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# Performativity & Affectivity: Lesson Observations in England's Further Education Colleges

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## Table of Contents

Performativity & Affectivity: Lesson Observations in England's Further Education Colleges	1
Table of Contents	2
Acknowledgements	7
Glossary	8
Abstract	11
Introduction	13
a. What this Research Adds: implications for policy and practice	16
b. Teaching & Learning Observations in FE: an overview	18
c. Research Objectives: Setting the Perimeters	21
d. Research Questions	22
e. Outline of the Chapters	23
Chapter One: The Socio-Political & Personal Contexts	29
Introduction and overview of the chapter	30
1. Observations in FE: a socio-political context in England	32
a. FE's 'Responsiveness' to Political and Economic Needs	33
b. Changes and Incorporation: Continuing Rhetoric, Limited Funding	36
c. New Labour's 'Social Inclusion' Agenda and FE	38
d. Assessment and Ofsted in Further Education	41
e. Graded Observation as Summative 'Assessments'	46
2. The Researcher's Position. 'Ursula's Story'	50
Pink for girls and...	55
Educating Rita	57
Beginning my academic journey	58
Twist of fate or irony?	60
Observing teaching and Ofsted	62
Chapter Two: My Theoretical Framework	65
1. Introduction	66
a. Poststructuralism, the Emotions and the Limitations of Language	67
b. The Emotional Labour of Observations	70
c. The Theoretical Concepts of Bourdieu	75
d. The Value of Bourdieu's Theoretical Concepts to this Research	82
e. Summary of Chapter Two, Part One	83
2. Symbolic Interactionism and Psychoanalysis	85
a. Subjectivity versus Objectivity	88
b. Performativity and 'Authenticity' in Observations	90
c. Sartre and Authenticity: 'Bad Faith' and Shame	92
d. Psychoanalytical Perspective: Self-identity and Emotions	95

Diagram 1: My visual interpretation of psychoanalytic concepts in interactions between patient and analyst.	100
e. The Emotions of Teaching & Learning: Bourdieu and Psychoanalysis	101
f. Performativity, Power and Playfulness	104
3. Conclusion	107
Chapter Three: Methodology	111
1. Introduction	112
a. Outline of this Chapter: 'multigenre texts'	113
b. Methodological Possibilities	114
2. Parallels: My Methodologies and Theoretical Framework	118
a. Ontological Considerations	119
b. Grounded Theory	123
c. Critiques of Grounded Theory	127
d. Summary of the Pilot Study	129
3. Methods of the Main Study	131
a. Ethical Issues, Sample Size and Participants	132
Table A: 'Lecturer' participants	134
Table B: 'Manager' Participants	135
b. The Format of the Interviews	140
Diagram 2: My revised visual interpretation: parallels between the researcher/participant situation and psychoanalytic concepts.	143
c. Processes of Analysis	144
4. Interpretations of Interpretations	148
a. Multiple Interpretations	150
b. Storytelling and Fictionalisation	151
Illustration from 'Ethel and Ernest'	153
Diagram 3: Processes in Data Analysis	157
c. Critiques of Fictionalisation	159
5. Conclusions	164
Chapter Four: Monica's Story	167
Being observed: the teacher's perspective	168
Chapter Five: A Thematic Analysis of the Lecturers' Narratives	191
1. Introduction	192
a. Outline of this Chapter	195
b. Introduction to Participants – 'The Teachers'	196
Grace	197
Alex	199
Naima	202
Jim	203
Sam	204

Brian _____	205
Sally _____	207
2. Framing the Context of Observations _____	208
a. The Context of Teaching and Learning _____	214
b. 'Hidden' Emotional Labour in FE _____	216
c. Performativity, Ethics Work and Emotional Labour _____	226
d. Embodied Emotion and Teaching in FE _____	229
3. Psychoanalytical Concepts _____	234
a. Anxiety and Stress in Observations _____	235
b. Feelings of Shame _____	240
c. Teachers Seeking Recognition _____	250
4. The Emotional Labour of our Professional Habitus _____	257
5. Conclusions _____	262
Diagram 4: My revised visual interpretation of the parallels between the individuals in an observation and psychoanalytic concepts. _____	263
Chapter Six: Richard's Story _____	267
Watching and listening: the Observer's perspective _____	268
Chapter Seven: A Thematic Analysis of the Observers' Narratives _____	285
1. Introduction _____	286
a. Pen Portraits: 'The Observers'. _____	287
Jennifer _____	287
Helen _____	288
Julia _____	289
Jason _____	290
James _____	291
Mike _____	292
Anna _____	294
2. 'Jumping through the hoops'. Observers' perceptions of the performativity of Observations _____	295
a. Playing the numbers game... _____	299
b. ...whilst "Ticking the boxes" _____	304
c. Relationships, Space and the Classroom _____	307
d. Importance of Mentorship in Observations: _____	313
e. Stress and workload: "Most of the time we are on our knees" _____	315
3. Tensions and Conflict within the Professional Habitus _____	318
a. FE's Constant "state of flux": hope/lessness _____	320
b. 'A fish out of water': feelings and identities _____	324
c. Avoiding fear of shame by being 'top of the game' _____	327
d. "Letting it go": surviving the conflict _____	331
4. Conclusions _____	333

Chapter Eight: Conclusions, Recommendations and Reflections _____	335
Summary of the Chapter _____	336
Overview of this study _____	337
1. Implications of the Research Outcomes for Policy and Practice _____	339
a. Research Question One: _____	342
b. Research Question Two: _____	346
c. Research Question Three: _____	349
d. Research Question Four: _____	352
2. Summary of Findings _____	355
a. Performativity & Embodied Emotional Labour _____	356
b. Critically Evaluating Fictionalisation _____	362
c. Reflections on the Interview Processes _____	365
d. Limitations of this Research _____	368
e. Weaknesses of this Research _____	370
f. Methods: Interpreting the Narratives: _____	372
g. Strengths of this Research _____	377
h. Interpretive Interactionism – what about the students? _____	378
3. Reflections and Suggestions for Further Research _____	380
My Final Thoughts _____	381
References _____	393
Appendix 1 _____	410
A Summary of some parallels and tensions between theories of psychoanalysis and Bourdieu’s ‘constructive constructionism’ within the context of this study.	410
Appendix 2 _____	414
Snapshot of extract from results of Pilot Study _____	414
Appendix 3 _____	416
Questions which helped guide the content of the interviews _____	416
Appendix 4 _____	417
Extracts from two transcripts and examples of the analytical processes _____	417
Appendix 5: Transcripts of two interviews _____	421
Alex (teacher) followed by Mike (manager) _____	421



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Note: The illustration in Chapter Three from 'Ethel and Ernest' (a biography of his parents) by Raymond Briggs, published by Jonathan Cape and used with the kind permission of The Random House Group Limited.



## **Glossary**

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
AoC	Association of Colleges
AP	Advanced Practitioner
Cert Ed	Certificate of Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfEE	Dept for Education and Employment
DfES	Dept for Education and Skills
DTLLS	Diploma of Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRC	European Social Research Council
FE	Further Education
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
HE	Higher Education
IfL	Institute for Learning
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
INSET	In service Education and Training
ITT	Initial Teacher Training

KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LEA	Local Education Authority
LLUK	Lifelong Learning UK
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PTLLS	Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector
SARs	Self-Assessment Reports
SMT	Senior Management Team
TLC	Transforming Learning Cultures (ESRC project)
UCU	University and Colleges Union
VET	Vocational Employment Training Scheme



# Abstract

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Teaching and learning observations (henceforth 'observations') are commonly used in a broad range of educational environments to assess teaching quality and support professional development. Research centred on observations in England's Further Education colleges (FE), suggests these strategies are often ineffective because of tensions between 'authentic' teaching and the inherent performativity required by some managerialist policies (Ball 2003). This psychosocial study draws on interpretive interactionism (Denzin 1989) to explore lived emotional experiences of FE staff involved in observations and perceptions of embodied 'performativity'.

My research involved in-depth semi-biographical interviews with FE staff (n=14) which explored emotional experiences of teaching and learning within the context of their roles as observer and/or observee. Using my personal reflections as an FE teacher, together with my creative writing skills, fictionalised accounts are presented to demonstrate anonymised consolidations of the participants' narratives (Sparkes 2002). Using conceptual tools from Bourdieu (1991) and the lens of psychoanalysis (Mollon 2002) I draw on Richardson's (1997) 'writing as a method of inquiry' and Ochberg's (2002) non-linear approach to data analysis to explore shared and disparate themes within the accounts, reflections and fictionalised texts.

Vocational and personal learning experiences are argued to form a fundamental aspect of the professional habitus of FE staff (James, Biesta 2007). Outcomes from my innovative approach, illuminates this interplay of factors, specifically within the affectivity in the performativity of observations. Hence these findings provide an

original contribution to knowledge in this area, by demonstrating how the potential tension in observations is situated in the *personal significance* of perceptions of an 'in/authentic self', rather than the performativity *per se*. Fictionalisation could be a useful tool to further explore lived emotional experiences of teaching and learning. Indeed, raising awareness of the perceived performativity intrinsic within the affectivity of observations could hold benefits for teaching practice more widely.

# Introduction

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Formal, numerically-graded observations of lessons are used in educational environments worldwide to measure and improve quality and/or support professional development. Teaching involves our unique (dis)embodied 'performativity' (Butler 1997) or 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983) which, during an observation is interpreted and judged by an Other – usually a line manager or an experienced teacher. Observations can be positive, for teachers who enjoy the opportunity to 'perform' their skills and/or engage in collaborative development. For others, affective reactions to a perceived managerial intrusion into their professional space can have a negative impact on their well-being and teaching practice and in turn, their students' progress. This is because, crucially, research suggests that if professional dialogue is absent during an observation, the opportunity for learning for both parties can be lost (O'Leary, 2012) since learning and reflexivity is difficult in an atmosphere without mutual respect (Knowles, 1985, Rogers, 1986, Schön, 1991). Indeed, arguably it is the intrinsic evaluative nature of observations that potentially leads to manifestations of emotions within and beyond the classroom because it can be perceived as punitive and bureaucratic in nature (Avis, 2005). Paradoxically however, often the emotional aspects of observations are ignored, perhaps because articulating feelings is considered a weakness or even dangerous territory (Lupton, 1998).

So, if research suggests that observations sometimes provoke strong emotions, what is the nature of these experiences and how can these be better understood to enhance teaching and learning practices? International research on observations has focused mainly on schools or universities (Hatzipanagos, Lygo-Baker, 2006). This research centres specifically on England's Further Education colleges (FE) which - as I explain - carries a complex political-cultural context in terms of staff and

students and space (James, Biesta, 2007). Partly because of this context, this research study draws on FE teachers' own narratives; an aspect often neglected in the research (Colley, James et al., 2007). It also draws on my own experiences as an FE teacher. My research methodology is logically situated in a qualitative approach sensitive to individual teachers' emotions; something quantitative methods arguably cannot offer (Silverman, 2001). For this reason, in-depth, semi-structured, biographical interviews (n=14) with FE teachers and managers were used to uncover their (often concealed) lived emotional experiences of observations. Importantly, this method links the research objectives with its underlying epistemology in placing the value of my own and my participants' views and experiences at the centre of the research (Wright Mills, 1959). The semi-structured interviews consisted of narratives from seven lecturers and seven managers<sup>1</sup> from FE institutions located in Central and Southern England. Some of the participants were known to me personally prior to the research<sup>2</sup> and therefore arguably this put the participants more at ease when talking about their emotional experiences in observations. Full details of the interviews are described in Chapter Three (Methodology). Recording individuals' stories, analysing and interpreting these for common and diverging themes has been claimed to be an effective way of illuminating insights into emotional experiences (Ochberg, 2002; Wolcott, 1994).

I am *not* attempting here to provide a comprehensive account of all the possible emotional aspects of observations. Nor am I engaging in the debate around types and contexts of emotions in teaching and learning more generally. Importantly, it has been suggested that there is a concealed or 'underground' nature to teaching and

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<sup>1</sup> As I explain, the terms 'lecturer' or 'teacher' and 'manager' can be ambiguous because of the often diverse roles and duties of FE staff.

<sup>2</sup> Where appropriate I have been explicit about these relationships in the 'pen portraits' at the beginning of each analysis section.



learning in FE in England (James, Diment 2003) that is under-researched. Because of the hidden nature of these roles and the emotions that surround them, I am therefore illustrating *my interpretation* of the complex and fluid nature of emotions experienced by teachers and managers within observations. The theoretical concepts drawn upon in this research broadly emerge from social constructionist and psychoanalytical perspectives. It is crucial that alongside these interpretations I constantly reflect on my own (concealed) presence within these data in an approach that is explicit about my own positioning and potential impact on the outcomes (Letherby 2000, Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992).

Drawing on specific examples from the interview data, I present elements of concepts from Bourdieu that provide an insight into the emotional impact of observations. I furnish these ideas with psychoanalytical notions; in particular, those from object relations theory, perspectives of which are centred on interpretations of the possible private or 'inner' meanings of these conceptual ideas rather than explicit linguistic or articulated issues. Finally, I bring these ideas together within an Interpretive Interactionist paradigm (Denzin 1989). I illustrate how it is crucial, for teachers and their practice, to raise awareness of the complex and fluid nature of the emotions that surround observations.

#### **a. What this Research Adds: implications for policy and practice**

The methodology and approach specifically examines the emotional experiences within the context of the interactions involved in an observation for FE staff. These emotional experiences are important because for complex reasons that I explain in Chapter One, they are often disregarded in favour of aspects of teaching and learning that more easily lend themselves to quantifiable measurement and assessment. As Bantock (1967) pointed out:

Emotion then, can manifest itself as an act or an inextricable part of an act of consciousness and not (simply) a suffering. Indeed, expression of emotion can reveal a 'truth' about a situation which rationality may ignore or, in extreme cases, even be trying to hide. (Bantock 1967 p. 73)

By focusing on the emotional experiences of FE staff, this research allows for insights into aspects of the potential deeper meanings of the embodied emotions involved within observations in an FE context. In this way, this research adds to a small but growing literature which aims to highlight the everyday practices and lived experiences of FE staff such as that by Avis (2007) and Colley (2006).

Outcomes from this research offer significant implications for policy and practice for FE observation procedures. This use of a psychosocial theoretical framework, together with an innovative methodology provides new interpretations which hold meanings and valuable sources of reflection on issues like our own presence in research, aspects of performativity within teaching practice and how our own learning experiences impact on our (teaching) lives. For instance, the use of metaphors could be a useful reflective tool within a dialogue about different teaching and learning approaches. It also offers insights into considerations of the interpretations of the performativity and emotional labour of FE staff. Using Bourdieu's theoretical concepts together with a psychoanalytical perspective that is influenced by existentialist thinking allows for sensitive interpretations of the performativity of emotion work that differs from one viewed as a commodity to be 'harnessed' - to one that includes compassion. An holistic, collaborative approach could be potentially valuable to all FE staff engaged in observations in sharing individual effective strategies in FE teaching and learning practice. A public dialogue could be presented through articulating these different voices (Robbins, in Grenfell, James 1998 p. 51).

Before outlining the specific boundaries and objectives of this research, it is first necessary to provide an overview of what exactly I am defining as a lesson observation and to summarise the context of this definition. However, this will be explored in full detail in Chapter One, Section 1 which follows.

### **b. Teaching & Learning Observations in FE: an overview**

Research has suggested that England's FE sector adds a crucial cultural context to the wider English education system (James, Biesta, 2007). The historical and economic reasons for this are fully explained in Chapter One, but for the purposes of highlighting how the emotionality of observations fits within this context, it is necessary to provide here a brief summary of the main issues.

Historically, the emphasis within FE has always been as provider of vocational courses such as apprenticeships. The hierarchy in terms of the perceived value of this education compared to academic qualifications has a long and complex history. The industrial decline of the 1970s led to government rhetoric which laid the blame for the shortage of skilled staff with FE institutions. Importantly, an aspect of this controversy centred on the fact that FE staff were often sourced from the industries in which they were teaching and hence many held no formal teaching qualifications. Inevitably, various government reports highlighted how FE lacked 'responsiveness' to the needs of the economy and that one reason was the poor quality of teaching (Unwin, 2003). Hence a recommendation called for all FE staff to obtain teaching qualifications and maintain professional development. This call was repeated in subsequent government papers and reports (Armitage, Bryant et al., 1999). Although significant progress has been made in achieving these objectives over the past thirty-four years, for complex reasons (outside the scope of this thesis) many

teaching staff in FE remain without formal teaching qualifications today (Lingfield, 2012).

The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 severed a link with local education authority controls. The impact of this 'incorporation' meant that colleges entered an era of 'new managerialism' where commercial factors were seen as one way of addressing the needs of an 'audit society' (Randle, Brady, 1997). Courses were pruned-down to those which could demonstrate profitability; classes grew in size and staff tasked with achieving 'performance indicators'. In short, although some cost-efficient savings were achieved, arguably quantity was sacrificed for quality (Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005). Colleges competed against each other for the same students, which inevitably led to closures and amalgamations. These dramatic changes continue today with the additional financial pressures from Public/Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) and government funding restrictions (University and Colleges Union, 2013).

With the economic and government pressures in mind and with additional commercial requirements present, calls for continuous improvement endure. Indeed, pressure from government targets and economic forces, impacts directly on the classroom. These pressures have forced observations in some FEs to appear more 'objective' (a problematic term that I discuss fully in Chapter Two Section 2a) to its Senior Management Teams (SMTs), leading sometimes to prescribed non-negotiable, judgemental 'pass or fail' criteria. This is in contrast to the developmental approach which seeks equality in the relationship between observee and observed, argued to be more frequently present in observations that occur in HE (Ewens, Orr, 2002). Although observations generally include those that occur between colleagues, the value of *these* sessions are at risk of being underplayed because of the focus on

numerical scoring used in managerial policies such as Self-Assessment Reports (SARs).

Furthermore, numerical judgements are often set using external criteria, often seen as non-negotiable. This was partly a result of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) report "*How Colleges Improve*" (2008), when the quantitative grading system of 1 – 4 (grade 1 being the highest attainable, defined as 'outstanding' and 4 being the lowest and termed 'inadequate') became contradictory when the grade depicting '*satisfactory*' (a grade '3') was deemed "*unsatisfactory*" (Ofsted, 2008) in a statement '*satisfactory isn't good enough*' (Ofsted, 2008 p. 13). This has since been taken-up by Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, who announced the re-labelling of '*Satisfactory*', to '*Requires Improvement*' (Ofsted 2012) and is emphasised in subsequent documents outlining the government's inspection framework (e.g. Ofsted, 2013). Despite the Kafkaesque linguistic confusion of these terminologies, debates around these definitions continue to appear off-limits to the FE staff caught up within them.

The combined pressures of commercial performativity, quality reporting, public-sector funding requirements means that the difficulties in defining and measuring the diverse and complex nature of teaching practice is often 'pasted over' (Coffield, Edward 2009). This has been emphasised by more recent burdens from the economic recession which inevitably bring risk of redundancies. Because of these different pressures, an holistic, qualitative and developmental approach is often dismissed in favour of a simplified 'tick-box' method in obtaining (arbitrary) quantitative statistics that are perceived to have significance and be comparable between teachers, departments, institutions and/or over time. There is plethora of research attempting to unravel some of the complexities involved in the subtle

nuances involved in ‘good’ teaching and learning, and sharing ‘best practice’ (Coffield 2000; Nias 1996; Strong, Gargani et al. 2011). However, because the apparently inherent ‘inauthentic’ nature or ‘performativity’ in observations differs from ‘everyday’ teaching practice (Page, 2011), observations have been claimed to be ineffective (Boocock, 2012). Research has suggested that the processes surrounding observations can be bureaucratic and reductionist in nature, viewed by some as divisive and filled with anxiety (O’Leary, 2012). But what exactly is meant by the terms ‘inauthentic’ and ‘performativity’ in this context? What are teachers’ perceptions of these terms and how are teachers’ and managers’ emotional experiences of observations related to them? These are the issues which remain unarticulated in the current literature and which deserve investigation.

### **c. Research Objectives: Setting the Perimeters**

As I outlined above, I am not attempting here to re/examine or evaluate the perceived ‘effectiveness’ of observations or to provide generalizable assumptions about observations in different contexts. Neither am I claiming one way of engaging in observations as ‘better’ than another or the difficulties in interpretations of Ofsted’s ‘best practice’ criteria. There is no space here to rehearse the more general debates that surround different definitions of emotion and the philosophical interpretations of physical versus internal feelings (see for example, Dunlop, 1984). As I outline in the chapter which follows, there is also an important literature around the study of professional identity, which although relevant, largely lies outside the limitations of this study. Instead, it is the *how* that is the subject of my investigation – the ‘how’ of the *processes* specifically within the *emotional experiences* of FE staff in England involved with observations. As I explain in detail below, the ultimate aim of this

research is to gain insights into these emotions through narrative data and the reflections on my own experiences in FE and the research process.

Avis and Bathmaker (2002, 2005) and others, note that FE is a particularly under-researched area of the educational sectors in England; similarly this has also been highlighted in Tertiary education sectors further afield (Hastings, 2008). For reasons that I will outline below, empirical data about the backgrounds, qualifications and experience of FE staff is difficult to obtain (James, Biesta, 2007). Indeed, researchers like Colley et al (2007) consider that research centred on the lived biographies, interactions and emotional experiences of FE staff is particularly sparse. My intention here is to address this imbalance; to bring some of the emotional experiences of FE staff to light and thereby provide new ways of understanding the complex nuances of teaching and learning in FE, within the context of observations. My reflections on this issue are relevant because I acknowledge the impact my own biography has on my motivations for teaching (as I explain in the following chapter). The overall objective is to provide new knowledge that contributes toward creating strategies and guidelines for observations in FE. This could improve pedagogical practice through the increased effectiveness of observations in FE, with wider implications across other educational institutions in other cultural contexts.

#### **d. Research Questions**

Having outlined the boundaries of this research and the objectives, below are the research questions which this research aims to address:

- What are the lived emotional experiences of FE staff within lesson observations?

- Research suggests that observations are ineffective because there is an inherent ‘performativity’ (O’Leary, 2012). What contributes towards interpretations of meanings of this ‘performativity’ for FE staff within observations?
- To what extent might personal learning experiences and biographies of FE staff contribute to better understandings of the emotions involved in an observation?
- How might these issues be addressed in order to improve teaching and learning in FE?

The extent to which I have been successful in addressing these research questions is explained in Chapter Eight, which also includes a reflection on the research methods, methodology and theoretical framework.

## **e. Outline of the Chapters**

### **Chapter One, Section 1: The socio-political context of FE**

In order to better understand the context of observations, in this first chapter I summarise the literature review of observations within the context and nature of FE in England; its socio-political history. I examine the political rhetoric which arguably manifests in pressure from authorities such as Ofsted forming managerial strategies such as observations. I also outline the philosophical and emotional issues intrinsic to observations that have been raised in the academic literature.

### **Chapter One, Section 2: The Researcher’s Position**

In ‘Ursula’s Story’ I outline my own position as researcher and FE teacher in relation to this socio-political context and the context of the research itself. Letherby (2013) and others have maintained how it is essential to acknowledge and reflect on the researcher’s positioning and motives in research of this kind, and I explain and



develop these issues further in the theoretical and methodological chapters that follow.

## **Chapter Two: The theoretical concepts**

I draw upon theoretical concepts in this thesis that are multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional. This is intentional for three reasons; mainly, the complexity of human emotions demands such an approach in that anything else would be disrespectful to the participants and viewed as reductionist. Furthermore, highly-acclaimed writers such as Bourdieu encouraged researchers to make *use* of their concepts *but not in isolation*. Lastly, as an experienced and qualified FE teacher myself, I form an integral part of this research. Like many of my FE colleagues, I have a diverse and multi-disciplinary personal and professional biography (see Chapter One). My presence within the research unavoidably adds a further dimension to the interpretations of the theoretical concepts and data I make use of here. Semi auto/biographical in its approach (explained in full in Chapter Three), my own presence in the study forms an integral part of both the formation of the data and the interpretation of the findings that evolve from it.

The theoretical framework used in this study is broadly poststructuralist in approach. The theoretical concepts drawn upon within this lens are set out in two sections. I begin by outlining how the concept of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) is relevant to this study, for instance in how teachers' emotions are 'managed' during an observation. Following-on from this, Bourdieu's conceptual tools such as field, game and habitus are explained within the context of this research. These are concepts which have been used extensively in educational research in recent decades (e.g. Reay 2004, Zembylas 2007a) however previously they have been largely unused in the specific application I have given them here. Using Bourdieu's concepts as a

foundation, in Section 2, I also draw on philosophical and psychoanalytical ideas. I also outline the limitations and contradictions of these conceptual tools. Due to my interpretation of the themes within the analysis of the data, I describe how notions of transference (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams et al., 1983) and shame (Mollon, 2002) are particularly relevant. Combining elements of Bourdieu's 'constructive constructionist' approach with psychoanalytical viewpoints, together with my own personal reflections through an Interpretive Interactionist lens, promotes an acknowledgement of the diversity of teachers' professional habitus. As I explain in the following chapter, these perspectives are largely absent from any debates concerning observation policies in FE.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

My methodology cannot be pigeon-holed into a specific typology. It has emerged and developed over the course of the research study in an intuitive, organic way in line with my knowledge of the subject area, the different methods available and the philosophical aspects of the study. In Chapter Three, I describe the rationale, background, methods including the findings from the pilot study. I also outline the ethical issues and guidelines that I adhered to. I have outlined some of the methodological possibilities of this research; examined each in turn and explained why these were or were not adopted. For example, the reasons I used in-depth interviews to investigate the phenomenon under investigation, rather than focus groups. I have also explained the parallels between my research and the philosophical framework – e.g. I am, in effect, becoming an 'observer' myself, and therefore there is a paradox between what I am researching (the impact of the observer) and HOW I am researching it. I explain the epistemological and ontological issues in this chapter. I also explain my reasons for using a fictionalised way of presenting my data – as a way of consolidating/anonymising the data and also

providing the opportunity of a further interpretation for the reader and writer. This is in line with the Interpretive Interactionist narrative approach which I have adopted for this research and presents a new way of creating an holistic 'case study' of the common and diverging themes from the data.

#### **Chapter Four: Monica's Story: the teacher's perspective**

This chapter presents a consolidated, fictionalised creative text which tells the story of a teacher involved in an observation, before, during and afterwards. As I explain in the methodology, I have used literary devices to create an atmosphere and context which attempts to combine the micro/macro elements of the tensions involved in observations; factors which are sometimes left unarticulated. I have fictionalised the data from a first-person perspective expressing views collected through the in-depth biographical interviews (for details of how these texts have been constructed see the Methodology chapter). In line with the poststructuralist perspective which believes there is no 'overall truth' (e.g. as a judgement of a lesson or in this research *per se*), this is a way of opening-up new interpretations and meanings which may be helpful to others and to me. This will be followed by the manager's/observer's perspective in Chapter Six.

#### **Chapter Five: Analysis of the Lecturers' Narratives**

As an introduction to this chapter, a brief 'pen picture' of each of the lecturer participants of the research is presented<sup>3</sup>. In this chapter, I return to the outline of the objectives and background to the observations in Chapter One. I link the recurring themes from teachers and their described emotional feelings before, during and after the observations and link these to the framework/methodologies described above. This was a continual process of analysis and re-analysis throughout the fieldwork.

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<sup>3</sup> I outline the limitations of these 'pen pictures' at the beginning of the two analysis chapters.

The emerging themes of lost opportunities at school, and other deeply personal learning experiences provide new potential interpretations of terms such as professional habitus (James, Biesta, 2007).

### **Chapter Six: Richard's Story: The Observer's perspective**

This chapter presents the same (imagined) lesson observation event but from the perspective of the observer, the manager 'Richard'. Like the previous story from the lecturer 'Monica's' perspective, it has been constructed from the issues raised in the narratives, consolidated from my interpretations and my experiences.

### **Chapter Seven: Analysis of the Managers' Narratives and fictionalised data**

This chapter begins with a brief outline 'pen picture' of each of the managers who were participants in this study. I follow this with a discussion of my interpretations of the findings from interviews with the managers who are involved with observations whilst considering the findings from the teacher's narratives discussed above. I also draw on my reflections and experiences, and those issues - both articulated and 'hidden' – raised in the manager's story in the previous chapter. In particular, I use phrases from the managers to convey their perspective of the hidden tensions within the emotional experiences of the observations that they describe.

### **Chapter Eight: Conclusions, Recommendations & Reflections**

In this concluding chapter, I return to the objectives and original research questions of this study. I determine that findings from this research support the outcomes from previous academic research in this area, and provide additional new knowledge in this area that could contribute to practical guidelines for a review of new observations policies. Specifically, the theoretical framework and methodology used, despite (or perhaps because of) profound conceptual differences to previous

research, provides new interpretations of the emotional lived experiences of FE staff in observations. For example, it provides some insights into aspects of professional habitus which arguably impacts upon teaching and learning practice. The weaknesses and limitations of this research are also examined in this chapter, along with my recommendations for future research in this area and its relevance to policy and practice. Finally, I reflect on the interview process, my personal learning journey and how my experiences may impact on my own research and teaching and learning practices.

# Chapter One: The Socio-Political & Personal Contexts

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## **Introduction and overview of the chapter**

As I explained in the Introduction, the process of investigating lesson observations in England's FE sector involves locating the contexts of these policies which, because they are focused on the emotions and within the context of an institution, are both political and personal (Wright Mills, 1959).

This chapter therefore forms two parts; in Section 1, I explain the historical development of observations in FE in England; the political and economic contexts. This will also include important elements of what contributes towards the culture of FE, for instance the development of bodies such as Ofsted in the quality inspection processes in FE. As I explain, these issues and perspectives form a crucial part of the performativity and inherent emotional experiences of the staff that this research seeks to investigate.

In Section 2, I employ a narrative style of writing to describe my own position within the research and therefore the rationale for its development. I present this as a fictionalised story. There are two reasons for taking this approach: a) as a way to introduce the concept of this style of writing to you, the reader, and b) as a way of communicating the atmosphere and subtle nuances that memories of emotions create. Fictionalisation is an effective way for new interpretations and understandings to be illuminated, as I explain in depth in Chapter Three, Section 4.

As I have hinted at above, throughout this chapter and those which follow, I explore the different styles and genres or tones of writing. Like the different timbre, pitch and intensity of a piece of music, these are essential elements of interpretations which aim to encourage interaction and engagement with lived emotional experiences.

Laurel Richardson (1997) illustrates how for her, writing can *itself* become a method

of enquiry, partly perhaps because it encourages “new ways of paying attention” (Ochberg, 2002). My intention is to use what Ellingson (2008) describes as ‘multigenre’ writings or contrasting ‘voices’ as a way of prompting different interpretations. For example, in considering the ethical guidelines of my research, I adopt a formal, academically ‘conventional’ tone and in other areas of the thesis (for instance in the fictionalised narrative), I utilise other, different writing-styles that allow me to access and articulate the subtle nuances of the narratives. In line with my theoretical approach outlined in the previous chapter, I suggest that the fluid and complex nature of these different voices reflects the different vulnerabilities of us all to the potential powerful possibilities of language (Butler, 1997). For Bourdieu (1991) this becomes ‘symbolic violence’ but between the lines, the silent or unarticulated parts of interpretations (both yours and mine) are the *unanticipated* elements of power. Importantly, rather than the tone, it maybe what is *not* said which becomes more significant to the individual than the words themselves (Butler, 1997).

The intrinsic heterogeneity that forms the culture of FE was described as unique by Huddleston and Unwin (1997). This heterogeneity does not just relate to FE’s diverse student populations, courses offered and community settings; it is a result of the diversity of the staff (Gleeson, James, 2007). Indeed, arguably the culture is embodied in the physical buildings in which the teaching and learning takes place. Personally, it is this particular aspect of FE that makes it such a demanding but rewarding place to teach. So, before explaining my own position within the research, in order to begin to unpack the complexities of observations, it is necessary to begin by summarising FE’s historical development and ‘inherent heterogeneity’ and how these issues are integral to the development of observations policies in FE. In setting



this scene I provide the contexts in which some of the emotions under investigation exist.

## **1. Observations in FE: a socio-political context in England**

Today, FE includes some three million students of all ages, enrolled on diverse types of courses which to varying degrees may be defined as 'academic' and vocational in nature in a wide range of disciplines. The broad range of students – and the appropriate staff to support them – is integral to the complexities of managing such a service. Indeed, as I explain in the following section of this chapter, at the beginning of my return to education, I experienced for myself the difficulties students had to overcome in order to achieve their learning objectives, both in terms of teaching quality and adequate learning materials. Others have highlighted how this educational sector has therefore suffered neglect in terms of investment from government (Ainley, Bailey, 1997) prompting Randle and Brady (1997) to famously refer to FE as the 'Cinderella service'.

FE's humble beginnings began in Edinburgh in 1821, when the first 'Mechanic's Institute' was opened. The increasing industrialisation of the UK had created a need for employees to improve their skills. Here was a place where fishermen could learn new navigation methods and labourers could become ship-builders (Huddleston, Unwin, 1997). During the 1800s these Institutes grew in number and proved particularly popular amongst the male middle-classes, many of whom saw new career opportunities for themselves in managing the increasingly successful cotton mills and ship-building industries. (Hyland, Merrill, 2003). Later, recognising the elements of poor literacy within its membership, the leaders of the 600+ Mechanics Institutes decided that, rather than addressing the root cause of this issue, it would

instead separate its programmes into either skills-based, vocational courses or academic scientific courses for the more highly-educated. This arguably formed the beginning of the division between the general and scientific educational provision that persists even today. Years later, this division was to be further embedded into our society and psyche, when the 1944 'Butler' Education Act separated the school provision into technical and academic.

By the mid 1960's there was an increasing 'binary divide' (Merrill, Hyland, 2003) between academic and apprentice-style educational provision and although the latter were expanded, they were arguably used by employers as a cheap source of labour dominated by construction and engineering industries (Armitage, Bryant et al. 1999). Youth unemployment rose to over two million by 1980 (National Office of Statistics 2013). FE inevitably therefore continued to expand; many were enrolled on Vocational Employment Training (VET) schemes, which proved to be a useful tool for government's Manpower Services Commission (MSC) which was set-up to supervise national employment training schemes under the Employment and Training Act (1974) (Armitage, Bryant et al., 1999). But importantly, FE also gained students from the adult population; changing sociological attitudes and economic pressures persuaded many who wanted a 'second chance' to re-visit educational opportunities (Randle, Brady, 1997). Indeed, rather than achieving the government target of a mainly young student population, by the end of 1980, the majority of FE students were mature part-timers (Huddleston, Unwin, 1997). This is important because many of the staff within FE have *themselves* benefited from FE provision – as mature students and/or within vocational or initial teachers' training (ITT) (e.g. Bathmaker, Avis 2005, Lucas 1996).

#### **a. FE's 'Responsiveness' to Political and Economic Needs**

Political educational perspectives fundamentally shifted during the 1970's world recession (Unwin 2003). In 1973, Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC) and consequently imports from countries outside the EEC significantly reduced (Hyland, Merrill 2003). The UK planned and developed substantial economic import and export infrastructures during this decade. However, spiralling costs arising from the 1973 Oil Crisis led to a sharp industrial decline and a shortage of skilled workers (Edwards, 1997). Discourses from world-wide governments (notably in the UK from Callaghan's Ruskin College speech, 1976) and from organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) blamed this perceived lack of responsiveness on the state-run education systems (Shilling 1989).

Education and training (of which FE was viewed as an integral part) had undergone a global change in being identified as 'the key' to a country's economic success (Brown, Lauder, 1996). However, despite the rhetoric that was repeated over the next forty years, FE was not to gain favour as the government's body of choice to deliver these requirements – and arguably, remains out of favour today (James, Biesta, 2007). In a follow-up to the Russell Report (1973) the Haycocks Report (1978) also began to lay the blame for the shortcomings of Britain's (un)skilled workforce at the gates of FE. When numbers of semi-skilled manufacturing jobs in the UK greatly reduced, newly emerging service-sector industries were simply not geared-up to provide training, which prior to this time was provided within the manual workforce in apprentice-type schemes (Edwards, 1997). Research in the 1980's suggested that, in the UK, there were five times more unskilled employees than skilled (Hampson 1988). Because FE staff frequently migrate from their (commercial) vocations, rather than formal teaching careers (Avis 2002, Bathmaker, Avis 2005) it was perhaps inevitable FE staff (many of whom had no formal teaching

qualifications) were specifically blamed for these perceived failures (Avis, 2002; Robson, 1998).

This was the backdrop to what Randle and Brady (1997) described as an era of ‘new managerialism’ which spread to all parts of the public sector in England during the early 1980’s. It took the form of policies taken from the commercial sector which were judged to be successful in terms of efficiency and profitability and therefore fully transferable (Ball, 2003). Seen within a global context, this was a response to how education has needed to adapt to the fundamental changes in our modern society lifestyles (Bauman, 2000; Leadbeater, 2000; Murphy, 2000). Advances in technology means industry increasingly seeks the ‘emotional labour’<sup>4</sup> (Hochschild, 1983) of staff, rather than semi-skilled agrarian or manual labourers (Castells, 1996; Featherstone 1991; Ranson, 1998). Because of the culture of FE within the education system, it is perceived that it should ‘respond’<sup>5</sup> to these changes - despite the sensitive and ambiguous nature of these skills and the teaching and learning that surrounds them (James, Biesta, 2007). Observations are integral to this issue because within this context they arguably have come to form the epitome of the performativity of managerialist strategies (Ball, 2003; O’Leary, 2012; Whitehead, 2005). In particular, they embody tensions within strategies that attempt to oversee, control and measure what is perceived as ‘best practice’<sup>6</sup> in the classroom (Ewens, 2001).

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<sup>4</sup> Explained in detail below.

<sup>5</sup> A debated term in education – e.g. how can an educational sector ‘respond’ to the diverse needs of government, economy, its students and staff? However, this debate lies outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> The commonly-used term ‘best practice’ in relation to observations is problematized as a fluid concept with infinite interpretations. Again, this debate is outside the scope of this thesis (for a valuable overview see Coffield and Edwards 2009).

## **b. Changes and Incorporation: Continuing Rhetoric, Limited Funding**

With the above historical development in mind, increasingly during the 1980s/90s, education was beginning to be seen as a product – not simply as a social good (Hyland, Merrill, 2003). It was as a result of this widening marketization, that the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) brought a new independence from local authority control for FE colleges which would become completely independent from local authority control with a board of governors responsible for its own employees. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) was formed which allocated and controlled funds and insisted on uniformity across all management budgets. However, allocation of this funding was not determined by quality assurance measurements like observations. Perhaps because there was no national strategy for ITT or CPD (of which observations are intrinsically a part), and this varied widely between (and sometimes within) colleges (Lucas, 1996). FE faced pressure from the outside world: not only did it shoulder the blame for previously not meeting the needs of industry, but now it was tasked with ambitious targets for increasing enrolments, becoming more ‘responsive’ to society and in turn becoming measurably ‘better value’ for the taxpayer (Randle, Brady, 1997).

In some aspects, FE did deliver its targets: for instance, over the four years from 1993-7, student numbers in FE increased by 33% and some inequalities in provision were addressed. However funding per student decreased by 21% (Ball, 2003), and pressures on staffing and resources meant that these increases may, in part, have accounted for the perceived ‘slipping standards’ reported by later Government inspectors (Ofsted, 2004). However, the criticisms of the actual *teaching practices* within FE from Ofsted (and other bodies) were arguably due to other complexities, for instance in whose interests were potential ‘improvements’ in teaching and

learning (James, Wahlberg, 2007)? And how were these *definitions* and standards changed over time (O'Leary, 2013)?

There were further pressures for the FE sector when 'incorporation' produced pressures to reduce costs. Many managers employed more part-time and sessional (hourly paid) and/or fractional staff which in itself has resulted in a significant change in college culture (James, Biesta, 2007; Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005). Arguably, because of the pressures of marketization and the need for more 'flexibility' in the FE workforce in responding to the ever-changing needs of policy, funding and student enrolments - by 1997, fifty-two per cent of FE staff were part-time (Hyland, Merrill 2003). Communication between FE staff became problematic when the practicalities of (paid) co-ordinated attendance at departmental meetings and training sessions grew increasingly difficult (Ball, 2003). This was exacerbated when students' timetables had to be manipulated in order to conform to the FEFC's new criteria of 'core' funding within the three specifically pre-determined dates or 'stages' of learning: 'entry', 'on-programme', 'achievement'. Avis (1996) reported that where courses had previously been run efficiently through strong team-support, this began to falter because part-time/sessional staff would often not be able to attend and/or not be illegible for paid attendance at meetings (Robson, 2005). Furthermore, prior to 2001, FE teachers were not required to hold a formal teaching qualification, and numbers of unqualified teachers in FE increased, reportedly reaching fifty per cent in some colleges (Ofsted, 2004). As each institution could now control its own pay grades and structures, further complexities arose as some staff migrated to colleges offering the best salaries, terms and conditions. Observations became in some ways the driving force of these changes, as I explain below.

### **c. New Labour's 'Social Inclusion' Agenda and FE**

With the landslide victory of New Labour in 1997, 'education' and 'social inclusion' become new Blairist buzz-words and thereby integral to FE's new delivery target. However, for some colleges, a decade of 'new managerialism' had created new problems. Significant growth in some FE colleges meant quality was sacrificed for quantity; classes became much bigger, courses had less 'contact' hours<sup>7</sup>, and the more labour-intensive pathways were swapped for those that were more wide-ranging or combined two courses into one. Research at the time suggested that FE managers (often drafted-in from commerce) became seemingly preoccupied with the commercial aspects of education as colleges were forced to compete against each other and against private training providers for the same students (Ball, 2003; Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005). Inevitable tensions arose between managers who had commercial sector backgrounds (often informed via freelance consultants) and teaching staff with vocational experience (Randle, Brady, 1997). Throughout the 1990's, educational management centred on striving for efficiency, through the increased use of perceived scientific, quantitative approaches to measuring and controlling workforce output through 'Key Performance Indicators' (KPIs). Political policies evolved from these contexts that aimed to measure 'successful learning' via performance indicators including observations which aimed to assess teaching competences. As I will explain, the *performativity* is an important concept here, as it highlights the complexities inherent in notions of pedagogy where the subtleties and complexities inherent in individual learning are arguably impossible to accurately 'measure' (Gleeson, James, 2007; Whitehead, 2005).

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<sup>7</sup> Contact hours are strictly-enforced measurement of minimum time limits for teaching or 'delivery' of an element of a course specified by the exam boards.

As a result of the changes described above, not least the pressures of new managerial procedures like observation policies, difficulties emerged for staff on micro and macro levels; in the classroom and outside. In particular, tensions were emphasised between individuals' perceptions of 'competency' and 'professionalism' as adhering to managerial constraints - compared to a view of professionalism as agents in control of their role (Gleeson, James, 2008). Furthermore, research has suggested that for some FE staff, their identities are closely wrapped-up with their (previous) vocational identities – rather than primarily as a 'teacher' (Bathmaker, Avis 2005; Clow, 2001; Lucas, 1996; Robson, 1998). With this in mind, it is interesting to note that some lecturers feel obligated to spend more time on perceived bureaucratic paperwork, compared to the perceived 'real value' of their roles i.e. time spent supporting the learning of their students (Colley, James et al. 2007; James, Biesta 2007). Reflecting on my own experiences, and confirmed by Whitehead (2005) lecturer's duties now include creating entirely new courses, marketing them, interviewing potential students (and their parents), running 'Taster -' or 'Open Days' and more. In particular, validation of any 'new' courses by examining authorities means considerable time is spent writing reports and completing forms by already over-stretched staff and with limited resources (James, Biesta, 2007). The somewhat inevitable result of these changes led to significantly less time in the classroom. However, rather than sacrifice the personal reward implicit in teaching and learning, research has suggested that some FE teachers take these aspects of their role 'underground' (James, Diment, 2003), for example through investing private time and money into interactions with their students. This is an issue I return to in Chapter Two.



In 2001 New Labour set up a new quango: 'The Learning and Skills Council' (LSC) which replaced the FEFC and the TECs and would oversee the planned re-building projects and the 'train to gain' qualifications. The student profile in FE was changing: in 2003, students over 24 years of age and studying part-time had grown to make up over 73% of enrolments (Hyland, Merrill, 2003). FE colleges were also now focused on strategic partnerships with HE institutions (Boocock, 2012). These changes and partnerships had many positive benefits to students and institutions as a whole such as a more consistent level of provision in terms of teaching-time and assessments (Robson, 2005). However they perhaps inevitably provided new internal difficulties. The division between HE and FE staff was often more than simply the physical location of the teaching rooms or campus. In my experience, supported by research, the perceived hierarchy of HE teaching compared to FE lecturer status sometimes contributes towards complex emotions in the staffroom, for instance in the form of resentment over salary or terms and conditions (Gray, 2010).

Teaching staff were at that time, required to hold a formal qualification, endorsed by FENTO (Armitage, Bryant et al., 1999). It was hoped that the professional qualifications would help to increase the perceived 'low status' of the profession (Robson, 1998) – something that, as I explain below – also had implications for self-identity and self-esteem of FE staff. However, the formal teaching qualifications were heavily criticised, perhaps because the professional standards were reduced to vocational, competency-based units - the pass criteria of which was similar in style to an NVQ (Avis, 2002). It was seen that a more reflective, values-based, professional teaching qualification was required for improving the professional practice of FE teachers (Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) ) 2004); one that was more sensitive to the diversity of FE teachers' needs (James, Biesta, 2007).

It is interesting to note the parallels between the perceived weaknesses of the assessment of these professional standards with the shortcomings of the 'tick-box' assessments which have become so controversial in observations<sup>8</sup>.

#### **d. Assessment and Ofsted in Further Education**

Prior to the government policy changes (summarised above) in FE that led to their incorporation in 1992, most observations were conducted as part of ITT or as part of a new teacher's probationary period (Cockburn, 2005). With the introduction of a more managerial approach, driven by definitions and criteria set by Ofsted, the focus was now on performativity. However:

Performativity is not designed to celebrate, or indeed value, the unique qualities, particular enthusiasms and subjective approach of the educational professional. It celebrates that which can be measured, weighed and 'objectively' assessed. So, lecturers find themselves having to be increasingly concerned with ensuring the paper trail works, rather than the learning does (Whitehead, 2005 p. 17).

Research suggested these pressures conflict with views of many FE staff who valued teaching because of its autonomy and spontaneity, which some propose is founded on the 'cultural norms' of professional isolation and scarce resources (Cockburn, 2005). This is reflected in teachers' perceptions of how their work is founded on creative empathy and intuitive artistry (Colley, 2006; Nias, 1996; Schön, 1991; Whitehead, 2005). Indeed, some FE staff in this study (including myself) prefer

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<sup>8</sup> Over recent years, more FE lecturers are now qualified teachers than ever before (Anon. 2012). However, this requirement has since been rescinded on a national level, leaving it up to individual institutions to set out qualification criteria for their teaching staff (Lingfield, 2012).

to define themselves as 'teachers' rather than 'lecturers'; job titles may represent different aspects of complex pedagogical roles.

In relation to observations, it is important to note that Cockburn (2005) and others (e.g. Boocock, 2012; James, Biesta, 2007) criticise a 'tick-box' approach to assessment and sharing of 'best' teaching practices. Similarly, research by Copland (2010) also suggests these issues are the cause of tensions within observations in ITT contexts. More specifically, she argues (in line with others such as Jones (1993) that open dialogue through joint preparation and participation in pre-briefings and feedback meetings provide enhanced opportunities for sharing the contexts of the classroom and thereby developing teaching practice. Hence observations which omit this important element are argued to be inadequate in addressing the complexities inherent in FE cultures (O'Leary, 2013). Observations have therefore understandably become closely linked to issues related to 'deprofessionalisation' which, as I described above, became a common theme in FE research during the mid to late 1990's onwards. The characteristics of this 'new managerialist' approach – symbolised in policies such as observations - was seen to be attempting to reduce teaching professionals to 'performative automatons' (Ball, 2003).

The implementation of measures designed to improve teaching and learning provision in FE may appear to be a valid response to the needs of this growing sector. However tensions grew between (past) staff practices, the value placed on learning and institutional pressures to be seen as 'responsive':

Performativity, through its chain of targets and accountability, operates within a 'blame culture' where accountability becomes a means by which the institution can call to account its members. In many respects performativity is

reminiscent of Fordist work relations in as much as the worker is tightly surveilled, with attempts to render transparent the details of practice. (Avis, 2005 p. 212)

Unquestionably, the dynamics of the FE classroom fundamentally changed: the observation now carries an implicit judgement about competence in the form of a formally-graded assessment (O’Leary, 2012). Hence it has been claimed that there is a paradoxical nature to concepts of professionalism in FE (Gleeson, James, 2007). The personal values, autonomy and artistry involved in the skills of FE teaching juxtapose against pressures for more ‘objective’ quantifiable measures of what is perceived as ‘best practice’ (Cockburn, 2005). Because concepts of competence and integrity are intrinsically linked, the association between surveillance of teaching practice and being seen as a novice (by the self and/or an Other) ‘unprofessional’ or even ‘incompetent’, understandably leads to feelings of anxiety (Cockburn, 2005; Page, 2011). Importantly, these risks exist not only on an individual level, but on an *institutional* level. ‘Failure’ may lead to a perception of humiliation as a result of incompetence, rigorous re-assessment, reduced funding and eventually closure.

In 2007, arguably in response to the Foster (2005) report’s recommendations, the ALI and Ofsted were merged. SMTs in FE felt compelled to respond to the requirements of Ofsted (Robson, 2005). In part this meant adhering to the Ofsted criteria of graded observations, which in turn contributed to elements of funding determined via quality standards. However, in relation to the practicalities of observations, neither the Institute for Learning (IfL) nor the Association of Colleges (AoC) offered any specific recommendations for colleges’ observation procedures. Many institution’s policies have therefore evolved and developed over time in

response to demands from Ofsted. Ofsted's report "*How Colleges Improve*" (2004) changed the quantitative four-point grading system making the grade '*satisfactory*' (3) "*unsatisfactory*" (Ofsted, 2008). More recently this has been redefined as '*requires improvement*' (Ofsted, 2012). The above illustrates an underlying binary divide in the language used in Ofsted reports, which wrongly emphasises a distinction between 'success' and 'failure' within the FE sector. "Best practice also implies there is only one approach which, if used, will solve any difficulties" (Coffield and Edwards, 2009 p. 375). Hence applying national criteria for arbitrary measures which contribute towards these definitions is not helpful (Coffield and Edward, 2009). Particularly when considering the diverse nature of the culture of FE, as I have begun to outline above.

The objective of the observation is therefore perceived as having an audit function allowing analysis towards identifying observable 'strengths and weaknesses' in teaching practices, as perceived by the observer. It is thereby often used as a quality assurance *and* quality improvement management system rather than primarily as a staff development tool (Cockburn, 2005). The pressure for these quality procedures comes largely from Ofsted inspections which have carried an implicit refrain of 'continuous improvement' (Ofsted, 2011) over the backdrop of the historical context I describe above. Ofsted's graded approach has debatably evolved to *defining* standards rather than inspecting them (O'Leary, 2011). Boocock (2012) explains the implications for the Ofsted criteria being used in observations in his case-study research:

To achieve a higher grade in the observation process lecturers were required to deliver lessons in which behavioural (i.e. 'measureable') learning objectives were linked to student-centred learning opportunities [...] which were

differentiated [via] learning styles (e.g. the Kolb learning inventory), learning difficulties and levels of literacy and numeracy. Crucially, such differentiation was expected to lead to the achievement of the learning objectives as evidenced within planned learning checks, such as quizzes...” (Boocock, 2012 p. 5)

Because of the power of bodies such as Ofsted in terms of funding and league tables, SMTs perhaps understandably take a literal translation of the Ofsted terms and criteria for observations, rather than create bespoke self-assessment strategies sensitive to the unique cultural contexts of the individual colleges and/or their staff. Research suggests that to remain effective, feedback to any evaluative assessment (whether formative or summative) must be provided as soon as possible after the event (Hammersley-Fletcher, Orsmond, 2005). However feedback in some observations is delayed by days or weeks and sometimes retained altogether for the exclusive use of management (Cockburn, 2005). The reasons for this are often based on research that suggests that formative feedback is often ignored or afforded less significance in the presence of a formal graded outcome (Ecclestone 2003; Race, Brown et al., 1996). This could be because “most people associate assessment with its summative purposes and tend to overlook its formative potential” (Ecclestone, 2003 p. 19). This could be seen as ironic when it is Ofsted’s recommendations which have arguably driven the need for a quantitative outcome – as opposed to a more formative, developmental approach (Robson, 2005). Whilst acknowledging the integral influence of Ofsted on the development and perception of observations in FE, the complexities of this debate lies outside the scope of this study which focuses on the emotions involved in non-Ofsted observations. Observers in these situations could be peers, but are perhaps more likely to be line

managers, advanced practitioners (APs) or SMT members of the college. I have had experience of being observed by my line-manager and others; however personally, I have had no direct experience of *conducting* these types of observations. This is partly the reason I explore in this research, the emotional experiences of a *range* of FE staff involved in observations (explained in full in Chapter Three).

#### **e. Graded Observation as Summative ‘Assessments’**

Because of their own experiences, observers may be aware of the potential symbolic power of the numerical grade and its ability to conflict with the teachers’ perception of their professional identity (O’Leary, 2012). Because of this, often an intrinsic part of the training required to be undertaken by observers involves consideration of the sensitivities of providing feedback - which should contribute to individuals’ reflections on the session. However, no matter how sensitively handled, feedback can sometimes (perhaps understandably) trigger defence mechanisms in (both) individuals which may inhibit an open professional dialogue about the content of the lesson (Cockburn, 2005). This aspect is central to my investigation into the lived emotional experiences of individuals involved with observations in FE. Closely linked to this psychosocial perspective are the difficulties inherent in the subjective judgement within a lesson observation. These are noted by Cockburn (2005) as being because “the presence of an observer is thought to change the situation and make the behaviour of the observed contrived and artificial” (p. 377). Furthermore, as O’Leary (2011) notes:

By attaching a grade to the subjective judgement of the observer, people are seduced into believing that such judgements have greater objectivity and authority than they can, in reality, claim to have. (O’Leary, 2011 p. 8)

These complex pressures from the many different areas of historical, economic and managerial factors have meant quality assurance measurements like observations must be seen to be ever more 'objective'. However, it appears that the elusive 'objectivity' is rarely problematized as a definition on a practical level within Ofsted reports (Ofsted, 2013) or FE colleges' own documentation (Ofsted 2008). Perhaps partly as result of the increased commercialisation and marketization of FE discussed above, together with SMTs recruited from commercial sectors, it appears (from personal correspondence, experience and reading college and Ofsted reports etc) that often 'objectivity' in this context is perceived to be accomplished through being detached or 'dispassionate'. As Lupton (1998) points out, often this is because emotions are viewed by some as the antithesis to logic.

Putting aside for a moment the problematisation of the term 'objective' (discussed in detail in Chapter Two), some ways in which SMTs have sought to make observations more 'objective' have been to ensure the observer is unknown to the teacher prior to the observation. Or that the observer has no experience in teaching the observed subject area (Cockburn, 2005). This has parallels across educational sectors, where Hatzipanagos and Lygo-Baker (2006) found that observations in HE were often conducted by individuals outside the lecturer's area of expertise.

Sometimes, the observer is not a qualified teacher. Crucially, the observer may also lack the *context* of the teacher, learners or the lesson (O'Leary 2013, Edgington 2013). In this way, some SMTs see the observer as remaining 'detached' from the teaching by observing a lesson unannounced (e.g. within a set time-frame of one week's timetabled lessons). Although for some teachers this perceived anonymity may be helpful in what is perceived to be a judgemental situation, the danger of this detachment maybe to de-humanise (Linstead, 1994) as this approach inevitably



leads to arbitrary judgements based only on the externally observable (Bourdieu, 1984). This can arguably lead to assumptions on behalf of the observer (Avis, 1996).

Levels of stress and anxiety in teaching professions are the highest of any comparable job, with FE teachers *in particular* being subjected to longer teaching hours, fewer holidays, lower salaries and poorer working conditions than any public sector teaching position in the UK (James, Gleeson 2007; Robson 2005; University and Colleges Union 2009). Perhaps understandably, staff turnover is high, with many teachers leaving after the first year (Boocock, 2012; Robson, 2005). The perceived unending bureaucracy of department meetings; observations; Ofsted; agendas of SMTs all add to the on-going stressors and potential 'burnout' (Stoeber, Rennert 2008). Research suggests that one of the main causes of this tension is because lecturers often felt they did not have enough space to exercise pedagogic judgement (Colley, James et al., 2007). No wonder then, that with observations reportedly adding further to this anxiety, they have been described as a common 'flashpoint' in many colleges (O'Leary, 2011). This is arguably because rather than being developmental, observations represent for some a symbolic representation of a 'deficit' model; an inherent risk of judgement as an 'incompetent teacher' – and the consequences this label may carry. Importantly, this should be seen in the context of the wider accountability agenda within education systems and indeed, since the de-professionalisation of FE described above, the pressure for more accountability arguably drives the quantitative evidence of graded observations that it is perceived Ofsted require. This has contributed to the perception of an 'audit culture' that for many FE staff has evolved into a 'tick-box exercise' (O'Leary, 2011).

Cockburn (2005) notes that, partly as a result of 'The Hawthorne Effect' - which emphasises the contrived nature of a performance where an individual is being

'tested' - there is an inherent power relationship within an observation. In light of this, O'Leary (2012) uses a Foucauldian lens to illuminate the apparent ever-present 'pan optical', managerialist approach to observations - arguing it is one of domination, not enablement. The tensions between the performativity of teaching and learning and the complex nature of the emotional labour involved, is summed up in a comment from Ball (2003): "...beliefs are no longer important – it is *output* that counts. Beliefs are part of an older, increasingly displaced discourse". (Ball, 2003 p. 233).

The conflict between the needs of management in adhering to the pressures from economic and political quarters, versus the creative 'hidden' nature of teaching and learning in FE is integral to the performativity of observations. However these debates leave little space for a deeper understanding of the *how and why* of individuals' emotional lived experiences of observations. In the research presented here, it is these affective elements of observations and their interconnectedness with more macro-level factors that is the subject of investigation. In Chapter Two I explain the theoretical framework that is used to bring meaning to these issues and the parallels to the research topic under investigation. First however, in the second part of this chapter, I turn to a different style of writing; one which allows me to 'tell my story' and the story of the motives and rationale for this research. I begin with a memorable situation from my childhood.

## 2. The Researcher's Position: 'Ursula's Story'

"She's called Missus Turtle 'coz she taught-us" "Ha, ha, ha!" went the often repeated joke in the playground, accompanied by someone performing her bent posture and her cross-looking face. Of course, if Mrs Turtle ever overheard us making fun of her, the repercussions would have been dire. We all lived in constant fear of Mrs Turtle and even though the playground was a sad, depressing outside space, overshadowed by the winding-towers and slag heaps of the nearby colliery, we were always glad to escape her oppressive classroom. This primary school was attached to a larger secondary school, and watching the older kids, smoking or snogging the other side of the wire fence provided some welcome diversions.

The year was 1979, and having moved around the UK frequently all of my short life, my only consolation was the knowledge that inevitably we wouldn't be here long. Unusually though, there was a reason for this latest move; my father – apparently disillusioned with his factory work - had undertaken a degree as a mature student at a nearby university. A recent move had been from an unfurnished three-bedroom house to fully-furnished, low-season holiday let, which forced us to sell, give-away or leave behind almost all of our (humble) possessions.

Mrs Turtle didn't believe me when I told her (probably with too much pride in my voice) that I had already completed that particular 'reading scheme', and that my previous school had allowed me to be a 'free reader'. It was true, even at that young age I can remember being an avid reader; hungry for anything that was remotely interesting on anyone's bookshelf.

"Ok, then, I'll test you" Mrs Turtle said sternly, in her too-loud voice (was that deliberate or was she slightly deaf?) so that the whole class went deathly silent and turned their heads to see the latest exciting drama unfold. Here was the posh new-

girl (“*who does she think she is?*”) getting her talking-to. Good. “*Here is the green book. What happens in this story?*” she asked, flicking to a random page. I feel my face go bright red, and sense the whole class waiting for my answer. I couldn’t remember. I racked my brain to think of what that particular story contained but my mind was blank. In hindsight I realise now why I quickly forgot the childish stories in these ‘set’ books. They were prescriptive and predictable; written to a template, to introduce children to new words (most of which I already knew). The stories (especially in those naïve days) were stereotypical, unimaginative and I found them infuriatingly boring. I could have explained what was happening in C.S. Lewis’ ‘The Silver Chair’ (the book I was reading at the time at home) in great detail - if I’d been brave enough. A moment of silence and then “*Mmm thought so*” mumbled Mrs Turtle. I was humiliated. Now, “*if you think you’re so clever young lady, what does **this** word mean?*” Her witch-like finger with long yellow nails (was she a smoker?) pointed at the word “*browse*”, and of course I knew what it meant. But the words just wouldn’t come out of my mouth. Fear of shame paralysed me. I knew it was an important moment and I wanted to be able to prove to Mrs Turtle that I could be of help to her, that I *was* clever and had “*lots of initiative*” (my previous teacher had written that on my last report – I looked it up in the dictionary and felt very proud). Because my mouth had somehow seized-up I decided I could *perform* the meaning of this word instead and looking at the books behind her desk I wanted to say “*browse is what I’m doing now – looking at your bookshelf*” but inevitably the words didn’t come and she (understandably) misread my change in body-language and apparent lack of attention to her as insolence. I was banished to the back of the class and told I would not be allowed to take part in the next lesson. Instead, I had to start at Book Number One and write a short summary of each of the stories in each of the seven books in the coloured series (over 50 stories in total) “*so that I would*

*learn not to lie again*". The memory of these emotions resonate with the topic of this research, as will become clearer later.

I remember it being cold in our 'new' house, not helped by the lack of furniture and carpets caused by another move from the fully-furnished holiday let (inevitable, now it was Spring) to an empty, dirty council house . There was no cooker (and no money to buy or run one). My mum cooked everything in one blue enamel saucepan on the top of an old cream-coloured paraffin-heater; one of those tall ones that had a rectangle window where you could see the little blue flame. When there were no 50p's for the meter everyone had an early night. But my memories weren't all like this. There are lots of happy ones. These mainly revolve around music, which was always an intrinsic part of our household. We sang carols around the piano at Christmas and practiced various different musical instruments together.

Walking upstairs to bed in that house, I touched the large black cracks in the white plaster, forking out like a photographic negative of lightning. Men from the council had inspected the house with gauges and measuring sticks and stuck lots of little rectangles of glass over the cracks – like the slides my brother would later use under his 'boys' microscope. Apparently a mile underneath us, were disused coal seams and mine-shafts, now flooded, and some of the houses in our row were slowly sinking. Each night, the thought of the house falling into the abyss below haunted me. Each morning I carefully examined each piece of glass, in-case they had snapped under the pressure of the seemingly moving, groaning house.



The lane from our village to the local colliery before it was closed down in 1986

Strangely, there was a familiarity about this scenario. An earlier house we had lived in was balanced strategically on the edge of a cliff, at the end of a row of houses. The view of the sea from the bedroom window was fabulous, but over the years similar views from other windows had vanished, as sea erosion caused each house to slip over the steep chalk edge. We were next in line, and my dad joked that was why the rent was cheap. But when we walked along the shingle beach at the foot of the cliffs below, we'd sometimes find pieces of red brick, washed round and smooth by the relentless waves. I stood on a groyne and looked up at our home and wondered...

My only coat at that time was a long black, woollen cape that I'd been given (or my mum had found at a local jumble-sale) that had a black, fake fur collar and a large single button: a representation of an old Roman coin (picture of it below):



Oh how I loved that coat's warmth! In hindsight, that cape was probably why my classmates thought I might be 'posh' (if only they knew)! I was oblivious to any perceived class differences then as I threw the coat over my bed with the pile of books from school with Mrs Turtle's instructions.

That weekend I read and read and read. Day and night through all seven large, differently-coloured, hardback books and when I finished each story I wrote one page (as instructed) about it. I had a lot of paper and my hand ached. I was driven mostly by the anger at myself for not being able to speak-up; but also by the unfairness of it. I felt ashamed but was confused as to the reasons. But perhaps the thing that most upset me at the time was not being understood and (a fear of) not being recognised.

I can't remember what Mrs Turtle's reaction was when she saw that I had completed that task over a weekend, when she probably hoped it would keep me occupied for weeks. (I expect it raised more than an eyebrow in the staff-room that day). I think that is significant: my motivation wasn't (and isn't) others' response or admiration. Often it's the sense of achievement alone that drives me to complete a task. The passage of time may have slightly skewed these events in my memory, but in

essence they are accurate. This was a *critical event* (Brookfield 1986) in my childhood learning and one that formed the foundation of my later emerging motivations for being a teacher. So when I'm faced with a particularly tiring day, or an especially needy student, I remember myself, all those years ago. I wonder what a difference it may have made to my life if I'd been given the support and encouragement that surely every young child deserves. Mrs Turtle 'taught us' very little – but she taught me the importance of *not* becoming a teacher like her.

### **Pink for girls and...**

A few years later I was in the 'top' stream in a Catholic Comprehensive school. Unusually, I was to spend five whole academic years here (but moved to many different houses during this time). Sadly, throughout my time at this school, not one teacher stands out in my mind as being supportive, understanding or academically challenging.

In contrast to my poor experiences, my brother was sent to the local Grammar school. At the time, I was totally perplexed at this. I knew that the school I attended didn't offer A levels and that the only way of achieving my growing ambition of teaching (now, at last, outwardly expressed) was to transfer to the Girls' Grammar Sixth Form.

Symbolically, my brother came home from his first day at school showing-off his Latin text-book. I noticed that, underneath his name, he had misspelt the word 'grammar' on the front cover of his workbook and poked fun at him for it. Later, I secretly cried about the significance of that small misspelt word. Why should my brother be favoured by my parents and given an opportunity he neither wants nor (so I thought) deserves? The answer was simple enough (but beyond my



comprehension then); I was female, and (as far as my parents were concerned) I would inevitably leave school, get married, have children and therefore not need any 'proper education'. It was unnecessary and inconvenient to provide me with any extra help or financial investment. My brother's extensive uniform was already too expensive for a family on benefits to afford. Much later these issues fitted together like a jigsaw when I read the seminal work of Paul Willis (1977).

My love of music moved my heart and body. I remember being recognised by a dance teacher as different to the others – again I was 'plucked out' to use one of my participant's terms, I collected many awards, achieved distinctions in exams and was often entrusted to dance in solo performances. But, like other teenagers, my commitment to music and dance waned (Daykin 2008). Ballet and tap shoes cost money. As my parents didn't drive, travelling to and from rehearsals and performances (often outside the sporadic bus services to our rural ex-mining village) was difficult.

My priorities changed during the last few months at school. I made lots of friends, discovered boys (and met my future husband), and enjoyed a social life that was exciting and at times risky. One thing I didn't give-up though was the voluntary music teaching I had taken on during my lunch hours. I found it very rewarding to be helping younger students with their music lessons and my students and I had lots of laughs together – especially when the exams were over. I was desperate to escape the poverty that seemed to surround me, both inside the council house and in the village as a whole, which was struggling to survive after the closure of the collieries a few years before.

## **Educating Rita**

Virtually every spare hour at that time was donated to my part-time job as a nanny and cleaner. This was a local family which for me opened-up a whole new perspective on life. Middle-class social differences that, until then, I had only read about in books, were personified in their language and lifestyle. In this ten-bedroomed Georgian manor house, set in acres of grounds, I learned about the etiquette (for example) of eating correctly (with more than one set of knives or forks) how to make a bed with the cotton corners folded neatly (no sign of any old coats for blankets here) and when the children were tucked-up in bed and their prep' school uniforms neatly ironed for the next morning, I '*browsed*' their seemingly endless bookshelves which (alongside the Wisden annuals) were full of enticing new stories to read.

This job was a trade-off: I gave-up most of my school-work (hence my low O' level results) and some of my social life; but I had my own income that would buy me independence. In the beginning this was just a bolt for my bedroom door (hammered into the doorframe with the heel of my stiletto shoe), but eventually (with the help of my now husband), I passed my driving licence and bought my own car (a car may be unsurprising to most, but coming from a family where neither parent had a driving licence, this was an astounding accomplishment). But it was more than that, I had new aspirations provided by my employer, who appeared to trust and encourage me more than any other.

But my hopes would take a long time to materialise. Financial pressures meant that, for the next ten years or so, after leaving college, I was employed in unrewarding jobs. Customer service, telephone sales, accounts, insurance, travel agent, merchandising; you name it, I've probably done it. Some jobs lasted two weeks,

others a few years. None were challenging and rarely did I have a manager who invested any time into discovering my true potential. Travel kept me sane. By this time I had become estranged from my parents when my boyfriend and I decided to buy a house together before getting married. Every year we visited at least one different country including New Zealand and Canada. Our private wedding took place in the USA. Discovering and researching new cultures and meeting new people is something I always find fascinating and rewarding.

### **Beginning my academic journey**

When my husband was offered a new job which involved a re-location to another part of the country, this seemed a good opportunity to begin a journey to a more fulfilling career. When we settled in our new home, I enrolled onto an evening course in psychology whilst working full-time in a near-by insurance office. I had fun conducting experiments such as the '*Mozart Effect*' on my fellow work-colleagues in our lunch hours. Our tutor was enthusiastic but I frequently felt disappointed by her apparent lack of knowledge when quizzed on things outside the syllabus. (Later I developed first-hand experience of the difficulties these sessional FE tutors face). By the end, I was hungry for more learning and convinced that I could progress further.

In 2000 I enrolled as a part-time university student. After the first two years I was disappointed with the English department who I perceived as somewhat unsupportive to 'mature' students. I also suspected that I might actually *be* an '*Epsilon-Minus Semi-Moron bred for menial labour*' (Huxley 1932) but needed to know more about the social context - the how and why. So I migrated to the Sociology department where I felt much more 'in-tune' with the academic nature of the modules they offered. The call-centres I had worked in provided an excellent illustration of a Foucault's 'Panopticon' in 'post-modern Fordism', and in my sales

jobs I performed a type of 'emotional labour'. For each module I added context to my learning from my working-class background and this further emphasised for me the importance that context has to our learning process (Knowles, 1985; Mead, 1969).

During my studies, a job opportunity arose at my university that suited my administration skills and experience. The potential to save valuable travelling time to/from evening classes was too good to miss. I applied and got the job. Working full-time whilst studying was extremely challenging at times, but each module of the degree was fascinating and assignment deadlines were met and new ones replaced them each term. My confidence in this new academic environment grew.

Soon I transferred to an administrative position within the university's medical faculty. Within this work experience, together with modules I was completing at the time on the 'Sociology of Health and Illness' and the 'Sociology of Education', my previous life developed new meaning. For instance, tragically, my brother-in-law was the victim of a road accident that left him a tetraplegic aged only 21, and reading Michael Oliver's (1996) seminal book helped me make better sense of his situation and the challenges it posed. I also realised that I had been a victim of an embedded social structure that had gone virtually unquestioned (by me at least) for most of my life. I felt pleased that I was beginning to climb out of my 'haze' of naivety and into some kind of new awareness. However, I was acutely aware of how others - some very close to me - were prevented from achieving their potential simply because of the language they used or that others used to negatively label them. My ambitions towards teaching took on a new meaning in this light.

### **Twist of fate or irony?**

The polarising consequences of the English 'eleven-plus' exam haunts many adults in different ways. My brother's grammar school provided many favourable educational opportunities; yet he left school at sixteen. In a further ironic twist, my dad believed investing in my education would be wasteful because of the 'inevitable' female lifecourse. In reality we have been unable to have children. The medical terminology is "unexplained infertility". We've been through the tests and some of the 'treatments' - the medicalisation of which brought back memories of studying Huxley. This constitutes some of the background context to my academic journey through the latter part of my undergraduate studies. Only now can I say that I am grateful of these experiences. I have another 'new' perspective. Like my working-class identity - I'm an 'insider' who has lived through that naïve assumption that 'one day', when it's convenient for us, we'll have a child. To see those hopes and aspirations slowly eroding over time was a frustrating, anxious and humbling experience.

In response to government policies of the time, during my undergraduate studies my institution became more supportive of the challenges mature students had to endure. Personnel contributed towards my fees and later I was given some extended leave to complete my qualification in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). After this achievement, I undertook unpaid teaching work at an inner-city community centre and re-discovered how much I loved teaching. For me, the particular joy of ESOL teaching was how autonomous it was, the government syllabus was flexible; I found it easy to create ways to include music, newspaper articles or other everyday things that brought context and fun to the learning experience. I found that even the students were surprised at what they could achieve

if they were encouraged and supported in a non-judgemental, informal atmosphere. What a contrast to that little girl being deliberately humiliated by Mrs Turtle...

I went on to specialise in post-compulsory education. The qualification provided me with a placement teaching opportunity at a nearby inner-city FE college and closer contact with a broad range of teaching styles and subjects. My mentor was an inspiration. To him, formative feedback, changing assessment styles, differentiation and all the other educational terminologies that I had learned about during my studies seemed an innate, embodied part of his practice and indeed a natural part of his personality. His enthusiasm was seemingly endless and the students loved his lessons. Being observed as part of my summative assessment for my qualification was bound to be stressful, but if my mentor was due to observe me during a lesson, I actually forgot he was there! Some of my favourite observed lessons were when I was observed by my mentor or someone who I shared a similar rapport with. This sparked my interest in how teaching and lesson observations impact the teacher and therefore the students' learning.

After completing my MA studies, I taught at an FE college in a nearby town. It had been a long time since I had not been actively engaged in studying *and* working simultaneously. Due to my husband's promotion, financial pressures were lessened; I was able to teach part-time and without the added pressures of studying (or raising a family). I had the 'luxury' of donating most of my spare time to creating and preparing lessons for my students, and then marking their work. New staff joined who were completely new to teaching and it was a joy to be able to guide them through the educational literature in their new qualification. By now the authors had become familiar to me and it was very rewarding to be able to provide help and support to colleagues. I firmly believe that this peer-support in the staff-room, which

could be defined a 'community of practice' (Hughes, Jewson et al., 2007) is under-rated and under-researched and forms an integral part of the coping strategies of teaching staff.

### **Observing teaching and Ofsted**

In the Spring of 2009 the college where I taught had a Ofsted Inspection. Hopes were high that after a relatively poor report three years earlier, improvements had made an impact and overall the rating would improve. I was confident that our students' needs came first and that the right policies were in place and indeed, our department achieved 'Outstanding' in the Ofsted report. Sadly, however, other departments did not fare so well. This didn't surprise me as the cooperation between departments had been poor and the quality of some of the teaching I had witnessed outside our faculty was unstructured. However, my colleagues and I were confident that we would now be called upon to help the other departments improve. Surely, we were now the 'Gold Standard' which others could learn from?

Unfortunately, this was not forthcoming. Instead of being able to provide positive suggestions, our department were seemingly treated like other 'failing' departments and instructed that new policies were going to be enforced that would 'root out' the poor teaching. Observations were the primary strategy of what was understandably to be perceived as a 'witch hunt'. Instead of the supportive, informal, positive learning opportunity we had all experienced previously, observations would now be formally linked to disciplinary procedures. In the interests of 'objectivity' the observer would be someone 'unknown' to the teacher, and would judge the lesson on an ad-hoc basis. In short, we would all be subjected to a 'pass or fail' test of our teaching.

I have written about this elsewhere (Edgington 2010) but it is important here to emphasise the experiences which began the journey toward this research. Because of the pressures instigated by these new observation procedures, stress levels amongst staff increased. I saw close personal friends who I knew were competent, confident, articulate, intelligent and well-qualified teachers, reduced to tears or vomiting as a direct result of the stress from this policy. Significantly, despite all I had been through, it was enough for me to question whether I wanted to remain in teaching. After all the time I had spent and the challenges I had overcome to get to the job I loved, I knew I was resilient enough to carry on. However, I also knew that many of my colleagues were not as resilient as me. This made me angry. I was angry at the management for allowing this situation to occur, but also I was angry at my colleagues. Why didn't they speak up about the way they felt? Why did they call me 'brave' when I felt it was my duty to simply communicate the facts to management about the anxiety and fear they were (presumably unintentionally) causing. There was also little support from Unions or other educational organisations. Without guidelines from the authorities, it seemed we were at an impasse.

Fortunately, since these experiences, things at my previous workplace have now changed for the better. However, disputes continue and observations at this and other colleges continue to be a controversial and contentious issue for many FE staff. So, in conclusion, the intellectual and emotional journey of this PhD research is a culmination of many objectives for me personally: firstly, it is the continuing lifelong learning journey that had a false start all those years ago. Secondly, it is the opportunity to continue to be involved in teaching and to further my understanding of the teaching and learning process. Thirdly, I feel it's an opportunity to meet a



responsibility that I have taken upon myself for the sake of both my students and my colleagues. This duty is to try to raise awareness about the emotional aspects of teaching and learning. My past experience during my various teachers' training courses, re-enforces the value of a teaching mentor who is understanding and sensitive to a teacher's emotions. By understanding the affectivity around observations in FE, we may be able to understand the differences in the emotional experiences and be more reflexive – both personally and sociologically – about our teaching practice. With this in mind, research into FE teachers' life histories and emotional experiences is limited - hence this study is particularly important. In the next chapter I explain the theoretical framework used within this research and set the basis for the methodology employed which is explained in Chapter Three.

