

**Literacy teaching in the inner-London primary school: the
shaping of professional practice, 1970-1979**

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I, Emily E. W. Harper, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores how advice on the teaching of literacy in primary schools is shaped by the context in which it develops. Recognising the profound changes in perceptions of 'best practice' in literacy teaching in my own professional life, I question the relationship between the nature of these understandings and the specific environment in which they are formed. I argue that the past can be used as a resource to investigate how guidance for teachers develops in a particular time and place. I take a historical case study approach, focusing on four distinct groups with an interest in influencing language and literacy practice in primary schools in the context of inner London in the 1970s. These groups comprise the Centre for Language in Primary Education (CLPE), the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) Inspectorate, the ILEA Education Committee and the Bullock Committee on the teaching of English. I interrogate those traces left behind by the existence and operation of these groups to answer key research questions. How did members of each group identify problems and solutions in literacy teaching? How did they see their role and responsibility in working to improve literacy teaching? And how did their understanding of the space in which they operated influence their advice to teachers? I consider how we can think about those concerned with literacy teaching in 1970s London on their own terms while at the same time allowing their work to speak to us in the present. I argue that by looking closely at the function and relationship of these groups in the past we can develop more complex and critical approaches to current practice as literacy teachers by questioning those boundaries of possibility within which we all work and considering alternative spaces for thought and action.

Contents

Introduction	5
1 Literature Review	22
2 Methodology	38
3 Background: introducing the main players and their stage set	57
4 The Bullock Report: ‘accommodating all reasonable opinion’?	79
5 Developing literacy policy in inner London: the work of the ILEA education committee	123
6 The ILEA Inspectorate: ‘shaping their complex duties to a meaningful strategy’?	178
7 The Centre for Language in Primary Education: developing the professional teacher	228
8 Conclusion	285
Bibliography	291

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the reader to my thesis by outlining my initial research interests in the context of my own background and experience. I describe how my original questions developed in response to the research process, shifting in emphasis as I explored the data and discovered its possibilities and limitations. I discuss how this ongoing relationship with the data led me to reflect on the centrality of my own agency in the research process and on how I was using documentary traces from the past to think about the teaching of literacy over time. These reflections raised fundamental methodological issues around the process of writing history and encouraged me to think about how and why I wanted to use the past to speak to issues around literacy teaching in the present.

I argue that rather than distorting the past in the service of the present to provide us with answers or lessons, we can more productively use it as a resource for comparative analysis. By seeking to understand how literacy practice operated in the past *on its own terms* we can question the inevitability of present practice, exposing the workings of structure, power and agency on literacy advice in particular contexts bounded by place and time. As the questions I asked of the data changed in response to my understanding of historical methodology, so too did those areas which I wanted to investigate. In seeking to identify and explore spaces within which advice on literacy teaching operated, I developed data sets around four particular groups with an interest in the teaching of reading in inner London in the 1970s. Taking a case study approach allowed me to examine how the space available to each group shaped its approach to literacy teaching. Looking at several cases at one time also gave me insight into how relationships between groups functioned in practice. In conclusion, I set out the central research questions of my thesis, and describe how I will use the data to address these.

How did I get here?

The questions which led to my research inevitably arose from my own interests, experiences and values. The researching and writing of history is an inescapably personal process (Rury, 2006: 324). Although historians may seek to produce narrative which 'appears not to have a narrator' (Gardner, 2010: 26), for me it is important to recognise the 'inescapability' of my engagement with the issues to which I was drawn (Fulbrook, 2002: 187) and to recognise that my initial questions and approach were profoundly influenced by my own background.

The story of my research is firmly rooted in my experiences as a history graduate, a teacher in inner-London primary schools, a literacy coordinator, and a post-graduate student at the Institute of Education. As an undergraduate I studied the history of schooling in several contexts, looking at education policy in different countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. My first job as a primary teacher was in inner London, working with infants in an area characterised by high levels of economic and social deprivation. By the late 1990s I was working as a literacy coordinator, having attended an extended course at the Centre for Language in Primary Education (CLPE).

