really not keen!

**Student:**    There's, there's, I hate Roald Dahl. As a result, I wouldn't read it to my children.

(Episode P2:3)

...and at other times by Pam, as in this example where students are discussing a range of possible scenarios in school:

**Student:**    Errm well we had, *(Reading from the handout)*: "You only ever get to choose a book every other Wednesday afternoon. You have a few minutes to choose a book before someone says 'Hurry up' and 'Make your mind up' - or even 'Just have this one' ". ....That's like still true now 'cause kids still do try it on and will spend half an hour trying to pick a book, but erm it kind of led into saying ...

**Pam:**           Can I just interrupt for one second? *( smiling)* What they actually said folks, really, was – *(smiling throughout and using dramatic gestures)* they were completely on the side of this teacher, because it drives you mad when children try to choose a book. ....So *( laughing)* - now we're having the 'official' version! *(general laughter)*

**Student:**    *(smiling)* Yeah we find, we tend, it's a shame you know, that we only got this one chance every other Wednesday to do it. But we can relate, with the 'hurry up'. *( Laughter)*

(Episode P2:5)

Pam tells personal stories about her family to illustrate various points (as in examples considered in section 5.3.4.3.1 below) and in the same way, students seem happy to share their own personal anecdotes with Pam and the class, thus indicating a level of informality in this potentially more distant relationship between tutor and students.

#### 5.3.4.2.2 Language choices.

Language choices again indicate this informality, with the continued use of a colloquial style:

'This guy we're going to talk about...'

(Episode P2:3)

and again, the use of the first person plural in a non-literal sense:

'The classrooms we're going to be working in very soon'

(Episode P2:2)

One notable feature, which is markedly more prevalent than in the last session, is the choice of vocabulary and language structures which seem designed to persuade. There is an interesting difference here between the language chosen when Pam is discussing *general* principles in relation to encouraging enthusiasm for reading; and that chosen when she is *specifically* talking about the approach recommended by Chambers, of which she herself does not have first hand experience.

When referring to the latter, Pam's choice of language is distinctly tentative.

I'm going to introduce you to an approach that might be interesting to you.

(Episode P2:1)

'What he suggests is....'

(Episode P2:6c)

But when referring to principles of which she herself is very convinced, the tenor is very different:

'Do, please enjoy books with your children!'

(Episode P2:8)

On a number of occasions, she even uses 'the pattern of three' – a persuasive device much loved by orators and politicians:

'You need to encourage parents to read to the children and like I've said *lots* and *lots* and lots of times to you: always, always, always find time to read books to the children yourself, however full the curriculum is.'

'What I *really, really, really* enjoyed was sharing books with children.'

*I think* that's a really important aspect.

*I think* the idea of going back to an easy favourite read is also important, and

*I think* you should allow children sometimes to go back to an old favourite.

(Episode P2:6)

In other cases, again when referring to her own strongly held principles, Pam's chosen language structures strike a dogmatic in tone:

'It's just so important to find the time to read those books to the children.'

'If you're going to be a teacher, you've got to be a reader of children's books'

(Episode P2:6)

And when students themselves express their enthusiasm for doing so, there is no attempt by Pam to be impartial:

Pam: I read loads and loads of children's books - and sometimes when I'm on holiday, my husband says to me: '....When are you going to read a 'grown up' book?'

Student You saying that,.....like I said, I don't do adult reading, but I've got loads of children's books.

Pam (*nodding and smiling broadly*) Excellent!

Student      They're the things I collect, I've got shelves and shelves of children's books..

Pam            Well that's brilliant!

Student      and I love reading books to children but ...

Pam            Brilliant!

Student      I just do (*laughing*).

(Episode P2:6)

Thus, it is argued that although some language choices are similar to those in session 1, there are also significant differences. These different language styles are strongly indicative of the intentions and convictions of the tutor; and whilst some parts of the session offer a genuinely open opportunity to consider possible pedagogical approaches, others are clearly designed to persuade the students of Pam's own strongly held views.

#### **5.3.4.2.3            Explicit validation of collaborative talk.**

The *implicit* validation of collaborative talk has been discussed above, but as in the previous session, Pam also *explicitly* values it in her introduction to the session, and refers to the many opportunities for talk that have been provided throughout the course:

I haven't done a PowerPoint for this. It's very much about your discussions and about you having a go at how you would approach erm the books that we've brought along today.

We've talked over the course haven't we? about the links between reading and writing. We've talked about the way that avid readers will probably be good writers, about how they use their experiences in reading and put that into practice in their writing.



We've talked about encouraging children to enjoy literature, how important that is, and how it impacts on everything they do, right across their lives really. We've talked about that rich literary environment and the kind of environment the classroom offers errrm and ways, we're going to talk a little bit more today about how that, how we can bring that about in our own kind of classrooms.

So I want us today to share some of our thoughts about books and about reading, and about the important aspects about making that kind of provision in the classroom. (Episode P2:1)

Thus Pam not only explains that discussion is the main purpose of this session, but she also explicitly demonstrates that opportunities for talk have been a strong feature of the course.

Moreover, within this session there are frequent requests for students to share their thoughts with the class:

'What do other people think? What did he actually learn from that?'  
(Episode P2:3)

'Any other comments?' (Episode P2:3)

'Rebecca, you were saying that weren't you? .....That's a relevant point. Do you want to tell them?...' (Episode P2:3)

'What do people feel about that?'  
(Episode P2:5)

Overall then, as in the previous session, a high value is placed, both explicitly and implicitly, upon talk as a vital tool for the students' professional learning.

#### **5.3.4.2.3 Patterns of interaction.**

The following examination of the patterns of interaction will reveal that, in this respect also, there are both similarities and differences between Sessions 1 and 2.

Although there are no 'IRF' sequences (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) at all in this session, the utterances quoted in the section above do reveal some patterns which are familiar, in that Pam is clearly orchestrating the responses from students, rather than allowing them to emerge at random. She also continues to draw together comments on particular themes from the small group discussions:

'I've tuned into some things (*gesturing towards the group that she has just left*) that people have said.....We'll bring some of those comments in in a minute.'

As has been seen in Session 1, she categorises these responses:

(Episode P2:3)

'It's got to be a very negative experience..... Nora?

(Episode P2:3)

and she elicits responses on a similar theme:

'Any comments about your experiences that link to those things? Or anything we can move on to from there?' (Episode P2:3)

Again in a similar way, there are several instances where Pam encourages a long contribution from one individual student, as in the extract below:

#### **Case Study 2: Extract 8**

##### **Transcript**

**Pam:** *It's got to be a very negative experience hasn't it? .. Nora?*

**Student:** *I was saying like, when I was little at home, like mum always used to read to me an' I really used to enjoy it. Then When like I went to school, I was like y'know, one of the more advanced readers, and through our corridors in school, we always had all the books all sort of lined up going from one level to another level. And I remember going up the corridor and looking at these books and thinking, I'm never be able to read these books and it put a fear in me and*

##### **Commentary**

Pam identifies a theme of 'Negative Experiences' and looks for students who have something to offer. Presumably, Nora's body language indicates that she has.

**Pam:** Really?

Pam's tone indicates interest.

**Student:** *like you were saying, like that one little boy who just wanted to read for the sake of finishing, like the scheme of books, that was me. It didn't have any meaning to me at all, I just wanted to finish it. And When I got to secondary school then, all my friends were all like reading as like a leisure thing, and even now I don't read. I do things like newspapers an' magazines but I hardly possess a book and - doing English for your degree (laughter) like y'know, cause' like you were saying one book one week and one book another week and again, that's what it instils in you. By the time I'd finished my degree I never wanted to see another book again, because I've just got so many books that I've literally just skim read. I wasn't enjoying them, you were coming out with like [...inaudible.] words, oh well, you can say something about that word, you can say..*

Norma refers back to something Pam said in the previous session...

and to a previous contribution from a student

**Pam:** Yes (nodding)

Pam is making eye contact, looking interested.

**Student:** ... You were sort of [.....] with words that they've put in not the meaning of the book.

**Pam:** *And that comes back to what we were saying about poetry earlier on wasn't it? It's the whole business of there's only one answer and the teacher's the one who's got it, so, why not just as you say, instead of bothering to read the book, to read the - the study notes or whatever it was.*

Pam again categorises this response as part of a theme.

(After this extract, Pam goes on to relate a personal experience, to do with her daughter's experience of reading at school, at some length. Thus she validates the student's experience, by sharing her own to make the same point.)

The extract above mirrors an example given from Session1 (in Extract 4 above) and is typical of many of the exchanges in Session 2, in that students offer relatively long contributions about their experiences, and Pam follows these with equally balanced contributions from her own.

So far then, patterns discerned in Pam's Session 2 can be summarised thus:

**Table 5.3** *Some patterns discerned in Session 2*

(Overall)	There are no 'IRF' sequences;
<b>Case Study 2, Extract 8</b>	One of several examples of extended contributions from individual students; often balanced by equally lengthy contributions from the tutor.

In addition to these patterns, there are some very distinctive types of exchange which have not been seen previously in the sessions from this case study, and which will be described below.

In the next extract, one can see genuinely cumulative thinking resulting from the talk, in the sense that the students build on each other's thoughts and are driving towards a common agenda:

### Case Study 2: Extract 9

(The previous topic, proposed by a student, had related to whether adults should impose their idea of a 'good book' onto children, for example by forbidding them to read books by a particular author. Pam had told a personal anecdote, to support her proposal that giving children a feeling of success is sometimes a more important factor than the 'quality' of the book.)

#### Transcript

**Pam:** *So what can we do then, to encourage that feeling of success with children, do you think? (.....) You were talking (indicating student) weren't you? a little bit about Shared Reading and the differences. This group (looking at the small group to which this student belongs) were talking about reading round the class weren't you?*

*(Looking around the whole class) Did other people have that kind of experience in their, in their primary schools or maybe...? (Turning back to the small group) Can you just tell us a little bit about what you were saying about reading around the class and how that felt? Is there anything more that you wanted to add to that?*

*(Students speaking together)*

**Student 1:** *Should [...inaudible.] on anything that that should be read, you would like follow the words so that you are in the right place when they've got to you, otherwise people have a go at you for losing the place because you obviously weren't concentrating! And then you'd read it but you wouldn't take any meaning from it. You would say the words and hope you've got it right.*

**Student 2:** *Also its humiliating even if you're confident that you can actually read the text fairly easily. It's still really embarrassing ..and for a child to have to do that. It's excruciating it really is. I hated it. I couldn't bear doing it.*

**Student 3:** *As well, if you're one of the better readers in the class you tend to get put on to do all the reading.*

**Student 2:** *And they give you a great big paragraph (indicating with hands)*

#### Commentary

Pam knows that this group has something to offer on the subject.

They have been comparing this with the more supportive experience of Shared Reading, as recommended by the National Literacy Strategy

She checks to see whether other groups might also want to contribute, but returns to the first group and encourages them to talk about their feelings.

One student tells of her experience.

Some students are nodding in agreement.

Another student moves the thinking on, to consider the experience from another point of view.

A third student continues with the new theme.

The previous student finishes the sentence begun by Student 3, suggesting another consequence of being a 'good reader' at school.

**Student 4:** *At my primary school, the best readers out of each class were given the bible to take home and learn a bible reading, and then you had to come back and stand in front of the class and read the bible,*  
(Laughter)  
*in front of the school and assembly and read the bible. I mean, you just didn't want to be one of the best readers!*

Another student joins the discussion, adding yet another negative consequence of being good at reading.

**Pam:** *You're sort of being punished because you're being pushed up there and kind of - on show.*

Pam categorises/ identifies the theme.

**Student 2:** *I still don't tell people... We were just saying about job interviews ....I'm not going to say I can play the piano - 'cause they'll make you do it] (General laughter and many students talking at once)*

Student 2 relates this to her own current experience of applying for her first teaching post, much to the amusement of all!

**Pam:** *Okay, some big indications there aren't there? (checking notes) Just, just, we're probably at the, some of the things we've already talked about, drawing implications for the classroom will come up in some of these points. I'm going to give you two or three points to discuss.....*

Pam does not move the discussion any further towards the implications of all this for classroom practice, probably because she knows that the next activity will provide the context for that.