# Chapter Two: My Theoretical Framework

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## 1. Introduction

So far, in the Introduction and Chapter One, I have explained the socio-political context of observations in FE and my own personal position within the research, as an FE professional. As I explained, the most crucial change in FE took place in 1992 when 'Incorporation' meant that college management were forced to become more responsive to commercial needs. Inevitably there are emotional tensions within these difficulties that are fundamental to understanding the context of this research. It can be seen that there is a strong political dimension running through these themes which links closely to my own sense of social justice and the motivations for pursuing this research (explained in the previous chapter). The current economic crisis in particular is placing more pressure on FE staff; which inevitably sometimes challenges their commitment to students and prevents reflexivity or workplace learning. It is not my intention here to explore the debates around the perceived value or effectiveness of reflexivity in teaching and learning (for an excellent overview of this issue, see Cornford, 2002). Of relevance here is that research has suggested emotional suffering is likely to emerge within a judgemental atmosphere which in turn erodes teamworking and therefore has a negative impact on professional and personal identities (Colley, 2012; O'Leary, 2012). But how can the contexts of these situations be better understood and how do the emotional experiences of FE staff fit within these contexts?

This chapter explains the theoretical framework upon which this research is based. Because of the nature of the topic under investigation and like the methodology which embodies it, this is a multi-disciplined approach. This chapter consists of two parts: in Section 1, I explain the main theoretical concepts that are relevant within this research and the reasons for their use. This includes concepts such as

Hochschild's (1983) 'emotional labour' and Bourdieu's conceptual tools which are valuable in providing insights into mainly the macro elements of the socio-political contexts of this research. In Section 2, I build on these concepts with philosophical ideas that link to psychoanalytical perspectives; allowing a more micro view of the lived emotional experiences of FE staff involved in observations. Together, these tools help provide a wide lens through which to explore the elements under investigation, the methods of which are explained in the chapter which follows.

### **a. Poststructuralism, the Emotions and the Limitations of Language**

The theorists drawn upon for the purposes of illuminating aspects of the emotional experiences of FE staff involved in observation can be broadly described as having a poststructuralist approach. Poststructural ideas take the position that there is no one 'truth' - only multiple interpretations of interpretations along a continuum. Because the subject of this research is centred on the emotional experiences of teaching and learning – the context - it is essential that abstract binary divides are challenged, deconstructed and transcended. Within the context of a judgement of a lesson in an observation this approach is useful as a way of questioning the terminologies within these situations and opening-up new interpretations and meanings which may be helpful to others and to me.

With this in mind, writers such as Derrida (1980) and Foucault (1974) were integral to the evolution of this philosophical lens which broke away from mainstream essentialist concepts of structuralism such as that defined by Saussure and Lévi-Strauss. Structuralist views centred on an analysis of social discourse which saw the ambiguities between a word and object or 'signifier' and 'signified'; ambiguities that were seen as universal binary structures where everything had a purpose or 'essence' and meanings were derived from context and socially embedded (Scott

2012). However, for poststructural writers like Butler (1997) and Bourdieu (1984), these discourses were not founded on innate or collective processes; they were based on complex and diverse interconnections between power and knowledge and hence multiple interpretations of meanings.

Western languages arguably have embedded conceptions of abstract dualities, the meanings of which serve to emphasise their opposite nature (Bourdieu, 1991).

Poststructuralists sought to de-centre the perceived dichotomies such as in/authentic, structure/agent, fact/fiction, un/conscious, objective/subjective success/failure viewing them as unnecessary and unrealistic conceptual distinctions which do not reflect the complex processes and interconnectedness of our emotional social relationships (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). This is highly relevant to the topic under investigation here. To provide two brief examples of these cultural conceptions: in on-going political discussions about the quality of the education provided to young people, a public statement from the Russell Group of Universities' spokesperson, said that in English Literature A Level exam board criteria, there was an emphasis on students' 'emotional response' to the texts, as opposed to critical theory (Russell Group Universities, 2013). This would indicate a perceived unrealistic boundary between literary skills and an intuitive 'feel' for literary appreciation.

Similarly (within the context of discussions of concerns from the public and authorities of the reported poor quality of care provided by some staff in care homes for the elderly in England) a reporter in a documentary programme about the issue suggested that the perceived absence of an attitude of 'compassion' in these staff towards their residents implied that there *was*, in turn, a presence of 'contempt' (BBC Panorama, 2011). This interpretation of the unacceptable behaviour of some of the

healthcare professionals seems unnecessarily reductionist and does not acknowledge the inherent complexities of the relationships between carer/patient.

As I have explained, the purpose of this research is to explore the narratives describing the emotional experiences within the context of FE lesson observations. Through a poststructuralist lens then, the 'snapshot' of learning under the microscope during an observation could be open to many interpretations by the observer, and thus the potential for different graded outcomes. Furthermore, the transcripts of the interviews within this research bring into question all the possible interpretations (in written form) of the (spoken) performance of the participants (Biesta, Egea-Kuehne, 2001; Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992). By drawing on the conceptual tools of theoretical perspectives that are situated at different spaces, they can be used as 'stepping stones' towards illuminating behaviours and experiences (Ochberg, 2002).

Butler explained how specific 'acts of speech' sometimes serve to either reinforce or break down the dichotomy between body and mind (Butler, 1997). An 'illocutionary act' (Butler, 1997 p. 16) such as this, can, as I explain, have an impact on professional lives and identities, and by definition therefore also on feelings. The embodied nature of pedagogy demands fluidity of meanings with factors of identity and agency (Iverson 2012). Hence both literally in the case the observable, explicit performance in an observation and theoretically or metaphorically in terms of the 'spoken' graded outcome of an observation, there are parallels to the subject of this study. Indeed, debates on this issue highlight the perceived prejudice embedded in some cultures which separates emotions from the cognitive (Lupton, 1998; Shilling, 1993). This prejudice may drive researchers to seek scientific, positivistic methodologies that attempt to 'capture' measurements of emotions that could

perhaps (partly) explain behaviours (Zembylas, 2007b)<sup>9</sup>. Likewise, often theoretical concepts are forced into paradigmatic categories which some claim are *themselves* socially constructed (e.g. Ellingson, 2008). Knowledge of the inherent differences between languages can sometimes make us more attuned to these subtle nuances of articulating human actions/emotions<sup>10</sup>.

## **b. The Emotional Labour of Observations**

In 'The Managed Heart' Arlie Hochschild (1983) described service-sector work - such as that carried out by flight attendants – as a particular type of performance which involved 'emotional labour'. In contrast to traditional manual labour, employees (she claimed) were doubly 'exploited': not only forced to repeat specific phrases that their employers (believed) their customers wanted to hear<sup>11</sup> they also had to '*genuinely mean them*'. By creating or controlling emotional responses to customers, Hochschild viewed staff as more believably 'authentic'<sup>12</sup> in their interactions with them; thereby demonstrating a personalised, 'caring' image of the corporate entity that supplied the service. Many years before, an earlier social constructionist, Erving Goffman had also illustrated how at times an actor 'becomes his own audience' (Goffman, 1959 p. 86). This is especially the case when an employee performs an act of 'deep acting' which (so Hochschild noted) is when the 'inner self' is corrupted and responds with an emotional interaction which is culturally appropriate and/or expected.

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<sup>9</sup> Discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter that follows.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the German word 'entwurf' provides a useful notion of a 'version' of the self; an identity that may be ever evolving, never static. There is no similar word in English, where the word 'draft' implies there may eventually be a 'perfect' self.

<sup>11</sup> For example statements in the future tense, as described by Pinker (2007).

<sup>12</sup> As I hinted at above, authenticity is a problematic term and is discussed further below.

As I explained in the previous chapter, my own experiences in working in the commercial sector provided an awareness of the effort required to continually react in specific ways towards customers who may sometimes be less than polite. Even (or perhaps especially) when interacting over the 'phone with a customer, it was drilled into me (and later, I delivered to others) the perceived importance (for instance) of smiling whilst closing that sale. It works. My own emotional labour became a skill that I could exploit myself, in order to achieve targets for financial gain. But on further reflection, isn't this kind of performativity present in our everyday lives? Is there such a vivid distinction between our public and private lives (Bolton, Boyd, 2003)? These emotional exchanges are arguably a way that we all 'get on', from making small-talk (when we feel unwell) with the cashier in the shop, to pretending to agree to our doctor's advice (knowing full well we will go against it). Indeed, as others have pointed out - it is perhaps *more* (morally) 'acceptable' to be paid for carrying out this emotional labour, when most of our lives we (need to) perform these interactions for free (Price, 2001).

The value, transferability and limitations of Hochschild's concept of emotional labour has been extensively debated over the past thirty years and this, inevitably, has promoted its use in research analysis outside the service sector. This is because as Bolton and Boyd (2003) pointed out "it is not only the organisation that defines the emotional agenda" (p. 291) our emotions are more complex than that. Indeed, as they acknowledge: "a person may work harder at emotion management than would normally be expected: if they care for the people involved or if they feel the situation is special" (Bolton, Boyd 2003 p. 292). As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, teaching in FE could definitely fit this category. Indeed, as research by Gleeson and James (2007) suggested, the exploitative nature of emotional labour in FE teaching



could make it unsustainable. This may be because of the nature learning in FE which for many is more than taking on new knowledge; it involves a personal and emotional growth (Knowles, 1985; Merriam, Heuer, 1996; Merrill, 2003; West, 1996).

Reflecting upon the emotional nature of learning as an adult, I remember discovering as an undergraduate the manipulation and biases within judgements of the eleven-plus exam system (as I explained in Chapter One). It made me feel angry and confused whilst simultaneously motivating me to investigate, uncover and disrupt similar private and social assumptions. The inherent emotionality of learning could be said to be even more relevant for the staff and students in FE; many of whom have already suffered a disappointing educational experience but have gathered courage to return (Avis, 2002; Gleeson, James, 2007). Critics of this 'therapeutic approach' see inherent dangers in labelling students with a 'diminished self', and I agree that if over-emphasised, this could be seen as a 'deficit' model and impact negatively on self-esteem (Ecclestone, Hayes et al. 2005; Ecclestone, Hayes, 2008). The skills of the teacher lie in balancing the sensitivities of these relationships (between others and selves); as researchers like Price (2001) and Nias (1996) have examined.

Teaching then, is more than performing emotional labour for a wage, it is often motivated by compassion and extremely rewarding – an important emotional experience in itself. This type of emotional labour has been described as a 'gift' by Boyd and Bolton (2003) who acknowledged that service-sector work contains complexities of behaviours that are not necessarily prescribed by the employer. The paradoxical nature of this emotional labour is discussed in more detail in the section below. Unfortunately, as Price (2001) and Sallaz (2010) point out, Hochschild has written little about these more multifaceted aspects of emotional labour. For instance,

emotional labour can be painful when we are disappointed by students (or teachers) who let us down. It can also construct tensions for student teachers when it conflicts with a personal faith (Bryan, Revell, 2011). Furthermore, as pointed out by Sallaz (2010) ways in which emotion work is defined (explicitly or implicitly) and conceptualised may differ significantly between individuals and perhaps between managers and staff.

The implicitly 'performative' nature of an observation (described above) provides a further layer of complexity to the concept of emotional labour. Despite the perspective that the performativity in an observation is unavoidable as they often form an integral part of the quality assurance measurement of management, a deeper understanding of the emotional labour involved in an observation could be useful. For instance, in investigating the emotional experiences of staff involved in observations, these narratives could provide some insights into the fluid and complex nature of the perceptions of their emotional labour. Despite - or perhaps because of - its potential rewards – should a teacher in a lesson observation feel it necessary (or appropriate) to 'display' any personal reward, explicitly? In contrast to being what Goffman called a 'cynical' actor (or Hochschild referred to as 'shallow acting') does an observer feel they need to look for evidence of 'deep acting'? How does this 'play out' in the classroom? For example, this may be illustrated when a teacher, during an observation, remembers a conscious awareness of *not* being aware of the presence of the observer<sup>13</sup>. That is not to say that the teacher forgets they are being observed – only that their own, embodied performance becomes the (only) conscious reality of that lived moment (or rather, the memory of it).

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, this is something I have experienced myself, as explained in the introduction.

The embodied nature of performance is perhaps illustrated most clearly in actors who are skilled in impersonating humans or imitating animals. In the stage production of *War Horse* (Warhorse, 2013), the horse puppeteers such as John Riddleberger 'take-on' the (physical) characteristics of the horses that they have (prior to the rehearsals) spent considerable time with. They have learned the characteristics in body language and posture of a horse and developed an ability to emphasise aspects of it for their own needs. The entertainer Jon Culshaw, explained during an interview that when mimicking others he feels it is impossible for him to re-create these sounds without the physical movements and facial expressions that go together to create the embodied sounds (BBC News, 2011).

Likewise, it is possible that at times the performance of the teacher during an observation may be perceived to express the characteristics of the performer, rather than the (learning) task itself. As such, a teacher may feel a need to over-emphasise an interest in the subject area, or an enthusiasm for an (over familiar) assignment task. By comparison, the teaching performance may involve a subject area that the teacher has a personal and perhaps particularly emotional attachment with, the details of which the teacher may *not* want to share with her students. This concealment may mean that - temporarily at least - certain emotions are (physically) hidden in order to preserve the self (Mollon, 2002). Salzberger-Wittenberg et al (1983) point out how teachers endure potential vulnerabilities to criticisms from their students – for example in terms of their academic ability, appearance or behaviours. It follows then, that a self-awareness and tolerance of our own shortcomings as teachers is crucial during further (closer) scrutiny from an observer. This is partly because the teacher's performance in an observation holds wider and symbolic implications, for example in the reputation of the department or the institution.

### **c. The Theoretical Concepts of Bourdieu**

Like symbolic interactionists Goffman and Hochschild, Bourdieu partly shared the view that reality is socially constructed through the cultures that are embedded in our society. Due to the social context of the time, Bourdieu was influenced (amongst others) by Marxist philosophy which alleged how the symbolic nature of language can strongly influence and reproduce our perception of reality and this, in turn impacts cultural prejudices and inequalities. With this in mind, the most striking aspect of observations is the graded system of judging teachers' practice (initiated by the Ofsted criteria described in Chapter One) which potentially labels them as 'good' or 'bad' teachers. Indeed, this is driven by the risk for the SMT in the institution as a whole being labelled as 'failure' as opposed to a 'success'. This could be interpreted as the symbolic nature of language which wrongly provides a dichotomy by emphasizing opposite natures or deficiencies (Bourdieu, 1986).

Although not overtly drawing on a Bourdieusian lens, Smith and Swift (2012) found evidence of the embedded nature of these artificial dichotomies within FE. Indeed, in different ways, Bourdieu's perspective on this issue has been used extensively in educational research over the past decade (Grenfell, James, 1998; James, Biesta, 2007; Reay, 2004). In support of this approach, Avis (2007) agreed that there needs to be more questioning of the usual binaries in order to provide insights into the "nuanced and complex accounts of learning cultures" (Avis, 2007 p. 80). Bourdieu's writings are numerous and complex it is not practical to fully explore them all. However below I provide an overview of the main concepts drawn upon in this research which will be explored in more detail in the chapters which follow.

### **i. Social and educational capital**

Bourdieu was interested in examining language and the processes by which it could reproduce practices of classification and re-enforce them to “create a social order understood in terms of social identities and differences” (Halas, 2004 p.146). These social differences may be perceived as potentially leading to advantage in material or symbolic hierarchy. Bourdieu used the term *capital* to describe the dis/advantage that an individual may lose/accrue during his/her life. This could be interpreted as a level of power between individuals in that (for example) a higher level education may provide someone with knowledge that would provide benefits over others<sup>14</sup>. There are different aspects of capital which may, in turn mean that an individual can make use of their social, professional or cultural capital in order to make gain(s). This may be financial reward, but equally it may be something more personal, for example recognition<sup>15</sup>. If we take this into the context of an observation, the parallels could be interpreted as the different capital that the teacher has, compared to the professional capital of the observer. Hence a teacher may need specific professional skills to be able to ‘perform’ evidence of their professional capital to the observer.

### **ii. Professional ‘habitus’ and embodied dispositions**

According to Bourdieu, habitus is what we each bring with us to every situation and relationship. It is the past choices, experiences, hopes and expectations interacting together to provide us with the opportunity of action (or not). Habitus can take many forms, for example in the skills of the teacher’s professional habitus (Grenfell, James 1998) and the emotional resilience we may develop over time. The importance of trying to understand our own habitus resonates with the context of my own life, and

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<sup>14</sup> This view should be viewed in the context of Bourdieu’s own educational history, however this is outside the scope of this thesis (see for example, Lane, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> This aspect of reward in the performance of professional capital is discussed later.

how my *professional* habitus brings value and meaning to my teaching and learning and to this research. There is a myriad of phenomena which combine to form my professional habitus – including that which I outlined in the Introduction. My background, gender, age, past and current experiences bring unique significance to the processes involved in the interactions I have with my peers, colleagues, students and research participants (Denzin, 1984). Other aspects of my professional habitus may include my fears and aspirations, real, imagined (or a combination of both) and my cultural contexts. As I will explain in the chapters which follow, this brings importance to my data and my development as a teacher/researcher (Wright Mills, 1959). But this brings difficulties too, in terms of questioning our assumptions and the perceived transparency needed in research. Hence (Bourdieu claims) the human mind is at times ‘trapped’ because of the limits of our socialized subjectivity. We are in some ways, products of the social world in which we exist - simultaneously consciously and unconsciously, physically and emotionally:

Bodily hexis, a basic dimension of the sense of social orientation, is a practical way of experiencing and expressing one’s own sense of social value. One’s relationship to the social world and to one’s proper place in it, is never more clearly expressed than in the space and time one feels entitled to take from others; more precisely, *in the space one claims with one’s body in physical space*, through a bearing and gestures that are self-assured or reserved, expansive or constricted (‘presence’ or ‘insignificance’) and with one’s speech in time, through the interaction time one appropriates and the self-assured or aggressive, careless or unconscious way one appropriates it. (Bourdieu, 1984 p. 474)

Bourdieu explains in this quote how our habitus may be outwardly interpreted through our accent or body language. Defined as 'dispositions', this concept is potentially important for this research as it crosses the boundaries of elements of our embodied emotional labour which are simultaneously conscious and unconscious, visible and hidden. We could use a forensic metaphor here; our habitus leaves traces not always visible to everyone, un/consciously present.

Here is a personal example of how this embodied habitus may be played-out: during a regular visit to my local gym some years ago, I recall the end of my session with an instructor when he unexpectedly commented "You've done ballet." At the time I was taken aback as to how to my performance on treadmill, weight machines and spinning bike could have given away to a stranger, movements that made visible this (secret) part of my biographical childhood (explained in Chapter One, Section 2) from nearly thirty years ago. My conscious concentration at the time had been deeply involved in the 'hard labour' of trying to maintain my motivation to keep going, despite utter physical exhaustion. Admittedly, this observation was made by a professional trained in aspects of the physical body – and yet, this was not ballet. So how and why did this physical habitus - embodied in what Bourdieu called 'dispositions' appear (is my unconscious-self haunted by an unrealistic, unrealised dream to dance)? What other aspects of my previous performativities has my body unconsciously 'remembered' in various dispositions? Perhaps more importantly, what (other) personal experiences of mine are observable by others?

The potential implications in using the concepts of habitus and dispositions in trying to understand the embodied emotional performativity of observations are profound when we consider that there is not an easily distinguishable line separating the explicit from the hidden. After all, as I explained in Chapter One, what is perceived

as important in an observation is what is observable to others about teachers' embodied professional habitus, even though this may be un/consciously performed. Indeed, as Lynne Layton (1996) reflects, because of the experiences of poverty from her childhood she has chosen to assert her own agenda through her writing: what we don't have is not always articulated, but its *absence* may become part of our habitus. Likewise, the historical context of FE may have imposed specific definitions of observations and the processes which surround them.

By developing strategies which draw and reflect on past experiences and knowledge we can be innovative and thus perceive uncertainty as a potential experimental space for interactional play (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992; Winnicott 1971). If we are to take this concept into a classroom, we can see that each student brings their own elements of habitus, for example social and linguistic, which in turn impacts upon the teacher's interactions with them and vice versa. This may have useful implications for understanding the emotions within the context of an observation.

### **iii. Field and doxa: the rules of the classroom**

I continue to explore Bourdieu's conceptual tools and the usefulness of these in the context of this research: social interaction takes place in a *field* or many different fields which are in themselves constantly interacting with each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In each field objectives are set and forms of power through social capital can be played-out. A field can be viewed on a macro basis, that (for example) may be the whole of the educational system, or on a more micro level, where the institution may be a field – with its own rules and objectives, or even the classroom itself (James and Biesta, 2007). A field may allow for interplay in a game of habitus and capital as it has possibilities for reward, in terms of us seeking different kinds of capital or seeking personal recognition. A football field is often utilised as a metaphor



for explaining this concept, however I prefer the use of a magnetic field. This illustrates the different 'pulls' on the players (objects and agents) in different directions for different reasons. Likewise it can also incur costs. The field only exists with habitus – they have a symbiotic relationship as the field itself is at stake if things go wrong (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). There is also an element of the agent or teacher's own role in this, perhaps in their own subordination in adherence to the rules of the field.

The rules that exist within the field are referred to as *doxa*. Often the *doxa* are unspoken as they may even be hidden or innate rules. So simply by agreeing to engage in the game, *doxa* are adhered to. Performativity in itself could be seen to have a certain type of *doxa*. Returning to the emotional labour research on customer service staff (Hochschild, 1983) the management perceive how their staff must 'enjoy' serving others' needs. Some players or 'agents' may want to maintain the *status quo*, whereas others may want change. The dynamic of the field in a classroom setting changes dramatically during an observation because rather than the *doxa* being determined by the curriculum and/or the teacher, the *doxa* is set by the criteria of (senior) management or perhaps Ofsted and in the observer's interpretation of what may be occurring within that field. The observation is rather different than a game consisting of players with common *doxa* because there are different things at stake: what the teacher can lose (e.g. in terms of professional capital) the observer doesn't gain. However the observer may have different capital to lose in terms of the power relationship.

**iv. The potential for tensions: *illusio***

One additional useful concept that Bourdieu provides is the term *illusio*. Rather than being interpreted as the 'illusion' this term is described as the 'fit' between an agent's habitus and the *doxa* within the field; the extent to which we commit to the rules in the field. Within this study's context, it can be seen as the conflicts or agreements between teachers' professional habitus and their involvement in playing the game or 'jumping through the hoops' of an observation; in particular the perceived 'bureaucratic' elements of the *doxa*. Bourdieu did not explicitly write about employees' emotional labour *per se* (Sallaz, 2010), although there were parallels in other areas of his work which highlighted the symbolic power between different fields:

The most resolutely objectivist theory must take account of agents' representation of the social world and, more precisely, the contribution they make to the construction of that world via *the labour of representation* that they continually perform [...] that is their social identity. (Bourdieu 1984 p. 234)

So, in looking at what may form this *illusio* for individuals and *how* these processes and relationships interplay, we need to look further than a social constructionist paradigm. Although these conceptual tools are useful for illuminating elements of the social constructions within an observation, there are still elements of the binary nature of language that Bourdieu questioned. Indeed, this is one of the main criticisms of Bourdieu's work: in trying to transcend the dichotomy, paradoxically his writings are abundant with these terminologies (Swartz 1997). But in exploring the nature of what is occurring within the field of the observation, it's the *process* of these concepts that must be investigated; the interplay and hidden nature of the

emotional experiences that spring from them. Not all of our behaviours seem 'rational' responses in terms of constructing our selves and those (objects) that surround and interact with us. In short, it's not the *why* of the emotional experiences of observations that this study explores but the *how*.

#### **d. The Value of Bourdieu's Theoretical Concepts to this Research**

In a book edited by Coffield (2000) educationalists brought attention to the absence of meaningful debate in relation to the definitions of 'good teaching' and 'best practice' in FE. I agree that there is a 'taken-for-grantedness' about these definitions – both within and outside these institutions - that needs to be questioned. This is especially important in an environment where (as I explained in the previous chapter) these terms are used extensively in governmental rhetoric and judgemental managerial reports. Research suggests that those perceived as 'successful' teachers (which as I have explained are defined differently by different people over time, for different reasons) are those who use improvisation in their classrooms to bring new meanings to educational theory and 'make it their own' by metaphorically (and perhaps literally) 'writing in the margins and between the text' (Sumara, Luce-Kapler, 1996). In this way, teaching practice or *professional habitus* becomes performance-based evidence for our 'ever-evolving and transforming selves' (Sumara, Luce-Kapler 1996). Adding new ideas, trying out new approaches with different students and in different contexts begins to ritualise the process of reflexivity, and it is this process which becomes the essence of learning teaching. But improvisation by its very nature is difficult to evaluate, elucidate or sometimes interpret or repeat (Tharp, 2007). And herein lies the impossible task of the observer of teaching and learning; through seeking 'objectivity' the observer has no knowledge of the context or internal

reflexivity, but is nevertheless obliged to formally, critically analyse the performativity of the teacher.

Concepts are important in allowing researchers (and you, the reader) to make sense of our social worlds and to question them. During the research process these concepts can be stretched and pulled apart, deconstructed and re-built in attempting to develop the research objectives (Ellingson, 2008). The foundational concepts I have drawn on in this research are numerous, and this has been necessary because of the complexities of the subject area. Furthermore, because there has been so little research into the emotional aspects of observations in FE, it has been crucial to make full use of the theoretical concepts which *have* been used, in order to create a broader picture. With this in mind, Bourdieu's writings encouraged me to see how structures are not set in stone, but actually co-exist and interact with each other and with their own objectives. So, by drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of 'game', 'capital' 'field', 'habitus', '*doxa*' and '*illusio*,' - my interpretation of these conceptual tools in relation to the research topic – and closely related concepts, such as emotional labour, I have shown how these can be applied to some aspects of observations in order to illuminate the social and emotional contexts of observations. To see how the objectives of observations for teachers and managers differ in interpretations and outcomes, it is essential to recognize that it is *within* these social contexts that the lived experiences of the individuals' emotions occur (Denzin, 1989).

#### **e. Summary of Chapter Two, Section 1**

So far in this chapter, I have explained the theoretical concepts drawn upon in this thesis and briefly outlined their contextual evolution. As philosophers have debated, individuals don't exist in isolation; our identities are a result of complex relationships. For some these interactions are embodied even prior to birth; the interdependency

we have with our mother (Crossley 2001, Winnicott 1971). I have explained above how Bourdieu's theories emphasise the importance of the interconnectedness of relationships that may contribute towards interpretations of human behaviours. The spaces where micro/macro elements interact deserves further examination, in particular the processes that surround the lived emotional experiences of these social worlds.

This is where psychoanalytical concepts may further illuminate the individualistic and personal contexts of observations. When examining the concept of habitus, what childhood experiences may have influence upon an individual teacher and/or manager's behaviour and decisions (Reay 2012)? What private defence mechanisms might individuals use if feedback is perceived as insensitive or even hurtful to the ego (Cockburn 2005)? Furthermore, to what extent do real or imagined situations have upon these emotions and in turn then impact on perceived identities within an observation? Perhaps more importantly, are reflections upon these issues valuable to the individuals themselves who are involved in observations? It is to these questions that I now seek some interpretations, within the framework of the psychoanalytical perspective.

The parallels between Mead's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism (which provides the basis for Denzin's (1984) more emotionally-focused *Interpretive Interactionism*) with the broad social science inspired by American pragmatism and Bourdieu's Social Constructionism has long been debated (for example see Halas 2004) and there is no space here to discuss this issue at length<sup>16</sup>. Following-on from the concepts outlined above and building on these understandings further, philosophical writers such as Sartre (1943) and psychoanalytical notions inspired by existentialism are

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<sup>16</sup> However, Bourdieu's 'conceptual kinship' within the roots of philosophers such as Hegel and the Chicago school of Pragmatism, is noteworthy (Swartz, 1997).

also relevant to explore the more individual, personal aspects of the emotions under investigation. Hence in Section 2 of this chapter, I outline these aspects of the theoretical lens used, within the context of my overall interpretivist approach.

## **2. Symbolic Interactionism and Psychoanalysis**

Symbolic Interactionism (SI), like pragmatist philosophy shares a view of knowledge based around our *interpretation* (symbolic or otherwise) of language, an object or a situation. Upon examining an abstract painting, we use our own experiences of previous images to construct a meaning that is relevant for ourselves, one that is just as relevant as the interpretation of another. Furthermore, if this interpretation is deemed valuable to us, we are likely to remember and repeat it in the future. Hence (so Pragmatists argue) much of the 'knowledge' we acquired in school is now forgotten because often it has little (if any) meaning in current situations (Mead, 1969). As Dewey had also written - children (or adults) are not 'empty vessels' to be filled with knowledge; their learning is influenced by social interactions and the environment around them. This is because (according to Pragmatists) our behaviours, although influenced by the past are situated firmly in the present. The pragmatists then, emphasise the 'emergent self' to a potential for improvisation in human action; we are largely 'free' to make our own choices. How the processes of a so-called 'emergent self' may influence human behaviour provided many different interpretations. Mead and others debated at length what influenced decision-making when views of the social 'self' conflict with those as 'me' or 'I'. For SI it is the *nature* of the 'I' and its relationship with the social 'me' that is important to consider. The self – me - becomes an object in its own right. Thus it has been claimed that the difference between our conceptions of what represents the 'authentic' 'I' can be

found in our response to the scrutiny of others (Scott, 2012). The actor constantly acts towards the 'me' (Mead, 1969) and we identify ourselves through the 'me' - through how others see us inter/acting.

The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organised set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organised 'me', and then one reacts towards that as an 'I'. (Mead, 1969 p. 175)

Like all theoretical perspectives no universal set of assumptions exists with SI (Cohen, Manion, 1980a) . However, there are some basic postulates. More broadly – and relevant for my explanations here - there are some ways in which SI is compatible with Bourdieu's constructive constructionism.

It is relevant here to provide the teaching and learning context. Because of the unique and complex nature of potential emotions between students and teacher; can the teacher 'take the role of the Other' (Charon, 1992)? Mead and Freud were separated only by the geographical location rather than time; had they ever met, a comparison between Freud's transitional phenomena with Mead's interpretation of social roles would have been an interesting debate to witness. This is because some criticised SI's theories because it was perceived that their attention on the personal, emotional nature of social interactions was somewhat lacking (Scott, 2012). Hence, Hochschild (1983) (a symbolic interactionist) developed Freud and Goffman's ideas in this area; defining her concept of emotional labour (Scott, 2012). It is relevant to note here that Freud's concept of the 'id' as an inner place of instinctual drives which acts impulsively, has parallels to Mead's part of the 'I' that is untouched by (social) interactions.

These debates centre on the degree to which:

Action is not simply a consequence of psychological drives, attitudes or personalities, or determined by external social facts such as social structure or roles, but results from a continuous process of meaning attribution which is always emerging in a state of flux and subject to change. (Cohen, Manion 1980b p. 33)

Giddens has also suggested that Mead's 'me' and 'I' are closely linked to the unsocialised self of Freud's 'id'. In the context of qualitative research the concept of the 'id' and 'I' in the interview process is useful in relation to transitional notions - as I discuss in the methodology (Hollway, Jefferson, 2000).

During the 1950's tensions between the antipositivism of existentialism and the scientific Marxist perspectives were in strong opposition<sup>17</sup>. Inspired by these debates, Bourdieu's ideas strongly emphasised the promotion of the role of agency in structural analysis and the importance of philosophical reflection within everyday social experiences (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). Hence Bourdieu's 'constructivist constructionism' and notions from psychoanalysis can transcend the often binary divide of conceptualizing emotions as either/or body/mind un/conscious social/personal. These lenses provide an opportunity to illuminate the way toward an understanding of the broad spectrum of emotional experiences for individuals within the context of observations. In the next section I outline the philosophical and methodological/ theoretical issues of debates around subjectivity and objectivity.

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<sup>17</sup> In 1951 Bourdieu enrolled in one of the most famous French educational institutions, the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS), alumni of which included many notable French academics such as Durkheim, Sartre and Monteauponty (Calhoun 1993). There was no formal faculty of 'sociology' at ENS when Bourdieu studied there, and it is important to note that his original studies were in philosophy (Swartz, 1997).



### **a. Subjectivity versus Objectivity**

Before exploring the details of the theoretical concepts outlined in the introduction of this chapter in more detail, it is crucial to first set out the specific points of the subjectivity and objectivity debates that are under investigation here. This is because there are important parallels between the poststructuralist intricacies of why and how data is regarded as 'objective' or 'constructed' and the objectives and subject of this research. An objective of an observation is applying a judgement of whether or not a lesson involves 'good practice', but as I explained, the definitions of this term are problematic (Coffield, Edward, 2009). This research takes an interpretive, social constructionist viewpoint in that 'good practice' in teaching and learning is co/constructed and fluid over time and between individuals. It cannot be accurately 'measured' only formed through the interaction and reflection by the individuals involved within its contexts (Ochberg, 2002).

In social science, Labov (1972) noted that sometimes, simply by observing, we 'contaminate' data. For Goffman (1959) this 'participant's paradox' meant that the act of participation conflicts with interaction in multiple, complex ways. This is especially relevant if the subject under investigation is particularly sensitive, as above all, a researcher must avoid causing harm. Bourdieu (1992) encouraged researchers to take care to reflect on their position and to retain some awareness of their relationship with 'objectivity' – however this may be conceptualised. I explore this in greater depth later in this chapter.

However, researchers such as Ochberg (2002) claim that rather than 'contaminate' the researcher *brings value* to the process and the data, by drawing on our existing habitus – explained in full below – which can bring our interpretation of the data to life. With this issue in mind, Letherby (2013) defines what she terms 'theorised

subjectivity'; the nature of research should allow an explicit articulation of the inherent subjectivity that the researcher brings to the research. I do not entirely agree that her approach allows access to a 'true reality'. However, with these issues in mind, it follows that within the context of this research a teacher may perceive an observer may either 'contaminate' the classroom by embodying an apparent judgemental approach, or at the other end of the continuum, *add value* to the learning experience by engaging with it.

So this is the observer's (and researcher's) dilemma.

There is also an unspoken pressure on the observer to find some aspect of potential weakness in order to articulate the progress or development objective of the session. It follows then, that arbitrary power may be delivered through decisions that may be perceived to be irrational by the observee (O'Leary, 2012). In the European Social Research Council (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Cultures (TLC) project, researchers (e.g. Gleeson, James 2007) used data from a reflective diary to illustrate how an observation by a manager was interpreted by a teacher. The teacher ('Rachel') described in her diary how the observation was seen by her as a measurement of practice which ran contrary to her own notion of pedagogy. In preparation for an Ofsted inspection, Rachel was told by a manager that in contrast to the (what she perceived as a 'successful') lesson she had facilitated, demonstrable 'good' teaching should consist of a teacher-led session. Hence, this illustrates a perception of the unrealistic separation between 'evidence' of student learning and the act of teaching. Whitehead (2005) comments that is because:

...performativity denies the professional's account or judgement as valid and takes cognisance of the *human dimensions* within organisational culture nor

allows for the complexities of individual performance and motivation. (Whitehead, 2005 p. 17) (my emphasis)

But what exactly is the nature of this performativity or perceived in/authenticity? How and why could this behaviour cause angst or anxiety? This leads me on to the nature of this performativity in what Symbolic Interactionists call 'emotional labour' and the implications on the emotional experiences of FE staff in observations.

### **b. Performativity and 'Authenticity' in Observations**

If an observation, sometimes at least, is perceived by some as a 'performance' then can it be an effective strategy in assisting reflection and self-development? If so, then is this 'performance' actually ever reflected back by the ('subjective') views of an observer? Arguably, there may be a conflict between the teacher's personal interpretation of their own 'authenticity' and others' perception of what is required to be seen (as 'authentic'?) by the observer (Ashman, 2008). But what is the nature of this 'authenticity' and how useful is this term in exploring the emotional experiences of FE staff in observations?

The poststructuralist perspective I have adopted for this study allows a more fluid interpretation of the definition of terms such as 'authenticity'. This approach is crucial because previous research in FE suggests despite the potential anxiety, some lecturers describe a 'pragmatic' response - implying an acceptance of their own perception of their 'inauthenticity' - towards the general performativity of their roles (Ball, 2003; Whitehead, 2005). In the specific context of an observation, staff described their feelings in terms of 'playing the game' (O'Leary, 2013). Hence *their own interpretation* of their perceived 'authenticity' seems important to explore, for as Goffman (1959) explains:

Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them *the specific response he is concerned to obtain*. Sometimes he will intentionally and consciously express himself in a particular way, but chiefly because the tradition of his group or social status require this kind of expression and not because of any particular response [...]. Sometimes the traditions of an individual's role will lead him to give a well-designed impression of a particular kind [...]. (Goffman, 1959 p. 18) (my emphasis).

It is worthwhile noting here that in research by O'Leary (2012), one observer articulated how she felt her experience in the classroom meant that she 'instinctively knew' whether she was witnessing an 'outstanding' lesson or not. Perhaps this is understandable when we read how during a job interview, first impressions are crucial because potential employers have already made up their mind about the suitability of an applicant, within the first few seconds of meeting them (Corfield 2010). However, this issue highlights the complexities and difficulties of the observer's role in attempting to 'detach' contexts in order to quantify observation judgements as finite, comparable assessment outcomes.

Whilst considering the importance of a physical and emotional 'space', in contrast to the performance in an observation the staffroom may become a 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959) or a 'transitional space' (Crossley, 2001) where personal items and inappropriate words are 'hidden' from the view of the 'audience' (students and managers). This is a space which contradicts and (de)constructs the performance of the act of "teaching illusions" (Price 2001). It allows for the movement from being on "autopilot" or everyday consciousness to a state of being "tuned in" (Crossley, 2001);

“emotionally alive and present” (Price, 2001 p. 162) or (in the context of a military role) “switched on” (Hockey, 2009); ready for the performance that *is* embodied emotional labour. For some teachers this can be a place to share intimate experiences. However, for those who, for complex reasons, may perceive they have ‘failed’ in their performance, no relaxation is possible. Instead, it may be a place of secrets and (perceived or real) ridicule, resentment or shame. Indeed, as O’Leary’s (2012) research suggested, often observations cause deep divisions between staff and managers. As I explained above, contrary to their objectives, observations therefore have a potential for having a *negative* impact on workplace learning opportunities.

The development of Denzin’s (1989) Interpretive Interactionism encourages researchers to view as entirely artificial the divide between subjectivism and objectivism. Because of the focus on reflective philosophical notions of our being, existentialists like Sartre are highly influential for sociologists exploring lived emotional experiences. But often their perceptions of a ‘true’ or ‘authentic’, agentic self are viewed in opposition to the social limitations and constructions of our lives, rather than being intrinsically linked to it. In the following section I explore the philosophical ideas relating to performativity and authenticity in more detail.

### **c. Sartre and Authenticity: ‘Bad Faith’ and Shame**

If we accept that integral to the act of performativity is the perception of the embodiment of a lie for the purposes of prescribed criteria, then when FE staff perceive they (at least partly) ‘perform’ during an observation, they perhaps acknowledge that they may be in some way denying the embodiment of their ‘genuine’ selves. This may be the case for both the teacher and observer because I explained in Chapter One research suggests how each individual in an observation

sees they have a particular 'role' to play – one that somehow attempts to reject aspects of 'context' in favour of a perceived 'objectivity'. The temporary rejection of elements of context (which would usually be accepted as an essential part of teaching) therefore becomes a private 'lie'. Arguably, a lie has a binary nature; the deceiver and the deceived (Levy, 2002). If we are in possession of the truth but choose not to use it, then we lie. In psychoanalysis this binary is present between the concept of the conscious and unconscious selves. The 'drives' provide a type of censorship of decisions controlled by the needs of the id over the discipline from the superego (for example).

However - and importantly for this study - existentialist thought rejects this duality; there is no un/conscious self; no 'true' or 'false'. We exist. First we exist and then we become who we are; we obtain purpose or 'essence' through the choices we have available to us throughout life. For a teacher then, 'essence' is perhaps felt in the reward of supporting a student to reach their potential; a role which (as I illustrate in the chapters which follow), involves making many difficult choices. Following this, I am never forced to do anything – I can *always* choose. Furthermore, I am free to choose beyond what may be perceived as morally 'right' or 'wrong' as these could be considered abstract concepts to our existence. To choose to 'lie' to oneself during a performance is therefore just as valid a choice as choosing not to lie. To believe that I have no choice is termed by Sartre as 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1943) because to deceive ourselves in that way, we potentially demean ourselves; through the act of deception and by *a priori* deciding to be deceived.

But is this possible without the binary division of un/conscious selves? Sartre believed that it was, through choosing to focus only on the *part* truth (often present in a lie), rather than the lie and/or by deliberately ignoring any false aspects of it. If a

part of a proposition is possible or probable, then we can choose to ignore the rest. This fundamentally brings into question the relationship and interaction between and within the self – what in psychoanalysis is defined separately as the *id* and *ego*. We can perhaps relate to this if we consider a truthful but embellished story (either told or heard), after being repeated, may become accepted as a ‘genuine’ occurrence over time. According to Sartre, it is our fear of making a choice which causes ‘angst’ or anxiety – not the choice *per se* (i.e. whether to ‘perform’ or not), because once we make a choice, that choice becomes the best decision for us at that time. This is because *who we are* is determined by *what we do* – the choices we make. From this perspective, even *not* choosing is still a choice as such - there is no escape. The paradox is how ‘nothingness’ gives us freedom, yet because we all are free to choose we suffer anxiety. Not necessarily just for ourselves but for others in that there are consequences in our actions. There is no hierarchy of choices – only the one we choose. Certain choices may however be attributed value, depending upon how others see them. In this way, in the context of this research, the criteria and aspiration for obtaining an ‘outstanding’ lesson may be given more value than on an individual level, because of the cultural contexts. Hence this perspective may provide insights into how and why an individual may decide to ‘perform’ a specific role within the context of an observation.

In exploring the emotions surrounding the acts of performing teaching in an observation, integral to the reported anxiety could be the dilemma of a perceived *choice* about *how* to conform to the perceived criteria. This could be potentially exacerbated when tension is caused when we simultaneously make decisions and utilise agency whilst also recognising the presence of an observer. By acknowledging we are an ‘object’ being observed we see ourselves as others see

us. This perspective may conflict with existing images of ourselves; our 'essence' - and therefore has the potential to cause strong emotions such as shame or fear of shame.

Modern interpretations found in Humanistic psychology links the term 'authenticity' to aspects of personal development and self-help (Walton, 2000). Indeed, one of the criticisms of Sartre's theory is the apparent idealism in rejecting any (perceived) lack of freedom that some individuals report (Levy, 2002) in favour of self-empowerment (Detmer, 2008). However in some schools of psychoanalysis the emphasis falls on a hierarchy in the terms in/authentic self with the aim of providing a possible cure for the 'diminished self'<sup>18</sup> (Freud, 1961). This is perhaps why existentialists including Sartre mainly rejected Freud's ideas of an individual's 'repression' or the 'unconscious' - because they believed these different states of being were fluid and mutually beneficial to understanding meanings of our existence. Because of the private nature of the emotions under investigation in this research, these philosophical ideas are likely to be highly relevant when considering narrative descriptions of performativity and the embodied emotional experiences that emerge. Importantly, this is also why Bourdieu's sociology is so valuable to this kind of study; his theoretical tools, rooted as they are within the philosophical controversies between and within existentialism and social constructionism, offer an opportunity for reflexive researchers to explore the interactions between social and personal phenomena; between cultural and agentic contexts.

#### **d. Psychoanalytical Perspective: Self-identity and Emotions**

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<sup>18</sup> Although this interpretation of Freud's theory is controversial, see Bondi (2005).



Psychoanalysis has an interpretive foundation that does have some relevance here. It is therefore useful to unravel some aspects of psychoanalysis in order to establish where Bourdieu's post-structuralist views interact, overlap or conflict. Despite his critiques, Freud was successful in bringing all aspects of an individual's psyche under the scientific microscope at that time, no matter how 'socially un/acceptable', (Brown, 1961/87). Indeed, although many have pointed out how Freud's theories could be viewed as obsolete in light of the multicultural postmodern society in which we now exist ( Brown, 1961/87; Elliott, 1999), over a century after his original explanations, psychoanalysis remains a crucial influence not only of the study of human behaviour but in every day speech<sup>19</sup>. Hence the potential relevance of this lens for this research: an analysis of narratives as a way of providing insights into descriptions of emotional experiences.

To help unravel some of these aspects, Brown (1961/87) suggests a convenient, if not somewhat simplistic 'categorisation' of psychoanalysis into three broad areas:

1. *The basic psychoanalytical concepts (as outlined briefly above)*
2. *The biological/ psychoanalytical theories which were based on observations.*
3. *The philosophical stance of the psychoanalytical school of thought.*

For the purposes of this research then, in which, as I explained, I have taken a phenomenological, hermeneutic approach, I limit my use of psychoanalysis with the research data presented here to '1' above: i.e. the 'basic' psychoanalytical concepts. This includes existential interpretations of psychoanalysis, in particular, notions from the object relations; specifically transitional concepts and interpretations which

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<sup>19</sup> One example of many is when we notice someone's error in an irrational choice a word and define it a 'Freudian slip'.

questions and explores the interplay between and within notions of 'self' and 'I' or the 'id' and 'ego' in the context of this study.<sup>20</sup>

Price (2001) asserts how aspects of psychoanalysis can provide particularly rich explanations of why teachers' 'labouring of the heart' can be paradoxically painful and also rewarding. In focusing specifically on object relations psychoanalysis, social interactions and cultural contexts are viewed as:

... not something that individuals suddenly encounter at some stage. It is, rather, creatively made and re-made through transitional realm of learning, tradition, ideas and intervention. It is within this space between subjects, the bridging of inner and outer worlds, that culture and social life arise. (Elliott, 2002 p. 74)

Object relations theory carries assumptions that it is our earliest relationships that can influence our adult personality as well as impacting on the development of our adult relationships (Elliott, 2002). There is plethora of research highlighting the intrinsic link between (adult) experiences of learning, well-being and childhood relationships (Boud, Keogh et al., 1985; Edwards, 1997; Hampson, 1988; Hobson, Welbourne 1998; Merriam, Heuer, 1996). Psychoanalytical notions founded on existentialist views of performativity and explorations of perceptions of the 'self' could be helpful in supporting the conceptual tools of Bourdieu. This is because this study seeks to explore interpretations of the views of FE staff in relation to the performativity inherent in observations; the embodied nature of teaching and

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<sup>20</sup>Although there are complementary aspects, there are also fundamental discrepancies between the philosophical views of psychoanalytical perspectives compared to those used in this research. In particular, I leave aside the controversial arguments concerning the central role of libido and sexual fantasy as a drive for human behaviour. Likewise, I do not enter into the wider philosophical debates which have a cultural context (see for example, Crews, 1999). Indeed, there is no space here to discuss these complex issues. A brief summary of the relevant issues for this research however, is included in Appendix 1.

learning: “Practices are incorporated within the body, only then to be regenerated through the embodied work and competence of the body” (Crossley, 2001 p.106).

In contrast then, to the poststructuralist approach I outlined in Section 1 of this chapter, psychodynamic concepts are more likely to centre on the personal nature of emotions, rather than their social context. Indeed, it could be said that approaches such as psychoanalysis which focus on emotions as individual experiences believe that although their roots are often from our (childhood) past, emotions are experienced instantaneously rather than developing over time (Parkinson, 1995). Furthermore, these emotions are viewed as important only as they arise in interactions with others, rather than their articulation (Butler, 1997). Psychoanalysis sets itself apart from other ideas of the time by claiming that an individual’s mental health should be seen longitudinally rather than as a ‘snapshot’ (Elliott, 2002). Just as Bourdieu’s concept of habitus incorporates our past experiences and future aspirations, cultural environment, (body) language and so forth, so psychoanalysis can allow insights into how our motivations are (sometimes) created from our attitudes and behaviours from childhood through to adulthood.

Rather than a ‘passive’ store, Freud saw the unconscious as consisting of a *driving force* where hidden or repressed instincts are the potential cause of (all) our apparent ‘irrational’ behaviours. This view could be interpreted as diverging from the concept of habitus and conflicting against views of philosophers such as Sartre which attempt to transcend these kinds of binaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Sartre, 1943). Within the psychoanalytical concept of unconscious, ‘drives’ can be incompatible with each other – for instance if an individual is seeking personal gratification whilst also trying to adhere to learned socially-acceptable behaviour. In contrast to our postmodernist era, where ambiguity, uncertainty and contingency are accepted as

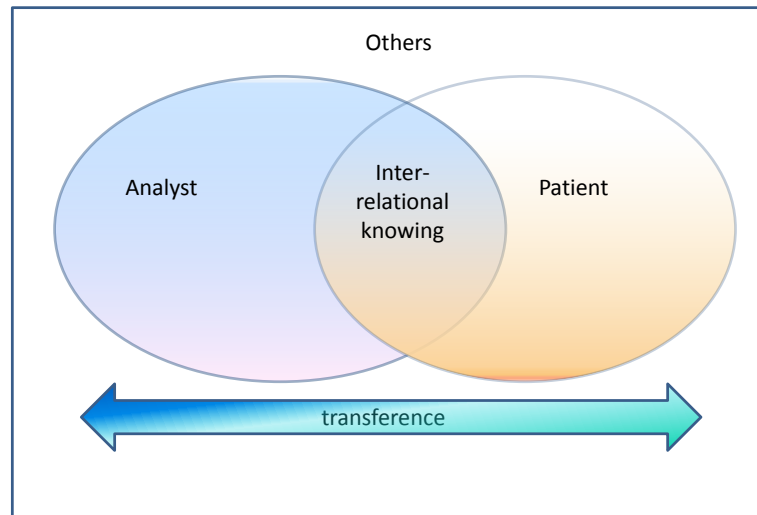
an unavoidable fact of life, psychoanalysis views this situation as a source of potential anxiety as an area of potential conflict between the needs of the ego and superego can potentially upset the 'equilibrium' of our psychic health (Brown, 1961/87 p. 7). These interpretations of emotional experiences are valuable in adding potential deeper understandings of the performative behaviours within the context of this research. For instance, research suggests that after an observation "ego defence mechanisms [...] are quickly deployed to ricochet bruising feedback" (Cockburn, 2005 p. 374).

Within the context of this research, seeking a balance between analysis/reflection in these 'inner and outer' worlds is crucial. This is because within qualitative research there is often an emotional connection or relationship between the researcher and interviewee; similarly between psychoanalyst and individual (patient) and (in the context of this research topic) between the observer and observee. This is because we often share an interest and/or experience of the subject under analysis and/or there is another common denominator (e.g. a workplace) (Letherby, 2000). There are important parallels here which may form elements of the 'context' of an observation as defined by O'Leary (2012).

Like a teacher-mentor, a skilled researcher might be able to draw on a relationship to raise difficult or sensitive subjects together and interpret different/shared perspectives. *This* emotional relationship is defined as a phenomenon to be studied *in itself* and termed an act of 'transference' wherein the individual is deemed *not* to be entering into a shared space, but simply substituting a memory of a past emotional relationship with an Other (Brown, 1961/87). This can be any significant emotional relationship from childhood. Some studies go further; trying to capture a definition of a particular 'moment of meeting' when there is 'something more' than a

shared understanding of an interpretation; an 'inter-relational knowing' (Stern, Sander et al., 1998) linking this to pre-speech communication.

The diagram (1) below illustrates my interpretation of these concepts<sup>21</sup>.



**Diagram 1: My visual interpretation of psychoanalytic concepts in interactions between patient and analyst.**  
(inspired by Stern, Sander et al. 1998)

Like the 'restrictive' situations reported in some observations (O'Leary, 2013) the power relationship between the psychoanalyst and the individual under analysis can sometimes be retained, in an approach which accentuates the differences between perceptions of trauma an individual experienced as a child, compared to adulthood. Similarly this emphasises the division between the perceived 'objectivity' of the psychoanalyst's interpretations of this trauma, compared to the 'passive' nature of the individual under analysis (Jarvis, 2004). There are specific parallels here in trying to understand the complexities of the emotions in an observation process, because as I explained in Chapter One, O'Leary (2012) and others have commented how important it is for observations to have a developmental or 'expansive' approach with a mentor/mentee relationship at its heart (O'Leary, 2013). Anna Freud commented

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<sup>21</sup> Later, I explain how these may have parallels with this research within my methodology and aims

on this issue in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*; if there is limited “success” of the analyst [in treating the individual] this maybe because the “analyst’s absence of bias is not reciprocated” (Freud, 1937 p. 30). It is difficult to see how an ‘absence of bias’ can be possible during the processes of any human interaction requiring personal reflection - such as an observation. Hence it may be extremely valuable to have an awareness of these concepts in order to provide a mutually beneficial understanding of the complexities involved in the emotional aspects of observations. How far and to what extent these concepts are relevant and helpful in *this* context, form part of the research objectives in attempting to better understand the affectivity of observations for the participants of this study.

As others have noted (e.g. Halas, 2004) there are some similarities here with Bourdieu’s (arguably contradictory) view that sociologists should be ‘seeking reality’ in that despite his repeated arguments encouraging researchers to challenge the artificial binary divide between (terms like) ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’, he maintained that an element of ‘objectivity’ was still possible if we explicitly articulated a reflexive approach to the subject under investigation (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). Hence concepts defined as *transference* by psychoanalysis and *reflexivity* by Bourdieu share an interest in attempting (conceptually at least) to ‘close the gap’ between the tensions in the perceived dichotomies in subjectivity/objectivity.

#### **e. The Emotions of Teaching & Learning: Bourdieu and Psychoanalysis**

From a psychoanalytical perspective, conjuring up emotional memories of previous acts which have caused emotional pain can provide the inevitability of future repeats of further injury to the self (Butler, 1997). The vulnerability of individuals’ professional habitus and the power of words (or silence) to injure the self, Bourdieu termed ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu, 1997) and may play an important part in an

individual's perception of gains or losses of social capital within the field of an observation. I have explained above how previous research has suggested how feedback from an observation leads sometimes to an individual feeling they have been affronted and (unfairly) judged. Arguably, as I explained in Chapter One there is a de-humanising aspect of being labelled with a numerical grade that is bound-up with personal and cultural meanings. The judgement of a grade upon perceived 'teaching quality' in this way can sometimes enact domination of one through a social position (Butler, 1997); in this case the manager over the teacher. Even if unintentional, the impact of this situation on the well-being of the individuals concerned can be profound, as previous research has suggested.

This 'symbolic violence' potentially increases further with the lack of transparency that occurs in some instances when institutional policies meant grades were deliberately hidden from tutors rather than included in any feedback (O'Leary, 2012). It seems that the act of teaching is (for some) so personal that it is inseparable from the whole person and therefore 'to attack one is to demolish the other' (Wragg, 1999 p. 99). It is with this in mind that James and Biesta (2007) define an FE teachers' professional habitus; a type of habitus - as I explained above - that brings together all the aspects that make-up who a teacher is - their own past and present learning experiences, their work and family lives, their skills and qualifications (James and Biesta, 2007). Although not conceptualised in this way, this element of 'context' was identified as an important aspect in O'Leary's (2012) data, for example in the way a teachers' professional habitus may conflict with 'measureable' requirements in the observation. This in turn may cause division amongst staff (see the case of 'Anne' in O'Leary, 2011 p. 237). This undoubtedly leads to increased levels of stress and anxiety for some staff, yet it remains underexplored.

The importance of this research lies in seeking to interpret the sensitive nuances of these profound, deep emotions. The emotions described in this research are wide-ranging: anger, resentment, shame, fear, disappointment, anxiety, depression, joy, pride....and all are an intrinsic part of teaching and learning. What I illustrate through the chapters which follow are my interpretations of the connections between the manifestations of these emotions and the lived experiences of the observations. This lies in the possibility that, for some teachers, they feel at risk of being penalized (by themselves and others) if they reveal aspects of their personal selves present in their teaching but at the same time 'hidden' (Honneth, 2004). Hence the performativity required in an observation may be perceived by others to illustrate a commitment or *illusio* to a role when it may involve complexities of identities including coping mechanisms linked to tensions between their own professional status and managerial views of competence (Cockburn, 2005). These emotions may be intrinsically linked to interpretations of the relationships between 'self' and 'I' or the *ego* in their perceived successes/failures in past relationships; attempts at previously seeking recognition, or in pursuing (social or economic) capital (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). Likewise, a *withdrawal* of recognition from others (or the threat of) also forms a fundamental part of the development of our self-identity (Benjamin, 1988) which may be founded upon long-forgotten childhood experiences or fantasies. (Butler, 1997)

What I have begun to unpack here are some of the elements that may go together to form the fluid nature of the emotional interactions within the multiple and changing identities of observation experiences. These are emotional experiences that evolve from the embodied, emotional labour that is teaching and learning (Denzin, 1989; Nias, 1996). Indeed, as I explain in the chapters which follow, there is an element of



this embodiment that has parallels with the aesthetic labour described in the service sector roles researched by (Witz, Warhurst et al., 2003). The physical presence of the teacher in the classroom; the position of the teacher's body and his/her embodied voice; the often embodied nature of the demonstrations of vocational learning (and the cultural connections these demonstrations may have to memories of a workplace) - all form a crucial part of the observation 'performance' that can be interpreted and experienced very differently by observer, student and selves (Denzin, 1989). Critics of Interpretive Interactionism include positivists who insist that researchers prove their objectivity and validity through strategies such as 'triangulation' and 'saturation'. Without these kinds of rigorous 'scientific' methods, interpretations apparently cannot form valuable propositions or explanations of behaviours, therefore no progress is made. No advance of ideas can be acknowledged. I do not dispute the perceived 'validity' of these perspectives, any more than I propose that my interpretations presented here form any 'real truth'. Indeed, it may be that these multiple perspectives may form a fuller understanding of the emotional experiences of FE staff within the context of observations.

#### **f. Performativity, Power and Playfulness**

Building on the different conceptual understandings of 'performativity' and its links with concepts of emotional labour, I have shown the potential complexities in perceptions of the inherent inequality or 'asymmetry' in the relationship between the observer and the teacher, researcher and participant, teacher and student.

Like Mead, Goffman (1922-1982) also studied at the University of Chicago and although he did not explicitly associate himself with SI, he explored this role-playing idea and provided popular studies of a 'dramaturgical approach'; illustrating how 'social agreements' are types of performativity (Goffman, 1959). Comparing human

behaviour to scenes on a stage, he provided examples of how people may interpret their roles differently 'on' and 'back stage' (through 'emotion-management' or 'emotional labour' for instance) and how the context of peoples' lived experiences may serve to pressure 'actors' to behave in specific ways.

These concepts are also likely to be valuable area for further investigation when considering the emotional experiences of staff during an observation. Arguably this is because, regardless of efforts directed toward performativity, it is sometimes human nature to 'pierce an individual's effort at calculated unintentionality' (Goffman, 1959:20). What Interactionists like Goffman meant by this, was that embedded in the observer's role is that of criticality, the foundation of which is in the individual's personal perspectives and experiences (Denzin, 1989). From Bourdieu's perspective, which focuses more on the macro elements of the institution's rituals wrapped up in a specific *doxa*, this situation may provide an illustration of 'symbolic violence' in that for many teachers, research has suggested this criticality leads to feelings of a fear of potential shame as a result of a judgement from an observation (O'Leary, 2012). As Price (2001) points out, these feelings may be connected to deeply-embedded private and social expectations of what it means to be a 'perfect' teacher (perhaps with 'parental' duties towards students too).

Following this then, even though these elements of teaching and learning are difficult if not impossible to 'measure' in any 'quantitative' way, some teachers may feel obliged - or perhaps feel they have little choice - to perform a version of strategic compliance in the act of concealing the fragility of the self or selves. Any (perceived) mistakes are corrected or hidden as there may be a heavy price to pay – in the case of the observation, both professionally and personally, to the *ego*. This concept of performativity may include a situation in which others feel obliged to give 'lip service'

(Goffman, 1959 p. 21) to a kind of unspoken, temporary agreement that denies the existence of potential conflicts of interest. To return to Bourdieu's concepts, the *illusio* of the teacher may change or be skewed in order to conform or resist the *doxa*. But there is a lack of self-confidence or self-esteem that is implicit in this 'temporary agreement' which presents apparent infallibility but also prevents any playfulness within these power relationships.

Progressivists view creativity and play as fundamental during teaching and learning, and research into improved learning experiences in FE promotes more innovation, improvisation and instinctive impulses (Harari, 2005). However, O'Leary (2011) suggests that many observations in FE seek to prevent risk-taking or creativity by ignoring the inherent contextual affectivity. If overcome, access to this space of 'playfulness' could provide a potential platform for freedom of creativity (e.g. Honneth, 2010) and in turn more effective reflexivity and learning (Winnicott, 1971). The complex nature of the 'inner world' of teaching and learning is illustrated in this quote below:

The insightful teacher makes decisions legitimised by implicit reference to events, themes and banks of goodwill, which have bonded the group throughout its life and are outside the awareness of the observer. Indeed, the greater the artistry of the teacher, the more tangible the psychological events being juxtaposed, and the less apparent these are to the observer. (Cockburn, 2005 p. 379)

The cultural norms associated with teaching and learning arguably need to be questioned then, if the emotional aspects of observations are to be explored. If effective observations are about promoting reflection and professional dialogue

about what may be perceived as 'best practice', staff should be encouraged to make use of these spaces to discuss the emotional aspects of professional development. In particular, it could be that rather than an area of potential anxiety, observations are crucial opportunities for potential playfulness where teachers can put away their 'tried and tested' lesson plans to take risks; where they can explore new and exciting opportunities for their own and their students' learning.

### **3. Conclusion**

Bearing in mind the context of this study I explained in the previous chapter and the underlying research, it is perhaps unsurprising that observations have been described as a 'flashpoint' for colleges that have triggered not only personal disputes and ill-health, but tragic suicides and wider, political and industrial action (University and Colleges Union, 2011). Observations in some colleges have reportedly had a far-reaching and negative impact on teachers' professional identities and their self-esteem (O'Leary, 2011). Because, he argues there are inherent power relationships within an observation, O'Leary (2012) uses a Foucauldian lens to illuminate the apparent ever-present 'Pan optical', managerialist approach commenting how often it is one of domination, not enablement. This view is intrinsically linked to the historical development of FE that I described in Chapter One. However it leaves little space for a deeper understanding of the *how* of individuals' emotional lived experiences of observations. In the research presented here, it is these affective elements of observations and their interconnectedness between micro/macro-level factors that is the subject of investigation. To some extent these viewpoints are reflected in my own professional habitus and therefore my motivations with/in this research. I acknowledge the importance of explicitly articulating my own place within the research. My reflections on this issue and the potential impact this has upon my

interpretations simultaneously forms an intrinsic part and a questioning of what Bourdieu defined as reflexivity in sociological research (Bourdieu, Waquant, 1992; Grenfell, James, 1998 p. 126).

This chapter has covered a lot of ground. I began in Section 1, with an outline of the various theoretical concepts drawn upon in this research, including a discussion of the concept of Hochschild's emotional labour and the theoretical issues relating to these debates. Particular conceptual tools from the social constructionist perspective, specifically Bourdieu can be useful in illuminating underexplored aspects of the language and affectivity of observations when viewed alongside some existing studies on this subject. By applying these concepts to the context of the observations of teaching and learning in FE, debates around the definitions of performativity and authenticity can be explored. Importantly, these concepts and the complexities of interpretation provide links to the close parallels within the methodology, epistemology and ontological aspects of this research.

In Section 2 I examined the more micro elements of the potential emotional contexts of the research topic with a description of aspects of psychoanalytical theory inspired by existentialist thought. In particular psychoanalysis brings a longitudinal view of how emotions can be formed from childhood experiences. This lens brings deeper meanings to an exploration of the personal teaching and learning experiences in the narrative approach of this study. The writings of Sartre have also provided further insights into possible interpretations of performing 'authenticity' and provides a basis for my own reflections within the research interpretations. Together with an Interpretive Interactionist approach these theoretical concepts encourage an investigation of the potential impact on emotions of the relationships involved in

observations, and the parallels between these relationships and others - real, remembered or imagined.

Halas (2004) Crossley (2001) Reay (2010) among others, hold the view that considering the parallel connections and the tensions between social constructionist views and psychoanalytical concepts, there is a potential for some areas of these theories (and methods) to merge. Within the context of this research, specifically because it centres on the narratives of descriptions of lived emotional experiences of FE staff in observations, these perspectives are potentially valuable to form the basis of further investigation. Drawn together, these useful 'stepping stones' could provide a way of transcending the usual binaries of cognitive/emotion associated with research into teaching and learning (Zembylas, 2007b) or indeed any micro/macro divide within sociological lenses. Through these multiple and flexible potential readings I provide the foundations for the subtle nuances and sensitivities to the data presented in the following chapters. The complexities of my life do not fit into a single theory (nor should I want it to), so why should narrative research data? These diverse conceptual tools, despite and because of their diversity, may contribute toward an understanding of the 'feel' of the emotional experiences I seek to illuminate.

In the chapter which follows, I explain the methodological, epistemological and ontological aspects of this research, which as I have indicated already, are intrinsically linked to the theoretical frameworks that I have explained in this chapter. These will then be drawn together within the analysis of the narratives in the chapters which follow.



# Chapter Three: Methodology

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## 1. Introduction

As I have explained in Chapter Two, Section 2, in September 2008 I began 'living' my research. I had taught in various different contexts over the years, but having recently completed my MA in Education, that September I began my first 'proper' full-time teaching role at a FE college in the Midlands. Teaching without the added complications, distractions and time commitments of any kind of formal study provided me with a renewed enthusiasm for my teaching. But detaching myself from my (by now) deeply embedded academic life was difficult. So when new, highly controversial 'teaching and learning observation procedures' were introduced, the proposal for this specific project was conceived. Unknown to me at that time was that the particular situation I was involved with would gradually evolve over the next two years into my own kind of 'action research' (McNiff, Whitehead, 2006).

Becoming a research 'activist' (Denzin, 2010a) took a great deal of commitment in terms of time and determination. It involved personal research, letters to/from the principal of the college, informal interviews with colleagues, students, governors and union representatives: all provided clues that observations were arguably causing a break-down in communications and undoubtedly some considerable anxiety for some. Furthermore, it became apparent that similar situations were happening in other FE institutions throughout the country. What drove me on was that there seemed to be a fundamental unfairness to the approach of management towards the lecturers and their professional practice. My sociological grounding provided me with some insights into interpretations of complex power relationships in FE and other educational institutions (Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005). But I had always been intrigued as to whether these power relationships were deliberately manufactured by management, and/or whether staff were (perhaps partly) complicit in their own

subordination. With this in mind, I highlighted to SMT what appeared to be the unintended consequences to the staff of the institution's new observation procedures. My strong sense of social justice meant that I needed to engage those with the power to change these procedures in the complex nature of what observations meant to those at 'grass roots level'.

**a. Outline of this Chapter: 'multigenre texts'**

As I explained in the previous chapter, throughout this thesis I explore different writing styles as a way of exploring different interpretations and also as a method of inquiry in itself (Richardson, 1997). Ellingson (2009) describes the way that writing with a multigenre approach provides new opportunities for interpretations and enhances the accessibility of research to broader audiences. This is an established way of providing an interpretive, phenomenological analysis (Denzin, 1989; Sundin, Fahy, 2008; Vickers, 2010). So far I have used conventional academic styles to outline the context and theoretical lens; I have also used an auto-biographical, fictionalised style to describe my motivations and influences upon the research. I draw upon these different approaches as a way of 'writing as a method of inquiry', and I explore these issues in more detail throughout the thesis.

Having described in the Chapter One the motivations for my research, and in Chapter Two the theoretical framework which underpins it, this chapter will explain and justify the methodologies, epistemologies and ontology involved in my research. There are four main parts to this chapter. I begin Section 1 with a discussion of some relevant overall methodological theories and through explaining the ontological aspects of my research; I describe the rationale for their use or the reason for them being discounted. I include a summary of the participants of this research in Tables A and B. In Section 2, I explain how, as with many research areas (and arguably this

is more relevant to my research topic), there are some striking parallels between my research *per se*, its methodology, and my theoretical framework and this begins to become more apparent in this chapter. I provide an overview of Grounded Theory and its critics and also outline the pilot study undertaken and how it informed the research. Section 3 of this chapter outlines the ethical implications and procedures for the research. I also describe the methods of recruitment of participants, interviewing and transcribing and analysing processes within this section. In line with its poststructural, interpretive interactional paradigm (explained in the previous chapter), in Section 4, I explain my method of fictionalised case studies which consolidate the different perspectives of teachers and the managers into a single event from two perspectives written in the first person. I discuss the strengths and weakness of this method and my rationale for its use. I also outline the parallels this approach has with my theoretical conceptual tools and framework (discussed in the Chapter Two). I conclude with a summary of the methodological concepts used in this research and an overview of the chapters to follow.

#### **b. Methodological Possibilities**

There were many methodological possibilities for this research, but my metaphorical 'jump' from my lived research (explained in Chapter One) to this thesis made me think differently about concepts such as Bryman's (2001) definition of inductive theory. Like 'subjective' and 'objective', the terms 'deductive' and 'inductive' vary widely in definition depending on interpretations and use (Hammersley, 2010). These terms seem to set up artificial binaries which simply are not helpful when a researcher (with emotions) is studying the emotional experiences of others. As I explain further below, attempting to separate the hopes, expectations, sensitivities

and interests from the research process and outcomes is simply not possible, as Rick Ochberg (2002) explains:

I am interested in how people understand themselves and their position in the larger society – and how this understanding may be constrained by the forms of public talk that society puts at their disposal. When I listen to an informant or read an interview transcript I ask myself, How might I use this to explore the discourse of gender, the moral contours of habitus, or the prospects for awakening sociological imagination and political activism? – and I do so from the beginning. I cannot emphasise this too strongly. I do not first interpret the text and only then cast about for some larger way of using it. Instead, the way that I pay attention to the text is shaped, from the start, by my anticipation of conversation that I might join. (Ochberg, 2002 p. 115)

In line with this viewpoint, I adopted a qualitative, grounded theory approach (Strauss, Corbin, 1990). Contrasting this with a quantitative, statistical analysis it seemed logical to reflect my knowledge of the literature with my lived and embodied emotional experiences of the subject matter and problematise these within that context (Charmaz, 2012). What has always been important to me throughout my interest in this issue is the emotional impact of the observations on individuals. Emotions are complex, fluid and deeply personal aspects of our lives; it simply would not have done justice to the topic area, or been respectful of the participants, if I had solely relied on quantitative data as a sole source of enquiry. Indeed, as I progressed through the initial interview phase of the research, the participants spoke of the value that the opportunity to talk openly about their experiences had presented for them. For example, in an email from a lecturer known as 'Alex', she joked that after the interview, she felt she needed to pay me for what she thought of as a '*successful*

*counselling session*'. The potential emancipatory or therapeutic nature of research is well-documented (Stevenson, Anderson et al., 2010) and reminded me of the importance of a sensitive approach (Richardson, 1997; West, 1996). This is something I return to later in this thesis.

Bearing in mind some of the comments on this subject from my 'critical friends', I also believe, as others have commented, that a critical realist perspective is relevant to my research area (Page, 2011). Indeed, this aspect forms an integral part of my motivation for engaging in this research. This is mainly because, to many readers, it seems unrealistic to use a 'snapshot' of a lesson within many hundreds of hours of teaching throughout the academic year, to judge teachers' competence. But this 'common sense' approach is complex, as I explained in the previous chapter and analyse further in the chapters which follow. There are certain assumptions with 'emotionalism' that need to be articulated here. It is not necessarily the case that an 'open-ended' interview produces freedom for the participant to 'tell their story'. It may be that the interview space itself, could be interpreted as a type of social control (Silverman, 2001). Furthermore, what right do we have as researchers to attempt to penetrate others' private worlds in order to then write our interpretation of them? (Hollway, Jefferson, 2000).

As I have mentioned above, I am mindful of the sensitivities needed during interviews, which in some cases was easier than in others (discussed in Chapter Eight). Difficulties arise when attempting to see these lived experiences as 'authentic', when this is an illusionary concept as every experience and story is, by its very nature, what the story-teller wants us to try to interpret. These 'displays' during interviews are 'crucial *because* they are examples of individuals' perspectives (Silverman, 2001 p. 112). These performances "frame remembered experiences of

that time with experiences prior and subsequent to it – in this way a ‘fuller’ picture [...] can emerge” (Dolton, Ditchburn, 2012 p. 1021). It is logical then, to situate my research methodology firmly in an approach which is sensitive, respectful and responsive to these individuals and their needs; something quantitative methods arguably cannot offer (Charmaz 2008; Silverman 2001). However, a small-scale, online, pilot questionnaire was conducted<sup>22</sup> which did produce some quantitative (as well as qualitative) data. This is described in full in section 2 of this chapter.

One option for my research could have been to produce an ethnographic approach to the study, whereby I also ‘sat-in’ with observers to investigate what the factors were that were being ‘observed’ and where the judgements were made. However, this produces many ethical issues and contradicts the very nature of the issue that forms a basis of my research – i.e. the subjectivity of the observer and the impact of the observer upon the observed. For this reason I decided very early on in the process against observing lessons, when the lecturer was also being formally (or informally) observed. There was another way to capture the lecturers’ lived experiences of being observed and in particular to gain a better understanding of the reasons why it was perceived as an emotional, embodied experience (as illustrated in the comments from the pilot study below).

Focus groups would have been another possible way of investigating the topic. However, upon consideration, I concluded that this method would be unlikely to allow or encourage the participants to fully explore their experiences. This is because of complex reasons, not least, the private emotions and experiences of the participants meant that many may be unwilling to share these with those they work with on a

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<sup>22</sup> Using the popular and free online survey facility – [www.surveymoz.com](http://www.surveymoz.com) (extracts from results in Appendix 1).

regular basis. The power relationships between colleagues and their line managers, especially during this pressurised economic time, may have prevented participants from feeling comfortable about fully describing their experiences (Wengraf, 2001). Time constraints and practicalities of booking large, quiet rooms were also unrealistic in certain institutions. With these issues in mind, I decided private one-to-one interviews were more suitable and would be more likely to uncover deeper understanding of the emotions experienced.

## **2. Parallels: My Methodologies and Theoretical Framework**

Creswell (2007) and other authors e.g. (Denzin, 2010b) describe ‘different’ approaches to qualitative inquiry, however, many elements (and likewise some controversies) within each of these methods had a part to play over the course of my research. Serendipitously, the foundational approaches or ‘traditions’ of my epistemology are simultaneously entwined within the methodology and topic of my research. This is because, as I explained in Chapter Two, there are complex socio-political and historical contexts within lesson observations, which in turn forms part of a unique professional habitus. Therefore there is arguably no ‘overall truth’ of any ‘objective assessment’ possible; the nature of teaching and learning is *by definition* fluid and impossible to define. Hence qualitative research of this nature - as I explain in more detail later in this chapter – does not and cannot offer a claim of any ‘monolithic truth’. The complex contexts of the researcher, participants, socio-political situation and numerous other factors, all contribute to an interpretation: one of many which can illuminate otherwise hidden aspects of individuals’ behaviours.

For this reason, it is necessary to make these connections between theoretical, philosophical elements and methodological ones within this (methodology) chapter, wherever appropriate. To begin, I pose the problematisation of positivism as this is

embedded within my research questions. For example, the epistemological question of whether (a) truth exists and what is acceptable knowledge can be coupled with philosophical issues of objectivity/subjectivity within an observation. For instance:

- How might an observer know when ‘learning has happened’ (Ofsted, 2006)?
- How can a definition of ‘good’ teaching for one individual, mean the same for another?
- Does an observer (need to) hold a view of empirical realism when observing a lesson?

Likewise, does the presence of an observer (or researcher) impact the ‘truth’ that is being sought in the (quality of) the teacher (or participant)? (Ezzy, 2010; Letherby, 2003). However, it is Eisner (1997) who points out that bearing in mind the growing interest in inventing new ways of knowing and representing knowledge, the definitions of objectivity and subjectivity have perhaps become less valuable than the investigation into *where* these definitions arise (and conflict). The philosophical debates I outlined in Chapter Two assert that it is the usefulness of knowledge rather than its perceived ‘validity’ that should concern researchers. Hence, in support of Sparkes (1992) and Ellis (2000), I investigate here what some would define as less academically ‘conventional’ ways of expressing my research outcomes.

### **a. Ontological Considerations**

I explained in Chapter One my motivations and intellectual journey to reaching this point. It is necessary here to briefly summarise the aspects which are specific to my own perspectives to this research. These experiences are important aspects of the approach and structure of this research and form the foundation for the theoretical framework from which I draw my inspiration. As I explained in the previous chapter,



James and Biesta (2007) use the term 'professional habitus' to define personal teaching ideologies that inform teaching practice, and in this thesis my habitus also informs my approach as a researcher. The value of the researcher's experiences has been debated (Atkinson, 2005) arguably because research becomes biased and therefore perceived as 'less valid' if the individual views and emotions of the researcher are involved. For me however, one of the most profound examples of the potential impact of personal experience can be found in the writing of Kay Redfield Jamison (1995), who draws on her academic expertise to convey her experiences of suffering from manic depressive disorder. Similarly, the book I mention in Chapter One, Section 2, by Oliver (1996), throws new insights from the perspective of an individual who articulates his experiences of being both able-bodied and disabled. My motivation to seek out an understanding of the processes behind observations eventually became (for a limited time at least) my 'intervention for exit' from FE (James, Biesta, 2007 p. 118). Positive change in the managerial approach happened sometime after I had left the college where my (extended) learning journey had begun - partly a result of my efforts at raising awareness of the unintended consequences of the observation procedures. My motivations for pursuing this research area were firmly based on my disillusionment and my emotional experiences – past, present and future hopes for its positive improvements. Emotional experiences that are emancipatory – both in nature and aspiration – are powerful catalysts for change and fundamental to teaching and learning. As Nias (1996) points out, teachers' frequent use of deeply emotive language to describe their professional lives, is not often associated with the average workplace: e.g. "*passion*", "*dangerously stressed*", "*profoundly disturbing*", "*great joy*" etc. Controlling and channelling these emotional energies inevitably has both a positive and negative influence on teachers' work, and their self-concept (Nias, 1996).