This period coincided with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in English primary schools, an initiative which involved unprecedented intervention in classroom teaching by central government. As literacy coordinator I was responsible for the implementation of the NLS within my school, working with colleagues and persuading them to change in ways which often seemed to contradict traditions of 'best practice' which we had all absorbed through initial teacher training, in-service training, and the culture of the school. This experience led me to think about the nature of curriculum change, developments in the teaching of reading and writing, and the extent of teacher autonomy in a system which seemed, by the end of the 20th century, to be increasingly dominated by central government and OFSTED.

I became interested in learning about changes in literacy teaching over time, perhaps seeking a way to make my own experiences more meaningful and to inform my professional identity (Steedman, 2001: 77). A master's degree in the history of education gave me the opportunity to study some of the major shifts in English education from the nineteenth century to the present. In my dissertation I explored tensions between progressive recommendations for infant teachers in the 1930s and the realities of literacy teaching in London classrooms during this period, as described in inspection reports and teacher accounts (Harper, 2004). This research developed my understanding of the literacy curriculum as a contested site, and of competing discourses underlying recommendations to teachers. Ongoing changes in my own classroom practice, particularly in relation to the drive for structured synthetic phonics teaching after the Rose Review of 2006, continued to motivate my interest in developments in literacy teaching over time.

Thinking about the tensions between classroom practice and official advice on the teaching of literacy drew me to look at periods which seemed to feature particularly intense debate in this area. As a teacher I had inevitably reflected upon my childhood experiences in primary school in the 1970s in comparison with my own practice, and I became interested in this period as one which seemed distant and particular enough for historical engagement while still containing many continuities and links to the present. Further reading around primary teaching in the 1970s confirmed my sense that the period seemed to be characterised by increasingly sharply drawn polarities of educational vision. What space in this debate did the teaching of literacy occupy, and how did it relate to wider issues underlying polemic on both sides of the argument?

My initial research proposal developed within the context of all of these interests. In searching for some 'coherent explanation' for my own situation (Rury, 2006: 324), I was looking to construct a narrative from the past which would help me to find a way of

understanding my present (Popkewitz, Franklin, & Pereya, 2001: x). My original intention was to 'explore classroom practice in the context of contemporary debate'. I hoped to find answers to questions like, 'what was advice on the teaching of primary literacy in the 1970s? What was really happening in classrooms? What was the relationship between the two?' Armed with this line of enquiry I set out on my mission among the shelves of libraries, the boxes of archives and the search engines of the internet. Insofar as I thought of it at all, I imagined the data as being 'out there', waiting for me to come and dig up answers until I had enough material with which to construct a satisfying story.

All roads lead to CLPE

During the first phase of my research I focused on finding my feet in the period I had chosen. The solid weight of official government reports on education were a reassuring starting point. I hauled the Plowden Report from the shelf and scoured it for references to literacy (DES, 1967). I did the same with the James Report on teacher training (DES, 1972b), and found a copy of the Bullock Report on the teaching of English in a second-hand bookshop (DES, 1975). Around these monoliths swirled eddies of contemporary texts on the teaching of literacy written by experts on the reading process (for example: Clay, 1972b; Goodman, 1973b; Smith, 1971; Southgate, Roberts, & Roberts, 1970; Spencer, 1976).

I also searched for texts which offered me glimpses into classroom practice, assuming that my research would eventually lead me to interview ex-teachers (for example: Bassey, 1978; Galton, Simon, & Croll, 1980; Goodacre, 1967; Plowden, 1987; Sharp & Green, 1975). I explored the debates over primary education in the notorious Black Papers (Cox & Boyson, 1975, 1977; Cox & Dyson, 1969a, 1969b, 1971), the pages of Hansard and *The Times Educational Supplement*, particularly in relation to crises such as the collapse of William Tyndale Junior School in Islington in the mid-1970s (Ellis,