This seems to be a relatively successful example of cumulative thinking (in the sense described above). The topic has arisen out of something important to the students, (as is made clear by the persuasive nature of their language) though Pam has steered its direction a little by adding an experience of her own. She then asks the students to suggest some solutions. The students open up the subject further, building on what has gone before.

(One of these students has already told a story from her own experience, about a boy in her class who was a poor reader, and was constantly humiliated by being put 'on the spot'.) Although the students do not really provide solutions as Pam has requested, the implications for the classroom, at least in terms of the sort of classroom practice which should be avoided, are clear. Pam also knows that the next planned activity will offer further opportunities to discuss this, and indeed that the approach she is going to recommend might be one possible solution to the problem. This, it can reasonably be assumed, will have influenced her decision to press on, at this point, with the next part of the session.

A further pattern can now be added to the summary, thus:

**Table 5.4 Comparison of Extracts 8 and 9**

There are no 'IRF' sequences;	
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 8</b>	One of several examples of extended contributions from individual students; often balanced by equally lengthy contributions from the tutor.
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 9</b>	An extract which demonstrate cumulative thinking, which can also be seen both within and across other episodes from the teaching narrative.

Other instances of Pam asking students to solve a problem will be considered in Section 5.3.4.2.4 below; but first there is one more new pattern which needs to be considered. Extract 10, below, has more in common with the casual structure of everyday conversation than any of the more formalised 'teaching and learning' structures we have so far encountered. (This extract actually precedes the interaction in Extract 9, chronologically.)

#### **Case Study 2: Extract 10**

##### **Transcript**

##### **Commentary**

**Pam:** *So the whole thing about choosing books is sort of coming through in everything that everyone says isn't it? Has anybody got anything else to say about that particular aspect - the kinds of books that they had to read and the choices that they made?*

Pam categorises the theme and asks for other contributions on the same topic.

**Student A:** *I enjoyed reading Enid Blyton. I can remember, going back to school, I enjoyed it and liked to get through the whole series or whatever. But parents/teachers were that negative (shaking head) with (spoken in a derogatory tone) an 'Enid Blyton' book. And as a child, you don't understand why they're so negative. Because to me it was a book, an' it was an adventure.*

One student obliges by sharing an experience and hints at her opinion on the subject..

**Pam:** *and you enjoyed it*

...which Pam picks up on

**Student A:** *and I enjoyed it. And they're, like, negative*

.....and the student reiterates.

**Pam:** *Yes*

**Student A:** *– and it - I was like, well (shrugs shoulders) y'know, You want me to read a book!*

The student concludes her point.

**Student B:** *Have you tried reading them now?*

Another student expresses another factor which might need to be considered...

**Pam:** *(indicating another student) Rebecca, just say that again ...*

...and Pam ensures that this is heard.

**Student B:** *I just said have you tried reading them now? I used to love them and I, I mean I still own the odd battered copy that's all brown and dark, and I'll let my children read them, but you try reading some of them now, and you're like 'Oh my God how sexist is that!'* (laughter)

**Student A:** *Noddy scenes, Noddy yes. (laughing) I can see the connotations there!*

**Student B:** *and there's all golliwogs and there's all kinds of things– not politically correct - I mean I never thought anything of it then. Teddy bears, golliwogs, they were all the same to me. But now the errrr – oh what were they called? St Clares? What was it called? St Clare's I think..*

**Student A:** *Oh, St Trinian's?*

**Student B:** *No, St Clare's.. err..*

**Several Students:** *Mallory Towers!*

These are short exchanges designed to help Student B remember a name

**Student B:** *That was the one. (Nodding sagely..) You read those now! {Oh my...*

Student B returns to her point

**Pam:** *{yes.*

*(Students all talking at once- laughter)*

**Pam:** *They are fairly dated now and sort of – inappropriate.*

This is a pacey exchange comprising short utterances, which often either continue or complete the previous one and seem to bounce back and forward from one participant to the other in pursuit of the same goal. There is much laughter and animated gesture, combined with colloquial phrases ('Oh my God!') which might not be considered appropriate to more formal classroom situations. This feels very much like a friendly chat, rather than a formal discussion and is much more casual in tone than any of the other exchanges in this, or the previous case study. Nonetheless, it introduces some serious points about the changing notion of what is considered 'acceptable' for children to read.

So, the summary of patterns of interaction discerned in this session can now be completed in the table below:

**Table 5.5 Comparison of Extracts 8 - 10**

There are no 'IRF' sequences;	
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 8</b>	One of several examples of extended contributions from individual students; often balanced by equally lengthy contributions from the tutor.
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 9</b>	An extract which demonstrate cumulative thinking, which can also be seen both within and across other episodes from the teaching narrative.
<b>Case Study 2: Extract 10</b>	One exchange only which has the features of a casual everyday conversation, though it still conforms to the theme under discussion.

It is argued that in Session 2, as before, Pam manages the interactions in a range of ways, and that these approaches fall at various points along a continuum. However, in this session the continuum does not begin with Pam presiding over the 'IRF' exchanges we have come to expect. Instead, at one extreme Pam is encouraging balanced and fairly lengthy contributions from the students and is offering similar contributions in return: at the other end she is participating in an exchange which features a casual conversational style, and in which she introduces the topic, but then hands over control to the students.

In Extract 9 above, Pam asked the students to offer a solution to a problem. The section below will consider this and other ways in which tutors might be introducing a level of challenge and debate into the sessions, or indeed, missing the opportunity to do so.

#### **5.3.4.2.5 Levels of challenge.**

This section will argue that in Session 2, there is evidence of a genuine attempt at joint problem solving, and that one can see a degree, at least, of debate between the students. However, it is also argued that, where there is an opportunity to foster debate, Pam actually takes steps to avoid this.

In this session, Pam seems to go to some lengths to ensure that a range of views are expressed, often giving open invitations for students to offer their opinions:

'This guy we're going to talk about, Aidan Chambers, he talks about 'flat earthers'. He talks about how children - or people - who just only read books that they're safe and secure with, and they want to read another one the



same, and another one the same, and another one the same. Errrm but what he's saying is, that there is a certain security about that, isn't there? I mean what do people think about that? What would you do with a child who only read Enid Blyton, or - even if it was something more appropriate perhaps, and modern, what would you feel? (*Looking towards a student who has indicated she would like to contribute*) Yes?' (Episode P2:3)

'So what do people feel about that?'

(Episode P2:5)

'OK, Let's talk about the issues we had over here on this table..'

(Episode P2: 5)

'So, anyone else got any... what about you two? Any other comments?'

(Episode P2:3)

As we have seen above, there are sequences in which there seems to be some lively banter between the students and the tutor and some in which participants support each other's ideas and move their thinking toward a common goal. In the following extract, there is also clear evidence of joint problem solving between the tutor and the students:

### Case Study 2: Extract 11

#### Transcript

**Pam:** *What do people feel about that? What do you do to encourage still that enthusiasm of children being able to choose books they want to, but at the same time be able to support their, their development? Yes?*

**Student 1:** *Just wouldn't choose a reading scheme that was so boring, 'cause I've looked at some of the reading scheme books at my school, and sit there and think - I can't - can't look at them and read them. They're so boring as well, you know and there's about y'know - if you're going to have a reading scheme you need some books, which are interesting. So many of them aren't interesting are they today's books?*

**Pam:** *Absolutely.*

**Student 1:** *Children are just there recognising their CVC words half the time - they're not - 'cause a lot of the*

#### Commentary

Pam explains the issue and gives an open invitation to suggest a solution.

One solution is offered

and justified

Pam is nodding in agreement

The student offers further justification

time I've been reading with them, I ask them what the book's about and if they'd read it. They've got no idea.

**Pam:** And they probably didn't know and they didn't care either, that's the thing. And again if, if every book you had to read, - we perhaps should put one of those as a discussion point - if every book you had to read was about the same two characters and there was always a magic key in it. How boring might that be? (smiling) Not that I'm casting aspersions on any particular reading scheme, you understand, 'cause I might get sued! But I think there are issues in terms of, certainly there are issues in terms of the choice. There are lots of good reading schemes about, that actually use really good authors, so that your children can also get to know different authors and choose books by the same author and so on. Anybody experienced any other ways around that that system?

Pam expands the justification for avoiding monotonous reading schemes..

...and hints at particular reading scheme which might fit this category.

She presents the case that there are good schemes to be had..

But asks if anyone has a different solution.

**Student 2:** The school I was in they had errrm -it was Year 3 so most of them got y'know were quite equipped with reading but they didn't have a scheme and I can't remember seeing one in - lower down the school, either - but they had bands of books for ... that the school had sorted out themselves. So errr like the red band was a great big variety of books all approximately the same level. And they did have to move up the scheme eventually, but they had free choices within that range. And they weren't all by the same author or anything. It was a total random mix.

One student obliges, by offering the solution that Pam had in mind and explaining how it works.

**Pam:** Absolutely. Has anybody else come across that? There's a publication, I should have brought it with me, a publication called 'Book Bands' and what it does, is it lists every book that there is, and it puts them into bands of difficulty errrm and so it requires, obviously it requires, it's a lot harder work for the literacy co-ordinator and the teachers 'cos you've got to go through you've got to get that publication, you've got to find the books and you've got to level all of the books an' what, what they suggest is you have a mixture of schemes and real books and you put them all in together but you band them in those particular colours errr and that's a much better I think approach, in my opinion

(Several students nodding)  
Pam explains how this idea could be implemented..

and admits that in her opinion, this is the best option.

In this extract, Pam is trusting the students to propose a range of options. One student does, in fact, come up with a solution which Pam is happy to endorse. As she explains at the beginning of the session, there have been many occasions during the course when Pam has had the opportunity to establish what she believes to be key principles in creating motivation for reading. Here (as in Extract 6, from Session 1) her trust in the students is rewarded and they endorse both the principles she holds dear, and also her preferred practical solution to the problem.

Clearly, then, Pam is investing a level of confidence in the students' opinions on professional issues, though one could argue that there was *not* a great deal of risk involved in doing so in the extract above, since Pam would still have the option to add her own preferred solution, had the students not been quite so obliging.

In the next extract, there are indications that perhaps Pam is not particularly comfortable when students have opinions which differ from her own. Before the extract begins, students have been discussing an Anthony Browne book, 'Voices in the Park' (2001). There is visual evidence that all but one of the groups seem to be engaged in animated conversation about the book, but one group (comprising only two students) read the text through quickly, but pay scant attention to the illustrations. Gestures are exchanged which indicate their strong dislike for the text. Having engaged with some of the other groups, Pam moves over to talk to these two, and is then seen to offer an alternative book also by Anthony Browne, but the students' body language indicates that this one seems also to meet with disapproval.

## Case Study 2: Extract 12

### Extract

**Pam:** *(addressing the whole group)* Okay, errm interesting. Angela clearly doesn't like this book, so I'm having to do the whole Aidan Chambers thing and say *(gesturing in an exaggerated fashion)* 'That's absolutely fine'. *(Laughter from Pat and the students)* He certainly is a sort of a strange one *(laughter)*

**Student:** I just find him weird, I'm sorry but  
....[.....]

**Pam:** So what would you do if there's a book that you really didn't like? Would that mean that you wouldn't share it with the class or that you would?

**Students:**  
[...inaudible – many students talking at once.....]

**Pat:** Mmmmm. It's a hard one that one isn't it? Cause it's hard to have enthusiasm, if you really don't like it.

### Commentary

Pam looks distinctly uncomfortable, although she is smiling and laughing.

Angela's arms are folded and she is shaking her head in a disapproving fashion.

But rather than tackle this head on, Pam diverts the discussion away from the book itself and towards a more general issue.

The students take up the issue, eventually concluding that even if you dislike a book, you can appreciate the cleverness of its author.