Bathmaker (2005) and Colley (2001) see unique aspects to the emotional labour of teaching in FE. Teaching is a creative art, or 'craft' created by and around our personal ideology (Wragg, 1999). A teacher's ethos and sense of self is inevitably shaped by their past (educational) experiences (Bathmaker, 2005 p. 19). James and Biesta (2007) suggest that there is also a collective sense of 'self' that is developed in the staff-room where colleagues often support each other through many emotional experiences; to some extent they become 'one' with the field. FE's diverse student population, many adolescent or young adult learners and often community-oriented location (both geographically and culturally) create uniqueness to the learning and teaching atmosphere of FE that is difficult to define.

Furthermore, Nias, (1996) suggests that teachers generally take their role as 'carer' as given: they are in close contact with individuals whose progress in the world is their responsibility and understandably they are passionate about *their* students, *their* skills and often *their* institution. The use of the word "their" is important – there is a territorial aspect to the teachers' domain – one that is increasingly being threatened by external factors<sup>23</sup>. Many teachers are also politically passionate about the government policies that they are surrounded by, and this territoriality has perhaps evolved as a result of the stark contrast of the stresses and anxieties of their role *outside* the classroom compared to the enjoyment and rewards that are often provided *within*. Indeed, often they articulate how they feel they hold some moral responsibility for their students' social and emotional development, for example in this quote from the research of Gleeson et al., (2005):

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<sup>23</sup> This important 'territorial' issue is something I return to in the analysis chapters which follow.

The joys are of course the students that you can see you've, or feel you've made a difference with, the ones that have really come on. You know their confidence builds and so on. However you look at it you've got to have had some part in that... (*Rachel* in Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005 p. 452)

Like Rachel above, my colleagues and I often talk of the importance of our sense of responsibility towards our students. This is why Sartre's existentialism brings meaning to me personally and therefore to the ontological aspects of my research. The 'freedom' inherent in the autonomy that is teaching is simultaneously a philosophy that we hope our students will develop: decision-making is, after all, as much about learning (the pros and cons of different choices) as it is about self-confidence. As Price (2001) commented, the essence of being viewed as a 'good' teacher is often found in the personal rewards the role brings in witnessing this development in others – rather than any external acknowledgement. After a lesson observation, teachers may be labelled by their managers and peers with the grade they have obtained and may even label themselves - for example 'I'm a (grade) three' (perceived as failure). Even though a lesson observation is just a small part of the duties of a teacher, as I explained in the previous chapter it is often perceived as an implicit judgement on the self (Butler, 1997). Indeed from the existentialists perspective, Sartre (1943) would term the feelings of being labelled in this way as 'Being-for-itself' (as opposed to 'Being-for-others') but would perhaps be critical of any perceived hierarchies between these terms (Detmer 2008; Levy 2002).

However, I want to problematize these kinds of binaries of identity and self, performativity and authenticity, in an attempt to gain an insight into whether and how these types of terms and thinking impact upon how FE staff experience observations. In drawing on aspects of Interpretive Interactionism this research is not

pursuing a singular 'truth'. Instead, I seek to explore the emotional experiences within the context of this study in order to provide some insights into the 'how' of these processes.

This personal involvement and experience with the subject matter under investigation creates a cross or multidimensional aspect to my project, which, from the outset, arguably because of my background, could also be described as multi-disciplinary. Indeed, others have described this kind of complex relationship as "between methods" (Richardson, 1997 p. 60); something which goes beyond a traditional approach offering an opportunity for new knowledge. Rather than being detrimental to the process; "...any analysis must *rely* on everyday experience, yet must *transcend* that experience" (Corbin, Strauss, 2008 p. 62 my emphasis). Denzin (2010) warns us against the dangers of believing that just by using two or more methods that an 'overall truth' may be uncovered as although this may provide me with further confidence about data analysis, the complexity of this research area, requires elucidation through more than one means (Denzin, 2010 p. 239). So rather than a simple 'triangulation' of data, I aim to provide what Richardson (1997) describes as a '*crystallisation*' effect; a multiple, dense, complexity of perspectives that eventually may allow the reader a better understanding of the emotions involved for FE staff during a lesson observation.

## **b. Grounded Theory<sup>24</sup>**

An heuristic (Moustakas, 1990) or grounded theory approach (GT) (Charmaz, 2008) can address some of the difficulties that these ontological complexities present. This is because they allow for fluidity in developing increasingly abstract ideas from

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<sup>24</sup> The explanation of GT is deliberately positioned here within the thesis rather than within the theoretical chapter because it is strongly situated within the pragmatic processes I employed during this study.

analysing and re-analysing participants' narratives (Charmaz, 2008). It also encourages the researcher to be 'grounded' in his/her own personal ideology (Denzin, 2010a). But the how and where of this 'groundedness' is controversial, as I explain below. This is mainly because, since the initial publication of GT (Strauss, Corbin, 1990) many diverse 'families' of methods within the GT genre have evolved (Bryant 2009). Rather than a specific research method, Babchuk (2010) therefore defines GT as a 'flexible set of principles and practices' (2010 p. 9)

What Moustakas (1990) describes as a 'GT-type approach', insists on 'truth-seeking' amongst the participants narratives, which, as I explain more fully below, is impossible here on a number of levels. Furthermore, Moustakas (1990) suggests that 'heuristic methodology' develops into a therapy for the participants, where "one develops a new view of self and life and makes possible movement towards authenticity, self-efficacy and well-being" (Moustakas, 1990 p. 124). Whilst I don't doubt that Moustakas has considered the ethical implications of this aspiration, and the complexities of the theoretical perspective (for himself and his participants), this view does not fit with the constructivist interpretive framework I use here. In contrast to Moustakas, what encourages me with Charmaz's perspective is an opportunity for what Letherby (2007) describes as a 'cook book' approach: that is, to create my own, unique version of a recipe; improvising slightly, whilst basing the main ingredients on previous expertise and traditions. Using metaphorical images can be a useful way of exploring this issue. Some may view their own theoretical and methodological lens as positioned upon a linear continuum; sociological theories perhaps being at one end of the spectrum and psychological concepts at the other. However I favour the analogy of picking 'ripe' plums from the conceptual tree, in that each branch may be interconnected but produces differently positioned fruit - some of which may be out of reach, but may, in time become accessible. Whatever our unique perspective, if

we are to truly embrace what may be described as a post-positivist approach, then we should strive to transcend artificial barriers such as sociological versus psychological paradigms and playfully ‘mix it up’ (Ellingson, 2008).

In seeking new meanings to existing data, new data can be sought and, in turn emerge and therefore the research process becomes truly organic in nature and open to change and interpretations. Data is not ‘formed’ by the researcher, but GT accepts that there may be some appropriate, intelligent ‘shaping’ of the data, simply because of what we know (Charmaz, 2008). There seems no logical reason to leave out the ‘*shoulds and oughts*’ that I have formed from my experience and background (Denzin, 1989). This particular aspect of GT can effectively address social justice studies, because ‘enacted processes’ (Denzin, 2010a) are only made real through actions that are performed repeatedly. In my research, this is exactly what I am interested in studying: i.e. the perceptions and experiences of different individuals’ behaviour in a classroom observation.

In using a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach (Charmaz, 2008), I am following the initial GT ‘guidelines’, but without the objectivist, positivist perspective it was based upon. Indeed, Thomas and James (2006) claimed that the intrinsic, contradictory nature of Stauss’ post-positivist GT is still (like many research studies of its time) reliant upon mainly positivist perspectives that seemingly were difficult to evade or ignore. The important aspect of this approach, for me, is that personal philosophy, biography and interpretivism plays such a fundamental part. So, yes, there *is* some bias – that’s because as a sociologist interested in emotions, it is the inherent social constructs, including language that forms the starting point of my investigation. This research simply would not exist without my being motivated to pursue it; motives that are embodied in my feelings! We cannot pretend to be

'outside reality' if we consider the possibility that there may be no such thing. Mead (1934) viewed research not as a 'discovery' of any truth – only that relationships, experience and research can *together* share the (de)construction of meanings. This ontology and equality ethos fits with my values and beliefs described above. I am optimistic my approach and method serves to strengthen my objectives to explore the emotions within the reported power relationships that are investigated in this research.

CGT holds an acceptance that we all construct our own interpretation of the complex meanings of our data and that rather than a hindrance, this is crucial to its (and our) development. It does not assume that 'impartial observers enter the research scene without an interpretive frame of reference' (Charmaz, 2005 p. 509). Likewise, my own belief is that an individual cannot observe a lesson without being affected by their own life-history, interests, relationships and other numerous issues. Just like the context of a lesson observation, the context of a research study is crucial to a fuller understanding of the interpretations inherent in any outcomes. Hammersley (2010) sees this 'context' as central to qualitative inquiry. But what is 'context' and how can we tap into our 'sociological imagination'?

...the sociological imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, from the political to the psychological, from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of [...] the world; from the theological school to the military establishment, from consideration of an oil industry to studies in contemporary poetry. (Wright Mills 1959 p. 7)

Wright Mills believed that a sociological imagination was crucial to researchers because of the way it allows us to begin to understand our own experiences and

measure our own outcomes. It does this by locating ourselves within our own time and by assisting us to become aware of others and their impact on us and our research subject. However, open-mindedness does come with its own difficulties (Denzin 2010b; West 1996). The language we use every day is full of potential prejudices and cultural biases carried forward in their meanings, nuances and tone. It is the interpretive researcher's duty to draw meanings from the surface and deeper substance of the narratives we are offered. In this way we can encourage *new ways of paying attention* to the data and new meanings from these interpretations (Ochberg, 2002). In Postmodern society, this brings a new relevance to the importance of interpretivism as interactional, and so leads us on to ways of (re)presenting, viewing and interpreting data which have changed in radical ways; ways that perhaps would have been unthinkable to academic writers from even a generation ago.

For these reasons, this thesis places the definitions, conceptualisation and interpretation of 'what research is', at its core. This is because this research is 'grounded' in my own views and experiences. As I have explained earlier, as a mature student, I firmly believe in the value of context that life experiences bring to our learning (Merrill, Hyland 2003; West 1996) and of the importance that context brings to the classroom (O'Leary, 2006). But a sociological imagination is more than using personal experience in research; it is expressing a reflexive self and using our imagination and creativity in the research process itself (Campbell, 2000; Sparkes 2002) as I explain in Section 4, below.

### **c. Critiques of Grounded Theory**

As I explained above GT has evolved dramatically since its 'birth' in 1967 - to the extent that some say that it should no longer be termed such (Thomas, James



2006). This hinges on the view that without its quantitative foundation, GT is more 'inventive' in nature than a method of discovery, 'grounded' in nothing other than interpretations. One of the main criticisms of GT has been its development into a more positivist space. Indeed, for some, its move away from the foundations of its qualitative, humanistic approach, into a more 'pseudo-scientific' methodology apparently reduced its credibility (West, 1996). But just as GT allows for fluidity and change, then GT *itself* must evolve to allow for the developments that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has provided. For Charmaz (2005) this involves problematizing the post-positivist roots of GT and adding a new, constructivist social-science grounding. This may involve a move away from the technical procedures that restrict a wholly qualitative approach (e.g. software packages such as NVivo, dialogue statistics or discourse analysis). It may also challenge a 'taken-for-grantedness' that research objectives must 'verify an official goal' (Charmaz, 2005).

However, whatever the term or definition of the GT 'method', it is the constructionist lens that is of value here. Kathy Charmaz's attempts at separating her more organic, creative approach from the anti/positivist methods that had been popular at that time were because, in her own words: "At that time social constructionists talked about everything being socially constructed but did not address their own constructions." (Charmaz, 2012). The creativity inherent in 'invention' is an important concept here, as I explore the meanings of playfulness within my own professional habitus and those of my participants (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992; Richardson, 1997; Winnicott, 1971). This conviction forms a fundamental basis for my professional habitus. As I have written above, there is an important parallel between my research topic and my research. By its very nature, my research and the wider research situation itself can never be totally objective – however you interpret the definition of that word

(Hammersley 2010; Letherby 2003). Because the concept of interaction is so crucial, I found Denzin's (1989) *Interpretive Interactionism*, the roots of which are firmly within Mead's Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1969), together with those views mentioned above, to be the most appropriate perspective to assist me with studying this topic. As I explained in the previous chapter, this hermeneutic-phenomenological approach suggests we cannot and (more importantly) *should* not 'factor ourselves out' during the processes of qualitative research. This is important because, not only are there parallels to the processes of observations in that (arguably) teaching practices are open to interpretations, but that also my interpretation of my participants' experiences *also* provides another level of analysis. In short, the context my research provides the grounds for the context of its methodology. I explain this in more detail below.

#### **d. Summary of the Pilot Study**

Drawing on my auto-ethnographic experiences (Denzin, 2010a), my initial academic investigations (described in the previous chapters) about the impact of observations on staff in FE confirmed that my own experiences and those of my close colleagues were not isolated. As I explained above, the concept of 'triangulation' in time, space and methodological approach (Cohen, Manion 1980b) is not sufficient for my research. A 'crystallisation' (Richardson, 1997) through different approaches would start on a practical level with a pilot study, which would help the direction of my research in terms of interview questions and theoretical framework.

In May 2010 I constructed a brief questionnaire through a free online survey tool (Surveygizmo.com) (see Appendix 2) to investigate this further. My objectives were to establish what lesson observation policies were in other institutions, and what lecturer's experiences were with them. The short on-line questionnaire consisted of

14 closed questions where respondents could either reply with a drop-down or tick-box entry, and two open-ended questions that allowed for general comments about the respondents' views and experiences of observations. The link was sent by email via contacts that I had at various institutions and through the University and Colleges Union (UCU)<sup>25</sup>. I had more success with personal contacts than I did through the mailing system at UCU members. Out of 24 sent out to personal contacts, I received 12 responses. However, the link sent to nearly 50 UCU members' email addresses produced only 6 responses – delivering 18 completed questionnaire responses in total from a range of institutions in South East England and the Midlands.

Perhaps the most surprising response from the pilot questionnaire was provided in the answers to question number three: “*How are formal observation outcomes measured?*” whereby nine of the respondents (50%) replied that their college's own grades were used, rather than Ofsted's grading system (explained in full in the previous chapter). Furthermore, seven of the respondents, claimed that no notice was provided at all of a formal observation; that therefore an observer could potentially turn-up anytime, unannounced. It was interesting to read that all but one of the respondents felt that ‘generally speaking’ the observer was always someone with teaching experience. According to most of the respondents, the amount of physical paperwork requested by an observer was a big factor of concern, with one of the respondents even writing ‘too much to list’. This was a recurring issue during the interviews, in particular the impact on personal time of the workload.

Thirteen of the respondents (79.5%) thought that the main purpose of the observation was for college quality control purposes as opposed to formative,

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<sup>25</sup> The UCU kindly assisted by using their system to generate a random sample of members' email address from their database.

personal development. The tension between these two objectives in an observation was explored during the interviews. However, it was the comments at the end of the pilot questionnaire (see Appendix 1) which proved the most interesting in terms of framing my *aide memoire* for interviews. For example, to the last question: “How do you feel about the observation policies and procedures at your college?” the following selected responses give an indication of the strength of feeling:

*“More punitive than supportive”*

*“Time consuming and barely worthwhile”*

*“Very stressful. I’m a good teacher, but don’t cope well with observations and the amount of stress myself and my colleagues is under is enormous [...] this has been one of the most difficult years of my teaching life”*

*“[...] virtually impossible to meet the new requirements”*

*“Extremely stressful. It is still pot-luck who you get to observe you – it remains a far too subjective process”*

### **3. Methods of the Main Study**

The results from the Pilot Survey (summarised above) confirmed that my suspicions about the emotions involved in the observation process demanded further investigation. I constructed some brief ‘outline’ questions that guided the interviews for the main study, but at the same time kept them ‘loose’ enough to enable the participants to talk about anything that they felt was relevant (see Appendix 3 for the list of these questions). My years of experience in various careers in the corporate world (described in Chapter One) had already involved training in ‘Open Questioning

Techniques' and other instructions such as using appropriate body language. Strategies at building rapport with interviewees and allowing for thinking-time silences had become second-nature to me within a sales environment and these were skills which developed further over the course of this study, within this slightly different context. Notions that some of these interactions may be linked to psychoanalytical concepts of transference relationships (Hollway, Jefferson, 2000) were unknown to me at that time. However, these new conceptualisations of the research processes evolved, in line with the research itself. For instance, the inclusion of a question inspired by the work of Hochschild, "describe a time [during teaching] when you felt strong emotion" produced some interesting responses, and the later interviews included a question about what kind of metaphor the participants would use (if any) to describe their classroom (see the analysis chapters for details).

Combining different methods and approaches did not necessarily mean the same conclusions emerged (no matter how much I 'willed' them to) (Hammersley, 2010; Moustakas 1990; Pelias 2004; Silverman 2001). The combination of multiple approaches, perspectives and methods, provides a complexity within the data which is inevitable and welcomed. From the interpretive interactionist lens (Denzin, 1989), I am reminded that there is (perhaps) no overall truth or 'complete picture' (Silverman 2001 p. 122) when what I aim to produce is a montage of stories; open to interpretation; an insight into the emotional lived experiences of teachers and managers in observations.

#### **a. Ethical Issues, Sample Size and Participants**

The ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) were consulted and ethical approval was sought and provided by the Ethics Committee within my institution. All the interviews with the participants were deliberately

arranged within an environment and atmosphere where an opportunity for reflection was encouraged. Some took place in the participants' own home (Alex, Anna) others took place in a quiet, private area of the staffroom or an office at the college (Jason, Brian). The participants chose where and when the interviews took place and how long they took.

For a variety of reasons, the interview times and locations were more successful with some interviewees than others. For example, time constraints and work commitments limited the return of some participants for a second interview and one interview - 'Grace' - took place with the help of *Skype* technology and hence was only 'virtually' face-to-face. Due to constraints on their own time, most participants were interviewed once for between one and two hours<sup>26</sup>. Some participants were interviewed more than once, and some data included emails that resulted from follow-up after the interview. Eight of the fourteen participants were known to me (to varying degrees) prior to the interviews. They volunteered to take part in the research partly because they themselves may have been interested in supporting teachers undertaking research studies such as this. Where appropriate I have been explicit about the nature of our acquaintance. **Tables A and B** below summarise the details of the fourteen participants and their process of recruitment to participate in this study.

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<sup>26</sup> Grace, Brian, Sam, Naima in the 'teachers' group; James, Jennifer, Julia, Mike, Helen in the 'managers' group.

Tables showing a summary of research participants. Different FE colleges indicated by letters after their location. Note that 'South East' includes London.

**Table A: 'Lecturer' participants**

Pseudonym	Location of College	At time of interview, employment type:	Main teaching Subject(s):	Route to being a participant:
Sally	Midlands A	Part-time, sessional	ESOL	Met briefly at an academic workshop
Grace <sup>1</sup>	Midlands B	Part-time, permanent	Health & Social Care	Past colleague
Alex	Midlands B	Full-time, permanent	Co-ordinator, Health and Social Care	Past colleague, personal friend.
Brian	South East B	Full-time, permanent	Access, Health and Social care	Met very briefly in a past workplace.
Sam	Midlands C	Part-time, permanent	ESOL	Unknown to me prior to interview. Volunteered in response to an email to a manager in her college.
Naima	Midlands C	Part-time, sessional	ESOL	As above
Jim	South East E	Full-time, permanent	Engineering	Friend of my husband

<sup>1</sup> Because of time and travel limitations for Grace, this interview took place using 'Skype' a face-to-face internet telephone call using webcams, which was recorded simultaneously and later transcribed.

**Table B: ‘Manager’ Participants**

Pseudonym	Location of college	At time of interview, employment type:	Role (generic):	Route to being a participant:
James	South East B	Full-time, permanent	Quality Assurance, Teaching: catering	Unknown to me prior to interview. Volunteered as a result of an email sent to the college
Jason <sup>1</sup>	Midlands C	Full-time, permanent	ESOL Manager	Past colleague
Jennifer	South East C	Full-time, permanent	Staff Development Manager	Unknown to me prior to interview. Volunteered as a result of an email sent to the college
Julia <sup>2</sup>	South East C	Full-time, permanent	Health and Social Care Manager	Unknown to me prior to interview. Volunteered as a result of an email sent to the college
Mike	South East D	Full-time, permanent	Staff Development Manager	Met briefly at an academic workshop.
Anna <sup>3</sup>	South East A	Part-time, sessional	Lecturer: English, Access, Psychology	Personal friend
Helen	South East C	Part-time, permanent	Health and Social Care Manager	Unknown to me prior to interview. Volunteered as a result of an email sent to the college

<sup>1</sup> At this participant’s request, only part of the interview was recorded see the transcript for details.

<sup>2</sup> NB Julia and Helen were interviewed together at their request

<sup>3</sup> Anna had previously held positions which included managerial duties as an observer, hence her narrative crosses the boundaries of ‘lecturer/manager’ and appears when relevant within the analysis.



When arranging the interviews I was mindful of O’Leary’s (2011) research, which although providing insights into the apparent ‘ineffective’ nature of observations, probably for sound practical reasons, did not appear to provide enough of an opportunity for the participants to fully explain their lived emotional experiences of observations. For example, asking the participants to ‘write three words to describe your emotions before, during and after an observation’ seemed restrictive. Hence another important aspect of this research; in providing the narratives which illuminate the process of the emotional experiences of teachers in observations, and also providing teachers and managers with a *space for reflection* about these emotional experiences. (I discuss this issue in more detail in Chapter Eight).

The research sample consisted mainly of what has been termed ‘convenience sampling’ (McNiff, Whitehead, 2006) or ‘opportunistic sampling’ (Creswell, 2007). The participants included some people whom I knew as friends, and/or colleagues or friends of friends who had volunteered to take-part in my research. There were fourteen participants in total. As can be seen from Tables A & B above, three of the lecturer participants (Alex, Jim and Grace) were already known to me prior to the study (Alex and Grace from a previous workplace, Jim was a friend of my husband’s). For these three participants in particular then, rapport between us was already present at the time of the interview (discussed fully below). A further two participants I had met briefly (at a workplace and/or university seminar) prior to the interviews (Brian and Sally); although I knew very little about their biographies prior to the interview taking place. I had not met Naima or Sam prior to the interviews, which were arranged via email. The content of the group of manager participants was slightly different (this had consequences for the analysis, see Chapters Six and Seven) in that only one participant (Jason) I regarded as a ‘close’ (ex)colleague prior

to the two interviews with him. Two other participants (Anna and Mike) I had met briefly prior to the interviews, (although again, I knew little about their lives and professional context). I had not met the remaining four manager participants; Helen, Julia, James and Jennifer prior to the interviews.

The two groups each of seven participants represent a relatively small sample size. However, within the context of the research objectives set out in Chapter One and the theoretical framework set out in Chapter Two, this sample size is considered by authors in the Baker and Edwards (2010) publication to be appropriate. This is because the subject under investigation is the individual lived emotional experiences (of observations), which by its very nature cannot be 'generalizable' in the way some authors claim. One oral history in its own right can be considered valuable, and therefore it follows that a few interviews which seek to explore the emotional phenomena under investigation demonstrates the complexity of the situation. Surely, this is the very purpose of research in this area? Furthermore, there can never be a 'saturation point'; each story is unique (Letherby, 2003). A greater number of interviews would therefore not provide 'more'; the depth is contained in each narrative. In drawing on Bourdieu's concept of 'field' (explained in the Chapter Two) it could be seen that an important element of the research is the diversity in some individual's conceptualisation of their own unique professional 'field' (Bourdieu, 1991). In order to provide a further layer of interpretation and data, some participants (Sally, Anna and Jason) were interviewed more than once. Interviews ranged in length from one hour to three hours, with additional data available in the form of personal notes taken at the time of the interviews, reflections upon these and email correspondence to/from the participants after the meetings. I explain with the aid of a diagram in the following section how data were analysed.

There is an assumption with convenience sampling that although the participants have been interviewed because of their location (physically or administratively) to the researcher, that they form part of an homogeneous group (Baker, Edwards, 2010). i.e. that there would be no difference to the outcomes of the research if the participants were chosen through another method. Because the aim of this study is in learning about the emotional aspects of observations for the staff, I felt that this method of sampling was particularly suited to the objectives of the research. Crossley (2001) writes that because a sample is perceived to be 'random' it does not necessarily follow that this provides more 'validity' than other samples. Indeed, it is important for this research that where a relationship existed between me and the participant, that this has been explained and reflected upon wherever appropriate and relevant.

A criticism of this method (rather than using a 'random' sample<sup>27</sup>) is the perceived 'risk' of introducing 'bias' to the data, in that participants may report what they thought I wanted to hear (rather than their own views or experiences). This is a common issue in any qualitative research of this nature, especially where in-depth interviews are concerned. As I have explained above and in the previous chapter, it is impossible to separate the researcher entirely when sharing potentially emotional experiences and more importantly I would not want to do so. With this in mind, I tried to maintain an unstructured approach within the interviews (participants often, because of this, veered off in abstract directions during their narrative). I felt that the benefit of being able to talk openly with most of the participants, some of whom I had already built-up rapport with, outweighed any disadvantages. For instance, I knew

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<sup>27</sup> Although the definition of 'random' is itself argued to be problematic (Silverman, 2001).

very little of Alex's personal circumstances - and nothing of her childhood - but I had worked with her in the past because we shared a staff-room. The interview with her was founded on a mutual understanding of the institutional environment we had both (previously) shared. Because there were aspects of our work together that 'went without saying' ( James, Biesta 2007; James, Diment, 2003) I felt this encouraged her to speak openly about how she felt about being observed and other private aspects of her life which had led her into teaching. Hence her narrative was particularly rich in 'meaningful data' (Wengraf, 2001) which I drew upon frequently when creating the fictionalised story and during the analysis. Similarly, but in different ways, those participants whom I had not met prior to the interview(s) allowed me to form a 'detached' approach; for Sam, Helen and Naima for example, their narratives contained comments I doubted they would have repeated in front of their manager; they were 'open' to me, but in a different way. This was perhaps their (only) opportunity to speak their mind. In contrast, for others, like James, the interview felt more like a performance which provided a stage for him to defend his managerial style (Bourdieu, 1991; Goffman, 1959).

Furthermore, after the second interview, it became apparent that there was an aspect of what I call 'ambivalence' that I hadn't anticipated held by some individuals towards the observation processes at their college. They presented views which conflicted or were contradictory<sup>28</sup>. What is important for the research and for me personally is that the participants themselves recognise the relevance of the data and the way it is presented. Only then can it be considered 'effective' (Bathmaker, Avis, 2005; Denzin, 1989). From the very beginning, I have been as open with the

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<sup>28</sup> This aspect of the contradictory nature of some of the narratives is discussed in detail in the analysis section of this thesis (May, 2010).

participants as I can, often sharing thoughts and ideas and with some, rehearsing (academic) presentations of the initial findings. This proved extremely useful for exploring the definitions of the terms used and the different interpretations of the findings.

I tried to keep the interviews as informal as possible, drawing on relevant similarities that I had with the participants; professional and personal. I hoped my approach provided the interviewees with space to talk freely in an atmosphere of mutual respect (Grenfell, James, 1998 p. 30). Rather than a form-filling exercise, I therefore read-out the ethics information document and consent forms. Although a relatively small sample, the impact of their activity on others (in the case of the lecturers; their students, and in the case of the observers, their staff and their students) is considerable. Small samples in this kind of research are extremely valuable because of the impact their lives have on others and the rich data their narratives produce (Bathmaker, Avis, 2005; Hammersley, 2010). This was particularly important to this research which, as I explained in the previous chapter, focused on an under-researched group.

#### **b. The Format of the Interviews**

The concept of the in-depth, unstructured interviews is crucial to this research topic and its underlying epistemology. Recording individuals' stories, analysing these and putting the common and disparate themes at the centre of the research is suggested as an effective way of uncovering a new understanding of the emotionality of our humanness. I agree with Griffiths, Borkan et al., (2010) in that "an individual is the best person to describe their qualitative state" (Griffiths, Borkan et al., 2010). What Geertz (1973) illustrates as the 'thick description' that is produced from this kind of

study has been described in interesting ways. For example, for Griffiths (ibid) it may capture the 'emergent present' and for Raddon (2007) it provides a 'timescape' of the context of an individual's life. For Griffiths (2010), a graphical creation by the participant of a 'living graph' becomes a tool to open-up dialogue. If such a 'prompt' was needed during my interviews, often this was the institutional documents needed for the observation.

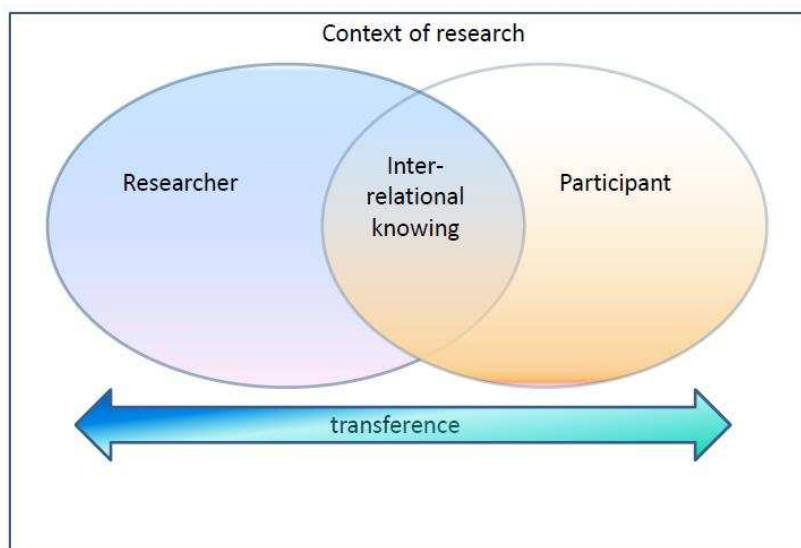
From the beginning of the interview stage, I was aware that the interviews were unusual to the participants, they prompted interest, not only in the research topic itself, but in academic life in general and the possible consequences and outcomes. For many of my participants, it is the first time they have entered into 'my world', that is, the world of academic journal articles, foreign (scholarly) terminologies and the practicalities/formalities of digital recordings/transcriptions. For them, I have 'swapped fields' to an unknown area and I am aware it promotes a level of reflection, both on a personal and professional level that goes beyond the everyday (Griffiths et al., 2010). This may in itself be beneficial in different ways for us all (West, 1996). There are parallels here with the reflexivity in Sartre's existentialism that appeared so influential to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992), as explained in Chapter Two.

With the above in mind, the biographical/narrative approach also offered a useful tool in developing a more in-depth understanding of the experiences (Letherby, 2000; Nelson, 1994; West 1996). With this approach more than one (lengthy) interview is usually required, and the participants are encouraged to fully explain their own life history – literally from birth to present day (but not necessarily chronologically). A study using this approach into the lives of FE teachers and managers is rare and indeed; had the economic situation been different, this may well have been the most

attractive method. However, because of the complex difficulties suffered by many lecturers in FE during the economic recession, this was not practical. For example, at one college, due to funding cuts, the department in which one of the participants (Brian) had worked for sixteen years was to be closed. The announcement came unexpectedly and all the staff were made redundant in 2011. As a researcher, with some past experience of sessional teaching in the very department which was to be closed, it was extremely difficult for me to maintain a positive atmosphere with the participant within this context and to focus on the research questions. The morale of the staff was understandably extremely low and imminent redundancy brings many complex private problems which were impossible to separate from the emotional issues included within the interview questions. My experience allowed me to see that because of the context and physical environment of the interviews, the content could inevitably descend into a negative spiral of attacks on personalities, management and government policies. I wanted to break away from this personal tragedy storyline and provide a wide-ranging picture of what the emotional experiences were specifically during an observation.

Another justification for deciding against a fully biographical/narrative approach is that this recent negativity contrasts against my personal experiences and those of other teachers of the mostly positive nature of teaching in FE (Nias 1996). CGT has been claimed as an effective tool for studying social justice issues (Charmaz, 2008) whereas in contrast, as Denzin (2010) points out, post-positivist methodological approaches do little to support any sense of social justice or a 'politics of hope' (p420). This did not mean that the interviews were formulaic or structured in their approach, for as Gubrium and Holstein (1995) stress, the importance of emotionalism; the subjectivity inside experiences is crucial for providing new insights.

Encouraging ‘ramblings’ is also a way of discovering through serendipity what is important to the participants and therefore the research (Hollway, Jefferson, 2000; Charmaz, 2008). With this in mind there were parallels between the theoretical perspectives of psychoanalysis described above and the interview situations, something that has been explored in depth by researchers such as Hollway and Jefferson (2000). Below, I have revised Diagram 1 presented in Chapter Two, Section 2 (d), to illustrate the potential space for ‘inter-relational knowing’ between researcher and participant. This is something I explore in more detail in the analysis Chapters which follow.



**Diagram 2: My revised visual interpretation: parallels between the researcher/participant situation and psychoanalytic concepts.**  
(inspired by Stern, Sander et al. 1998)

I took a ‘general interview guide approach’ as described by Teddlie and Tashakkori, (2009, p. 229). I then typed the transcripts myself (usually) straight after each interview and before the following one. The participants were invited to read and comment on each transcript as they were completed and any changes they



requested over and above my initial anonymising of the data were subsequently made. I used generic job titles like AP (rather than ones that may have been unique to a particular institution) (James, Biesta, 2007 p. 173) and additionally, some participants also asked for the names of countries they had mentioned to be changed. Wengraf (2001) perceives there is little value in asking participants for their interpretation of transcripts; often participants are very busy people and have given the 'gift' of their time to the researcher and then 'moved on'. It may not be of interest to them what your 'personal interpretation' of their narrative is. The offer was made to all participants, but only two participants provided feedback (Sally and Mike). I was aware that there is a risk that an (in)sensitive interpretation may, in turn, cause (additional) harm and therefore go against the ethical code of research practice (Clough, 2002; Robinson, 2012) .

In this way, the focus of the interviews evolved over time as questions and responses emerged and changed after each interview (see Appendix 3). The interviews contained issues that had been previously highlighted as significant but underdeveloped, or ones that had emerged from some interviews but not others. After reflecting on the transcripts, aspects of our childhood learning began to take on new meanings, as did the perceived element of 'performativity' in our teaching/during observations. Metaphors were also a useful way of asking participants to conceptualise the field of their classroom. These are all issues that are discussed in later chapters.

### **c. Processes of Analysis**

In the context of HE, a case-study approach was used by Yiend, Weller et al., (2012) to investigate this topic. However, I believed a 'case study' approach set as a context

within one or more FE colleges (used effectively by O'Leary, 2011) would not be sufficient to allow the complex stories of individual's emotions to be fully developed. Like Denzin (1991), I am conscious of the importance of the things that are *not* said, that are equally or even more important. In the true spirit of CGT however, I experimented with the software NVivo after collecting the first three interviews. I wanted to discover what this software package could deliver in terms of assistance with analysis of the data. More out of curiosity than anything else, I 'allowed' the programme to process the interview transcripts and this produced some interesting results which provided stimulus for the interview questions and the analysis. However, this method was later dismissed in favour of a more 'hands-on' and non-linear approach to the data. This involved returning repeatedly to the transcripts – both the audio versions and the texts, to the literature and other sources that promoted the development of themes which were shared or contrasted with other participants and with my own experiences.

Often the narratives that were shared by my participants were not chronological and formed a story which became clearer to me after reflecting upon the transcripts. The nature of a semi-biographical interview means that historical information is shared alongside the context of the (un)spoken (Hollway, Jefferson 2000; Letherby 2000; Nelson 1994). A deconstruction of the coexistence of our 'other' selves can be useful to try to understand what influences our behaviour (Freeman, 2002) and reflecting on the research process more widely (Letherby, 2000). For this reason a 'micro-analysis' of the transcripts in the form of a discourse analysis such as that encouraged by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) would not do justice - was not sensitive enough - to the complex, emotional narratives that had emerged. However a

broader type of discourse analysis described by researchers such as Ochberg (2002) was valuable.

The first stage of the analysis took the form of a type of discourse analysis (DA), as described by Silverman (2001). DA is a broad term describing different types of narrative analysis, however it has three common assumptions, which can be summarised as follows: *anti-realism* (language under analysis cannot be treated as 'true' or 'false' – rather as interpretations of versions of the world); *constructionism* in that the narratives are a 'performance' of the construction of the participants' understandings and thirdly *reflexivity* in that telling stories and reflecting upon them creates a way of constructing meanings for both participant and researcher (Potter, quoted in Silverman, 2001 p. 179). Although conversation analysis (CA) and DA are similar, CA centres on the more micro elements of deconstructing a text, which has been argued to decontextualize the narrative – something that this research seeks to avoid.

Because this is a psychosocial study, I developed my hybrid of CA and DA to present the narratives (e.g. I have included in the transcripts and quoted extracts such things as a striking of a clock in the background and stuttering or pauses etc). This is because these unspoken aspects seemed important to include as a way of illustrating the personal and socio-political fields in which the language of the participants exists. They also formed important aspects for the creation of aspects of the fictionalised texts (described in the section below). Transcripts can never be an entirely 'accurate' record of a conversation, but equally must hold relevance to the research objectives.

After typing the transcripts and then coding the relevant common, contradictory and diverging themes from all the participants, the analysis process subsequently involved listening repeatedly to audio recordings - all set within different contexts. I remembered other aspects of the interviews and whilst reading through the transcripts many times, highlighted aspects from these texts – phrases and words explicit or ‘hidden’ – that appeared sometimes immediately, other times only after a long period of ‘incubation’ – e.g. ‘sleeping on it’, writing about it and using my imagination around what other stories these individuals have. Sometimes I had ‘other’ data – stories that were not included in the actual ‘data’ but background knowledge of the person and/or their experiences; photos on their desks, personalised coffee mugs or books on their shelves. To return to Letherby’s metaphor; all these ingredients took time to ‘bake’ and that this time of ‘unknowing’ was in itself valuable for ‘learning and discovery’ (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams et al., 1983 p. 58). In section 4b below, I explain the processes involved in the writing of the fictionalised stories. Together with the other stages of the analysis, these processes provided an opportunity for the data to “take on a life of its own”.

Krathwohl (1997) described the process thus:

Recurring facts, themes, comments and the like are selected from fieldnotes [and transcripts] and organised into categories expected to help to explain a situation of interest. Descriptive names for the categories become codes which are assigned to new fieldnotes as appropriate. (Krathwohl, 1997 p. 681)

However these words do not do justice to the ‘organic’ nature of the development of the analysis. Specific metaphors emerged alongside crucial, repeated phrases that ‘struck a chord’ or provided intrigue by being ‘deviant cases’ (Silverman, 2001). At times the participants themselves were the ones who highlighted a particular area of

interest, when they reflected on the transcript after the interview and admitted how an element of it had deepened their understanding of their own behaviours. In addition to the more practical processes of coding and assessing common and disparate themes, an element of innovation and creativity is needed for insights from theory to emerge from data (Babchuk, 2010). I used mind-maps that were not intended to appear in the final presentation of the data, but helped me to formulate my thinking, linking and layering of the methodological and theoretical concepts. I expanded this idea further by going through the processes of fictionalising the narratives, to provide a deeper understanding and perhaps a further interpretation for a reader who may not be familiar with these contexts and experiences. Two of the participants read and commented on the fictionalised accounts. This method will be fully explained in the following section before summarising the issues covered in this Chapter and moving on to the presentation of the data.

#### **4. Interpretations of Interpretations**

It was the popularity of television that prompted McLuhan (1964) to write his iconic statement: 'the medium is the message'. But it holds a new relevance now.

Individuals' personal emotional stories in 'reality' TV shows; disembodied internet forums or social network 'status updates' are increasingly accepted as the norm. The emotional nature of our world is increasingly reflected in the media that no longer surrounds us, but has become embedded within our social worlds. From "revisit" programmes to undercover "secret millionaires", it seems we and those we watch are constantly being asked to look back, reflect and answer: 'what would we have done differently?' But it's the *emotional context* of these reflective accounts that perhaps makes them so appealing. Why else would so many of us turn instinctively

to the 'about the author' section on dust-jackets or follow Blogs or Tweets? It is interesting to note that this approach has migrated to other areas, for instance, estate agents' sales particulars often now include a "what the owner says":

*This has been my family home for the last 21 years and I have really enjoyed the convenience of living here. Now it's more space than I really need, it's time to downsize. I think these just make great homes, and now it needs someone new to love it and take it onto its next phase and I hope that it becomes as wonderful a home to someone new as it's been to me.*

(taken from a local estate agents website, Jan 2011)

Ways of understanding emotions are important to all of us because, as I described above, if our reality is socially constructed, these are almost always about *shared* experiences. Arguably, these considerations are even more relevant with feelings of anxiety or trauma (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). I agree with Wolcott (1994) in that social science cannot answer value questions, but it needs a value-relevant framework (Hammersley, 2010). The value-relevant framework within this thesis is me! Sociology works with a 'fuzzy' or 'woolly' reality which is polymorphic (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992 p. 23). Sociology is *not* an ideology – hence it is the *interactional nature* of sociology that adds to the value it provides - through others' interpretations (Bourdieu 1993, Denzin 1984). As I mentioned above, interviews could be viewed as performances of an individual's (conflicting) perspectives at a specific time and place, not necessarily a 'true' or 'false' report (Silverman, 2001). If we are to accept the possibility that reality is socially constructed, then what is the value of attempting to present something as 'fact', or similarly, as 'fiction', when these terminologies are arbitrary and meaningless (Bourdieu, 1993)? Indeed, it seems that the more blurred

these boundaries become new possibilities are opened-up for discussion on our own interpretations of our experiences.

The anti-positivist movement in qualitative research has led some to debate whether 'academic rigour' is to be found in focusing our sociological investigations within a single theoretical paradigm (Delamont, Atkinson, 1995). Some suggest research seeking to highlight social injustice or inequalities should adopt a Foucauldian analysis to explicitly provide insight into the power relationships within society. However, just like the language we use to articulate them, paradigms could themselves be understood as socially constructed because (as I illustrated in Chapters One and Two) they are produced within specific historical, economic and philosophical contexts, aspects of which may or may not be relevant to our own investigations. The inherently complex nature of our emotional lived experiences and the interconnectedness with cultural backgrounds, past experiences and future aspirations needs to be reflected in research which attempts to shed light on our understanding. For this reason, it is often necessary and appropriate to draw on multiple theoretical concepts and methodologies which may, at first glance, appear contradictory, but which share significant relevance within our own interpretations of the specific contexts of our research (Ellingson, 2008).

#### **a. Multiple Interpretations**

It is crucial here to note how the various strands of my methodological, ontological and theoretical perspectives have become increasingly interconnected and overlapping throughout this research process. This was unanticipated at the beginning of the research and is, in itself, a topic of discussion in the final chapter. But I am consoled by the words: "methods should be the *pupil* of the researcher, not

the tutor” (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992 p. 35). Hence my blending of reflection, analysis, playfulness and theory in this research means that the poststructuralist perspective inherent my methodology is also part of a social constructivist framework which in turn forms one of the ‘stepping stones’ in the ‘conceptual tools’ used during the analysis of the research data. As I explained in Chapter Two, Bourdieu (1991) wanted to draw our attention to the symbolic nature of our language which reproduces the embedded but artificial and abstract dualities in our society. Although for Bourdieu these binaries were perhaps symbolic of the Marxist controversies at the time (Bourdieu 1991 p. 143), the implications of this perspective for my research are profound. The power relationships that O’Leary (2012) highlighted within observation experiences provides a further significance to the emotional experiences of some FE staff in being labelled by an observer as either ‘good’ or ‘unsatisfactory’. In challenging and deconstructing the institutionalised dichotomies in this particular language and the managerial strategies that surround it, I aim to ground this approach within the very nature of the research itself (as Bourdieu and Wright Mills encouraged researchers to do) within my methodology. For these reasons I chose to embrace elements of interpretation, auto/biography and playfulness by fictionalising the consolidated narratives from the participants and my own reflection into two stories, as I explain fully in the following section.

### **b. Storytelling and Fictionalisation**

Just like the (hopeful) connection between the buyer of the home<sup>29</sup> mentioned above and the emotional experiences of the current owner, my objective in this thesis is ultimately provide access to, and a connection between the participants and the

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<sup>29</sup> Note the use of the term ‘home’ rather than ‘house’ and the other emotional words in this extract.



reader (Silverman, 2001). As Sparkes (2002) suggests within the context of the performativity of sport, only then can new interpretations of the data be produced. One of my own experiences of this is through music: by transposing and playing a piece on the flute that was originally played/composed for the clarinet or vice-versa, new meanings can be interpreted through musical phrases or passages of improvisation which may seem more 'natural' or contain different timbre or emphasis.

Many 'fiction' authors have played with the fuzziness between facts and fiction in their own creations to good effect. Richard Adams' *Watership Down* and *The Plague Dogs* both use factual people mixed with fictitious ones, actual places within imagined ones. By creating a novel environment – here by fictionalising this research data into a consolidated, anonymised story - the lines between what is 'fiction' and 'fact' become blurred and create a risky, playful space for new interpretations (Bourdieu 1991; Winnicott 1971). Bollas (1992) argues that poetry doesn't simply allow the reader 'to know' the information; it allows for the experience of *feeling it*. This is because texts may communicate before they are (fully) understood; the creative process brings it (and us) alive (Richardson, 1997). Similarly, fiction can also promote insight, partly because the unspoken and hidden nature of the context of people's lived experiences can be explored when artificial boundaries are blurred (e.g. *The Ethnogs*, *Fem Nogs* et al., 2011).

It can be valuable to explore this 'blurring' through art or music. For example, there is pathos in many of the illustrations by Raymond Briggs, perhaps *because* we often only see the back of the character. Their facial expression is inaccessible and unobtainable and therefore can *only* be re/created and interpreted by the onlooker:



**Illustration from 'Ethel and Ernest'** (a biography of the author's parents) by Raymond Briggs, published by Jonathan Cape. Illustration used with the kind permission of The Random House Group Limited

In fiction, as in other types of art, the unsaid can also become articulated; the ambiguities of words in irony, a pun or metaphor are explored (Bourdieu, 1993 p. 625). As Ciardi's study of '*How does a poem mean?*' (as opposed to 'what') it is the etymological meanings that are seen as more meaningful because of their ambiguous, hidden nature (Ciardi, 1975, cited in Ochberg, 2002). Unlike the 'coldness' that can be experienced when reading a transcript, all these issues, as well as the silences, and more, can be re-interpreted and re-experienced through fiction (Sparkes, 2002). They open-up new conversations. Our personal stories are not linear, they are interconnected and part of others' stories (Bourdieu, 1993). With this in mind, the objectives of the research remain in the foreground and as Grenfell and James (1998 p. 172) suggest, Bourdieu acknowledged how the unobserved is not necessarily unknowable, and has value too:

...the work of the sociologist is akin to that of the writer of the novel: like the latter our task is to provide access to and to explicate experiences, generic or

specific, that are ordinarily overlooked or unformulated. (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992 p. 206)

Furthermore, Bourdieu claimed that providing an accessible, readable text can be a valuable method of transcending the potential of symbolic violence embedded within academic cultures (Campbell, 2000; Swartz, 1997).

But it is more than this.

My 'insider knowledge' as an FE teacher provided opportunities to draw out aspects of the contexts of my participants' lived experiences that were unspoken but (perhaps because they were) mutually understood. My personal stories, perspectives and interpretations (which *in themselves* have also changed over time and through their creation) mingle and contradict, empathise and contrast with those of my participants (Letherby, 2000; Letherby, 2007). Poststructural approaches that allow for story-telling provide an opportunity to develop our understandings of the roles of emotion, the multiple discourses and subject positions (Sundin, Fahy, 2008). It is the interconnectedness of all our experiences which highlights the importance of articulating personal emotions (Sparkes, 1992). Like the many memorable enactments on stage or screen, it is the actors who seem to *emotionally connect* with a private memory (real or imagined) whilst delivering their performance, who themselves blur the boundaries between their different (re)created realities. As Stanislavski (2008), the creator of 'method acting' taught; for the audience it is this closeness in perceived realities for the actor which *in itself* increases the intrigue for the audience.

The (crucial) transcripts should not be (entirely) relegated to the appendix of this thesis<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, ethically this could potentially be interpreted as disrespectful to the participants in the study who have given-up their valuable time and thoughtfully articulated their feelings. There are parallels between the time, trust and (with some more than others) rapport I have built-up with my participants, and my trust in the data. My exploration in my own writing - in the different genres, topics, events and approaches - have allowed for the data to in some ways 'construct itself' in a way that Charmaz (2008) and Richardson (1991) describe. I have used different literary devices to provide a 'feel for the game' that would otherwise not be articulated. For example the addition of rainy weather outside creates a specific 'feel' to a Friday afternoon inside a classroom and the oversized character of the observer (Richard) emphasises his embodied presence within the personal space and dynamics of the lesson.

There is no doubt of the 'ambiguous' nature to this process (Ochberg, 2002), however this should not represent a reason to trivialise it. In the pursuit of trust and respect, fictionalising also allowed for an effective way of anonymising the data; one which is perhaps more effective than simply changing names and places etc.

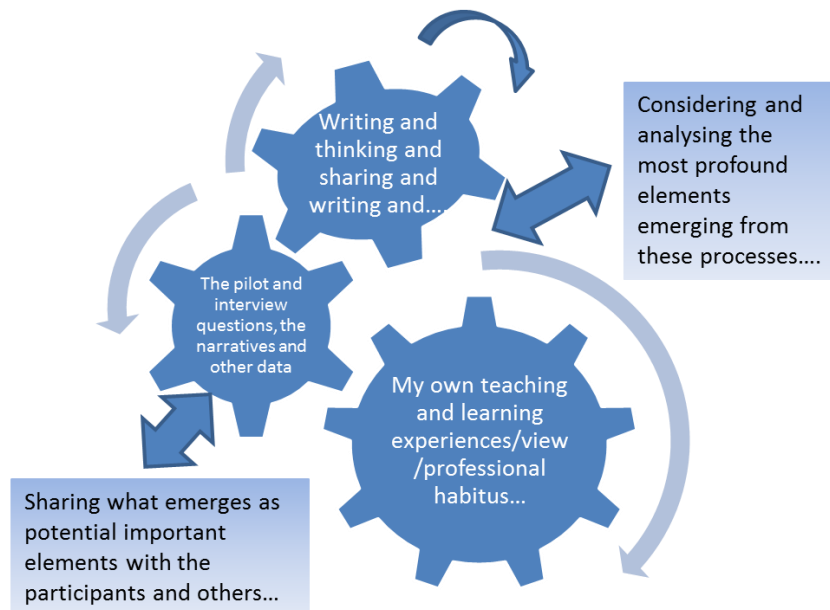
Fictionalising data is also a way of presenting a non-linear representation of a life-narrative, in that (as I have described above), our lives are fluid, complex and multi-dimensional. As Winterson (2011) illustrates in her own autobiography, life-histories can be changed, deconstructed and played-with over time (as I have with my own, in Chapter One).

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<sup>30</sup> Two of the actual transcripts are provided in Appendix 5

Stories are an intrinsic part of everyone's lives; we are all constantly telling stories: in jokes, anecdotes, (exaggerated) gossip, telling others about films and events we have witnessed and even as dreams in our sleep. These stories change over time and become part of our being, our selves. We are not 'complex systems' storing data on hard drives to be computed. So therefore, through 'playing' with story-telling we can rationalise and empathise and create new meanings (Campbell 2000; Inckle 2010; Sparkes 2002; Winter 1988). Play is not meaningless or valueless, we need to overcome these perceived hierarchies because play is how we all learn; as the bible and children's fairy stories illustrate. Play happens between gaps in knowledge and experience and allows an imaginative space for serendipity – development of ideas and new understandings (Winnicott, 1971). The value of our imagination in the analytical process is integral to creating new understandings, as Les Back in Baker and Edwards (2010) asserts: "What we are listening for is decided through our analytical framework and the books and ideas we use to furnish our imaginations".

In line with Creswell's (2007) recommendations, to provide an explicit summary of my analytical processes, the diagram (3) below is a visual interpretation which is representative of my methods:



### Diagram 3: Processes in Data Analysis

The processes I employed in the writing of this thesis were not linear or predictable. The analytical processes simultaneously fed into each other and the academic, reflective and creative writings that emerged from these thoughts and shared ideas, in turn, also evolved over time. Some examples of the transcripts with the processes of analysis are included in Appendix 4. The largest ‘cog’ in the mechanism of the process is not meant to represent the most important aspect; it is simply the foundational first ‘layer’ in the evolution of the fictionalising processes of the narratives. In this way I explicitly bring myself into the research; by using my skills as a creative writer. I created a patchwork or ‘quilt’ from the data (Ellingson, 2008) whilst simultaneously bringing my participants into the research. This is because to create the stories I had to imagine myself in the position of the protagonists – ‘what would I think and feel if....’ This illustrates what Bourdieu defined as a way of “making my point of view, a point of view on a point of view” (Bourdieu, 1993 p. 625). It effectively brings that space between what we may understand as the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’ together in order to more closely interpret the inter-relatedness

rather than the differences. This method has been utilised in the past within many different situations, including teachers' experiences (Nias 1996, see for example: Winter 1988). The way that writing can be itself a way of further understanding by providing new interpretations can be likened to art; as I draw or sketch I am sometimes unaware of what (later) emerges from the blank page. Somehow, sometimes, mysteriously a landscape or seascape appears, a pair of eyes stares out at me – 'willing' me to give it life. Likewise, in music or dance, it is only through repeated practice, discipline and repetition that a new, creative approach evolves (Ellingson, 2008; Tharp, 2007). Taking this further, some have commented how this process may be considered to be psychoanalytically therapeutic for improved self-understanding (Winter, 1988).

I use this creative method because I want to move away from the "technique of the laboratory" (Winter, 1988 p. 238) where data may be quoted in a 'foreign language' or (perhaps worse) dismissed to an appendix. Each of us are creative - in different ways, every day, and often this is how we develop knowledge – for ourselves and others. Indeed, sometimes it's only through using our imagination and intuition and being creative (e.g. living our 'mythical selves') that we can begin to open-up new entirely new meanings (e.g. see The Ethnogs, 2011). But who are these different audiences and what are the issues with taking this approach?

Wright Mills was also clear that a sociological imagination meant being *self-consciously committed to affecting argument and writing creatively* for a variety of what he called 'reading publics'. The danger he foresaw was that sociological work might develop a technical language that turns inward on

itself [...] to avoid this we have to aspire to *make sociology more literary*.

(Back, 2007 p. 164) (my emphasis)

### **c. Critiques of Fictionalisation**

The criticisms of fictionalisation centre on the lack of (perceived) validity in a story and the narcissistic nature of the researcher wanting to 'indulge' in 'academic navel-gazing' in favour of research with more scientific, rigorous standards (Atkinson 2005; Delamont, Atkinson, 1995). The voyeuristic nature of the media perhaps serves to lessen the perceived 'validity' of listening and trying to understand others' stories (or has it simply de-sensitized us to them?). Furthermore, upon reading work by individuals such as Moustakas (1990) and Ellis (2000), I am reminded of how sometimes (in contrast to the 'verification' of responses that Moustakas and others describe) a reader can feel alienated by reading texts which (for complex, personal reasons) they cannot feel connections with or perhaps even feel repulsed by. However, (even) these texts, within a broader academic discussion of what represents research, provide opportunities for learning.

From a poststructuralist perspective, if we are to believe there is no one 'truth', then this presentation of fiction could be interpreted as another *type* of truth, indeed for others it may be an 'undecidable', being fact/fiction; neither one nor the other (Derrida, 1974). Either way, it holds the potential – either in the present or at another time and context to provide a playful space for (new) interpretations by the reader. As Inckle (2010) points out, this creative approach has enjoyed a long history because:

In terms of representation, ethnographic fictions circumvent the entire well-worn social science debates around 'truth', validity and objectivity in which



disembodied 'snap-shots' of individual's lives are commonly appropriated for dissection in the academic lab. (Inckle, 2010 p. 38)

Indeed, the term 'snap-shot' is important here because that is why an observation has been criticised as being: a snap-shot measurement of teaching practice. I acknowledge that some methods into researching observations could be criticised as also being a snap-shot - with implications that this would be missing important contexts. I want to question this approach and find a new way which as Inckle (2010) and Pelias (2004) point out can be a way to bring humanness – our 'body and heart' into our research.

But it is not enough to just 'read'. I ask that you engage too in the search for (your own) understanding within this study. A 'climate' of supporting these new ways of creating and presenting data is not enough; a critical reflexivity should be used to 'nurture' these ideas and take them forward (Eisner, 1997). With this in mind, I asked those participants who were keen to find out more about my research to read the fictionalised accounts and to add, delete or amend them as they thought necessary. In this way, a further layer of interpretation is added and the voices of the participants have been included within the accounts – both literally (in the spoken words taken from the transcripts) and metaphorically (in the movements or descriptions of emotions). The issues that I believed as important to include in the text have been noted in the analysis – and the reasons why.

In the context of Interpretive Interactionism, a case-study may be used as a way of exemplifying a common theme from the research. Just as a piece of music may connect with the personal and embodied emotions of the listener; likewise the viewer of a piece of abstract art may connect something new to the perceptions of the

sculptor. Likewise, I aim to provide new insights through creative writing because fiction creates new emotions, yet helps to “streamline our search” for meanings (Eisner, 1997 p. 7). Because fiction ‘sensitizes us to the possible”, these may be issues which are unknown to the writer/artist/creator. Emotions are felt in relation to other interactants (Denzin, 1984) or emotional ‘associates’ who provide a temporal structure. We need to deconstruct our personal theories of emotion in order to grasp their meanings (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, 1998). The only way we can do this, is through the uncovering of descriptions, those articulated and those left unsaid, the explained and (un)lived experiences; the fears and hopes – through fictionalisation. This is a skill I have and can put to good use here for the purposes of providing new potential interpretations and meanings. In the process of creating the fictionalised accounts, I first wrote brief narrative-based ‘case studies’ of the participants, before cross-referencing these against my own experiences. The constant layering of these different interpretations of emotions and memories provide a particularly rich and complex story which my participants and I believe provides a valid interpretation of the complex interactions of FE teachers’ embodied emotional experience in an observation.

But is this research? Is this ‘valid’ or ‘scientific’? I return to my earlier point about the philosophical, epistemological issues so closely entwined within this research topic and respond that your interpretation of the definition of these words is crucial. The following quote holds relevance for me to the question: ‘what is research?’

My conception of research is broad. I will count as research reflective efforts to study the world and create ways to share what we have learned about it.

Research can take many forms that echo the forms of the arts and humanities

or those of the natural and social sciences. Its forms of data representation are open to invention. Ultimately, its value as research is determined by the judgement of a critical community. What is your conception of research?

(Eisner, 1997 p. 8)

As a lover of fiction since a very young age, I believe it has a unique way to create understanding. As C Wright Mills (1959) put it: "...novelists whose serious work embodies the most widespread definitions of human reality frequently possess this (sociological) imagination" (p. 14) "...and provides a quality of mind which promises an understanding of realities..." (p. 15). Long transcripts from numerous interviews can be difficult, time-consuming and perhaps tiresome to read. Hence the transformation of narrative fiction provides a text that may otherwise be lost. There are potentially new opportunities for new insights through integrating creative writing and research narratives (e.g. Campbell 2000).

But how is writing a story an act of theorizing? Perhaps because it involves elements integral to researching – in that I am using my skills as a creative writer to organise sequences of events and scenes, provide believable descriptions and characters whom others can relate-to, in order for the reader to find it stimulating. But this approach also allows me to undermine the familiar in unexpected ways, indeed, creating the unexpected is a crucial part of keeping the reader (and writer!) engaged. There are times when creative writing promotes ideas that erupt from me and only then become known when lying on the page – they were not 'known' before (Cixous 1975/1986; Richardson, 1997). There is artistry and technique involved in this process which goes beyond what is known by summarising and interpreting the richness and complexity of the data in a new way (Winter, 1988). Indeed, as Winter

(ibid.) suggests, creating a naturalistic description provides a genuineness (as opposed to an ‘objectivity’) that adds a pattern and significance to its own and other, wider contexts. But it can also provoke a rational, intelligent response through distancing the reader of a controversial text. In the storyline of the long-running Archer’s radio programme a well-loved character (Nigel Pargetter) came to an early and sudden death when he fell from the roof of his house on New Years’ Day. Online forums showed the outpouring of criticism from fans apparent feelings of horror at the Nigel’s ‘lack of consideration’ to go onto the roof in icy conditions. This illustrates an example of the way that the ‘reader’ (or, in this case, listener) *plays* with the text too, as a way of exploring the ironies, contradictions and discrepancies – and that is what a patchwork offers. So critiquing the fictional content is also about uncovering the “concealed” aspects within the stories themselves (Winter, 1988) or perhaps “illuminating” them (Eisner, 1997 p. 8). This approach then, “embodies a theory of ideology in terms of a set of dilemmas” (Macherey 1978 p. 87). After all, risk-taking can be another way of uncovering something new:

The sphere of the practical is necessarily the sphere of the uncertain; this is the condition of significant action. One must look before one leaps, but one must still leap. (Gauthier, 1963 p. 49)

Inevitably, not all researchers are creative writers (or readers), but Wright Mill’s suggests that as a ‘beginning scholar’ I have a duty to find a way of interpreting and (re)presenting my data in a way that ‘feels’ right. And as Eisner points out: every researcher must find what suits their own ethos and objectives (Eisner, 1997). I therefore have a responsibility to use a medium that appeals to a wide audience. With this in mind, I am also conscious of Graves (1981) who writes “we need

teachers who write themselves” (p. 6) so my skills and experience and the inherent emotional aspect of my research provides an opportunity for a symbiotic relationship that I confidently believe adds unique value. But how does it happen? Winter does not show us ‘how’ – he just delivers his belief. Even Wright Mills (1959) only provides ‘clues’ in the appendix of his ‘Sociological Imagination’. Using our imagination is an impulsive and unpredictable thing (Ochberg, 2002). Freud’s method of ‘free association’ is perhaps an equally ambiguous way of unravelling what the un/conscious may keep hidden. There is undoubtedly a self-exploratory aspect of creative writing, and this has been explored on many levels (Brecht, 1974), however this specific issue lies outside the range of this thesis.

## **5. Conclusions**

In conclusion, I have outlined in this chapter the epistemological and ontological aspects of my research deeply embedded within my methodological and theoretical approaches. I use the plural here because as I have explained, I believe ownership of my research involves what Letherby (2007) has described as a ‘cook book’ approach – an interpretation and improvisation of many different but appropriate methods. Through these methods (rather than method) and ways these methods have been used, I show how this achieves ‘a quality of research which is more likely to influence others’ (Letherby, 2003 p. 88). I have described some of the possible ways I *could* have approached this research, and explained why some of these have not been possible or appropriate. I have demonstrated my case for a more sensitive, reflexive and creative approach towards both the research topic itself and the presentation of the data. The emotional labour of the interviews, the emotional nature of the interview data and the presence of myself within these emotions

emphasises the 'self' as an important resource for assisting uncovering meaning in mine and others' lives (Letherby, 2003). Something that I have attempted to illustrate in the diagram of the analytical process presented above.

As I explained, an integral aspect of this sensitive approach is the 'tone' or 'genre' of my writing. Often, it is necessary to change my 'mode of address' (Butler, 1997 p. 2) not only does this help present a new interpretation of the story for the reader, but it also encourages new interpretations for me, as researcher and writer. This is crucial to help understandings through our reflection. This is especially relevant in the context of observations because the emotions described by the participants, such as shame, is an emotional 'pain' (or 'angst') that is, by its very nature 'unrepresentable' (Butler, 1997 p. 6). This is because it is entirely individual and individually internalised. Individuals are therefore often unable to articulate *causes* of pain (Winnicott 1971). As it is the emotional experiences of observations under investigation here, this further embeds the importance of using their voices – both in terms of their spoken words and the unspoken ones - because in speaking their words through different contexts, the usual boundaries between academic, fictional and reflective writing are challenged.

The methods and approaches that I have described above, provide something unexpected and I hope that, like Richardson (1997), becoming a 'prose sociologist' (rather than a 'poet sociologist') would lend itself to me learning new outcomes, and be "gentler, more consciously revealing" (p. 135) for my participants and their stories.

The next chapter will begin the journey of the fictionalised accounts, with the teacher's perspective. It is significant that Monica defines herself as a 'teacher' rather than a 'lecturer' as I explained in Chapter One. The account is written in the

'first person', as a way of assisting the reader to enter into their 'social world' (Bourdieu, 1998). This has similarities with the way I attempt to facilitate my students' learning by creating learning materials which contain relevant context that can bring meaning. Inspiration for many of the actual words in this text and most of the unspoken descriptions are taken directly from the transcripts, as I explained in Methodology chapter and explore in specific detail in Chapters Five and Eight.

# Chapter Four: Monica's Story

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## Being observed: the teacher's perspective

It was a rainy, Friday afternoon in Birmingham. That popular book<sup>31</sup> for trainee teachers reminds us about how rainy weather meant students were inevitably badly behaved. This arbitrary statement amused and interested me at that time; now an experienced teacher, I accepted this as the inevitable end to a bad week.

I took in the familiar smell of floor-polish and disinfectant as I walked down the corridor; this was the older part of the building where the main halls were used for exams. Last year the contrasting PPI<sup>32</sup> extension had been completed and ran parallel to this corridor and in contrast to this warm, old oak panelling, the new version was cold and corporate in glass and aluminium. Many years ago I had been a student here myself. After leaving school I went to a dead-end job in marketing but always dreamed of doing something better with my life. Teaching always seemed such a fabulous job - something rewarding where you could help and support others. I dreamed of myself in that role, but it seemed an unrealistic dream when I was stuck in that office, day in, day out. I never thought I'd be good enough to teach; feared being 'caught-out' by something I didn't know. Now I realise that there has to be a limit to our knowledge and anyway, most of the stuff we teach here has been so 'dumbed-down' over the years anyone could deliver it. There was no doubt that the level of the students' literacy skills had declined over recent years, they just prefer to mess around on facebook instead of engaging in a *real* book.

Me, I was always a reader. Glandular Fever had forced me to miss a lot of school and there was nothing much else I could do – no iPads or smart phones in those days. I was off for months and then my parents had their own problems, which led to

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<sup>31</sup> See Cowley, S. (2006) *Getting the Buggers to Behave*. London: Continuum Intl

<sup>32</sup> Public Private Investment building contract.

numerous house-moves. I never managed to get any O' levels. Much later, when I met my husband, Jack, he encouraged me to go back to college and so I started here, in this very college with an A level in English Literature. I loved it. Being around all the buzz of the learning, walking down these corridors with armloads of books; the squeaking sounds the polished floor made when you were wearing flat-heeled shoes and the intimidating, large varnished wooden doors that I walked through to take my final exams. Back then, I was terrified and excited at the same time. A little unsettled by the much younger people around me, but equally committed to showing them (and me) that I could do it. And I did. Look at me now, more than twenty years on: a qualified teacher. It has been a long and difficult journey, and the job was getting tougher and tougher. Lesson observations were just part of the game – I feel I'm always jumping through hoops with no recognition for all my hard work.

I sighed as I unlocked the classroom door with one hand, whilst carefully balancing all the books and materials in the other. I released them with a heavy thud on my desk. The room was airless; windows misted-up. I walked over to open them and the sound of the incessant rain got louder. Somewhere outside one of the gutters had broken. I drew a smiley face into the condensation on the glass and looked over at my desk and the empty chair. For a moment I was struck by a memory from my childhood; Ms Caraway, my English teacher from my all-girls school. She was a lovely, charismatic woman, highly knowledgeable in literature and nurtured my love of poetry – until I got ill. She never sat in her chair though, she always walked around us and occasionally, when she was reading from a long text, she would sit on her desk and wrap her black skirt around her milk-bottle legs. Her long greying hair was always in a tight bun and around her neck was a string of pearls. We all admired her and she respected us, perhaps because she always tested our knowledge. Each

week she would ask us a series of questions about what we had learnt the week before. I would get really nervous about what would be asked of me. I didn't want to let myself down and tried really hard. Unlike my parents and other teachers, I really felt a connection to Ms Caraway; she understood me in a way no-one else did. That was why I chose English when I eventually got a chance to go back to my education here. In a way, Ms Caraway was a crucial part of my inspiration to teach.

*"Oh, I thought I had this room?"* an unfamiliar woman's voice asked, and I turned around to see her at the door with an armful of books. I told her there'd been a room-change and that she'd have to check where she was. "OK" she replied happily. I hadn't seen her before, but that wasn't unusual, she was probably a sessional tutor. Perhaps she was secretly glad that if her students didn't know where they were, she might actually get to cancel the lesson and go home early for a change. This building, on the far edge of the college campus, was always suspiciously quiet on Fridays.

The room was as ready as it could be - with ten minutes to spare. It wasn't my usual room. Friday's lessons were usually always in a computer room because students were understandably de-mob happy for the weekend and often too tired to engage with any new concepts. But here we were, on this special day; lights on and windows open for ventilation. The PowerPoint presentation was loaded and the overhead projector and interactive whiteboard whirred noisily. I was happy with the structure of the lesson I'd spent long hours preparing – last night into the early hours worrying in-case I'd forgotten anything. 'Starter' and learning tasks were original and the lesson was to end with a creative conclusion, which should tick all the boxes. I went through the lesson repeatedly in my head, just to be sure that all the different needs of the

students were addressed. I had to show the observer 'differentiation'. I'd deliberately moved the desks from the familiar conference-style 'horse-shoe' into a more 'Humanistic' group-work setting – I wanted to make sure we physically looked like we were adhering to the 70:30 rule<sup>33</sup>. I always feel a bit uncomfortable about creating these artificial situations, the observations aren't really an accurate 'snapshot' of what teaching is like, probably because that's an impossible situation anyway. But there is something slightly disconcerting, something morally wrong about going along with these bureaucratic rules; it somehow makes me feel a fraud and, especially in front of my students, less of a 'good' teacher. However, so long as I can get through this, I can get on with my 'real' job with less hassle from management. There's nothing worse than having someone constantly looking over your shoulder, so the payback of getting an observation right is being entitled to your professionalism, for the time-being at least.

I'd already pre-briefed the usual 'trouble-makers' to prevent them from sitting together and their tutor, Rachel had blackmailed them with a promise of a tin of *Quality Street* if they sat where I instructed and behaved themselves. They weren't actually 'trouble-makers', other teachers had labelled them as such in the staff-room but this was because they didn't know about their difficult backgrounds. They were all girls; this in itself was perhaps difficult for the male teachers to cope with. But I was pleased to have made a lot of progress over the last term with this group – they had each signed-up to their own "*Bill of Rights*" – which they, themselves had created, printed-off and stuck-up on each of their classroom walls. It included simple rules like "*turn off your mobile phone*" and "*respect each other*". Whenever things got

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<sup>33</sup> I'm referring to the Ofsted recommendation of the ratio between student to teacher interactions.

a bit 'unsettled' we returned to their *Bill of Rights* and I reminded them why they had created it. It worked like a magic spell.

But some individuals were still causing a lot of problems out of lesson-time. Demi in particular was a concern to me. She was a very likeable character and had a great sense of humour, but it seemed she was on a road to self-destruction. She had refused to eat for days and fainted in the corridor last week. After staying with her in one of the classrooms (we didn't have the luxury of a first-aid room here) she confided to me that her alcoholic dad had beaten her up and then kicked her out because he caught her '*doing it*' with her boyfriend. Social Services had put her into a bed and breakfast in a rough part of Birmingham. She was too vulnerable to be subjected to a place like that. When I was talking to her in the staff-room one day, I looked down at her bare arms and saw the evidence of her self-harming. I wondered to myself 'what can I do to help her?'

Emmie was one of the slightly older ones in the group at 20. She was strikingly attractive with her dark skin and glamorously-styled black hair. I'd read in her records that her Mum had taken an overdose two years ago and Emmie had found her, dead on the kitchen floor when she's returned from school one day. It was difficult to understand how an 18 year-old could recover from that trauma – but here she was, with her group of friends, going to college and taking everyday as it came. She was a bit unpredictable in class - some days being an extrovert and finishing tasks ahead of everyone else; other days she closed-in on herself and just stared into space, seemingly unable to communicate with anyone. I had spent lots of time with her in tutorial sessions on an individual basis. It would take time for her, lots of time.

I placed the handouts with names on, around the desks in the places where I wanted them to sit for the first half of the lesson (like every ‘good’ lesson<sup>34</sup> the students would be moving around to conduct some peer-assessments later on). The name on the next hand-out was Saima’s. My colleagues and I were all concerned when her work had rapidly gone downhill. She was one of the brightest in the group and we were optimistic that she would complete the Level 2 and progress eventually to University. But then we discovered that her father had arranged a marriage for her and that Saima had refused to go along with it. He’d come to take her away from college one day last month and the police were involved. She was ‘sofa-surfing’ now, but how long that could go on for, she didn’t know.

One tutorial after another was like an episode of *Eastenders* – the only difference being this was Birmingham, and these were all young people. Drugs, anorexia, domestic and social violence – it was a constant reminder of our society’s problems and I found it increasingly depressing. For some students, the course itself was irrelevant and their attendance was only necessary to keep them off the streets and allowed that them to claim student benefits. Often I spent hours anxiously trying to help them overcome some of their challenges; filling-in job applications; completing references for housing applications, authorising an absence whilst they had an abortion and booking appointments for them with the college counsellors (who were already overstretched). My colleague, Louise had been right when she’d said “*we really are like social-workers, not teachers.*” Some of this stuff really went against my ethical judgement, especially the abortion, but what choice do I have?

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<sup>34</sup> As defined by Ofsted that is, not necessarily my own choice – especially on a Friday afternoon when the students were likely to be more enthusiastic to talk about their weekend plans rather than assessing each other’s knowledge.

Scott (the only male teacher in our department) was very supportive and often told me that I worried too much about the students. “*You can’t take on their troubles on top of your own*” he said, more than once. And although I knew it was true, it didn’t stop any of us from worrying about one of them being homeless on the streets of Birmingham overnight, or ending-up in Hospital after being beaten and abused again. Last term one my colleagues even ended-up putting one of her tutees up for the night because she apparently didn’t have anywhere to sleep. I personally thought that was overstepping the mark, although I wasn’t sure what I would have done, faced with the same dilemma. I had been guilty myself of overstepping this mark more than once; in ‘lending’ a student some cash to get some desperately needed cigarettes when I knew that would ‘buy’ his crucial attendance in my lesson<sup>35</sup>.

Helen was the quietest in this group. She was the carer for her mother who was dying of cancer. Often she would miss weeks of college because her mum had been taken into hospital again, but apparently now there was nothing more they could do to help her. Helen told me that often she had to stay up all night with her mum, washing her and counting-out the medication that was controlling her pain. I asked Helen whether there was anyone else in the family who could help her, but there was only an uncle apparently and he lived in Scotland. I hadn’t seen Helen for a few lessons and after leaving messages on her ‘phone, was worried about what may have happened to her.

Anyway, I needed to put all that to one side for the next two hours. I was about to be observed. By whom, I didn’t know. I had waited all week for the ‘man with the clipboard’ – who could have appeared at any point. Had he (or she for that matter)

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<sup>35</sup> When I say ‘crucial’ I mean because of statistics for my department’s retention figures, which are slightly below target for this term.

attended a lesson from earlier in the week, they would have found me full of enthusiasm, delivering lessons with plenty of ‘pace’ and ‘lively content’ and a classroom full of inspired students where ‘learning was happening’....but now I’d had just about enough of this Ofsted-speak. My scepticism was seeping back, as was my desperate need for a holiday. Easter would soon be here and although I wasn’t looking forward to the pile of 150 assignments to mark, at least I could hide away in the library to do them – out of reach of emails from my manager or the ringing ‘phones where I had to sell the courses I taught to potential new students for next years’ intake. I could hardly cope with this year, let alone think about doing the whole thing all over again. I sat down in my chair and waited for the students to arrive and my mind returned to Ms Caraway. I remembered that one mistake of mine in taking her chair to sit in– there were no other chairs left. She was livid! Even though she never sat on it, she was appalled at my insolence at taking the *teacher’s* chair to sit down on. I felt utterly mortified in front of my classmates and I felt ashamed for a long time. It was the one time I saw a different side to Ms Caraway and it made me wary of her, but at the same time in awe. After all, here I was, sat in my own teacher’s chair.

The module I was delivering to this group had ended. All 30 students in this class (all apart from Helen, Emmie and Demi of course – but I was on top of that) had submitted their assignments and we had only one week left for them to complete any other outstanding modules this term. Normally, they would be on ‘study leave’<sup>36</sup> with only the struggling students staying for one-to-one tuition to get things finished (anything to prevent our department’s statistics from being negatively affected). But

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<sup>36</sup> This ambiguous terminology is useful for student retention figures as it officially acknowledges their physical ‘absence’ as ‘presence’.



of course, three weeks ago I had the dreaded email notification. These came from the newly-formed 'Quality Assurance Department' – some faceless authority figure who had no teaching experience but whose job it was to oversee all the teaching that happened in the college. I was the last one to be observed in my department and I'd seen the negative impact of the policy on every one of my colleagues. Marie was a fabulous teacher. I'd seen her in action many times. The learners loved her and she was a fully-qualified midwife, so she'd had loads of experiences to share with those of them who were keen to progress to university.