McWhirter, McColgan, & Haddow, 1976; Gretton & Jackson, 1976).¹

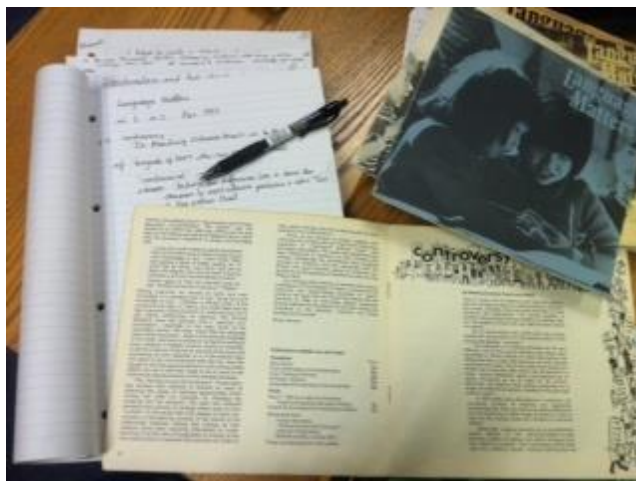
After several months of reading I was forced to rethink my approach. The first problem was that there was far too much potential data, and without more focused research questions I was at risk of drowning beneath waves of notes and photocopies before I reached the shore of disciplined enquiry. Secondly, data which I expected to find was often absent, and many sources which I hadn't anticipated were appearing. It was one of the unexpected absences which first led me to rethink my research questions. Confidently setting off for the London Metropolitan Archives where I had pored over inspection reports from the 1930s for my master's dissertation, I was dismayed to discover that the boxes containing the 1970s equivalents were scarce, and those which did exist were suspiciously light. I found a few reports from the late 1960s, but very little after that, and those that I did find were so short and generic as to be of limited use in discovering 'what was really happening' in classrooms.

This lack of inspection data led me to look more closely at the relationship between the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and the schools it served, and to ask questions about accountability and monitoring. The Authority's evidence to the Bullock Committee on the teaching of English referred to 'worried' public opinion on reading standards, supported by 'recent surveys' which showed inner-London children performing less well than their peers in other areas (ILEA, 1972a). The evidence provided a detailed account of action taken by the Authority to improve the teaching of literacy, one central feature of which was the establishment of the CLPE, a teachers' centre created to provide advice and training on language and literacy teaching.

¹ The school became nationally notorious in the mid-1970s after a breakdown in relations between teachers, parents and the LEA resulted in an inquiry into its management and operation. The Auld Report, published by ILEA in 1976, criticised teachers for neglecting the curriculum and ignoring the concerns of parents, and the LEA for failing to intervene before the school reached breaking point.

Being interested in the CLPE as an organisation which had featured in my own professional development, I started to think about the ILEA approach to the teaching of literacy with the Centre as a focus. I began to build up a picture of individuals, references, networks and relationships within and around the CLPE. I busied myself with folders of letters, pamphlets and meeting minutes held in the archive, and also with publications where I hoped to find evidence of a clear 'CLPE discourse' on literacy teaching. What did the CLPE understand by the terms 'language' and 'literacy', and how did its understanding of the relationship between the two influence its recommendations to teachers?² My questions were beginning to move away from classroom practice towards the shaping of professional practice, with the CLPE as the centre of my enquiry.

Looking at *Language Matters*



At this stage in my research, I found myself spending time in the Institute of Education library, a pile of copies of the CLPE journal *Language Matters* on one side, and paper

² During the 1970s, the terms 'language', 'literacy' and 'reading' were often used interchangeably in relation to primary teaching, and my terminology in this thesis reflects this. I also explore how each term was understood by different interest groups. For example, staff at the CLPE promoted 'literacy in the fullest sense' (see below, p. 69), as one element in a child's whole language ability and emphasised the importance of thinking in terms of 'language' rather than 'literacy' alone. In contrast, politicians and journalists often focused on testable 'reading standards' as the fundamental measure of success in literacy teaching.

and pen on the other. The first issue of *Language Matters* was published in July 1975 as a 'CLPE newsletter' to schools, to serve as a means of disseminating advice on language teaching, keeping teachers up to date with book reviews and course details, and providing a forum for accounts of classroom practice. The magazines, which sit in cardboard folders on the periodical shelves, are generally 24 pages stapled together, and full of articles, black and white photos of children and teachers, and examples of children's writing. As I read each issue I noted the names of CLPE staff, individuals on the editorial board, contributors, referenced authors and academics. I conscientiously read through each article: *Reading as communication* (McKenzie, 1976), *Comics: the literature they choose for themselves* (Warlow, 1976), *Do reading schemes teach us to read?* (Ballin, 1975), *Language in the classroom* (Forsyth, 1978). I collected suggestions for further reading, book reviews, and accounts of in-service training. Cross-referencing with the CLPE files in the London Metropolitan Archives, I found minutes of meetings discussing the journal's cost, content and purpose. In my file, a thickening pile of notes and photocopies began to accumulate, and on my computer I worked to develop ways of linking key individuals, texts and recommendations.