Perhaps this was an opportunity to allow some genuine disagreement and debate. (This would, after all, have provided a model for the open discussion in which Pam is

suggesting that children might be encouraged to engage.) But instead, a less contentious issue is pursued and the chance is missed. This may just be that it is simply time to draw the session to a close; or that Pam is reluctant to finish the students' course on a note of discord; but it could also be that she is uncomfortable with being openly challenged and takes steps to avoid this. At any rate, it is clear that Pam draws the line between allowing expressions of dislike and encouraging an open forum on the matter. She is faced with a choice here between modelling the very approach that she is supposed to be recommending, and preserving the books of a favourite author from attack. She chooses the latter.

#### **5.3.4.3. Common contextual tracks.**

Having argued that Pam seems uncomfortable with too open a challenge, this section will consider strategies which are designed to emphasise the cohesion of the group.

##### **5.3.4.3.1 Previous learning.**

As has been demonstrated in section 5.3.2 above, at the beginning of session 2, Pam emphasises the importance of previous learning by detailing all the previous relevant discussions that the course has offered. Perhaps after listing these in detail, she considers further reminders unnecessary, or perhaps she believes that there is only a need for carefully scaffolded progression where subject knowledge is involved; but whatever the reason, there are only occasional references to previous joint (college based) learning experiences from the course in this session.

##### **5.3.4.3.2 Reflecting on experience.**

This, however, is more than balanced by the fact that the whole session (as for Louise's session 2) is based around sharing personal and professional experiences as a basis for making professional decisions.

In terms of *professional* experience, Pam gives a number of examples from her own, exhorting students to learn from her mistakes as well as her successes:

'So what we did in our school at that time was.....  
but the trouble with that, of course was.....'

(Episode P2:5)

'I was certainly guilty of that.....' (Episode P2:6c)

And to finish the session (as will be seen in the extract quoted in the next section) she gives students advice for their own teaching practice, based very much on her own years of experience as a teacher.

The activity in which students discussed various scenarios in school, was designed to encourage students to evaluate their professional experience on school placement; though it also appeals to them to consider their pupils' personal feelings and emotions. As has been seen in some of the extracts above, students again seem confident to express their opinions on professional matters, but in this session they often revert to their own *personal* experiences in order to do so. For example, when discussing the relentless nature of some children's experience with reading schemes, Norma turns, not to her experience on school placement, but to her own experience as a child (already shared with the class) to support her point:

'But that's like I was saying though, because you'd go through the scheme and they were getting harder and harder, and looking ahead and thinking 'I can't read those' - and obviously you can't because that's the whole point of the scheme, but that's it. Y'know, if you're struggling with a book there's never the option of going back to a lower scheme. It's always: Just keep pushing forward.' (Episode P2:5)

Clearly Pam, like Louise, encourages students to express their emotions during this session. Admittedly, Louise's emotive and nostalgic story telling from her own childhood has no direct parallel in this session. Nevertheless, Pam's heavy use of persuasive language has already been demonstrated, and she is not averse to using emotive personal stories of her own to drive home her point. Scenes from her own family life are again used to evoke empathy, told with language which seems, as before, to imply a friendly relationship with the students:

Our Francesca's like that, she gets into - she loves series of books, and she'll just read the next one and the next one and the next one. But then when

she's finished that series, or when she's outgrown that, she moves on to something else. I mean we were putting her - she came to stay on Sunday - and we were putting her to bed and she said 'Grandma! I'm really into this new author, Gwynneth Reece. I thought - yeah, Isn't that great y'know, a nine year old saying 'I'm really into this author!'

(Episode P2:3)

Later, she tells a story taken, not from her own direct experience, but from an autobiographical novel (McCourt, 2005) set during his days as a teacher, which she had recommended during the previous session. Here she relates some advice by the author; about finding things in teaching that one loves to do, in order to maintain one's enthusiasm and inspire the pupils. McCourt (she tells the students) advises that, like the advice given to parents by airline staff, teachers must first take their own 'oxygen' in order to be able to help their pupils. She continues in emotive fashion:

He says: 'What you need to - remember that you've got to survive, remember that you've got to enjoy what you do. And he says: 'Find what you love and do it!' And what I loved about being in a primary classroom was that whole business of reading to children, and having them in the palm of your hand desperate for the next chapter or whatever it might be. It's the most *brilliant* feeling out!

(Episode P2:6)

These extracts demonstrate that Pam is happy to relate not just her professional experiences, but also her own feelings and emotions to the students. Like her colleague, she thereby suggests that intuitive decision-making is valid when it comes to some, at least, of the decisions about the reading curriculum. It is clear that she has, throughout the session (and indeed the course) put forward many other reasons to justify the practice of reading stories to children. But here she is suggesting a rationale which has long disappeared from any government agenda: that teachers should read to their pupils because they themselves will actually enjoy it!

### **5.3.5 Summary of key findings from Case Study 2, Part 2.**

There is clear evidence again, that Pam uses a range of different strategies to guide the talk in this session. There are several examples of teaching which is 'dialogic' in character (in Alexander's 2004, terms) in that Pam maintains authority over turn taking, but often allows the students to control the agenda. Furthermore, on a number of occasions, she prompts and encourages a single individual student to pursue a line of thought and to develop an argument for the benefit of the whole class, as Alexander recommends.

In seeking to place the interactions along the continuum suggested by Mortimer and Scott (2003) however, it becomes apparent that not all the exchanges demonstrate features which are typical of classroom talk, at least in relation to what has come to be expected in 'whole class' contexts. In this session, there are none of the classic 'IRF' (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) sequences that have been evident in all the other sessions in both case studies. There are, on the other hand, occasions when the students and the tutor are seen to engage in cumulative thinking, in the sense that they build on and sometimes complete each other's utterances in pursuit of the same goal. In one instance, the talk even takes on a very casual conversational shape and tone, although still relating to professional issues. Again, Pam ensures that a range of opinions is heard; by shaping the contributions into themes, and actively seeking opposing views or contributions from different angles. Most of these exchanges are still 'stage managed', however, and when one discussion shows the potential to develop into a lively debate, Pam seems to avoid this by steering the topic in another direction.

On the whole however, students continue to voice their opinions on professional issues with confidence, supported by the friendly and supportive ethos which Pam is seen to be maintaining in the variety of ways discussed above.

There is a strong emphasis throughout the session on personal and professional experience, and both of these are endorsed, both as legitimate starting points for discussion concerning pedagogical issues, and as a valid basis for making professional decisions. Feelings and emotions, both of the students and their pupils are again valued as key aspects of classroom life and as important considerations

when making curricular decisions. Moreover, personal anecdotes are shared confidently with the class, both by the students and the tutor; not just as a means to promote and maintain a relaxed ethos, but also as a means of justifying professional opinions. In this session, it seems to be these first hand personal and professional experiences which are being gathered together and drawn upon by tutors and students as a resource to support their discourse.

### **5.3.6 Overall commentary and initial conclusions for Case Study 2.**

It is clear that the open exchange of views encouraged in Session 1 is again promoted in Session 2. I would argue, therefore, that the students' voice is again relatively strong. However, evidence also supports the conclusion that overall, it is the tutor's voice which ultimately prevails. It could even be argued that on the one occasion where a student begins to openly challenge her opinion, Pam is seen to have been moved outside her 'comfort zone'; and that although the ethos she maintains is a very supportive one, and students are openly encouraged to express their opinions, there is a point where Pam draws a line and prevents open disagreement from being expressed.

In the main, both professional and personal experiences are highly valued by both students and tutor, but it is argued that in this session, it is first hand *personal* experiences which are most highly regarded as a basis for professional decision-making. The implications here are that for both tutor and students, *intuitive* judgements are entirely valid in professional contexts; and the affective aspects of learning, both for themselves and their pupils, are very important considerations.

A relevant factor here is the level of passion with which both tutor and students express their views in this session. Both engage in emotive and persuasive storytelling to ensure that their voices are heard. Here again, is an indication of the complexity of the decision making process in the context of teacher education and another dilemma presents itself: how can the tutor imbue these student teachers with a passion and enthusiasm for her subject, without taking advantage of her authority and forcing her own strongly held convictions upon them?



Again, this is no easy matter, but here, it would seem, the authority of national strategies, government guidance and college regulations are of very little consequence: for both tutor and students it is personal conviction that matters.

## **Chapter Six - Comparison and discussion of findings.**

This chapter will make overall comparisons between the two case studies in relation to the research questions and will discuss the issues raised in relation to key points drawn from the literature review. Recommendations will be made in relation to these tutors and to this specific context.

### **6.1 The focus of this research.**

The research questions have been outlined previously, but to provide easy reference for the reader, are restated here:

- Taken from a socio-cultural perspective, in what ways do the tutors in this study shape and guide the talk between themselves and their students in 'whole class' contexts?
- Whose authority is being called upon or deferred to in this talk? Whose 'voices' are heard both explicitly and implicitly in the whole class dialogue?
- How and to what extent are these voices managed, guided and facilitated by the tutors in the context of this 'whole class talk' - and to what effect?

The first of these questions is an overarching one. It provided the initial direction of the research and required me to view the data in a way which would provide a rich holistic picture of the talk in these contexts, but which nevertheless paid attention to the detailed processes which were under study. The first question therefore constitutes a focus in itself, but also provides the context for the more specific focus of the other two questions. The three questions are thus inter-related, and the headings below, whilst they are of course related to my findings, are often rooted to all three of the research questions.

### **6.2 Relationships are fundamental.**

The case study data, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, reveal a number of techniques which the tutors use to manage the talk in these whole class contexts. I would argue, however, that the analysis also indicates that the answer to the research questions above needs to comprise far more than just a list of the techniques employed. From both case studies, evidence has been presented that

relationships between the tutors and the students form a key aspect of the ways in which they shape and guide the talk in the whole class contexts of these sessions. Both tutors can be seen explicitly and implicitly establishing and maintaining a relaxed, friendly and supportive ethos in which students, for the most part, seem confident to express their views and articulate their understanding. In both case studies, the underlying approach to classroom interaction is a personal one: individuals are seen to matter, and are encouraged to 'tell their own stories' in respect of their relevant personal and professional experiences.

The evidence suggests that in shaping the talk in these sessions, the tutors are aware, at least implicitly, of the affective elements which both provide the context for the talk, and are shaped by the talk itself. I have argued in Chapter Two that these affective elements are fundamental to the learning process, and it is clear that the tutors are sensitive to the students' possible anxieties in whole class contexts. Interestingly, the importance of such sensitivity is one of the topics endorsed by the students themselves, when reflecting on their childhood experiences of reading in school. Case Study Two, Extract 9, for example, presents a conversation between two students about the potential embarrassment caused to pupils by the practice of 'reading round the class'. The delicate business of preserving students' self esteem in these whole class contexts clearly presents Pam and Louise with some difficulty, and resonates with the work of Mortiboys (2002, 2005) who argues for greater understanding of the affective dimension in pedagogical encounters. As we have seen, Hargreaves (1994) argues that to be successful, teaching must involve an emotional understanding of the learner's position. There is ample evidence that the tutors strive to achieve this in the whole class dialogue, and there are some indications of their success.

Furthermore, I would argue that there is a particular strength in the way that these two tutors establish, maintain, and support, an ethos which does not just take account of the affective conditions for students' learning, but actively creates the 'partnership of head and heart' which Damasio (1994) recommends. Theoretical issues are of course explored, but both tutors ensure that these are frequently rooted in experience, and related directly to the feelings, both of themselves and of their students. Students are asked to recall and retell their own first hand

experiences and are encouraged to use the associated emotions as part of the reasoning process. Tutors challenge students to engage with theoretical subject knowledge, but also draw upon their own years as teachers in the primary classroom, offering this as a kind of vicarious experience to support their students' developing understanding, at this early stage in their own professional journey.

However, a note of caution needs to be sounded here, for it could also be argued that over-sensitivity to the students' feelings might actually be hindering their learning, particularly in relation to the tutors' handling of students' misconceptions. We have seen that Pam and Louise tackle this in different ways, and with varying levels of success, a point which will also be considered in section 6.5.1 below. A further question needs to be asked in relation to the affective aspects of learning and their relationship to a dialogic approach to teaching and learning. Is the tutors' awareness of the feelings and emotions of students used to support original thinking and the generation of new meaning, or could it be seen as a persuasive device designed to close down discussion? This question will be further explored in section 6.3.