She'd been physically sick every morning that she was expecting to be observed. "I never did very well in exams" she explained softly, smiling at us all in the staff-room.

To make things worse, she'd had to wait over two weeks from the day of the observed lesson for her feedback. She had been told she was 'Grade Three'.

Apparently this was because of the lack of pace and '*differentiation*' (there were a number of students with learning disabilities in that group). She was in tears for hours afterwards and had to go home early because she couldn't go on "I'm such a crap teacher, I can't do this job anymore" she said as she left. Of course she came back the next day, but she's been very quiet and obviously very unhappy. "The worst thing is, I've got to go through all this crap all over again" she said recently with a sense of disbelief on her exhausted-looking face.

Long hours comes with the territory in any teaching job, but lately I'd felt like I'd run a marathon. Being a single parent and trying to keep up-to-date with all the demands of this job was getting to be impossible. Increasing amounts of paperwork meant every night was a late night, and my little girl, Sophie was heart-broken when I couldn't help her with her own reading one evening last week. I feel so guilty having to feed her easy food from the freezer. What a paradox when I'm trying to teach my

own students not to eat this stuff! I'd wanted to attend Sophie's Easter performance, where I knew she would steal the show, but I just had to stay late and complete my planning for this observation. It makes me so angry, but I have to keep reminding myself that it is a job, and with redundancies on the horizon at every college, it was important that I kept on the right side of my boss.

On top of these pressures, I have thirty-five references to write for my own tutor group, many of whom are applying to the University we have an affiliation with.

There is still no sign of the software system that's supposed to help us compiling these letters, so I've (once again) had to construct my own mail-merge document in Word and help my colleagues do the same. One of the benefits from my past commercial-life in administration was the IT skills I had accumulated. More cost-cutting measures means copying handouts for students is virtually impossible unless (like me) you strategically do small batches at a time, using photocopiers in other departments early in the morning<sup>37</sup>. I often creep around the corridors smiling at the familiar faces of the cleaners but feeling like a criminal! Once, the photocopier I was using jammed-up and I couldn't leave it like that because my name was on every sheet! I pulled the concertinaed piece out eventually but I was desperately late for my class. Thank God my boss wasn't around. Coloured copies are outlawed completely as they are deemed 'too expensive' and these handouts (mainly for the students who were dyslexic) regularly had to be printed out at home<sup>38</sup>.

I'd learned over the years that being observed was a kind of a game. All of my past observed lessons had been awarded 'good' or 'outstanding'. Two years ago we all

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<sup>37</sup> Management had recently protected some of them with passwords or PINs, but these were always secretly shared among staff who knew it was in their interest to make full use of everyone's budget.

<sup>38</sup> I manage to get my toners cheap on ebay, they're probably stolen, but there's no way I could afford them at full price.

looked at the revised paperwork in the staff-room and discovered that if an 'outstanding' was awarded, a teacher now had to be re-observed, so that the outcome could be 'moderated' and others could '*learn from your good practice*'. With this in mind, and after a particularly rewarding observed session which had 'ticked all the boxes', I knew I had to avoid the possibility of being labelled 'outstanding' (and thereby all the additional paperwork) and decided to stand on a chair at the last minute to (unnecessarily) turn off the projector. The resulting feedback confirmed I had been 'marked down' on Health and Safety grounds. Thank God, I thought secretly, I was free of any further critical judgement for another term.

Last year we had our Ofsted inspection. As a department, we were overjoyed to be considered 'Outstanding' and it confirmed in all our minds that all our hard work and commitment (emotional and physical) had been recognised at last. Many of us cried tears of relief at the feedback meeting after all the weeks of preparation and stress. Sadly, the other departments didn't do so well, with some even being labelled as 'inadequate' – the worst possible outcome and apparently completely unexpected by the SMT. As we expected, the Principal resigned. The new guy was drafted in from a corporate bank and he immediately announced a new regime; the SMT would oversee all observations, and if there were any that didn't get a 'Grade 1 or 2 then that teacher would now automatically be at risk of disciplinary procedures'.

"Right people, great to see you all. Shall we get started?"

I cast my eye around the room and ran through the register mechanically. Then: Helen was here! I caught her eye, she smiled back; her eyes dark circles in her pale face.

Unexpectedly my students' eyes light up. They can see I'm not my usual self – trying too hard, talking too fast and delivering a lesson that didn't 'fit' with the rest of the course. But I'd bought their silence with chocolates and stern words. Some were intrigued, others just bored.

Five minutes in: no sign of the 'observer' and the students begin to relax. Was it fair that I had completed all the paperwork for the whole week, waited patiently for the final lesson and still they weren't going to show up? I continued explaining the 'starter task' to the students, finding myself talking genuinely whilst thinking, shocked "does this mean I have to go through another whole week like this all over again?" Inwardly, I began to feel quite angry.

Starter task underway and students were busily exchanging notes and scribbling down bullet points on their questionnaire. I walked around the grouped tables in the room, muttering encouraging words to everyone who needed it and from the back of the room looked over at my empty chair behind my desk.

Then he appeared at the door. He was an older, short, tubby man with the inevitable clip-board. He had obviously rushed to get here and looked hot and bothered. I didn't recognise him, but this wasn't unusual – other colleagues had been observed from managers based in any of the other ten departments. He looked around and because he was late and the students had moved around for their group-work, the chair I had set aside for him had moved. He obviously felt conspicuous and I was still at the back of the room, trying unsuccessfully to catch his eye. Then I saw him walk over to my chair and drag it to the side of the room and sit down on it. How dare he! I thought to myself. How ill-mannered! His beige suit stretched to its limits around his arms and stomach, and he began scribbling on his form. I went over and handed

him the blue plastic folder containing all the paperwork he needed<sup>39</sup>. The students all looked over at this intrusion. I held a finger to my lips and winked at them with my back to him while he was looking at his paperwork - they got the message.

The lesson progressed quite well. Considering it was a Friday afternoon and these poor students had lived through the stresses of every lesson with me having to be 'full on', I felt some sympathy for them. At times I seemed to almost forget the observer was there in the room with me, but then I caught sight of him staring at me and the façade of my performance made me feel like a puppet. But my students were all engaged in the tasks I had set them. Perhaps because this was one of my favourite topics, they were genuinely interested in the content of the lesson which was an introduction to the module I was teaching them the following term – Food & Nutrition. I felt a sense of foreboding when we reached the slide about Public Health and Obesity. There was a picture of a very overweight person and inevitably Demi piped-up from the back "that looks like someone in this room!" Someone giggled. I knew who she was referring to, but one of my fierce glares was enough to force her to get on with the task I had set them about public health strategies to fight obesity.

After we had explored the terms for the different 'food groups', we talked about our favourite celebrity chefs or recipes. I showed them a short 'YouTube' clip of my favourite recipe and asked for others to add to our college intranet page. There were some good suggestions and I was encouraged. I asked them to write what they had eaten over the past few days or (especially for Demi) "*make it up if you prefer*". We had a good 'Q&A' session on what was healthy and unhealthy and why. Then they got up to exchange and assess each other's diet and make suitable

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<sup>39</sup> Class profile, lesson plan, risk assessment for the room, course outline, module outline, copies of all the assignment tasks, learning materials, copy of some feedback, targets for the group etc etc.etc...

recommendations from some empty food packets I had brought in. Some were happier than others to talk about their eating habits, but this was a good starting point that we could build on for next term.

The final task was for them to work in small groups to create a poster about the elements of a healthy diet using the new keywords they had learned. It was then I noticed that poor Helen had fallen asleep, head on the desk and pen still in her hand. Her classmates knew about her home-life, and had come to realise that this was normal on the rare occasions that Helen was in the classroom; they got up to get the pens and paper they needed and worked around her. We had twenty minutes to go, and I was so relieved I could smile and talk more naturally with the students now. Some were working in pairs on their posters and others were happily talking about their plans for the weekend. 5pm was approaching and the noise from outside grew louder as the other students were making their way to the bus-stops.

Each poster was proudly held up by one from each team to show the others in turn. I was pleased that the task had been understood and in my view, with the limited time we had, executed very well. The observer left. He hadn't spoken to the students. He mumbled something - his name was Richard and we'd meet-up next week. Before long, it was time to tidy-up (there were always volunteers to offer help with this) and wish them all a good weekend as they left.

“Did we do OK?” asked Demi as she zipped-up her coat.

I smiled at her and told her not to worry. The relief that the stress of the observation was over was overwhelming. Thank God it was the end of the week too. I switched-off the PC projector and sat down for five minutes, waiting for the congestion of damp human bodies to subside in the corridors outside.

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The automatic lights clicked on as I entered the staff room. Coolness. It was empty and silent. I smiled absent-mindedly whilst I checked my emails. Above my desk was the familiar dark green government poster shouting in bold lettering: 'Every Child Matters'. Someone had defaced the poster a while ago: crossed out the word 'child' and written 'teacher'. I sighed. Despite the difficulties, I was pleased with how the afternoon had ended. I filled my briefcase with the outstanding marking that had been left on my desk by the secretaries. Closing and locking the windows, I wondered who the observer was and what his conclusions may have been about the lesson. I quickly dismissed any worries, the weekend lay ahead and my Sophie needed collecting from the childminder's. It would be good to have some quality time together for a change.

Then there was a knock at the door. It was Emmie. She had her assignment in her hand:

"Can I just ask you about this for five minutes?" she asked, and then looking around, "Oh, sorry, are you going home?"

I really needed to get away, but I knew that this was precious time for Emmie too and that really she needed to catch-up with the group. If only I could encourage her to do the bare minimum, then she could move on to the next assignment quicker. But she refused to do this. She wanted to achieve the best she could and in that way she reminded me of myself. So, inevitably, after some persuasion:

"Five minutes - and I'm not joking" I said in my 'stern-sounding' voice, as I

locked the staff room door behind me. We went to the next-door classroom to sit down together at the nearest desk....

Forty minutes later, Emmie was striding-off to the nearby bus-stop with a pile of paperwork under her arm and a happy smile on her face; I turned the key in my car's ignition. At least it had stopped raining.

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It was Thursday before I heard any feedback. The observer sent me an email.

Richard Huntley was his name and his email 'signature' told me he was manager of the Motor Vehicle & Engineering Dept. I remember I had spoken to one of his staff last year when I tried to get my tutor group some time in his workshops. Many of my tutor group were just starting driving lessons at the time and I thought it would be really helpful for them to have a session with the mechanics who could teach them how to change a tyre and check their oil etc. However, despite meetings, risk assessments, emails and telephone calls and the full support of my manager, no date was offered and it never happened. Time was too short to follow it up any more, but perhaps I would have an opportunity to mention it now to Richard. His department had been heavily criticised by Ofsted and were under a lot of pressure. Maybe finally getting this project going would be a way of helping them?

We met in one of the empty classrooms; it was one I had a vague memory of from my teachers' training course from about ten years ago, which perhaps was appropriate. Nothing much had changed in here; it even retained its circular old fabric blackboard, now torn and partly hidden by a pull-down projector screen. He wasn't wearing the too-tight beige suit today. Instead he was in dark-coloured corduroy trousers and a rugby shirt, but although his appearance was more relaxed



he seemed very on-edge. This didn't bode well, I thought anxiously. I noticed his dirty finger-nails and wondered whether he taught at all now and if so, how different his own approach to teaching was to mine. The environment alone was on a different planet to ours – no desks, lots of risk assessments for all the machinery they used and smelly young lads in oily, blue overalls.

I knew to expect the usual 'shit sandwich', so he started with the positives: I had a good rapport with the group apparently; the handouts for the lesson were good quality and included a wide variety of tasks. Differentiation was evident and some learning took place (how did he know that?). Then the negatives: there was too much emphasis on the Interactive Whiteboard and Powerpoint<sup>40</sup>, the lesson's pace was too fast and in places didn't fit with the name of the module on the timetable<sup>41</sup>; one of the students were so bored they fell asleep. I tried to explain about Helen's personal situation. I had even added a brief note in the 'class profile' document to describe her situation, but I knew he hadn't had time to read all the paperwork I had prepared. He dismissed my comments as irrelevant. He told me that apparently a teacher should always be in control of the class and that I was '*letting my feminine side get too emotionally involved with students' problems*'. According to Richard, this was potentially '*dangerous*' and I needed to take more control of the class and insist that they all took part in every task, regardless of their circumstances. I was beginning to get angry at this point. There was more: the room was too warm and too small for the group. There was little I could say to this as it was common knowledge amongst all teachers in this block that the rooms were almost impossible

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<sup>40</sup> Ironically, this was something I had been told was a strength at my last observation with a different manager.

<sup>41</sup> I tried to explain that this was an end of term lesson, specifically for the observation.

to keep cool (they faced South and the blinds were broken) and that a class of thirty was difficult to fit into any of the rooms on this campus.

I took a deep breath and looked down at his short hand-written report to try to make some sense out of what he was saying. Lots of the boxes were crossed and I couldn't read much of his writing. He hadn't listened to a word I had said. We hadn't even had a conversation about my own background or qualifications. He really wasn't interested in any context to the lesson, or the unique situations of me or my students. He told me, without making eye contact, in a solemn voice that 'sadly' the lesson had been 'Grade Three'. I was devastated. This felt like a disciplinary, not anything that would help my teaching, or my students' learning. I could feel my face blushing and my eyes welling up. I tried to control myself. I cast my mind back to the fulfilment and relief I had felt that Friday. In disbelief, I stood up; I had to leave the room immediately. I didn't want my weak 'feminine emotions' to show-up in front of this cold-hearted stranger.

I walked back along the familiar corridor and picked-up my speed in heading for the toilets. In my mind I was running through all the hard work I put into this job, I felt shocked and ashamed of myself – how could this happen? Uncontrollable tears erupted as I locked the door behind me. All that hard work utterly wasted; all the long, long hours of preparation, into the early-hours some nights. Why did I give up so much for this job? Why did I sacrifice the quality of my own life and my beautiful daughter Sophie, to support my students? Does no-one understand? It's all my own fault. I've brought this on myself by having unrealistic expectations. Should I just give-up? I felt overwhelmed with shame. If no-one recognises my devotion to my job, my students, then I must be useless; a useless, incompetent teacher. My tears continued as my thoughts gradually turned to the additional work that this had

created. It meant another observation, further preparation. Time with my daughter would have to go on hold for longer whilst I planned for the next judgement day. This was on top of all the marking and admin I knew was already piling-up. I felt totally out of control and overwhelmed with work. I was exhausted, physically and emotionally. Am I too tired to go on? I wondered. Maybe I should just leave this job. The hours I work I could work in Tesco's and earn the same amount. But simultaneously I recognised that I didn't and couldn't give up supporting my students. The faces of Emmie and Demi were in my mind. There were elements of the job I loved, but sometimes it was too much to bear.

I took some time to recover privately in the toilets for a few minutes. The white tiles felt cool and the room was dimly-lit. I checked my mascara in the mirror and powdered my face, I drank some water before I put my head under the hand-dryer and then I went to seek the solace of a mug of tea in the staff-room. I was slightly anxious about the reaction to my news. I would have preferred to have kept it quiet, but that was impossible as my colleagues would know about my imminent re-observation. Thank God we had the Easter holidays between now and then. In some ways that was good, but in others it meant that whole holiday would be overshadowed by my continued anxiety. I had to explain to Sophie (she didn't really understand what my job involved) that unlike her school teachers, we didn't have a 'holiday' from college. We were expected to be here, even when the students weren't. In that way the workload was relentless.

There would be sniggers of course. Vanessa in particular would laugh up her sleeve when she found out about me. She always got a 'One'. She thought very highly of herself and her teaching skills – perhaps too much. She always had an infuriatingly clear desk with all her lessons filed away in alphabetical order on her shelves. She

had manipulated the timetable somehow so that she always taught the same module. Now, with three years of unchanged syllabus behind her, it seemed to run like clockwork: photocopies and videos all arranged well in advance. There were never any stressful tantrums in her corner of the staff-room. In fact she was very rarely there at all, just immediately before and after her lessons. Unlike the rest of us who seemed to slave away from sometimes six in the morning until well-past six at night.

The staff-room was quiet. Louise was alone, sat in the corner, likely to be busy doing some marking during her lunch-hour.

“How did it go?” she asked brightly.

I couldn't get the words out. I didn't know what to say. I was overcome with emotion again and this time I was angry. Louise saw my face and made moves to comfort me. I sat down with a big sigh.

“I'll put the kettle on” she said, putting her work aside. “I need a break too”.

After I explained to Louise what had happened, I felt wiped out. I didn't want to talk anymore. I wanted to defend myself and fully explain about the students and the lesson but emotion was drained from me. I just wanted to bury myself away somewhere, out of sight of everyone; hide away. I made an excuse and left the building. Louise said she would cover for me for the rest of the afternoon. I got in my car and went home. What would my boss say about my absence? Quite honestly, I was beyond caring. My own green front door felt welcoming; I turned the key and went straight upstairs. I passed the old photographs of my husband and I. together on a beach in happier times. They were so familiar now I didn't think about what they

meant. But they were comforting in a strange way. In my bedroom I saw all the paperwork on the floor from the previous night's marking and preparation. I started crying all over again. There was just no fairness in this system, no recognition and there seemed no way out.

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The re-observation came a few weeks into the following term. It was different this time. My observer was someone I knew – she was an older lady, partly retired now. She had supported me as a mentor when I was studying for my teaching qualification all those years ago. I knew she wouldn't be overly critical like Richard had been last term. My boss had given me some time out to see an AP and also some of my marking had been 'farmed out' to a sessional tutor. I knew their feedback wasn't going to be as robust as mine, but there was a limit to how many hours I could donate to my job. I had to be realistic now. I took the opportunity and really enjoyed the quality time with a mentor. We bounced ideas around together about different ways to approach a subject with the students and she also helped me with my time-management. I really had to be stricter with myself so that I prioritised the right things.

There were still the same issues of course; the paperwork, the preparation the endless bureaucracy about retention figures and targets. But time with an AP had given me some renewed enthusiasm for creative ideas. I had a very specific group of learners in mind for my newly-constructed lesson about health and safety in their workplacements<sup>42</sup>. I was allowed to specify when the observation took place (after

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<sup>42</sup> This was a group who spent more than the average time in their workplacement, because of the vocational focus of their course. It was for lower-ability students.

some explaining to the SMT about the difficulties of my timetable at this time of year). Yes, I jumped through their hoop again. I achieved a 'Grade Two', which wasn't brilliant but was good enough to keep the anxiety away - and perhaps the threat of redundancy (for now at least). My fellow colleagues seemed just as relieved as me when I returned to the staff room with a smile on my face. We went out to celebrate together one evening, when most of the marking had been completed. Another academic year was nearly at an end and another cohort of students would need to be interviewed next week. And then the cycle would start all over again.



# Chapter Five: A Thematic Analysis of the Lecturers' Narratives

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## 1. Introduction

I explained in Chapters Two and Three, my reasons for engaging with Symbolic Interactionism and more specifically, *Interpretive Interactionism*, and for using CGT. Before explaining in more detail the specific aspects of the emerging data and what this interpretive framework illuminated, it is necessary to first summarise how these methodological approaches may have impacted on the research process itself and why. I return to these issues in the final chapter.

Symbolic Interactionism and CGT have some concepts in common (Charmaz, 2008). For example, individuals or collectivities have an agentic power and action, and studying these aspects are integral to the process, founded as they are on theories of observations. Indeed, as I describe below, the interactive nature of teaching and learning is often articulated by teachers as being a crucial element of their practice. As Price (2001) notes, one of the central functions of the teacher is to emotionally identify with, and carefully balance, the students' experience of 'not-knowing'; not knowing brings potential for anxiety. This issue is particularly relevant in FE because FE staff are arguably more likely than other sectors' educators to have experienced this 'not knowing' themselves at many points in their lives - for the multiple reasons I outlined in Chapter One, Sections 1 and 2. Furthermore, their autonomy within these (wordless) interactions (for example in their ethical practice) is integral to an interpretation of the analysis of their narratives and therefore a better understanding of the emotional complexities within an observation.

Within the research process - in the reflections that some of my participants engaged in throughout the research - these tensions came into my awareness<sup>43</sup>. This was not an objective of the research process, but evolved into a fundamental element of it – as was the case with other FE-based research (e.g. James, Biesta, 2007). In *The Handbook of Grounded Theory*, Charmaz, (2011 p. 17) asks the reader: ‘Do you have the ability to see what is in the data’? But what we may ‘see’ in the data entails sensitivities and skill which (I discovered) only develops with experience, discovery, talking and writing and also heuristic serendipity. This is because what I ‘see’ may be different from others’ interpretations, but is no less valid as a result (Ochberg, 2002). Indeed, like the highlighted data within the narrative transcripts, it is the *processes within* my research (and socio-political contexts) which has provided its own meaning. To be specific, observations and the terms which are integral to them, appear to have different contexts and objectives for the FE staff I have interviewed. These are the issues that I explore in this chapter.

Although Wright Mills (1959) promoted the idea that the voices of the discriminated, vulnerable or unheard should be articulated, some noted how these voices were missing from his work (e.g. Denzin 1991 p. 53). Here, as I explained in the Methodology chapter the actual voices from my participants are not only used throughout the thesis – but they have formed an integral part of its evolution. As well as common themes, I looked at different variations of how these themes took shape within these biographies in light of the emotions described in observation experiences. This is because social phenomena are multi- dimensional; by highlighting some of the different stories that co-exist, I aim to raise awareness of the

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<sup>43</sup> Discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

fluid and multi-disciplinary nature of these lived experiences (Mason 2006 p. 10). The relationship between these stories and the abstract external measures such as theoretical frameworks are not apparent, they are interpreted and deduced and thereby *contribute towards* the story (May, 2010). From the transcripts to the fictionalisation and the analysis, strong emotions – including tears and sadness, memories and happiness have been integral to this process. It is a playful, messy process in which unanticipated, new and different ideas evolve from individual stories, and the formation of friendships and fantasies, real and imagined experiences become part of a motivation for change. The feedback from some of the participants upon reading the fictionalised accounts described how they felt that *Monica's Story* strongly represented their social world of FE. Although not all participants were able to read *Monica's Story*, there were interpretations of the text that held deep meanings to each of the participants. I used extracts from the narratives to construct and develop the story. For instance, it was Grace's feelings of guilt about being too busy with preparation for the observation to be able to cook 'proper' food for her children which inspired the additional embodied dynamic: 'Sophie'. With no children of my own this provided a good opportunity to 'put myself in their shoes' and explore the implications of these emotions in the situation explored (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992).

Together with my own experiences of working in FE and of observations, I have drawn together the narrative accounts from the seven lecturers I have interviewed who are represented here in my interpretation of the lived experiences within lesson observations. Likewise, I have explored the seven managers' narratives to provide an account of some of their contexts. In what Letherby (2007) describes as a 'cook book' approach, I develop the beginning of a conversation between the different

conceptual tools – and others - that assist with interpretations. These exemplars and the readings that spring from them I hope will provide the basis for further research. As I described in Chapter Two, the embodied emotional labour that FE teachers engage in has been described as complex and fluid. During the interviews, some teachers explained how (what they perceived as) some important elements of their work are carried out in private. Where it was perceived that their roles were unnecessarily restricted (and therefore the potential progress of the students), by a limited supply of materials, these were sometimes funded themselves. But there is an inherent difficulty in writing about this ‘hidden’ or ‘ethics work’ (Colley, 2012). Because these invisible actions are firmly based on the professional habitus of these teachers, often reflection on practice in the context of their role was not possible – hence a deeper meaning is arguably impossible to grasp. Therefore, the explanation of the data presented here (like other similar studies on affectivity) is heuristic in nature and relies heavily on interpretation, rather than primarily on description and analysis (Wolcott, 1994).

#### **a. Outline of this Chapter**

Building on the conceptual tools which I outlined in Chapter Two and the methodological concepts that I explained in Chapter Three, I explain in this chapter the common or diverging themes from the narratives which I have defined as follows:

- Reward and ‘hidden’ emotional labour
- Performativity, ethics work and emotional labour
- Embodied emotion and teaching in FE
- Stress and anxiety in observations
- Psychoanalytical concepts: feelings of shame

- Teachers' 'seeking recognition'

Within these themes, I provide examples of how Bourdieu's conceptual tools, such as game, habitus, *illusio* and *doxa*, arguably can apply to observations and the lived experiences that the teachers' describe. Attempting to 'fit' issues around observations into an inappropriate pigeon-hole could be criticised for being reductionist. However, as Bourdieu himself encouraged researchers to do, I build on these ideas and integrate other conceptual tools in a multi-dimensional landscape including the fictionalised texts which provides a more contextualised story. Using Bourdieu's conceptual tools - balancing these ideas with concepts of performativity and embodied emotional labour - provides new interpretations of these concepts. The interactional space between social and personal aspects of the narratives are illuminated by object relations psychoanalytical concepts including notions of feelings of shame and seeking recognition from the writings of Butler, Winnicott and Mollon. Finally, I integrate these ideas through a psychological and interactionist concept which has been termed the 'narrative unconscious' (Freeman, 2002; Freeman, 2010). As I explain in the final section, the *narrative unconscious* holds the potential for a valuable way of viewing teachers' professional habitus and understanding how complex and fluid emotional experiences may impact on the process of observations and teaching and learning more generally.

## **b. Introduction to Participants – 'The Teachers'**

In the spirit of the social constructionist framework of this research, these 'pen portraits' are presented as one possible interpretation – one of many possible truths at this present time. These pen portraits do *not* pretend to represent the 'whole' person – they are an interpretation *within the context of this research* and the issues and situations surrounding it at a particular point in time. There is not a 'substitute'

for another pen portrait that is 'more genuine' than this – it is just one possible truth of many (Harding, 2006). The style in which I have written these very brief pen portraits portrays (at points) a logical, rational flow in these peoples' lives which is not necessarily accurate for them personally or for others around them (Letherby, 2003). However, my understanding of their situations stems (mainly) from their own accounts but also from other data as I described in the methodology - their habitus - emails, first impressions, accent and language etc. These accounts, like the fictionalised accounts - serve a purpose only within the format of this research and I acknowledge their inevitable inaccuracies, limitations and risks within this context (Hollway, Jefferson 2000). I agree with the views of Ochberg (2002) and West (1996) in that a more 'Gestalt' approach *could* be perceived to provide a more 'meaningful' view of these participants' lives. However the limitations of space and time allow only for these brief pen pictures only.

## **Grace**

At the time of the interview I had known Grace for approximately three years. We had met and worked in the same department together for a year at an FE college in Central England. I had recently, briefly visited her at her home whilst in the area. Grace worked for many years as a physiotherapist, and after a ten-year career-break to raise her family 'fell' into teaching in FE (as she explains in the transcript) because of her misunderstanding of the term 'tutor': in the advert for her teaching role, she interpreted this term to mean a counselling role for the students - one which she felt with her health professional qualifications and experience, she was well-suited for. It was only after she was offered an interview that she took on the challenge of aspiring to become an FE 'lecturer' – including the new qualifications that this new role involved. Like many FE lecturers, she undertook her teaching and training

simultaneously, which she found very difficult in terms of balancing her other commitments. She is now fully qualified and has enjoyed her three years teaching. However, she confides to me that (like many individuals relatively new to the teaching profession (Colley, 2006; James, Diment, 2003) she often feels disillusioned. For example, she told me that she felt her own commitment to the students' well-being and progress is not matched by others in her team and that her manager does not value her work. Grace also told me that she finds the workload (even without the additional deadlines of her own studies) too much to cope with and she misses her old position as a healthcare professional. She plans to update her physiotherapy qualifications next term and seek a role within the NHS for which she feels that her teaching experience and qualifications will serve as an important advantage – both professionally and personally.

Grace's school life was unsettled and included many moves and as a result she struggled in some subjects. There was only one teacher who stood-out for Grace in terms of supporting her with her studies – towards the end of her secondary education. Indeed, Grace links-up the reason why she has such a positive approach with all her students to the positive support she received from this teacher. She tells me how she passionately believes that every individual has the right to a second-chance at education, and FE is symbolically important to her because of that. She feels that without the help of this teacher she would not have been able to progress to the career she chose (physiotherapy) or be in the job she is now. The difficulty for Grace is that she feels that often these underlying principals get lost in the bureaucracy of FE - elements of which she feels are unfair to her students and to staff.

She agreed to be interviewed as part of my research some time ago, but lives a very busy life of family, church and charity commitments, as well as teaching part-time. In contrast to the other interviews, rather than physically face-to-face, this interview took place via Skype with video and was recorded independently and then transcribed at a later date. The Skype call took place on a Wednesday afternoon in July 2012, the locations were at Grace's home, in her kitchen and at my office at home. My reflection on the issues surrounding the differences between using this technology - compared to the other interviews which were face-to-face are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

### **Alex**

At the time of the interview, I had known Alex as a colleague and friend for approximately four years. I worked closely with her for two of those years as a lecturer in an FE college in central England. She is fifty and lives alone with her two dogs near the centre of a Midlands city. Her house is walking distance to the college where she has worked for the last six years. She has lived in many different areas of the UK. She has suffered from ill-health all her life, and admits that smoking doesn't help her health problems but that she is unable to give-up due to high levels of stress. In the past three years she has been diagnosed with a chronic eye disease which means that her eyesight is deteriorating. She finds it particularly difficult to drive. She has developed coping strategies for everyday tasks such as using specific lighting or coloured texts/fonts. In her teaching she has been allocated a specific room which has no windows (and therefore no glare) and instead of moving tables and chairs around for students to perform group-work, she maintains a 'didactic' layout she says enables her to easily negotiate walking around student's desks during lessons. This approach also assists Alex in remembering students' names,



because she has difficulty with facial recognition. This is particularly relevant as the numbers of students in the department has increased significantly in recent years. She explains how she feels her deteriorating eyesight has had a negative impact on her self-confidence and how she is worried about her future ability to live an independent life. Despite her difficulties, Alex's personality is positive and witty. She enjoys socialising but feels that her financial difficulties and her health problems limit her enjoyment of events.

Like Grace, myself, and others mentioned in this research, Alex moved around frequently as a child. She can remember not seeing her parents much as they were either working or sleeping. In particular when they returned from school in the evenings they were not supported with their homework because her parents were too busy. She never felt comfortable at school even though she perceived herself as 'always brighter than average'. She puts this down to her interest in reading, which enabled her to develop a 'joker' identity with her classmates. She never felt she connected with any of the teachers – until she met Ms Caraway in her sixth form. She did 'OK' in her O' levels and stayed at the Midland School for Girls to study A levels. Her intention was to become an English Teacher. During this time she further developed her love of reading and in particular English poetry. Ms Caraway taught her English and recognised Alex's 'sensitive soul' and her academic potential. However, a serious car accident left Alex seriously injured at age sixteen. She spent many months in recuperation and many more months undergoing regular physiotherapy at a fracture clinic. She was inspired by the physiotherapists, in terms of their skills and commitment to the care that they provided to her and others with similar injuries. Alex became interested in pursuing a career as a physiotherapist,

however the time away from school prevented her from completing the A level Biology grade she needed to enter the appropriate course.

As a compromise, she took up an offer of a nurses training course and after qualifying went on to work in a ward for children suffering from cancer. These were times before recent advances in medical technology and sadly the children and young people in Alex's care frequently died. She spent many years in this role and despite her descriptions of the tragedy and heart-break; she enjoyed building relationships with her young patients and using her sense of humour to try to overcome the great sadness. She explored the benefits of alternative complementary medicines and developed an interest in this area and subsequently undertook some training. She tells me there are some patients she stills thinks about every day.

She became 'disillusioned' with the NHS and left to set-up her own business in complementary medicine. However, financial commitments forced her to get a job teaching. She was later promoted to a permanent, full time, programme coordinator position at the same college. Alex goes out of her way to help her students - spending her own time at weekends and most evenings in providing additional feedback on assignments etc. She even confides in me that she occasionally 'lends' them money so that those students who are in desperate financial trouble can get home safely. This is not unusual practice in her department. Her experiences of observations include her being so anxious about an impending session that she crashes her car in a near-by car-park – apparently due to a lack of concentration. However she also described how she more recently has benefited from the support of an AP, who has taught her how to 'play the game', and how to perform what is expected of her.

This interview took place at her home, on an evening whilst I was staying there. I had already had numerous conversations about her past experiences of observations.

### **Naima**

I had not met Naima prior to the day of the interview nor had I visited this particular college before. Naima is 42 years old and is married with three children. She lives in an inner-city area in the Midlands. She comes from an Asian background, and was born and has lived in England all her life. She has taught at the college as a sessional tutor for three years and whenever possible she works full-time hours. She responded and volunteered to participate in this research because she is interested in research herself and hopes to continue her current undergraduate studies into educational research and linguistics. She teaches maths and English for the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) department.

Her childhood memories are dominated by her mother preventing her from learning or progressing well in school. She was forced to leave school early and work in a factory where she was very unhappy doing monotonous jobs. She met and married her husband and over the years worked in a variety of jobs including retail, bakery and dentistry environments. After having her children she returned to work with a renewed enthusiasm to gain a more rewarding career. This involved teaching and subsequently she has engaged in many qualifications as well as currently undertaking her undergraduate degree in social studies. She admits to retaining a feeling of resentment towards her mother because of the extra workload that she perceived that she had brought onto her. Importantly Naima articulates how she feels forced to undertake her work and study commitments, when these would have been easier when she was younger without the additional family commitments.

She tells me that she understands many of her students have gone through (or are going) through similar negative experiences to those she experienced in her own childhood. She feels passionately that these individuals should be supported in any way they can to progress in their education. She loves teaching and although she doesn't feel that she is valued by her management (mainly apparently, because of her current 'sessional' status), she plans to progress into management once she has gained more experience and qualifications. She has aspirations to get a full-time permanent teaching position and to pursue her studies to doctorate level eventually.

The interview took place in November 2012 in a quiet, open-plan social area outside the main staff room in the college during one of her breaks.

### **Jim**

Out of the seven participants I knew prior to the research interviews, I had known Jim the longest - about 25 years at the time of his interview. He is aged 62 years at the time and lives with his wife. They have no children or pets. He is a personal friend of my husband's and worked for the same FE College for many years. During the course of this study he opted for early retirement when the college merged with a larger institution and staff were made redundant.

He left school with very limited qualifications and worked in construction for a few years and then later in a factory manufacturing car parts. He has a passion for Japanese culture and learnt karate from a young age. Later he set up and ran his own successful karate club for local people who wanted to learn the skills and culture of Karate. He only charged people the minimum amount of fees because he passionately believed that everyone has a right to learn about Karate without being

exploited. He covered his costs for hiring the hall and equipment and apparently never made a profit from the club.

He always harboured an aspiration to be a blacksmith and collected many tools which allowed him to create and repair things in his spare time and also learn about the practical skills of Japanese sword-making. During this time he became employed by the National Coal Board (NCB) – originally applying as a blacksmith but later as a driver. He worked there for many years and built up strong friendships with his colleagues who he describes as ‘brothers’ - although many have sadly passed-away since, due to health problems (often associated with working in a colliery). After being made redundant from the colliery when the coalfield was closed at the end of the 1980’s, he returned to education to retrain as a motor-mechanic (which was funded by the NCB). Achieving success in his studies, he stayed on as a member of staff at the college and although not formally qualified as a teacher (his portfolio for the qualification went missing upon submission to the exam board) was employed as a ‘Technician’ within the engineering department. He has subsequently taken early retirement (one year after this interview). He has always been involved in teaching at the college – both formally and informally. He has seen many changes within the college management and is particularly frustrated at the management which seems to Jim to be extremely wasteful in acquiring and then wasting expensive resources.

This interview took place at their home during a midweek afternoon during a college half-term. His wife was busy making dinner in the adjacent kitchen.

## **Sam**

I hadn’t met Sam prior to the interview day. She is married with no children and was aged about 45 years at the time of the interview. She had responded to the request

for participants via another contact I had at the college. She enjoyed her school life and went on to be successful in her A levels. She then went to university – she was the first of her family to do so - and did her degree in English Literature and then wanted to go into nursing. However she failed an important exam at the end of her first year and this led her to re-think her career. She decided to take up an offer of a reduced-fee TEFL course on the condition she taught abroad for an agency. She has been teaching English ever since – beginning in 1994 – she loves travelling, living and working in many different European countries and learning about different cultures and communities. She worked for the British Embassy and many other bodies. She continued to complete teaching qualifications and then six years ago for ‘personal reasons’ returned to the UK to take up a job at this college.

She needed to undergo an update of her teaching qualification - which she did successfully whilst she was teaching full-time. She has therefore experienced many different kinds of observations in many different environments. This led to interesting data in the interview. The interview took place at the college where Sam works in a quiet common room during a lunch hour in November. It was preceded with a general discussion about observations and my research in the staff room and followed-up with a brief email.

### **Brian**

Brian was approaching retirement at the time of this interview. He is single with no children. I worked with him briefly (about three months) prior to the time of the interview whilst I was undertaking some agency teaching for the same college. He volunteered to take part in the research because he was a researcher himself and held an interest in the subject area. He has since retired and I have been unable to contact him to follow-up the issues raised in the interview.

Unlike the other participants in this study Brian did not want to discuss his school life. He described his childhood learning as 'happy' and explained how he started his career as a researcher. Brian has a quiet, calm demeanour and I can imagine him perhaps being comfortable in this environment compared to a relatively 'rowdy' classroom of teenagers. He left school to complete a degree in Psychology (the specialist subject he taught at Level 3). He described how later funding for his postgrad research fell-through; hence he was forced to seek work elsewhere. A friend suggested that he tried teaching psychology in FE, which he did . He did his teaching qualification whilst working full-time and over time has reduced his hours because he felt otherwise it was too stressful.

He describes himself as lacking in self-confidence but how he has managed to develop his confidence over time. He was surprised how 'easy' it was to teach without any formal qualifications but how he instantly liked the interaction with the students. He views himself as 'not a natural teacher' but that he developed the skills only through the help and support of a good mentor and colleagues. Over the decades of his teaching at the college he (like Jim) has also seen many alterations to the management structure and the buildings. He confides with me that he feels tired of the constant policy and hierarchical changes and is looking forward to his retirement.

The interview took place at the college where Brian worked at the end of a college day in a quiet corner of some common-room space. It was followed-up with a brief email before I lost contact with him.

## **Sally**

At the time of this interview I had known Sally for about 18 months. She is single and divorced, no children and at the time of the interview aged 53 years. She lives alone. She has a strong accent from Northern-England and she tells me as soon as meet how aware she is that this may mean that some people make assumptions about her (class?) whilst she is currently living in Southern England. She was brought up by her mother as an only child and her father was much older than her mother. He died whilst she was only six years old at home. Sally tells me how she still cries whenever she remembers the event. Her father also left children from his first marriage. Sally did not get on with this family or her own cousins. She describes a class divide because relatives would make fun of her Northern accent and also the way she behaved. Her cousins also attended a private school, whereas Sally was forced for financial reasons to go to the small, local school which was a coal-mining community.

She enjoyed her time at school but apparently did not feel 'challenged' intellectually. She spent many hours absorbed in drawing pictures and writing stories and she felt that the teachers absolved her any of the usual curriculum assessments because they felt sympathy for her bereavement at such a young age.

Her mother encouraged her to leave school and go into secretarial work, which she did for many years. She completed many qualifications in typing and administration and sales, progressing up the commercial sector hierarchy into a personnel and training position where she obtained teaching qualifications. She felt she had some sense of personal reward in helping to support her employees in their (e.g. literacy) needs during her time in this job. She also benefited from significant financial



rewards. However, she felt she wanted to expand her horizons and teach in other environments and so took-up an opportunity to teach ESOL at a local FE college.

She enjoyed the roles at the college and went on to achieve her qualifications in teaching and later a Masters in English Language (part time whilst teaching). Later she was offered an opportunity to teach in Taiwan for a year. She enjoyed it so much that she stayed out there for five years. During that time she developed an understanding of the language and this gave her an insight into the experiences of those learning English as a foreign language in FE in England.

She was forced to return to the UK because her mother was very ill and needed to be moved into a residential home. She returned to sessional teaching in Southern England and is now engaged in her PhD research which focuses on English Language students. Like Sam then, Sally has diverse experience of being observed in her teaching both here and abroad and in different contexts. She volunteered to take part in this research study via a mutual friend who was also interested in research and worked at the same college.

There were two main interviews with Sally. One took place in a canteen on a quiet lunchtime in a college. The second, follow-up interview took place outside in a picnic area on a sunny day over a shared lunch. There were also follow-up emails that clarified aspects that were discussed during the interviews.

## **2. Framing the Context of Observations**

As I outlined in Chapter Two, Bourdieu suggested how different kinds of habitus allowed us to get a 'feel for the game' to provide us with a sense of what is appropriate behaviour within a culture, bearing in mind our skills, experience,

education and memories. James and Biesta (2007) suggested professional habitus could be useful within the FE context. FE staff trained and experienced in industry may integrate their vocational skills within their teaching (Bathmaker, Avis, 2005). Hence they may provide their students with a broader view of employment opportunities than perhaps would be otherwise available. Likewise, a teachers' professional habitus will include their own personal views of what represents to them 'good practice', which will (in part) be formed and influenced by their own experiences of learning (James, Biesta, 2007). Often the lecturers expressed how they felt caught between the tensions of doing their job and the bureaucratic procedures of their role. This juxtaposition was symbolically present for Alex, where the college building included cold 'corporate' buildings and the original older classrooms (as I explained in Chapter One, this is a common situation):

“Yeah, and this environment we're in now in that it's just a *faceless, nameless* building, there's no kind of community or, *cosiness* about the building at all, it's just a huge corporate-type place with no familiarity. It's all kind of sterile”.  
(Alex, original emphasis)

I illustrated the 'feeling' of this place in Monica's Story:

“Last year the contrasting PPI extension had been completed and ran parallel to this corridor and in contrast to this warm, old oak panelling, the new version was cold and corporate in glass and aluminium.”

The text metaphorically captures the tensions between pre-incorporation attitudes toward education as a 'social good' (Merrill, 2003) compared to the current difficulties evolved from 'new managerialism'; the pressures of which seemed to have forced

education to be perceived in terms of 'measurable' outcomes and a consumer product (Gleeson and James, 2007).

Despite the variations in observation policies, the narratives revealed a specific and constant *doxa*; staff perceive their classroom needs to explicitly, physically represent an 'interactional learning space'. During a lesson where Anna was being observed, her students had regularly divided into small groups of social friends - which coincidentally divided the class into ethnic groups. Anna permitted this to continue because she felt that physically disturbing the natural group dynamics was sensitive enough to negatively impact on the students' learning. However, after the session, the observer suggested that Anna should have seated the students in a more obviously 'integrated' way; presumably to illustrate 'equality' or the diversity of the students' shared learning experience in the classroom. This meant that the *doxa* within the observation conflicted with Anna's usual teaching practice, as she describes below:

"They absolutely wouldn't have chosen - the Somali students wouldn't have chosen to work with the Polish students, they only had them for a t...if I'd had the students for a long time, you know, if it was a National Diploma group and we had a team and they were all teaching them, and then we could have had a strategy...but because I had them for [only] two hours, erm, and they were a whole load of different groups [...] I didn't feel that there was time" (Anna)

Anna was angered by the perceived reductionist approach of the observer's feedback. She perceived the 'tick-box' approach (a common feature of observation documents) as inadequate in attempting to encompass the complexities of the sensitive pedagogic strategies - explicit and innate – in her teaching and learning

practice. She perceives that her discretion has been questioned, her autonomy taken away in light of the observer's judgement. Similar experiences were described by other participants. For Jim, it was the unspoken interaction between him and his students which meant that he changed his lesson from that planned on the documents provided to the observer.

“...I could see that the students were just, you know, glazing-over and this stuff, well, some of them, it went straight over their heads. I knew I had to do something different *otherwise I would lose their attention*, so I changed tack and talked about another part of the engine...” (Jim, my emphasis)

Notice that Jim described how he anticipated the need to change the delivery of the lesson. It was an *unspoken understanding* that has evolved from a *mutual understanding* between them. But the rules of an observation are not sensitive to these invisible, unspoken situations. Hence - in the absence of a pre or de-brief - the changes that manifested as a result of these unarticulated exchanges were looked upon negatively by the observer during the feedback, even though, due to the context (for example the time of day), Jim saw it as a necessary part of the teaching and learning of that particular (vehicle mechanics) lesson. Other perhaps more 'measurable' aspects to an observation include things like providing relevant and accurate paperwork which illustrates explicitly how 'normalised' Ofsted criteria for a 'good' lesson has been (planned to be) addressed by the teacher (e.g. in differentiation for students' 'learning styles'); setting chairs and tables out in an appropriate 'integrated' manner and so forth. These are some of the explicit ways observation *doxa* can be adhered to, or to use a popular phrase from different participants throughout the research: “they tick the boxes”.

Alex (a lecturer) had benefited after an observation from the expertise of a mentor who had emphasised the importance of ‘playing the game’ or what James (a senior manager) described as “managing the process”. Subsequently, when confronted with a situation where she felt the lesson needed to change from that which was planned for the observer, Alex deliberately, repeatedly verbalised the change to the students (whereas ordinarily she would have internalised it). Thus, Alex explicitly signposted change for the observer: her emotional labour consciously exploited the *doxa* to gain social capital (i.e. explicit acknowledgement) of her teaching skills. Yet upon reflection, Alex felt the personal cost of this performativity - of following the *doxa* of the observation and how it had negatively impacted on her practice:

“Like the AP said to me, tell them what you are doing. And that’s what I did and they [the observers] said afterwards, yes, you ran out of time, but you told us what you planned to do. ‘Oh, alright then’, kind of thing. It stilted everything – it stilted my, er, flow”. (Alex)

The use of the word ‘flow’ provides an insight into Alex’s reflection on her teaching practice outside an observation. The naturalistic ‘flow’ has parallels to the creative aspects of art and of an/other self. It indicates the innate nature of the emotional labour that Boyd and Bolton (2003) term a ‘gift’ because it is centred on what Alex perceives as her ‘genuine’ interest in her students’ progress – both personal and academic. The creative nature of this ‘flow’ is particularly interesting when we learn that the context of Alex’s childhood learning included a love of English literature and

especially poetry. This was also an important aspect of Sally and Anna's childhood learning – and my own<sup>44</sup>. These are issues that I explore fully later in this chapter.

These descriptions illustrate the very private, emotive nature of the learning field where for some teachers more than others, the physical presence of an Other changes the dynamics of the intimate relationships and interactions occurring in that space. As Sam describes:

“As I say, it got better, you know as it normally did, but it still um, I still feel slightly artificial [in an observation] because...I don't know, you're just more... sort of more thinking about what the other person is thinking about you.”

(Sam)

Rather than a distinct binary in emotional labour between 'genuine' teaching practice and that required for an observation, there appears to be a fluid, complex nature to this performativity (Bolton, Boyd, 2003). Sam articulates her memory of her awareness of the view of what she perceived as her 'inauthentic' self as an object of the Other. This slippage between an (un)conscious acknowledgement of the presence of the embodied role of the observer and the potential tension this caused was another common theme within the narratives, as Alex's reflection of a memory of an observation articulates:

“I wasn't anywhere near as comfortable as I would normally be (...) but I did forget they were there, but they were still at the back of my mind, still, you know...” (Alex)

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<sup>44</sup> Of course it is likely that my own interest in creativity has played a part in an interpretation of this concept.

In Chapter Seven I provide a similar example from the analysis of the observers' perspective of performativity. The narrative exemplars above illustrate how Bourdieu's conceptual tools are useful for illuminating elements of the socially-constructed nature of the performativity of emotional labour within an observation. However, in trying to understand the nature of what is happening within the field of the observation, it's the *process* of these concepts that must be investigated; the interplay and hidden nature of the emotional experiences that manifest within and/or spring from them. In short, it's not the *why* described above, that I'm exploring, but *how* do these concepts impact upon the individual during an observation?

#### **a. The Context of Teaching and Learning**

In support of O'Leary's research, some participants voiced their concern that often practical contextual information appeared to be missing from the observers' knowledge or feedback on the observation. This formed a crucial aspect of the perceived restriction to the teachers' levels of discretion or autonomy in the classroom. For example, the participants recalled critical feedback concerning the temperature in the classrooms when this was beyond the teachers control or breaks being taken at unplanned times (when these had usually been at the discretion of the teacher)

“...because I came in, and had a break and he made a great issue about that. And his whole style was, you know, he commented on the layout of the room, and the quality of the room and sometimes, you know, these were all things you don't have control over.” (Brian)

I illustrated in Monica's Story how classrooms are often changed for an observation in order to manipulate a lesson which would otherwise take a different format (e.g. in

a computer room) which may be perceived as lacking the criteria of a 'good lesson'. The practical elements of the lesson's context had a crucial role in the way that teaching and learning took place for Alex. She suffers from a medical condition that means her eyesight is at times very poor. This meant that the layout of the classroom needed to be predictable, for her to manage the students' effectively and safely. The 'field' needed to be carefully controlled. She recalls a time when the observer of a lesson had apparently not taken into account these difficulties:

Alex I don't feel very confident anymore, I've lost a lot of my confidence. And with the lighting, so if I can see their faces and I can keep looking at them

UE and you know where they are...

Alex and yes, I know where they are and I feel more comfortable and I, it helps with their names as well. And that's why I don't like having them in groups, in tables anymore.

UE So presumably the observer wasn't aware of...

Alex No, and that's the thing, he wasn't aware of my disability and clearly hadn't looked at any of my, I don't know where that would be in my, I assume that would have surely been if they look at, but they don't even look at it, anything to do with your work history or your, I'm down as having a disability, I mean that should be flagged-up, surely when they...?

This illustrates how for Alex this particular observation was far removed from any potential personal development opportunity described by Avis (2009). The observer of this lesson was unaware of the challenges that Alex needed to overcome because of her medical condition in her day-to-day teaching role. There appeared to be little



compassion or sympathy for the difficult situation that Alex found herself in. It was perhaps unsurprising that the elements of Alex's narrative implied how she felt severely undervalued by her manager and detached from any professional identity.

#### **b. 'Hidden' Emotional Labour in FE**

One of the difficulties with researching the affectivity of observations lies in the perceived binary divide in the terminologies of teaching and learning (Smith, Swift 2012; Zembylas, 2007a). On the one hand, there is the explicit nature of the performativity of the teachers' embodied emotional labour (Witz, Warhurst et al. 2003); the accepted *doxa* to which the teachers must conform to the criteria of the curriculum and the overt evidence (for the benefit of the observer) of appropriate 'effective' teaching strategies. On the other hand, there is the invisible or 'hidden' labour and learning that occurs. For example, in the case study of the FE teacher 'Gwen' from the Learning Cultures project (James, Biesta, 2007), research based on her narrative suggested that her personal responsibility and commitment towards her students and the inherent relationships these presented meant she felt forced to challenge ethical dilemmas by working many more additional (unpaid) hours and making private sacrifices. These behaviours were viewed as an essential part of the job that contributed greatly to the progress of the students, but which were 'under the radar' in terms of being able to be 'measureable'. This situation was echoed by many of my participants, notably Grace, who summarised her views about why there were these 'hidden' elements of her role:

“..so there's a tendency to see that [building rapport with students] as an insecurity or weakness or a character fault, rather than a [inaudible], but you know, I can't, I can't agree with that personally because if you don't genuinely

care, if you *don't genuinely care* then you can't genuinely do a good job.”

(Grace, original emphasis)

In the context of Grace's vocational past, this comment takes on new meaning when she described how, as a healthcare professional, she supported the recovery of stroke victims. The significance for her and her patients in having as 'small' an objective as (in her words) achieving a “flicker of movement in a finger” by the end of a day, has parallels to her students' academic and personal progress. Importantly for Grace her sense of reward and the extent to which she commits to her teaching – her unique 'illusio' - seems to come from seeing her students' progress (rather than her manager's statistical reports), as she described simply:

“[...] you know, you value your relationships with your students more greatly than you value your relationship with your manager” (Grace)

Similarly for Sally, as she describes her sense of reward of her emotional labour:

“...when there's a buzz - there's a buzz in the class, and you hit the nail on the head and you're keyed into their thinking and what together you, with the class, are working on, in harmony to produce something that particularly is of benefit to them, a learning experience - and that's satisfaction.” (Sally)

Sally had a difficult childhood learning experience, complicated by witnessing her father's death whilst a young girl, with whom she had a close relationship. Sally's narratives include memories of learning together with her father through the creation of stories. Supporting the research I discussed in Chapter One by Villeneuve-Smith et al., (2008) it appeared these experiences formed an important part of the motives for Sally to become an English language teacher. From the narrative exemplars so

far, I have illustrated how the complex nature of relationships between students/teachers is an important aspect of the emotional experiences in observations. These relationships are often tested by the tensions between the needs of students and the large workloads of FE staff - requiring sacrifice in terms of time and energy (University and Colleges Union 2011). This 'underground learning' (James, Diment, 2003) was a recurring theme of the data.

The additional workload of many FE staff involved in providing this 'gift' of emotional labour for their students is simultaneously outside yet also symptomatic of management strategies arising from the impact of a criteria driven by Ofsted. The performativity and audit reduces the perceived value on the caring or 'therapeutic' nature of their role and the focus on the students' well-being in favour of a quantitative approach - focused on exam and assignment results and retention figures. I have illustrated this in the fictionalised account of Monica by drawing attention to the specific elements of her students' lives which are intrinsically linked to their ability and readiness to learn. Indeed there is a potential negative impact on the self or 'ego' in deciding to retain personal values and objectives and take on this caring or 'ethics work' (Colley, 2012). This is supported by data I present here in that many of the participants - teachers and managers alike – describe how they feel forced into investing long hours into their roles.

“...I wasn't as well prepared as I normally am, because I'm working *every hour that God sends* with this other role and sooner or later - and it did - it will impact the lessons I deliver - and it did and it impacted on that lesson. Because there's only so much I can do, and I couldn't prepare as much as I wanted to, I couldn't prepare something up my sleeve in case it all went tits up and I'm not...it was lack of time.” (Alex, original emphasis)

Like most of the participants in this study, the fictionalised character Monica, is committed to providing good quality learning materials which are accessible to all the students, for instance in coloured font for those with Dyslexia. However, due to funding cut-backs, the (expensive to maintain) colour printers in the college have been stored away. Because of the commitment to the specific needs of her students like Demi, Emmie and Saima, she takes the learning materials home and pays for the colour printing herself<sup>45</sup>. The decision to carry out this work is hidden and personal. As explained in Monica's story, this kind of 'ethics work' forms part of the relationship between the teacher and the student, in a joint commitment to learning.

Research by Colley (2012) show that this 'hidden' work becomes taboo and is therefore often not discussed. This stigma may partly be because the dominant rhetoric of workplace learning and managerialist approaches which (as I explained in Chapter Two) seems to continue to undermine professional identities. Admitting (to ourselves or others) that the workload is too much to cope with is often not an option. Monica's story illustrates this in many ways, for example in how photocopying is sometimes carried out in other departments early in the morning to exploit unrestricted equipment. Managers may ignore this practice - as discussed in Julia and Helen's narratives (see Chapter Seven) – because paradoxically it is 'illegal' behaviour which is beneficial to the students and the institution as a whole. In an era of austerity public sector jobs are constantly under threat of redundancy and therefore workloads are increasing, bringing further pressures. Narratives from this study like the one above confirm that ethics work and the 'hidden' emotional labour that it inevitably presents new and daily dilemmas for FE staff (Colley, 2012).

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<sup>45</sup> I explore this issue in more detail in the following chapter which analyses the managers' narratives.

For some teachers the motivation in terms of the potential emotional reward for their emotional labour – whether revealed or hidden - is considerable, making ‘ethics work’ more of a personal investment because of its value to the teacher’s self-esteem, as explained in the example below.

UE so what is it about the mature students that's different for you?

Alex Because they have erm, much more knowledge of the world and they're of a generation that - culture-wise, language-wise, thought-wise - where I can *relate to them*. And the concepts that I might come out with - they're on it straight away. And they build on that concept and I'll come back at them with extra information, and they'll come back at me with further information and it's a real *exchange of ideas*, erm and you don't get that with the younger ones.

UE So it's a whole different [kind of] relationship?

Alex ...completely different relationship. They respect me as well. And they are interested in what I've got to say, genuinely interested.

These comments resonated with me when I remembered the challenges I had overcome when returning to education as a mature student (described in Chapter One). Interestingly, in contrast to Alex’s and the other participants’ views, Naima revealed how she preferred to teach younger students, because she perceived they were “so full of life and laughter” compared to some of the adult learners who were there apparently “because job-seekers sent them”. But whether young or old, it is perhaps understandable that their students’ progress and well-being provide a personal motivator for these teachers’ ‘ethics work’. The potential impact on these teachers’ self-esteem and professional identities has profound implications on the

importance of the feelings of shame that were described by some teachers; the psychoanalytical aspects of which are explored later in this chapter.

This same experience was reflected in the case study of 'Joanne' in Colley's (2012) research:

"I seem to be getting frustrated very much this term, I don't know if I need a break, I'm very conscious of the fact that my fuse is shorter at the moment. There are a couple of students that are getting to me. Things that frustrate me are where I've got students that constantly talk in class, or that don't, you know, give you eye contact or seem to be paying attention." (quote from *Joanne* in Colley, 2012 p. 330)

This was also an outcome of research carried out on observation policies for teacher educators in FE by O'Leary (2012). Likewise, having shared a personal experience of the immense workload that an FE lecturer endures, this was a topic that I was sensitised to and (perhaps therefore) featured heavily in the narratives. This extract from Alex's interview was typical:

"I don't think they understand and I think (sighs) they are, everybody's very, very busy and we are all busy, definitely, but I don't feel that anybody recognises just how much work I am doing. [...] It's got everything to do with the workload that keeps getting pushed my way. And nobody is...everybody is just too willing to shirk the work that they've got to do, because they're drowning in it. But they... I don't...I'm just thinking to myself, why have I got all of this work? *Why have I got all of this work?* Is it that I'm *creating* this work, because I want this to run so well, that I'm setting erm, my goals too high?"  
(Alex, original emphasis)

With this and similar excerpts from the narratives in mind, it was important in the fictionalised story to try to illustrate to the reader the perceived unfairness in the workload and the sense of anxiety that a lack of control in a workload can produce. Monica's sense of exhaustion in the run-up to the observation and her feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy after the feedback sessions with the observer provide some examples of how I incorporated this into the story.

It is important to note that as I described in Chapter One, there is a deeply embedded rhetoric of the positive benefits of lifelong learning and calls from government and other agencies for *continual improvement* in FE teaching practice. Yet in light of the above experiences, it is difficult to see how teachers can reflexively improve their practice under the kind of stress articulated by most of the participants. Although, as I explained, research into FE teachers' experiences is limited, it appears the themes from the analysis of this study's narratives are not atypical (Colley, James and Biesta, 2007; O'Leary, 2012). Indeed, it could be significant that the two lecturer participants where stress and anxiety attributed to workload did *not* feature heavily have retired since the research interviews (Jim and Brian).

Furthermore, the apparent complexities of teaching roles or identities perhaps become more explicit in the emotional labour within an observation within this context of anxiety. For example, Anna, Alex and Sally described additional work that they carried out prior to an observation and important contexts within the classroom which, although they perceived as crucial elements of their job, an observer may have been unaware of. I have illustrated this in Monica's story when her high workload simply adds to her anxiety and feeling of being out of control with her job. It is also symbolised visually when she returns home early after her observation to see the evidence of the work she had carried out the previous night. The workload of

staff and the perceived unfair delegation of work contribute to negative emotions within the staffroom, as I explain later in this chapter.

The data presented here supports the view that additional work carried out by FE teachers is frequently 'under the radar' in that it often goes unacknowledged by management and therefore perceived as of no value. Indeed, teachers could be seen as being implicit in creating their own vulnerabilities (Butler, 1997). It is unclear how the teachers' perceive their relationships with their students can (or whether they should) be more highly valued by others, perhaps this is why they are often not spoken about except in the 'back-stage' area of the staffroom. Certainly in the case Naima and Alex, there were a series of contradictory statements about their relationships with their students; descriptions which ranged from open caring to taking a 'tough love' approach followed by elements of resentment or detachment from these individuals. For instance, when I commented that some managers may think it is inappropriate to build close relationships with their students, Naima agreed with this view - despite telling me that she had shed tears over students' progress. What intrigued me was the fluid nature of these narratives and how our assumptions and expectations of others may shape a description of these relationships. This is something I explore in further detail below and in the final chapter.

In the specific situation of observations investigated here, this 'hidden' work can reveal itself to an observer if it is evidenced through good rapport with the students. However, from my own experience and supported by participants' views expressed within this research, these relationships are often developed outside the classroom – away from any 'measurable' criteria. Staff may spend time with the students individually outside lesson times or correspond via email. Naima lives in an inner-city community housing estate where she sees her students on a daily basis; one female



student apparently calls her 'aunty'<sup>46</sup> despite there being no family relationship between them: "[...] yeah, I kind of 'click' with my learners" (Naima). These relationships can be the result of a shared understanding of the anxieties inherent in teaching and learning (Nias, 1996; Price, 2001). The experience of unknowing can be unsettling and requires a mutual sensitiveness to the subtle nuances of the classroom – something articulated in Jim's quote at the beginning of this chapter, when he used his instinct and decided to change the planned learning outcomes before his students lost their concentration.

In Monica's story I used examples of how these student/staff relationships sometimes involved staff lending money to students or giving them cigarettes. Although participants like Naima and Sally acknowledged this happened at their colleges, they commented how they felt uncomfortable with it. It is worth consideration (but outside the scope of this research) how research within the context of psychiatric hospitals suggested how staff perceived smoking with their patients helped to strengthen trust between patient/healthcare professional (Ratchen, Britton et al., 2011). Perhaps there was a conspiratorial 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959) within the role and identities of these healthcare professionals, as there may be for some FE staff.

The complexities of these teacher/student relationships become apparent when teachers may be required to trust students to be officially marked on institutional documentation as on time when they are actually late, or as present or on 'study leave' when actually they are absent for private reasons. Sometimes, these absences raise moral or ethical questions – for example in the fictionalised text one

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<sup>46</sup> The significance of this familial term has been explored by Ellingson and Sotirin (2013)

of Monica's students had been absent because of an appointment for an abortion. When values are sacrificed to preserve a relationship this emphasises the importance of pursuing students' 'measurable' learning progress. For Naima there was evidence of her view of a power-relationship: she used her social capital as a teacher within the field of her language classroom to stabilise or progress relationships. She described a situation where a student had been banned from college due to heavy drinking when later she goes against this ruling and welcomes him back into her classroom. Understandably this created a conflict between her and her manager:

“He [Charles, Naima's manager] said he's not allowed in again. At that time, I put my job on stake and accepted him back in. Could've lost my job, in front of Charles, could've lost my job on the spot, um, the problem with him [student] is, he had...he really worked hard, hard-working man, worked hard for his wife, children, and his wife just walked out on him by listening to her brother. Her brother was like interfering, she walked out on him and he was living with his mother who then died, and he suffered severe depression.” (Naima)

Naima trusted her own instinct in continuing her effort with supporting this particular mature learner which eventually contributed toward him achieving academic success. This student apparently continues to acknowledge to Naima:

“...so he came in with a big box of, you know, sweets and we sat there and we... chatting together, and he told me the whole story and he sat there and he was in tears.[...] So yes, that was a very important learner for me and even today, he said, 'well we got Naima there, don't worry, she'll sort it out, Naima

she'll take care of you there', you know, so many times he's come to see me here." (Naima)

In this way, FE staff may find they are caught-up in a vicious circle of workplace suffering when 'good' teaching is seen by management as coping with the additional workload, even though this work is hidden from others for fear of the shame in being labelled incompetent (James, Biesta, 2007). This fear of shame in itself can be a motivator to maintain the hidden nature of the work, as I explain below. It is unclear exactly how much additional work individuals like Alex and Naima and others undertake, and therefore the potential consequences to students (and institutions as a whole) are unknown, should this goodwill be withdrawn. As Colley (2012) points out in her research with careers advisors, these situations are not restricted to FE staff but arise in similar professional caring roles.

### **c. Performativity, Ethics Work and Emotional Labour**

As I explained in Chapter 2, Hochschild's (1983) seminal work on emotional labour described how employees are paid to manage 'appropriate' emotions for commercial gain. Hochschild saw how the more embodied the emotional performance was for the employee, the 'deeper' or 'more authentic' the (service) act portrayed to the customer (Hochschild, 1983). But as I have hinted at above, critics of Hochschild's theory say that claiming a clear distinction between the public and private aspects of emotional labour is reductionist. The participants had strong views on their conceptualisation of this emotional labour and the impact on their performativity during an observation:

"You, you don't feel like you're being your *actual* self.[...] You feel *even more* like you're putting on a performance, you *are* kind of doing that with the

students anyway, to a certain extent. When someone else is watching you, it just...I don't know...it kind of makes you more self-conscious about what you are doing. (Sam, original emphasis)

The 'invisible' nature of this embodied affectivity meant that, for Hochschild, this kind of labour was 'unseen' by management and therefore went unacknowledged - financially or otherwise. But contradicting Hochschild's theory, Sam's comment provides some insight into the 'fuzziness' or fluid nature of embodied emotional labour (Boyd, Bolton, 2003); suggesting the subtle complexities of performativity. Viewed through the lens of existentialism, this description of performativity has parallels with Sartre's concept of 'bad faith' explained in Chapter Two (Sartre, 1943). Sam appears aware of the deception to herself in choosing to adhere to the criteria of the observation, yet this is somehow exaggerated by the presence of the observer making her more 'self-conscious' of this 'lie'. In light of this, dichotomies such as 'shallow' and 'deep', 'compliant' and 'resilient' are not adequate or helpful terms when describing the emotions of FE staff in this context. When asked to expand on this 'self-consciousness' (or performativity), Sam described how this differed from her 'everyday' self:

"not *very* different, but I suppose I'm quite, I do sometimes come across as well, I am a quite *quiet* person and I'm not, I wouldn't say I'm *majorly* loud in class, you know, but I am, um, I definitely, you know, try to be *more assertive* and...um, and I think it's partly because, you know, your classroom is like 'your group, your gang and you're the leader' [...] But I'm not a *natural* leader."  
(Sam, original emphasis)

This excerpt illuminates Sam's perception of her different teaching/self-identities. Her professional habitus includes performing her perception of a socially-constructed teacher who is self-confident and therefore she recognises her need to be "more assertive" than her "natural" self. This view of the self was shared by Brian (a lecturer who has since taken early retirement) when he explained how, at the beginning of his forty years of teaching, he had difficulty in living-up to his own image of what he perceived as a 'good teacher', despite his colleagues telling him otherwise:

"[...] I really enjoy teaching but, I really *hadn't got the confidence*. Part of it was, you know, I wasn't, I'm *not the most outgoing person*. I think it took a long time before... I'm more outgoing now than I used to be, you know, and *I'm alright in the class, but I was always shy* and I, people said to me 'you can teach' - you know, and they gave me the confidence." (Brian, my emphasis)

Brian notes how he is "alright in class" indicating (like Sam) that his identity as 'a teacher' is in some ways (for him) a performance of his socially constructed teacher-identity. Indeed, it appeared that Sam and Brian did not perceive themselves as teachers but instead as 'facilitators of learning'. Hence Sam described herself as a type of 'band leader'; her students being the 'musicians'. Metaphors were an unexpected and unanticipated feature of the narratives in how the participants described their pedagogical practice and approach. I discuss this in more detail below and in Chapter Seven. However, of all the metaphors used by the participants, I found Sam's deeply meaningful. As a musician I recognise the crucial (but often unacknowledged) skills of an expert conductor. For me, Sam's metaphor illustrated the importance of eye contact between a (nervous) musician and the conductor. Waiting for a cue involves a shared understanding of one another's strengths and weaknesses (in terms of 'difficult phrases'). Like the FE classroom, often in a group

of musicians no hierarchy exists; collectively they create the 'best' interpretation. In Monica's story a silent but meaningful 'gaze' at her student Demi is enough to prevent her stepping 'out of line' during an observation. The metaphor Sam used also has parallels with my methodology in that researcher and participants together are creating new interpretations.

The issue of the 'hidden' nature of emotional labour raises important questions for this study. Witz et al., (2003) claim that although these exchanges are 'beyond contract' for service sector workers, the exhibition of what Boyd and Bolton (2003) define as 'a gift' is intentionally developed by management, for the benefit of others. In the context of FE, Smith and Swift (2012) suggest that colleges with an overtly 'therapeutic' approach towards their students' needs are indeed awarded higher status from Ofsted and other authorities – demonstrating that in making these strategies explicit, they can be recognised as 'valuable'. So what allows this type of emotional labour to be articulated in some colleges but remain 'hidden' in others? How are these exchanges experienced by teachers; to what extent are they perceived as part of their teaching identities? In the following section, I explore these questions in more detail using examples from the teachers' narratives to illuminate some possible interpretations.

#### **d. Embodied Emotion and Teaching in FE**

James Lang (in Denzin, 1984) begins to tackle the embodied notion of emotion in explaining how, in contrast to common perception, strong emotion often *follows* its embodiment – not the other way around. For example, we can see a film and find ourselves unexpectedly crying in response – it's only *then* at *that moment* we may identify and make connections with our 'genuine self' - a feeling of sadness that we share. So emotions – whether acted or not - may first be experienced or perceived

as physiological, then (afterwards) cognitive. But not always. In some ways, it's the very importance of the inhibition of the exhibition of emotion (between stimulus and reaction) that causes the emotion. In the case of a teacher, this may lead to a perception of less 'authenticity' when acting 'from the heart' is deemed inappropriate by the observer (when it is explicit).

Alex described a time when she was watching a video with her students which showed a healthcare professional abusing a patient (from an 'undercover' documentary about poor quality care homes). She found herself crying in response to the video, and was glad that the classroom was "very dark" and that therefore her students were unable to see (and presumably be prompted to respond) to her embodied emotions. This illustrated how, like Brian and Sam above, for Alex, there was an expected "staged and scripted performance of the embodied self" (Witz et al., 2003 p. 39) in how she needed to be seen by others. Perhaps here lies the distinction - for Alex at least - between the 'genuine' self and the performativity of teaching? From this perspective there is no *doxa per se*, any rules dictating what may or may not be explicitly 'performed' are fluid and interactional, dependent upon the teacher's own specific decision in that time and space. A teacher's performativity may therefore be described as a 'style of the flesh' (Butler, 1990) that may include a different performance depending on the context. However for the observer, it is the form of expression (e.g. speech), which may not only control but articulate these contexts (Butler, 1997).

Reflecting back to my memory of my gym instructor's observation that I had undertaken some training in ballet (described in Chapter One, Section 2), I am reminded of Alex's own biography. During her career (prior to teaching) as a paediatric nurse in a cancer ward, her emotional labour involved trying to hide

feelings of sadness at the frequent tragedies of childhood chronic illness and death. The natural 'flow' that Alex described within her unobserved teaching, is perhaps perceived as a freedom from a perceived control of her emotions. The observer's presence seems to prevent her from feeling able to articulate openly the close relationships she has with her students – the 'gift' element of her emotional labour within her 'everyday' teaching. I discuss this in further detail in the following section.

Away from the students' needs, the staffroom is 'back-stage' (Goffman, 1959) where often there is an exchange of ideas and an opportunity for the professional dialogue that many teachers seek (O'Leary, 2012). However, I have also been aware that for others, these experiences have included negative interactions which have added to the burden of feelings of shame. I included this in Monica's story in her anxiety about returning to the staff room and her colleague Vanessa's reaction to her perceived failure. This stemmed from examples like Alex's narrative when she described the way that when she returned from an observation, she thought her colleagues were 'laughing at their sleeves' at her. Whether this perception was real or imagined is arguably irrelevant, as I will explain later in this chapter.

“And I know that 98% of the people there feel really badly for me, and really feel for me, but it's just that 2% of people who are just laughing at their sleeves and really pleased that I got a 'three'.[...] If I get *another* bloody 'three'. And they are going to, it's not going to...they're not going to think it was a fluke, the first time it was just a bad group, they're going to be thinking....and questioning *me* as a teacher.” (Alex, original emphasis)

So, for Alex, the embodied, aesthetic labour that she undertook during her lesson observation, arguably meant that it was even more important for her to undertake a



performance that allowed her self to remain hidden; her self that engaged in the gift of emotional labour in caring for her students. The possibility of a shared understanding of these complexities was evident in a quote from Sally:

“I don't want to be put on a pedestal....in terms of (inaudible) I mean it's always nice if that happens to you, but to me, workplace or working with others is the, is the ability to gel as a team, have a harmonious erm, harmonious way of working, that settles differences that isn't necessarily openly competitive, because that is negative as far as I'm concerned (...) but, looking at the focus of the problem might be, but the purpose, the purpose of you coming together is to develop knowledge and to support these people through their learning, then you should as a team do that, and it shouldn't be anybody pointing a finger.” (Sally)

Like Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical performance, the presentation of different identities was a continual process of manipulation to the desires of what was perceived to be the needs of the other (observer), so as to prevent any possible conflict or 'disruption', as Mollon (2002) explains:

The fear that this will be an embarrassing shock to the other. In general situations of embarrassment always involve *some kind of disruption* of the expectations one person has of another. It follows then, that for the person who has developed an extensive false self, the more 'authentic' aspect of self will be felt as an embarrassment. There will tend to be a continual monitoring of the *presentation of self*, so as to fit in with the expectations and desires of the other. This is the basis of embarrassed, self-consciousness. (Mollon, 2002 p. 17, my emphasis)

Within the context of an observation, the emotions are exaggerated by the views of others who are perceived as a 'good teacher'. This is illustrated in Monica's story and was described in the narratives of Sally, Naima and Anna. Alex provides a graphic and typical description about these feelings:

"It was terrible. Looking back on that, [...] People were throwing-up! And being ill and like me crashing the car....because I was thinking about that [observation]. You know, it's still a huge amount of pressure, an unnecessary amount of pressure and its unfair, being judged on your whole performance on fifty minutes once a year. It's just ridiculous. Definitely. But you still see people walking up and down the corridor, crapping themselves still, really working themselves up into a frenzy." (Alex)

In this chapter so far, I have explained the main themes emerging from the analysis of the teachers' transcripts. With the help of Bourdieu's conceptual tools I have illuminated the different ways that some FE teachers may emotionally (fluidly through the fuzziness of un/consciousness and/or un/willingness) perceive they 'buy into' the *doxa* of the performativity in an observation. I have illustrated how Bourdieu's framework provides a way of escaping the perceived duality of the emotional aspects of an observation, allowing a focus on the importance of the interactions within these situations. However, arguably what is missing is an explanation of the complexities of how a professional habitus is formed, and how it may impact on the embodied emotions. It is with this in mind that I turn to the psychoanalytical perspective to assist with understanding the micro elements of the contexts of observations. In particular, I was interested in uncovering the potential meanings of feelings of shame, anxiety and frustration shared in some of the teachers I interviewed when they described their experiences during and after an observation - emotions which I

have witnessed and/or experienced myself. In examining the possible causes of these feelings, their significance may be useful when reflecting on aspects of teaching practice, especially in an observation. Exploring notions of object relations theory inspired from existential psychoanalytical perspectives, helped illuminate the individualistic, private elements of these emotions or the emotional aspects of our professional habitus. For example, what childhood experiences may influence an individual's embodied performativity? To what extent do real or imagined situations have upon these emotions and subsequently impact on teachers' identities within an observation?

### **3. Psychoanalytical Concepts**

As I outlined in Chapter Two, the concept of professional habitus includes acknowledgement of the possible psychological impact on our behaviours and feelings, including interpretations of past, present and future emotions. Specifically, the notion of 'transference' means feelings of empathy or jealousy during childhood towards adults could lead to a teacher being afraid that similar feelings exist in their own students. Importantly, an individual's image of a teacher is sometimes shattered by disillusionment. For example, a teacher may see a student as the embodiment of their own weaknesses of unknowing and risks acting-out this defensiveness in treating the student with contempt. However, there is a danger within this approach: reflecting on our emotional impact on others does not necessarily allow a more 'objective' view of our relationships (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983 p. 40); it simply provides another interpretation, which, in itself, could be valuable.

### **a. Anxiety and Stress in Observations**

Two of the narratives in particular emphasised the significance of the participants' past as present. For instance, when recalling her school-life, Sam constantly referred to her childhood class using the word 'us'; inferring that decades later when remembering the shame of the class' poor behaviour as a group, she viewed the group homogenously not as self and other, but including herself. This clue strengthens the interpretations explained above regarding the collegiality of being a class together because we perceive ourselves as sharing an anxious 'unknowing' (Price 2001). Fischer (1989) suggests that we turn away from opportunities to reflect on these emotions because for some they do not represent an opportunity to explore our 'being-in-the-world', but rather just a way through it.