Burying myself within the worn shabby pages of *Language Matters* and the CLPE files, I began to make sense of the who? what? when? and how? questions which I had been asking. Who was selecting advice to give to teachers? How were they choosing to disseminate this advice? What were the central features of their recommendations? Fitting pieces of a puzzle together, I was busy creating a picture of those elements which worked together to constitute 'what was going on?' in advice on the teaching of literacy in inner London in the 1970s. As I followed up references in the articles, I researched the publications and job descriptions of individuals, and explored influences beyond the immediate environment of the CLPE such as the ILEA Inspectorate. The names on the page began to mean something to me; I had read those texts they recommended, and could nod in recognition at references to central concepts in the discourse. Sitting among

the documentary traces of the past, I felt myself engaged in that 'foundational and paradigmatic activity of historians', archival research (Steedman, 2001: x).

Happy as I was to be 'doing history' in this way, I began to feel uncomfortably aware that the process in which I was engaged was potentially infinite. The endless gathering of information, the pursuit of clues and the hunt for references seemed to stretch away on every side as I tried to make decisions about what I needed to investigate, and what I could neglect. While I felt a strong connection with the words and pictures in the pages of *Language Matters*, I was also conscious that in my anxiety to treat the past on its own terms, and to use sources with respect and integrity, I was failing to take control of the data. The answers I was finding to my question of 'what was going on' in advice on the teaching of literacy in this particular place and time were beginning to feel hollow and unwieldy. How could I move away from potentially endless information gathering and position myself more effectively in relation to my data?

If *Language Matters* is the answer, I need a different question!

At this point I dragged myself away from the archive to reflect on the nature and process of documentary-based research. What I had been doing was digging in the written records of the past to try and answer questions which were beginning to seem irrelevant. In order to reinvigorate my research, I read more about the nature and process of 'doing history' (for example Gardner, 2010; Jordanova, 2000; Jupp & Norris, 1993; Scott, 2000; Tosh & Lang, 2006). I began to understand that my own agency in the research process was inevitably central. Rather than attempting to present the 'doing' of history as an unproblematic, albeit laborious, search for answers which would reveal themselves after hours of archival research, I could avoid this 'methodological ingenuousness' by shedding light on the process itself (Gardner, 2010: 7, 15). Traditionally, historians have often written themselves out of the text, and have been 'reticent' about methodology

(Rury, 2006: 328; Scott, 2000: 56; Steedman, 1987: 120). Realising that my relationship with the data was central to the research process, and that question and data would continue to inform and challenge one another in a spiral of 'give and take', was liberating (Saran, 1985: 208; Tosh & Lang, 2006: 91).

Once I accepted the significance of my role as 'interpreter' of the data, I could work to become more explicit and reflexive in my interrogation of documentary sources (Gardner, 2010: 120). Instead of tiptoeing around sources like *Language Matters*, worrying that I was missing something out in my endless quest to produce a definitive account of advice on the teaching of literacy, I could move beyond detail and description by clarifying what I was asking and how I wanted to use the data to find answers. This would involve taking decisions over what to include, what to leave out, and where to draw the limits of my inquiry.

This sent me back to my research questions. What did I actually want to find out? How would I use the data to do this? My original questions seemed limited. I had been conducting research which had privileged respect and empathy for the past (Fulbrook, 2002: 187) at the expense of relevance to the present. The centrality of my own experiences and values to the research had been suppressed in a fruitless (and ultimately impossible) quest for historical authenticity. I needed to think about my own agency, and my own framework of understanding, and make these more central to the process (Scott, 2000: 56). If writing about the past can only come from a set of 'current preoccupations' (Steedman, 1990: 245), I wanted to overcome a tradition of 'unease' in historical writing and attempt to articulate how present concerns were shaping my research (Tyler & Johnson, 1991: 2). As someone still very much involved in the day-to-day realities of classroom practice I was used to the reactions of teaching colleagues who found it hard to understand why I was looking at the past when I was occupied with

teaching literacy in the present. It was time to think about why I was doing this, and how I wanted to ask questions of past data which reflected present priorities.