The importance of giving appropriate feedback without damaging self esteem has long been recognised in the primary sector, but some have argued (Clarke, 2001, 2003; Black and Wiliam, 1999) that acknowledging mistakes is crucial to children's learning, and that in contrast, the use of indiscriminate praise can in fact be detrimental to pupils' self esteem. The issue of how tutors can effectively scaffold the students' learning will be addressed later, but for now let it suffice to argue that whilst the tutors' sensitivity to the students' feelings is, for the most part, a strength of their practice, it should not be allowed to prevent an open discussion of students' misconceptions.

It is clear from the data that empathy with the students is something these tutors wish to cultivate. In the next section, it will be argued that the case study tutors use storytelling as one way to actively embrace such feelings and emotions.

### **6.3 Using story telling to endorse opinions and support reflection.**

The evidence has shown that to both these tutors, first hand personal and professional experience is an important factor in the students' professional development; and that collaborative reflection on these experiences and their associated emotions, is encouraged and supported - both through the kinds of opportunities provided for talk and in the ways in which such talk is managed.

A strong case has also been made, drawing on the work of Schön (1987), Pollard (2005) and others, that reflective learning is an essential part of teacher education, and that this should involve reflection on professional experience in the classroom (for these students, mainly gained on school placement) and also personal experience, both as school pupils themselves and in other 'real world' contexts.

One way in which both these tutors are seen to model and support such reflection is by making use of emotive story telling, not just to make learning memorable, but in order to encourage students to reflect on similar experiences, to convince the students of their point of view, and to endorse or challenge a particular value judgement made by one of the students. Louise's story telling (as discussed, for example, in Case Study 1: Extract 10, and in Section 4.3.4.3.2) draws upon nostalgia to encourage empathy from the students; and Pam re-tells personal experiences to establish what she believes are fundamental principles underpinning the teaching of English, as in the story of Francesca's bedtime reading in Section 5.3.4.3.2. What is more, the students take up with enthusiasm the opportunity to articulate their own feelings through personal stories, and some of the longest contributions from students are made in this way. Thus, it is clear that both tutors and students consider feelings and emotions to be a valid foundation on which to base professional opinions, and both seem to believe that intuitive thinking has an important part to play in professional decision-making.

The evidence suggests then, that for these tutors and students, story telling is a crucial way of enabling them to process first hand experience, and in particular express the feelings involved.

However, these stories are also used to endorse opinions or to persuade (for example in Case Study 1 Extracts 5 and 6, and Case Study 2, Episodes 3 and 6) and to build a resource from which tutors can later build their own argument (as in the discussions of scenarios concerning children's experience of reading in part two of both case studies). There is little evidence that they inspire further reflection; nor that they are compared in a way which would take them forward into genuinely interactive dialogue; nor yet that they provide a platform from which new meanings can be generated as presented in Bakhtin's (1981, 1984, 1986) model of dialogism. Students are certainly encouraged to see things from more than one point of view – to attend to the different voices being expressed, but there seems to be no entry into that 'inclusive 'space' of dialogue within which self and other mutually construct and de-construct each other'. Wegerif (2008, p 353). It is this which Wegerif proposes as the defining characteristic of a Bakhtinian 'dialogic' rather than 'dialectic' approach to learning, and I would argue that the discussions around the students' and tutors' stories observed in these case studies falls short of a 'dialogic' experience in this sense of the word. Little re-construction is happening here, nor is new meaning being opened up or negotiated as in Mercer's flexible model of the 'Intermental Deveopment Zone' (Mercer 2000, p141).

I have also argued that although Schön's (1983, 1987) work on 'reflection' has been very influential, we need to move beyond his rather solitary model, to encourage *collaborative* reflection on the students' experiences. I would argue that the evidence from this study, informed by the literature reviewed, strongly endorses the potential of storytelling as a tool for such collaborative professional reflection, but suggests that some of that potential is unfulfilled. The work of McDrury and Alterio (2003) in this field has been reviewed in Chapter Two. They propose that storytelling should hold a respected place in professional education, and suggest that to be truly effective, the students' individual stories need to be expanded, processed and reconstructed in a group setting. This unusual and valuable work might therefore merit some further exploration, suggesting some ways in which this potential for the generation of meaning through stories might be realised. It is also hoped that this thesis is effective in holding up a mirror to tutors in similar situations upon their practice, and that in doing so it might highlight such potential for reflective storytelling. In particular I would argue that the students' personal story-telling

needs to be moved beyond the cosy re-enforcement of pre-existing opinions into a challenging and truly dialogic negotiation of meaning.

The literature review has suggested that storytelling is a natural human propensity (Hardy, 1977) helpful in a number of ways to the development of children and adults alike. In this section I have discussed the ways within these case studies in which storytelling, both that of the tutors and of the students, have been used to enhance the educational experience of these student teachers and also ways in which this could have done so more effectively. The next section will consider ways in which discussion of the knowledge held in common between tutors and students is used by Louise and Pam to support their students' learning.

#### **6.4 Using talk to establish, recall and draw upon common knowledge.**

The review of literature presented evidence that for learners and teachers in most educational contexts, a bank of 'common knowledge' (Mercer, 2000, p 25) is often built and drawn upon to support learning. It has been argued above that both the case study tutors use talk as a means of integrating the students' experiences in school (both as professionals and as pupils themselves) into this common contextual knowledge. The tutors are then seen to use this as a resource from which to draw, not only during discussions and exchanges of views, but also during expositions by the tutors, to develop understanding (mainly of pedagogical principles or professional issues) and to encourage students to form opinions on professional matters.

Another major strand of these common contextual tracks is the prior knowledge established in previous English sessions. Louise is very explicit about the learning 'journey' along which she is guiding the students, explaining in detail how each stage is relevant to the next, and Pam makes frequent mention of previous episodes from taught sessions, and to earlier student contributions within the same session, continually weaving them into the talk. Both Pam and Louise gather key points made during small group discussions, encouraging students to represent these to the whole class. Louise varies her approach, sometimes taking these at random, but Pam almost always gathers them into themes. Both tutors do this either by asking specific students to express for the whole class an idea already voiced within the group; or

by asking for voluntary contributions on a particular theme; or by requesting views which coincide with or contradict those already offered.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, Myhill (2006) draws on schema theory (Bartlett, 1932) to argue that for learning to be effective, prior knowledge must be activated, so that new knowledge can either be integrated securely into existing understanding or used to challenge and adjust it. The evidence outlined above, I would argue, indicates that (if Bartlett's influential theory does indeed present a good model of learning) both Louise and Pam are effectively supporting the students' learning by investigating and using their prior knowledge in this way. This would mean, of course, that the students' personal learning experience is being enhanced, but arguably, the positive role model provided by these tutors is also very important. The TALK project (Myhill et al, 2006) found that teachers' use of children's prior knowledge to support their learning was minimal. If the teachers in her study are typical, then student teachers are unlikely to encounter such practice on school placement. In this respect, then, it seems that despite their background in Primary teaching, the way in which Pam and Louise use talk to activate and tap into prior knowledge in these case studies does not reflect common practice in primary schools.

The next section will discuss the patterns of interaction seen in the case studies; and here the evidence shows both similarities to, and differences from, typical classroom practice.

## **6.5 Shaping and guiding talk for different curriculum purposes.**

In both case studies, patterns of interaction are seen to vary according to the subject matter and curriculum aims. The next sections will discuss the different ways in which the tutors support talk, depending on the learning contexts.

### **6.5.1 Talk about subject knowledge.**

Where subject knowledge is involved, many of the techniques commonly used by teachers such as recapping, elicitation, repetition, reformulation, and elaboration, are used by both tutors in this study (Mercer 1995). The ubiquitous 'IRF' sequence (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) is also prevalent in three of the four sessions studied,



though many of these exchanges are not of the type where the tutor simply evaluates the answer as correct or incorrect. Instead, the tutors usually give supportive feedback, which develops the point further and could reasonably be assumed to support understanding and 'scaffold' learning (Wood et al, 1976). In one of Pam's sequences, however, this feedback seems to be too elaborate for the students' needs, and there is an apparent loss of engagement on their part, presumably indicating that although Pam retains 'the floor', she is no longer influencing the students' thinking.

Again in relation to whole class talk about subject knowledge, both tutors are seen trying to respond to individual students' misconceptions without causing embarrassment. Louise does this by couching her criticism in conciliatory terms, whilst Pam probes the response further, asking students to explain how they reached their answers. In Case Study 2: Extract 1, for example, this helps her to see that the response about reading strategies was not 'incorrect', but that the student had used a logical approach to come up with an equally acceptable alternative answer. This example of scaffolding seemed to be successful, since it made the student's thinking more transparent to his peers and ultimately provided reassurance; although the request for clarification did appear initially to unnerve the student concerned. In the parallel discussion about the reading process ( Case Study 2: Extract 3) when one of Louise's students demonstrates a misconception, she points out gently that the answer is 'not exactly' right, and then moves on to another student. This approach might have avoided giving negative feedback, but did not provide the student or the tutor with information about how the misconception had arisen. Responding to correct answers might seem more straightforward, but even here there are pitfalls to be avoided. In one instance, Pam affirms a student's response about using grammatical knowledge to support reading, but goes too far when elaborating upon it and loses the students' attention.

Such examples reveal a classic dilemma of 'whole class' teaching, particularly where question and answer routines are concerned. As Myhill (2006) emphasises, decisions at such 'critical moments' are not easy: they have to be made instantaneously, yet can make a crucial difference to the learning outcome. She also finds that teachers' own insecure subject knowledge is a factor which often leads them to confuse their

pupils at such key turning points in the lesson. This, I would argue, adds weight to the case for these tutors to take an authoritative stance in whole class interactions where subject knowledge is involved. The small group activities provide a vital opportunity for students to engage with this knowledge together by creating an 'intermental development zone' (Mercer, 2000, p141) where they can potentially negotiate a more equal balance of control over the direction of the thinking. This also gives the students time to share answers with their peers, before 'exposing' them to public scrutiny. But once back in the whole class context, I would argue that it is often important for the tutor to accept an 'expert' role. Mercer's model, seen in this context, is still built upon the Vygotskian principle that the learner's progress is often dependent upon the teacher's guidance, but he emphasises that there must be variable contributions as the dialogue proceeds. I would argue that at some points in the learning sequence, the communicative relationship between tutor and student needs to be one in which the tutor takes control, and that she should not be afraid to do so.

As has been argued previously, there *are* right and wrong answers in some of the topics under discussion in the sessions, which need to be carefully examined if students' understanding is to become secure. In terms of the reading process, for example, whilst controversy might continue about which model is most helpful to the student teacher (and indeed for the pupils), once it has been established which model is under discussion, there is little debate about what the terminology represents. It was evident in the first sessions that there was some overlap in terms of acceptable answers, and also some potential for mismatch between the student's intended reply and the tutor's interpretation. This emphasises the need to recognise and examine students' misconceptions in this whole class situation. For Pam and Louise to 'fudge' their response to students in contexts such as these, would surely be to do them a disservice. Even (or perhaps especially) in terms of controversial subjects, if these tutors are to act as 'discourse guides' as Mercer (1995) recommends, they will need to provide the students with a comprehensive knowledge of the necessary vocabulary and understanding of the key theoretical models, so that they, in turn, can engage knowledgeably in current professional debates. We have seen that for this understanding to develop, students will need to process and discuss the information presented, but I would argue that ultimately the

tutors need to claim the authority here. As Mercer put it, they each need to 'be the person who brings the language and the frames of reference of the 'expert' discourse into the 'collective consciousness of the group'. (Mercer, 1995, P82)

Even so, responding as the expert is not straightforward. Skidmore (2006) might warn that if Pam and Louise do so inappropriately (as he believes many teachers do in such exchanges) they will 'encode a 'weakest link' view of knowledge' (Skidmore, 2006, p 513) and reduce the students to winners and losers in an educational 'game show'. On the other hand, we have seen that at one point, Pam's overzealous approach to feedback was equally futile.