As I explained in Chapters Two and Three, lecturers report feelings of resentment at having to be managed (O'Leary, 2011). From a psychoanalytical perspective, this is perhaps because there is also an element of not being recognized by others – outside the workplace, perhaps from our childhood – that resonates with these feelings – amplifying them. Freud viewed experiences as never lost; they can be stored and re-awakened if a situation resembles the past in some way. The complexities inherent in FE teacher/student relationships that I explained above revive many emotions including parent/child ones. Although there is an interdependence or 'reciprocal dependancy' (Winnicott, 1971) within child/parent relationships, there is an intrinsic vulnerability which we cannot distance ourselves from, especially when these roles are played-out repeatedly in the classroom and later, within the workplace and at home (Honneth 2004). Furthermore, as Butler (1997) points out, the resonance *itself* may serve as a reminder that these (uncomfortable) feelings are themselves, repeatable, further adding to our

vulnerability. The personal nature of this vulnerability was explained by Sam, one of the lecturer-participants who (as I explained above) explicitly described themselves as lacking in self-confidence especially during observations in her early teaching career:

“Well, um, I don't know, I was more self-conscious person then, I was really...before I started teaching I was much shy as a person and, er... I wanted to teach, and I found out that's what made me a much more confident person actually, I'm still not brilliant in front of people, but from a psychological point of view, I'm sure it helped me to...in communication and everything and I just used to get, um, *really anxious* about, you know what they would say I was doing wrong and that kind of thing and I did used to, I'm not quite so bad now, but you know, *I did* used to get...um, *really nervous* about that.” (Sam, original emphasis)

Likewise, for Alex, who describes her memories of a recent observation:

“I hate it. I find it absolutely er, erm, *demeaning*, I find it *demeaning*, *distressing*, *stressful*, I find...I, I just think the whole thing has no [inaudible], it's one tiny part of the massive role that I do. I think the role that I do is very complex and that I'm being judged.” (Alex)

The implicit inference in these two comments to a struggle for recognition is not necessarily a ‘rebelliousness’ against the *doxa* of the classroom (although perhaps, for some, it is); a struggle for recognition can be the result of the internalization of the inescapable subordination and all that it entails (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). After all, it is implied in the performance that is an observation, that the observer holds more ‘legitimate’ forms of knowledge than the teacher (Foucault 1980), when the

complexities of the contexts within the classroom are deemed irrelevant by *doxa* held by the observer (O’Leary, 2012). Reflecting the quote from Sam earlier in this chapter, Crossley (2001) points out:

Our awareness of their awareness of us generates a paranoid tension and alienation, an insecurity, which can only be resolved if we win their recognition. [...] We must prove ourselves to the other in order to prove ourselves to ourselves. (Crossley, 2001 p. 87)

It could be seen therefore that within an observation, the FE teacher is actually a part of their own (perceived) subordination and the interconnected feelings of shame. Thus, paradoxically, observations are not only an inaccurate performance management tool, but are also worthless for professional development. This is because no reflexivity or learning is possible in an atmosphere that creates (potential) feelings of shame (Mollon, 2002) or does not allow any articulation (or playfulness) of these emotions.

[...] Anyway, I had this one observation, in one class, which didn’t go very well and um, oh, he made a right, instead of like, you know, just saying you’re ‘not very good’, ‘it was crap’ or whatever, he went through this right long process of saying ‘well what would you do...’ I don’t know, but he... really long, roundabout sort of [...] and everything and anyway I was *quite upset* about that... (Sam, original emphasis)

The drawn-out nature of the feedback was the important element of that memory for Sam. Mollon provides some insight into why this might be the case; ‘shame and embarrassment arise in the jarring of cracks between the expectation of the other and the actual feelings and behaviour of the self’ (Mollon, 2002 p. 17). The ‘jarring

cracks' for Sam may be between expectations of the self and the observer in the observation. Indeed, Mollon (2002) expresses sound observations which have parallels to the concept of multiple (teaching) identities and the embodied emotional labour and performativity of observations.

A similar experience was described by Anna:

“[...] but she sat there, look..., frowning, you know with this real frowny, stern expression on her face...and I thought, why are you sitting there looking like that? That's making me feel really uncomfortable. So I just sort of felt that I was just *losing* it, because I couldn't, be myself, with this woman with this stern, frowny expression on her face. [...] Because, you, I just felt, I mean I ended-up just getting a 'two'<sup>47</sup>, but I just felt as if I lost myself, I kept *losing my thread* and not being able to follow-up what they said? Because I kept forgetting what they said, because I just felt so utterly uncomfortable, in this stupid, stupid situation [...] I felt completely undermined by the experience.”  
(Anna, original emphasis)

These narrative exemplars illustrate how these emotional experiences were often not discussed and are therefore concealed - not only from the observers and/or their managers, but even from the participants themselves. Sally admits to never having previously discussed these issues before they were raised during my research interview process.

Sally [...] well I wasn't battered because I just closed-down really.

UE What do you mean?

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<sup>47</sup> Indicating Anna's perception that an observation awarded a grade two ('Good') is not good enough.

Sally Well I just closed-up because I realised that whatever I said was going to incriminate myself [laughs] I was only going to make it worse if I was going to explain something and she gave me a lot of negative feedback.

Sally says she “wasn’t battered” hinting at the perceived embodied threat through the emotional trauma of the verbal ‘negative feedback’ to her (bodily) self – what Bourdieu defined as *symbolic violence*. To defend the ego and avoid this perceived physical feeling she described ‘closing-down’. In this way, Sally tried to protect aspects of her self (her essence as a ‘good’ teacher’) from the vulnerability that fear of shame inflicts. By its very nature, this ‘closing down’ coping strategy prevents any reflection and learning that lesson observations can otherwise achieve. It also has a potentially detrimental effect on future observations, because, as Sam pointed out “well, you tend to really remember the bad ones I suppose, you know, they’re the kind of ones I remember...” - indicating her acknowledgement of the circular nature of the vulnerability explained above. The narratives on this issue were summarized by a comment by Sally comparing a positive experience of an observation to a more recent negative one which felt like it was:

“[...] crushing me into the ground, by making me feel that this is not, this is not a professional, er, erm, observation, it’s more of a disciplinary, lets pull you in line, with what we want you to do er, experience.. and that was it.”

(Sally, original emphasis)

In contrast to the above, Anna chose to hide from the repercussions from an observation she had felt disappointed with. She apparently ignored the email containing the written, formal feedback from the session, feeling that it was not valuable because it contained nothing that she did not already know:



“And I found it, really, really felt [...] felt completely undermined by the experience and completely anxious and de-skilled by it. And I don't think...we never, ever met for a feed-back session, she just sent me this stuff, which I didn't actually read! [laughs] because I felt that I didn't even want to because I didn't *need* her to tell me what had gone wrong [...] I didn't feel that it was about stuff that I didn't know already.” (Anna, original emphasis)

As I explained in Chapter Two, through the lens of Object Relation psychoanalysis, the ‘false’ self is the image that we perceive our mother (or significant care-giver) wants us to become (Elliott, 2002; Winnicott, 1971). The child becomes an embodied fantasy of the mother, instead of feeling recognised, accepted and supported to develop a more ‘authentic’ self (however this may be perceived). A poststructural reading may illuminate these inherent anxieties when we consider the possibility all our identities are potentially false; constantly re/constructed performances for others and ourselves (Goffman, 1971). Conflict occurs when what we perceive others *think we are* and *our own perception of our identity*, do not match (Mollon, 2002). The fear of this conflict often means that we avoid the likelihood of this mis-match, even from ourselves.

### **b. Feelings of Shame**

The potentially traumatic impact on our well-being forces us to endeavour to preserve the self, as I explained above. Shame has a circular nature, we may carry shame at being ashamed and shame is felt in the body as a reaction to the previous feelings of shame (Winnicott, 1971). The experience of seeing ourselves as an object of the other – here specifically as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ teacher to the observer - inevitably produces a vulnerability because of its potential impact on our professional habitus. Crucially, vulnerability comes out of what the other sees in us is inherently

unknowable, even if it is partly interpreted through embodied facial expressions such as those described by Anna as “frowny”. In most observations, the teacher may get some idea of what the observer has perceived of the teaching and learning through a feedback session – whether this happens immediately or sometime after the observed lesson. However, the fear of continued vulnerability and therefore lack of agency, is perpetuated in institutions where feedback is retained by management (O’Leary, 2012). In this situation there is no opportunity for self-reflection, and therefore no development opportunity.

The shame associated with emergence from a false position is to do with the expectation that the more ‘authentic’ feelings and aspirations will not be recognised, understood or accepted. It is akin to emerging from behind a mask, or taking off a costume, or exposing oneself as having been a fraud or an imposter. (Mollon, 2002 p. 17)

This quotation illustrates the tension between the performativity and the perceived in/authenticity of the self. Within the context of this study, this is important when considering the narratives of the teachers describing the experience of seeing ourselves as an object of the other (the observer and others) – here specifically as a ‘bad’ teacher (or a ‘failed’ department/institution).

The behavioural impact of shame is often described in a withdrawal or covering of the body; the removal of the self from the social space or the “publicly identified other” (Garkinkel, 1959 p. 421). Panic and anger are two terms which were often included in descriptions about wanting to ‘disappear’ from view after what was perceived as an unsuccessful observation. There is a sense of rejection of further contact with the social world in a sense of disgust at oneself, for example “I could

have sunk to the floor” and “I wanted to the earth to open-up and swallow me” (Garfinkel, 1956 p. 421). From a traditional psychoanalysts perspective, rejection is a result of attempts at protecting the ego from further pain and anxiety; this makes shame unique in that it has to be experienced alone and in an individual’s own time. Sally described how she ‘closed down’ to cope with these emotions - illustrating a view of herself as a machine now unable to function. Existentialist interpretations of rejection attempt to transcend the separation of the unconscious elements of the self. This notion of rejection is important when we consider the narrative of Alex; she linked how she felt after her observation feedback with her emotional memories of being abandoned by her past boyfriend many decades before:

“...who knows what the complex reasons might be, but when I got that ‘three’, I was absolutely, erm, devastated, and I cried uncontrollably...And I had to go home...And that’s never happened to me before. Well, it’s happened to me once before, when my partner went off to another country and I wouldn’t see him, but erm, I just went in the toilet, and I just think it was, er, to me it was, I think I was working so very hard...” (Alex)

In this profoundly heartfelt quote, Alex illustrates the fluid nature of our consciousness – between past and present emotions and the complex interaction between them. The potential impact of the fear of shame for many FE teachers is severe because - for complex reasons explained in Chapter One and in the first section of this chapter– they may perceive themselves as deprofessionalised and low in self-esteem. Hence, if the face of the observer is not seemingly empathetic - as in Anna’s ‘frowny’ description described above – memories of past shameful moments (whether real or imagined) may become more apparent. The tensions between the perceived socially acceptable behaviour during this emotional time

could be interpreted as a conflict between the perception of different identities – seen/unseen, evident in Naima’s comments below:

“I wouldn’t like to express that childishness in front of my peers and so I wouldn’t cry. I just keep it inside me, I wouldn’t cry, just hold it inside me. If it’s like me, I wouldn’t cry, you know, um, that, that, but, kind of inside me I feel really reserved, but like Tuesday [the day of the observation] I was really like *holding it in*, I felt ‘God, I need a cry after this’ After the observation I just go to the Ladies [toilets] and just cry to relieve myself. Just let it out.” (Naima)

There are echoes here with the narrative of Alex, although later in the same interview Naima contradicts herself by denying that she embodied her emotions. However, as I explained earlier there is sometimes not a clear distinction or dichotomy between the self that feels emotion and the bodily response to emotions (Dunlop, 1984). There are complex connections in our un/conscious selves from past, present and future experiences, fears and aspirations which feed into these emotions (Denzin, 1984). “Shame emerges at moments of our deepest psychological vulnerability” (Mollon, 2002 p. 26) because these embodied emotions are deeply connected to our past experiences – real and imagined – and thus our professional habitus (Crossley, 2001). But shame does not co-exist where there is empathy. For the teacher, empathy is embodied by the presence of a supportive mentor, an individual who understands the context of the classroom (O’Leary, 2012) and their professional habitus (James, Biesta 2007). This was articulated by Anna, Brian and Sally as they described the importance of engaging with an individual in professional dialogue:

“To actually to get some captured, protected time with her [the mentor], all to myself, where we could just go through, all these bits and pieces and she could come up with all these solutions. It was brilliant.” (Alex)

And again, later, when Alex explained the importance of a shared empathy with a colleague...

“...that you've got links into an AP that does actually take time and you don't feel rushed and you can actually do, what you can do to improve yourself. And, and something that's very real and realistic and things to improve the situation that I don't really feel was there before.” (Alex)

As I explained in Chapter Two, without empathy, shame grows over time into a hatred of the self. Our sense of agency diminishes when others do not show empathy and we may feel instead like objects under the ‘gaze of the Other’ (Sartre 1943). Shame is when violation of self and exposure of self meets lack of empathy (actual or imagined) in the Other, so the mentoring role described above by Anna and Sally did not appear to exist in the role of their observer – or perhaps even outside this role, in wider communities of practice. The implications on self-esteem are profound in that having support and professional dialogue about an observation can be extremely valuable.

These findings support outcomes from O’Leary’s research (2012) despite coming from different theoretical lenses. The consequences on relationships with colleagues in particular, for example, when Alex returned to the staff room having achieved a positive outcome from the lesson observation:

“I've got my revenge on them, yeah, that's exactly right, but you know, it's about - I've got this 'one'<sup>48</sup> - basically because I had time to prepare that I didn't have before and I've also had support and input from the AP, which has been fabulous. “ (Alex)

Hence - as we can see from the change in Alex's narrative, the power of shame is immense, both positively and negatively: “feelings of weakness, helplessness and passivity associated with shame – can lead to a wish to turn the tables and triumph over the other, giving rise to feelings of guilt” (Mollon, 2002 p. 29). This comment illuminates Alex's remarks above, which show the joy at her perceived 'revenge' after the behaviour of some of the unsupportive teachers whom she worked with.

In another incident, and after criticisms in her college of the perceived 'facelessness' of the bureaucratic procedures of the observation policy, posters were created for the staff noticeboards with photos of SMT members involved in observations. Alex described how these posters were subsequently defaced in what (Mollon 2002) describes as the actions of the powerless to 'turn the tables':

Alex Yeah, and they're not very flattering photographs either. You can have...and I have seen them around the college and people have defaced them which I think has been brilliant.

UE Oh no!

[laugh together]

Alex Like put moustaches on them and stuff.

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<sup>48</sup> Graded 'One' in Ofsted criteria indicates an assessment of a lesson as 'outstanding'.

UE Oh God. Brilliant [laughing]

Alex Yeah, and devil's horns...

UE Oh no! [laughing]

Alex It's like being back at school

[pause]

Alex There's one thing about teachers is that they've got a really naughty sense of humour, they really push, they really push it don't they?

In her research in school classrooms, Price (2001) noted how for children, “clowning is a very powerful way of managing shame and uncertainty” (2001 p. 172). It is significant that feeling deprofessionalised, FE teachers in Alex’s college cope in similar ways by using strategies to inject humour into anxieties surrounding observations. I illustrated in the fictionalised text which follows how defacing the posters created a dramatic change in dynamic; the teachers changed from passive to active members of their college, albeit in a negative rebelliousness. In the fictionalised text, Monica remembers a lesson observation where she steps onto a table to turn off a projector; instantly breaking a health and safety rule and thereby eliminating the need to be re-observed for an otherwise ‘outstanding’ lesson<sup>49</sup>. This begs the question, could these creative acts of humour and deviancy be utilised in a more positive way?

In contrast to Sam’s narrative, when Alex described her school-life she remembered feeling angry at the apparent lack of support provided by her parents; due the nature

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<sup>49</sup> Inspired by a personal experience.

of her parents' work her education was disjointed. She explained how she constantly struggled to be recognised and accepted by her teachers. Once she had missed an important exam at the beginning of an academic year at a new school. Because she had not been allowed to demonstrate her level of ability, she was placed in the lowest stream. She felt trapped, vulnerable and "scared" of the group of students she had been placed with, who had learning disabilities. But she remembered 'Ms Caraway' with fondness; she stood out in a childhood history which involved (like my own) numerous house-moves and different schools. 'Ms Caraway', demonstrated some genuine care and support for Alex: "because I think she recognised that I was a sensitive soul." Like Sally, Alex later admitted that these memories had remained largely unarticulated until the interview. Some of the issues in Alex's narrative I have re-produced in Monica's story. How far and to what extent these memories of Ms Caraway influenced Alex's current teaching practice is unclear. However, the following phrase I interpreted as significant:

"[...] she'd taken the time to actually pay attention to what I really liked, and she got me this little leaflet, and I was quite aware that other people had got it as well, and I knew that other people in the group were her favourites as well, but, she still showed me that extra bit of attention that I never got from any other teacher, *ever* and I had lots and lots and lots of teachers." (Alex, original emphasis).

An important memory for Alex involved an incident where she was reprimanded by Ms Caraway in front of the class; she described feeling shame in front of her peers. This occurred when the classroom in which she was attending a lesson with Ms Caraway had run out of chairs for Alex to sit on, arriving late and knowing that her teacher never sat on her chair during lessons (she apparently either sat on her desk



or remained standing), Alex naïvely took her teacher's chair to sit down on, without consideration for the potential consequences:

“...so I go to take her chair and she came in and she said 'How *dare* you' [exaggerated stern voice] and I'm like [pulls a face] “How *dare* you take my chair! How ill-mannered of *you!*” - like this, and in front of everybody and all the lights and you know, the artistic ones like Laura going 'He he he' and I was like *mortified*. Absolutely mortified.” (Alex, original emphasis)

It is interesting to note the similarities in language. Specifically Alex uses the same word 'mortified' to describe the memory of how she felt after the situation with her teacher at school to her feelings after her perception of 'failing' an observation. This supports the comments above that fear of/feelings of shame from the potential consequences of an observation session lead to a need to cover the body or to 'close down'. In Alex's memory the teacher's chair had taken on a symbolic meaning of that sense of embarrassment and the status of the 'teacher's chair' now holds private significance for Alex's professional identity. One interpretation is the teacher's chair represented a 'psychic entity' similar to the description of the green mat of 'circle time' in the primary school classroom research by Price (2001). There may be an element of transference present for Alex's conceptualisation of the chair in that she sees her students as representative of her young self (Elliott, 1999). The hard-won achievements of her academic qualifications after her disappointing school experience means that she feels a sense of responsibility towards her students that is deeply personal. Hence her past teacher who had a 'connection' with her, now has an absent presence: as an object of transference. In Alex's present-day teaching, these shameful feelings have symbolic repercussions as she went on to recognise herself:

“...and ever since that day, if anybody ever takes my chair in class I go absolutely mad [laughs] [...] Yeah - I can't control myself [laughing] I know I'm doing it! [laughing] and they take my chair and I go ‘How *dare* you!’” (Alex, original emphasis)

This fascinating element of Alex’s professional habitus was incorporated into Monica’s story and given emphasis by the observer (Richard) taking the chair himself. Interestingly, Sam described her feelings of shame when she recalls how she feels conscious in an observation of how her teaching style reflects a more ‘formal’ style than that of some of her peers. Perhaps this could be interpreted as a result of her memories of her own ‘poor behaviour’ during her school days:

“...now we're talking about teachers, one that sticks in my mind was a male music teacher, who was, well he wasn't... he was nice from what I remember, he was a nice bloke, but everyone misbehaved in our class and I just remember, you know, sometimes you know, when you have bad classes I think of him [laughs] yeah and you know, I think of those letters Michael Gove sent out recently, did you see those?<sup>50</sup>...and I can imagine one of those letters - sending them to him: ‘We were so sorry, we were so terrible.’” (Sam)

According to developmental psychologists, shame serves a purpose in helping us to learn what is expected from others and ourselves (Elliott, 1999). We adapt our behaviours and manage them so that they can fit into family and other social norms “We learn to be human by knowing what we feel others also feel” (Pines, 1995, quoted in Mollon, 2002 p. 351). We are always at risk of feelings of shame or

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<sup>50</sup> Refers to an article in the media (Kinder, 2012) where the Education Minister wrote an open letter to his teacher of thirty years ago, seeking forgiveness for his misbehaviour in school. This sparked a debate about encouraging others to do the same if they also felt guilty for being disrespectful to their past teachers.

embarrassment with any social interactions; every social interaction should therefore contain empathy. These narratives suggest that throughout our lives we strive to be understood, recognised, supported and loved. Hence a psychoanalytic approach is useful and relevant when reflecting on the social interaction that is teaching and learning.

### **c. Teachers Seeking Recognition**

The final theme of the findings from the narratives of the lecturers was one of perceived 'missed opportunities' at school or college. This was articulated by all participants (except Brian who preferred not to discuss his childhood experiences of learning) and also experienced by myself. This has been suggested as a common element of teaching staff in FE (James, Biesta, 2007). Reflecting on my own experiences I recognise the impact on my learning of the embedded patriarchal views of my father, but also acknowledge the positive motivation this provided, both for my own learning and in my teaching. My own experiences were reflected in those articulated by Sally, who although suffering the loss of her father, did not feel supported by her mother to pursue her talent and love of writing. Through the lens of object relations psychoanalysis, a teacher can be seen as a caring mother – one that provides sustenance and the space where learning begins (Stern, Sander et al. 1998). However there are also anxieties and tensions to be negotiated between concepts of 'ideal' parents and weaknesses as we seek to make up for previous relationships. The potential transfer of emotional states and responses are continuous – creating changes in the self and this may form a crucial part of a teachers' self-identity:.

...when the students' 'got it'. It was not *primarily* the emotional relationship that is satisfying, but *the working together*, if asymmetrically, in bearing frustration and getting there. (Price, 2001 p. 172)

Sally experienced a serious illness which kept her away from school at a significant time and prevented her from succeeding in particular exams. Like me, Sally was later encouraged to leave education, so she enrolled at a secretarial college; a role perceived to be 'in-keeping' with the stereotypical gendered views of appropriate career choices held by Sally's family at that time. Similarly, an experience was described by Alex who suffered a tragic car accident at a very important time during her school career and felt that obtaining her nursing degree was an opportunity to reach her earlier objective:

"But it was to prove myself, that I wasn't as thick as I'd been made to believe because of being behind all the time at school and everybody....well not everybody, but I was always making-up for the fact that I started a new year and that... I'd been behind and I'd missed the last year and this that and the other, and I always felt disadvantaged. so my, you know, that degree, meant the world to me, getting that grade" (Alex)

In different circumstances, but likewise ones that apparently prevented her from achieving her academic potential, Naima described extremely traumatic childhood experiences where her mother controlled her every move resulting in her leaving school early to work in a factory. It was only much later in life (echoing my own story) that she felt she had developed enough self-confidence to re-enter the education system to achieve her dream of teaching.

“[...] I don’t want to see my kids going through the path that I went through because it was difficult, what I went through. [...] Now, I kind of look back and what...I’m struggling now, trying to take care of teaching, work, children and I’m trying to do my next essays....I shouldn’t have to do that. I kind of blame my mum for it, you know, I really kind of blame [her] for what she’s done to me, that I’m going through all this now. [...] because I’m bitter to her.” (Naima)

Is it possible that her apparent resentment towards her mother for preventing her from reaching her educational potential forms part of her *illusio* in her commitment towards her students who may be viewed as ‘failing’? Like Naima, Jim also re-joined education at the college where he later worked as staff, after working at one of the Kent coalfields. The symbolic importance of simply being involved in education resonated profoundly with the contrast with his perception of his perceived “wasted” childhood school-life:

“But there was no eleven-plus in those days. I left school with no qualifications. No qualifications at all. It wasn’t that I was thick, although I’ve never been brainy, you know, I was always in the ‘C’ stream. Never got higher than that. But at school I didn’t really want to know things, because I didn’t know why I needed them.” (Jim)

It is important to note the parallels in the symbolic nature of the graded assessments Jim experienced at school, compared to the observation criteria he has to adhere to now. This was something I illustrated in Monica’s story because as James and Colley (2007) comment, often the background learning journeys of these lecturers remains untold. Previous qualifications stacked-up for many of the participants –“I’ve got certificates coming out of my arse” said Jim. However, apart from Naima,

paradoxically the participants didn't seem to place the same significance on these compared to those achievements reached by their students. For example:

“So I did, you know, I got a first-class honours, but I got that basically, as far as I was concerned, it was because I'd stayed twenty years in the career. “

(Alex)

“I'm not an academic – not an academic at all” Sally told me. However this was contrary to how many others may have perceived her, after all, she had achieved many personnel qualifications in business, teaching qualifications and a Masters in ESOL. She was studying towards her PhD during the time of the interviews. Closely connected to this issue were descriptions from the narratives of to the extent of any recognition of qualifications and experience. At different points during the interviews, some of the participants commented how they felt about this aspect of their roles, both within and outside the context of an observation:

“ ‘Cause I don't feel I get any job satisfaction anymore. And I certainly don't feel I get any recognition.” (Alex)

Indeed, there seemed to be contrast between the importance of recognition within the relationships and rapport with students, compared to the perceived feelings of being undervalued by others:

“Management I don't feel I get a lot of....[recognition] not just myself, I don't think any of the teachers do. We're here to do the job; do it and go.” (Naima)

With the above quotes in mind, I return to Bourdieu's conceptual tools, where a striving for recognition within the tensions of the field can be seen as a search for capital, especially when the capital that is 'won' in the game can be transferred to

another field. In the case of obtaining a 'Good' grade in an observation, the professional capital that it is associated with that may become for some economic capital (in the form of a pay grade increase) or symbolic/social capital in the 'backstage' of the staff room.

At times the narratives revealed ways in which the relationships with students involved a striving for recognition – for instance in terms of workload or personal space. Alex explained how she wanted desperately to go home to get on with some marking, but ended up staying over an hour alone in the staff room, in order to sit with a student 'Claire' who wanted additional support with her assignment – as she explained:

“Like today, I'd caught myself a little bit of time to do some marking, and then one of my tutor group, Claire came banging on my door and said “Can you help me with something?” and I said “Actually, Claire, this is my down-time. This is *my* time to catch-up on work, have some respect for it.” “But b..b..b....b.....” I said “Never mind any of that” you know, [...] it's never *five minutes*. It *always* takes more than five minutes. So I said “Right *five minutes*, come on then”. *Twenty-five minutes later* she went on her way.” (Alex, original emphasis).

The complexities involved in this 'underground' learning are illustrated in Monica's story when she helps her student Emmie. As I explained above, this narrative becomes meaningful within the context of Alex's fragmented childhood learning. Her narrative resonated with my own story, as I too felt that parents and childhood teachers had not understood my needs or recognised my perceived potential. Like Alex, I began to reflect on the potential influence this had on my professional habitus;

the way I had also gone 'beyond the call of duty' in order to provide my students with the support and encouragement that I felt had been lacking in my childhood. Had I projected my child-self onto my students, believing their needs to be my earlier unfulfilled needs? What part had my own 'involuntary childlessness' played in this?

It has been said that an individual's perceived struggle for recognition is not always rebelliousness but rather the result of internalising a feeling of inescapable subordination (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). I included this in Monica's Story because an important aspect of the 'underground learning' described by Alex is that she perceives her manager *holds no value for this type of teaching*. The complex context of the relationships between Alex and her students is unlikely to be 'seen' by an observer (or even perhaps acknowledged by Alex herself). As I explain in Chapter Seven, this student/teacher relationship (and the learning that is created within it) is not transparent to an observer, but by its very nature, hidden and intimate and - because of the inherent 'unmeasurability' - potentially 'dangerous'.

A feedback session after an observation creates the opportunity for some recognition. This may be hoped and anticipated but at the same time feared; forming an integral part of the emotions like shame that are often unspoken. The observer must strike a careful balance when articulating this feedback because these emotions form a synthesis of perspectives - on personal and social levels - validating them within the interactional framework and context of an observation. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) warn us that there is no certainty of 'logic' to practice; there is often a 'fuzzy' spontaneous or improvised nature to our behaviours. Thus there is no simple duality of right or wrong action in power relationships but dilemmas of different 'rights'. In the case of resisting domination by an Other, paradoxically an individual may need to accept domination. Similarly, in submitting to the things which



defines a group as 'dominated' (e.g. observation procedures) then we may also be claiming a specific social identity. Paradoxically then, from an existentialist perspective, resistance can be alienating and submission can be liberating (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). Perhaps this is because that not all action is motivated by achieving perceived social capital – there are altruistic motives too - e.g. for Grace there is 'genuine care and love' in her teaching approach, without which she claims 'there's no point'. This perspective offers a potential insight into why some FE staff engage in emotional labour which is hidden from view.

#### **4. The Emotional Labour of our Professional Habitus**

In this chapter so far I have provided a 'pen picture' of each of the Lecturer participants. I outlined the different themes that emerged from my analysis of the data and have followed these with examples from the lecturers' narratives and the fictionalised text 'Monica's Story' to show the value of using different theoretical concepts from Bourdieu and object relations psychoanalysis. It is impossible to outline all aspects included in Monica's story, but this psychosocial approach to analysis provides opportunities for new interpretations of the emotional lived experiences of FE staff. The narratives from the participants indicate how our biographies – the way we think and articulate them - are embedded within and infused by our cultural contexts. Hence, despite the unique nature of 'our' narratives, they are therefore mediated by others and otherness (Freeman, 2010).

What is 'mine' is, at one and the same time, permeated by what is 'other' and, in turn, that any and all attempts to separate selfhood from its sociocultural surround must fail. [...] 'my story' insofar as it emerges from what has come before me – from the very tradition into which I was born and from which my life has acquired its very sense and shape – extends well beyond the confines of the stretch of time between birth and death. (Freeman, 2010 p. 137)

Multi-disciplinary writers such as Denzin (1984) and Freeman (2010) provide concepts like the 'historical halo' and the 'narrative unconscious' that help us to make sense of theoretical perspectives within the context of personal interpretations. In an effort to overcome the perceived duality described above, rather than competing against each other, these mixed philosophical interpretations are valuable in bringing more fluid, processual insights to aspects of the emotional lives of these

teachers' professional habitus. In particular they provide an opportunity to open up the way for meaningful interpretations of personal biographical stories (Denzin, 1984). In turn, these may provide ways to illuminate the "dramaturgical induced emotion" (Denzin, 1984 p. 76) and other lived experiences described by the teachers as a result of observations (for you, the reader, and for the teachers themselves).

Taking the example of the 'teachers' chair' excerpt from Alex's narrative (and partly used in Monica's story) the concept of the emotional labour of our professional habitus can illuminate an understanding of Alex's feelings about teaching and more specifically during an observation. The absent presence of her old teacher – eternally symbolised for her in the physicality of the teacher's (empty) chair – and the complex emotions wrapped-up around Alex's past and current identities and relationships with teachers and students provide a window into her world - or to use Richardson's (1998) concept: an opportunity of a view through facets of a crystal. Within this context, as Alex described the challenges she had overcome during her childhood and as a mature student, her motives and disappointments within teaching and the performativity within an observation became more apparent. This part of Alex's story was just one part of her unique professional habitus and helps provide important context to the emotions she described.

Likewise, when Jim was asked about his views of what 'good teaching' meant to him personally, he responded:

"...a teacher is someone who can help the students, someone who can help them to understand. It's a bit like *being on a staircase* with the students at the bottom *looking up* and you're at the top *looking down* and somehow you have to get down to their level by *reaching them somewhere in the middle*. It's

difficult. It's not easy. It's about working hard at building some rapport with them so that they can respect you and pay attention." (Jim, my emphasis).

The metaphor of the stairs in 'reaching the students' used by Jim in his narrative is meaningful bearing in mind his past career working long hours in a coalmine, 3,000ft below ground level. The value of the rapport and trust between colleagues during this dangerous occupation has been well-documented. This camaraderie increased or fractured during the bitter political disputes as the coal mines were closed down during the 1980's (for an excellent personal account of this lived experience, see Bolton, Ditchburn, 2012). Sharing views that have been voiced above, Jim places the importance of the commitment to building strong relationships with his students – regardless of the (often hidden) emotional labour this involves. So, as Goffman (1959) pointed out, although many elements of performativity are 'prescribed and scripted' and therefore required to be visible - it's the elements that are *invisible* that are arguably most crucial (Crossley, 1995). This is especially relevant when considering the emotions involved in observations in the socio-political FE contexts.

As I explained in Chapter One, Section 1, there has been a long-standing disconnect between the rhetoric of government policies and the actual realities of the service provided by FE (Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005). Research suggests that a widespread disillusionment persists with low morale amongst staff and this was reflected in the narratives. Interestingly, Sally contrasted her feelings of disillusionment at her current institution with her experiences elsewhere:

Sally I mean I've worked for another college as well, which is where I've done my research, and the experience there is quite different.

UE Is it? In what way?

Sally Erm, the teachers seem to, as far as I can see, pull together more, erm, they, everyone seems to, there's more of a helpful, element to it, erm, which is more compatible with me and how I am. I don't want to ...I think it...in that environment you are operating as a team, and I think that's a much happier situation.

The historical context outlined in Chapter One, highlights many aspects which may make this 'pulling together' difficult in some colleges. In particular the sessional teachers (like Naima) often feel alienated from the day-to-day realities of teaching within a specific department.

"...in the whole week I probably see him [her manager] for like five minutes. I saw him like, whole week, five minutes that was it. And then I see him for five minutes or it's a text or a phone a quick phone call, that's it. I hardly see him for him to sort of like and he's not going to stand there all day and say 'you're a wonderful teacher, you're a wonderful pers'..." (Naima).

In my experience this situation is often left unarticulated, but does not make it any less important to reflect in this study. Inevitable artificial hierarchies between permanent and sessional staff can become exaggerated when sessional staff are not paid and/or required to attend departmental meetings (often because they fall outside their usual contracted hours). Serious breakdowns in communication can occur between staff and additional workload such as marking and report-writing (by necessity regularly carried-out in teachers' own time) is often excluded from a sessional teacher's remit. This is hinted at when at the beginning of Monica's story, a sessional tutor, whom she had not met, entered her classroom. Monica is suspicious that the sessional teacher may use the room change as an excuse to cancel the

lesson. The changes in room allocations caused by the requirements of an observation (outlined in Chapter One) may mean that sessional tutors are more likely to be moved than permanent staff.

Jim, like Mike and James (the latter both managers – see Chapter Seven) as mature students originally studied at the same college where they now worked<sup>51</sup>. Jim described how he ‘fell into’ teaching and worked his way up from a technicians role in a workshop. It seemed to him the college building *itself* held a personal significance, being symbolic of the knowledge that for complex reasons was not wholly accessible to him when he was at school. This is illustrated in Monica’s story as she describes her memories of the corridors where she had begun her learning journey to becoming a qualified teacher, twenty years before the time the story is set. She specifically remembers walking through the large wooden doors to take her exam – symbolic of (re)entering the world of education. Jim admitted to leaving school with no qualifications (hence Monica’s careers) spending many years in manual jobs including working in a coal-mine, before re-joining education aged forty.

“But I loved the learning, to be around all the buzz of the books. Just to be able to find anything out, anything at all [...] it was *amazing*”. (Jim, original emphasis)

It is important for Jim to be able to ‘share’ his knowledge and his love of learning with his students which provides a ‘double structure’ to his teaching (Denzin, 1984 p. 134). The ‘narrative unconscious’ could be interpreted as an integral part of our professional habitus and therefore should not be undervalued when considering the

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<sup>51</sup> These participants are from three unconnected colleges in different locations – see the summary table in Chapter Two for details.

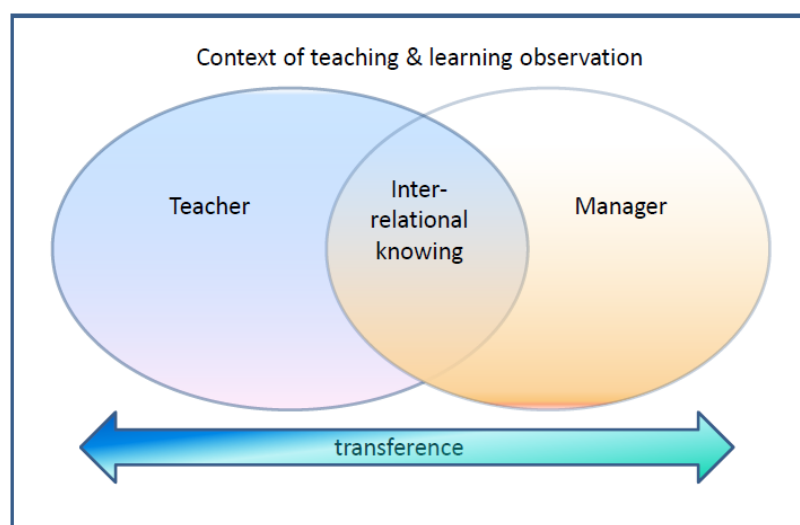
context of the emotional labour of FE staff in observations. For example, Jim admitted that when he encounters a student who does not share his enthusiasm for “the buzz of the books” this challenges his skills at emotional management as he risks losing his patience. This was also evident in Alex’s narrative as she described the frustration she felt at the ‘dumbing-down’ of what she perceived as crucial pieces of knowledge for the potential future healthcare professionals she was teaching.

## 5. Conclusions

These narratives and others encouraged me to reflect on the significance of my own educational history. Leaving school feeling like I had been unable (or at times *prevented* from) reaching my potential, made me realise the personal importance of encouraging my students to reach their potential, as well as having some recognition for the challenges I have overcome and the achievements my students and I have gained. There is an inherent reflexivity present in this longing for recognition (Butler, 2004) which undoubtedly has a crucial impact on the context and emotionality of my emotional practice when I am observed teaching. My experiences and qualifications provide me a renewed perspective but my past also provides me with a crucial context which is constantly present (West, 1996) and an “ongoing process” (Butler, 2004 p. 132).

Like Alex, these unique aspects of my life “infuse, animate and haunt [my] lived emotions” (Denzin, 1984 p. 127), but are also fluid processes as “temporally, emotionality moves forward and backward in the interactional situation, just as time itself moves forward and backward in the person’s biography” (Denzin, 1984 p. 52). This interpretation illustrates how for Alex, Jim and I, our personal and teaching

ideologies are perhaps embedded in our interactions. Crucially here, if we bear in mind the potential for understanding in interactions between analysand and psychotherapist, researcher and participant (as I explained in the previous chapters), this can perhaps be brought into the context of an observation, when we consider the potential for personal development through a deeper understanding of elements that form our professional habitus. Below I present a further revised diagram which illustrates the possible interaction between mentor and teacher in an observation:



**Diagram 4: My revised visual interpretation of the parallels between the individuals in an observation and psychoanalytic concepts.**  
(inspired by Stern, Sander et al. 1998)

The importance of trying to understand our emotional practice resonates with the context of my own life, and how my personal ideology brings value and meaning to my teaching and learning and to this research. My background, gender, age, past and current experiences bring unique cultural significance (Denzin, 1989) or narrative unconscious to the processes involved in the interactions I have with my peers, colleagues, students and research participants (Freeman, 2010). This brings importance to my data and my development as a teacher and researcher (Wright



Mills, 1959). The deprofessionalisation of teacher's autonomy, together with the implicit power relationships between individuals within an observation have perhaps predictably led some to see observations as a 'fabrication' to appease an audit culture (Gleeson et al., 2005). But my perspective provides a specific context for the (de)construction of the power relationships involved in observations. I have seen the conscientiousness and high level of compassion, support and genuine love that teachers often provide for their students (Nias, 1996). These views were also articulated in my research in interviews with, for example 'Alex' and 'Anna'. I am therefore optimistic that there *are* ways and means that teaching practice can become a more reflective practice to enhance students' and teachers' learning experiences.

Many of the elements intrinsic to observations, such as an important teacher from our childhood, or a particularly supportive mentor (either formal or informal) in our professional lives, include concepts and narratives that have until now, remained unspoken or hidden because of the context of the research and/or personal experiences. However, in attempting to discover how (rather than why) observations have been a source of potential emotional trauma for many teachers (O'Leary, 2012), hidden aspects are no less important than other, more explicit elements of the narratives – and perhaps more so.

The next chapter is presented as a fictionalised text of the observers' narratives. As I explained in Chapter Three this is a consolidated convergence of the observer's stories – both the articulated and unarticulated phrases – which have been immersed into the context of Monica's story and expand upon it from the observer's perspective – a fictional character called 'Richard'. It is told in the 'first person' so that like Monica, the reader is encouraged to make a further interpretation of the

circumstances. It is followed by an analysis of the common and diverging themes from the observers' narratives and the creation of the fictionalised text that emerged from them.



# Chapter Six: Richard's Story

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## **Watching and listening: the Observer's perspective**

“Hey, Richard, What’s with the posh suit? Give us a hand with this will yer?”

One of my members of staff, Ian, was in the process of changing the wheel on one of the staff cars in the workshop. I put down my clip-board and went over to help him, switching the electric heater on as I went. The wheel-brace was stuck and needed my weight behind it. It was awkward with my suit on; I wasn’t as fit or as slim as I used to be! I had to be careful not to get oil on this tie (my wife would kill me). I put a hand to my back and stretch upright through the pain. Absent-mindedly I found myself, once again, looking forward to my forthcoming retirement.

We made some further adjustments and I managed to loosen the nut. I stood back and grabbed one of the near-by blue rolls of paper to wipe my hands. I had to be careful of the buckets around the floor, there were numerous containers strategically placed to catch the rain which leaked through the workshop roof. It was made of asbestos apparently and too costly for the college to replace, so it was patched-up every year in an effort to delay the inevitable. We had timed it too late to benefit from the PPI funding, and now the recession had properly kicked-in, I doubt there’ll be a budget to do anything about it for the foreseeable.

“Cheers, Richard. Once I’ve done this little job, I’ll get Rob to change the oil in our minibus, shall I?” Ian asked, always eager to encourage the students to help out in the department. I was very proud of Ian. He had passed all his teaching qualifications with flying colours and (thanks to me pulling a few strings for him with my contacts) had built a successful link for securing apprenticeships for our students with a reputable local Ford dealership nearby. It dawned on me that I knew very little about him. In over three years, I’d never asked Ian about his home-life, and I wasn’t

going to start now, I was the boss after all. I gave him the keys to the minibus and automatically reminded him of the dangers of the ramp. Ian was the kind of guy I could work well with and we could do with more like him if this department was ever going to reach its targets for student retention and achievement. In fact, I often wondered about the future of our department as a whole, but then soon it wouldn't be for me to worry about.

"Have you got a minute, Rich?" asked Ben (another member of my team but one whom I felt wasn't quite so 'on the ball' as Ian). I invited him to sit down on one of the near-by orange plastic chairs.

"It's just that I have my observation tomorrow, as you know...." (I hadn't been aware of this, but nodded anyway) "...and I need to change the room that I'm booked in". Ben proceeded to explain that because most of his students had in fact already finished their practical assignment, he had pulled-forward an introductory lesson for the start of next term and would therefore need a more 'academic' classroom, rather than the workshop one that was booked for him. I had a quick look at the system to check which rooms were available to us. Everything was chocker-block in the computer-rooms, it would be impossible to change any around at this late stage. But I promised to have a closer look for Ben later and let him know what I could do. One of the other staff members may be able to swap with him, if I asked them myself.

"OK, thanks Richard, I really appreciate your help." He winked at me conspiratorially because we both recognised the importance of him achieving a 'Good' grade on behalf of my department this term. The right room was crucial. Suddenly remembering my duty, I looked at my watch; I was going to be late. I looked at the form and I saw the room number was in a part of the campus I wasn't

really familiar with. 'Shit!' I said aloud and picked-up my clip-board on my way out of the workshop.

I took an umbrella for my walk over to the 'Old Block'; the rain was constant. I stepped inside the building and saw a bunch of students making a nuisance of themselves outside a classroom. Asking where their teacher was, one of them shouted: "He's always late" and that made me cringe a bit – I knew it was Barry, one of the sessional English teachers. I had worked so hard at this college and as a manager always wanted to portray a professional image to our students – they were our 'customers' now. But staff like Barry tended to let us all down. They just didn't deserve the title of teacher in my opinion, not like Ian. The trouble is I didn't really get to hear about my own team's progress. Just as I was forced to carry out observations for lessons like Health and Social Care, other managers were brought in from outside Engineering to observe *my* staff's lessons. This was because (according to our principal) where managers had observed their own staff there had been 'grade inflation' – which meant that the grades for observations were viewed as artificially high between those of us who knew each other. In an effort to make the observations more 'realistic' they had created more work for us - more paperwork to look at in areas we weren't familiar with. These observations weren't really developmental for staff: they were simply about the numbers. Create statistics so that in their meetings they can be studied closely and debated in an effort to compare different aspects of teaching and learning in the college. Well, they can talk and talk until the cows come home, but they won't get what they need. Teachers are people, not numbers. But I had lost that argument long ago....

At that two-day training course, the consultant bloke<sup>52</sup> kept repeating the fact that students were now our 'customers'. It was a training course to improve my skills at being an observer, so that I could be more accurate in my observations. I wasn't overly keen on attending it – I had lots of other more important things to do in the run-up to the end of the term. But Hilary, my boss, had told me, in no uncertain terms, that by 'choosing' to comply with these new management requirements my future retirement options would become 'more favourable'. I took the hint. My wife wisely advises me to do anything that makes life easier in the long-run and this latest policy seemed like just another hoop to jump through before I was allowed to take leave of the place.

How times had changed. When I first started here as a student in the sixties, there was only a handful of teaching staff and us students took our studying very seriously. I had started on a special scheme and had one day of practical skills and one day of English and Maths – the other three days a week were based in a garage. I loved the workshop lessons, we learnt so much from our teacher, Jeffrey, and if we managed to finish early we could always work on our own projects. Mine was an old Ford Capri; I made it look fantastic by the time I finished college. It was my pride and joy and I'm sure I wouldn't have won the heart of my now wife back then, had I not been able to take her to the pictures in it, all those years ago.

I started teaching here in 1979 - just fell into it really. Got made redundant from the car-parts factory down the road and I was still in touch with Jeffrey. I met him in the pub one day and he suggested I applied for a job that was coming up. Never thought I'd get it, after all, it hadn't been long before that, that I'd been a student myself. How

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<sup>52</sup> I wondered at the time how much he was earning in those two days. More than me probably, even though all he was telling me was common sense. Never any 'differentiation' in these staff sessions!



could I actually be teaching? But I got it. The college supported me through my training and I was keen in those days. It paid off. Who would've thought I'd be here today, 33 years later. Back then, there weren't any women managers, let alone lesson observations (unless they were done by an inspector that is – and they hardly ever happened). Nowadays there were always arguments and politics at the top. So much conflict at director-level and that wasn't something I could or would get involved with. Partly because of these debates the college was in a constant state of flux. The Principal said that the staff and students were always top priority, but that was all lip service! The management don't care about us. You just had to look after Number One, if I'd learnt one thing over the years of working here, it was that. Look after myself because no-one else would. I went through the motions, made my pension payments. One day I would get my escape, and that day wasn't too far off now.

In contrast to the approach we had back then, now the whole college was obsessed with ticking boxes on forms and other 'quality control' measures. What was more worrying was how the rules were constantly changing; first there were 'data collection dates' moved (where the students had to be registered as attending to allow for funding to be allocated to my budget), then the criteria were altered - just like that with no discussion with us on why or how. The targets me and my team had worked hard to achieve were suddenly worthless according to the SMT. I'm completely fed-up with it all, but I couldn't say that out loud to anyone of course: after all, I do represent 'management' to some, although what exactly it is I manage I still can't fathom. There's very little that I can control, even my staff get drafted in from some agency. No-one wants this job anymore, and who can blame them? The pay is worse than a school-teacher's, with many more hours and no long summer holidays

to tempt. Anyone with half a brain would much rather go for a job in commerce or go overseas, once they have a qualification. Ian was the exception to the rule and I wished this college would do more to acknowledge the good staff we had and try to keep them.

But it wasn't always like this. I remember a group of my staff, many years ago, together with the union rep' protesting over the new contracts the principal wanted to bring in. They wanted everyone to work more hours for less pay and make sure everyone was fully qualified. I'd got my teaching qualifications by then of course, but some of my colleagues hadn't, perhaps because they didn't feel their English was good enough for all that writing. Their mechanical skills were fabulous though, and that's all that was needed, here in this workshop – back then at least. The students learnt mainly through trial and error, not like today with all these new technologies. Who would have thought that today we'd be plugging a car's engine into a computer the size of a calculator to diagnose a problem? Things were indeed moving on and (increasingly, I felt) leaving me behind.

Anyway, here's the room of the observation. Wait, there's Barry! He's at the photocopier with loads of hand-outs. No time now to confront him. Maybe I'll mention it to Hilary when I get back. There's no way we're going to meet our college targets if staff aren't even in their classrooms on time. Who do they think they are these sessional teachers? We never even had access to photocopiers when I started teaching here, the students had to copy things that they needed during the lessons. As I remembered this I looked up at the ceilings and recalled how the doors in this block seemed so much bigger back then, when I had first walked down this corridor as a student to take an exam. It was the only theory exam I took back then. Most of the assessments went on in the workshop and it was just my tutor standing over me,

making sure I was doing things right like tightening the bolts enough. It never seemed like an 'assessment' at all. The workshop was always busy with people coming and going, so I just had to concentrate on what I was doing rather than what was going on around us. You soon got used to it.

I push the door open: they've started, so I'll just sit here out of the way and look at my form. There's such a strong scent of perfume in here. The teacher's name is...Monica. OK. The group seems to be quite lively. Now, what is it I need to start with? I'll have to look back at my tick boxes on this form....

It doesn't look too bad in this classroom. I wonder if Monica knows how lucky she is having a dry, carpeted classroom to teach in, fitted-out with all this new-fangled technology. There doesn't seem to be any health and safety issues to worry about here, other than that projector cable she keeps stepping over. Over the years, I've seen our working conditions in the workshops get progressively worse and worse. The roof leaks, the heating system has broken, even the 'new' ramp we had fitted in 1993 had to be scrapped recently. It was bought for us as part of a partnership with the local Renault garage. Basically, they sponsored some of our equipment in return for some free marketing on our minibus. That was a result of the changes that came in in '92. The principal thought it was a good idea at the time, but that kind of sponsorship takes time; something we haven't got any more since the new procedures and assessments. Anyway, funding like that has dried-up since the beginning of the recession. Even the students are finding it difficult to get jobs now, whereas a year or so ago there were plenty of opportunities. These new cars with five or ten year warranties and franchises which contract-out their work for MOTs, it's just too competitive for many garages to survive now, many are laying people off and certainly not taking on extra staff.

Anyway, back to the job in-hand. Monica looks quite nervous, not sure why. She doesn't know who I am, but I suppose I am a manager and some people feel a bit intimidated by the title. Lots of these teachers make such a fuss about being observed but at the end of the day, this is their chance to show-off. They've had enough notice to prepare everything they need, it should just be a case of going through a lesson that they know will suit the situation. Time is running short and this is Friday afternoon. I would like to get home on time if possible. Feedback will have to wait until next week. More procedures required for that. Now, I need to complete this form and fill-in these boxes. Were the objectives at the beginning? (not sure as I wasn't here, better write 'yes'). Is the pace of the lesson appropriate? I need to check the class profile for that, which must be in this pile of paperwork she has left for me. I haven't really got time to read through all that now.

"That looks like someone in this room" I heard one of the students shout out suddenly – and looked up at the direction it came from. I couldn't work out what she meant at first, until I straightened my head and looked ahead at the slide Monica had on the Powerpoint. It was a picture of a very overweight bloke, with the words 'public health' underneath. I'd listened to Jamie Oliver on TV and seen other related programmes without interest; I'd never really thought of *myself* as a public health issue before – but maybe I am! I lowered my head to carry on with the paperwork, my mind on other things as Monica continued the lesson and encouraged the students with their tasks. She seemed very natural in her role and I wondered how long she had been a teacher and what motivated her to stay here at this college.

After a while, the boxes looked quite full with my scribbled hand-writing, so I looked around the room. It was a room full of teenage girls. Some of the girls had earphones in and were obviously listening to loud music whilst they were working. There seemed to be a lot of legs in black tights sticking out from under the desks. One of them was sitting on a desk to reach over to complete a large poster. Didn't she realise what she was revealing? I felt rather angry that I was being subjected to this. It made me feel quite uncomfortable and it was far too hot in this room as it was. Is this how my grand-daughter behaves when she's at school I wonder? Most of them had opened their pencil-cases (denim ones, pink fluffy ones and see-through plastic ones with stickers on) and were busy colouring something in on their posters, or writing headers in black marker pens. One of them was facing away from me, but I could see in her small mirror she was putting on some lipstick. I should really talk to them about what they were learning, but they seemed so involved in their personal musical worlds and work. They might even laugh at me as I didn't really understand them or this topic. Some of these girls could be so rude - I'd seen them in the corridors shouting and swearing.

I wrote a few more sentences in my report and signed it with my silver pen: *Richard Huntley*. When I finished, I put my pen back into my jacket pocket (It felt good to be in my suit now I'd got used to it again). I heard Monica do a nice summary and finish up – it was similar to the sort of thing I did with my own students (on the rare occasions I taught nowadays), with a quiz session. Then I saw one of the girls was asleep! There she was, in full view of Monica – and not a word had been said! I am constantly amazed by the apathy of these teachers. Maybe she had a similar attitude to that useless Barry I saw earlier. Late for lessons and students falling asleep? That wouldn't have happened in my day. There was just no respect for us teachers

anymore and it wasn't being questioned. That was another reason why I wanted to retire. The role I aspired to for all those years, the pride I felt at working hard and getting to this position in life; it all seems such a waste of time. I thought back onto all those years when I was a student at this very college.

What a shame. It had been a fairly good session, one of those (in my opinion) that I had been instructed in my managers' meetings to 'mark down slightly' because, after all, one of the reasons why I was here was to help the college improve standards by sharing 'best practice'<sup>53</sup>. I was hoping that my own department would also benefit because this would skew the whole college figures slightly. This session could be used as an example of one that previously would have been defined as 'Satisfactory' but now wasn't. After all, I was a manager and I had a duty to affect the changes needed to improve the quality of the teaching in the college – even if I was going to retire soon.

The lesson had ended and the students were on their way out. I got up and gathered my paperwork quickly as I wanted to get home before the rush. I told Monica I'd let her know next week about the feedback and wished her a good weekend. Thank God another week was over. Soon it would be the Easter break and I could spend some time with my family. My elderly mother was due to leave her flat and go into a home next week. There was a lot to arrange, not least hiring a van to move some of her stuff (and take some of it to the dump). Thankfully my son said he would help me and I ought to ring him now to get started with the project.

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<sup>53</sup> What they meant by that was what Ofsted liked – for instance using the interactive whiteboard and stuff like that. It ticked another box on my form.

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The next week, on Thursday I sent Monica an email suggesting a time and place to meet up for her observation feedback. I had a copy of her timetable, so I chose a space that I thought would be appropriate. I hadn't had much time to look at the other paperwork, but to be honest, I just wanted to get this over with and move on with the other jobs I had stacking-up. It would be great to allow for more time for this kind of thing, get to know Monica a bit and what she was teaching, but there really wasn't the space for this anymore. At the end of the day, teachers like Monica know full well that this is a performance for the SMT and if they can't put on the show that ticks all the boxes, then maybe they just shouldn't be here. OK, I know that actually I shouldn't really be saying that; staff (especially qualified staff, like Monica) are difficult to get hold of and keep, but that wasn't really my problem anymore. I just had to hold on to my position for a bit longer, maintain the college's policies and keep on the right side of Hilary. With any luck I can get to my retirement without too many meetings like we had the other week. God that was awful. The Principal was a total bully, he had slammed his fists down on his desk and demanded that the statistics we provided him with were improved – or 'heads would roll'. *Improvement?* Didn't he realise how hollow that word sounded to us after these years of constant change and constant criticism? I never saw him work as hard as the rest of us for his massive salary and his posh Merc' parked in his own parking space. Granted, he comes in very early to work every morning. But no-one's sure what he does (apart from maybe read the paper). At about elevenish he sends out one of the secretaries to buy him a sandwich. It's the same every day – cheese and pickle on white. No fancy stuff for him. Once the secretary was replaced by a temp' and she brought the wrong one

back from the canteen – he hit the roof! ‘F’ing and blinding. Poor girl. If it had been the other secretary she’d had answered back – but not this one. She just stood there, took it all in and then ran to the loo bursting into tears. He just doesn’t know how to behave. He treats everyone like that – no respect.

He leaves every day on the dot of five. I’ve seen him taking his dogs for a walk over in the park when everyone else is busy beavering away on some project or other that needs to be finished. Marking, noticeboards, memos, he doesn’t enter into any of that side of college life. He keeps to his desk at all times. If he needs to speak to someone he rings them (even if they are only in the next-door office) and ‘summons’ them into his office. They go of course, hands shaking, scared of what they may be accused of now, or worse still, what project they may get delegated to. But last week, in this meeting, my department was ‘named and shamed’ in front of all the other departmental managers. We weren’t doing particularly well, granted, but we are doing the best we can in difficult circumstances. What did he physically expect us to do? Magic these statistics out of fresh air? There is a limit to the hours in the day you can work and the amount you can expect from your students. My staff do try, but the equipment and environment around us really doesn’t help to improve morale. I really feel that there’s nothing I can do now. I really am doing my best in this job, but it’s getting too much to bear. Sometimes I feel like I’m on my knees. It’s time for someone else to take over.

Monica and I agree to meet in one of the empty classrooms near to her office. Walking along the corridor, I see the SMT poster which includes a photo of all us observers so that the teachers could see who we are. This was a clever suggestion I thought. It was in response to criticisms from the union reps: we were seen to be some kind of ogres, on a witch-hunt on something. People felt they were being



victimised. Of course that was ridiculous, the observations were all about trying to raise standards, and somebody had to take them seriously. Then I noticed that someone had defaced the poster. Someone had taken a thick marker pen to our photo. I felt my face turn red with embarrassment at my own likeness. Someone had added horns from my forehead and my boss's face bore a beard and glasses. It was probably a student just messing around, but it was so immature and disrespectful. The poster was in a prominent position, not far from Monica's staff room. I wondered why hadn't she taken it down? Was it possible that she (or one of her team) had done this graffiti? Did they think so little of what we were trying to achieve in this college? I tore it down and crumpled it up, dropping it into a nearby litter bin. My embarrassment turned to anger. I made a conscious effort to remember to mention it to Hilary later.

I wasn't familiar with this older room. It still had one of those green fabric blackboards on rollers; the squared 'page' was torn and partly hidden by a pull-down roller projector screen. There was a faint smell of sweaty bodies and disinfectant. That blackboard reminded me of my old maths teacher Mr Bailey. His bright red, angry face, he used to pick up the board-rubber and chuck it at us when we got a question wrong. If his aim was good – and sometimes it was – it would land squarely in someone's chest and he never seemed to care. He got me once and it hurt so much I remember going home to tell my mother about him. "Well you must have done something wrong then, mustn't you?" she'd said, shrugging her shoulders at me. The previous year, my father had passed away suddenly and I guess her expectation was for the school to pick-up on any discipline in his absence. People never seemed to question the unfairness of teachers then – it was like they could do no wrong. Violence was almost accepted and as boys we were often being criticised

and slapped by teachers. But it was the teachers who respected us who earned our respect and they're the ones I still remember today.

Monica was dressed smartly in a black skirt and white blouse and had a pencil and paper ready for our discussion. I wished I'd worn my suit again because I didn't really feel like her manager in my overalls. She seemed a bit anxious and I wished I could have a proper conversation with her. We could have shared some views about all the shit we were surrounded with in the college – the bureaucracy and the workload. But where would I start? No, I just needed to stick to the 'script' this was purely about the numbers, nothing else. The observation grades statistical reports were the main part of my massive workload now and I had to accept that and tick these blasted boxes - until my retirement.

I looked outside to the cloudless sky. I'd hardly been out during the weekend because I'd had so much work to do; marking, moderating, reports and references. I'd also had to arrange an advert for a new staff member because one of the sessional blokes had moved-on. It was a constant battle to keep up with everything. I took a sigh and looked at Monica's paperwork and started with the usual 'feedback sandwich' like we had been trained. The positives included how she had a good rapport with the group; her hand-outs for the lesson were good quality and included a wide variety of tasks. Then I moved on to the 'weaknesses'; there was too much emphasis on the Interactive Whiteboard and Powerpoint<sup>54</sup>, the lesson's pace was too fast and in places didn't fit with the name of the module on the timetable; and most importantly students were so bored they fell asleep. I recalled the Principal's red angry face like old Mr Bailey all those years ago. I thought of the possible

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<sup>54</sup> I much preferred lessons which concentrated on the students using traditional materials – after all I wasn't too clued-up about all this technology regardless of what Ofsted wanted us to do.

consequences if he had witnessed this lesson for himself. A student falling asleep in any lesson was totally unacceptable.

She tried to explain about the personal situation with one of the students. I hadn't got time to listen to this and I knew I needed to read the 'class profile'. It was a sad fact of college life (I told Monica) that students' progress such as their self-esteem and improved decision-making abilities were not really a factor in the college's statistics – they couldn't ever be. Those things were old fashioned and went under the radar. The bottom line is a teacher should always be in control of the class and I suggested that it was dangerous to get too emotionally involved with students' problems. Anyway, it wasn't all about that - there were other issues: the room was too warm and too small for the group.

I didn't want to make eye contact when I told her that her lesson had been a 'Grade Three'. I could tell she was a bit upset. I tried to point out the fact that there were things that I personally found unacceptable in that lesson. Even ignoring the fact that one of the students had fallen asleep and she hadn't challenged them, there were students listening to music through their earphones when they should have been concentrating on their work. There was too much reliance on the Powerpoint presentation and not enough on textbooks. I didn't get a chance to fully explain what I meant because Monica just got up and left. She obviously wasn't interested in reflecting on the lesson and quite honestly I didn't have the time anyway.

I packed-up my things and went back to my workshop the other side of the campus. I needed to give this form to Hilary (she had to check all my paperwork before it was signed-off), who in turn would provide a copy to Monica's boss. Between them they could follow it up however they wanted. I didn't need to get involved again – apart

from if Hilary needed to clarify anything about the observation. In a couple of weeks it would all be forgotten and we will have moved on to the next urgent managerial matter.

“Excuse me, Richard, can you help me with this?” a student asked me as I entered the workshop. It was his portfolio assignment which had missed the final deadline date. It was against college and examination board procedures to accept work after the final deadline. However, I’d discovered it was easy enough to manipulate the rules if you oversaw them. It would just be another assignment to add to the pile. Even though it meant additional work for my staff and me in marking, adjusting reports, paperwork and moderation, it was in our interests to get the assignment in with the others. After all, the more successful student achievements we got, the better our department looked at the end of term, and I needed all the help with that I could get.



# Chapter Seven: A Thematic Analysis of the Observers' Narratives

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## 1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the thematic analysis of the managers' narratives describing their lived experiences of observations. Consistent with the teachers' narratives discussed in Chapter Five, this chapter also contains explorations and interpretations of participants' own personal teaching and learning experiences. What became apparent to me whilst undertaking this research was how managers did not always identify themselves as managers – there was an apparent fluidity within their own professional habitus. The narratives exposed their division between (and sometimes conflict with) their teaching and other selves and their managerial selves and that 'fuzziness' between. I have illustrated how sometimes the observation procedures were perceived by some teachers as part of a hierarchical disembodied culture within their institution; a type of *symbolic violence* that is inflicted upon them (Bourdieu, 1991). Arguably, this was partly due to the ritualistic nature of the requirements of the performativity - the expectations from themselves and others. This is relevant when considering the fluid nature of the managers' identities as both manager and teacher.

The narratives from the managers illustrated that the observation policies are a complex mix of managerial pressures, pre-prescribed *doxa* and innate assumptions and cultural contexts that together form part of their own professional habitus. With this in mind, in this chapter I provide an analysis of the narratives which again draws on Bourdieu's theoretical concepts. In the second part of the chapter, I present some ways in which these managers articulated the conflict they feel between what is required to perform these different identities and their own values and beliefs. For example, as I explained in the previous chapter, but perhaps in a slightly different way for some of the managers I interviewed, issues that surround their memories of

learning experiences may form part of their professional habitus. I see how psychoanalytical perspectives are again able to illustrate some of the possible meanings behind these conflicts, for example through emotions connected to aspirations or mistrust, transference and shame form a crucial part of their professional habitus. Where appropriate, I draw on my own reflections and also those included in the fictionalised accounts of Monica and Richard from Chapters Four and Six. I begin with a summary of 'pen portraits' of the observer participants, which is followed by an analysis which is divided into two main parts: the first relates to the performativity aspects of the observation, as perceived by an observer, and the second focuses on the tensions within these interpretations.

**a. Pen Portraits: 'The Observers'.**

NB My comments at the introduction at the beginning of the pen pictures of the teachers in Chapter Five Section 1 b, also applies here.

**Jennifer**

I had not met with Jennifer prior to the interview – which was arranged via email. Jennifer is in her fifties and is married with two grown-up sons. She worked as a hotelier/publican for many years prior to going into teaching and when her children were 'old enough', she did her undergraduate degree (Philosophy and English Literature) as a mature student. She has worked at this college for thirteen years – working her way up from a sessional teacher to a manager. She lives and works in the South East and volunteered as a participant in this research via another contact in the same college. She has been an Advanced Practitioner at the college and is now involved in managerial observations and staff training – overseeing quality issues. After a recent Ofsted inspection –the outcomes of which were disappointing



- there has been a re-structure at the college. She explains how she feels anxious about impending redundancies. She has experienced difficulties in communicating with her new manager and does not feel her expertise in staff development is being utilised fully. For instance, she explained one of the reasons for her being able to participate in this interview – which was held in a room at a nearby university - was that her manager was not aware of her whereabouts. Her perception was that 'he didn't care' about her role at the college. Jennifer believes that her work experience in private service-sector work prior to re-entering education means that she values 'working with people' and uses a mentor-type approach to her staff observations which she views should be developmental opportunities. During this interview she describes how she feels the tensions between what her managers want to see in terms of observations outcomes which are presented as 'numbers' in contrast to her own, more developmental approach.

The interview lasted approximately an hour and a half and was followed-up with brief emails.

## **Helen**

I had not met Helen prior to the interview which was arranged via email with Julia.

The interview takes place in a quiet corner of their college canteen during a morning break. Helen has worked at the same college for ten years. She is in her late fifties and has spent most of her working life in the health and social care public sector – either working as a nursery nurse or a social worker. She started work at the college as a teacher and has worked her way up to managing the department where she is now based. She oversees the observations of staff in other departments and also coordinates the training for her own staff. She works closely with Julia and the two ladies were interviewed together at their request as they felt they wanted an open

discussion and to have the opportunity to share their views. Helen's childhood experiences of learning she described as 'horrific' e.g. she was regularly beaten by her teachers for seemingly trivial misdemeanours. She recalls telling her mother about the painful discipline she endured and getting rebuffed with a response along the lines of 'Well, you must have done something wrong'. Her experiences led to her motive for working with vulnerable children and later becoming a teacher. She explains how it's important to care for the students and how far away this caring is from the statistical reports she needs to create in her management role.

The interview lasted approximately an hour and a half and was followed-up with brief emails.

### **Julia**

Julia chose her own pseudonym and her interview was with Helen (above) at their request. I had not met Julia prior to the interview, but we had exchanged some emails about the subject of my research which she had heard about through a friend of a colleague of mine at the university. Partly because of ongoing debates at her college she was interested in taking part in the research. Julia is also involved in teaching and managing within a health and social care department at the same college as Helen, although her specialist area was childhood development. She had worked at the same college for a number of years. She was also involved with observations of staff in departments outside the area of her expertise. She explained in the interview how she believed this undermined her authority as a manager, because her own manager believed that a detachment from her own department allowed for more 'robust' outcomes from the assessments of observations. Julia's own childhood learning was made difficult through many house-moves. She found she struggled to keep-up with her peers and that often teachers did not provide

adequate support and would not allow her the time and space to catch-up with assessments or revision sessions for important exams. Like Helen, she had also endured corporal punishment. As a result of this, Julia felt that she did not fulfil her potential in her childhood learning and left with limited qualifications. She went on to have a career in social care and only many years later returned to education as a mature student determined to gain entry into a more rewarding job such as teaching. Because of her extensive experience in childcare she was valuable to the department of health and social care in the college at that time and was promoted to manager. She described her feelings of anger at the senior management of the college for appearing not to value her or her colleagues.

The interview lasted approximately an hour and a half and was followed-up with brief emails.

### **Jason**

Jason is fifty years old, has no children has recently married and lives in central England where he has worked in ESOL departments in different colleges – sometimes connected to university-based teacher-trainer courses – for many years. Prior to the interview I had known Jason for six years. We had worked together for six months at the beginning of that time, during a period when I was studying towards a teaching qualification. We had always got on well together and I value his teaching expertise and his humanistic approach to his students and his staff.

His tells me his childhood learning was ‘successful’ and he excelled in languages gaining many qualifications. This motivated him to teach languages - first in this country and then on various overseas visits over many years. He still frequently travels abroad and has an extended network of friends and colleagues who he keeps

in contact with. Jason volunteered to take part in my research after I contacted him to ask for his cooperation in recruiting potential participants. Two of the teacher-participants of this study work at the same college as Jason. He was recently promoted and took-up a position as head of the ESOL department, where he oversees about twenty staff members. College procedures do not allow him to observe his own staff, and although he explains that he is fascinated to observe other departments' teaching (e.g. Dance and Drama) he feels frustrated by the detachment from the training and development needs of his own staff.

Prior to this interview we had an (unrecorded) discussion about the observation procedures of his college and the differences compared to other colleges where he had been involved in teachers' training needs. Jason described how disillusioned he had become with education and how he would consider changing direction in his career. However, he felt that his age would prevent him from pursuing this and that now he was married he had financial responsibilities that limit any risk-taking. Jason is positive about the inner-city area where he lives and works. Because of his experiences abroad he values the 'cosmopolitan lifestyle of live music and street food' and enjoys the atmosphere of the diverse cultural population of this Midlands city.

The initial interview (unrecorded) lasted approx. one hour. The main interview with Jason was recorded during a meeting at his college in his office.

### **James**

James is senior manager, married with children and was 41 years old at the time of the interview. The interview took place in the college where James worked, in a quiet corner of the canteen outside the time of a normal academic timetable. Although I

had previously undertaken a small amount of sessional work at the college (2010-11), I had no direct experience of being observed at this college and had never met James prior to this interview, which was arranged via email as a result of another contact I had at the college.

James had recently been promoted to a senior manager position at an FE college in the South of England overseeing all departments. He studied catering at the college in the late 1980's after leaving school with CSE qualifications. After 17 years working as a chef, he accrued some vocational assessor qualifications before re-joining the same college as a sessional teacher. Over the past ten years he had been promoted from teacher in the catering department to his current director-level role and still undertakes approx. four hours teaching per week. He undertakes observations in all areas of the college and manages and oversees the processes involved. James is currently studying himself for an MA in Lifelong Learning at a local University alongside his management role at the college.

The interview lasted approximately 1 hour. There was one follow-up email.

### **Mike**

Mike was born in New Zealand and has lived for many years in England, frequently returning home to visit friends and family during the college holidays. He is aged approx. 40 years old and lives with his partner and works at a college in South East England where originally many years before, he was a mature student. At the time of the interview I had previously only met Mike briefly, once, at an academic conference about six months before. He has recently completed his Masters in Education. We got on well and he volunteered at that point to participate in the research the subject of which he also shared an interest in.

Mike described his school life as 'successful' and perhaps partly because his parents were also educationalists, he felt thoroughly supported throughout his education and achieved many qualifications. His family hoped that his ambitions were to join them in working in education, however Mike felt that he needed to take a different route and took a degree in Maths, going onto obtain a position in a bank. The bank offered Mike an exchange programme to work in a branch in England and he moved soon after his graduation. Although the programme was for one year, he was retained by the bank and stayed on to become successful in his role and then met his partner. He decided later than he did not find his role in the bank rewarding enough and sought to change his career by enrolling in a local college as a mature student. Mike now works at this same FE college, where he has been teaching for a number of years and currently holds a position as Advanced Practitioner and Director for the teacher-training course which is run in conjunction with a university. He undertakes observations both as part of the college's Quality Assurance procedures and also observations required as part of the student's teacher training qualification requirements. This is one campus of a multi-site college and like many of these institutions the original building was a school. This interview took place in his office, which he shares with a colleague (not present during the interview) and is situated in an annex of the main building.

The interview was arranged via email and took place in Mike's office at the beginning of an academic year. It was held on one day but in two parts separated by lunch. In total it lasted approximately 1 hour 45 mins. Additional information was in an email reflecting further on Mike's school learning experiences (see the transcript for details).

## **Anna**

Anna is in her fifties and has had a varied career in teaching in many different sectors and also the commercial sector, based mainly around the South East of England. She is divorced with grown-up children and is currently teaching part-time at an FE college whilst also studying for a PhD. At the time of the interview I had known her for one year. In the past she has also been a manager in an FE college who has engaged in observations for staff development, teachers' training and quality assurance purposes. Hence Anna's narrative has relevance across many different perspectives within this study.

She describes her childhood learning experiences as 'disappointing' mainly because she blames herself for not making enough effort with her school work. After leaving school she worked in clerical jobs which she found unrewarding. She later returned to education to gain a degree (English) and then trained in Primary School teaching before migrating to teaching in FE and HE.

There were two main interviews with Anna - one hour (recorded) plus an additional one hour (notes taken) and some email correspondence. Of particular relevance was her reflection about the significance of participating in the research, for her teaching practice. She explained how thinking carefully about the possible implications and philosophical contexts of the emotional experiences of being observed and being an observer, had re-framed her perception of this role. She felt that whereas previously she would not have been consciously aware of the possible power relationships within the situation and the importance to the teacher of the context of the classroom, she would take more care with future observations to allow a more informal space and a reflexive atmosphere.

## 2. 'Jumping through the hoops'. Observers' perceptions of the performativity of Observations

As I explained in Chapter Five, a teacher's professional habitus is (partly) innate in that it is a "structured structure" (Bourdieu, 1991); produced by, and at the same time *reproducing* the field. Embodied forms of knowing, knowledge or competence are social – by their very nature they exist only when interpreted by others (Crossley 2001). The difficulty in attempting to describe these embodied, professional habits however is in the fact that:

...it is not obvious to everyone how to do them and they must be learned, sometimes with difficulty. They are revealed as specifically body techniques and embodied forms of knowledge and understanding because what matters is the *ability to do them*. Some people can do the technique without having a reflexive, intellectual grasp upon *how* they do it, or what it is that makes the technique work; they 'just do it'. Others may appear to grasp the principal intellectually or discursively, but still fail to execute the technique 'properly'. It is the technically correct *performance* of the technique however, *which tends to count as knowing or understanding* it for those involved.

(Crossley, 2001 p. 88, my emphasis)

The perceived subjective nature of this embodied performativity was apparent as a constant tension within the managers' narratives. This supports research by O'Leary (2012) which illustrates how, despite the observation procedures providing a perceived unrealistic, subjective 'snapshot' of a teacher's performance, that for some, it still retained some 'validity'. James' quote below provides a powerful example to underscore the relevance and support of O'Leary's argument here:



“I use the analogy of kind of like it’s erm, doing your driving test, you look in the erm, rear-view mirror an awful lot, don’t you, you *over do it*, and actually I think on that opportunity, if you are going to be graded, or if you have got Ofsted in, you really want to do that, you almost want to *overdo* it, just to make sure, I think, you know, *we need to get teachers into that frame of mind.*” (James, my emphasis)

This also supports the idea that some managerialist approaches towards observations may encourage managers to seek ‘designer teachers’ in an attempt to escape the perception of an inefficient old-fashioned FE (Ball, 2003). Like the teachers’ narratives explored in Chapter Five, it seemed these individuals, in different ways, brought with them their vocational identities and that at times these conflicted with the requirements of managerial roles. This supports research by Bathmaker and Avis (2005) noted in Chapter One. As the narrative of Alex illustrated in Chapter Five showed, she had been assisted via her manager to use the support of an AP in order to learn to manage her observation, in other words to explicitly embody and articulate the required performativity of her professional habitus. But the narratives from the managers often openly acknowledged or mocked the ineffective nature of the observations they were themselves conducting:

“[...] and I think also, even if you don’t mind, it changes the feel, the attack upon<sup>55</sup>...it changes the way you behave.” (Jennifer)

And likewise for Helen who explains the differences in the teachers’ behaviour she observes:

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<sup>55</sup> It is impossible to predict what Jennifer was about to say here – but my interpretation would lead me to add the (unspoken) words ‘the self’.

“So they're *not* naturally performing are they? As they would, which is [to] 'strut your stuff up the front of the classroom and all round...' erm, you don't really *perform* in that way when you're being observed, because you're being watched.” (Helen, original emphasis)

For James, Jennifer and Helen then, the performative nature of their staff's behaviour during an observation has evolved into the measurement of teaching quality *per se*. For these observers, the perceived 'inauthenticity' they saw in their staff was not part of a 'lesser self' – it was just as valid a state of being, because it was a means to an end (their own ends); a compromise of the tensions between the field. However, as I have shown, the teachers' *perception* of this emotional labour conflicted with their professional habitus, often causing anxiety either during or after the observation. Reflecting also on the comments from my pilot research study, this perspective seems to illustrate how the managers appeared to believe this aspect of their staff's emotional labour was an intrinsic part of their role, whilst paradoxically also being *in contrast* to the everyday duties of teaching. The observation then was the performance that simply complied with the managerialist policies – apparently serving no purpose other than complying with the perceived needs of quantitative statistical reports. However, contradictions appeared when despite the apparent acceptance from some managers that their staff undertook this performance yet some teachers were not granted the environment or context in order to perform their 'driving test'. As Mike illustrated in his comment:

“...despite the fact that we have to grade, actually [...] you get people saying 'well I want you to come to a good class, and I want everything', because, you know, they want to get a good grade...which *defeats the purpose* to a certain extent, so I expect there *is* an element of, you know, *performance*, and you

know, 'let me see if I can get my best class in, and make sure nothing goes wrong, so that it doesn't impact on the, um, grade'..." (Mike).