Approaches to the history of education

The history of education is a field which is both complicated and enriched by the relationship between two areas. In working with elements from two fields, the researcher has 'a duty to history and to education' (Aldrich, 2003: 134). The duty to history encompasses a responsibility to the people of the past in seeking to represent them fairly, with respect, and with as much depth and accuracy as possible. I interpret this as the endeavour to deal with the past 'on its own terms'. The duty to education involves the 'promotion of informed discussion and decision-making' (ibid: 137) within the present. As education is so centrally concerned with improvement, development and learning, it is essentially forward-looking and adaptive with a strong contemporary focus on 'what works' (Lagemann, 2005: 18). Those working in education are occupied with the here and now, and with the future. On a personal level, spending part of each week in historical archives, and part in a classroom of five-year-old children, I wanted to find a way of reconciling the two. How can the past be used in educational research, and is it possible to reconcile the demands of history and of education?

In my own research I had been working hard to see the past on its own terms. I had gathered, read and noted huge quantities of data, trying to establish a 'true' picture of advice given on the teaching of literacy at a particular place and time. In working in this way I was busy developing a meticulous micro-history of the CLPE, presenting this as a 'real' or 'complete' account of the past by virtue of exhaustive detail. This history could be expanded (perhaps endlessly) outwards to incorporate more elements, but it would essentially answer the same question; 'what was happening in the past?' The work would serve the same purpose as an exhibit in a museum; a reminder of a past where

'they do things differently'. In this, I was denying the true nature of my research as an active interpretative process between myself in the present and traces of the past. And in denying the relationship between history and the present I was running the risk of irrelevance. Anyone with a particular interest in the area might, at best, find it to be a diverting story. Anyone else would flick past to find something else which caught their attention. Ultimately it would constitute another contribution to a long 'series of brightly coloured lantern slides' (Tosh & Lang, 2006: 46) which tell stories about the past without connecting these to the present. Could I find another way of 'doing' the history of education which offered more potential?

An alternative approach, favoured by many writers on education, is to use historical research to make sense of the present. There were certainly elements of this in my original decision to find out more about the teaching of literacy in the past which I hoped would improve my understanding of my current work. Much of the writing which takes this approach constructs a narrative over time which has the effect of portraying the present as the grand conclusion or punch line. Sometimes this implies a Whiggish march towards educational enlightenment and the 'right' answers: 'how we worked out how to teach reading properly'. It can also be an account of loss, with central government eroding teacher autonomy and professionalism. In this tradition, for example, Janet Soler and Roger Openshaw write on the 'trend towards the politicisation of literacy education' in *Sowing the Seeds for the National Literacy Strategy* (Openshaw & Soler, 2007: 6), Denis Lawton describes the gradual centralisation of curriculum as a 'tightening grip' (Lawton, 1984) and Clyde Chitty tells 'the story of education policy' from the postwar consensus to the present day, tracing continuities between the Thatcher administration and the 'New Labour modernizing project' (Chitty, 2009: xiv).

The appeal of this approach lies in its construction of a readable account which 'makes sense' of both past and present by bringing them into relationship. However, the data I

was amassing in the archive seemed to resist my attempts to manipulate it in the service of narrative. The dominant 'stories' in the literature on 1970s education seemed to miss the point when confronted with the complexities of the past and the integrity of the data. The voices in *Language Matters* were speaking in their present, with all the contradiction and ambiguity that involves. Selecting and shaping them to conform to a narrative pattern chosen forty years later felt uncomfortable. I wanted to avoid the artificial imposition of order, direction and coherence on the passing of time in the interests of creating a meaningful story, and to resist playing the role of omniscient narrator, insisting that 'everything makes sense with hindsight' (Kahneman, 2011: 218).

Another approach to the past in education involves the search for precedent. A belief that we can use the past to identify patterns in schooling permeates much of the language of politicians and journalists in this area, as well as academics. Thus we are presented with 'cycles' and 'pendulums', and the clichés of 'reinventing the wheel' or 'back to basics'. The past, it is argued, can be used as a resource to help us to avoid 'past mistakes' (Alexander, 2010: 203). This approach is particularly tempting when looking at the history of literacy teaching; we can see shadows of present practice in the Victorian primer, and hear the tired dichotomies of 'the reading wars' resonate through the generations. We are naturally inclined to draw parallels with our own experiences, finding 'echoes' of current practice and 'seemingly recurrent discourses' in the teaching of reading which 'sound familiar' (Cove, 2006: 111).