Black et al (2002) suggest that in the primary classroom, the secret of success lies in establishing a culture where pupils are comfortable with 'wrong' answers, because they know that they can be as useful as 'correct' ones, and are happy for their classmates to help the teacher move them towards the correct solution. I would argue that the same principle should apply in this adult context, and that to encourage such an approach would provide a good model for the students' practice, as well as supporting their own learning. Mercer's model of the 'Intermental Development Zone' (Mercer, 2000, p 141) implies, of course, that this 'expert' role should not *remain* with the tutor. In the case studies, there are clear examples of 'handover' (Wood et al, 1976). In Pam's first session, for example, where phonics is discussed as part of the reading process, she is seen to accept the expert role, but later in the course, when students have much more knowledge and experience of their own to draw on, she successfully trusts the students to advise each other about a theoretical aspect of phonics and its implications for the classroom.

Again, deciding when and how such handover can be effected is a complex business, and although it can be informed by probing the students' responses as discussed above, it may always remain (to some extent) an intuitive judgement on the tutor's part. Nevertheless, the tutors in these studies might be advised to investigate this difficult dilemma further, to find ways of establishing a context in which the students' errors of subject knowledge can be unequivocally highlighted, without undermining the very positive ethos in their classrooms.

### **6.5.2 Talk about wider professional issues.**

It has been shown that where subject knowledge is concerned, the patterns of interaction in these studies have much in common with those in many primary classrooms. In the whole class sections of Pam's and Louise's Session Two, however, where wider professional issues are being considered, a wider range of interaction patterns is discernible; and Pam, who is teaching a smaller group because of poor attendance, abandons the IRF sequence altogether. At one point this facilitates one of the few exchanges seen in the study where students reply to, or build upon, each other's contributions without recourse to the tutor's 'orchestration' or control. This sequence resembles a casual conversation in its structure and choice of language, and provides one of several examples of 'cumulative talk' in Mercer's terms (2000) to be found in the sessions of both tutors. The smaller group might be a factor here, and it must be acknowledged that this might be making it easier for students to interact with each other. Without a much wider data sample, however, it is impossible to tell whether group size affects the pattern of interaction in this instance, and a comparison of the effectiveness of different patterns of group organisation falls outside the remit of this study. Nevertheless, there is no reason why Pam's relationship to the students would change with the group size, and any power imbalance imposed by the traditional tutor / student roles would presumably still apply. Perhaps it should simply be noted that such a pattern is discernible here, and that Alexander's 'Talk for Learning' project (Alexander. 2003, 2005) shows that in a minority of cases, such student autonomy can be achieved in the context of whole class talk. I would argue that it would certainly be desirable and would also be achievable, in this adult context.

Notwithstanding this one example of a more naturally evolving discussion, there are no examples in any of the sessions of genuine debate or open dissent. Where some disagreement is apparent, this tends to be presented to the class by the tutor, but not pursued. In the case of Pam's Session Two, she takes this a step further and is seen to carefully avert what might have been a lively debate. It seems then that whilst the 'primacy of the social' is certainly maintained (Holquist 1990, p 39) there is no real evidence of meaning achieved through 'struggle' (ibid, p 39). There *are* sequences in which cumulative thinking is evident (the students' discussion of 'reading around the class', for instance, in Case Study 2: Extract 1; and the exchange

about Enid Blyton books in Case Study 2: Extract 10). Here students and tutors build on each other's utterances to chain them into a coherent line of thought or enquiry. However, there are *no* extended examples of genuinely exploratory talk, (Mercer, 1995, and 2000) in which ideas and opinions are openly contested and debated. It is this type of talk which Mercer sees as being the most productive in terms of learning. However, both tutors *do* ensure that a range of views are heard in the whole class context, actively asking for contradictory views to be expressed, and, as it were, 'scripting' a debate, though not presiding over a 'live' version. Thus a model is presented in which different viewpoints are discussed, even though the students are not encouraged to argue directly with each other's opinions in this whole class context. (Interestingly, the small collaborative groups, which feed into these whole class discussions in both case studies, often seem to have reached a consensus within each group, which might suggest that such friendship groups are too 'cosy' to encourage debate, and that perhaps even here there is no real 'struggle', nor are students happy to leave differences unresolved. The issue of dialogue within small groups falls outside the remit of this research, but might be worth further investigation)

A level of control in terms of the direction of the talk is also discernible in the ways that tutors respond to student contributions. In most cases, even where the discussion gives an initial impression of being very open, tutors nonetheless find a way to evaluate the students' responses. On some occasions, where tutors clearly hold very strong views on professional issues, there is no pretence at even-handedness: Pam's emotive reference to Frank McCourt's novel and to her own experiences as a teacher, to persuade the students of the importance of reading to their pupils is a case in point. In other cases the evaluation is more subtle, for example when both tutors indicate their approval of an opinion offered through gesture or brief affirmatory utterances (Louise in Case Study 1: Extract 3, and Pam in Case Study 2: Extract 7) or where Louise subtly changes the view expressed by a student when representing it to the whole class, in Case Study1: Extract 3.

For both tutors, then, the approach falls short of encouraging genuinely exploratory talk in Mercer's terms. Again, there is little evidence of the challenge and negotiation implied by Mercer's (2000) 'IDZ', nor do we see the tutors and students opening and

maintaining 'a dialogic 'space for reflection' which facilitates the emergence of creative solutions to problems' (Wegerif 2005, p 358). I have argued above that in the case of subject knowledge, it is often appropriate for the tutor to act as an expert guide in whole class contexts, moving the students towards what Edwards and Mercer (1987) call a 'principled understanding'. But I would also argue that in cases where wider professional issues are concerned, the tutors might need to negotiate a less authoritative stance within Mercer's (2000) 'intermental development zone'. Of course, the tutors' experience is wider than that of the students and, as has been acknowledged above, they will understandably hold firm views on certain aspects of their subjects. However, a 'transmission' approach to professional opinion might prove as futile as it is for other aspects of learning, and if one complains of the overbearing nature of government edicts, it might be wise to avoid replacing them with one's own. Here again tutors are faced with a difficult dilemma. After all, their opinions *are* born out of a great deal of knowledge and experience, and they might consider some principles so fundamental that an element of passionate persuasion is more than acceptable. Even Bakhtin, with his insistence on struggle and interaction in creating meaning, emphasises that 'sharedness' is an important part of the process, and believes that 'in order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of others.' Holquist, 1990, p 28). An element of passionate authorship is surely consistent with this dialogic view of learning, but it is hard to discern where 'passion' ends and 'indoctrination' begins! Perhaps it is enough that these tutors are alerted to their potentially powerful influence and encouraged to consider when and how such 'passion' is acceptable or beneficial.

## **6.6 The choice of topics and the issue of authority.**

Another way in which the balance of power leans heavily towards the tutors in these studies is in the choice of topics, which is almost always in the hands of the tutors. The only exception to this occurs in the first part of Pam's Session One, which is presented as an opportunity for students to share their experiences of English teaching on school placement, and to evaluate them as either positive or negative. In this lengthy discussion, the students suggest topics for consideration and confidently offer their opinions and Pam shapes them into themes, giving her own opinions and offering clarification as part of the discussion. Thus students are in control of the topics discussed, although they still have to bid (through gesture) for opportunities

to speak, which are allocated by the tutor. This, I would argue, indicates that tutors should consider ways in which students could be given more opportunities to focus attention on the issues which matter most to them. I am not, of course, arguing that tutors abdicate all responsibility for the choice of topic and as the literature review has shown, this would in any case be impossible in the current national climate. However, it would seem self evident that student motivation and engagement would be further increased if students could raise professional issues which are of concern to them personally.

This approach would be consistent with the tutors' concern for the individual student, documented above. It would also build on the high level of student engagement already evident in some respects.

### **6.7 Reflecting on experience: a matter of professional confidence.**

In terms of topic choice then, the case study tutors generally exercise considerable control, as do their primary school counterparts. However, unlike many classroom studies, there are frequently quite long, confidently expressed utterances from the students, especially where they are talking about their own experiences. Sequences reveal evenly balanced contributions, (in terms of their length) from tutor and students; as well as those in which the tutor's utterances are much longer than the students'. There are also times when the students' longer utterances are balanced by very short ones from the tutor, often just to encourage the student to continue. Thus the longest and most confidently expressed contributions from the students are often about their own first hand experiences, either as a child, or as a student teacher in the school environment.

These opportunities to express, question and evaluate practice, and ask advice from their peers, as well as their tutors, is clearly a valuable one if student teachers are to acquire not just professional 'competence' (in the sense that they comply with all the government requirements for the award of Qualified Teacher Status), but also professional 'confidence' to take their place as thinking professionals in the dynamic world of education. Thus the evidence of longer student contributions during opportunities for professional reflection on practice would seem to endorse the plea,

already made above, for more time to be made available for such collaborative reflection.

What is more, the information gleaned about the students' experiences and concerns is often seen to be useful later in a session: it is used to scaffold learning, tackle certain issues, and help address some of the students' concerns within the planned topic. I would therefore argue that such discussion also helps the tutors employ effective formative assessment, as advised by Black and Wiliam (1998) as well as scaffolding students' professional learning. Furthermore, it is consistent with Wells' 'spiral of knowing' (1999, page 84) since the process comprises a continually reiterative interaction between information and experience which helps students test the relevance of their knowledge 'in relation to their own personal models of the world and, where possible its practical application in action' (Page 90).

Thus the evidence suggests that greater opportunities to talk collaboratively about their experiences, combined with stronger student control over the direction of the talk, might have further enhanced the students' learning experiences in these whole class contexts.

#### **6.8.1 How the tutors shape and guide the talk: a summary of comparisons and discussion.**

The data from these case studies reveals that there is a range of ways in which talk in the whole class sessions is shaped and guided. There is a considerable similarity in this respect between the two tutors - differences being more in style than in substance. Key points are summarised below:

- The affective context for the students' learning is both recognised and actively constructed by both tutors.
- Students' prior knowledge, both in terms of subject knowledge and pedagogy, is effectively activated by the tutors, who use it to scaffold the students' learning.
- Collaborative thinking, through talk, is highly valued by both tutors and is both explicitly and implicitly endorsed during these sessions;



- Cumulative thinking is more evident than exploratory talk, for which a carefully orchestrated model is presented, rather than an open opportunity for live debate.
- Many techniques beloved of English school teachers are employed and classic dilemmas are met in dealing with students' errors. Where question and answer techniques are used, these are managed in a range of ways, sometimes simply to check whether answers are correct, but more often to provide a means to scaffold learning, both in the immediate exchange and later in the sessions.
- Tutors deal sensitively and supportively with students' misconceptions, but are sometimes reluctant to take an authoritative stance where this might be appropriate.
- Both tutors and students are seen to give long and passionate contributions relating to their own experience; and first hand experiences, together with their associated feelings and emotions, are valued by both tutors and students as influential factors in professional decision-making. There is further potential in both case studies for tutors to facilitate challenging comparison of and reflection upon these feelings and experiences, in order to generate new meaning and pose further questions
- Overall, virtually all utterances in these whole class contexts are mediated in some way by the tutor. Not just in terms of subject knowledge, but also professional opinion, the tutors are ultimately seen to have the last word.

### **6.8.2 Whose 'voices' are heard and how are these 'voices' managed?**

It is clear from the discussions above that a number of 'voices' are heard in these sessions and that their relative strength seems to relate directly to the purpose and aims of the session, or the particular 'episode' within the session. The 'constraints' of the system are referred to by both tutors in terms of the original National Literacy Strategy Framework for teaching (1998), and the controversial nature of guidance concerning a new model for reading is mentioned both in the session devoted to the teaching of reading and also in Pam's discussion with the students in Session 1 about their experience on school placement. However, this is not to say that these initiatives are criticised overall: some teaching strategies and national initiatives are enthusiastically endorsed. Rather, in these sessions they tend to be mediated by the

tutors' voices of experience, and the unequivocally positive view promoted by government agencies is tempered by reference to practical realities and sometimes strongly held personal reservations. Other constraints, such as the new students' lack of autonomy in the classroom, are also expressed by the students and acknowledged by the tutors. Thus, despite the overbearing nature of government regulation and 'guidance' described by Alexander (2000), this does not seem, in these sessions at least, to unduly repress the voices of students or tutors.