In the fictionalised text, one of Richard's staff is about to undergo an observation and Richard is asked to change his room for him so that it can be manipulated to become a more 'interactive' lesson – to adhere to the *doxa* of an observation. Thus a manager may do all in their power to provide the 'best' conditions for their staff to achieve the desired grade. However, as Chapter Five has shown, often this is without acknowledgement of the unique emotional dynamics and context of the classroom. There was an acceptance among some managers that an observation was an artificial performance in which individuals reacted in different ways to the requirement for performativity. Mike accepted that: 'we all deliver different lessons over time' and the narratives from managers included remarks about the differences between teachers who for example:

"...pull out this particular lesson, which ticks all the boxes" (Mike)

Or:

"[...] will do their best to work out, or they actually send you emails that, you know, say, 'Actually, 'I'm not in that day' or 'change it to this day'; it's dreadful really.'" (Jennifer)

Although not a fundamental aspect of this research, it is important to re-state these contradictions inherent in many of observation policies which are set out by O'Leary (2012). This is because it forms an underlying aspect of the emotional complexities of the teacher and managers' lived experiences of observations. The tensions between the unhelpful dichotomies found in the subjective/objective arguments that

surround observations in FE, form a foundational layer of the affectivity involved in the performativity of observations and this aspect is explored in more detail in the sections below.

**a. Playing the numbers game...**

As I explained above, some of the managers seemed to accept that the grades in an observation were entirely 'subjective' even going as far to acknowledge that they were manipulated and therefore weak or invalid. Paradoxically however, most participants simultaneously maintained how the process of observation was still worthwhile. There were frequent contradictions along these lines regarding this issue within the narratives:

“[...] if someone's just giving you feedback, the sort of 'that was good and that was a 'Grade Two' that's it, you go away happy and it's meaningless”  
(Jason)

This meant that although Jason spent 'many hours' creating reports centred on these grades, subsequent comparative analysis of these statistics was apparently meaningless to him and therefore to his managers and staff. In contrast to this view however, as James' quote demonstrates, there were also attempts by some staff engaged as observers to justify the use of these arbitrary grades as an overall judgement of college quality standards:

“Well, that's the one-off shot again isn't it, the one-off grade, erm [...]...well you can always marry those up with our success at achievements at kind of results, so...” (James)

This point is illustrated in the fictionalized character, Richard, when even though he feels he should get to know the teacher ('Monica'), in order to better understand her

professional habitus, he is prevented from doing so because of the perceived status of his role and time constraints. Even though these procedures go against his better judgement, he feels forced into 'jumping through the hoops' of the graded observation procedures, because of the potential for loss of his own social capital. He had attended a meeting where his department (and therefore his ego) was 'named and shamed' in front of his peers as falling below college quality expectations. This situation was described in the narratives of participants Helen and Julia in this research, where they recalled the 'bad-feeling' that the policy had brought onto the department, but which at the time was left unarticulated by staff.

The professional habitus of the manager within the field of an observation and the potential for gain/loss of social capital means that regardless of whether the *doxa* may contain 'meaningless' numbers, the game must continue to be played. This is perhaps because of what Butler (1997 p. 134) refers to as a 'shared social sense' rather than the individualistic way that these kinds of *doxa* are not only unconsciously understood, but *embodied*. The conventions of the performativity are a result of power through language within these social institutions (Bourdieu, 1991; Coffield, 2000; Smith, Swift, 2012), but these rules are not necessarily explicit. In this case, the 'utterance' of graded outcomes within an observation and the binary labels enforced on participants as either 'good' or 'bad' teachers, calls into question the established grounds of legitimacy within the social institution. In the narrative of Mike, he described the principal of the college as a bully who 'banged his fists on his desk' in order to get his points across to the SMT. In this way, the symbolic violence was articulated and indeed embodied – forming a constant reminder to his staff of the potential for shame. I have included this situation within the portrayal of Richard,

the fictionalized manager, as it illustrates the potential connection to his own professional habitus, as I will explain later in this chapter.

The anxiety described by many of the managers in this study was seemingly heightened by the constant flux of the *doxa* within the field of perceived college quality standards. Targets were constantly adjusted during the course of an academic year, often impacting negatively on departmental budgets. Indeed, because the statistics were widely acknowledged as arbitrary, this led ironically to the reports being questioned as potentially ‘invalid’ by higher management even when results were perceived as favourable; as Jennifer explained:

“[...] they want to see the numbers. And we do, you know, if we get some numbers, I mean one area for example [went] from 69% to 79% in teaching, in terms of ‘Good’ or better teaching<sup>56</sup>, but erm, that’s been pulled into question, erm, because ‘they *can’t* have got that much better’ [laughs]. If you take that then, you know, if you *want* numbers, you have to *trust* the numbers, if you *don’t* trust the numbers you have to look at *why* they could be wrong. But there’s no investigation as to why they may be wrong, it’s just well ‘Oh well, they can’t be right!’ (Jennifer, original emphasis).

Jennifer articulates how the definitions of terms which drive the ‘numbers’ are outside any debate and her laughter whilst trying to explain these contradictions illustrated her frustration at ‘playing the numbers game’. Like Mike and Jason, she explained how she meticulously produces statistical reports, but subsequently the rules were changed because ‘successful improvement’ was not perceived by others

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<sup>56</sup> Refers to the common practice of creating a comparative report from statistics generated from the outcomes of graded observations year-on-year.

as realistically obtainable and the 'measurement' rejected as 'invalid'. In order for her to retain her position of 'legitimate power' within her institution, she must adhere to the fluid nature of the *doxa* within these different games, which continuously enforce fields of internal conflict (Bourdieu, 1991; Butler, 1997). Understandably, throughout the narratives of the managers (and their staff) shared feelings of hopelessness pervade. The emotional impact of this frustration is explored further in the following sections.

In contrast to the criteria explained above, but in support of my findings from Chapter Five, there was an acknowledgement amongst the managers of the ambiguous, creative 'flow' involved in teaching. In this long quote from Helen, she also hints at the unspoken nature of teaching and learning practice, the intuitive aspects of subtle nuances and eye-contact described by Jim, Alex and Sam.

“If you think, when you look at a beautiful painting, someone else might think its crap [laughter], but you might think it's sublime.[...] I do feel that education is a bit like that, you, you go in there, you get *caught up in the moment* in the *passion* of whatever you're teaching and they either respond to that or not. If they don't respond, I think I'm not doing it right. You stop, you find something else, but you're constantly *scanning the room* and, and with regards to observations, I think we look for that in a teacher....we think 'does this teacher know the moment in which the student has *switched-off* and thinking about their chips for dinner or whether they've had a row with the old man or something..', you KNOW that's not, you know. I think, in observations, I look for those things that...” (Helen, original emphasis)

Helen's reference to the students' being 'switched-off' demonstrates support for research into teachers' (and students') emotional labour and the importance of being 'emotionally present' and alive and 'switched on' as I described in Chapter Two (Price, 2001). This illustrated an expectation of the embodied disposition of a socially- constructed teacher, whilst perhaps hinting at the acknowledgement that there is 'something more' in these interactions that has inner meanings for the teachers and students. The quote above from Helen illustrates how she tried to 'see' these dispositions.

As Bourdieu explained, external cultural and social factors often mean that individuals feel forced into playing the game, with the result that:

“...it's being judged objectively, it's not, teaching is *not* purely objective, some aspects of the academic side, but *not* the teaching and learning as such, and it's the difference between the old, 'academia' and, and the new business-run...they, they, it's a *business* now.” (Helen, original emphasis)

In my experience in different colleges, everyday practice is a constant reminder of the contradictions inherent in 'playing the game' as a teacher but within a commercial environment. For example, in order to obtain funding, retention figures are sometimes manipulated when a specific 'data collection date' has not yet been reached by claiming that a student was on 'study leave' (even if they had already notified their tutor that they had left the course). The frustration that emanated from these tensions was a common topic of the narratives from these participants:

“I think the problem is, the college here, *thinks they can do everything by number*....and the problem is, here in [this department], *we are dealing with*



*people* and there's a mis-match between the data that you get that is PEOPLE and their bloody numbers.” (Julia, my emphasis in italics, original in capitals).

Here, Julia acknowledges the value of ‘people’, i.e. tutors’ creativity, autonomy, innate professional habitus and skills. However, the hidden and ‘messy’ nature of the emotional labour involved in teaching and learning in FE - the intrinsic ‘unmeasureableness’ of it – means that interventions for positive change in the learning culture of FE cannot happen. There is a taken-for-grantedness of what constitutes ‘good practice’ without an in-depth investigation into the complexities of the important issues this term raises. Supporting research outlined in Chapter Two, it would seem from these findings that the creativity inherent in FE teaching and learning is not being celebrated or encouraged (James, Biesta, 1997).

**b. ...whilst “Ticking the boxes”**

Following-on from Julia, Mike and Jason’s comments describing frustrations from their (mainly failed) attempts to change the processes surrounding observations, sometimes these feelings appeared to provide motivation. Often the changes were connected to suggestions that they themselves had put forward within SMTs, or it was within their own area, department or ‘field’ where they had an element of autonomy over the institution’s procedures. However, despite these changes, further frustration and anxiety were expressed when describing how wider observations policies could be improved, but how other factors prevented this from happening, as the two quotes below illustrate:

“Yeah, and I'm trying to push, as an AP in the quality team, that we, engage with staff, because it seems very much that we, It's a very *top-down, it's very, it's typical of that managerialist approach* that, you know, ‘this is how it's going

to be', with all this *accounting, auditing* and erm, environment that we are in. *It's very much a tick-box* and it's done 'yes, yes, yes' and rather than thinking, well what does the staff...what do the staff think in their teams, perhaps in their subject specialist area, *do they feel* that erm, you know, *they'd like support in a certain area* and maybe have the AP come along and then it's more bottom-up..." (Mike, my emphasis)

*"It's all about that tick box now*, we've gone back to tick boxes. In a way we went to a narrative form, but we've gone back to a tick boxes. I know, and we're going round and *round and round* in a circle, really." (Jennifer, my emphasis)

However for some, their role as an observer was not explicitly included within the paperwork but included deeper meanings in trying (like Helen explained) to see dispositions within the performance, as Jason described:

" [...] you've almost got to think outside the box, and say, you know, are the students, erm, turning theory into practice, before, you know 'before your eyes' - kind of thing – and if you can see that happening, then they've obviously taken on board what the teacher's actually trying to [teach]." (Jason)

The perception of the embodied nature of the students' learning – 'turning theory in practice' - illustrates the explicit performativity of the teacher in being able to reflect back to the observer what is perceived as relevant within this field. The above quote was in the context of a dance lesson, something that was outside the expertise of the Jason's usual (ESOL) observations. However, in a similar situation within an observation of a law lesson, he illustrates how he could see similarities between the teaching strategies in his own area of expertise and these other areas:

“...to see how he was using some really, really sound scaffolding techniques, breaking stuff down into really simple chunks and then building it back up again and making sure the students came with him, was just fantastic. I mean obviously you look for that in an ESOL lesson, because it’s second nature, but to be seeing that in a completely alien subject area, was quite, quite intriguing, quite fascinating.” (Jason)

Understandably, despite an approach which successfully ‘ticked the boxes’ (whether explicit or personal) for their own managers, some individuals expressed concern about the anxiety these strategies created. They described a need to detach themselves from the institutional processes, because (as I explain in the next part of this chapter), it seemed to be contrary to their own professional habitus including aspirations for their staff:

“I mean we're not in the game of destroying people. But I do have to say that sometimes the management side of ...and perhaps Ofsted, is a very *destructive*, well I think, process. It's in no way developmental it is something with a big stick attached.” (Julia, original emphasis)

It was interesting that Julia described the management as ‘destructive’ but excludes herself because she does not apparently agree with the policy. She felt forced to pursue the requirements of senior management whilst retaining a middle ground. Likewise, Jennifer explained how policy changes which go “round and round” are relevant on a more macro level too, in respect of FE’s constant difficulties when faced with government rhetoric (explained in Chapter One).

### c. Relationships, Space and the Classroom

All the participant managers I spoke to also engaged in teaching to varying degrees (e.g. James four hours per week, Helen approx. 20 hours per week). As I described in Chapter Five, the personal field of the classroom is important – unique elements of the teacher's *doxa* exist within. For instance, when Helen described her teaching field she used the metaphor of a 'lionesses' lair with her students represented as her cubs which she must 'protect'. Anna described her classroom as a 'bubble' where the outside world was temporarily put on hold. Julia, however, had a different viewpoint of her classroom, as she described it as a 'floating cloud' where she and her students and senior managers could enter and leave without disturbing the atmosphere. Mike acknowledged the personal nature of these spaces, and described this phenomenon thus:

“[...] the space we occupy in the classroom is, is very private to us and our learners, you know, those four walls, it's our professional space and someone's coming in and making judgement on those...” (Mike)

The intrinsic rewards of teaching were also shared by many of the managers and a core part of their motivation and professional identity:

“[...] I just decided that's what I wanted to do, I suppose. I enjoyed doing my own A levels so much that I thought that I would enjoy doing it [teaching]. And I do. You know, it's a good experience. *I love it*. Which is the only thing that would make me stay really, to be quite honest, because some of the rewards are not there otherwise, are they?” (Jennifer)

The managers who took part in this research often seemed to place emphasis on the relationships that they had with their *colleagues and managers*, providing an

interesting parallel to the perspectives of the teachers who (as I explained in Chapter Five) seemed to place high value on the rapport they built-up with their students. This was understandable considering that often these staff spent less time actually in the classroom (because of their other duties). However, they often described how much they valued their (somewhat limited) teaching time. For example, in the case of Julia and Helen the rapport that they had between each other was evident, both physically during their interview and through reading the transcript:

“I think that’s a huge part of, of staying [in teaching], you know, isn’t it? The social aspect, of having someone to talk to and bounce ideas off.”(Helen)

And:

“It’s very [inaudible] females feel not quite good enough, constantly and I think if you don’t have some kind of support that will say: ‘Well, actually, I feel like that as well, it’s been a nightmare and that you couldn’t do it is understandable’ - I would feel constantly not quite good enough, because we do not celebrate fully...<sup>57</sup> we pick on anything that goes wrong” (Julia)

However, the positive impact of the support that they provide for each other provides a stark contrast to the experiences of conflict and fear of shame from the lecturers in the previous chapter and that I further illustrate below. Indeed, there was a theme from the managers’ narratives of a strength of feeling and support for their staff and a sense of respect for their skills, for example, relating to a law lesson Jason observed, he commented on the innate aspect of the performativity of the teachers’ skills:

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<sup>57</sup> What is particularly interesting in Julia’s quote is that she seemingly didn’t articulate the word ‘success’ – was this because it was unfamiliar and seemed so far away from her expectations?

“And the interesting thing was, the teacher wasn’t aware he was doing it!”

(Jason)

The narratives reflected a sense that there was a need to build rapport with staff, whilst simultaneously (and arguably paradoxically) retain a detachment from the processes that they openly acknowledged were the cause of anxiety, stress and frustration:

“...and [...] it was all about that [statistics] and people were hauled over the coals and made to feel less than who they were. And you should *not* come to work, if you've tried your best and feel less than who you are when you leave. That's not a good thing.” (Helen, original emphasis)

The reasons for this detachment from the contradictions could be attributed to the commercial pressures of budgetary constraints and impending redundancies through funding cuts due to the worsening economic recession. This climate of fear was explained by Helen:

“They are afraid. Everyone is afraid. Everyone in a job, there aren’t many jobs about I, I don't know what would happen to me personally, if I couldn't work, I have no money to speak of, erm, I like my life, I *love* what I do, so I think, they know that, and they know that you are hungry, if you like, that you need this job. You have to ‘toe the line’ whether you’re happy about it or not.” (Helen, original emphasis)

The narrative of James, a senior manager at a college in South East England, held a particular interest because in contrast to other managers, he appeared dismissive about the perceived performativity of teachers in observations. However, this begins

to make more sense when brought into context with his working life prior to teaching. After leaving school in the mid-eighties, James (like Mike) trained in the same college where he is now a senior manager. Unlike the lecturer Jim, who (as I described in the Chapter Five), perceived the college building *itself* as symbolic of knowledge, James appeared to view the institution as a different kind of field – less a public service towards learning and more a personal career opportunity (explained below).

After what he described as a successful and enjoyable time obtaining his chef qualifications, James left to work in commercial restaurant kitchens. After some years he ‘took a risk’ and migrated to teaching – something he was always interested in pursuing:

“I always had it in the back of my mind that I would like to do that [teaching]. [...] throughout my time in industry, nineteen years, it was always there in the back of my mind that I would like to do it and throughout those years I was creating a toolbox that was helping me to get it.” (James)

Reflecting on what James had told me about those years he spent working in kitchens, made me think about the many highly-acclaimed restaurants I had been lucky enough to have eaten at, in the past. In those highly competitive environments the food - its quality, provenance, presentation and above all the *transparency* of these elements - are crucial to the success of any kitchen. These are directly linked to the perceived competence of the chef (and his staff)<sup>58</sup>. There are parallels with James’ description of how he believed all classrooms should be ‘fully glazed’ to

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<sup>58</sup> Indeed, this factor is fundamental to the growing popularity of kitchens which can be observed by their guests at the restaurant’s tables, and/or special (costly) ‘chef’s tables’ which provide insights into the innermost ‘magic’ of the emotional labour of a Michelin-starred restaurant kitchen (Hubbuck 2012).

enable 'true transparency'. With this in mind, it was interesting to note James' response to my comments about the way his staff may or may not perceive their classrooms as their own space:

"[...describing a classroom as a personal space] would be very much an 'old school' approach, I think, because we are trying to generate an ethos here at this college, is where we've got a much more 'open door' approach. I mean, our [new department] development we've got glass all the way along *so you can't hide behind a door*. So we're trying to have a much more transparent approach..." (James, my emphasis).

My interpretation of his narrative was that his perception of the importance of his classroom (kitchen) was in creating learning (food). The 'transparency' he demanded in his vocational identity in terms of quality of provenance, preparation and presentation of food was a requirement of the restaurant and food hygiene laws. Transposing this perspective into the context of a lesson observation suggests some possible reasons for the emotional tensions between teachers and observers. In stark contrast to the 'personal spaces' of a 'bubble' and 'lioness' lair' described above from other teachers and managers, in his identity as senior manager, James appeared to dismiss the need of some teachers to create a more intimate learning atmosphere, in favour of the in/visible professional 'boundaries' of corporate 'glass and steel' environment recognised by Monica as 'cold and corporate'<sup>59</sup>. Teachers who share views like Helen with a view of her classroom as a secure and intimate 'lair' may find it difficult to understand the views of observers like James, whose perception of 'best practice' is founded on the performativity in a field which is

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<sup>59</sup> This phrase originates from the narrative of Alex in a similar context.



physically (but perhaps not emotionally) 'transparent'<sup>60</sup>. These metaphors were a valuable source of reflection for some participants (and me) during and after the interviews.

In contrast to the narratives of Jim and Mike who talked about the positive experiences of being a mature student and later the perceived 'privilege' of working in an educational institution, it seemed that James left his old 'student' identity behind in favour of his managerial role in a commercial world focused entirely on statistics. As I described, his statements were contradictory; accepting the inherent subjectivities of the reports based on graded observations, whilst simultaneously placing high importance on them. Perhaps the new *doxa* he imposes on himself within his role offers a more meaningful 'field' in which to play the game, compared to his experience of learning decades earlier. This is perhaps unsurprising when he described his disappointment towards the poor quality of the teaching he experienced, compared to the challenges of teaching today:

"... 'cause the teachers then were really held in high esteem. Obviously that was way back then [laughing]. Things have changed. You know. They [the students at that time] almost *worshipped* the ground they walked on, that sort of stuff. But when I think back to what they did, they had a very easy life. [...] what we have to do now as the modern FE lecturer is a totally different ball game to what we did, or what *they* did in the mid '80s. I clearly remember sessions where they were [...] dictating out of a book." (James)

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<sup>60</sup> The glazed transparent rooms that James describes resonates with what O'Leary (2012) described as the 'panopticon' in FE (Foucault 1980) where managers like James assume that 'hiding behind a door' provides an opportunity for unprofessional behaviour or, at the very least 'poor quality teaching'.

James appears to want to disassociate himself with the previous atmosphere of educational sectors of the 1970/80s. This links to the debates around deprofessionalisation I described in Chapter One. The lack of suitably qualified teachers at that time appeared to have had a direct impact on James' memories of his learning experiences during that era. These recollections had become part of his professional habitus. He therefore understandably welcomed the new approach to monitoring and auditing of educational outcomes – because perhaps he recognised his own place within it.

#### **d. Importance of Mentorship in Observations:**

Many of the managers described how their idealized view of observations would be to include a more humanistic, mentor-type relationship. There was a tension between what they perceived as a requirement of their role as a manager and the socially constructed view of the caring teacher. The developmental aspect of supporting their staff was something that they valued in their job and for some formed an important part of a memory from their own learning experiences. For example, Jason described throughout his narrative, his hopes for integrating more space for professional dialogue between him and his staff in the observation process:

“[...] I mean I've offered to vocational teachers to say look, 'I'm quite happy to come to your class, sit with you, see what you're doing, feedback what's really, what's picking up on and maybe give you some tips on how you can develop literacy skills for...'... I think that approach - people feel like you're giving them a helping hand and *they don't feel threatened.*” (Jason)

Mike, from a different college, (but whose expertise coincidentally, was also in ESOL) also hinted at the potential risk involved within the observation in damage to the self, as he described how he values this mentor-type space which exists between him and his own manager:

“[...] I’m very fortunate in having Mary as my manager, she was an AP, she was one of us, she was part of our team and then in the re-structure she, she got a management position.[...] she’s a good teacher, very thorough, very, very fair, very rational, so, you know, I respect her judgement. *Which is what it should be.*” (Mike, original emphasis)

In experiencing the space for professional dialogue himself, it presents an aspiration that is achievable in other professional relationships. In contrast to the diminished self of some of the lecturers described in the previous chapter, Mike’s high expectations extend to his colleagues whom he appears to trust implicitly. In this situation I imagined opportunities where Mike and Mary openly discussed and analysed together emotional aspects emerging from their shared reflections on aspects of teaching practice. However the extent to which this approach may have been carried through with their own staff during observations was unclear.

The mentor role was perhaps emphasised in some managers’ minds because, like Alex in Chapter Four, many recalled a feeling of fear and loss of agency from lessons delivered by a teacher from their past. For them, the socially-constructed teacher represented the opposite to the caring, nurturing role that some of them identified with, as Jennifer recollected a significant teacher from her past as: “... a bit terrifying”. In contrast, relationships with their staff were important for most of the participants, in creating a mentor/mentee approach within the observation:

“[...] the kind of observations I enjoy the most [are] where the teacher doesn't feel they're judged or they're not under pressure, you're really, it's just like a professional friend, you know, a critical friend, if you like...” (Jason)

Both Jennifer and Jason commented on the importance of playing a mentor role in a developmental observation that did not rely on graded criteria. Yes despite the value placed on these relationships, the managers said they often felt obliged to at least attempt to adhere to some mis-placed sense of achieving more 'objectivity' in an observation. The managers' own sense of value in knowing, respecting and engaging in a dialogue with the observer is abandoned. The impact on the manager of this action I explain in Section 2 of this chapter.

**e. Stress and workload: “Most of the time we are on our knees”**

Workload pressures were a recurrent theme throughout the interviews. In particular feelings of resentment were evidenced about the perceived unfair workload which was outside the control of the managers:

“ [...] hesitance from subject teachers, because they say 'oh, it's not my job to teach', more work, more preparation, more marking...” (Jason)

Undoubtedly these strong emotions could not easily be detached from the dynamics within an observation. Some understandably claimed that the issue of unfair workloads had in turn meant that potential changes that could have improved policies surrounding observations had not been allowed to happen:

“[the observation procedures at this college] tend to be very much top down. I'm as guilty of that as anyone for that. There's very little dialogue, discussion, not that - certainly from my perspective – it's not because it's not want[ed] or

[there's not] a desire to do it, but simply because *there's no time*. You don't... you move on..." (Mike).

The process for Jason was similar to other participants in that he managed a team of eighteen teachers, and yet because the observations were conducted by managers outside his department (in order to prevent what Jennifer called 'grade inflation' – positive discrimination from a manager who knows the teacher personally), he was not involved in the outcomes of his own staff's performance. Like Richard in the fictionalised text, instead of any space for professional dialogue between managers and their staff, Jason was forced to spend some considerable time obtaining the information he needed from a secure college Intranet site:

"I mean, I've now got to dig around for eighteen observation reports, you know, download them, read them, *try and interpret* them [...] make some notes and meet with the teachers. Yeah, it's just not realistic." (Jason, my emphasis)

Jason's comment on trying to interpret the observation reports is crucial, because his own interpretation may differ considerably from the other managers, not least because he is already familiar with the context of the students' lessons and with the strategies employed by his staff in addressing these contexts. Undoubtedly this kind of process increases potential stress and anxiety for managers by ostensibly questioning their professional expertise and knowledge of their own staff whilst simultaneously increasing their workload.

Jennifer, Mike and to a certain extent, James, apparently see themselves as holding a mentor-type role for their staff, whilst still insisting on upholding a quantitative approach. These two objectives do not sit easily with each other (Avis, 1996). They

feel unable to question their superiors about these strategies perhaps because at times and for various reasons they do not feel valued as managers and teachers themselves – as illustrated in the comments above by Mike and Jason. The strict procedures they must adhere to as managers, apparently leaves them “no time to breathe” (Jennifer).

“It comes down to who’s going to pay for it all, because all the staff are right up to their hours and there’s also that element of *‘where does it go’?* and then - you know, *who controls it?’*” (Mike, my emphasis)

Teachers and managers differ in their ‘feel for the game’ because of the perceived tensions between them and their colleagues but also within the ‘messiness’ between their own managing, vocational and teaching identities. These create pressures which may also play a part in preventing a sense of control in their roles:

“I do every weekend, most evenings and a lot of the time *we are on our knees*. It is, it is *really bad*. It just seems – it’s a constant battle, you finish one lot of marking, the next lot comes in...” (Julia, original emphasis)

“Functional Skills for example, now you cannot in one-and-a-half-hour [sessions] in the day, the week, the year, do prep’ properly, all those sessions – you *can’t* do it. You just *can’t* do it.” (Jennifer)

As seen in the quotes in this chapter there seemed an element of hopelessness in the narratives of the managers in the context of having any input into the managerial tasks they performed. Yet, with the exception of the quote above from Jennifer, there was little acknowledgement from these individuals of the high workload endured by their own staff which was an integral part of these managerial responsibilities.

### 3. Tensions and Conflict within the Professional Habitus

On a more positive note, personal examples of the motivation and intrinsic rewards of teaching formed a common part of the narratives from all the participants. Below is a quote from Jason's reflection on his original ambition to become a teacher:

"I always remember as a teenager, I always, I felt I'd really understood something if I could explain it to somebody else, that seemed to be what, almost I did without, I mean *without reading any theory books*, I just did that, I just stumbled across that, to be honest, I used to literally teach myself."

(Jason, my emphasis)

His habitus as a young man included an aspiration for his teacher-self. His sense of purpose or his 'essence' centred around him achieving his goal of professional teaching. He remembers that he was enacting the practice of deep level learning before he studied learning processes perhaps sharing Mike's view of himself as a 'natural teacher' in recognising his own innate knowledge of levels of understanding:

"Erm, I know it sounds really cheesy, but I would, you know, put a piece of cardboard up on my bedroom wall and I would teach myself the subject I was revising [...] and I thought, if I could do that, to that level, then I really understood that subject, so that, that's always worked for me..." (Jason)

In the quote above, Jason recalls how he embodied his teacher-self whilst simultaneously his student-self was 'learning'. In some ways this is an integral part of all teaching – attempting to have the perspective of the students. At that time, his young teacher-self held an aspiration for a future where he would have achieved a professional teacher identity. In the context of Jason's current mentoring approach towards his staff, this suggests some of the subtle nuances integral to our

professional habitus and potential reasons for tensions between his values and managerial strategies he feels he has to perform.

As I mentioned above and illustrated in the fictionalised texts, memories of teachers from our past can play a part in our perceptions and motivations for teaching and learning. In Chapter One I described how I remember feeling intimidated by a teacher from my childhood and how this unconsciously impacted on my learning. I drew on these emotions in Richard's story where he recalls a memory of Mr Bailey after seeing the old blackboard. Richard remembers how in that classroom, respect was seen as crucial and learning was about adhering to the rules. This contrasts with current interpretations of learning environments where respect for teachers must be earned - without being forceful or violent. Bourdieu would perhaps see an irony here as symbolic violence can sometimes be more hurtful than physical violence (Bourdieu, 1991).

A psychoanalytical lens can provide some depth of meaning to these emotions, through the concept of transitional phenomena. As I explained in Chapters Two and Four, a current relationship may carry echoes of a teacher/student relationship from the past. This may be because these relationships can carry an intrinsic fear of shame (of unknowing). For Richard the subject area of the lesson he observed was alien to his engineering background. Hence the managers' approach may serve to try to protect the self or 'ego' in that they feel they must adhere to the rules, or risk losing face or social capital (Mollon, 2002; Winnicott, 1971). This potentially hidden dynamic is an important consideration - especially in this current climate of job losses.



For some teachers there are perhaps situations where a past teacher is present and embodied in their *own* performance. In the case of the observation, this may be a part of what forms the expectation of their dispositions. For instance, I recall a skilled carpenter fitting new internal doors to my house. He explained how this was one of his ‘favourite jobs’, because it reminded him of reaching a level of competence in his apprenticeship many decades before. He described how he felt his (long retired) absent ‘master’ continued to watch him work in the present, ‘looking over his shoulder’, simultaneously but silently guiding, supervising and reminding him of what he had learned. In some ways then, like Jason, the carpenter was continually re-teaching himself, in the past and the present, illustrating how our different pasts exist also in our present and vice-versa, as aspiration, inspiration and memory. These are all elements of our professional habitus and integral to a deeper understanding of the emotions involved in observations.

**a. FE’s Constant “state of flux”: hope/lessness**

As I explained in Chapter One, the incorporation of FE has manifested many different problems through the tensions between the perceived measurability of teaching and learning processes and outcomes. The narratives highlighted some feelings of resentment between managers and their principals and other senior managers who may not be (perceived as) teachers. Indeed, often the management structure was divided by teaching experience and the perceived higher status of ‘commercial’ and business worlds<sup>61</sup>. The profound implications of this within the context of observations are explored below and in the conclusions in the following, final chapter. One example of this tension between the fields within the observers’

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<sup>61</sup> This perceived hierarchy carries echoes of the debates surround the binary divide between quantitative and qualitative research and objectivity versus subjectivity outlined in Chapter Two.

narratives is illustrated by Jennifer as she describes one of her staff approaching her to complain about the outcome to a particular observation:

“...one of my colleagues, observed a particular teacher in a classroom, you know and um, and one of the students came up and said - he's quite a good teacher – ‘and one the students was asleep, and so he got a 'Four' right away’, I thought I, well, you know, anyway, it turned out - and he did give him a ‘Four’- but he [the observed teacher] came back, and came to see me and said ‘What do I do? This student's got narcolepsy<sup>62</sup>, we did do our best to keep her awake and you could see, actually, it was sometime, if your eye's not on her all of the time, she will just *go [fall asleep]*.’ You know, so I said ‘OK’, the point is that, you know, there are always those situations where really, I like really to talk to people...” (Jennifer, original emphasis)

This supports the findings discussed earlier when Alex explained how her observer was apparently unaware of the symptoms of her medical condition which prevented her from seeing the students' faces clearly and this impacted on her teaching practice. This is in line with research by O'Leary (2012) which found that at times observers are unaware of the context of the classroom and shows how this factor impacts negatively upon the teacher's emotional experiences of observations.

Despite the challenges, there were excerpts from some of the narratives which provided hope for the future, both on a micro and macro level – for the individual and the institution as a whole. The longer-term possibility of being able to make positive changes to the managerial approach to the observation procedures are illustrated in the following quote:

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<sup>62</sup> A medical condition where the individual may fall asleep at any moment.

[...] so I can be more *developed* as an AP so that *we can develop* [...] permanently, [...] it means that if I jump through the hoops [...] we might have a bit more [support] behind us to [...] come up with some ideas....” (Mike)

Mike hoped that his own acts of strategic compliance with the *doxa* of his managerial role may result in positive changes to the observation procedures. He effectively feels caught between the fields. He has sympathy for his staff and would like to spend more time with them on their professional development but at the same time must appear to meet that balance between humanistic and professional approaches for his senior managers. Interestingly, in contrast to the narratives of the lecturers, in the observers’ narratives the wider setting of FE in relation to other public sector and educational sectors was often hinted-at, along with political views, for example when talking about the auditing systems and the difficulties of managing them, Jason commented:

“[...] and that’s still an issue, here, well I mean in education generally” (Jason)

For some, the professional autonomy that they sought was still not present in their managerial role, and that resulted in disappointment. Importantly, towards the end of this research I learned that Mike had resigned from his position to move overseas and take-up a new career. This illustrated how FE as a sector endures on-going struggles with staff retention, causing additional tensions on micro and macro levels:

“I think there are, you know, some areas certainly, have huge difficulty in keeping their staff or getting them, you know, staff, they’re not going to want their staff to go because if they get a ‘Grade Four’ and that’s a good reason *not* to give them a ‘Grade Four’ and not to give them a grade, you know, [that]

*truly reflects what they teach*, even if you don't really agree with the way that works, you know.” (Jennifer, my emphasis)

The interesting thing here is the paradox between Jennifer's perception of an observation being able to 'truly reflect' the quality of teaching, compared to her apparent preference for a more 'narrative' approach to the observation (described above). Arguably, this complex and at times contradictory argument perhaps further impacts on the 'state of flux' described above.

“...but again, its political in terms of, yeah, that's politics at director level basically, you know, there are all kinds of in-fighting going-on.” (Jennifer)

There was no doubt to me during the interviews that these comments were evidence of individuals: “Trying to behave ethically in a structurally unethical field” (Reay, 2012). In this increasingly marketised FE there is immense pressure to conform to practices which many fundamentally disagree with. Mike, for example (until he left) felt he had no choice but to go along with these policies because other more humanistic approaches just 'wouldn't wash' with upper management. There are strong parallels here with research by Colley (2007, 2012) described in Chapters One and Two. The anxiety described by many of these participants presented the perceived conflicts within their professional habitus; the psychic cost of these un/ethical choices.

As I described in Chapter Three, sometimes I used the documentation of the observation as a prompt during interviews. It was interesting to note how often this observation paperwork was perceived as a type of 'technician's charter' (Mike). For Helen and Jason too, the documents could be seen as a symbolic representation of the tensions I have described above:

“ [if only I could]...encourage a, a reflective learning-circle-type approach, where [...] it’s not where those hard facts, where’s those targets, the correlation between what you’re doing and what the increment grades are, and all that shit. That whole managerialist approach - it isn’t doing a lot of good.” (Mike).

The view was of this issue was echoed by Jennifer:

“[...] because we can’t see the point of grades, it upsets people, you know people have a nervous breakdown, go off sick for weeks at a time, you know, we have a certain...we know.” (Jennifer)

This comment is important. It implies that even though it may not be explicitly acknowledged by management, the potential harm that observations cause to her staff is directly contradictory to her own views.

#### **b. ‘A fish out of water’: feelings and identities**

Bourdieu used a metaphor of a ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992 p. 127) to illustrate how - for some - their roles within their fields and the impact of their habitus is positive and constructive. They do not feel the ‘water’ around them because they feel at home in the water (‘field’); there are little or no (perceived) tensions. Other than James’ narrative, there was little evidence that any of the participants could be interpreted as at ease within their environment. When a fish is ‘out of water’ the fluid and complex nature of the field, *doxa* and the individual’s professional habitus - like the ones I have illustrated here – are in constant conflict. This often leads individuals to feel like they do not belong, or that they are ‘fish out of water’, unable to carry on with their roles (as indeed, some participants later acted upon). There was a common theme from the narratives of the managers that involved words such as

'battling against' the rules that were laid down by the higher levels of the institutions hierarchy. These were battles that often the managers felt powerless to fight against, despite the issues conflicting with their own personal values and beliefs. This meant that their role and identity as manager felt '*uncomfortable to me*' as Jason put it. Like the suit that didn't fit Richard the observer in Chapter Six, his body did not belong to the restrictive practices of the managerial role he had taken on.

Reflecting Bourdieu's metaphor, when Mike referred to his previous career in banking he described feeling like a 'square peg in a round hole' and compared it unfavorably with teaching which he perceived as 'doing something worthwhile'. He explained how his childhood experience of learning was full of positive experiences with very supportive parents. However, despite him describing his current job as 'very rewarding', he told me that he doesn't 'fit' in FE and that he felt there is another role for him elsewhere. This could be interpreted as further evidence of the fluid nature of the emotional labour of FE staff creating a blurring of vocational/teaching identities, as I explained in Chapter Four and Five (Bathmaker, Avis, 2005; Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005; Lucas, 1996). For Helen and Julia, Mike and Jason their aspiration to be perceived as mentor (see section 2.d above) was an integral part of their professional habitus and formed an integral part of their coping mechanism. In short, they seemed to care deeply for the well-being of their staff and for their students. However they explained how they felt restricted in how this care could be articulated because of how that may be mis/interpreted as a 'weakness' by upper management.

The embodied performativity of the managers' role was seen by the participants as a means of 'jumping through the hoops'. The observation perhaps embodies managerialism to them and therefore is beyond the realms of being able to be

challenged. Picking-up on Mike's perception of teaching as 'doing something worthwhile' it is worth noting Jennifer's comments:

"[...] so when my children were old enough to go to school, I thought I'd better get back to work, you know, 'I've got to start *doing something. I've got to do something* [...] and that's all I intended to do. It was one of the tutors there persuaded me to apply for uni. Hadn't even occurred to me. [to go into teaching]" (Jennifer)

Like some of the lecturers described in Chapter Five, often the manager participants described how they 'fell into FE' - this was because their work circumstances had changed and they had re-thought their original career journey. In contrast to James' views, Jennifer, Mike, Jason, James and Anna seemed to respect teaching as a profession.

Managers articulated the frustration and sense of hopelessness at the constant changes in the *doxa*, in particular in the context of observations the controls over the perceived definition of subjectivity and validity in the 'number's game'. Mike's quote below provides a profound statement on his views of the connection between the macro field - in the way that FE may be perceived as a consistent victim of the 'continuous improvement' rhetoric - and the micro aspects of the field in which his everyday teaching and learning takes place:

"...when I can see how...FE is so, um...allows itself to be manipulated and um, by politics and government...and, and it's, you hit me *this* way and you hit me *that* way and without saying 'fuck off!' You know, don't interfere, et cetera and that trickles down to, also, to what we do here. You know, I despair when a very experienced, you know 'good' teacher said to me 'what form am I going

to use, Mike?' where do I have to put this?' and it has to be more than that. Surely to *God*. My question is 'do you differentiate?' forget where you put it, that's my view. [But] That won't wash up top." (Mike)

**c. Avoiding fear of shame by being 'top of the game'**

As I explained in the previous chapter, a fear of shame can for some play an important part in the formation of professional habitus. Not least because of learning experiences from our past which have taken on new meanings within a teaching and learning environment in the present. For some of the managers within this research, it seemed that the self was protected from possible fear of shame by entering into 'playing the numbers game' because otherwise they risked being shown-up by others:

"It's a stressful time, particularly when, [...] you have a *reputation*, when you've got, you know, your peers and I am, you know, a Senior Lecturer here, [...] we are expected to be *top of the game*, not only because you are an AP but because you are a teacher-trainer too and that element, er, just like, you feel that er, you are being you're a performer, you are being looked at by your peers, you don't want to, erm, *appear to be a fool* or to be seen as *lacking in an area*, you must cover all the bases, and it's stressful..." (Mike, my emphasis)

In addition to these pressures that are in some ways similar to those illustrated in the narratives from the teachers described in the previous chapter, there is also the element of the perceived professional identity of the manager's staff – as understandably this, in turn, may reflect upon the professional identity of the observer. Mike recalled his feelings of shame when he described himself as being



'exposed' in a meeting by his own managers. This was because, unbeknown to Mike, a staff member had been seen being late for his own lesson because he was busy photocopying whilst his students were queued-up waiting outside the classroom, waiting for the lesson to begin. Mike described this as 'anathema' - indicating the level of hatred leveled at those who Mike felt should not be entitled to recognition as a professional. The crucial component of this recollection here is how this strong emotion could potentially NOT overspill into Mike's later observational judgement of this teacher (perhaps unintentionally). Mike feels there is no excuse for this level of 'unprofessional behaviour' – that these people simply 'aren't worthy' of the professional role that he sees himself in and importantly one that he and others in this research shared an aspiration to join, perhaps because of its perceived high status. I return to the context of these views below.

As I explained in the previous chapter, the potentially traumatic impact on our well-being forces many of us to endeavour to preserve the self in difficult circumstances. Shame has a circular nature, we may carry shame at being ashamed and shame is felt in the body as a reaction to the previous feelings of shame (Winnicott, 1971). As I explained above, within the fictionalized account, I illustrated how Richard was reminded by the violence of the principal of the fear of shame caused by his Maths teacher Mr Bailey from his childhood: the shame at getting a question incorrect in class, which was re-enforced not only through an act of physical violence, but the acceptance by his mother that this physical violence was an appropriate action. The significance of a teacher throwing a board rubber at a student for answering incorrectly (or talking over him) was recalled in the narrative of Helen but resonated with my own childhood memories. It was a theme also present in the narrative of Alex. That fear of shame at others knowing about you 'not knowing' forms an intrinsic

part of the management of student/teacher relationships (Price, 2001). Hence the significance of including this incident within the fictionalized account for Richard. This situation creates a useful way of connecting the concept of power relationships within the field of FE with our professional habitus. In particular, it illustrates how an emotion connected to a significant individual from our past can be transferred symbolically to an Other (Mollon, 2002; Freeman, 2002). In similarities to the teachers in an observation, the experience of seeing the self as an object of the Other – specifically as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ manager to the principal, inevitably produces a vulnerability because of its potential impact on the managers’ professional habitus; the loss of social capital.

Importantly, there were many references within this research (from teachers and their managers) to difficulties experienced in college with practical issues like trying to print and copy adequate learning materials for students. Again this is something I experienced myself. Although not directly connected to the emotions surrounding observations, this issue does form an important part of the context. As I illustrated in the fictionalized account of Monica (Chapter Four), often staff are forced to print things at home at their own expense. Alternatively they may feel forced into exploiting a loop-hole in the system by, as I described, the actions of the fictional sessional lecturer Barry (Chapter Six), utilizing another departments’ printing equipment or photocopying password in order to obtain materials. Arguably, the professional habitus suffers when regularly faced with these kinds of moral dilemmas (Colley, 2006). The interesting thing here is that despite feeling shame because of being let down by the perceived unprofessional actions of some staff, Mike also felt that management had let *him* down – during a recent Ofsted inspection.

“Morale here is pretty poor because the Ofsted, when the college was inspected it got a ‘Three’. When teaching and learning got a grade ‘Two’. *It was management that brought the grade down*, like finance *et cetera*, so there was a lot of staff who were pissed off that the college ...when we are renowned for the teaching and learning...” (Mike, my emphasis)

In the fictionalized account, Richard did not engage in eye contact with Monica. This may have been because of fear of shame being reflected-back. As I explained in Chapter Two, shame is often recalling from others’ your own experiences. When recalling what Julia had described earlier as being ‘switched-on’ to the students’ needs, it is worthwhile returning to Sam’s metaphor of a band-leader within her field of musician (Chapter Five). Some instrumentalists confidently begin a phrase at the correct time - ‘come in’ - when the conductor gives them eye-contact. The conductor is a facilitator – providing an interpretation of a performance which is perhaps unarticulated. The silences and pauses in the music are what provides the depth of understanding from the audience. This understanding was apparently missing between the two characters in the fictionalized texts.

In contrast to the high value placed on teamwork and a collegiate workspace found in the teachers’ narratives, often managers experienced conflict with others. Some had experienced confrontations where they had not been supported in trying to change observation policies:

“I find you have people to agree and to support you in these situations [...] but that they *fade away into the background*. That is very common. And the other thing is, the college, erm, tends to sack people at the end of the Summer term, so that you’re [the staff] divided, you’re dispersed, *that first flush of*

*anger* would have gone away, by the time term starts again. (Helen, my emphasis).

This perception that the college management (of which ironically, like Julia, Helen is a member but simultaneously detaches herself from) deliberately manipulates the timing of the exit of a staff member so that any potential challenges about the issues or legalities surrounding the exit from other staff are avoided. The emotions swayed between hopelessness and strong passion for the job, as illustrated in this quote:

“[...] the principal - when he was here, slamming his fist, he was a bully he would slam his fist on the desk and saying to his deputy ‘what training are you putting in place to address what Ofsted are saying?’ I say ‘what the fuck are *you* doing to address your problems? Because teaching and learning ain't a problem.” (Mike)

The lack of support from others has been emphasized by the difficult economic climate which has put additional pressures on pay role budgets:

“...we go back [after a holiday] and you find out there are people [who have left the college] and we never know whether it's your people or what the reason is [for them leaving]. I think people won't stand-up now. They are less likely now to stand up than they ever were.” (Helen)

#### **d. “Letting it go”: surviving the conflict**

As I explained earlier, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) warn us that there is not necessarily a logic to behaviour and the examples I have provided show how this behaviour may result from complex options in improvisation or deviance. The dilemma caused by the conflicts in these different fields and values may help an

interpretation of some of the manager's perceived lack of agency or their detachment from their own role as managers:

"...the management here just don't care; it's all lip-service." (Helen)

And later:

"...what seems to be a great *gaping gash* here, a *gaping gash* in the system, is that we live in this [culture of] differentiation, equality and diversity, but it does *not* apply to staff. Not in any way whatsoever." (Helen, original emphasis)

Like Mike and Jason, Helen described how she came across difficult conflicts between her role (as teacher) and what she perceived as required of her in her role as manager, which at times she found impossible to cope with:

"...actually it was at *that* point that, after a year [in the management job] I thought, I felt terrible, I thought, 'what am I going to do'? I will have to leave. [but] You can't take on any of that, you have to let it drop away, or leave."  
(Helen)

Likewise, Julia admitted how she used to stand-up for what she believed was a morally right way to behave but is 'less likely' to now. This was apparently because of a number of staff who had been sacked.

As I explained in Chapters Two and Five, an individual's understanding of shame is often closely linked to a fear of repeating the same emotions that are remembered from a previous shameful experience. And although not seen as degradation ceremony (Garfinkel, 1956) *per se*, the inevitability of the negative emotions, coupled

with a perceived lack of agency to change the procedures was shared with managers such as Mike and Jason:

“Ofsted and the observation issue – I just think the whole thing’s stressful, just thinking about it is distressing.” (Julia)

Importantly, it seems she perceives that it’s the actual policies that she *enacts* that has the potential to ‘destroy people’ (see quote above) not the agent enacting them (herself).

#### **4. Conclusions**

In conclusion I have outlined above some of the common and diverging themes that emerged from the narratives of the observers. I have drawn on Bourdieu’s conceptual tools to illustrate how my interpretations of the narratives illuminated how the observers felt about observation. It seemed that often they felt forced to adhere to the observation procedures even though often these were in direct opposition to their own ethos and professional habitus. There were clues as to how managers’ past learning experiences and vocational careers impacted on the meanings they brought to their roles. I described how some of the vocational identities provided different perspectives for the managers when carrying out observations and how for some ‘playing the game’ of being a manager was more of a priority than being seen as a mentor to their staff. The tensions and hence the potential anxiety and frustrations described by the participants seem to be how individuals often felt they had little or no agency in changing these procedures. They were ‘caught-up’ in the fields. For some this led to them leaving the profession during the period of this study.

In the following chapter I draw together the analyses of the narratives within the context of the original research objectives and the literature review. I review the strengths and weaknesses of the research in terms of approach, theoretical framework, methodology and outcomes. I present recommendations in terms of new strategies or guidelines that could be adopted in observations for instance in ways that FE management could review their processes. I also recommend some possible avenues for further research in this area.

# Chapter Eight: Conclusions, Recommendations and Reflections

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## Summary of the Chapter

In this concluding chapter, I return to the objectives and original research questions of this study in light of the findings, theoretical lens and research methodology.

Outcomes from this study broadly support the findings of the limited existing research in this area that I outlined in Chapter One (Boocock, 2012; James, Biesta 2007; O'Leary 2013; Robson 2005). This is despite the profound conceptual differences in the theoretical frameworks and methodologies in these studies - thus emphasising their importance. Outcomes presented here provide additional contributions to existing knowledge by exploring the micro and macro contexts of the performativity of the emotional labour of FE staff within observations.

This research also provides new knowledge by my use of innovative methodologies to create interpretations of the narratives of FE staff. This has illuminated some of the complex tensions involved when FE staff reflected on their experiences before, during and after lesson observations. Specifically, it highlights aspects of the professional habitus of FE staff, and the potential impact upon the emotional labour of teaching and learning practice. The interpretive interactionist conceptual framework and the methodology of fictionalising the narratives highlights potential inner meanings and opportunities for valuable reflections for the participants and myself. After outlining the implications of these outcomes for policy and practice, I turn to the extent to which this study was effective in addressing the objectives. Reflecting back to the original research questions, I also outline the outcomes, weaknesses and limitations of this research, in terms of the content and methods, along with my recommendations for future research in this area and its relevance to policy and practice. Finally, I reflect on the interview process, my personal learning

journey and how my experiences may impact on my own research and teaching and learning practices.

## **Overview of this study**

Writers such as James and Biesta (2007) and Avis (2002) point out how FE is a particularly under-researched area of the educational sectors in England and indeed there are similar situations in tertiary education sectors further afield (e.g. Hastings, 2008). Empirical data about the backgrounds, qualifications and experience of FE staff in England is difficult to obtain (James, Biesta, 2007) making much of what happens at 'grass roots' level in FE hidden from wider public or political view. Indeed, researchers like Colley et al (2007) illustrate how research centred on the lived biographies, interactions and emotional experiences of FE staff is particularly sparse. Hence my intention was to in some way begin to address this imbalance.

I outlined in Chapter One some of the socio-political circumstances in which FE staff exist and how this impacts on processes of what has been termed 'new managerialism', including observations (Avis 1996, Randle, Brady, 1997). Indeed, as I illustrated, there is a common theme of academic research in this area, which highlights the perceived lack of autonomy that FE staff have endured alongside political rhetoric and assessment strategies which have evolved from an era of 'deprofessionalisation' (Gleeson, Davies et al., 2005; Jeffrey, Woods, 1996).

Throughout this study these issues have formed an intrinsic part of the narratives of the participants. Debates which surround issues of the emotional labour integral to professional identities have included comparisons between observation strategies which are defined as either 'expansive' or 'restrictive' with FE staff involved in these

strategies identified as being 'resilient' or 'compliant' (O'Leary, 2013). These perspectives, although valuable, do not address the intrinsic, innately private nature of the emotional labour of teaching and learning or the complexities which arise from these potential tensions.

Coffield commented that "just because we feel we cannot answer these profound questions, doesn't mean we should ignore them" (Coffield, 2000 p. 55). Thus, I sought, in this study, to specifically address the personal nature of the emotional experiences of staff involved in observations, the rationale for which was firmly centred on questioning the 'why' and 'how' of the reportedly 'inauthentic' nature of the emotional labour or 'performativity' of observations (O'Leary, 2012; Page, 2012). This focus was something that was missing from the academic literature in this area and reasons for this are unclear, especially in the context of the expanse of literature and debate about the emotional aspects of learning for students (Ecclestone, Hayes et al., 2005; Ecclestone, Hayes, 2008). The processes, data and outcomes from this study has helped to begin to address this gap, and hopes to inspire and encourage further debate and investigations into this area.

As I explained in detail in the Introduction and in Chapter One of this thesis, research has suggested how processes surrounding observations are ineffective and for some, filled with anxiety (O'Leary, 2012; Robson, 2005; Page, 2010). In this research, I did *not* set out to re/examine or evaluate the perceived 'effectiveness' of observations, their apparent objective to obtain or improve 'best practice' nor to provide generalizable assumptions about observations in different contexts. Neither did I claim one way of engaging in observations was 'better' than another. The study of professional identity has (I explain below) provided some valuable avenues for past and future study in this area, which although relevant, were largely outside the

scope and objectives of this study. Instead, the subject of my investigation was centred on the 'how' of the *processes* within the *emotional labour and emotional experiences* of FE staff involved with observations. I aimed to combine these factors to gain insights into the often unarticulated tensions in the performativity of the emotional labour within observations. In short, it was a psychosocial study of micro-level emotions, set within socio-political contexts. Overall the study was successful in gaining insights of the emotional experiences from FE staff and I summarise below the main outcomes that have been explored in the previous chapters.

## **1. Implications of the Research Outcomes for Policy and Practice**

This study has served to demystify some of the emotional experiences of FE staff and provide new ways of understanding the complex nuances of teaching and learning in FE, within the context of observations. I have shown how, for complex reasons - in an interplay of micro and macro elements of the fields - the presence of an observer fundamentally alters the dynamic of a classroom. This is because the observer embodies a witness to an unarticulated personal act which paradoxically is not measurable, nor perceived as of great value. Even though (or perhaps because) the art of emotional labour involved in teaching is widely acknowledged as being difficult to 'capture' or define, it remains largely outside an area for debate or reflection within the current policies of observations. Instead, the consequences of using a type of crude behaviourism in many observations can unintentionally undermine the value of the inherent 'underground' nature of teaching and learning in FE and consequently the self-esteem of the staff involved.

The outcomes from this research for policy and practice are twofold: Firstly, it appears that interpretations of FE staff of their own perceived 'inauthenticity' in their performativity may be the factor contributing to the emotional anxiety that surrounds some observation procedures – *not* the performativity itself. This is because teachers in this study described the impact of being simultaneously aware of their (in/authentic) teaching self and of the observer and their perceived lack of choice in adhering to the *doxa*. Some managers apparently saw the endurance and 'management' of the potential anxieties within the observation process as an 'inauthentic' performance whilst nonetheless being an intrinsic part of (assessing) their teaching. This has serious implications for the way that reflexivity is approached in teaching and learning practice. Indeed, it draws into question the way we see and reflect on our own 'authentic' (teaching) selves differently and how this may change over time.

Secondly, that the innovative methodology adopted in this research study could empower FE staff to explore and share their professional habitus, through the use of creative non-fiction, and/or the use of metaphors/images. Encouraging teachers to become researchers could provide a way of creating conversations about emotional experiences of observations and teaching and learning more generally – conversations that are currently largely absent.

This new knowledge outlines the need for a more sensitive and nuanced approach to observations in FE. Whilst I fully acknowledge the requirement for an element of explicit 'evidence' of teaching skills during an observation, this should not rule out the inclusion of our humanness. This study demonstrates a need for a more holistic approach. A deeper understanding of the inherent hidden or 'underground' aspects to teaching and learning is required, aspects of the context that are unique to all the

individuals involved and that by definition cannot (and arguably should not) be subjected to arbitrary assessment strategies like those commonly utilised by the FE colleges involved in this study. I agree with O’Leary (2013) in that a moratorium needs to be immediately implemented on all FE observation procedures whilst a crucial review takes place that allows FE staff to debate the form these strategies take, in relation to the unique contexts in which they take place. In line with Cockburn’s recommendation (2005) observations in the future should be conducted without the close connection between a graded assessment outcome and externally observable classroom factors. The processes and outcomes of this research supports previous studies of the potential harm to FE staff caused by the complex pressures of some current observation policies. In contrast to this, this study has demonstrated how beneficial it could be for FE staff (and their students) to have the space to identify and openly examine the issues around the perceived performativity of teaching and learning. By disconnecting the processes of observation from crude behaviourist interpretations of it as purely audit-orientated rather than developmental, there can be a shared understanding of teaching and learning skills and practice. Thereby, significant opportunities are created for reflection and dialogue in different education sectors – not only about observations *per se*, but broader debates about how and what constitutes ‘best practice’ and who defines these terms. The outcomes from this research can therefore contribute towards guidelines for practical steps for policies of observations in FE. In turn, these could improve pedagogical practice through the increased awareness of elements that may impact on reflexivity in observations in FE, with wider implications across other educational institutions.

In Section 2 of this chapter, I explore these two main outcomes in more depth. First however, I return to each of my four original research questions outlined in the Introduction and explain how the analysis and the fictionalised data contributed to my interpretation of some possible answers – and indeed to further potential areas of inquiry in this context.

**a. Research Question One:**

**What are the lived emotional experiences of FE staff within observations?**

In light of my review of the literature in Chapter One, there was some evidence to suggest that there are reports of anxiety and stress that surround the policies and procedures of observations. Importantly, all the staff I interviewed reported their college used a numerical graded observation policy. The narratives largely supported the existing research - with a broad range of attitudes towards these pressures – as one would expect. Significantly, there were two main factors which emerged from the descriptions and reflections on the emotional experiences of the participants. These were found in the perceived tension between what an individual ‘felt’ to be right - the *definitions and values* of the *emotional labour* during an observation - and what they perceived as required of them by management. Often, it seemed there were simultaneously different perceived as ‘performativity’ or ‘authenticity’ - which could not necessarily be reduced to one or other of these binary definitions. They were contradictory. This emphasises the weaknesses of definitions that have previously been used to explain some FE staff’s attitudes towards performativity, such as ‘resistant’ or ‘compliant’. At different times in different ways there were sometimes subtle, hidden elements within the data which illustrated how some FE staff performed what seemed to be in line with their own conceptualisation of a ‘good teacher’ or a ‘good manager’ whilst also complying with criteria set out by

others. Further, as I described in the previous chapters, there were tensions between these identities; what was seen by (the self or others) did not necessarily match-up to personal expectations. This was illustrated by participants such as Sam and Brian who described how they did not feel they were self-confident enough to be 'good teachers' however they felt they *were* effective 'facilitators' of learning. In line with similar research in the sector and with other participants interviewed for this study, these participants emphasised the private importance of their students' progress – academic and personal. The criteria of an observation was effectively seen as a 'hoop to jump through' in order to return to their 'everyday' facilitator role and the subsequent sense of reward that emerged from it.

The processes of the performativity in passing in/through these observation spaces - for some - appeared to conflict strongly with their professional habitus. Aspects of their performativity seem to go against some teachers' moral principles in that it was *perceived by them* to be embodied by an 'inauthentic' self. Their interpretation of their own 'inauthenticity' in their performativity was the issue that some participants articulated as contributing to the emotional anxiety – *not* the performativity itself. This was particularly evident in the narratives of Grace and Alex in how they described being simultaneously aware of their teaching self and of the observer. To emphasise this point, for some managers, it seemed they needed their staff to endure the potential anxieties within the observation process as this 'inauthentic' performance was seen as an intrinsic part of (assessing) teaching. This was despite this approach being contrary to the personal values described in some narratives - as explained in the previous chapter. This has implications for the way that reflexivity is approached in teaching and learning practice in the potential value of exploring the way we see our own 'authentic' (teaching) self differently and how this may change over time.



With this in mind, contrary to my initial thoughts when beginning this research, the narratives provided evidence that there was not necessarily an 'either/or' in terms of teachers' anxiety in observations and those who have a more pragmatic approach. Often within the same narratives participants described (either through their own reflections on memories and/or from witnessing others) many different attitudes and emotional experiences. These could be described as being on continuum of changing situations where - in different times and spaces - FE staff in varying degrees, sought to overcome their 'moral' principles in order to choose to 'perform' or struggled against these tensions. This supports research from other social contexts which suggests emotional labour has a more fluid nature than that described by Hochschild (1983). Likewise that it is not helpful to view socio-political and individual emotional experiences as opposing micro/macro elements of observations. Rather than in opposition to each other, this study has shown how these contexts are intrinsically interconnected. For instance, if staff feel forced to use their personal time and money printing learning materials for their students, resentment inevitably builds between those staff and SMTs who are perceived to have power over budgetary restraints. Hence interactionist theories are extremely valuable here as they attempt to read these emotional experiences within relational contexts.

The 'one size fits all' approach embedded in observations - driven by (often unquestioned) interpretations of the Ofsted criteria - seemed to restrict staff development by making them feel penalised if they were truthful about the perceived realities of their roles. Hence the emotions of fear of shame featured heavily in the narratives alongside descriptions of anxiety and stress. As I have explained, it is important to note the circular nature of emotions that are wrapped-up in feelings of

fear of shame; often these have historical connections with our own learning experiences, as the analysis of the narratives and the fictionalised texts illustrate. The relationship between the *doxa* of different social spaces or fields held symbolic meanings for some of the participants, for example in Alex's description of her memory of her past teachers' chair and the emotional connections to her childhood. For her, it seemed her teacher identity bore strong links not only to the importance of a single adult who supported her through a difficult childhood, but also was representative of the challenges she had overcome throughout her learning journey as a nurse and then a mature student. The emotional elements of the anxiety Alex experienced seemed to be a result of the conflict between perceptions of personal versus institutional needs being often left unarticulated and therefore perceived as worthless, despite these issues forming an intrinsic part of a teachers' pedagogic approach.

The narratives illustrated the striking physical realities of the emotional impact of observations in everyday teaching practice which for some caused intense anxiety and stress. Bourdieu's term 'symbolic violence' is perhaps misleading because as Halas (2004) comments there is nothing 'symbolic' about anxiety which (as Alex and Julia described) manifests itself in being physically sick, having diarrhoea or a crashing a car. But staff coped in different ways toward the threat of this symbolic violence; Naima apparently waited until she got home to let out feelings to her husband, Sally described how she 'closed down', whilst Alex broke down in the staff room which had implications for her 'losing face' among her peers. These coping strategies had different consequences for each of these individuals in terms of trajectories. Naima was focused on achieving her career in teaching and the perceived social capital that promised for her family's financial stability. Whereas for

Sally and Alex, there seemed to be less emphasis on 'saving face' and more on the potential impact on their students' progress.

Some of the observer-participants explained how they created coping strategies in observations; simultaneously 'adhering' to the *doxa* of the observation policies (e.g. the perceived objectivity) whilst also trying to address the developmental needs (professional habitus) of their staff. Mike and Julia explained how they recognised (or remembered) how they *themselves* feel when they are being observed and how they addressed their perception of the needs of their staff into their own approach.

However they seemed to perceive that this would be construed by others as a 'weakness' in their managerial style; hence they explained how their humanistic approach was often 'hidden' from any official observation paperwork, lest the outcomes are perceived by their superiors as 'less rigorous' or 'invalid'. This view is perhaps understandable when close relationships and rapport between staff/students (and therefore staff/staff) are voiced by senior managers like James as being 'old fashioned' or 'dangerous'. James sees himself as the embodiment of the *doxa* – he articulates it and thereby he gives meaning to his staff adhering to the *doxa* (Halas, 2004). He legitimatises its meaning and hence it is accepted by his social (teaching) group as a social reality in the institution. This collective action is given life - the 'fiction' through a process of "performative magic" becomes unquestionable (Bourdieu, 1991 p. 106). Hence the graded system of labelling teachers as either 'good' or 'bad' is maintained and the emotional experiences continue, largely unquestioned.

#### **b. Research Question Two:**

**Research suggests that observations are ineffective because there is an inherent 'performativity' (O'Leary, 2012). What contributes towards**

### **interpretations of meanings of this ‘performativity’ for FE staff within observations?**

As I explained in Chapter One, observations could be defined as an idealised expression of managerialist strategies; pressure to perform pre-prescribed externally observable, pedagogical behaviours; characteristics of which are often not open for discussion with FE staff. Hence observations are often viewed as ‘punitive’. Some of the reasons for this are outlined above in the findings to the first Research Question. However, the inherent performativity in observations forms part of a larger government agenda – played out by bodies such as Ofsted – in obtaining performance outcomes through procedures that seek arbitrary measurable statistics (Ball, 2003; Robson, 2005; O’Leary, 2012). Importantly, my interpretation of the narratives illustrates how some of the participants apparently absorbed the binary definitions frequently used in managerial policies, often without questioning their underlying assumptions (Coffield, Edward, 2009).

The pressures of performativity seemed to prevent FE staff (both teachers and observers) engaging in playfulness or improvisation in observations despite (or perhaps because of) these ‘unmeasurable’ behaviours being perceived as part of a teachers’ innate professional habitus. Indeed, both James and Julia appeared to see playfulness as ‘deviant’ or ‘invalid’ in that the performativity involved in the strict adherence to the *doxa* of the observation was an integral part of a teachers’ role. Undoubtedly, the complexities inherent in trying to measure employees’ competence occur in sectors other than teaching, but this doesn’t mean it should be covered-up or left uninvestigated. Outcomes from this research, supports findings from James and Wahlberg (2007) who suggest that FE staff do not feel able to break-away from

a performativity culture which discourages creativity and has a potentially harmful impact on learning for staff and students.

Elements that contributed to understandings of the performativity in an observation could be divided into three main areas:

- **The approach of the observer.** As I explained, this varied in nature and because it was sometimes seen as 'hidden' the narratives may not have provided a full picture. There was also the aspect of what was *not* articulated but still inferred. In the narrative of Anna, the 'frowny expression' on her observer's face made her feel 'really uncomfortable'. It was the perceived judgmental attitude of the observer that appeared to negatively impact upon Anna's memory of her performativity during the lesson, thus causing her anxiety. Discussion with the observer may be beneficial for learning in that it provides an opportunity 'off stage' to formulate questions and consolidate learning.
- **Colleagues/peers.** For some staff the support of colleagues was integral to their role (e.g. Julia and Helen), whereas for others, their role was more isolating (Alex, Naima). In terms of the potential for shame if the observation was viewed as 'unsuccessful' a teacher may suffer as a result of the stigma attached to the graded outcome. This was further embedded when some of the managers referred to their staff collectively by the numerical grade they had been awarded.
- **Personal and Institutional Contexts.** The achievements that staff had accrued during their careers understandably featured strongly in the narratives of all the staff interviewed. There was a paradoxical aspect to this

issue because despite the intrinsic value placed on qualifications and experience within the educational institutions, these staff achievements seemed largely unacknowledged. Yet, for Julia her vocational experience in childcare was integral to her professional approach and likewise for James in the catering industry.

I explain these issues in more depth in the Section 2 of this final chapter (below).

**c. Research Question Three:**

**To what extent might personal learning experiences and biographies of the FE staff involved in this research contribute to better understandings of the emotions involved in an observation?**

This research illustrated how Bourdieu's concept of habitus is indeed valuable in providing insights into the *professional habitus* of FE staff. In particular, how this forms a crucial aspect of individual conceptualisations of their own and others' teaching/learning. The narratives suggested how memories of personal teaching and learning experiences can contribute a symbolic representation of interpretations of the performativity involved in an observation. This perspective is arguably more than a set of priorities based on a vocational identity as described by Bathmaker (2005) or the 'blurring of roles' described by Lucas (1996) and James and Gleeson (2007). As I explained in the previous chapter, senior manager James had a background in a commercial kitchen as a chef (later as food lecturer). The nature of cooking (in terms of clearly-defined health and hygiene laws, open-plan kitchens, presentation and provenance of the food etc) could be argued to have influenced his view that *all* teaching and learning should similarly be 'transparent' in nature. His professional habitus conflicted powerfully against the more personal nature of teaching and learning held by teachers like Grace who embodied a caring approach from years as

a physiotherapist. Teachers Grace and Alex shared views with managers Julia and Mike that teaching and learning was uniquely intimate and personal. In line with perspectives from researchers of adult learners such as Knowles, Merrill and West (1985, 1999, 1996) for them, adult learning was much more than accumulating knowledge; building trusting relationships and supporting students personally as well as academically was equally (if not more) important. Had these staff members been working at the same institution, I imagine an observation involving them would potentially have been more developmental than the stressful observations they had described as experiencing at their current colleges.

Bourdieu explained how habitus does not act on its own – it occurs within the field(s) where *doxa* and social hierarchies pre-exist because of historical contexts (Bourdieu, 1991). In the context of this study, this view connects the micro with the macro - the political-economic - with the psychosocial concepts; more specifically by drawing on Bourdieu's constructivist theoretical concepts with elements of object relations psychoanalysis. Some have suggested (e.g. Halas, 2001) that these theoretical approaches lead to outcomes that are deterministic in nature, focusing on the pressures of social constraints over agentic power. However, the narrative exemplars drawn upon in the analysis of this study, suggest that these strong emotions are present *because* of these conflicts i.e. in the struggle between the expectations of self and others in the performativity of the different roles. The persistent presence of tensions between the artificial binaries of terminologies like 'good' or 'inadequate' teacher, re/create themselves repeatedly. By its very nature, even though it is often left unarticulated, conflicting perspectives exist between the continued deprofessionalisation of FE staff with the personal values inherent in teaching and learning.

Symbolic violence is hurtful to the self because of the cultural context of the institutionalised *doxa* of the field. Instincts may provide protection for the ego, for instance in maintaining the title associated with power or 'jumping through the hoops' associated with assessment procedures. Importantly because of the taken-for-granted nature of many of these policies, sometimes it is only when/if an individual uses their agency to stand up against this potential symbolic violence that it becomes visible to others (Butler, 1997). However this relatively small-scale study illustrated how there seemed little (if any) opportunity for these tensions to be articulated – even for the managers.

Some FE staff in my research described memories of their fear of teachers from their childhoods. Indeed Sam and Helen seemed to have in some ways absorbed this into their own ways of managing their emotions in observations; by being 'detached' from their perception of their 'authentic' selves. Other participants viewed teachers from their past with a sense of 'awe' (Mike, James, Jim, Jennifer) but went on to describe feelings of disillusionment upon later joining the profession. It could be possible that their disdain - for instance when James and Mike describe some staff members as 'unprofessional' for being late for lessons - causes some resentment towards their former (naïve) selves? Might this be a reason why Mike in particular feels apparently unable to articulate his disagreement with the 'dehumanising' observation procedures at his college? The different approaches between Mike and James are intriguing and this area has potential for further exploration.

The character Richard in the fictionalised text moves away from the anxiety he felt being bullied by the principal about his own department's performance, to performing the required policy of the observation anyway. I interpreted his own professional habitus as being embodied in a way he could methodically approach a mechanical



problem and overcome it (from his engineering background). Could he therefore see this observation policy as another diagnostic method – one integral to him maintaining his educational management role? This caused anxiety for Richard, as described by managers like Julia “we don’t want people coming out [of the observation] feeling less than who they are”. This was in contrast to the James’ detached view of his role in the observation processes, although the extent to which this part of his narrative was itself a performance for my interview was unclear.

#### **d. Research Question Four:**

##### **How might these issues be addressed in order to improve teaching and learning in FE?**

It is appropriate at this point to stop and reflect on the ‘so what?’ question - in light of these initial findings. This research illuminates the emotional experiences of FE staff involved in observation which I have illustrated have profound effects on everyday teaching practice. The potential for feelings of shame and humiliation in the interactions within and outside the observation had parallels to a symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984) or the Symbolic Interactions ‘degradation ceremony’ (Garfinkel 1956). This could be viewed as paradoxical when we consider the continual encouragement from bodies such as the IfL toward the practice of ‘reflexivity’ in teaching and learning (IfL, 2013).

The ‘hidden curriculum’ has become a common term in discussions regarding the emotional aspects of children’s education (Dunlop, 1984). However since Knowles (1985) commented on these unarticulated aspects within adult education forums, it has arguably remained missing from FE teachers’ professional development, despite the increasing use of terms like ‘reflective practice’ of which emotions must inevitably form an integral part. Emotions have been viewed traditionally as particular types of

experiences, or habitus in that they are connected to, but not entirely cognitive functions. Teachers' and managers' perceptions of their own identities are fluid and hold their own validity for difficult complex personal and sometimes seemingly 'irrational' meanings. Alex's description of the significance of her teacher's chair is illustrative of this. Likewise, the potential for tension between views of glazed 'corporate' classrooms versus the more 'intimate' nature of some teachers' professional habitus. Often my participants would comment after the interviews how valuable it was for them to share these reflections. Hence talking about these emotions in *itself* potentially holds a valuable key to the reflexive nature of teaching practice and the wider benefits to the individuals themselves. Alex was amused at her colleague's act of deviance in the graffiti on the photos of the SMT (described by the feelings of Richard the manager in the fictionalised text) (was it actually her own act of defiance?). This defence mechanism was an attempt to hide the potential fear of shame. Richard did not see it as this and felt angry at what he perceived as 'immature behaviour'. Importantly, there was evidence that suggested morale was improved by a sense of camaraderie that existed for some participants. Most notably workplace humour often crossed the boundaries between performativity and forms of its (perceived) assessment (Boyd and Bolton, 2013). In this way, the posters that were defaced supported the view that staff created coping mechanisms for dealing with stress in light of what they perceived as observation processes that were outside their control. This accentuated the tensions between the SMT and teaching staff at the fictionalised college – yet paradoxically, these feelings remained unarticulated, arguably *because* of the strong emotions the 'deviance' produced.

Lecturers are commonly assumed to be the main agents of change in FE, however, supporting research by James and Biesta, (1997) and James and Wahlberg (2007)

this research has shown that *not only* do these lecturers feel that they do not have the power to change policy and practice within their colleges, but neither do their managers. The outside pressures appear to be perceived as so damaging that this contributes towards blame being laid at the doors of others – e.g. the principal, sessional teachers, individuals, consultants etc. Without the opportunities for change it is already too late for some, many of my participants (seven of the fourteen participants) have left the profession since taking part in this study.

In many of the narratives there was a strong theme of disillusionment with the teaching profession and generally a feeling of low morale. This was the case for managers and teachers alike and something that I highlighted in the analysis and the fictionalised stories of Richard and Monica. Participants largely welcomed the opportunity to articulate how they perceived the regimes of audit and inspection that formed part of their everyday lives created feelings of frustration at being unable to facilitate their students' learning effectively. These feelings were further exacerbated by reduced resources - increasingly an issue for colleges in the current economic climate. Although these issues could be argued to be largely unavoidable, these narratives portray the importance of feelings which emanate from inadequate time and space for self-development and a perception of lack of autonomy inherent in the paradox of professionalism (Gleeson, James, 2007). The potential impact of the emotions of the staff upon these individuals' health and wellbeing and in turn their students learning should not be underestimated.

The narratives provided support that managers were often involved with teaching, yet appear to be dislocated from the day-to-day practices and 'underground learning' that other teaching (including sessional staff) were involved with. In particular, the interview with James provided evidence of a different kind of emotional labour – one

that was wholly bound to his institution's position with the Ofsted hierarchy and his own career-path. These very different views between managers and teaching staff often create significant emotional tensions which would otherwise be open spaces for valuable debate around what individual's conceptualisations of 'best practice' and how an observation could be a reflective tool (rather than being perceived by some as a bureaucratic and punitive managerialist strategy).

Like the methodology used in this research, this study has explored the diverse emotional experiences connected to the values and beliefs inherent in the professional habitus of the participants. Use of fictionalisation could be a valuable way of encouraging shared reflection upon perspectives and experiences of observations. Metaphors could also be a particularly valuable method of exploring the emotions of our different approaches to teaching and learning.

## **2. Summary of Findings**

The future for FE looks uncertain. Many funding sources have recently been dramatically redefined and re-structured. Many students who may have ordinarily have enrolled (onto virtually any course) in FE will now be forced to think more carefully about the potential financial implications of their studies. Also, in an unexpected turn, FE could see a resurgence in younger students enrolling straight from school as funding for A level provision in schools is substantially reduced (rather than FE funding increased) (Mourant, 2010). The international economic recession and the increased youth unemployment which coexists with it, also presents additional challenges for FE staff and institutions as a whole when funds are stretched to cope with additional intake.

With the above in mind, it is appropriate to quote Leathwood (1998) (quoted in Hyland, Merrill 2003), who suggests that it is irrational to think that any learning will flourish in an atmosphere that is without “excitement, enthusiasm and passion”. Indeed, as I have written elsewhere, the importance of the emotional and social atmosphere of learning - both for the teacher and the learner – is often underrated (Edgington, 2008). One of the common themes from research with lecturers in FE illustrates low levels of self-esteem and the negative impact of managerial policies like observations on self-identity (e.g. O’Leary, 2011). Because of the emotional nature of these issues, the theoretical perspectives explained above serve to illuminate these issues more clearly in allowing new and relevant interpretations in the hope that those with the power to change these policies will take note.

#### **a. Performativity & Embodied Emotional Labour**

Many staff – teaching staff and managers – acknowledged in the narratives the intrinsic performativity of their roles. But the performativity was heavily linked to the limitations of the ‘measureable’ embodied emotional labour outlined via the prescriptive observation criteria. This criterion is perceived as created and driven by Ofsted. In contrast to the findings of Smith and Swift (2012), some of the narratives seemed to perceive their emotional labour (within and outside an observation) lacked ‘value’ to others. This lack of self-esteem and perceived agency to change policy has been shown to impact negatively on teachers’ exercising their professional judgement on a day-to-day basis (Nixon et al., 2008). As I explained in Chapter One it was ten years ago that Ball (2003) effectively argued how FE staff did not feel valued as individuals or professionals. Outcomes from this research suggest that for some FE staff, little has changed in the past decade.