This exercise allows the historian to assume the position of a sage who has seen it all before and can remain resolutely unsurprised by the twists and turns of present policy with its insistence on novelty and improvement. It can also be used to argue for policy informed by the past, either by seeking to recapture a golden era or by avoiding the repetition of mistakes by 'learning from history' (Cormack, 2011). In working with my data I was constantly coming across pedagogies, debates and approaches which had

strong resonance with present concerns in literacy teaching. However, I felt uncomfortable mining these traces of the past for lessons or for inspiration. It would be possible to understand the tattered copies of *Language Matters* either as examples of everything which was wrong in literacy teaching in the 1970s, or as surviving relics of a golden age of teacher autonomy and professionalism. But to do so would be to overemphasise the researcher's presentism and to distort the past by viewing it solely through the lens of current policy preoccupations.

Another way of thinking about the past?

My concern at this point in my research was to approach the past as a resource which could be used to inform practice in the present while also avoiding twisting it out of shape to suit current concerns. I found a way forward by focusing on what was particular about the teaching of literacy in London in the 1970s. By asking 'what was really going on?' and then 'how come?' (Troyna, 1994), I hoped to identify and clarify those structures and relationships within which approaches to literacy teaching were formed. And by being careful to root my questions in a particular place and time I could show that categories, discourses, and method in education are not 'timeless and universal' as they may seem in the common-sense of the present (Popkewitz, 1997: 135). Rather they shift continually in response to the fluctuating pressures and possibilities within which they are situated.

In seeking to understand the workings of education policy and practice in the context of specific period and location, it is possible to challenge the inevitability of the present:

'history serves to show that-which-is has not always been' (Michel Foucault in Kritzman, 1988: 37). As we question and analyse the workings of the past, we reflect that 'we would do well to ask ourselves, 'what is the nature of our present?' (ibid: 36). By accepting that 'now' does not automatically constitute some high-water mark of progress (or nadir of decline) in education, we can use the past to inform our understanding of

those forces which might be shaping our current understandings of schooling. Thus advice on the teaching of literacy is not formed by a march of progress towards a shining solution, nor by the triumph of false prophets and charlatans. Rather it develops and operates in particular contexts of time and place.

Turning back to *Language Matters* it now became possible to see its authors neither as ridiculous and wrong, nor as prophetic and right. Rather they were individuals working to improve literacy teaching within the only context available to any of us, framed by their own space as it existed in time and place. It was still important for me to build up a picture of the CLPE discourse and its dissemination, and the links and relationships between individuals, groups and publications which characterised this. But in trying to move beyond a merely descriptive account of past practice, I could identify how the space within which CLPE existed influenced the advice it produced for teachers. Gaining a clearer understanding of this space allowed me to see the past on its own terms, and also offered opportunities for using the past as a comparative analysis resource for the present. If we understand 'now' as a point in time like any other, we can interrogate it more effectively, questioning the apparent rationality and logic of present practice in education. If the existence, operation and legitimacy of the CLPE was informed by its context, what are the ways in which current discourse and policy might also be constructed?

Changing the questions

So what did I now want to ask about the past? My research questions changed from 'what were teachers doing?', 'who was advising them?', 'what were they being told to do?' and 'were they willing and able to do it?' Detailed descriptive answers to these questions were no longer sufficient. And I was no longer seeking to place myself and my own experiences within the framework of a coherent narrative to find out why I was

spending my time working through a structured programme of synthetic phonics with a class of 30 five-year-old children. Nor was I trying to sift through traces of the past to detect secret patterns, identify wrong turns and dead ends or shake my head at the futility of the swinging pendulum.

Having looked to material such as *Language Matters* to answer my initial questions about 'what was going on?' in advice on literacy teaching in 1970s London, I now wanted to consider more profound questions. What was the space within which *Language Matters* was devised, created and published? How was the advice which it contained on the teaching of literacy shaped by this space? How did the magazine's contributors understand the possibilities and limitations of context? And how did this understanding influence their definitions of problems and solutions in relation to literacy teaching? Thus rather than sitting on a neglected shelf in a library as an answer waiting to be discovered, the magazine constitutes a question in itself. If we are to seek to answer 'why *Language Matters*?', we need to look at the space within which it existed in place and time, seeing it on its own terms rather than shaped by our current opinions on the nature of its content.