The strength of the students' voices varies considerably. Unsurprisingly, where subject knowledge is concerned, the tutor's voice is always strong, although it has been argued above that in some circumstances it needs to be stronger, and in others it needs to be more restrained. In relation to professional issues and pedagogical principles, there seem to be some differences between the two tutors at the early stage of the course, since Louise does not offer students the same level of freedom to express their opinions as Pam. This difference is due almost entirely to Louise's decision not to pursue the planned opportunity for reflection on the first school placement, however, so it may not be significant. It could be argued that the decision itself indicates that Louise prefers to leave such discussions to a time when students have more experience to bring; or that the crowded nature of the year-long PGCE course encouraged such a choice; or simply that she was right in feeling that this particular group had already been offered many opportunities to 'reflect' on their recent experience and that further similar discussions would feel repetitive: it is impossible to say. What is clear, however, is that students at this early stage of the course feel no need themselves to delay offering their opinions until they can be informed by more experience as professionals in the classroom. On the contrary, opinions on a range of relevant professional issues are assertively and confidently expressed.

Later in the course (in Session 2) students in both groups are given extensive opportunities to make their 'voices' heard. The student voices *are* strong here, particularly in their articulation of their own personal and professional experiences and the opinions that spring from them. It is perhaps surprising then, given the lack of government prescription involved in a topic fairly open to personal opinion, that the students' 'voices', despite their confidence, are always mediated by the opinions

of the tutors. There are, of course, government voices whispering in the background: the overcrowded curriculum; the pressure of SATs and league tables; and the tendency towards dry dissection and analysis of texts in the Literacy Hour; all are cited as reasons for a lack of emphasis on enjoyment in the reading curriculum. In contrast, the government strategy of 'Shared Reading' is approved by Pam's students in Case Study 2: Extract 9, as a much more positive experience for pupils than the more out dated 'reading round the room'. But ironically it is the passionate belief (clearly held and assertively expressed by both tutors) that in terms of reading, *the child's opinion* matters, which ensures that it is *the tutors'* 'voice' which ultimately prevails in these sessions. I would argue that there is a need here for more opportunities for open and challenging debate, in which tutors take a less authoritative stance, and in which the 'voices' of these new entrants to the profession are more actively nurtured and encouraged.

Despite evidence presented in the literature review of a high level of central control exerted on primary schools and teacher training institutions in England, the evidence here does not present a picture of tutors or students who are dispirited by overbearing government restrictions. Certainly, both tutors and students display an element of pragmatism in their discussions of day-to-day decision-making and they are realistic about the levels of professional autonomy which prevail. However, notwithstanding the strength of the tutors' voices overall, relative to the those of the students, as already discussed, both groups are seen at times to express their views with confidence.

What is very clear from the evidence in these case studies is that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the students do this most convincingly when they are speaking from their own experience. I would therefore argue that the time and space for student teachers to 'tell their own stories' needs to be jealously guarded. In the same way that Pam and Louise argued for the place of storytelling in the over crowded primary school curriculum, so these tutors need to pause long enough, on the 'whistle-stop tour' of the PGCE year, for their students to engage in this particular mode of professional reflection and for their own professional voices to be actively nurtured and encouraged. Indeed, they need to make time for such stories to be further explored and compared, encouraging conclusions to be challenged; alternative

interpretations, implications and potential to be considered; fresh meanings generated and new questions asked.

In summary, the findings raise a number of questions about the practice of the case study tutors, which might well be applicable to other tutors in similar contexts. These are as follows:

- Both tutors are seen to present a range of opinions on some issues, but are there ways in which these students could have been offered more opportunities for genuine debate, and encouraged to take an authoritative role in whole class discussion? Would such opportunities have been more effective in helping them to develop a strong professional 'voice'?
- The students in these studies *are* given opportunities to reflect on experience, but were there opportunities for them to select the stories which they personally feel are worth telling; and to raise professional issues and concerns which really matter to them? Was there further potential for students' personal stories to be explored, compared and challenged in order to consider alternative conclusions and to generate new ideas and raise further questions? Would this offer them a stronger platform from which to evaluate the plethora of evidence, opinion, and guidance which they will doubtless encounter in their professional lives?
- In relation to subject knowledge, are there ways in which these students could have been made more comfortable with 'incorrect' answers, and encouraged to use them as positive steps in their own and their peers' learning? Would this have supported more confident professional learning, or perhaps offered the students a stronger 'voice' even in contexts where the tutor is an acknowledged 'expert'?
- When does 'passion' become 'indoctrination'? How can tutors maintain a passion for their subject, but at the same time nurture and respect the students' developing professional opinions? How can they maintain their own strong 'voice' without inhibiting that of the students?

These questions merit further discussion around the difficult theme of 'control' within teacher education. The following section attempts to tease out some of the relevant issues.

### **6.8.3 The complex issue of 'control'.**

The issue of whether, and in what ways, thought is being controlled or influenced in these contexts is complex, and in order to remain true to the 'dialogic' model of thinking outlined above, this theme needs to be considered from a range of different perspectives.

It is clear that different levels of control are proposed within the various models of teaching and learning which this thesis has discussed. Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p 84) emphasises the students' potential for learning, but implies that the teacher or more experienced peer has the responsibility to recognise such potential, and to some extent plan the learner's means of achieving it. The 'scaffolding' proposed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), in calling upon the teacher to support and prompt the learner towards a specific learning goal, also places the control (albeit within the context of shared thinking) in the hands of the teacher or tutor. Even Alexander's (2004) model of 'dialogic teaching' (whilst encouraging open ended thinking and genuinely interactive discussion) emphasises the achievement of a common understanding and a gradual progress towards a 'handover of concepts and principles' (Alexander, 2004, p 23), implying that the teacher or tutor still ultimately holds the reins. Whilst I have argued above that this might well be appropriate in the case of subject knowledge, only Mercer's (2000) Intermental Development Zone, with its shared, negotiated space for reflection and variable roles between participants, comes close to the Bakhtinian ideal of 'dialogism' and as Wegerif (2005, 2008) insists, tolerates a level of uncertainty and openness which allows for genuine negotiation of meaning and interpretation. Surely this model of dialogue would be appropriate in the context of discussion about professional issues. In discussing these levels of control within the current case studies, a number of points need to be addressed.

Firstly, we need to consider what is actually being controlled. To what extent, for example, does control by the tutors of the *talk* in these sessions constitute control of the students' *thinking*? As indicated in the tentative nature of the research questions

for this study and discussed elsewhere, this is almost impossible to gauge. Use of video, rather than audio recording as a data collection method in these case studies sometimes offers hints of the disparity between what is actually being said and the thinking which might underpin it (as in the evidence of inattention in students' body language in Case study 2, Extract 3). At other times students' thinking is evident as it re-emerges in later discussion or is purposefully re-activated by the tutor (as in Case Study 2 Extract 6), but such hints of possible thought processes and attitudes can never be more than indicative. What *is* clear however, from the persuasive techniques evidenced in the analysis, is that tutors *are* overtly attempting to control or at least influence thinking, particularly where they themselves feel passionate about a particular approach to English teaching. Equally clear is the government's intention, well documented elsewhere in this thesis, to control thinking in a very explicit and authoritative way.

This introduces the second important consideration: how and by whom are such attempts at control being made? In the interests of clarity, the protagonists in this particular drama have been presented as individual characters (tutors; students; the government; the National Literacy Strategy and so on) yet from the socio-cultural perspective outlined in the literature review, this is, to say the least, a very oversimplified interpretation. Influence and control are, I would argue, reflexive and re-iterative. Tutors in the study are themselves 'controlled' to some extent by government pressure, and are influenced by their own cultural and personal experiences and their past and present encounters with other agencies, such as the National Literacy Strategy. Furthermore, although the tutors' 'emotional intelligence' (Mortiboys 2005) has been seen to have very positive influence in these learning contexts, tutors have also been seen to recognise, sometimes even to manipulate, the students' feelings and emotions, in order, it has been argued, to control or at least to strongly influence their thinking. Students' perspectives too are shaped by their own web of experiences and cultures, as well as by the overt influence of government controls and the arguably more covert influence of the beliefs of their tutors, class teachers on placement, and so on.

Moreover, none of these 'voices' are stable. Particularly, I would argue, where the tutors are successful in creating and maintaining a relatively free exchange of ideas,

it is clearly to be expected that viewpoints and values, both of students and tutors, will change as a result of - and even in the process of - the dialogue in which they participate.

Next, we need to tackle the issue of where control *should* rest if the students' learning is to be effectively supported, and if Vygotsky's 'buds and flowers' (1978, p 6) of professional opinion are to develop and bear fruit. It has been suggested that no hard and fast rules can be established about this, and that tutors need to make largely intuitive decisions about the appropriate levels of freedom of thought in different curricular contexts. It has also been intimated that a sliding scale of 'control' might be appropriate, in which tutors maintain stronger control in matters of subject knowledge and conversely allow, and indeed encourage, an open negotiation for control in matters of professional opinion. This, however, is by no means a simple formula. Indeed one might question, within the educational contexts under scrutiny in this study, whether such open negotiation is ever really possible, since even by exercising such intuitive judgments about when to 'allow' freedom of thought, the tutors are in effect, maintaining control. Furthermore, one might question whether this open-ended approach to knowledge generation is desirable or justifiable, in the atmosphere of the invasive government control of teacher 'training' documented in Chapter Two. Government interventions in the shape of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies emphasise a version of 'best practice' in which there is little opportunity for negotiated meaning. As we have seen, the work of English et al (2002) points to tensions between advice that in their lessons, teachers should press their pupils forward urgently towards a set learning objective and yet remain open to pupils' ideas. There seems little room here for new teachers to allow genuinely open negotiation (with and between their pupils) as to the direction of their discussion and the nature of their thinking. Is it therefore pointless to encourage such a process through our own practice in teacher education?

I would argue, however, that even on a purely pragmatic level, 'training' aspiring teachers to operate obediently within a government straightjacket makes no sense at all. How, after all, will such teachers be able to operate when those currently making such powerful decisions are removed or replaced, or when the thinking behind government edicts is undermined or discredited? Will they merely have to mark time

in the ensuing vacuum, awaiting further 'instructions'? Surely, of all the professional spheres, teacher education should be one in which we aim to educate individual thinkers, who are capable of generating new and innovative solutions to the dilemmas and complex issues they will face in the classroom. I would argue that this is the way to take a 'constructively critical approach to innovation' (TDA 2007) as the government suggest, whilst also managing to survive, and even flourish, within the constraints of the system.

Finally it is important for tutors to recognise the power and extent of their own control in terms of the students' thinking. There is little point in waxing lyrical about the benefits of negotiated meaning and railing against the government's restrictive view of 'best practice' if in turn, one is relentlessly pursuing one's own agenda. It has been established that personal relationships between tutors and students are crucially important to the students' professional learning and that they constitute a powerful tool in the tutors' approach to supporting it. I have also suggested that a level of passion in the tutors' treatment of controversial topics is appropriate. If meaning is to be created through 'struggle' then those involved in the dialogue, both tutors, students and other agencies, will need to engage in it with passion and commitment. However, it is also crucial to ensure that intensely personal and passionate commitment is not merely used as another powerful means of 'control', and that it genuinely supports negotiation of meaning and the development of the students' own personal understanding and individual professional opinions.



## **Chapter 7 – Evaluation of the study and recommendations.**

This chapter will examine the strengths and weaknesses of this study and suggest that it has provided helpful insights in relation to the research questions within this particular context, and has also raised issues which could usefully be explored in a wider context.

### **7.1 A holistic approach.**

The study has taken a holistic approach to a very complex issue. As explained in Chapter 3, a number of possible ways of restricting the focus were considered, but rejected, in order to ensure that the selected methods of data collection and analysis acknowledged the complexity of communication and learning processes within the classroom.