The observation policies described by the participants in this research indicated that rather than a “fellow social interactant” (Bolton, Boyd, 2003 p. 299), the observer of the emotional labour in the observed classroom is *perceived* by many teachers as customer – with needs that are fundamentally different to the students’ needs. Hence the embodied emotional labour of an observation carries a very particular type of performativity; a performativity that is driven by the artificial dichotomous terminologies of managerialism/Ofsted which runs contrary to perceptions of ‘everyday’ teaching practice. For some, perhaps particularly those who have come from a service-sector vocational background (e.g. Alex and Grace), their professional habitus is firmly based in the context of caring and nurturing rather than explicit, measureable outcomes driven by artificial statistics. I argue that it is *this* that is potentially the source of the tension and anxiety. i.e. the observation emphasises the ‘lack of room’ for ‘therapeutic’ approach to teaching which, by its very nature, is unmeasurable and therefore not viewed as valid or valued. It has been suggested that the novelty of the FE classroom (for some teachers and students) was the lack of managerial presence (Clow, 2001); hence the importance of the difference in dynamics in an observation. Those engaged in emotional labour can often “manipulate and implement the managerially-prescribed rules of engagement (within the constraints)” (Bolton, Boyd, 2003 p. 303) whereas in an observation environment, this is perceived as largely ‘off limits’ and therefore forced ‘underground’ (James, Diment, 2003).

Rather than a pre-prescribed managerial role, the narratives reaffirmed research that suggests the emotional labour in FE teaching is largely seen as a ‘gift’ to the students; it is the embodiment of a private commitment to the personal and academic development of their students (Colley, 2006). Wrapped-up in this context

is the (personal) significance (to the teacher) of the potential wider benefits that education can offer. That is why the presence of an observer sometimes changes everything – the observer embodies a witness to an unarticulated personal act which paradoxically is not measurable, nor perceived as valuable. Thus there is no divide between the micro/macro dynamics of emotional labour – teaching involves a fuzzy multidimensional fluid concept of emotional labour, something which this research attempts to provide some insights towards understanding.

As I explained in Chapter One, emotional labour is a controversial concept with many different interpretations. The performativity aspect hinges on the extent to which individuals perceive they “act out their role obligations without ever ‘buying-in’ to the set of norms set by the company [institution]” (Bolton, Boyd, 2003 p. 299).

However this research supports the view that there could be a more ‘multi-dimensional’ view of emotional labour (Ashman, 2008). Indeed here I have taken it a step further by introducing a psychosocial theoretical framework that helps illuminate these complex emotions. This supports work by Sallaz (2010); emotion work significantly differs in the ways it is defined (explicitly or implicitly) and conceptualised between individuals and perhaps between managers and their staff. Further research is needed then, in this area, particularly in the under-researched area of FE teaching and learning.

As I have explained, within an observation, the observer is perceived to play the part of what Goffman termed “training specialist” (Goffman, 1959 p. 157). Even for the well-experienced teacher (or perhaps even more so), the presence of this individual may *symbolically* represent an individual from his or her past (real or imagined), perhaps their teacher educator or another individual, who may have played a similar role (Butler, 1997; Winnicott, 1971). The crucial aspect of the observation for the

teacher then, could be the inherent deficit model or an 'asymmetric' relationship (O'Leary, 2012). Hence the space in which this happens is also significant, as it could be interpreted as symbolic to an individual's past identity, for example as a (failed) student or a 'good' teacher. Importantly, this 'other' may carry uncomfortable echoes for the teacher 'performer' as a *becoming* but also *repressed* self (Butler, 1990). With this in mind, this research has suggested how for some these perspectives could be valuable in illuminating interactions and the emotions that surround observations.

Thus the outcomes from this research support the view that for some, an observation is a reminder of a past identity: there is a self who was previously embarrassed at their own incompetencies and may have lacked the confidence that brought the freedom of playfulness or improvisation within their role. This "vivid image of a clumsy self" (Goffman, 1959 p. 157), can also be understood as a concept which may develop into a sense of shamefulness, simply because it is (unwillingly) shared with and (mis)interpreted by others (Denzin, 1989). Indeed, this becomes evident as a broad theme within the narratives reported here. Some of the teachers reported feeling a fear of the potential shame of being labelled as an 'unsatisfactory' teacher and similarly for the managers as not living up to others' expectations as being 'top of their game'. Research has suggested that this mis/understanding is especially relevant when no substantive dialogue is present and therefore there is no opportunity for formative feedback (O'Leary, 2011). This may explain why individuals with mentoring roles provided for teachers are not always effective: i.e. if they physically, consciously or unconsciously, were people who 'knew them when...' they perceived themselves to be not fully competent (Mollon, 2002).



But as the writer Pinter radically illustrated what's important about a (performed) conversation are the silences. Elements of our language can be seen to dictate and reproduce socially constructed arbitrary binaries which force us to think of differences between objects/emotions rather than their fluid complex nature (Grenfell, James, 1998). In the silences lay the fuzziness between the actors' various identities and the audiences' recognition of the perceived 'authenticity' of the performance. Just like in teaching when a passion for a subject and in learning itself may be contrived for the sake of the students or the observer (or both), but it's in the silences and the hidden emotional labour – or what Colley calls 'ethics work' – that provides the reward for the teacher and the students. Is this undermined by an institutional habitus? Do these policies inflict a kind of symbolic violence on some of these staff? The research presented here provides some insights into the emotional responses to the work and to being observed, these issues deserve further investigation.

The narratives from this research often included an apparent 'uncritical acceptance' of Ofsted/managerial criteria in observations, such as 'differentiation based on students' learning styles' – criteria which sometimes ran counter to the staff's professional judgement (Smith, Swift, 2012). These lead to important questions; if there is a mismatch between teachers' idea of professionalism (e.g. commitment to the students) and the managers' space – is this a result of, or a symptom of, the change in the *perceived value* of their mainly vocational skills in teaching? Where does this leave professionalism? These tensions echo that from previous research in this area in that there are overwhelming conflicts between the professional habitus of FE staff and the fields in which they exist (James, Biesta, 2007).

There was evidence to support the fact that in some institutions policies were being improved, with a more holistic, developmental approach. However, there was little to suggest that this was what Mike called a 'bottom up' evolution. There is an aspiration that a consensus can be reached – through interpretations that involve sharing understandings of the concept of our professional habitus. I argue that this is not an escape from the realities of teaching towards an emotionalisation or over-sentimentality of learning (Ecclestone, Hayes et al., 2005, Ecclestone, Hayes, 2008), but an intrinsic part of it. It is evident from the participants' narratives how important these students' welfare is to the FE staff. It is also tragic that these elements of their professional skills are seemingly not perceived by them as a valued aspect of their everyday teaching and learning. Seen within the socio-political historical context, conflict in the educational sector can be seen as an important process towards a better understanding of the needs of students and staff. However FE has suffered so many conflicts over the decades, it is difficult to see how the tensions inherent within observation policies will be overcome.

The 'backstage' of the staff room formed an important part of the research, both in terms of a 'safe' place to talk and share aspects of the research, and for staff to articulate how their colleagues had been un/supportive of their own observation experiences. This supports the findings of Smith and Swift (2012) in that there are potentially negative consequences to the staff community in this space. Butler refers to a "shared social sense" (1997 p. 134) rather than the individualistic way that kinds of *doxa* are not only unconsciously understood, but embodied. The staff room constituted an interesting place to potentially explore these concepts further. The narratives described how the conventions of the performativity of the observation policies are a result of the power of social institutional language (Bourdieu, 1991).

Through this reading, the 'utterance' of graded outcomes within an observation and the binary labels enforced on participants as either 'good' or 'bad' teachers, calls into question the established grounds of legitimacy within the social institution.

With these findings in mind, the importance of professional learning as situated in and *through* social experiences and relationships is emphasised (James, Biesta, 2007). More specifically, these elements may help us to better understand teaching practice - especially that which is 'underground' and the emotions that surround observations.

### **b. Critically Evaluating Fictionalisation**

Upon reading the stories of Monica and Richard, a reader might ask: What right have we to take these people's stories? How might they feel about their personal narratives being changed, 'enhanced', manipulated and interwoven for the purposes of 'research'? As researchers we have a responsibility to the potential sensitivities of these stories (although of course we can't be aware of all of them). One way of allowing for these sensitivities is through the participants reading the text themselves and allowing for their suggestions for changes to be integrated into the analysis and writing processes. Only three of the participants (Alex, Anna and Sally) were able to give up their valuable time to read the stories. Others commented how they 'trusted' me to 'convey the right message'. Those who did read the stories provided feedback that was wholly positive in that they told me how pleased they were about the effectiveness of how their stories were told. In this way the processes of fictionalisation has become political – the stories are re/interpreted and re/presented in a way the participants perceived as 'safe'.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, fiction has long been established as a way of helping to articulate feelings. In the context of psychotherapy, Lomas (1987) describes a patient who used characters in the classic piece of literature *Wuthering Heights* to explain the complexities of their trauma. But there are limits to this interpretation; story-telling can also be interpreted as patronising or trivialising a subject that is (for some) profoundly disturbing. There may be cultural differences for example which distort these sensitivities. There are undoubtedly merits of the shared understanding (and tensions) possible through these mediums. However more discussion is needed about the potential value of using methods of fictionalisation in teaching and learning FE contexts.

Playing with emotional interactions – especially through the different perspectives integral to this research – is a way for the reader to explore the different potential meanings of the text. “Writing like this creates (at least in our imagination) a different relationship with the reader and the material” (Smart, 2010). Stories allow for the non-linear way interactions in our lives are played-out; the memories of the teachers from our past, the way we teach and learn. Without the use of fictionalisation, the analysis would have missed some of the nuances of these emotions. I used literary devices to ‘enhance’ the readers’ experience and interpretation for instance the rain played a part in ‘setting the atmosphere’ for Monica’s observation; the smells of the old corridors (perhaps) conjured up memories of the readers’ own memories (and mine); the changes in tense and the shorter sentences played a part in portraying a quicker pace... all these are common tactics used by creative writers that are arguably also utilised (perhaps in different ways) in other (academic) writing. I hope to achieve a new interpretation of the data - but only you, the reader, can validate whether this was successful (now or later) towards achieving the objectives of the

research – i.e. in exploring the emotional lived experiences of FE staff in the context of observations.

One particularly important element of writing the fictionalised pieces was writing in the 'first person'. In this way, the texts become a "performance" for the reader as they 'live' the character described. Encouraging others to read extracts from these texts, in academic conference presentations, proved to be powerful tool. Feedback described how this exercise allowed a 'deeper understanding' of the lived experiences of the participants. There are now opportunities to further exploit these different interpretations through others sharing their stories. However this type of playfulness is only possible in an atmosphere of mutual trust, love and compassion. Improvisation and autonomy is what many teachers find so important in their roles – yet in an observation this element is seemingly not valued and therefore resentment can arise for both parties.

Many historical 'clues' take on new meanings within an interpretation through the use of creative non-fiction and other readings. The fictionalised texts provides one of many possible explanations that are possible with help of expertise, previous experience, intuition and 'something more' that Stern et al., (1998) referred to within the context of psychoanalytical interactions. One issue related to these multiple possibilities in the stories involved the specific students in the classroom. The student (Helen) evolved from the narrative of Julia and actually suffered from Narcoplasy (as per the narrative from the manager). Similarly, Alex suffered from an eye condition that prevented her from recognising her students' faces from a distance. However, after some reflection on these issues, I wanted to make their stories more generalizable and less about specific medical conditions; more about

the complex context of the students' and staffs' lives. Whether these individual's conditions were medicalized or not I viewed as less important to the specific context of this study - it was their emotional experiences that were important to the research objectives here. I acknowledge that this strategy could be seen as being insensitive to the challenges these individuals endure.

I have constructed within and around this research a 'patchwork' of what Ellingson (2008) calls 'multigenre' texts that help to provide us with an holistic story.

Throughout the processes of writing I am aware of the importance of the implicit power relationships between the teachers and their managers, between myself and my participants, as I put myself 'in their story' (which is in part also my own experience); hence my attempt to write sensitively (Richardson, 1997). The use of colloquialisms in the fictionalisation was integral to this sensitivity – as it was an integral part of the (everyday) narrative. But I address this as a potential area for dialogue: is this 'chatty, magazine style' appropriate here? Why? Why would it NOT be? This has parallels with the definitions and language used and questioned throughout this thesis: e.g. what is 'good' (teaching) practice' and more importantly, what does this actually mean to the individuals concerned? As I have commented, often these definitions are left unchallenged in the institutions. This research has outlined some of the ways that teaching and learning practice is integral to the complex context of the teachers/classroom/students/day/weather/subject area.....and so on. And this is what I have tried to explore in the fictionalised texts presented here.

### **c. Reflections on the Interview Processes**

The most profound area for reflection upon the interview process was held in the contrast between the narratives of Alex and Naima. However, the difficulty for me

was that Alex was one of the participants whom I knew prior to the interviews; I was familiar with her teaching style and personality and admired her sincere commitment to her students and her conscientious work ethic. In contrast to this, Naima's apparent lack of sympathy with her own adult learners sat uncomfortably with me. This was exacerbated because she had already described how she herself had been a mature student (like me) when she returned to college after a long absence. I instinctively wanted to find some similarities between us, in order to build some rapport, but found myself increasingly alienated by the content of her narrative. During the (single) interview, she openly admitted to a series of behaviours which I found disturbing – on moral grounds. I remember I had difficulty in not articulating my horror or disgust when she described how she hit her son because of some misbehaviour, or how she had flirted with a male student and on more than one occasion had sent students home because there were only three who had 'turned-up' for class because it 'wasn't worth it' (teaching them) – even though (or perhaps because) she was confident of still being paid for the session. I was shocked by the stark comparison between Naima and the perceived caring, modest content of interviews with participants like Alex and Grace. Because the interview with Naima came after James' interview (a manager) it questioned notions of FE lecturers that I has taken for granted and gave me some sympathy with James' views (see Chapter Seven). However, at the back of my mind was the question: was this, in itself a performance for me, the researcher? (Wengraf, 2001).

The complex and fluid space between the self as 'researcher' and the self as 'colleague/listener' held valuable parallels to concepts of observer/observee explored in this research. For instance, during an interview, I may suddenly realise that what my participant is saying has particularly profound implications for the

analysis; rather than listen intently, I sit up and check that the digital recorder on the coffee table is still active. Thus, as Derrida (1972) noted, the distinction between the spoken and the written word becomes embodied in the space between us. Is the machine still recording every word for my 'other' self? The self that will sit in a darkened room and methodically type-out word-by-word what I am listening to now? But is the other self 'paying attention' any less or more 'authentic' than before? I suggest that like the narratives within this research, all our roles are fluid and multi-faceted and the result of a complex interplay between personal and socially-constructed worlds.

Like the classroom, the elements that create research interviews are always dependent upon an understanding of power relationships and hierarchy (Wengraf, 2001); it is never context-free or the 'whole story'. The content and reflection upon it was all crucial 'data'. My thoughts during the interview with Naima returned to the comments of managers like Mike and James; is this what they meant when they described how observations could be an effective strategy to "get rid of 'dead wood'" as James' put it? Were individuals like Naima the reason why they didn't trust sessional teachers to do their work without being explicitly 'managed'? In some ways, Naima lacked credibility for my research – but simultaneously she symbolised the difficulties inherent in it (Weiner-Levy, Popper-Giveon, 2011). For me she epitomised the opposite of the caring, humanistic nature of apparently conscientious staff that I had witnessed, whilst also providing a 'performance'. Hence in the 'sifting' of the analysis I cannot disregard Naima's narrative because this is integral to the research topic, despite or maybe because I could not 'embrace' this participant (Hollway, Jefferson, 2000). The researcher cannot disregard aspects that are contrary to their own ontology; this is the essence of shared understandings and



deeper meanings. Likewise, my own story is only within the context of thinking about this particular piece of writing and this research. Other issues exist but I may not have mentioned. Like Naima, I acknowledge that this is not an equal ‘conversation’; this research is to a certain extent, manipulated in different ways and in different times – with the objectives of the research in mind.

#### **d. Limitations of this Research**

In the Introduction of this thesis, I outlined the boundaries of this study, based as it is entirely within the context of FE institutions in England. Its use in researching similar observation processes outside the particular contexts of FE are therefore limited, especially perhaps in educational sectors outside England<sup>63</sup>. I used methods which were focused on collecting data for analysing the emotional experiences of staff within observations and because of the sensitive nature of these investigations, the methods used could be criticised as being ambiguous and lacking in ‘validity’. The generalizability of this study could also be argued to be limited because of the relatively small number of participants from a small sample of different colleges. However, the aim was not to provide a generalizable outcome, but to provide new insights into the depth of emotions of a specific group of individuals (Baker, Edwards, 2010). As I have described in Chapters Two and Three, through the interpretive interactionist lens and the conceptual tools of Bourdieu, the field of study could be problematized in that the FE *profession* (as well as college in which the individual interacts) is *itself* conceptualised as a field (James, Biesta, 2007). Thus, a relatively small sample is potentially justifiable in order to understand some of the different

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<sup>63</sup> However, existing research and my tentative personal investigations into observation processes in the United States and Australia have shown this is an area for potential further investigation.

struggles within this field and the diverse interpretations of our professional habitus (Bourdieu, 1991 p. 325).

I have been explicit about how some of the participants were also individuals whom I had known before the research began (see the Tables in Chapter Three), and therefore an element of performativity or bias hidden in the narratives could exist in these and also in my interpretation of these (Denzin, Lincoln, 1994; Silverman 2001). I addressed this issue through a method of further interpretation and reflection – as described in the Methodology. For example, the participants were offered an opportunity to feedback on the transcripts and fictionalised stories. Furthermore, there were elements of the participants' narratives which carried contradictions and challenged my initial expectations. As I have outlined above, the creative writing texts could likewise be criticised to be biased in favour of highlighting only the aspects of the narratives which I personally felt were of 'value'.

As I explained in Chapters Two and Three, I acknowledge the limitations of this study in terms of views from a positivist perspective, or in measuring factors which contribute to the processes of observations. Indeed, these are the very views that I have attempted to deconstruct within the context of the research topic. This is because lived emotional experiences are by their very nature, fluid, ambiguous and complex and therefore demand a more compassionate, nuanced approach. This is particularly relevant when investigating the contexts of FE staff, where research in this area is sparse. However, this study did NOT investigate the emotional experiences of FE students which are an integral part of the emotional labour of an observation.

### **e. Weaknesses of this Research**

As I discussed above, the weaknesses of this study include the limitations of its methodology and the inherent discrepancies between the theoretical lenses that I have used. Limitations of funds, time and practical matters restricted the amount of interview data accrued. The interviews aimed to unravel some of the historical complexities of the participants' learning experiences, but often due to time constraints or (in the case of some of the participants) because they had left their institution, a second or third interview which would have sought further information about the personal memories shared at the initial interview proved impossible. The psychoanalytical lens of object relations theory was valuable in illustrating initial insights into some of the possible connections between the participants' life-histories and emotional learning experiences and their professional habitus. However, I was disappointed that I did not have an opportunity to explore more of these issues and in greater detail. Indeed, one of the participants (Brian) did not feel able to share any of these details with me, and it was unclear (after he had taken early retirement) whether this would have been different even if I had been given the opportunity to build up rapport with him. Many of the participants commented on how useful participating in this research had been to their own personal reflections. However, it must be emphasised that equally others may not want to discuss intimate biographical details and this must be respected.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I was unaware of how far these narratives would become unique stories of survival and how they could illustrate part of the invisible nature of emotional labour of teaching. It has been argued that all teachers "hold an unconscious tension in learning" (Price, 2001 p. 179); they simultaneously retain curiousness whilst rejecting feelings of vulnerability in the unknowing – for the self

and their students. This moral dimension to service work and the classroom as a community forms part of the 'background' to the wider political-economic context of the participants' stories – many aspects of which were, inevitably, impossible to include within this small scale research project. These issues are surrounded by other tensions that FE staff are in the midst of, some of which have been described here; the caring atmosphere vs criteria of exams, explicitly/innate nature of teaching /learning. All these aspects are integral to an exploration of the potential counter-transferential fears of staff and students something that remains underexplored.

As Dunlop points out, ironically, the personification of this in terms of someone who is highly intelligent but lacks heart is potentially very frightening (Dunlop, 1984). Arguably, this is because it sits between the two recognised entities of machine versus human (there has been inspirational material here e.g. Star Trek). Perhaps likewise this is the conflict that qualitative researchers face: in striving for a 'scientific' answer, they lose touch with the realities of the lived, emotional experience. Herein is found the parallel with the research under investigation: the narratives of the managers have suggested that they acknowledge the risks of losing the essence of what constitutes successful teaching and learning experiences, because of the processes that surround observations. For this reason, I have sought throughout this thesis to use new ways of interpretations which encourage a deeper understanding of the issues that impact upon observations in FE.

As I have explained, the participants involved in this study were individuals with complex backgrounds and many of these issues I was forced to exclude from their story because of the limitations of space and time. The aspects I *did* choose to include in the fictionalised texts were my own decision, and like the analysis the processes involved in these decisions were influenced by my own experiences,

values and beliefs. Some of the complexities these issues illuminated were portraying Monica as a single mother and Richard on the verge of retirement which were taken directly from the contexts of the interviews. I acknowledge that this may be seen to demean some individual's personal circumstances in favour of another.

With this in mind, early in the research I chose to outweigh feminist perspectives that emerged from the data, in favour of those which specifically focused on emotional issues in observations. These two issues are inherently linked and that this could indeed have been a valuable focus of the data analysis, as this quote from Julia clearly illustrates:

“It's very [inaudible] females feel not quite good enough, constantly and I think if you don't have some kind of support that will say: 'Well, actually, I feel like that as well, it's been a nightmare and that you couldn't do it is understandable' - I would feel constantly not quite good enough, because we do not celebrate fully...we pick on anything that goes wrong” (Julia)

However, for reasons of space and time it was not possible to include issues related to feminist perspectives within the data analysis.

#### **f. Methods: Interpreting the Narratives:**

Following on from the potential weaknesses of the research, I must also acknowledge the 'subjective' nature of our learnt emotion words both spoken and written. In terms of the interviews then, and my interpretation of them, the question needs to be asked: can we accurately express our feelings? (Dunlop, 1984). The understandings of our language (and its inherent limitations) are conceptual and develop over time. Hence the relevance of drawing on Bourdieu's lens to explore this issue, even though there are inherent tensions within this. Our pre-conceptual

knowledge means we must 'go back'; relive the experience in order to remember the emotion within the context of the experience. Once remembered, then we usually conceptualise (Dunlop, 1984). Thus the performance of the interviews forms an integral part of understanding for the participants – an act that apparently some found unusual and beneficial. But what about remembering a 'feigned' feeling? How valuable is this? And to what extent is 'inauthentic feeling' not *not* feeling, but when an Other self intervenes in my inner selves allowing the (perception of) shallow or empty feelings (Dunlop, 1984)? We sometimes de-personalise these feelings saying things like the emotion "takes over" the body, hence comments from Grace like "I wasn't myself". (Dunlop, 1984 p. 41). Even though the root of the word emotion is movement, when an emotion is deep it is said to 'move' us – implying that we become passive to an Other self. Again, these issues could be explored further within the context of teaching and learning.

As I explained, a term which I find particularly helpful in trying to understand how these emotions manifest themselves can be found in Freeman's (2002) concept 'the narrative unconscious'. There are links in this concept to Bollas' concept of the 'unthought known' (1992) and Denzin's 'historical halo' (1989) (and others) – these are all part of attempts to make sense of what that 'something more' is (Tronick, 1998). In this concept the complex nature of "unrecognized and uncognized aspects of our own histories" (Freeman, 2002 p. 200), Freeman illustrates how these emotions are affected by the fluid and interwoven combination of our participation in a 'field' and our professional capital with in it, as well as our unconscious or repressed feelings which may be founded upon our childhood and other experiences. Furthermore, the cultural context of the social body may *itself* have an impact on our professional habitus, in reflecting upon our own complex histories –

real and imagined, present and/or absent. “Feeling is inseparable from the cognition; we could not identify such feelings without reference to the understanding of the situation which evokes them” (Hirst and Peters, 1970 quoted in Dunlop, 1984 p. 7). The relevance of a context which extends beyond our own life, into a shared culture, has profound implications for our emotional selves, as Freeman explains in describing his first visit to Berlin:

But I had carried with me a significant enough store of common knowledge and common imagery as to activate the undercurrents of some of the events witnessed. ‘Memory’ in this context, becomes a curious amalgamation of fictions, experiences and texts, documentary footage, dramatization, plays, television shows, fantasies and more. (Freeman, 2002 p. 199)

The body ego – inner and outer - cannot be reduced to sensible feelings; it is part of the body consciousness, the lived emotion in the current stream of consciousness but also simultaneously linked to residues of past emotional experiences (Denzin, 1984). This is beautifully illustrated in Kate Moss’s fictional story ‘Winter Ghosts’ (Moss, 2009), where a sense of place can also carry an historical significance which would ordinarily be unarticulated. The fluid nature of being between life/death opens possibilities for the protagonist, just as an awareness of this otherness opens up potential interpretations of the data presented here. This is because an observation appears to be both a *lived experience* of emotion and an *out-of-body emotion*. A teacher’s body may be a body-for-others - but a different one depending upon who the audience is. Think of the quotes from the narrative of Jason (Chapter Six) who reflected upon ‘teaching’ his younger self. He simultaneously embodied a teacher and student as self and Other. Likewise, I have illustrated how through the lens of

psychoanalysis, it is possible that at times teaching for some is about the presence in the classroom of a (younger) self. For some, the presence of an Other (embodied or imagined) may present an awareness that 'I'm *not* myself' but at the same time a continuation of 'going through the motions of teaching' persist. Thus, when reflecting upon the interactions in an observation between the teacher and the observer, an awareness of the important elements of each other's habitus could be beneficial. This is especially relevant when we consider educational research which indicates that it is within these spaces of uncertainty and risk that learning is more likely to occur (e.g. Williamson, 1998).

The potential for an act of symbolic violence in an observation was at times legitimised by managers. In the analysis, I illustrated how Helen described how when she came across difficult conflicts, she felt forced to complying with them:

“...actually it was at that point that, after a year I thought, I felt terrible, I thought, 'what am I going to do'? I will have to leave. [but] You can't take on any of that, you have to let it drop away, or leave.” (Helen)

Likewise, Julia admitted she used to stand-up for what she believed was a morally right way to behave but is 'less likely' to now. This was apparently because of a number of staff who had been sacked as result of 'putting their head above the parapet'. This was also echoed by other narratives, including Mike. Hence it can be seen how symbolic violence can be reproduced over time because of individuals' sense of reduced agency (Bourdieu, 1984).

There is a fundamental tension in this work: my presence in the research versus Bourdieu's views against the auto/ethnographic approaches. Bourdieu opposed the dichotomy of objectivity versus subjectivity - yet he claimed we can achieve rigour in



academic sociology by explicitly seeking objectivity through studying the relational. If reflexivity should be used to 'overcome' symbolic violence then similarly should we strive to overcome the pressures to conform to 'science'? The personal is the political and like many others, Bourdieu believed in politically motivated research as a way of challenging the reproduction of inequalities. By exploring many different approaches, this research attempts to challenge any taken-for-grantedness in the research and its topic area by 'messing it up' (Ellingson, 2008) because playfulness can be a way of discovering new insights.

Crucially, the impact of the issues described above, together with the complex power relationships within an observation can be illuminated by Bourdieu's and Freud's theoretical concepts, and the concepts of performativity that writers like Butler, Goffman and Hochschild have described. This may be further exaggerated for some FE teachers who in particular, and for a variety of reasons (some of which stem from the macro issues raised in Chapter One), have suffered from low self-esteem (Colley, 2007). For those teachers who appear to have a mainly positive or 'ambivalent' attitude toward observations<sup>64</sup>, this study has shown how there still exists a sense of resistance to the 'surveillance' aspects of the observation. However the approach of this research delves deeper into these concepts to explore the interconnectedness of these emotions from socially constructed elements as well as psychodynamic explanations.

Observations are claimed by policy documents to be part of a strategy towards sharing perceived 'best practice' in teaching and learning by providing interventions that help to improve provision to students. However, it seems apparent from this and

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<sup>64</sup> As can be seen in the narratives of 'Brian' and 'Julia' described in the analysis.

other research in this area that much of what forms part of FE teaching and learning practice is seemingly 'underground' and therefore impossible to define as part of teaching skills or strategy *per se*. It is therefore unclear in whose interests potential 'improvements' are in and how these terms may be defined (James and Wahlberg, 2007).

#### **g. Strengths of this Research**

The methodology and approach of deconstructing the interactions involved in an observation has allowed for a view of the psychosocial aspects of the embodied nature of teaching and learning in FE. Previous research in this area described in Chapter One included investigations through positivist perspectives (e.g. Boocock 2012), those drawing on a Foucauldian lens (O'Leary, 2013) as well as qualitative case studies such as the TLC project (James, Biesta 2007) all have aspects in common - and this adds to a growing literature on FE contexts which aims to highlight the everyday practices and experiences of FE staff. This psychosocial theoretical framework, together with an innovative methodology have provided new interpretations which hold new meanings for the participants and me and valuable sources of reflection on issues like our own presence in research, in our teaching practice and how our own learning experiences impact on our (teaching) lives.

In illuminating the lived emotional experiences of FE staff involved with observations, this study has:

- Provided insights for others into the lived experiences of some FE staff involved in observation procedures in different colleges.

- Encouraged dialogue between these parties and more interpretations and discussions.
- Used theoretical concepts and research methodologies in an innovative way to investigate the emotional labour of teaching and learning in FE.

The outcomes from this research offers significant implications for considerations of the emotional labour of FE staff. I have shown that a psychoanalytical perspective that is influenced by existentialist concepts such as object relations, allows an interpretation of emotion work that differs from one viewed as a commodity to be 'harnessed'. Through this lens, the lived emotional experiences of FE staff in an observation can be seen less as a 'coping mechanism' and more as an opportunity of what Ashman (2008) describes as "engaging proactively with one's situation in the world" (2008 p. 301). Thus, whether the emotional labour is perceived by the individual as 'genuine' or not, this interpretation provides an opportunity for self-reflection and individual agency.

#### **h. Interpretive Interactionism – what about the students?**

Halas (2001) believed that Bourdieu's theory of political action against symbolic violence took the Interactionist theories one step further than the micro elements of social behaviours. When we consider the students embodied presence within the field, this delivers a further dimension to the emotions of an observation. This has mainly been outside the scope of this research, other than to explore the relevance to the FE staff of these relationships. However, from personal experience I have seen how students may behave differently depending upon which teacher is present within the classroom. On stage, this was illustrated marvellously in Alan Bennett's

famous play 'The History Boys': when the students are confronted with an unusual situation of having two different teachers in their classroom simultaneously, they are confused as to how they should behave. The character 'Dakin' articulates his classmates' confusion: "*We don't know who we are, sir*". In light of the outcomes from this research, this scene illustrates the potential fluidity of the identities and emotional labour of the *students*. Their *performance* should also be seen as a response to their teachers' performativity to them. In *Monica's Story*, this is demonstrated when, at the end of the observation, her student Demi asks: "Did we do OK?". These interactions and processes of observations remains under-researched and deserves further investigation in the context of seeking a better understanding of the dynamics involved in an observation.

A constant theme throughout this thesis has been an attempt to question the perceived binaries within the language of the FE sector. As Bourdieu (1991) emphasises - it is perhaps not helpful to view the world as either 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' or our performativity (or learning) as either 'deep' or 'shallow' acting through conscious or unconscious feelings. These terms simply do not do justice to the inherent complexities of our lived emotional experiences. This was partly the purpose in using fictionalisation as one of the ways to present the data in that it allowed for an ambiguousness and playfulness that was not possible in more 'conventional' methods. I suggest that this questioning of socially-constructed terms could and should be extended to the strategies and processes of observations in FE. Previous research in this area has suggested the main reason for the perceived 'ineffectiveness' of these observations is due to the 'top down' managerialist approach. However, observation strategies should not be thought of as an either/or i.e. humanistic in nature via a mentor, versus a bureaucratic, punitive audit resulting

in what Sally described as “basically a disciplinary”. Perhaps a ‘middle ground’ is an integrity and respect for the contexts implicit within teaching and learning, not only between individuals in the FE sector, but also more widely between bodies such as Ofsted and the IfL.

### **3. Reflections and Suggestions for Further Research**

My methodology is an improvised creative process – practically in terms of sensitivities to the participants’ needs and procedurally in the analysis and writing - just as my teaching includes a ‘flow’ and an intuitive interaction with students’ needs and contexts. The course of these creative processes can be related to the fluid and sometimes unpredictable or ‘underground’ nature of learning in the classroom – in contrast to the need for explicit ‘learning outcomes’ often included in the criteria of lesson observations.

The processes and outcomes of this research join together to support the views of Gleeson and James (2007 p. 461) that professional habitus is a set of “durable *transposable* dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1990 p. 53) generated from past experiences and settings and simultaneously mediated by existing fields. Furthermore, that professional identities form a fundamental part of professional habitus that should not be ignored. The self-determination of the staff shines through in that despite these tensions (or perhaps because of them) and decades of conflicting policies and restrictive managerialist procedures, their students remain their highest priority. The differences in each individual’s professional habitus was evident – metaphorically the “writing in the margins” of their book (Sumara, 1996).

At the heart of this topic is the ontological question of whether it is possible to be ‘objective’ in order to assess outcomes from teaching practice. It could be argued

that this is a question that can never be answered. Likewise, in all research the difficulties in drawing on different conceptual frameworks and the subsequent claiming of relevant 'truths' causes tensions (Barton, Wahlberg, 2003). This research has shown how a 'cultural shift' away from the binaries embedded in educational language is needed for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of FE staff involved in teaching and learning. The findings of this study point to a potential foundation that this 'shift' could be achieved, for instance, through research which uses fictionalisation and story-telling, metaphors and creativity to enable debate around the conceptualisations and definitions of terms such as 'objective' and 'good practice'. In this way a broader view in understanding the different contexts to teaching and learning, researching and interpretation are opened-up.

There have recently been developments within some FE colleges, where the use of real-time digital recording of lessons has replaced or supported an embodied assessment technique (Copland 2010; Marsh, Mitchell et al., 2010). However this policy raises further ethical and philosophical issues if the teacher being recorded is physically absent from the room where the recording is under scrutiny by others. Indeed, a participant in this study highlighted her potential objections to this policy. Certainly there is a need to explore in depth this, and other options in terms of the emotions involved in observation processes.

### **My Final Thoughts**

The philosophical issues raised by this exploration of the emotional aspects of observations carries parallels to the wider value of research and its inherent subjectivity. It also provides evidence of the potential relevance - within research and teaching and learning practice – of teachers' professional habitus. Furthermore, the

value of my own biography and professional habitus is integral to this research; without my experience and motivations, these interpretations would not exist and the participants I have spoken to would (probably) not have had an opportunity to articulate and share their feelings about observations - nor reflect upon them. The value of this for the individuals concerned should not be underestimated as this carries profound implications for FE teaching practice.

From the beginning of this research, I was confident my 'insider knowledge' combined with my creative writing skills could contribute to raising awareness of the issues I was so passionate about. As I explained in Chapter One, Section 2, I genuinely care for the wellbeing of my colleagues who, for complex reasons may feel angry or upset about experiencing observations which they perceive as insensitive to their own and/or their students' needs and contexts. Providing an opportunity for them to 'tell their story' – as well as trying to understand their managers' perspectives of the issues involved was a strong motive throughout the research process.

It is interesting to reflect on the extent to which I was 'theory testing' or 'developing theory' throughout this research process. I was highly critical of my own approach and read widely in order to gauge what the criticisms of my research would be and how it 'fitted' within existing paradigms. I was 'testing' Bourdieu's concepts within a new context – a more micro context to that which it had been used in the ESRC project (James, Biesta, 2007). An example of its evolution came from the narratives where some participants had (unexpectedly) described their classroom as personal spaces – somewhere they perhaps felt protective over. The 'field' of the observed classroom took on new meanings within this context, as I argued earlier in this

chapter. In pursuing this issue, in the first year of my fieldwork I had an article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal (Edgington, 2013). This article outlined the emerging outcomes of my research and this academic acknowledgement allowed me to gain some confidence in the wider interest and 'validity' of my work and consequently access to other researchers who were exploring this area – some 'informally' through action research projects in their own colleges.

After the initial stages, the research seemed to 'take on a life of its own' in some ways - by illuminating parallels with other aspects of research and providing some surprises to the data that inspired new questions for the interviews. For example, I was surprised at how some of the observers interviewed were able to 'detach' themselves from their (perhaps more humanistic) 'teaching selves' for the purposes of being seen (by themselves and others) as being a 'professional manager' during an observation process. I repeat the quote from the manager Julia which specifically highlights this issue:

"I mean we're not in the game of destroying people. But I do have to say that sometimes the management side of ...and perhaps Ofsted, is a very *destructive*, well I think, process. It's in no way developmental it is something with a big stick attached." (Julia, original emphasis)

Upon reflection, I had perhaps unknowingly and inappropriately used the same binary educational terminologies I was paradoxically attempting to address and deconstruct. From the start of the research I had seen the observer and observee as two distinctly different (if not opposing) viewpoints. However, the data presented here illustrates how the complexities of human behaviour sometimes discourages



individuals from viewing themselves as others see them – even if (or perhaps because) their job title might label them as such. In some ways I explored this within the thesis, but simultaneously I have also unwittingly exaggerated it; by using terms such as teacher/manager and by presenting two different stories from each perspective, physically dividing them into two chapters.

Similarly, during the research journey, I remained sympathetic with my participants' experiences, but I gradually no longer saw myself (entirely) as 'one of them'; their stories became part of that 'personal tragedy storyline' that I felt both part of, but at the same time distinct from. With the benefit of my new 'academic' knowledge, I now embodied a new identity as a 'researcher' who was seen (by my participants and me), to have a responsibility to provide insights (for an Other) through stories and the complexities behind them. This resonates with emotional aspects of my childhood learning experiences. The boundaries between these identities increasingly became 'fuzzy' just as the analysis revealed the 'fuzziness' integral to the narrative from Julia explained above.

Furthermore, the data illustrated how some FE staff swayed between being anxious and ambivalent towards being observed or observing others – depending on the circumstances of their own teaching and learning journeys. Hence a tension existed as I could not (and did not want to be) 'detached' from them or the enquiry. I feel passionately that the voices of FE staff should be heard, just as during my undergraduate studies I felt strongly about the inequalities embedded in my school education. Some of my participants' stories were upsetting and were difficult for them to gift to the research. They trusted me with their personal experiences and it was

important that I accepted this responsibility in taking all of the narratives into consideration.

My experiences during the research study provided inspiration for reflecting on the definitions and role of research more broadly, not just within a 'conventional' academic setting. For example, with regard to the stories which present the data, I asked myself (and others asked me): *How 'valid' are these stories? – are they 'simply' my own creation rather than others' experiences? Furthermore, is it ethical to 'play' with others' stories in this way – where are the individuals?*

As I explain in my methodology (Chapter Three), the stories are a combination – created through a lengthy process – which enabled parts of all the participants' stories (and others) to be told. I do not pretend that *all* aspects of the stories will be relevant to *everyone*. For different reasons, at different times, specific aspects of the stories have been shown to have significant personal meanings to those who form its foundation. The response from those who have listened/read or been involved in the research is enough to justify its value. At all times I respected the participants' stories – they were given an opportunity to feedback on the transcripts and the stories themselves as they evolved. Some chose not to be involved in this process, but those who did, provided me with good motivation for continuing my efforts.

To some extent *all* research is biased – it's an interpretation based on an individuals' 'habitus'. The word 'biased' is often used in a negative context, but I am biased because I have experienced and witnessed the observation processes myself – that provides me with added 'hidden' data which is valuable - not detrimental - to the research. Just as reflecting upon the emotional contexts of those situations (like those personal to me, described in Chapter One, Section 2) also adds depth to these

meanings. These perspectives add the dynamic which provides an 'insider's view' of aspects of what sometimes happens 'at grass roots level'. Often these are perspectives that may be excluded from governmental reports - omissions which may, in turn, exaggerate feelings amongst FE staff that their work is undervalued and misunderstood.

My research journey itself was difficult. As commonly occurs, my supervisors were not experts in this field. I sought-out those who *were* able to help me achieve my objectives; individuals, professional bodies and institutions. Over the course of my PhD I presented my research at over fourteen international academic conferences – including four overseas. In many of these events, I was successfully awarded either a bursary place and/or financial support towards travel, accommodation and participation costs and I am grateful to these organisations for their support and encouragement towards 'beginning scholars' like me. Becoming involved in the wider academic community allowed me to network with a diverse range of researchers and educationalists willing to share their own experiences of observations and provide their expertise and support. I built strong relationships, some of which led subsequently to joint presentations and to current and future co-writing projects.

It is interesting to consider additional parallels to the subject of this study and the context in which it is situated. For example, I am aware that there is a possibility of using the concept of 'inter-relational knowing' within the setting of the supervisor/student relationship. Just as there is an opportunity for a mutual understanding of the 'something more' between the patient and analyst; interviewee and researcher; mentor and teacher, thus the doctoral learning journey could surely

hold additional rewards for those involved, if conducted within this supportive, reflective atmosphere?

My participants also had a difficult journey. The economic downturn had a destabilising effect on many of my participants' roles and their institutions and inevitably their personal lives too – aspects of which overlapped during my discussions with them. The publication of the Lingfield Report (2012) during my fieldwork, along with other statements from government education ministers, reinforced a message that FE institutions should be self-managing, culturally and commercially 'responsive' – simultaneously (but arguably, paradoxically) able to adhere to a strict criteria of defined teaching and learning outcomes . Outcomes that many FE staff perceive they have no control over. It is difficult to see how FE staff can feel motivated or valued when caught between these escalating tensions – as these research findings illustrate.

I had wanted to follow-up many of the aspects which evolved during the data analysis, but sadly this was not possible when participants had left their job and (in at least one case) moved overseas. The distance between my participants and me – both geographically and professionally was frustrating at times and unanticipated at the beginning of my research. These issues forced me to reflect carefully on whether I could or would return to teaching in FE. Being part of a 'young' (metaphorically) enthusiastic, academic community, excitedly focused on research that was 'cutting edge', was at times a sharp emotional contrast to the feelings of resentment and utter hopelessness in the environment I experienced within FE colleges. At the time of writing this, one of my participants (Grace) told me how the college where she works has just announced 300 compulsory redundancies, including all the

administrative staff in her department. Already feeling overwhelmed with the extreme workload, she is understandably upset and anxious about how she will be able to continue her job in the future and fears the potential impact on her students' learning.

Elements of others' (untold) stories become a part of ours (Freeman, 2002 p. 204). Stories from my participants have undoubtedly already formed an important part of my professional habitus. Hence the 'hidden' elements of Monica's and Richard's stories include aspects that were spoken and some which were unspoken; they are a consolidation of the narratives and 'something more'. Most importantly for *this* research, emotions are often seen as 'things' that 'happen' to passive individuals, rather than experiences that result from agentic interaction or control (Parkinson, 1995). In other words, psychoanalytical theories of the unconscious emphasise and question binary views of performativity because they: "deny that the self is aware of its own ideas" (Robinson, 1993 p. 96). But as I have explained, my interpretation of the narratives from this research promotes an existentialist view of these emotions in that FE staff often seem to choose to place *themselves* in positions that produce moral conflict between their different identities or 'selves' and that it is *this* conflict and the inherent 'fuzziness' of these identities, that embodies the very fluid nature of their emotional labour.

For observations to be an effective professional development opportunity for FE staff there must be a positive environment in which reflection can occur (Cockburn, 2005; O'Leary, 2012) . This research provides further evidence of the complex reasons why observation policies in some FE colleges do not generate this positive reflexive atmosphere and are therefore in need of radical review and reform. Articulations and reflections upon the emotional lived experiences of FE staff should not be perceived

as weak or dangerous; they form an intrinsic part of the processes of teaching and learning. These findings can contribute and inform new guidelines for practical steps that can raise awareness of the complexities of the contexts of observations, including the emotional aspects inherent in the professional habitus of FE staff.

From a personal perspective, I am preparing to take on a new challenge; my husband and I are moving overseas as a result of his employment. My numerous house moves as a child and later my extensive travel (described in Chapter One, Section 2) have meant that I am perhaps less apprehensive than some about any perceived risks involved in change of this kind. Our emigration to New Zealand provides many new opportunities – personally and professionally.

During this research, I engaged in some undergraduate teaching in HE and this provided some interesting personal reflections on the differences between the pedagogy of FE with and that in university environments. For instance, the expectation from my new students was for a more ‘didactic’ approach to teaching and learning. This issue is something I wish to explore further in the future. Certainly, if I am given an opportunity, I also look forward to conducting comparative studies based around teaching and learning observations in New Zealand Tertiary institutions, and the views of staff involved. Political and economic differences mean that New Zealand has (largely) escaped the social symptoms of recession that have become so familiar within the UK. This will be a welcome change in context. Increasing cut-backs in educational funding and student support, redundancies and frequent government changes in processes and rhetoric can do little to encourage new and meaningful debates around teaching and learning policies in England.

Education sectors in New Zealand have different, if no less challenging issues to address. Retaining qualified teaching staff who may struggle with balancing their salaries against relatively high costs of living is one, as is ensuring institutions can keep up with the educational needs of the significantly increasing numbers of international students. I am excited to be given the opportunity to experience first-hand the evolution of the partnerships between New Zealand's Tertiary and HE sectors tasked with addressing these and other challenges. Indeed, encouraging a wider sharing of knowledge and expertise could prove beneficial for both countries' educational sectors.

In conclusion, whatever the future holds for England's FE colleges, their long and complex history and the embedded nature of their processes and terminologies dictates that any further changes cannot happen rapidly. When I reflect on the three main hopes and aspirations for the intellectual and emotional journey this research offered, it has indeed proved to be an important culmination of many objectives for me personally. Firstly, my continuing lifelong learning journey will now take on new meaning, within a different cultural context. Secondly, my understanding of teaching and learning processes has evolved considerably and will greatly benefit my reflective, professional practice. Finally, I have in some ways fulfilled an opportunity to meet a responsibility that I took upon myself for the sake of my students and colleagues to raise awareness about the emotional aspects of observations. By illustrating aspects of the affectivity around observations in FE, I have shown how we could begin to understand the differences between individuals' emotional experiences and therefore become more reflexive – both personally and sociologically – about our teaching practice. Understanding emotions and the inherent humanness of teaching and learning experiences is fundamental to

exploring the processes of observations. This research – in its outcomes and methodology – therefore has an important part to play in raising awareness of these complex contexts within the emotional lived experiences of FE staff.





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## Appendix 1

### **A Summary of some parallels and tensions between theories of psychoanalysis and Bourdieu's 'constructive constructionism' within the context of this study.**

- The theoretical concepts used in Freud's original psychoanalysis are arguably founded on perceived static oppositions between conscious and unconscious, subjectivity and objectivity, normal and 'abnormal' (behaviours) etc. these are arguably arbitrary binaries embedded in our language and therefore cannot form accurate representations of the complexities of these issues.
- There is an implicit assumption that the patient has a 'neurosis' which needs a 'diagnosis' in seeking to overcome an issue (or 'abnormal' behaviour) in order to 'work it through'. This emphasises rather than questions the inherent power relationship<sup>65</sup> and subjectivities within this perceived judgement and the moral issues that surround a perceived 'deficit' in another's psyche<sup>66</sup>.
- The terminologies and concepts used in psychoanalysis (such as 'abnormal' or 'neurosis') are arguably detached from historical, economic and cultural contexts in which they exist (Fromm, 1963/2004). For example, seeking a collection of specific material goods (defined in psychoanalysis as 'anal retention') may, in some societies be virtuous; whilst in others it may be discouraged.

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<sup>65</sup> There are also political interpretations related to this issue, e.g. in Marxist thinking, in that these binaries form hierarchies that potentially reproduce social inequalities through oppression.

<sup>66</sup> This raises another controversial issue outside the scope of this thesis, that of the financial capital to be gained as a result of a psychoanalyst attempting to 'cure' this deficit via costly clinical sessions of analysis.

- The perceived potential source of an individual's 'abnormal' behaviour is interpreted and then reflecting back by the analyst. This is the main objective in psychoanalysis. However in sociological research any potential benefit (or harm) to the individual is a secondary symptom - but no less a consideration - of the aims. For instance, Hochschild's concept of *emotional labour* relies of an individual's *perception* of the *expectations* of the performance of in/appropriate behaviour/emotion (Price, 2001).
- The theories and concepts of psychoanalysis are perceived to be generalizable – whereas we are all individuals with different complex backgrounds. Inevitably we each have diverse emotions, experiences and attitudes which combine in subtle way at different times to influence our behaviours. Bourdieu's conceptual tools encourages an understanding of the tensions between the micro and macro 'fields'.
- Things are unarticulated and/or repressed from memory (but remain an integral part of how we think/behave) not because they are insignificant but *because* of their significance. These things may for different reasons be perceived as a potential threat to the ego – hence repressed. Psychoanalysis and poststructuralists would broadly agree with the sense that our intention should be to explore these unarticulated issues – for personal and social reasons.

- There is an aspect of what Freud termed 'Psychic Determinism' in some schools of psychoanalysis and arguably, if framed as deterministic, our unconscious *could* be seen as a driving force controlling our behaviours, in that nothing is accidental. From this perspective, psychoanalysis is required to help bring into the conscious awareness aspects which, for complex reasons may be 'repressed', in the (arguably naïve) assumption that by raising awareness the conscious and unconscious regions of the mind will become more 'in balance'. Likewise, although Bourdieu's writings on this matter are ambiguous and contradictory at times, some uphold the view that the role of our own agency in controlling the tensions within the 'field' is underplayed (Grenfell, James 1998).
- In sympathy with Bourdieu's concepts and in line with the Interpretive Interactionist approach used in this research, psychoanalysis theories suggest the importance of the *interaction* between the personality and the environment. Analysis was a method of drawing-out potential causes of symptoms that may be causing anxiety etc. but these personality traits are only *potential* personality traits until they are contextualised within a certain situation.
- In an approach to analysis known as 'free association' the individual is encouraged to articulate any word which come into their mind, which in turn the psychoanalyst may interpret to represent certain 'repressed' emotions. There is a performativity in this analysis – as there is within any research interview - in that the patient may articulate what he/she thinks the analyst

may (not) want to hear. This also has parallels with the topic under investigation, as I explain during the course of this thesis.

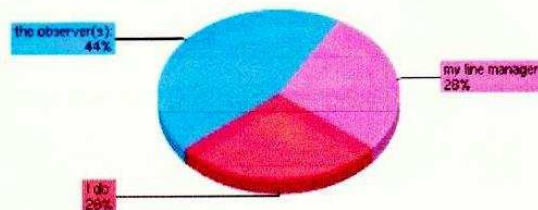
## Appendix 2

### Snapshot of extract from results of Pilot Study



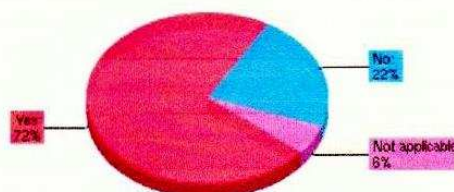
12 In your experience, what is the MAIN purpose of the formal TLO?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics
Exclusively for my own teaching reflection	2	11.8%	Total Responses 17
Mine and my colleagues' reflection	1	5.9%	
for college quality control purposes	13	76.5%	
for competence or disciplinary procedures	1	5.9%	



13 Who mainly controls any documents and other outcomes from the TLO session(s)?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics
I do	5	27.8%	Total Responses 18
the observer(s)	8	44.4%	
my line manager	5	27.8%	



14 Is there a formal procedure for appealing the outcome of a formal observation?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics
Yes	13	72.2%	Total Responses 18
No	4	22.2%	
Not applicable	1	5.6%	

## Appendix 1 Cont.: extract from 'Other comments' from the Pilot Study results:

unannounced and shorter observations.

- 1 They are ok so far but there could be more consistency eg some observers ask for things that others dont.
- 1 Although I understand that adhering to college standards is important, I don't believe there is enough focus on the actual teaching. Observers can observe a revision session or a tutorial for example, as they turn up unannounced. If teaching is really to be improved, there should be a discussion between both the observer and the observee so that support can be given.
- 1 Very stressful. I'm a good teacher, but don't cope well with observations and the amount of stress myself and my colleagues have been under is enormous, though some cope better than others. It has changed the dynamic of the team and my line manager, understandably, has been piling on the pressure to get us up to speed. Given the fact that new qualifications have been introduced and we have had to develop everything from scratch, I would sday that this has been one of the most difficult years of my teaching life.
- 1 Extremely unrealistic. The sheer volume of pro forms alone that need to be taken to every class in case a TLO turn up to observe puts teaching staff under extreme pressure. The pressure newly appointed staff are submitted to is worrying. Staff turn over has increased since the new system was put in place, 8 teachers have been dismissed for failing to meet the new college standard and new staff replacing them are finding it virtually impossible to meet the requirements.
- 1 I understand the need for TLO and policies and procedures have changed over the years to accommodate teachers needs and requirements.
- 1 Extremely stressful. It still is not luck who you get to observe you - it remains a far too subjective process.
- 1 They cause a lot of stress and upset. I have had a grade 3 and felt devastated. It feels like you are being judged on things over which you have no control. On the other hand it did make me work harder for my next observation so perhaps it achieves the objective of driving up standards. s ~ harder = better?
- 1 I feel a bit nervous and sometimes stressed if it is arranged at short notice, but in general I think they are a good tool for improving your teaching.
- 1 The materials that have been developed are brilliant and of very high standard. However they are for an ideal world that and do not take into account the reality of other administrative work that Lecturers do working in an ever changing high pressured environment where lecturers are working so hard at work and putting more hours at home. Lecturers do not have a social life due to this. However due to funding and importance of being up to date so that Colleges meet the OFSTED etc I can see why Colleges of FE are putting in place these procedures to maintain high standards. Its crucial for consultation to involve Lecturers to achieve practical and balanced perspectives in the TLO and production of the materials produced to take into account vocational departments delivering vocational courses.
- 1 It is getting better however I feel that lecturers need more time to produce all the paper work. It can be a stressful process.

URL Variable: crc

URL Variable: id



## **Appendix 3**

### **Questions which helped guide the content of the interviews**

- What brought you to teaching?
- What has your career journey been so far?
- Tell me about lesson observations here
- How do you feel about lesson observations?
- Describe a real situation within a classroom that was important to you, when you experienced deep emotion. (Inspired from research questions used by Arlie Hochschild (1983).

#### **Questions added later:**

- To what extent do you think you need/get any recognition for the work you do with your students?
- To what extent do you feel you have to be a 'good actor' to be a teacher?
- If a good friend were to watch you teaching, would they say 'that's the person I know' – 'or who is this person'? (Inspired from research questions by Ashforth and Tomiuk (2000).

## Appendix 4

### Extracts from two transcripts and examples of the analytical processes

Confidential: This transcript forms part of the PhD research of Ursula Edgington, Canterbury Christ Church University. Email ue4@canterbury.ac.uk

process together and call it under the one umbrella, 'Developmental' - however there WILL be a graded one in there.

UE OK

James The college don't fully know that yet, that the process that I've just pulled together as we're going through the proposal.

UE That sounds to me like it COULD be interpreted, if I was a teacher here, maybe who'd been here for twenty-odd years, been used to the older system, as if I was being micro-managed in some way. How would you react if one of your teachers said that to you?

James (...) Why would you say micro-managed then?

UE Because I think lots of teachers believe that their classroom is kind of their... belongs to them in some way

James Mmmm Mmmm, OK.

UE I'd had it described to me as like a 'Lioness' Lair' you know, this my cave and these are my cubs...

James Well, yeah, that would be very much an 'old school' approach, I think, because we are trying to generate an ethos here at this college is where we've got a much more 'open door' approach. I mean, with our new development downstairs we've got glass all the way along so you can't hide behind a door. So we're trying to have a much more transparent approach. We, we as a college are trying to...these T <sup>ADs</sup> with ourt Fe're users, that they've also developed a peer-observation process so we're really trying to generate an ethos of where we're much more used to having people in the classroom, watching what we're doing but also what the students are learning, so erm... we've been heading in that direction anyway, I mean we're coming away from 'it's my den, my lair', for sure. Erm, as part of our, we have teaching and learning standards, that we expect every teacher to apply to, a part of that is that we would expect every teacher to do at least two peer-observations a year, as well. So we're trying to develop that process that we're used to having people in there a lot more erm, and it's about sharing as well, it's about sharing good practice, developing your skills, recognising what other people are doing well and how you can

*talks the talk.*

Alex and erm, it was like, but then, I spent the NEXT bloody three months, trying to catch-up with all the lessons I'd missed. It was a really stressful time and...

UE and what were your parents doing?

Alex They just weren't interested, they were just...my parents were always business-orientated, they always, you know, I mean I don't blame them in the slightest bit, but when you look back on it, it wasn't the best childhood at all, because they weren't they were just basically, working unsocial hours, you know, in pubs

UE yeah

Alex so, you'd see them at breakfast, but then you wouldn't see them again for the rest of the day or the evening or anything.

UE MM

Alex So that was basically it (pause)

UE So they couldn't help you with your homework

Alex No, not with homework or anything like that.

UE And it was the same for your brother I guess?

Alex Yeah, she'd come home from work...

UE How did you feel about that at the time?

Alex At the time, you, you'd think this is normal. You didn't think anything of it. So you, you literally wouldn't see them when you got back from school because they were having a nap in between the pub opening hours. Erm and then they might pop in and see you at one point during the evening just to say, you know, have you had your tea, are you going to bed? You know, and that would be it. So you wouldn't see them for most of the time. So for Ms Faraway to turn around and say to my Mum that you've gotta start paying attention to your daughter, I thought - great - I was really impressed. With her.

UE So did anything change after she'd said that?

Alex No. No. Mum and Dad were always too busy. Always too busy, with erm, you know the pub and everything. It didn't change but it just made me think - great, somebody recognised that you know I actually am trying really hard and trying to do the best that I can in the circumstances I'm in. The circumstances got much worse after that because my parents got divorced and then my Dad died...

UE yeah

Alex and it all went tits up after that. Anyway...

UE Like life does



Julia + Helen.

65.

Do managers compartmentalise their obs. self?  
i.e. they feel forced to perceive them as  
a binary divide - between obj./sub views  
of teaching quality -

fear of the teacher

80

-> how far does that play a part?

Teaching

Permitted by numbers - "Its a numbers game"

line 98

The craft taken away 236

527 - Name + Shame

551 - No agency

Scanning the room - Conducting - 114

(\*) Shame + the game

- Not in the game of destroying people 148

566 - Sacking

156

- saw that as inevitable?

430 - Don't care

could it stop it?

+ 293 agency?

Workload "On our knees"

176 on hours etc.

Mentor Role - the 'gaping gash'

- bouncing ideas off - 299 Social aspects.

Performing badly"

- 271-277 "of days" 352.

- 467 going to stream you into. And they took us away on holiday and I missed all the exams. 3a  
468 And when I got back I was put in the very bottom.. 4a/2a  
469  
470 UE Oh God  
471  
472 Alex Bottom set... 2a  
473  
474 UE To see if you could prove that you could work your way up?  
475  
476 Alex I never took any of the tests. They stuck me the bottom set and wouldn't allow me, I  
477 had to stay in that bottom set until Christmas. From September until Christmas in the  
478 bottom set. I mean I learnt how to, you know make a skirt! (laughs) 4a (irony)  
479  
480 UE How did you feel then about being in that set?  
481  
482 Alex It was...well to start with I was frightened. Because they were really bloody scary. 4e  
483 (laughs) I mean they were really.. 2a  
484  
485 UE In what way?  
486  
487 Alex They were emoti...I mean you know, these were guys that were really like off the  
488 wall.  
489  
490 UE Oh, alright...  
491  
492 Alex They were kids with serious dysfunctional, you know kids... (2a)  
493  
494 UE yeah  
495  
496 Alex Frightened they would have belted you if you looked...so when you went in class, it 4e  
497 was like how to do I behave, because if I even LOOK at someone the wrong way, I'm  
498 gonna get a black eye.. "The looks" (Sartre).  
499  
500 UE really?  
501  
502 Alex It was like, to begin with everyday when I went in there the fear...I'm gonna get 11 1d  
503 belted. But erm, I won them over because I was just joking all the time and messing about 2a  
504 and I won them all over and at the same time I was seething with anger, thinking I 4e  
505 shouldn't be in this...class and how far am I gonna get behind and how long is it gonna  
506 take me to catch-up with the other sets? But in a way, it was quite good because all we did  
507 was practical stuff, things like how to make a (laughs) skirt, how to do a hem, it was like  
508 woodwork, but it was all stuff that I really liked doing, so I enjoyed it in that way and I made  
509 loads of friends, got on really well, then all the tests again and went into not the top set, 3a  
510 but the one below 4a/b  
511  
512 UE yeah  
513  
514 Alex the second to top 4a/b?  
515

## Appendix 5: Transcripts of two interviews

### Alex (teacher) followed by Mike (manager)

*I have known Alex as a colleague and friend for approx. four years, I worked closely with her for two of those years as a lecturer in an FE college in central England. She is fifty and lives alone with her two dogs.*

*This interview took place at her home, in her living room, on an evening whilst I was staying there. I had already had numerous conversations with Alex about her past and current experiences of observations. A few weeks prior to this interview, we had a long telephone discussion about an observation which Alex felt had not gone well and which she felt very emotional about. She felt a subsequent observation went better for her. Names of people and places have been changed where appropriate to protect identities. The transcript has not been edited and represents the actual recording as closely as possible. Words in capitals show an exaggeration in speech, pauses of longer than a few seconds are noted.*

*(Participant information and confidentiality issues have been discussed with Alex prior to the recording beginning). Alex has chosen her pseudonym.*

Alex I'll try not to swear

UE Its OK – no-one else will hear it...so ermm...

Alex I've got one, one of my mature group records me all the time - it always makes me (inaudible), I don't normally swear anyway, but...if... that kinda makes me swear...

UE it doesn't matter.

Alex ...because they're recording you, it...

UE Lets kick off then, tell me about your educational history, for instance I don't know much about your school-life Alex...

Alex Oh my God (laughing) He! He! He!

UE Can you describe what you, your school-life was like...?

Alex Erm (coughs) my school-life up until I was about 15, I moved schools every six months, because my parents were in business of where they moved all the time and I had, I suppose I found it, er, (pause) I was quite ANGRY, I think, in the end, because I felt that I was disadvantaged by the fact that I was moving every six months, so I felt that I didn't do anywhere near as well at school as I could have done. And I think I could have done alot better, had it not been for that moving around every six months and having to start...

UE Mmm

Alex ...a new place, all over again, all over the country, from scratch. So I never got to do half the things I wanted to do, like I wanted to learn a second language, but that never happened and my maths has always been weak. And I felt disadvantaged because of that, starting all the time in new schools different - 'where are you with your maths?' so by the time I got to the final school when I was 15, I felt erm, inferior...

UE MMm

Alex I always felt like I was trying to, erm, prove myself all the time, because I was always behind everybody. And it wasn't a very pleasant experience. That last school I was in, that Midland School for Girls, I just felt (coughs) really disadvantaged, and that I was fighting really hard to try to leave school with a reasonable mark. And right in the middle of my A levels, I had a erm, a car accident, and ended-up having to go to hospital every week,

UE MMmm

Alex ...which impacted on my learning even more...

UE MMm

Alex ...so, I didn't leave school with what I wanted. You know, I really wanted erm three reasonable results at A level, so I could go on to be a physiotherapist, that's what I really wanted to do, and I didn't. I wanted to do a degree in physio', and at that time - back in 1984, there was only two places in the country that actually did degrees in physiotherapy. Erm and one of those was Edinburgh and I applied to do that, and I didn't get the grades I needed.

UE MM

Alex And a lot, it was to do with having the accident.

UE MM

Alex And missing out on my biology lessons every single week. I had a three hour biology lesson, and every single week I was in the fracture clinic.

UE Mmm

Alex So I didn't do very well in the biology and never ended-up doing the physiotherapy. So I went into nursing instead. And erm, I didn't get to do my degree in nursing until right at the end of my career, because they way things were at that time, you had to get permission, to have the study time, plus you had to be funded to do the degree...

UE While you were working (?)

Alex While you are working (nods) and I had to wait my turn..

UE Oh, right,

Alex and when I was in, erm, London, I waited for a couple of years and then I left - the job. I went up to Northtown then I waited for three years, then I left before I managed to take my degree and then I went to Northland and waited for TWO years, and basically that's why I didn't do my degree until right at the end of my career and by the time I DID do my degree, I'd already made my decision I was leaving. Nursing anyway. But I thought I'm definitely going to go with a degree anyway.

UE MMm

Alex So I did, you know, I got a first-class honours, but I got that basically, as far as I was concerned, it was because I'd stayed twenty years in the career.

UE Doing the job

Alex I would have been, you know, disgusted with myself if I had've got less, you know. But that came at a price, because to be able to...I mean I'm not a high-flyer academically, and I totally, erm, accept that, but I got that degree because I gave up every single spare day and every single holiday, for two years.

UE Yep

Alex ..in order to get the grades. But it was to prove myself, that I wasn't as thick as I'd been made to believe because of being behind all the time at school and everybody....well not everybody, but I was always making-up for the fact that I started a new year and that... I'd been behind and I'd missed the last year and this that and the other, and I always felt disadvantaged. so my, you know, that degree, meant the world to me, getting that grade,

UE yeah

Alex it was a huge impact on me

UE Yeah

Alex and I felt that I'd proved myself, but at the same time I understand that, you know, I would have expected to have got a grade, or a result as high as that because I'd been in the job for twenty years.

UE Yeah

Alex ...and that enabled me to achieve that really, apart from anything else, because part of that degree, we didn't do a dissertation, what we actually did, 50% of it was practical.

UE MMmm



Alex So we went into the workplace and we did, we put erm, things into place like practice development projects that we started from scratch and built. So I did a, er, a teenage clinic for Diabetes, kids with Diabetes for two years and followed it through from scratch and that was 50% towards my grade really and analysing it and evaluating it.

UE Mmm

Alex I absolutely LOVED that, I really enjoyed it.

UE Did you, yeah.

Alex yeah, But then I left, I left nursing because, erm, erm (pause) demand far exceeded supply. And expecting more and more and more of you, but giving you less and

UE MMM

Alex and less resources - which is EXACTLY the position I'm now in. In Teaching. And I KNEW history would repeat itself. I KNEW, erm, it would reach teaching, but I didn't expect it to happen as quickly as it has.

UE Mmm

Alex I really didn't, because the world of teaching that I entered five years ago - it's completely different, to the situation I'm in now. And I'm AMAZED at how far we've come in such a short time and yes, in such a short time . I'm absolutely gob-smacked.

UE Well, when you think that they were paying for teachers to get trained.

Alex Yes that incentive, to come into teaching into an area that didn't attract many teachers and trying to get more students into HE, that was all part of the long-term plan. Yep. and now you actually, you're completely inundated with students and you don't know what to do, you have them coming out of your ears!

UE Mmm

Alex And but our, if they haven't given us the resources, to deliver the service that they wanted. What they were planning on. And then there's the question of where they're going at the end - outside of FE

UE Mmmmm - yeah.

Alex Exactly. And they still not, certainly when you look at the level twos, where do they go? Because the prospects are very poor.

UE Where DO they go?

Alex They go to apprenticeships, some of them. But I'll tell you where most of our students go to, they go into residential care.

UE Do they?

Alex Yeah, you have seventeen and eighteen year-olds working with eighty year olds. And I don't think its right because they've got NO idea. And they don't care. And it really it just a job and its just money. They don't...the care the compassion, is completely lost. They don't understand what It's all about. And I....I dread to think, I'm gonna be on the receiving-end of that (laugh together). Really.

UE Yeah

Alex You know, I put these morons into that place. And I'm gonna be reaping it.

UE Yeah, very few of them have got a genuine, innate sort of caring attitude, haven't they..?

Alex They haven't. I would say, you know, five years ago, you'd have 75% of the students on level three, would be the kind of students who you'd want to be attracting into the caring industry, and then you'd have a quarter of them where you'd think - 'bloody hell, what are you doing here' you know. And it's reversed completely now, so you have about a quarter of them who should be there, and 75% of them...

UE yeah

Alex don't have a clue what they're doing with their life, and don't have a compassionate bone in their body.

(pause)

UE So why are they there?

Alex Because they don't know what else to do. No, and I don't know if alot of it is mis-representation of the caring industry on TV - of the so-called caring industry. Programmes like bloody Casualty and Holby City, give a completely warped idea of what real life is all about.

UE Yeah

(Pause)

Alex So, I've no idea, the only thing I can think is, is that many, many of them, have had involvement with social services, have had involvement somewhere along the line with health and social care services, and they've seen a nice person,

UE yeah

Alex and they've been drawn to them because of that.

UE yeah, definitely.

Alex but the thing is, they're seeing my generation of people, that are staffing those places, which are people who genuinely care about people. But they don't have a clue about that.

Ue Yeah

Alex You know, and we're being replaced by people who don't care. Who don't HAVE a clue about what it is to, understand..you know, they don't have any compassion, or any respect for US (*meaning their teachers*) and you know, we're people in their immediate environment. So how can they, you know, they seem to think that they can switch it off. Caring. Switch it on and off.

UE Yeah

Alex But I try to say to them, you have to be innately caring to do that job.

UE Yeah.

Alex You cannot switch it on and switch it off.

UE yeah

Alex Like I can switch my swearing on and off!

(Both laugh)

Alex But I can't switch my caring on and off. It's a completely different kettle of fish and they don't understand my language. They don't understand what I'm talking about. I can't meet them on any kind of level any more.

UE Yeah

Alex There's only a handful that I can actually meet on a decent level. That I can actually relate to.

UE Yeah, absolutely. I can understand that. Definitely.

Alex It's just like being in a different world, on a different planet. Different values, different interests.

UE And as the years go on....?

Alex Its getting wider and wider and wider....

(pause)

UE So going back to your school-life, is there a particular teacher who stands out more than.. (others)?

Alex Oooooohhhh Ms Caraway..(in a funny voice) (laughs).

UE OK

Alex I always remember Ms Caraway, because, she was my English teacher, and English was always my first passion, before I got into the physiotherapy. And the only reason that happened was because of the accident. But Ms Caraway, because I think she recognised that I was a sensitive soul.

UE yeah

Alex And that I loved poetry.

UE Yeah

Alex And that she nurtured that in me. erm, and that, erm, my parents never went to parents' evening, they didn't have time. And the one occasion that did go to parents evening and my mum came back with a like a complete flea in her ear, because she'd been told by Ms Caraway that she must pay attention to me, erm, and that I was quite a sensitive soul and that she'd just been ignoring me.

UE Right.

Alex And that, like my Mum, she was really angry about that, but..

UE so she re-told that story to you did she? When she got home?

Alex Yeah, my Mum told me that story "ner ner ner" with all like (demonstrates) arms crossed and everything...and 'I've been told this, this and this' and I thought - thank you Ms Caraway.

UE yeah

Alex 'Thank you for doing that'. And she actually, there were two incidents, I'll never forget, one where she actually mortifyingly embarrassed me, never forgot that, and the other one where she actually she gave everybody when they left, a little booklet of their favourite poet. And she gave me erm, John Clare and I absolutely loved John Clare - it was either that or John Keats...

UE yeah

Alex ..and she couldn't make her mind up what she wanted to give me, but John Clare was the one who I was really, like chuffed with, and its just the fact that she'd taken the time to actually pay attention to what I really liked, and she got me this little leaflet, and I was quite aware that other people had got it aswell, and I knew that other people in the group were her favourites as well, but, she still showed me that

extra bit of attention that I never got from any other teacher, EVER and I had lots and lots and lots of teachers, through all...I mean I went to twenty different schools...

UE yeah

Alex ...and she was the only one...

UE Yeah, I probably went to that many as well...

Alex Did you? Yeah, and she was like the only one who EVER stood out, out of ALL of them...

UE So what about this embarrassing situation? Take me there...

Alex Oh my God (laughs) I'm so embarrassed (laughing) I nearly died! And it's not even that bad!

(Laugh together)

Alex But, you know like you have this erm, in a horse-shoe shape (*referring to the layout of a classroom*)

UE Yep

Alex ...and like we always used to trail in there for our A level English, and we'd just like, go round this horse-shoe shape, and there would be the 'in' crowd, like all the artistic ones, like Laura, really artistic

UE Yeah

Alex ...and then there would be the 'in between' erm, crowd, and then the really like 'God you're so SQUARE (in an exaggerated voice)'crowd - like don't join the SQUARE ones. So I was sat on the left hand-side of the 'in-betweenees', the left-overs - and she, she was always at the front with her desk and her chair and she never, ever, ever, ever sat down. She NEVER used the chair, she's one of these people either sat on the desk, or she walked around and talked, she never sat in that chair. And...

UE And what did she look like?

Alex Tall, thin, short hair. Yeah

UE Yeah.

Alex But quite a matronly-looking-woman, quite like, milk-bottle legs and neck....quite chunky legs (laughs)

UE Yeah, OK

(Laugh together)

Alex But, twin-set and pearls?

UE Right

Alex That kind of woman. And I came in to this lesson one day (laughs) and there was no chair at my seat.

UE Right

Alex And I thought, Oh God, I'll just go and take her chair.

UE Coz she doesn't use it anyway (laughs).

Alex No, she never uses it anyway, so I go to take her chair and she came in and she said 'How DARE you' (exaggerated stern voice) and I'm like (laughs)

UE (Laughs)

Alex 'How DARE you take my chair how ill-mannered of YOU' like this, and in front of everybody and all the lights and you know, the artistic ones like Laura going 'He he he' and I was like MORTified. Absolutely mortified.

UE How old were you then?

Alex I was sixteen, no seventeen - doing A levels - and ever since that day, if anybody ever takes my chair in class I go absolutely mad (laughs)

UE You? (Laughs)

Alex Yeah - I can't control myself (laughing) I know I'm doing it! (laughing) and they take my chair and I go "How DARE you"!! (Laughs)

UE I love that! I never knew that!

Alex Honestly, I friggin' see red - it's like a red rag to a bull. And it's obviously...and I think to myself, but you KNOW how MORTified you were when she did that to you, why are you doing it other people? (laughs)

UE Yeah (laughs)

Alex 'I want to make you feel like me'! (laughs)

UE That's brilliant! (laughing) I love that! (laughing)

Alex Why do it? But the thing is, I meant like, I meant the best intentions in the world, because we were in a room that was like miles away from any other room. there was NO WAY I could have got a chair, from anywhere else.

UE No, right.

Alex And it was logical, it was logical and she never, ever used that chair

UE Never sat down.

Alex And she'd been teaching me since I was fifteen, I knew she never used that chair. But when people take my chair in MY room, I always use my chair!

UE So to her it was a status symbol of - that was HER desk and that was HER chair.

Alex Yeah, But to me it was like - I've got to go and get a new chair a piggin' chair now from another room and I'm gonna have to. really, try and manoeuvre it and flash my card and you know, to me it's really like an inconvenience because they KNOW I always use my chair. So to me it is like really rude because you're taking something away from me that I use.

UE Yeah

Alex so but, it's obviously coming from THAT, that you know "How DARE you take me chair" (exaggerated voice) (Laughs) Miss Caraway ohh. I did love her (sighs) I did love her. She was a spinster.

UE That's good

Alex Yeah old Ms Caraway...Yeah I think because she made my Mum, sit, sit up and listen, and she hadn't..and my mum, I think mum and dad because we'd moved around so much, I felt angry about that

Alex Mm

And one particular thing, when we moved to one of the schools, it was the time of the year when in the first six weeks when they were assessing you. To see what groups they were going to stream you into. And they took us away on holiday and I missed all the exams. And when I got back I was put in the very bottom..

UE Oh God

Alex Bottom set...

UE To see if you could prove that you could work your way up?

Alex I never took any of the tests. They stuck me the bottom set and wouldn't allow me, I had to stay in that bottom set until Christmas. From September until Christmas in the bottom set. I mean I learnt how to, you know make a skirt! (laughs)

UE How did you feel then about being in that set?

Alex It was...well to start with I was frightened. Because they were really bloody scary. (laughs) I mean they were really..

UE In what way?

Alex They were emoti...I mean you know, these were guys that were really like off the wall.

UE Oh, alright...

Alex They were kids with serious dysfunctional, you know kids...

UE yeah

Alex Frightened they would have belted you if you looked...so when you went in class, it was like how to do I behave, because if I even LOOK at someone the wrong way, I'm gonna get a black eye..

UE really?

Alex It was like, to begin with everyday when I went in there the fear...I'm gonna get belted. But erm, I won them over because I was just joking all the time and messing about and I won them all over and at the same time I was seething with anger, thinking I shouldn't be in this...class and how far am I gonna get behind and how long is it gonna take me to catch-up with the other sets? But in a way, it was quite good because all we did was practical stuff, things like how to make a (laughs) skirt, how to do a hem, it was like woodwork, but it was all stuff that I really liked doing, so I enjoyed it in that way and I made loads of friends, got on really well, then all the tests again and went into not the top set, but the one below

UE yeah

Alex the second to top

UE yeah

Alex and erm, it was like, but then, I spent the NEXT bloody three months, trying to catch-up with all the lessons I'd missed. It was a really stressful time and...

UE and what were your parents doing?

Alex They just weren't interested, they were just...my parents were always business-orientated, they always, you know, I mean I don't blame them in the slightest bit, but when you look back on it, it wasn't the best childhood at all, because they weren't they were just basically, working unsocial hours, you know, in pubs

UE yeah

Alex so , you'd see them at breakfast, but then you wouldn't see them again for the rest of the day or the evening or anything.

UE MM



Alex So that was basically it (pause)

UE So they couldn't help you with your homework

Alex No, not with homework or anything like that.

UE And it was the same for your brother I guess?

Alex Yeah, she'd come home from work...

UE How did you feel about that at the time?

Alex At the time, you, you'd think this is normal. You didn't think anything of it. So you, you literally wouldn't see them when you got back from school because they were having a nap in between the pub opening hours. Erm and then they might pop in and see you at one point during the evening just to say, you know, have you had your tea, are you going to bed? You know, and that would be it. So you wouldn't see them for most of the time. So for Ms Caraway to turn around and say to my Mum that you've gotta start paying attention to your daughter, I thought - great - I was really impressed. With her.

UE So did anything change after she'd said that?

Alex No. No. Mum and dad were always too busy. Always too busy, with erm, you know the pub and everything. It didn't change but it just made me think - great, somebody recognised that you know I actually am trying really hard and trying to do the best that I can in the circumstances I'm in. The circumstances got much worse after that because my parents got divorced and then my dad died...

UE yeah

Alex and it all went tits up after that. Anyway...

UE Like life does

Alex yeah, life just does that, it has that way of throwing you a curved ball. But I was just pleased that I, I was just pleased that she recognised that I was a sensitive soul, that I was trying really hard and I did find you know, that poetry was beautiful and was moved by it.

UE yeah, so there was some recognition...

Alex yeah

UE there...

Alex yeah, definitely...

UE so do you think, erm, linking that with your life now, that you get recognition for your work as a teacher?

Alex No. I don't feel, I...I..I reached a point now, where I have very little job satisfaction, I don't feel that anybody recognises the amount of work that I do, at all. I don't think they understand and I think (sighs) they are, everybody's very, very busy and we are all busy, definitely, but I don't feel that anybody recognises just how much work I am doing. And it's got absolutely NOTHING to do with my eyes (refers to her poor eyesight) or my health. My eyes are really good at the moment. It's got everything to do with the workload that keeps getting pushed my way. And nobody is...everybody is just too willing to shirk the work that they've got to do, because they're drowning in it. But they... I don't...I'm just thinking to myself, why have I got all of this work? Why have I got all of this work? Is it that I'm creating this work, because I want this to run so well, that I'm setting erm, my goals too high? And I'm trying to re-evaluate. But at the moment, I don't think, I don't think that I'm doing that, I'm just trying just to meet the basic standards of what's required.

UE So do you think there was a time when you DID get recognition in teaching?

Alex (pause) No. I don't think I ever got recognition.

UE Really?

Alex I think, for me am I getting recognition confused with job satisfaction.

UE Mmmm

Alex Coz I don't feel I get any job satisfaction anymore. And I certainly don't feel I get any recognition.

UE Why? What bought you into teaching then?

Alex I fell into teaching (laughs). Just like I fell into nursing, I fell into teaching. Basically, yeah the only reason I did it was because I erm, I was trying to get the holistic therapy business off the ground. And it wasn't going that well. And I thought I'll do some hourly- paid teaching to subs.. supplement that..

UE MMmm

Alex erm, so I applied to do this hourly-paid, and then I got a letter back saying there's a full-time teaching post. And I thought to myself, well I don't want a full-time teaching post, because if I do that, I'm not going to be able to do the holistic therapy. But at the same time, I was in a position, where...(coughs) I wanted my own place, I wanted to support myself, I didn't want to envisage a future living with my Mum, so I thought well let's just do this full-time, for a while, and, you know, get my foot, you know, get myself back to square one again, and that (inaudible), just came into it for that reason, really. Because it was a job I had abilities to do. I wasn't particularly... for some reason, I mean thinking back on it now, I had some misguided and stupid idea, that it would be great to pass on my, my erm, my experience and my knowledge.

UE yeah

Alex But I was COMPLETELY naive. Because if I was going to do one of those kind of things, I should have gone into teaching nurses, not going into FE. I should have been in nurse training.

UE Yes, undergraduate nurses?

Alex Yeah! Absolutely. Not intermediates now, who couldn't give a toss...

UE Yeah

Alex ...about anything really. Anything to do with nursing or to do with caring for people. And that the...for me, that's the thing I've been fighting against for the past five years, is what am I doing? Because I've got this wealth of experience and it's just there, it's on a shelf and its getting dusty, am I gonna brush it off and do something about it, or am I going to replace it with this banal bollocks that I'm doing now and really it is banal CRAP that I'm doing now.

UE Mmm

Alex Because I'm teaching people that I have...I have erm, erm dumbed down my teaching and dumbed it down, and dumbed it down and dumbed it down to such a degree that I'm bored...shitless with it. I'm boring the tits off myself and that's become more apparently since September because I've actually got this group of mature students that I'm a tutor to, and I'm teaching them the same stuff that I'm teaching the other groups and they are REALLY interested in what I've got to say.

UE Yeah, yeah.

Alex And all the information that been stored up in this dusty shelf, has been coming out. But it also...I've..It's made me realise that I'm still connected to all of that stuff - everything that's relevant now. And that's all coming out. And that's wasted, completely wasted on these sixteen year olds. And, you know, should I carry on doing something like this? I'd be better off getting someone who actually wants to teach sixteen year olds...

UE so what is it about the mature students that's different for you?

Alex Because they have erm, much more knowledge of the world and they're of a generation that culture-wise, language-wise thought-wise, where I can relate to them. And the concepts that I might come out with - they're on it straight away. And they build on that concept and I'll come back at them with extra information, and they'll come back at me with further information and it's a real exchange of ideas, erm and you don't get that with the younger ones.

UE So it's a whole different relationship.

Alex Completely different relationship. They respect me as well. And they are interested in what I've got to say, genuinely interested.

*(Clock strikes)*

UE Mmm

Alex And they want MORE from me, and I've got it all there. It's just not coming out!

UE This is a common theme, with access or mature students, lots of lecturers who I've spoken to, have got this different kind of relationship and that is actually what makes things, their teaching worthwhile, its these small groups that keeps them going...

Alex Actually that's the only thing that's made erm the last three months worthwhile for me

UE Really

Alex ..is them. And the they are a difficult group of students because they are so diverse in their needs, you've got some who've been out of education for twelve years, and other people that did the progression diploma last year - they're actually quite used to something that's er...another one that did the access, but then had a baby...so they're very used to full-on, really intensive course - my course is really quite laid-back and then you've got people that haven't had to put pen to paper for twelve years, others that have got severe Dyslexia, but only just been diagnosed, you've got all of those people in the same room and you're trying to cater for all the different needs, and its so..it makes it very challenging and they want everything and they want it now. If you know what I mean and they expect you to bend-over backwards..

UE Yeah, that's right

Alex ...to sort them out, and then they've got no concept of what else goes on, coz they're in their little bubble. You know the younger ones are in a little bubble, but..

UE And I always found that, like they take your feedback, if you wrote feedback they'd take it very seriously...whereas..

Alex Oh yeah, definitely they do..

UE In contrast to the younger groups

Alex Yeah I'd wrote something this week, I wrote something quite sarcastic - I don't normally do that, but I thought I've had enough of you, you've really got on my nerves (laughs) and I'm letting you know what's what.

(Laugh together)

Alex And you've messed about in my lessons and I'm putting on your assignment that you have. And I've been really worried thinking Oh my God what's this student going to be like when I sit here, and today it was like normal, it was like I'd never written that on the assignment. Whereas if I'd written that on a mature person's, they

wouldn't have forgiven me, they'd probably come in and seen me before the lesson and had it out with me...

UE Yeah

Alex So Yeah, it's a whole different ball game.

UE I wonder why that is?

Alex Yeah, it's the first time I've taught them you see...I'd never..

UE It's not just about their maturity.

Alex No,

UE Because sometimes you can get a sixteen year old who is very mature but ...

Alex But is it to do with the fact that we have more respect of people in authority? So if someone in authority criticises us, it goes...it goes home and it roosts, and perhaps we want a bit more explanation, whereas the young ones they are probably used to so much criticism, or they don't give a toss about what we've got to say anyway, that it's like water off a duck's back if we actually criticise them...I dunno. (pause) Coz they couldn't care less, I mean what gets me about the young ones is that they ask you a question - and this really grates, it drives me mad, at the moment - they ask you question and they do not wait for you to give the answer

UE yeah, (laughs)

Alex Keep talking, not interested, you think - ' why did you ask me the question in the first place you...wanker' (laughs) Do you know what I mean?

UE Yeah, absolutely! (laughs)

Alex just 'talk over me why don't you, you know' you know. Grrrrr

(pause)

UE So, here's a question: describe a real situation, within a classroom, that was important to you, where you experienced deep emotion.

Alex Deep emotion (thinking)

(pause)

Alex: what you mean it could be any type of emotion?

*(Phone rings)*

Alex oh! Ignore that – it's my mother.

*(Phone rings off)*

Alex If she rings again I'll just say bugger off (laughs). Coz she knows you're here. (laughs) Oh no, I know, I know why she's rung, it's just to say she's back from bowling - we do that....erm, yeah, I can't think of any really, really happy situation that springs to mind, I can't think of anything like that...

UE Oh, well what about something negative then?

Alex Ohhhhhhhhhh there's lots of them

(Laughs)

UE Oh, that's sad

Alex What like a really strong emotion?

UE Yeah

Alex There's two, there's like two erm emotions....one was a real anger, and I felt really offended,

UE OK

Alex When, I can't even remember what it was about now, so it can't have been that important.

UE Mmm

Alex Where a student said something really bigoted,

UE Mmmm

Alex erm, it was a, and she...and you know, I said you're entitled to your opinion, but really that's not...I just got really angry and I felt like saying you are....such an ignorant, stupid, young woman and the reason why I got so angry was because she wasn't being stupid, she was being deliberately nasty and offensive. But it was borne out of racism. But the only other time, and when I cried, when I was showing a clip of some undercover care work, and people being abused and that ...and I'd already seen it once before, but for some reason it got me again and they couldn't see me because I was in the dark, but I had a little cry...

UE Yeah

UE Didn't it?

Alex No

UE Well, it didn't outwardly...

Alex No, not outwardly, not obvious. But I tell you one thing I've noticed, I might have mentioned this to you before, its complete, a total lack of expression in kids' faces these days.

UE Yeah?

Alex I don't know if it's to do with networking sites or the, whatever it is they're doing, they're not having one-to-one contact with people, but there's this like lack of facial expression.

UE Yeah, I know what you mean.

Alex You know, it's very difficult to deal with. Because you think they're not interested or whatever, and it's not that, it's just that they...

UE They haven't seen it in someone else...

Alex yeah, they can't reflect it. That's happening alot I've noticed.

UE Really? Increasingly?

Alex Yeah. But it's quite difficult when you're actually teaching them to gauge what's going on sometimes, because you, they're not engaged, because you can't see from their expression...

UE yeah

Alex it's just nothing happening...Its either that or they've all been on the (laughs) botox! And they've not got any movement in their faces anymore.

UE Yeah. I'd not thought about that, but I think you've got an interesting point there.

Alex I find it really difficult because I feed of facial expressions

UE yeah absolutely

Alex it's happening more and more

UE really

Alex MMm

(Pause)

Alex I, I don't know if there's more drug-taking going-on, if that's got anything to do with it

(laughing)

UE Well we are in the Midlands (laughs)

Alex Yeah, exactly (laughs)! But these networking sites, you know, where you just sit there and type and don't actually have to give a facial expression...

UE yeah, exactly

Alex yeah

UE oh dear,

(pause)

UE So, moving on to observations then, things have changed ..tell me about what it's like now.

Alex Well they've tried to make it more 'nicey, nicey' and more like, you know more acceptable to observee in that 'come and meet the observation team (*in a silly voice*) for a cup of coffee' and (Laughs). We've got better things to do, you know, like interviews or poke bloody pins in me eyes (!) (Laughs). And they've got pictures of all these people in the observation team, you know, so you've got like a...a 'wanted' poster, so we..

UE Oh, I see, so you know who's who.

Alex Yeah, and they're not very flattering photographs either. you can have...and I have seen them around the college and people have defaced them which I think has been brilliant.

UE Oh no!

(laugh together)

Alex like put moustaches on them and stuff.

UE Oh God, Brilliant (laughing)

Alex Yeah, and devil's horns...

UE Oh no! (laughing)

Alex It's like being back at school

(pause)

Alex There's one thing about teachers is that they've got a really naughty sense of humour, they really push, they really push it don't they.

UE The boundaries, yeah.



Alex I love that. Coming from the background I have come from, you never question authority. You always do as you're told.

UE Because our students are questioning authority and don't have any respect, so it rubs off on us perhaps.

Alex Yeah. And they are, and they do and they do question authority alot. But I thought that was great, when I saw these pictures..."Ohhhh yeahhhhhhh" (pause) I've forgotten the question, what's the..

UE What are the procedures like now...?

Alex Well thanks to you, and thanks to you, definitely and all the things that you put in, the observation window is now, I mean I believe It's directly down to you, it's only three days as opposed to five.

UE Right yeah

Alex ...so that's made a huge improvement for people, that its reduced down to three days instead of five. Coz it's just a nightmare, trying to, you know, prepare that many lessons..

UE Yeah

Alex and this 'meet the observation team' I think was down to what you'd put on there about people, you know, often from departments where they've got absolutely no knowledge whatsoever

UE yeah

Alex ...of you and you don't know who they are, so this is the opportunity to get to meet them and come and say hello or whatever. So that's made it a different...as well you know in terms of supposedly reducing the fear factor

UE yep

Alex I don't know

UE yep

Alex erm, I can't think of anything... well, no hang on, the year you were there, was the fact that a poor grade observation was linked to competencies.

UE yep

Alex .....and that used to be frightening and we knew that redundancies were coming up and I knew that they would be linked to redundancies. I knew they would. And now, that isn't the case now. So if you get a 'three', which is a 'satisfactory' – It's still not good enough, you've still got to be re-observed.

UE Satisfactory is UNSatisfactory

Alex You know, I don't understand it. coz a 'three' is a 'three' and it's NOT unsatisfactory is it? So why do we have to be re-observed? So we still have to go through this whole process within six weeks again, which, I think is, demoralising and all kinds of things. But apparently it's NOT attached to any kind of competency hearing if you got another 'three', I, I don't know what would happen if the next time you did. But certainly, it is attached in some ways to erm, the fact that they now have, no matter what ever you've scored for your observation, you now have to go through your development plan with an AP (*Advanced Practitioner*).

UE right

Alex So regardless of what your grade was. So I met with our AP to go through our development plan. And we had to go through the things that had been pointed out from my observation, about what I had to improve or develop, erm and went through them with me point by point and came up with very realistic and very easy solution. And I found that very, very useful.

UE Oh good.

Alex To actually to get some captured, protected time with her, all to myself, where we could just go through, all these bits and pieces and she could come up with all these solutions. It was brilliant.

UE Yeah, she is good.

Alex She was fantastic. She really was. And having done that, she also booked in another session for me, so I went through all my, my lesson plans, and she came up with all the extra bits that get you the 'One'. All the little ity-bity, put that on your list and that's the only reason I got the 'one', because I would have only ever hit another 'two' again, like I have in all the other years.

UE yeah

Alex But thanks to her, I got the 'One'.

UE Yeah

Alex So, that's a big improvement as well that you've got links into an AP that does actually take time and you don't feel rushed and you can actually do, what you can do to improve yourself. And, and something that's very real and realistic and things to improve the situation that I don't really feel was there before.

UE Mmm That's good.

Alex So, yeah, it's changed, It's very different from when you were there.

UE Well it was unbelievable.

Alex It was terrible. Looking back on that it was absolutely appalling.

UE Mmmm

Alex when you think of that...still people are very worried, but people aren't throwing-up the way they used to be. People were throwing-up! And being ill and like me crashing the car....

UE yep

Alex ...because I was thinking about that. You know, it's still a huge amount of pressure, an unnecessary amount of pressure and its unfair, being judged on your whole performance on fifty minutes once a year. It's just ridiculous.

UE Mmm

Alex It really is. But it has improved.

UE That's good.

Alex Definitely. But you still see people walking up and down the corridor, crapping themselves still, really working themselves up into a frenzy.

UE Yeah

Alex And worn-out.

UE Like you felt? What happened there?

Alex Oh my God. That bloody dickhead! What a wanker! He's the guy with spiky hair (*referring to the observer from the first observation*).

UE Right yeah.

Alex And he observed Casey last year, and he gave her a 'three' last year and she said to me she'd done exactly the same lesson as this year and she'd got a 'one'. And everyone had said to me you don't want to get him. And I, you know, not paying much attention to these things, I didn't really think 'who was this guy?', and this bloke turned-up and he was nice as pie to me and I've met him in the kitchen over a cup of tea and I thought 'oh, he's alright, nice enough bloke'. But the lesson went, it did go tits up. I mean when I look at the feedback he gave me, the feedback is really, really positive, it doesn't fit with the 'three' at all, it fits with a 'two'. So you know, the written feedback doesn't match with the verbal feedback. All I got, and I wasn't mis-hearing him, I got one bit of positive feedback, out of the whole twenty minutes of negative feedback he gave me, but when you look at the written feedback, the positive far out-ways the negative and it wasn't to do with what can I hear and what can't I hear, because I was definitely trying to hear something positive and nothing was coming out. He picked on all the negatives. And I've got a really well-prepared lesson, as I normally do, all my resources, all me bits and pieces, I'd done all my objectives, I'd

done everything that I could possibly think about that I would normally had done and they just weren't having it that day.

UE It was that group wasn't it, I remember you saying.

Alex It was the beginning of the day, but the day before they'd been observed twice.

UE Oh that's right.

Alex With two different teachers, and I think holding all of that naughtiness in, it all came spewing out and I couldn't believe what they were doing, because they'd been as good as gold with me before. And to honest I just thought, you know, it went all wrong basically because it was the week after half-term, so they weren't on the ball, I'd organised, the whole lesson was a re-cap to remind them about what we had done before half-term. They knew they'd forgot it all, and I had to re-cap it because the P4 (*refers to the assessment criteria for the unit*) was connected to the other grades. So I had to re-cap it all otherwise they'd be lost. And they just wouldn't have it, and there was only four of them that had actually done the P4 of the whole class. So I thought what we'll do then, you four that had done the P4, I will stick you four into four separate groups and you can lead the erm, the groupwork. And what they can do is brainstorm the P4 spider diagram in their group - that would make them all get there much quicker.

UE Yeah

Alex So they weren't having it. But I made them do it because what else am I going to do and most of them haven't done it?

UE yeah

Alex because if I don't make them do it they're going to be really behind if I don't make them do it. So while I was going around the groups, they just weren't complying, they were just pissing about. And some of them (begins to laugh) behind my back were poking each other with pens (laughs) and I couldn't see them.

UE Its quite funny now (laughing) But it wasn't funny at the time.

Alex It is now I've got their assignments in front of me, oh I'm laughing now, coz I'm getting my own back the little shits!

UE Yeah?

Alex Because, typically, those ones who think they know it all have actually produced the worst assignments.

UE Yeah, it's always the way.

Alex The thing is, the observer was trying to make out that they were bright! (laughs) and that they (laughs uncontrollably)...

UE But what would he know he's from engineering?

Alex Exactly, and that they'd done the case study. Them saying they've done it and them actually producing the work to prove they've done it are two different things...

UE completely different things

Alex ...and the work they've produced is completely wrong. So the reason they were messing about was because they KNEW they were shit at it, and they were just trying to covering it up really and messing about for the sake of it. And because I'd shown them up probably, by saying, you know, 'No, what you've done isn't correct', and you know, because I was a bit nervous, I was a bit too angry with them, but they really just pissed the whole thing up the wall for me. And Sally was in there, and she was very unforgiving as well.

UE Mmmm

Alex So it was terrible, I thought I've lost it here, I'm gonna get a 'three', erm, but I don't...you know, looking back on the feedback he gave me, it wasn't as bad as that, because I changed the lesson, so I've got certain things, like Blockbusters I was going to do with them, but I decided not to do Blockbusters because I have to clear up this spider diagram

UE yeah

Alex There's no point trying to do a re-cap with them using Blockbusters [interactive whiteboard game], if they don't understand.

UE Yeah

Alex Because I hadn't SAID that, because I hadn't actually said, at the end of the lesson 'we have run out of time, we will do Blockbusters in the next lesson' I got penalised for it.

UE Oh God

Alex It's just so stupid!

UE Crikey

Alex And I didn't have...I didn't have the erm...the desks in erm, groups. I had them in rows.

UE Yeah

Alex And I do that, one because one, the room isn't big enough anyway, two because of my eyesight, because of the fact that I've got with the lighting and if they're white, it doesn't matter if they're black, but if they're white, because of the

holes on my retina I've got distortion of faces (*refers to the symptoms of her long-term chronic eye disease*).

UE Yeah

Alex Their eyes and noses look strange when they're that distance away from me. So I find it quite hard, to, really concentrate on them, if I can't see their faces clearly.

UE yeah

Alex I don't feel very confident anymore, I've lost a lot of my confidence. And with the lighting, so if I can see their faces and I can keep looking at them

UE and you know where they are...

Alex and yes, I know where they are and I feel more comfortable and I, it helps with their names as well. And that's why I don't like having them in groups, in tables anymore.

UE So presumably the observer wasn't aware of...

Alex No, and that's the thing, he wasn't aware of my disability and clearly hadn't looked at any of my, I don't know where that would be in my, I assume that would have surely been if they look at, but they don't even look at it, anything to do with your work history or your, I'm down as having a disability, I mean that should be flagged-up surely when they...?

UE You would have thought so..

Alex But it wasn't...so what they, when I, one of the things that the AP made me do was, which was a really useful thing, was er, erm, on my class profile, for my next observation, I actually put a summary of the group..

UE yeah

Alex ...but a summary of me as well

UE good idea, yeah.

Alex brilliant idea. And I directly said, that it linked into my development plan, that I don't put the tables...because of my disability, and because I can't see I can't really distinguish dark colours against dark backgrounds.

UE yeah

Alex And I can't see dark bags against grey carpet, so I prefer to keep them in rows - which makes sense

UE Yeah

Alex Its logical isn't it...It's like little things like that that help..

UE You see what happens in some other colleges is that they have a pre-observation brief

Alex Ohhh?

UE Where you meet with your observer, you discuss stuff - like what the objective is of that observation, so say for instance you might be particularly weak in using IT, then you could say this particular lesson, I'm gonna use a variety of things, like the Blockbusters quiz, and use that as a Q&A and use IT and bring everything together and so that would be the objective of the lesson. So he will know, or she will know, exactly what your needs are...

Alex right

UE and he'll be all ready, reading the class profile and know what the class is all about and what the problems are and all of the rest of it.

Alex That's a good idea that, a really good idea. Because, as I said, our pre-observation visit is erm, it's not anything really like that, it's simply just getting to know someone's face and that's it. Which isn't, isn't relevant.

UE yeah. And it doesn't happen all the time you say?

Alex No, because you can opt in and out, and they usually book it at a time when I've got interviews and stuff like that and it clashes with my interviews.

UE Yeah

Alex Its always a time issue, definitely. It's either a team-meeting time or interview time and I never get to go.

UE Mmm. So overall then, how do you feel about observations in general?

Alex I hate it. I find it absolutely er, erm, demeaning, I find it demeaning, distressing, stressful, I find...I, I just think the whole thing has no (inaudible), it's one tiny part of the massive role that I do. I think the role that I do is very complex and that I'm being judged, and you know, I'm not just a lecturer, I'm a coordinator and nobody takes into account the impact on my teaching role of the administrative job that I have and the fact that I knew that I wasn't as well prepared as I normally am, because I'm working every hour that God sends with this other role and sooner or later and it did, it will impact the lessons I deliver and it did and it impacted on that lesson, because there's only so much I can do, and I couldn't prepare as much as I wanted to, I couldn't prepare something up my sleeve in case it all went tits up and I'm not...I was complacent in that I've only taught level three this year, not level two, and it not gone tits up once, and so I got complacent and so I hadn't got something up my sleeve, whereas normally with the level twos I've always got something up my sleeve.

UE Yeah - we always used to.

Alex But it was lack of time. Lack of time and being complacent as well time to prepare. Time to think of every eventuality, I just didn't have the time to do that. So I slipped from a 'two' to a 'three'. And I think.. judge it, looking at it...

UE you've still got to remember that a grade three is satisfactory

Alex Exactly, a grade three is satisfactory, but I'm being made to feel as if I'm UNSatisfactory, and that's the way they're making me feel. But the one thing, what been so bad about the whole thing is that I'm the only person in the entire team to get a 'three'.

UE Mmm

Alex Everybody else got a 'two' or a 'one' and embarrassment, mortification, of being a coordinator and getting a three is just been disgusting, I've hated every second of it.

UE Mmm

Alex And I know that 98% of the people there feel really badly for me, and really feel for me, but it's just that 2% of people who are just laughing at their sleeves and really pleased that I got a 'three'.

Alex What, it's kind of a..

UE Just to say, you know..

Alex 'I've got one on you' (unison)

Alex Yeah, so it was absolutely VITAL to me that I got that one. VITAL. (pause)

UE So now you've got a 'one' you feel that you've sort of got your revenge?  
(laughs)

Alex I've got my revenge on them, yeah, that's exactly right, but you know, it's about I've got this 'one', basically because I had time to prepare that I didn't have before and I've also had support and input from the AP, which has been fabulous.

UE yeah

Alex But I might have gained that 'one' had I had that time to speak to her before my original observation anyway.

UE Yeah, which should have happened.

Alex Which SHOULD have happened, she offered it, but realistically I just couldn't find the time to do it.

UE No



Alex I just couldn't. The thing is...but it also to say, in other ways that that guy that observed me, how can somebody go from a 'three' to a 'one' in five weeks, when I haven't done anything different apart from that two hours with an AP?, and you don't go from a 'three' to a 'one' with just two hours with an AP...

UE No

Alex So I didn't take any more time to prepare...

UE How far then do you think it may have been a change of attitude maybe, on your behalf....in the fact that you'd gone in there maybe with a slightly different attitude...?

Alex I think, MMmm yeah, I certainly I wasn't er, erm I wasn't as clearly motivated, I think I was a bit err complacent it was basically because I did not have the time to prepare. I had too many other things and I thought...part of it was that, and part of it was well I've always been alright previous years, I'll be alright this year, I won't worry about it.

UE So when you went in when you got the 'one' what was your attitude like then?

Alex In what afterwards, or...?

UE No before...

Alex Erm, I was really worried.

UE Were you?

Alex I was worried because I had spoken to (the AP) and said, you know, is there going to be some kind of competency link with this, am I going to be going down that route...?

UE Yeah

Alex ...you know, am I going to have to have meetings with you on a weekly basis, to look at all my lesson plans and things like that..

UE yeah

Alex and I can't bear that.

UE No

Alex and she said, 'Oh no, I don't think it's as bad as that'. But I thought, Oh Jesus Christ, that fear, I thought I don't want someone looking over my shoulder..

UE No

Alex ...and it was the real fear of 'how am I going to look in front of my colleagues'

UE yeah

Alex If I get ANOTHER bloody 'three'. And they are going to, it's not going to...they're not going to think it was a fluke, the first time it was just a bad group, they're going to be thinking..and questioning me as a teacher.

UE so was that in your mind then, all the way through?

Alex Er, no, as soon as I start teaching I forget that they were there.

UE really?

Alex Coz I was enjoying the lesson so much. With, it was a subject that I absolutely love and I had gone to alot of trouble to make sure it was 'just so'. And if, ...in an ideal world I always go to that amount of trouble for all of my lessons, because I had to for that one, and therefore its..the topic I didn't have enough time to do it to do it full justice, I really didn't, but erm..

UE What topic was it?

Alex It was Harold Shipman, you know, basically, it linked in quite well actually with the erm, two units I started in the new semester: Health and Safety in the complementary therapy, one of the passes is all about regulation and therapy and policing and...so to set the scene I thought I'd do four different tutorials on medical scandals. And start with Harold.

UE Yeah, good idea.

Alex And I love, I love all that.

UE yeah

Alex So I made this plotted history timeline of his career and all the things he did wrong and it was like four pages and I had to cut it down, down from eight pages, coz I was conscious of the fact that there are two people there with severe dyslexia and they wouldn't had got through the reading of them, which was quite difficult, but I manages to, erm, but there was nowhere near enough time to feedback as I would like to have done. It would have made it much more valuable. Erm, but as soon as I got into it...I just forgot that they were there. But also, one of the women, out of the two observers, I'd seen her around because she'd always smiled at me and always was friendly, so I felt more relaxed because of that.

UE Right, yeah.

Alex The other woman, I didn't know at all.

UE Right

Alex But once I got into the session, and got into the nitty gritty of it, I relaxed and forgot that they were there and just got on with it. And that was really nice.

UE That's the best way.

Alex Yeah, just forgetting that they were there. And it went quite smoothly, but I was just conscious of the fact that, you know I was going to run out of time, I was going to be penalised again because I'd run out of time. But because I was very verbal all the way through in that 'Right, we haven't got much time, so we're just going to do fifteen minutes of this, instead of twenty'...

UE yeah

Alex Like (the AP) said to me, tell them what you are doing. And that's what I did, and they said afterwards, yes you ran out of time, but you told us what you planned to do.

UE yeah, that's right.

Alex Ohhhh I'm alright then - kind of thing. It stilted everything - it stilted my er, flow.

UE Yeah

Alex I wasn't anyway near as comfortable as I would normally be (pause) But I did forget that they were there, but they were still at the back of my mind, still you know...

UE So how far do you think that, erm, your teaching is a performance? You know, when I'm teaching for example, I'm aware that I'm teaching, but I'd like to think that if someone saw me teaching, they'd say, oh yeah that was the Ursula that I know - kind of thing. How far do you feel your genuine self when you are teaching? Or do you think you become somebody else...maybe Ms Caraway

(both laugh).

UE Do you put on a performance?

Alex Oh yes. definitely. Erm, I don't know, I think...

UE Imagine your Mum was in the classroom. What would she think for example?

Alex No, I think, I think she'd be incredibly proud of me...

UE Of course she would

Alex ...but I think she'd be looking at me and thinking, you're trying so hard and you are wasting your time.

UE Really?

Alex Yeah, because they're not really listening. They are not really interested in what you've got to say. Erm, and that's the way I feel when I teach. (pause) And it's just such a shame, because I've got so much, so much that I could share with them, but I've, I, I've really begun to question my teaching methods, it's really made...the 'three' definitely. But before that, I was thinking, I've got to change erm, the activities that I'm doing, because quite clearly I'm not connecting with them because I'm not getting the feedback the expression, the interest the lesson, I don't feel like that that was a really good lesson, I really enjoyed that, I don't, that doesn't happen anymore, it hasn't happened.

UE so it used to happen?

Alex Yeah, It used to happen. And I don't know whether it's because I've changed, or the calibre of the students has changed, or, I....I, I just can't...

UE ...probably both, maybe...or the environment, the economic environment...that's changed things for us all now.

Alex Yeah, and this environment we're in now in that it's just a faceless, nameless building, there's no kind of community or, cosiness about the building at all, it just a huge corporate-type place with no familiarity. It's all kind of sterile. I think. And I need to do something to my room actually, because it's my room really, coz I'm the only one in there, so I should be able to tart it up a bit. I just don't have time, but I could quite easily start to tart the room up and making it more nice. Like putting posters up.

UE Yeah,

Alex Yeah, I've got a really like reflexology map, a foot map a huge one. I could put that up on the wall.

UE yeah, make it feel a bit more personal

Alex I don't see any reason why I couldn't do that, and that might make me come alive a bit. But I kind of feel, a..a complete lack, a like a loss er, loss of connection with them.

UE Mmm that's interesting.

Alex Yeah. But I don't with the mature ones. I feel connected to the mature ones.

UE Yeah

Alex I do feel connected to them. But sometimes, I hear myself and I just think 'God I'm boring myself', and I'm boring them (laughs)

(laughs)

Alex Do you know what I mean? You just think...Oh my...(pause)

UE Well I think that's about it really...

Alex Blimey, Is it?...I thought it would be more..

UE Is there anything else that you think is important to mention?

Alex Important? Oh, I don't know....I could say that I...who knows what the complex reasons might be, but when I got that 'three', I was absolutely, erm, devastated, and I cried uncontrollably...

UE yeah

Alex And I had to go home.

UE Yeah

Alex And that's never happened to me before. Well, it's happened to me once before, when my partner went off to another country for a year and I wouldn't see him for a year, but erm, I just went in the toilet, and I just think it was er, to me it was, I think I was working so very hard and then I knew it would be a humungous amount of extra work that I'd have to do, right smack in the middle of other things to do and I didn't need it, the embarrassment factor, the fact that I was thinking they must, they must really dislike me, I didn't think that they would really dislike me to that degree, that they would mess around in my lesson and cause me to get a, a bad mark.

UE You mean the students, yeah.

Alex That's what REALLY got me, REALLY hurt me, because I thought I'd got a quite a good relationship with them. And I thought they'd deliberately sabotaged....

UE More so than what management might think or do...?

Alex Yeah. Yeah, that really upset me, it really, really upset me.

UE Was it because the students didn't realise what the possible consequences were?

Alex I don't, no, they didn't. They just thought it was a laugh. I don't think they understood at all what the consequences would be to me and I still don't think they do. Erm,

UE I remember that level two group I had that time, your tutor group.

Alex Oooooorghhh. God.

UE And that was them, it wasn't any vindictiveness or anything like that...

Alex No, that's right...

UE ...it was purely...we're having a laugh, at your expense, and we don't really care what the consequences are...you know.

Alex yeah

UE Mmm

Alex Wouldn't we all love to be like that?! (laughs)

UE Yeah

Alex But it was just the fact that I'd been nothing but professional, I'd been friendly, I'd been respectful, I'd bent over backwards to try and help you guys, and this is what you do to me in return. And that, I just lost all my faith in students then, I think actually, since that moment, my relationship with all of the students has gone...I just think why bother? Why do I bother? But I know that I DO bother, because I'm now breaking my back to try and turn marking around for them, so that they, you know, so that their life is going to be a bit easier. But I think, why should I bother because tomorrow night it's gonna mean I'm gonna be pulling a really late night again tomorrow night. Why should I bother?

UE yeah

Alex When, er, you know, particularly for this group, this group that were ass-holes, I wasn't going to give them their making back until after Christmas, but because I know it's important to them, I now breaking my back to get it back for Thursday and why should I? Because, hang on a minute, what's going on here, I'm the one who's losing out, not them!

UE Isn't it weird?

Alex That's all down to, you know, to us though, isn't it, and our sense of erm....

UE we're too conscientious?

Alex Yeah

UE When we look at some other people that we work with...

Alex no they're not.

UE so why...? what is it that makes us feel more committed to our students than other people?

Alex I know. I've never been able to understand that.

UE Mmm

Alex No. Like today, I'd caught myself a little bit of time to do some marking, and then one of my tutor group came banging on my door and said 'can you help me with something?' and I said 'actually, number one: you're not supposed to be in college today, this isn't a college day for you'. and number two: this is my down-time. This is MY time to catch-up on work, have some respect for it. "Bu....bbbbuuu.bb..b....b....."

I said 'never mind any of that' you know ' you are impinging on my time' 'or, it'll only take five minutes' 'er, it's never five minutes!' It always takes more than five minutes. So I said, 'right five minutes, come on then'. Twenty-five minutes later she went on her way.

UE Yeah It's always the way isn't it?

Alex But it's quite clear that it does make a difference... because I wouldn't have remembered Ms Caraway, or any of that...

UE Yeah, absolutely.

Alex And she definitely remained a, you know, a person in my life. And you, by the fact that you didn't get anything and you feel that it would've made a difference?

UE Yeah definitely,

Alex I don't know, the whole thing, And I think Ofsted, not next year but the year after, so the whole of next year will be geared-up for bloody Ofsted.

UE Oh no that was awful.

Alex Want a tea or coffee or something?

UE Yeah, let's call it a day for now.

*(interview ends)*

*At the time of the interview I had previously only met Mike briefly, once, at an academic conference about six months before. The interview was arranged via email and took place in Mike's office during a day at the very beginning of the academic year. Mike has worked for this FE college, for a number of years and currently holds a position as Advanced Practitioner and Director for the teacher-training course which is run in conjunction with a University. He undertakes observations both as part of the college's Quality Assurance procedures and also observations required as part of the student's teacher training qualification requirements. This is one campus of an inner-city college and like many of these institutions the original building was a school. This interview takes place in his office, which he shares with a colleague (not present) and is situated in an annex of the main building.*

*Participant information and confidentiality issues have been discussed with Mike prior to the recording beginning. Mike is a pseudonym. Names of Institutions have been omitted or changed to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Pauses of more than few seconds noted like this: [...] emphasised words in capitals. Mike has authorised this version.*

Mike: Erm, do you want to wait 'til that ... (indicating the cafetiere) - or shall we get going?

UE Let's get going.

Mike Yeah. OK, yeah

Ue Do you want me to tell you bit about my research then first...?

Mike Yeah

UE I don't know how much I've already told you and maybe you've forgotten, since we spoke...

Mike ...forgotten, probably, yeah and I've been here 'til late last night doing advice and guidance<sup>67</sup>, that's probably why I forgot the milk as well,

UE Oh God, yeah it's a nightmare time of year isn't it.

Mike Yeah, never mind.

UE I'm not sorry to be missing that side of things.

Mike Yeah

UE ...but I am sorry to be...'cause there's a bit of a buzz isn't there, in an FE college that you don't get in many other places really.

Mike Yeah,

UE Yeah.

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<sup>67</sup> 'Advice and Guidance' sessions usually form a mandatory part of every lecturer's contract and takes place during evenings or weekends which are 'Open' to the public to encourage the registration of new students.



Mike So, yeah, no, it's been fine, I mean thankfully we're not starting our teacher training courses 'til erm, well, in a couple of weeks.

UE Right, and then you're heavily involved in that, are you?

Mike Yes, that's, I'm course director, for that and as an AP, I do all the quality side of things...

UE So do you have any involvement in any of the teaching of the students?

Mike Yeah, yeah, teaching the trainee teachers, yeah

UE Ok. Yeah

Mike So my trainees, they are teachers doing their training

UE ...but not the youngsters?

Mike Not the young nineteen year olds, no, thank God.

UE [edited-out – a brief intro to my personal educational background]

Mike So, what's your intended trajectory when this is done?

UE I'd just like to keep my hand in with a bit of teaching and maybe a bit of research...

Mike You see that's my issue, with my PhD, I'd like to do it full time because I'd just like to get it done and be immersed in it...

UE Right, yeah

Mike ...erm, there's the issue of staying very close to the field...

UE yeah that's right.

Mike ...and being immersed in that side of it.

UE Yeah

Mike ...and managing it, and I don't quite know, because I've never done it before, I mean, I know what my Masters was like, part-time, and working full-time, and the commitment, erm, but to do, to do the other, I could still do it full-time and do, take two classes a week or something...

UE that's right, yeah.

Mike ...if that's possible.

UE Yeah, absolutely

Mike ...but whether that's possible, do you know what I mean, in an organisation like this, where admin is so cut to the bone. I mean, I'm sending these letters out to the students now (indicating the PC) and all that sort of stuff.

UE Yeah

Mike [your research] sounds interesting

UE [more admin is inevitable], especially in the current situation

Mike I suppose because I'm, because of my teacher-education work, I'm..

UE ...helping teachers make the connection, between research and practice?

Mike I mean I could probably start in January, or even the April.

UE Mmmm yeah, and there are bursaries available ....

Mike ...trouble is, it's not terribly valued anyway here, I mean we have people who have PhDs working in the college but that's not in education, in their, they're using their sociology background or whatever and our principal, or Vice-Principal....

UE Mmmm

Mike ...did his doctorate while he was here.

UE Right

Mike But, because, I don't want to go on [like this], I don't want to be stressed.

UE No

Mike ...as far as the Masters...I worked hard, I got up every Saturday as a minimum, right from the beginning...

UE Right, yeah,

Mike ...and got into that routine. And when the dissertation time came that, all my summer leave, and that was OK and that, but it was so demanding and I don't want that pressure for five years, doing the other things as well.

UE Yeah it's difficult isn't it? I can't believe how this time has flown for me.

Mike Yeah, and when? You'll write-up next year will you?

UE Well I'm hoping over the next nine months, to get it to the first draft

Mike Is that too strong for you [referring to the coffee].

UE No, thanks, that's fine. The thing is, FE is such unique area...

Mike Yeah. So your research is about the observations and...?

UE Yeah, I've been in contact again with [author of article], I think I mentioned his work when I spoke to you.

Mike ....was he talking about teacher's training or about quality assurance?

UE Yes, both, this is what I'm exploring really, what I want to explore with you.

Mike Yes – how for some they pull out this particular lesson, which ticks all the boxes.

UE Yes

Mike It's like a mask, yeah. For some.

UE So that's what I'm exploring really,

Mike Yeah. I'm happy to help. I'll answer as honestly as I can!

UE Great. Thank you. Well, do you want to start by telling me about what happens here?

Mike OK, yes. The normal cycle for the quality assurance process, it's an annual thing, they are supposed to be organised within the first term of the academic year, on the basis that if there is anything that needs to be developed for that individual, and that individual be supported, then there's time for that to happen, and obviously the impact on the learners of course so it can be addressed early on and then, the idea is that they are graded observations and that they, erm,

UE ...and what grades...do you use the Ofsted...?

Mike We use the Ofsted grades profile, yeah and we...at this stage, erm it's in a state of flux at the college at the moment there's a discussion about how much notice you've been given, I think it's, at the moment about three weeks.

UE Oh, OK

Mike ...notice, but there's talk now, you know, in light of the Ofsted inspection regime, the inspection and everything that the idea that it should move to something that's less defined,

UE Yeah

Mike ...and people should perhaps be told it could be one of the lessons in that week, rather than the actual lesson, but that, and that's being discussed I think, at the moment, but the idea is that it should happen for the first term then observation graded the criteria being used, if they are a grade three or four, they are supposed to be re-observed in the same year, er, ...

UE by the same person or...?

Mike Not necessarily, and the observer really should be the 'Performance Manager', that's the new name for a 'Curriculum Leader'.

UE OK, so they are someone familiar with their..

Mike ...they are responsible for the provision, yeah.

UE OK 'Performance Manager', not heard of that one before,

Mike No, yeah, we have 'Performance Managers' and 'Sector Heads', Sector Managers are the, um old Heads of Department and they report the vice principal and yeah we have fortnightly

PRBs - performance review boards, well not always fortnightly, but we have fortnightly returns that the staff have to give to the performance managers in terms of retention and achievement...

UE Right, OK

Mike ...tracking and then they have...

UE You don't have a 'name and shame' kind of scenarios do you? Because I know that happens at some of these [review boards]

Mike Well, the performance, well I think PRB [Performance Review Boards] are chaired by the principal or Vice Principal and the quality person and I think that can happen in THAT space, but I think it happens in the ... I don't get involved and it's not about naming and shaming in terms of individual staff for observations, its strong on protecting people's professional identity, well, officially, so um, yeah to get back to the normal cycle is that all departments they should have an observation done at the beginning of the academic year in the first term then we also have what's called 'subject review week', planned as part of the quality calendar which means that one section will have the spotlight on them, and there will be a series of intense observations undertaken by people like myself as an AP, possibly the Quality Manager and possibly the Manager as well so that they're getting, we're getting the quality side plus the curriculum side having a look. Um, and that, yeah, again we can identify whether there are areas that are for development that are common across the section and what can be done and as an AP I will be....

UE So what highlights the spotlighted section?

Mike When usually, and it's a good question because we, we're going through that, a new calendar [year] this, starting it now and I said to the Quality Manager, yesterday, you know, 'what criteria are we going to base it on?' and usually we were told, from my perspective TOLD and I think it came from analysis of the stats and the data which tended to indicate, whether, you know, the figures, poor retention in those areas, um, we had an Ofsted inspection, so that, and that will probably trigger, certainly for this year, teaching and learning was effectively graded a 'Two', but they thought B and D [Business and Development] being actively promoted, not enough, you know, so those might mean things and that might mean that they look at areas that Ofsted didn't look at, because those sections that WERE looked at by Ofsted, might be the ones going forward and the things might be some of the things that Ofsted picked up in the inspection

UE Yeah

Mike So it depends where in the year those subject reviews happen and invariably, given the stresses and strains of working in a sector like this, in a college like this, quite often the PMs haven't had a chance to do those obs [observations] in the first term, so they'll wait 'til one of their sections is having a subject review, and the observations that happen then will tick their box, they are being observed, their staff, they are being observed in subject review that's still a report, that's against their name and then that goes up to the quality manager who then collates the data for the college profile um, we have a standardisation meeting

after the subject reviews we remove people's names, but we look at the profile: let's look at a 'four', did anyone have a 'four', you know, do we agree the criteria and that's how...and then the idea is that underneath the back of the end of the obs report actually this is the area and this is what needs to be done.

UE Yeah

Mike ...tends to be very much top down, I'm as guilty of that as much as anyone for that. There's very little dialogue, discussion, not that certainly from my perspective not because it's not want or a desire to do it, but simply because there's no time. You don't, you move on and then hopefully...

UE Yeah

Mike ... so that's the quality side etc. of the college and then we've got our teacher-training work which we do have some members of staff on teacher-training and [University partner training provider] are very, very strict about - quite rightly - that they are very separate. One can't be used for the other, er, so um, we have a candidate who, which is challenging to the, the, who is at once the candidate and the professional and the novice, and the because the professional when they're observed as part of that quality cycle, but now they are a teacher training and being seen as a student..

UE Do you think that that affects the way people perform in an observation?

Mike I think, well I try to suggest to trainees, um, that they CAN be themselves, and they can they can be creative, they can be experimental, because it's safe place

UE Yeah

Mike To do it

UE Yeah

Mike ...despite the fact that we have to grade, actually, the teaching obs to the teacher training um, which, then again, you get people saying 'well I want you to come to a good class, and I want everything,, because, you know, they want to get a good grade...

UE Yeah, absolutely.

Mike ...which defeats the purpose to a certain extent, so I expect there IS an element of, you know, performance, and you know, let me see if I can get my best class in, and make sure nothing goes wrong so that it doesn't impact on the, um, grade, but hopefully not to the same...

UE Yeah, that's a common thing about the observations...

Mike It's a false, it's a false environment, and of course, the space that we occupy in the classroom is, is very private to us and our learners, you know, those four walls, it's our professional space and someone's coming in and making judgements on those, because I get

observed, in fact I'm waiting to get an email shortly saying, you know, a time..(makes an anxious-looking expression).

UE Yeah 'Ahhh!'

[laughter together]

Mike Although I'm gonna push back a little bit, and take a ..because, you know, we get very good grades, well we should, for our teacher's training lessons, we would, but I'd like to be observed not in a classroom but giving feedback to a ST [student teacher] because I want to get the most out of it and I want to put myself into a position where someone CAN give me objective advice, and I'm VERY fortunate in having Mary as my manager, she was an AP, she was one of us, she was part of our team and then in the re-structure she, she got a management position.

UE Right

Mike But her background is ESOL, teacher training and AP that she's done a lot of work with that and she's a good teacher, very thorough, very, very fair, very rational, so you know, I respect her, her judgement. Which is what it should be.

UE Yeah, that's very important.

Mike Um... but we are all so very anxious, because our report gets written and we did the grade profile we are the only 'grade one' department in the section of the college, teacher training, and so we should all be a 'One'. So there's that pressure we all feel that we have got to do it.

UE Yeah. I know the feeling.

Mike So in a way, you do, your classroom it will be the details in the lesson-plan, not to the extent that it's wholly what we do, but it is much more focused,

UE It's about the preparation as well isn't it.

Mike ...and I'm very aware, we tell all staff that it's a judgement on the learning, not, you know we'll all deliver all types of lesson over time.

UE So how do you feel when you know you are being observed?

Mike It's a stressful time, particularly when, as I say at this time, when you have a reputation, when you've got, you know, your peers and I am, you know, a Senior Lecturer here, there is only four of us at the moment, so we are expected to be top of the game, not only because you are an AP but because you are a teacher-trainer too and that element, er, just like, you feel that er, you are being you're a performer, you are being looked at by your peers, you don't want to, erm, appear to be a fool or to be seen as lacking in an area, you must cover all the bases, and It's stressful because you just have to go and ... once I'm in it I'm fine, it just goes, particularly if you know the learners well, and I sort of, you know I will take a bit of a jaundiced attitude afterwards, in that 'well if it's a 'two', it's a 'two', ...

UE it's almost better for some people to get a two, because you're not then put on a pedestal?

Mike Yeah, yeah, exactly. But that hasn't happened, so when it comes around and, you know, how false it is, it could be much better and I've said it in our team with Mary we should all - she does do some teaching on the Diploma...

UE Yeah

Mike ...programme

UE Yeah

Mike ...that we should all get in and observe each other.

UE Yeah

Mike ...again these informal drop-ins,

UE Like peer observations?

Mike Yeah, and I'm trying to push, as an AP in the quality team, that we, engage with staff, because it seems very much that we, It's a very top-down, it's very, it's typical of that managerialist approach that, you know, this is how it's going to be, with all this accounting, auditing and erm, environment that we are in. Again it's very much a tick-box and it's done 'yes, yes, yes' and rather than thinking, well what does the staff...what do the staff think in their teams, perhaps in their subject specialist area, do they feel that erm, you know, they'd like support in a certain area and maybe have the AP come along and then it's more bottom-up, erm, it comes down to who's going to pay for it all, because all the staff are right up to their hours and there's also that element of 'where does it go'? and then - you know, who controls it? For performance purposes or developmental purposes.

UE So, as far as feedbacks concerned then, after you've done an observation when does that happen and what form does that take?

Mike It happens, erm, [...] immediately erm, after the observation that is practically possible, so particularly coming up to a break time, usual, usually they're an hour, and you...that hour precedes a break um but if it's not directly a break-time at the end of that hour, I say I'll be back in the break, so you do that and then you give the verbal feedback, erm, and then, where I think it falls down, is where we have to go and write the report, in subject reviews, particularly, the policy is not give a grade until erm after moderation has happened, after that week of all the obs, but they can usually get the gist if you tell them, I mean you obviously invite THEM to say how do they think it went compared to what they planned and the issues etc etc, I mean you put your two bobs in and then, er and then yeah, as I say, where I think it falls down is once the report's written and the grades agreed at moderation and they get it, they don't get it directly from us, it comes via their manager, and then, we don't have that time, well I don't as an AP, to follow...

UE So it becomes impersonal [at that point]..?

Mike Yeah, it would be better to sit down and go through that report with them and er, and, and also I think there's far too much of the observers point of view and nowhere near enough and no privileging of that teacher voice.

UE So what does that form and stuff look like?

Mike I can show you, erm, but it's a standard, erm, we've played around with it a bit, because there's a section on planning, er, and teaching and learning assessment resources etc. and a little check-list, yeah

[look at form together]

UE OK so it is a very...

Mike Yeah a prompt

UE yeah

Mike ...a bit like a technicians charter in some ways, we teach them as technicians, which I'm dead against but that idea which...but it does say on these report yes or no to these prompts doesn't mean to say it's good or bad, it may not be appropriate to... and they are helpful I've got to say, especially for an inexperienced observer, if it's an area that they are not familiar with and that and everything to be reminded of and comments...

UE So it's more than one page?

Mike Oh yes, yeah, depends how much you write, but I think it runs to, with all the bumf and the, you know, guidance, about fifteen pages, but the actual report is about three pages, there's a front sheet that does have the summary, summary strengths and weaknesses, have to use evaluative language and to be in bullet points and then an overall summative statement and then the grade and then backed-up by the subsequent pages where you can view then how did the lesson develop. So I do quite detailed, bullet points there and then the other points I just mentioned, the section on planning and resources is really just for notes and that supports that quite often the er, the observee doesn't even get that, that level of detail and then erm, yep, that, that's, that's how it is. And they are of variable quality of what's written up and we're very mindful to ensure that everything is evidence-based, erm and you use that to....

[interruption: phone call]

Mike Erm, that's the Vice Principal, excuse me.

[interview suspended due to unscheduled student visitor]

UE So....

Mike So where were we?

UE Erm, dunno where were we?



Mike Observation here.

UE What about you - tell me about you?

Mike Right...mmm

UE How did you get here?

Mike Very interesting learning, erm journey for me. Erm, I'm a trainer, and I did my degree in economics in New Zealand

UE Mm

Mike Erm, a bit like you, initially worked in a bank, then eventually got an opportunity to actually do it, do something worthwhile. Did that, did full time study, loved it then came to Britain, then erm,

UE What took you to Britain then?

Mike Well basically my partner, well before that, after my degree, I did a um, (...) I took part in a, I applied for a programme called [name of] exchange programme.

UE Right OK

Mike Which we really designed for people in their penultimate year of their undergraduate studies, but I applied (laughs) I applied when I'd finished but I was still accepted. The idea was that you, a British employer would take on a New Zealand worker and vice versa.

UE OK

Mike Just for a period of three months to work and everything. So I did that and I was accepted and my employer, my British employer, turned out to be a New Zealand bank based in Britain based, with an office in Britain.

UE Yep

Mike In banking, so I came originally, for a period of time, because I'd finished my degree I could stay longer and they were happy to have me, took longer, met my partner an New Zealand banker, erm, there, and ..we're talking 1990,

UE Right

Mike And er, but it was through that contact with the bank and then through thinking 'Mmmmm what shall I do', and I got a graduate position back in the office in Melbourne at the Bank back there and my partner was there and then we went to Paris for a period of time.

UE Yeah

Mike ...and finally the move to Britain had us in Britain now for eighteen years, was his work, to get him to, back into the same bank basically.

UE Yeah

Mike ...and at that time, it was actually perfect timing because I actually hated banking

UE Right (laughing)

Mike I was a square peg in a round hole.

UE Right

Mike Even though I'd embarked on a Master of finance - which is very difficult to get into and I achieved that and I got into a...but, I remember being in a lecture hall and thinking 'God, I can't BEAR this'

UE Yeah, yeah

Mike So I withdrew in two weeks!

UE Yeah

Mike Before getting a huge penalty for the fees.

UE Yeah

Mike ...and when this opportunity from my partner's work to come back to Britain and you know everything would be paid for and everything, so I was able to do it, so I dabbled.. I thought I might have gone back to Uni to do social work or something like that and erm, and a round about way, I, you know, I had a student visa, so I could stay here and then you- know-who came to power and changed the rules for my partner who was a Canadian but had a British mother, so he, you know he had that [dual citizenship]. So I had indefinite leave to remain and actually I did some study here, at this college, just as a means to be a student and...

UE Oh, that's interesting

Mike ...and people had said to me for years, because I come from a whole family of teachers, my father's a retired school principal and my sister is a classical maths teacher married to a maths master and my [inaudible] is a primary school teacher who is married to a primary school principal who's now a director for education at a another place and a sister-in-law is a primary school teacher my aunt and uncle who are.... so I've always.. you know, I do obviously, even in the banking I had to do some training stuff...

UE Training, yeah.

Mike So it was a natural thing that the person that am, I erm, I did some part- time work for an educational charity and people recovering from mental illness, and the person running the charity was a part-time tutor at the college, which was also, apart from being a tutor, a course director at the college,

UE OK

Mike ...for IT and business courses, and said I'm desperate for someone to take an evening class. 'I got no-one to do it, but you'd be able to do it'. and I said 'I can't do it', but I did, and you know, it

seemed I was a natural, so and then I had FOUND my thing, I guess, and then I did my PGCE at the University very early-on I think, twelve or thirteen years ago,

UE OK

Mike Again my tutor at the time said you know, you're very, very, very, good, you need to get out of this type of teaching, to be teaching more challenging types of courses like A level courses etc and erm, and then erm, a teacher-training opportunity came up and again I was plucked, you know: 'we need you to be doing that' so that's how I got into it, I was still doing some IT teaching and then doing some erm, point five, teacher-training, erm and that was pre- the 2007 reforms the 7407<sup>68</sup> changes and that...

UE Crikey yeah [remembering the qualifications]

Mike ...and because of the nature of the job, you can't do the job in a normal contract because of the observations you have to do and the travel time and I mean everything like that, so I erm, was appointed as an AP (Advanced Practitioner) with appropriate remission [from teaching duties] which allows the job to be done [laughs]. And then also became full time in teacher-training, which also I've found because that is where I'm very good at teaching at a higher level I think I struggle with the lower-level courses.

UE Yeah

Mike ...and I LOVE being with the university programme. We teach the City and Guilds DTLL<sup>69</sup>s and I'm Course Director for that, I can teach on it and the PPTL<sup>70</sup>s which is enjoyable and short but I love the freedom that you have and the, to engage in that...critical thinking... so it was because I had the PGCE<sup>71</sup> but my Batchelors wasn't in education or anything that I felt I needed to do that, the Masters at the university...

UE Right, OK

Mike In post-compulsory education and that was fantastic and erm, highly enjoyable, demanding I learnt an awful lot and erm, I feel that's given me, hopefully, you know, a greater sense of a, a bigger knowledge- base and more solid knowledge-base, hopefully, because I felt a bit of a fraud, it's a HUGE subject, teacher-training, and after talking, you know, being an 'expert' on theories of learning and, you know, it IS there, you KNOW it, but I thought I'd just like to have a deeper, and erm background, so it hasn't really...but it's given me a focus...

UE Sure

Mike I think especially when presenting at conferences, not that I'm particularly interested in that, but I do have a nose for bullshit, and reflective practice is sometimes bullshit [laughs] but I wanted to test that idea, so, you know, what it's like for main-stream practitioners who AREN'T in teacher-training who are aren't immersed in reflective practice I's difficult for them...that's what it came

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<sup>68</sup> Refers to the (vocational) teaching qualifications that FE teachers were encouraged to achieve at that time.

<sup>69</sup> Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualification

<sup>70</sup> Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualification

<sup>71</sup> Post Graduate Certificate in Education

from, there [the motivation for learning about it], but it , by researching and finding out, and that's what I enjoy about the course, that I'm teach... because, we are constantly, you know into journals, you know...

UE Yeah

Mike ...so that it's really, so, the next step for me really, is to do the doctorate and to teach at somewhere like the university, to be honest, but those possibilities aren't there now.

UE No

Mike So anyway, I could do it at [another] university, and I think they'd be very happy to have me and professional, to be their City-based person, but at the moment, and the Lingfield<sup>72</sup> review..

UE I know, what the hell is that going to do?

Mike So, I mean I'm in that state of flux at the moment where this college itself is going through a re-structure, with a new principal erm, consultant principal...

[interruption – knock at the door]

(?) Do you know where is the training room?

Mike Er, here

(?) Is it here?

Mike Yes

(?) Thank you

Mike OK

UE Do you get that all the time?

Mike Yes (laughs)

UE So

Mike So we're shrinking so we're probably take-over targets...

UE OK

Mike ...and that will have implications for the teacher-training

[edited out discussion about possible take-over]

Mike So we could, we do have a very, very good reputation in the area.

UE Mmm

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<sup>72</sup> Refers to the recently published government report – refer to Chapter One, Section 1 for details.

Mike So we might be, we might come out on top in any merger, I don't know

UE Yeah

Mike But, that's all up in the air...

UE So, going back to your undergraduate degree, what took you in that direction?

Mike Because what I was good at school, I enjoyed at school and I also thought that I DID NOT want to go into teaching (laugh together). I had to do something that was not in teaching and I didn't want to do a general BA, so it was a Bachelor of Economics and funnily enough, thinking about it now, now I'm forty-five, and sort of that journey, you get an idea that I was very interested in industrial relations, and I did very well at that and labour law...

UE Yeah?

Mike ...in that degree, so it's interesting that I'm you know, looking at what it's like to be in the workplace, workplace learning, erm,

UE Yeah

Mike ...and erm, that issues of that should be with me now.

UE Yeah, so it is [still] relevant?

Mike It IS relevant, yeah, but it if if you asked me about the supply curves and which way they go I wouldn't have a clue!

UE But do you think that that much more quantitative approach has impacted on your role today in looking at stats and graphs etc?

Mike Not particularly if I'm honest, but I do feel confident that if I'm called upon that I can,

UE Yeah

Mike Erm, but I don't, I don't really draw on that, what I DO draw on is erm, I guess being, having a critical nose, I think doing the bachelors and the PGCE has made me think like that, which I think is a bit of a struggle to sort of reconcile sometimes, just sort of looking at some of the students who come here, my expectations, you know, some of the learners we're getting through, they say they have a degree, and then we have to, I have to ask someone to give a second opinion, because I think how on earth did they get through a degree?

UE Yeah

Mike But then you have to realise that there are sort of differences, but I still enjoy that sort of idea that probing and generating discussion in the classroom, so I think that's a legacy from my experiences from being a student at university

UE Yeah, I suppose it certainly makes you more of a cynic in some ways?

Mike Yeah, yeah, and I think where I am obviously slightly erm...conflicted is I'm not exposed to, er, vocational subject areas and um, that's not my background, I'm much more academic,

UE Mmmm

Mike ...and that's why I'm in my right place in teachers' training, it's not a snobby thing

UE No

Mike It's just where I feel...

UE comfortable?

Mike Comfortable, exactly, and

UE Where your expertise is and...

Mike and therefore I chafe at the bit sometimes when I can see how...FE is so, um...allows itself to be manipulated and um, by politics and government

UE Yeah, absolutely.

Mike ...and, and it's, you hit me this way [demonstrating being hit sideways] and you hit me that way [from the other side] and without saying 'fuck off'!

UE Yeah, that's right.

Mike You know, don't interfere...etc. and that trickles down to, also, to what we do here. You know, I despair when a very experienced, you know 'good' teacher said to me 'what form am I going to use Mike?' where do I have to put this? and it has to be more than that. Surely to God. My question is 'do you differentiate', forget where you put it, that's my view.

UE Yeah

Mike That won't wash up top

UE Yeah

Mike The point is, [for example] do you understand the *principles of differentiation* and do you do it?

UE Yeah

Mike Not worrying about and spending hours thinking 'what template do I use'.

UE Yeah

Mike ...and yet that's the CULTURE we're in now.

UE Yeah, the managerialist approach, the kind of...

[...]

UE Are there any answers do you think in overcoming that problem?

Mike Errrr.... No. I think we all sort of have that 'strategic compliance' that we know what to do to satisfy whatever.

UE Yeah

Mike ...and again within those four walls, we know that does happen. I also know [about] respect of your management when I was exposed in a meeting - I was told that not all staff were on time for the start of their own lesson, which to me is anathema to, you know, because here I'm a teacher's professional and we should be valued as a professionals...

UE Yeah

Mike ...and then you've got managers saying but I've seen learners waiting outside a classroom and their teachers out photocopying, and I'm thinking, well, OK.

UE Yeah

Mike You know

UE Mmmm

Mike So I can see where they are concerned, and this is WHY we need a standard of practice and because we have SOME people who don't see themselves, don't... to what extent they represent the workforce I don't know, but we all have our teachers- training we are well-organised, prepared and we're there well before and we tell our trainees that, and we observe people who have the idea ,who could just turn up not prepared and sort of doing things on the fly and they're ten minutes late... well then they undermine my argument...

UE That's right

Mike In the eyes of management because I would like to think that let's drive things forward, let's privilege the professional voice, they know their learners, etc etc etc

UE Yeah

Mike But then you can kind of see from their perspective, the manager's perspective that they, some people aren't worthy of holding that....if you like...

UE Yeah

Mike So

UE Yeah, it's very difficult isn't it.

Mike Yeah, but I think, there is an opportunity for me personally, I guess, at the moment because there's an issue about my AP hours, my teaching hours, and so that I will have even less contact teaching so I can be more developed as an AP so that we can develop me and Kieran so we're both there permanently. It's that common idea, it means if I'd jumped through the hoops and be

interviewed and stuff [inaudible] but that, if I was good enough to be re-appointed each year...thankfully, so we might have a bit more...

UE Right

Mike ...behind us, to sort of say... and then come up with some ideas and get back into the ground, go into the staff meetings, be with the team, be with them, and not have them feel that you're someone coming into make a judgement but to get in and do those...observations with them, perhaps encourage a, a reflective learning circle-type approach, where part of um, again... it's not where's those hard facts, where's those targets, the correlation between what you're doing and what the increment grades are, and all that shit. That whole managerialist approach which, isn't doing a lot of good.

UE Yeah

Mike That's what I'd like to explore, with them.

UE Yeah

[...]

UE So is there a particularly memorable teacher for you Mike?

Mike Yeah a couple, from high school

UE in New Zealand?

Mike Yeah, in New Zealand

UE Mmm what makes them memorable do you think?

Mike 'Cause they were interested, they were interested enough and they brought the subject alive, in this case English, um and, and they allowed fun to happen in the class, but they, yeah, we're talking a long time ago now, but yeah, they, they...

UE Not that long ago now Mike!

[laugh together]

Mike it is a long time!

[Laughing]

Mike One of the things my, MY tutor said to me in my PGCE course she said you, it's no surprise to her that I was raised by someone who was an educator.

UE Yeah

Mike And she said, and she prefer her interests was actually funnily enough, even though she was teaching post-compulsory, in research between child, early childhood development and teaching and she said its common, you know, I would never had noticed it but even to tell your father



properly explained something to you or, and that's coming out in your teaching and so it's no surprise that you are a teacher,

UE So did you feel at home that you did get that support?

Mike Yeah I did and also it was, you know, it was very understanding, it wasn't an academic, you know, we weren't surrounded by dusty old books, you know, I had friends who WERE raised in households like that...

UE No, you weren't pressured then.

Mike No, not at all, just you, you make the best of what you, interests you, you know, they always wanted us to be educated, simply because you had the best possible start, so it was expected that you would go to university. That was um, that was the idea.

UE Yeah

Mike That people would do that, whereas I had an uncle, mum's brother who's the opposite, left school at fifteen and started a business and was accepted. He was always a bit cynical about all this academic fuddy-duddy stuff - you talk about 'all these academic books and everything' - so he made it all very good for HIS children one of them's my age that he didn't really value that. They didn't, she was a bright girl, she got [inaudible] a very interesting period, but no study, so that was the exact opposite if you like, to mine.

[...]

Mike So no I can't think of any specific teachers now....I'll have to think about that.

UE How would you describe your own teaching style?

Mike Um.....

UE Has it changed over time...?

Mike It has I guess, yes, and, you know, the more exposure you have to the theory and stuff, you know, you try to practice what you preach. I think initially it was all driven by the syllabus and what the syllabus required and the time we had to deliver it and it was all about a, um, a didactic approach I guess, um, whereas now it's very collaborative it's very um, you structure it, we use that classroom next-door [indicating the next room], that's our main room that's the biggest room, classroom, in the college, it's called the training room, so any training event in the college, external ones, here, we set it up in pods, so it's all group-based work and stuff like that...

UE Yeah

Mike ...and so the idea, the tutor, she had to do an observation of me, as part of the quality assurance for the university, and she just said, you have a very humanist approach, VERY humanist where you are, you know, allowing those discussions to flow and giving them a voice. It's still structured around the constant questioning and probing, but there's very little me standing and writing on the board or that kind of stuff, and drawing people out of context but then it allows it.

UE You've got that autonomy to do that, yeah

Mike Exactly, yeah.

UE Whereas that doesn't happen in every case...

Mike But then I might again, being a bit cynical of this whole idea of this, you know 'active learning' what the fuck does that mean? You know, effectively, getting people to - you speak this language - but the idea that you can do this 'lovely' but where's the learning?

UE Yeah

Mike ...and equally, a didactic teaching approach could be, you know, fine, a lot of people, I mean I've got colleagues I know, not so much here, but they say, the idea, the idea is that I go into a classroom to be taught something and they should sit me down and let's all go through it but no it's all group-based work and 'oh my God' and just talk to me, and tell me what you need. I mean that's the irony, we all KNOW, and that's perhaps how I got it, and ironically when MA teach, on the Masters I was doing at the University we had this - one of the things they wanted us to engage with the VLE [Vocational Learning Experience] and get him to do the synchronous discussions and stuff and all people on that course - APs and teachers' trainers, knowing what all the theory is "so why don't you want to do it?" 'Because we feel safe" and we're here. And they are just ignored. I mean there's HUGE stuff about online learning, that...so I'm sort of mindful about that, and I like to throw that into my, I like to throw that back to the students...

UE Yeah. Again it goes back to that identity thing doesn't it, of like I become a student, and you're the teacher and I sit here and perform a role as a student.

Mike Yeah, that more passive thing, and I guess it is about yeah...and being AWARE of that, because I've observed people in classes and...and in that class you can see that teacher trying to encourage more independent learning and self-directed learning and saying you as the [inaudible]the example is to look at those cereal packets, grams and index and what I'd like you all to do is go home and in your cupboards in your kitchens...

UE Yeah

Mike 'Why should we have to do that?' 'sort of thing, 'Your job'!

UE Yeah, exactly

Mike 'You give US the information'

UE Yeah

Mike But I want YOU to, you know

UE Yeah, take some responsibility

Mike exactly, it's interesting, it's challenging and yet knowing it yourself and that you may be like that yourself,

UE Mmmm

Mike Like, 'I'd like to get as much out of you as I can, and then you set me up and then I'LL do the learning outside' - that's what I do

UE That's right, you tell me what the objectives are...

Mike ...and I'll flesh it out...

UE ...because then that space of the classroom, becomes to them, not a learning space, it's just a space to dictate what the needs are..

Mike Yeah, it's interesting, I'm a bit um, yeah sometimes I'm a bit, sometimes I champ at the bit, I mean we have people coming in, they talk about this 70:30<sup>73</sup> thing because again it makes everything try to fit into one box and it doesn't.

UE Yeah, because it's down to the student's needs?

Mike Yeah, and some really just take to that. They need... I think it was very difficult, I mean I do, you know, training for industry, no, not really based on evidence it's a proxy for learning

UE We never know

Mike I'm a terrible cynic, Ursula, when it comes to these learning theories

UE I was going to ask you about your learning - is there a memorable situation?

Mike Um yeah, actually there is, and again this is, funnily enough, something that I do return to with my learners, this self-directed learning idea, the ONLY, REAL, assignment, or piece of work that I can recall (apart from obviously my Masters dissertation, which is relatively recent) which is in my Bachelor degree when the only time we were asked to come up with our own assignment and our own research interests and it was a, um, 'Socio-technical Car Production in Sweden for Volvo' - the fact that I can remember this..

UE Right ?

[laughing together]

Mike ..in 2012 and I did it in 1987

UE Bloody hell

Mike Um, and that's how, because , it came from me.

UE Yup

Mike I had to do it, and I...yeah, so learning is something that I found interesting, and it was labour industrial relations, the idea, that model, funnily enough, it WAS about that idea that instead of

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<sup>73</sup> Refers to the often-quoted controversial recommendation of ratio between student:teacher interactions in lessons.

being on a production line where you're doing the bolts in here, move along.. someone else...the whole TEAM built the car, they all, they all built the car and that was a new model. I mean I can't... there's a lot more to it than that, that I HAVE forgotten, but it does stand out to me, that if you ask me for years after I had done it that was li do remember and I got (chuckles) a great result because it was genuinely something that I wouldn't have chosen one of these titles and write about it, you, you [were given] carte-blanche to get it.

UE Yeah, and the emotions after the project?

Mike Enthusiasm. The enthusiasm I felt for the project, the love of learning, which is why I did the Masters, and why I want to do the Doctorate, that idea of gathering things and genuinely interested in finding out about, you know,. Um...

UE And that's interesting the parallels between the project that you were just briefly describing just then and the actual concept of the way teachers work...

Mike Yeah, that's interesting, I'd never thought of that. I'm in a bit of an interesting position in that we, now we, the family are in New Zealand and we have connections and property in different countries and I feel I don't want to, to get too caught here, or to lose touch with the New Zealand system. I've signed up to the [name] Vocational Research Centre—and I was reading some journals from the university website, and in there, there is this notion of professional identity coming up time and again, you know that dual professionalism that er, that allegiance that one had to their trades background or their vocational background as [compared] to a teacher, and the discourses about the managerialist approaches, that really interests me. The entrepreneurial versus the democratic idea and that collaborative sense of teachers and how that has been diminished...

UE Diminished, yeah

Mike With the idea that all managers are GOOD and the structures and managers, and you can see some of that here actually, you see some of the managers and you think well you couldn't be managing a widget shop (?)

UE No,

Mike You know it's all about are you the manager for this? Are you the manager of that?

UE Do you think it's the commercialisation of FE...

Mike Yeah absolutely, I think it's horrendous. Our 'Principal' is a 'Chief Executive'. How the hell he, before he retired, thank God he did, it makes you wonder how well equipped HE was to manage a business and put all the eggs in one basket...<sup>74</sup>

UE Yeah

Mike Um, knowing that it's a three year contract it could be lost.

UE So he left before this contract finished?

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<sup>74</sup> Refers to a large training contract that was lost with serious financial consequences to the college.

Mike He retired. He announced his retirement on the eve of the Ofsted inspection and um, when the, they'd already lost the contract and the finance person also left.

UE ...and how did that affect morale?

Mike Morale here is pretty poor because the Ofsted, when the college was inspected it got a 'Three'. When teaching and learning got a grade 'Two'. It was management that brought the grade down, like finance etc, so there was a lot of staff who were pissed off that the college ...when we are renowned for , well the teaching and learning was a grade Two, so we are attractive because of that, as a lot of colleges in this area, their teaching is NOT good, and so, I think we had people who were sort of, yeah, well, but, er, the idea of the principal -when he was here, slamming his fist, he was a bully he would slam his fist on the desk and saying to his deputy 'what training are you putting in place to address what Ofsted are saying?' I say what the fuck are YOU doing to address your problems? Because teaching and learning ain't a problem.

UE Yeah

Mike So I think, you know, um, perhaps there is that conflict, I mean for them, people coming from that background, they THINK they know how to manage, they are quite capable possibly, but at the end of the day, you'd like to think, and that's why, you know, the idea that you can [inaudible]for from any management position, performance manager, tracking I'd like, I'd like to.. my future isn't in FE, I don't think.

UE Right

Mike And I know that there are people who are passionate about it, because they see it, and quite right, they can SEE it and it IS that second chance to give to people and it's SUCH an important, and I believe in all of that I don't see my PLACE in it, that's all.

UE No

Mike I don't see where I can, you know, identify, if I did sociology and helping those people coming back to education but I don't have that background, but the university teaching, loving that, at university I'd be devastated if we lost that link.

UE Mmmm Who knows what the future holds with FE/HE?

[phone rings and is ignored]

Mike It's that idea that, the consumer society we are in, and the students will be paying three grand to go on these courses. Most colleges will be able to demand what they like. And the professionalism will always be an issue.

UE And the implications of the Lingfield report too...

[...]

Mike Just generally going back to observations we have to, um, come up with a better system, I think they're valuable, absolutely valuable, but when it's being used as a threat, as a performance management tool rather than a development tool and you know, you've got that idea, I'm sure

you've seen it I think it's Bell or someone who had that idea that that grid, you know, you got that performance and you have the formal and the informal.

UE That's right yeah and stuff

Mike What I like is the university's observation - who we work with, which is I can't remember the details too much, but I do remember that NO-ONE gets the, um, no-one other than the observer and the observee, sees - except the last section, which has something like - I think this is fabulous; the observer says 'this is what I've gained' then the observee says 'this is what I've gained' and then what we BOTH feel could be done differently and that's what management sees. I think that's so grown-up and professional.

UE Yeah

Mike And it's just that idea that this has happened and that they are trusting the professionals to get on with what needs to happen, to go and do it and then perhaps to get someone in, back in to do it again I think, and that's how I'd like to do it, but, [sighs] it just won't sit.

UE No?

Mike It won't fit here. And you have people, you know, who it's all about having that profile. I have heard of some colleges moving away from graded obs, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, you know, that kind of idea? And I can see the argument for people saying 'well, people will just exaggerate and they don't really care too much', and I suppose again, thinking about those teachers who don't turn up to classes on time, and all that stuff, that WOULD be fine for them.

UE Yeah

Mike Um, um so, I don't know, I think that would mean a whole cultural change.

{edited out - a discussion about another college's procedures}

Mike I've asked my family about this and it's interesting - no Ofsted in New Zealand of course, my sister who's a very senior maths teacher, been a mentor and stuff and I asked her, how are you seen by your head of department? But being in New Zealand, because I was there in August and picking up on it's a big issue now, quality of teaching, what can be done, huge focus now. They don't want an Ofsted, I don't think, they don't want it to come from that route, but they do want to have some better system where they can read up.

UE Because the reputation of New Zealand education system is...

Mike They still do much better than here, on their Intl scores, and their maths I don't think er, which is ironic actually that they are seventh in the world in maths or something and the UK is twenty-fifth, and there's no Ofsted or whatever, but they may be a bit more like England but have a bit more autonomy in the school or college which I think, well one of the [government] ministers in New Zealand is looking at it the idea that it's much harder to get into the BEd, much prestigious profession to get into, maybe that will change.

UE Yeah, it will be interesting to see what happens.

Mike I could talk on and on about this!

UE Oh, well thanks for your time Mike,

Mike Oh, you are welcome. Now, if I just show you the paperwork....

[recording ends after approx. 1 hour 45 mins in two parts)

**After thought from Mike after reading this transcript [extract from an email]**

“To be honest I haven't thought too much more about good/bad teachers. I do recall from my high school experiences those teachers who I respected - they were the well prepared, organised and enthusiastic ones who somehow could read you and did take an interest in you as a person (my English and geography teachers I have fond memories of). The bad teachers were the lazy, ill-prepared, poor communicators who enjoyed using their power to intimidate and lord it over us. There were a couple of those - the industrial arts teacher particularly springs to mind!”