The strength of adopting a relatively open-ended framework of analysis was that this allowed for discussion of a wide range of factors, all of which seemed to be influencing the way talk was organised in the chosen settings. Thus the analytical framework focused attention on the significant aspects indicated by the literature, allowing connections to be made within and across the different categories, and reflecting the complex nature of the research topic.

For example, I have argued that personal relationships, created and sustained by the tutors between themselves and their students, were found to have a considerable effect on the nature of the talk, and arguably on the students' learning. These relationships were seen to be affected by many of the factors identified in the broad analytical framework, and could not have been meaningfully examined within a narrower research methodology. It was often the case that categories were not mutually exclusive and that it would have been possible to discuss a particular factor under more than one of the prescribed headings. Patterns of interaction, for example, often indicated what sort of reasoning was being valued and supported the tutor's scaffolding of the students learning; which in turn made use of students' prior knowledge and helped to build common contextual tracks from which tutors and students could draw. Each of these had been identified as separate points to consider within the analytical framework, but each was part of, or had an impact on the other. Thus the degree of flexibility within the framework helped to present a

realistic and meaningful picture without precluding essential aspects of the knowledge building (Wells 1999) and communication processes. The broad flexibility of the research framework, then, recognised the complex nature of classroom interactions in the context of learning, both in the way it approached analysis and in the way the findings were presented. Rather than address a much narrower focus over a larger number of sessions or tutors, it enabled a wide range of inter-related factors to be considered, which in turn allowed a very detailed picture to be presented, of just two tutors in a total of four sessions.

However, this will not preclude particular aspects of these communication and learning processes being suggested as a focus for further, more narrowly focussed research. The ways in which these tutors dealt with student misconceptions, for example, emerged as an important factor in the students' learning and, as will be discussed below, would certainly merit further investigation, across a larger number of tutors and sessions, either within this same context or beyond it.

It had been decided that in order to reflect the socio-cultural perspective justified in Chapter Two, it would be necessary to examine the ways in which the tutor and students made meaning together. The whole teaching narrative was therefore presented in outline for each session, before extracts were selected and examined under the headings of the analytical framework. I would argue that this proved very effective, since it gave a rich and detailed picture of interactions within these classrooms and allowed the reader to see how the talk was managed and how this affected the joint development of meaning. Isolated utterances or exchanges were sometimes given as examples, but only as part of this broader context and where they had something relevant to say in relation to the same key headings. This facilitated examination of the complex web of factors involved and enabled connections to be made between and across them.

## **7.2 Reliability: an audit trail.**

In accordance with Descombe's recommendation (2003), in order to enhance reliability, this section will provide an 'audit trail' mapping out key decisions made in the process of this research project. This will, in the main, follow the chronology set

out in Chapter Three but will provide details of how these decisions worked out in practice.

Having decided on the research focus and refined this to produce the research questions, the decision was made, as justified in Chapter Three, to focus on two tutors in my own institution, including myself. The possibility of bias is acknowledged here, has been discussed at length in Chapter Three and was examined again in the discussion of Case Study Two. Suffice it to say at this point therefore, that this awareness underpins every decision detailed below.

Selection of a date for the first sessions to be recorded towards the end of the students' first term worked well, in that by that time the tutors felt they had got to know the groups fairly well, and established a degree of trust with them which would allow the request to be made for their participation in the research study. A slightly earlier session was also recorded in order to test ways of gaining the optimum sound quality, and also to familiarise the tutors and students with the presence of the camera. The decision to film on the last day of the taught element of the students' course worked less well, because of a timetabling problem which resulted in a low attendance for my own session. A 'reserve' session had been filmed the previous week, but it was decided that the advantage of comparable numbers was overridden by the less suitable session topic. (These issues have already been discussed in the relevant case study.) The choice of sessions worked well, however, in terms of the curriculum topics covered, and although aspects of practice noted in these sessions cannot be proven to be typical of our practice overall, the analysis has demonstrated that the sessions did present contrasts in terms of 'curriculum content' and aims. What is more, Louise and I both felt that the sessions did include the most open ended discussions presented during the course, which renders all the more pertinent, the plea for a higher level of debate and a stronger 'voice' to be offered to the students.

Difficulties were anticipated in terms of students who did not want to participate, but these did not materialise: once explanations had been offered and assurances made, all the students were happy to take part.

The probability that the presence of the camera would affect behaviour has also been acknowledged, and is in no way denied, although both Louise and I felt that it had been less of a problem than anticipated: we were certainly aware of its presence, but initial self-consciousness soon faded as we became absorbed in our teaching. Indeed it has been argued in one of the case studies that it was a useful visual aid when recommending that the students take a reflective approach to their own professional practice.

The transcription stage was unproblematic: a few minor lapses in accuracy (mainly due to the transcriber's lack of familiarity with subject specific vocabulary) being easily identified and remedied at the checking stage. As described in the section on research design, the transcriptions were initially examined in their entirety. One advantage of working as a lone researcher which had not been anticipated, was that I had taken on this role of checking the accuracy of the transcriptions, and this provided me with a very comprehensive knowledge of the data before the detailed analysis was embarked upon.

The next stage was to summarise the teaching narrative and to divide it into manageable units for the purposes of analysis. In the main, this was easily done, by referring to the most obvious transitions between different types of activity within the sessions; but in the case of some rather long sections, sub-sections had to be identified by noting a change of emphasis, for example where a tutor moved from a section which had been predominantly an opportunity for discussion into a section which was mainly exposition. The rather arbitrary nature of these decisions is acknowledged, but this does not affect either the validity or reliability of the analysis, since the purpose was simply to make analysis more manageable for the researcher and the reader.

The next task was to examine each episode and annotate it according to the framework for analysis detailed in Chapter Three. Here the video data proved useful as it could be consulted when the emphasis or meaning of any utterance was unclear. Maintaining the integrity of the data, while annotating it according to these key features, enabled me to see, in ever clearer terms, the inter-related nature of these categories. It also prompted me, on occasions, to return to previous sections

of the data. Where a particular phenomenon was first noted, I checked to see whether this had in fact been present in earlier episodes, but had been missed on first examination. In a similar way, because of the parallel nature of the planning for the sessions, comparisons could be made between the ways in which different tutors managed the talk within the same activity or topic, and these examinations too could be conducted in an iterative way, with continual back-tracking and cross checking. Combined with the fact that all this analysis was conducted by a single person, it is argued that the analysis was therefore conducted with a high level of consistency.

This system also meant that what might be considered purely intuitive judgements were checked and re-checked against the evidence. For example the conclusion was drawn, in relation to several categories from the analytical framework, that the ethos which both tutors created was supportive. It is acknowledged that this judgement could be open to the accusation of bias, given my own close involvement. However, this was then checked against other categories in the framework. This led me to decide that in some cases such a conclusion could be justified, but in others, such as in situations where the tutors were dealing with student misconceptions, the evidence was less conclusive and more open to interpretation. (These specific issues have already been detailed and discussed within the case studies, but are cited here to illustrate the rigorous nature of the analysis.)

The selection of certain episodes for further examination and discussion was only made *after* these more detailed stages of analysis had been completed, and on the basis that this indicated that specific episodes had something important to say in relation to the research questions. It was at this point that findings were set out in relation to each of the key headings from the analytical framework, incorporating detailed examination of the selected key episodes from each session within each case study.

Given the detailed, iterative and rigorous approach to each of the stages outlined above, and notwithstanding the possible weaknesses in research design acknowledged in sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2 below, it is argued that the final comparisons between, and discussions about the case studies, as well as the overall conclusions drawn, are both credible and reliable.

### **7.3 Validity.**

By following the audit trail above, it can be seen that in line with Denscombe's recommendations (2003), the internal validity of the findings for this research project has, as far as possible, been assured by:

- avoiding over simplification of what is essentially a very complex process;
- maintaining consistency in the ways described above;
- acknowledging the influence of the researcher's close involvement with both case studies and especially the one involving the author herself;
- adopting a framework which encouraged the examination of alternative possible explanations;
- making the selection procedures for certain extracts from the data transparent, and ensuring that they are consistent with the chosen analytical framework;
- asking Louise to offer her opinion on the proposed explanations, and considering these in the analysis.

As explained in Chapter Three, the *external* validity of the project rests not on any claim to typicality or generalisability. However, I would argue that this research project is part of a dialogue between those in similar research contexts and, as such, provides a means by which professionals in other similar settings can question and evaluate their own practice in terms of the management of talk. This will be further discussed below.

### **7.4 Possible weaknesses in the research design.**

#### **7.4.1 Minor problems with the sound quality of the recordings.**

As has been shown above, the thick description provided by this analysis was enhanced by the decision to use video recording as the principle means of data collection. One minor drawback was encountered however, in terms of the quality of recording. The decision had been made to keep the camera focussed on the tutor in each case, so as to minimise the potential levels of self-consciousness of the students and encourage them to behave as naturally as possible. Whilst this did seem to result in the students being fairly relaxed with the camera, it also meant that, although *within* a sequence of exchanges individual contributions could be

identified, it was not always possible to know whether a student who had featured in one sequence was again taking part in another exchange later in the session. Therefore the data was not clear enough to draw conclusions, for example, about whether particular students tended to dominate in whole class discussion overall.

#### **7.4.2 The range of data collected.**

It has been argued above that the data collected was accurate and detailed, but a possible weakness in the research design relates to the range of data available. As a lone researcher, some pragmatic decisions had to be made about the extent of the data to be collected. The familiar context of the research meant that I was very aware of the ways in which the sessions had been developed and some of the reasons behind their design, without the need to ask for written information about this. With the advantage of a larger research team, however, the validity of the study might have been further enhanced by collecting data which represented the tutor's thinking and decision-making at various points in the sessions. This knowledge was of course available to me when analysing my own sessions, but not when considering Louise's. Such reflections could have been collected immediately after each session, and would have provided me with valuable insights to inform the analysis.

Another useful addition to the data might have been provided by also asking some of the students to view the video and comment on the analysis. Silverman (1993) warns that because of the situated nature of a case study, collection of different kinds of data might not necessarily provide an element of triangulation, since it could be argued that each participant might hold their own different, but equally valid perspective. However, he does concede that information from a range of viewpoints gives valuable addition insights, and in the current context, when discussing the feelings and emotions, it might have been helpful to see how certain sequences of exchanges felt from the students' point of view. Given that the research questions for this study focus on the ways that the *tutors* shape the talk, it could be argued that the *students'* viewpoints are not strictly relevant, but nevertheless, it would have perhaps have added a further dimension to the discussion. Such additional information might therefore have been useful in a larger project, although in one conducted by a lone researcher, its feasibility is questionable. Moreover, the

awareness that without such data, students' feelings and emotions cannot be reported with any degree of certainty is reflected in the tentative way in which such suggestions are made during my discussion of the analysis.

In keeping with the focus on the tutors' management of talk, however, the opportunity was given to Louise to comment on the analysis of her own sessions after the event, and to consider the comparisons made with my own sessions. She commented that she thought the case study presented an accurate and fairly typical picture of her sessions and of the interactions between herself and the students. She found the analysis interesting and was already aware of some of the strategies which I had identified as part of her practice. The use of inclusive language, for example, was, she said, a deliberate choice on her part, because she did not want to give the impression that she felt her experience necessarily meant that she had all the answers. She also wanted to give the students the impression that 'we are all in this together, as teachers', rather than that she is in some way superior to them. She commented that when she had been given the opportunity to watch the video footage (prior to analysis) she had been aware that some of her body language did not encourage this impression of equal worth in terms of tutor and student contributions. The analysis, on the other hand, gave her a much more detailed picture of her verbal exchanges with the students which she hoped would have a positive impact on her teaching. There were no aspects of her case study which she felt were inaccurate or unfair. Louise's comments had of necessity to remain fairly general, since it had been decided that in terms of the time available to her, it was not practicable to expect her to carry out a detailed response to the analysis. Again, in a larger project, funding might have facilitated such a detailed check by participants, and offered the opportunity to undertake more detailed joint analysis. This might have contributed positively to the participating tutor's professional development, as well as providing valuable insights to inform the analysis.

## **7.5 What has been learnt from this study?**

The study set out to investigate the ways in which the case study tutors shaped the talk in the chosen contexts to facilitate their students' learning. In particular, it pursued the issue of 'authority' and sought to discover whose 'voices' predominated and how this was brought about. This section will consider my own personal learning



in these respects and then go on to draw conclusions about the main implications of the findings from this research within the wider field of teacher education.

### **7.5.1 My personal learning journey.**

The main aspects of my own personal learning from this study fall into two categories. Because of the nature of the research the topic, the first category concerns discoveries about my own management of talk in the context of the university classroom. Examining my own practice under the microscope of a detailed analytical framework, and comparing it to that of my colleague, has been a salutary experience which I would recommend to any researcher involved in making such judgements about others. The process has, of course, heightened my awareness of the possibilities and pitfalls of classroom talk both in my own professional context, and (through the literature) in the primary school classroom. It has also taught me a great deal, not just about the effectiveness or otherwise of my own teaching per se, but about the ease with which one can make assumptions about one's own practice which are not necessarily borne out by scrupulous investigation.

The second, and probably even steeper learning curve, has been in relation to the research project itself. In particular, I have become convinced of the dialogic nature of my own particular learning journey, and I am aware that my understanding of the relevant issues has not developed in a linear fashion, nor could it merely be 'transmitted' to me by the authors of the literature I studied. I can see clearly, looking back, that my learning has indeed developed in the cyclical way represented by Wells' (1999) 'spiral of knowing' (p 85). My initial reading of the literature remained at the level of 'information' until it was tested by the need to 'transform' and reshape it into a review, and then test it out against the vicarious 'experience' offered by the video recordings and transcripts. This in turn challenged some of my 'understandings' and forced me to return again to the literature (both in relation to the substantive topic and also in terms of my research methodology) before drawing my final conclusions.

In many respects, it has been a tough climb, but I have no delusions that I have reached the 'summit' of my learning. As my understanding developed, so I became more and more aware of what I still needed to understand.

### **7.5.2 Final conclusions and recommendations.**

No claims are made that the tutors in this study are necessarily typical of other professionals involved in teacher education and although some answers have been proposed to the research questions in relation to the particular contexts of the case studies, it cannot be assumed that these are necessarily applicable in related contexts within teacher education.

Nevertheless, in the spirit of Bakhtin's maxim that: 'If an answer does not give rise to a new question of itself, it falls out of the dialogue' (Bakhtin, 1986, p 168) I would argue that these case studies make a relevant contribution to the dialogue about teacher education, and do indeed pose some questions which need to be asked by other tutors in the sector, of their own practice.

The findings in this study suggest that the ways in which the case study tutors manage whole class talk have been influenced by their years as primary school teachers, and perhaps even by their own time as pupils in the classroom. I have argued that some of these influences are likely to benefit the students' learning and some to hinder it. Since most tutors in teacher education programmes have been teachers themselves, the findings from this study would certainly merit further investigation in relation to the wider community of teacher educators.

I therefore suggest that there is scope for further research into the following broad issues.

- The findings suggest that in these case studies, the strength of the students' 'voices' varies considerably, but that it is ultimately the tutors' 'voices' which prevail. Wider research could therefore seek insights into the extent to which student teachers are encouraged to develop their own 'voice' in relation to professional issues.
- It has been suggested that the ways in which the case study tutors manage talk bears many of the hallmarks of their previous professional lives as primary school teachers. The extent to which tutors in this sector bring patterns of school classroom interaction into the context of teacher education could usefully be investigated more widely, as well as the effects that this has on student learning.

- In the chosen contexts, it has been suggested that the 'power balance' in terms of the talk between tutors and students is not an equal one. The extent to which the traditional power associated with roles of 'tutor' and 'student' affect the way talk, and potentially thinking, is managed in large group contexts, and indeed in smaller ones within teacher education, would be worthy of further research.
- The case study tutors are shown to pay considerable attention to the feelings and emotions of their students in the learning context. Wider research concerning the extent to which the affective climate created by tutors in the context of teacher education influences the way talk is used to support and control students' learning would therefore be worthwhile.
- This study has highlighted the complexity of the tutor's decision making processes, when dealing with student responses. Further research is therefore needed, in order to throw more light on the effectiveness with which, within 'whole class' dialogue (and indeed in any interactions with their students) tutors in the sector handle critical turning points in the students' learning.

All these are important findings. However, the strongest, and perhaps most important theme to emerge from the data is that for the participants of this study, personal relationships between tutors and students are not just a factor in the learning and teaching process; they are an integral and fundamental part of the meaning being created. Maybin's (1994) 'long conversation' is only part of the picture here: the case studies provide evidence of a continually developing learning relationship, and the meaning being created here seems to be as much emotional as it is cognitive. Mercer (2000), Barnes and Todd (1977) and others describe the way teachers help learners to recall past learning, and Mortiboys (2005) gives advice to the 'emotionally intelligent lecturer'; but the teaching seen in these case studies does more than just build on prior knowledge, and is not just about sensitivity to students' feelings (though each is of course part of the tutors' repertoire).

There is an *emotional context* being created here which encourages (albeit sometimes more successfully than others) some essential 'risk taking' on the part of the students. Despite the evident anxieties about being 'wrong' that were shown by students in both case studies, they *were* prepared to respond, and the prompting

and supportive questioning from the tutors seems to be for emotional as well as cognitive purposes: indeed one appears to be an integral part of the other. The tutors, in effect, are providing a sort of *emotional scaffolding*, and thoughts, feelings and emotions are being gathered together into a common cognitive resource. Experiences are shared, (though there is further scope for reflection upon them, as Schön (1983, 1987) and Pollard (2005) recommend) but the personal perspectives on these experiences also become part of the relationship and part of the meaning created.

New feelings, perspectives and opinions seem to be part of the tool kit which students employ to challenge and perhaps dispute their existing thinking and understanding, and accommodate new ideas. Subject knowledge is sometimes called upon as the adjudicator in this dispute (and here it has been argued that the tutor is entitled to act as the 'expert'), but it often seems to be the *emotional* climate which is the deciding factor in whether such knowledge is successfully integrated into existing understanding. The student, in effect, seems to be asking: 'Why should this matter to me? Is it worth struggling to integrate and assimilate this knowledge? What relevance does it have to my own experience and to my personal aspirations as a teacher?' And here the relationships between tutors and students are crucial. The tutors seem to 'call in the favours' bestowed earlier: the smiles and words of encouragement, the reassurances given, the affirmations offered. They capitalise on the strong relationships they have created. Their response is offered in persuasive tones: 'We've come a long way together. We're firm friends now. This should matter to you because it matters to *me!*'

Here the theme of 'voices' becomes particularly significant. This version of the learning process is all about whose voice really matters and whose will prevail. The management of these voices carries with it a heavy responsibility: the evidence suggests that the tutors are very much in control and that they are often making instantaneous and intuitive judgements about whose voice will be heard. Mortimer and Scott, (2003) refer to science lessons as: 'the staging of a public performance on the social plane of the classroom' (Mortimer and Scott, 2003, p 28), but the current case study sessions do not give the impression of a finished performance. The making of meaning is a creative enterprise, certainly, but the tutors here seem more

like sound technicians, still in the process of producing a final recording of this piece of music, but holding the power to mix and fade the many different voices in the process. The students' voices, strongly influenced by the emotional aspects of their experience, are sometimes allowed to predominate, but at other times are barely heard at all. Even after rehearsing their parts in the relative freedom of the small group discussions, it is the tutor who decides which of these 'pre-recorded tracks' will be part of the final mix. Likewise the voices of officialdom sometimes speak strongly through the tutor, but at other times are reduced to a whisper by her own persuasive voice of experience, and sometimes by her orchestration of the students' feelings and emotions.

Perhaps the 'mix' is different when these student teachers reach their own primary school classrooms. Perhaps official voices are again turned up to full volume when the pressures of 'SATs', league tables and Ofsted inspections hold sway. If these, and other, newly qualified teachers are to have any chance of being heard, they will need to have developed a passion for their role and to have had plenty of practice at expressing it. I have argued that relationships are highly influential in the students' learning and suggested that the tutor's passion for the subject is important: it follows that tutors must use this passion to enthuse, and perhaps even to persuade, but not to indoctrinate. The evidence from these case studies shows that humour and personal storytelling are also used, both by both tutors and students, as a powerful means of ensuring that their voice prevails. Again tutors need to be aware of the potential of these strategies, and to use them judiciously. There seems to be very little research into how these two teaching tools might be most effectively used, and there is therefore considerable potential for this to be further explored.

I would argue that this study has highlighted issues which are of crucial relevance to the world of teacher education. From a socio-cultural point of view, as long as the roles of 'student' and 'tutor' exist in any form, the nature of the interaction between them will be of vital importance to the quality of student learning.

In a sector which is dependent on public funding, it also seems unlikely that staff-student ratios will rise significantly, making it important that when tutors interact with their students in relatively large groups they should do so effectively.

Furthermore, if the current emphasis on whole class teaching in primary schools continues, student teachers have a right to expect, during their teacher education, to be presented with good role models which support their own developing expertise in this respect.

Finally, the evidence from these case studies strongly suggests that the personal and emotional aspects of student teachers' lives are inseparable from their learning; and that the relationships created between themselves and their tutors are fundamentally important in developing their confidence as thinking professionals. I would argue that the extent to which the 'voices' of student teachers are heard will influence not only their personal learning experience, but also the extent to which they offer their own pupils an active, vocal and confident part in constructing their own understanding. The tutors in this study have had the courage to question their own practice in this respect, and have both learnt a great deal in the process. I therefore recommend that, in the interests of the next generation of teachers and of their pupils, other tutors and researchers find ways to ask such questions in a wider context, and to investigate further the ways in which personal relationships can be created and used to provide genuine support for learning.

Doubtless, during their teaching careers, our students will be part of many heated debates in the wider educational world: if they are to engage in them with knowledge and confidence, their emergent professional 'voices' must be heard.

{Student And that was an hour a week

{Student .... But really it wasn't an hour because it was too long for them to concentrate for that long on phonics, so it would probably be about half an hour - fifteen minutes direct teaching and then fifteen minutes doing a task and that's it. [...]

P Ummmm. That's quite different isn't it from the model that's recommended, certainly by the Strategy and by the, kind of all the new initiatives at the moment and it will be interesting to see whether this is the same in another year's time because the whole push at the moment is to change all of that and to make phonics much more erm upfront and much more frequent and regular and ten or fifteen minute slot each day as were saying. You know, my concern about what Sharon was saying about the writing and everything is that all of these other things are fine with the punctuation and everything but y'know but actually, if they're going to put the words down on the page and certainly in the very early stages, it depends totally doesn't it on the phonics, depends on that business we talked about, do you remember? of segmenting and listening to each sound in the word and then having a go at putting each sound down. If children can't do that and they haven't got the knowledge of the letters, you can do all the Big Writing in the world and all the inspiration in the world, and have lovely background music, but if they haven't got the skills, the tools if you like, to to get the words down on the page you're on a loser before you begin aren't you? So I think that is a concern.

The other concern that I think is worth picking up on is this issue of what you do in the class room compared to what the school policy is. Erm, Did anybody else feel that there were things that they would have liked to have done in school but actually were kind of constrained by the system?

Tag question to establish common ground.

NLS / 'Big Write' - Conflicting authorities?

Previous learning - phonics  
tag question  
Establishes shared experience

Repetition for persuasive effect

Managing the dialogue - Validating student voice.  
indicates start of first part of tag question to establish common ground.

→ So CUMULATIVE nature of group talk - now enters the cumulative talk of the whole group shared by the whole group.

Actively encourage students to compare + contrast experience with previous learning and official recommendations. **DT** indicator. Collective

long reply by Tutor but relates back to students' contributions.

CONTRASTS

expresses own opinion

long conversation | Spiral Curriculum

exhaustion - Mercer's techniques.

→ New TOPIC but linked by previous one. Shared opinion.

Explicitly picking up the issue + shaping the conversation.

Acknowledgement of personal feelings / opinions.

CUMULATIVE

PLANNED DIALOGUE

+ Mercer

Explicit comments

CONSTRAINTS

Tutor proposes next TOPIC.

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