Using case studies in historical research

Taking the CLPE and its publications as my original case study, I began to investigate those structures and spaces which shaped its function. The immediate place to look for data on the Centre's origins and purpose was the ILEA, and the workings of the Education Committee which directed its operations. In turn, looking at this data highlighted the central role of the ILEA Inspectorate in working to disseminate advice on the teaching of literacy to schools, and I developed another data set around those inspectors with responsibility for English and for primary education. I also wanted to look at how debates on the teaching of literacy were being played out nationally and at how the approach of the three ILEA groups fitted into this broader context. To this end I

returned to one of my 'official' starting points, the 1975 Bullock Report on the teaching of English (DES, 1975).

Using a case study approach I looked at four different, though connected, groups with an interest in the teaching of literacy in London during the 1970s. By using the data to explore the operation of each group in the context of its particular understandings of role, responsibility, possibility and constraint, I was able to explore how advice on the teaching of literacy was shaped by particular circumstances. I could examine and account for differences and similarities between groups, and also investigate the relationships between them. Seeking to avoid the sweeping and simplifying narrative arcs of historical writing, I focused instead on trying to capture some of 'the complexity of reality' (Levi, 1991: 110) in certain circumstances, while recognising that my own agency would necessarily form an intrinsic part of the account. The case study approach allowed me to embrace the 'incompleteness and ambiguity' (Franklin, 1999: 468) surrounding curriculum in the past, and to recognise this as a feature which persists into the present.

Questioning the data, data-ing the questions

My research has been continually shaped by a process of using the data both to reach conclusions and to raise further queries. Rather than asking questions, then scurrying to the archives to unearth increasingly detailed answers, I have stopped regularly in my research to revisit the direction of my investigations. I have also had to think hard about the purpose of my research and what was really motivating me to undertake it. Although not always easy or comfortable, this process has enabled me to use questions and data in a more ongoing and productive relationship. In seeking to find a constructive way of using the past to speak to the present I have had to consider which questions I can usefully ask of the data in my research area, and how I can best use the data to reach conclusions.

My main focus of interest is to understand how advice on the teaching of literacy is shaped by the space in which it is situated. To explore this I use four groups operating within the same area and time frame as case-studies: the Bullock Committee, the ILEA Education Committee, the ILEA Inspectorate and the CLPE. For each of these case-studies I use published and unpublished data left behind by their existence and operation to consider how they understood the context in which they existed. How did they define role and responsibility? How did they characterise problems with literacy teaching? How did they seek to reach solutions? How did relationships between the groups operate to frame possibilities and limits in their advice on literacy teaching?

In the following chapters I describe how my engagement with historical and sociological literature on literacy, curriculum and education policy has informed and influenced my research. I discuss how methodological issues have affected my approach to the data. I outline the workings of my four case-studies to provide a structural background against which to position more detailed analysis. I then look at each of the four groups in turn, using a range of documentary and pictorial data to answer my research questions on the relationship between their context and their operation. In conclusion I argue that a historical case study approach to curriculum and education policy can inform the work of those concerned with literacy teaching in the present by helping us to understand those limits and possibilities which define the immediate space within which we all inevitably operate.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I characterise my relationship with the literature as a process of moving through a range of uncertainties as I sought a flexible and productive way of using the work of others to inform my research (Thomson, 2013). I describe how I progressed from popular contemporary narratives of my area of interest to academic accounts of education in the 1970s, seeking to 'find out what was happening' in the teaching of literacy in the period in primary schools. My initial intention was to survey the field, focus on those issues which had a bearing on my research area, and identify a gap within the literature in which to situate my work. Rather than providing a comprehensive account of my reading at this stage, I trace four relevant 'stories' of education in the 1970s. I describe how, in seeking to position my research within these stories, I became dissatisfied with my attempts to fill a space in the historical record. Turning away from the history of education, I became interested in policy sociology literature which seemed to offer me a lifeline of structure and analysis as I drowned in pages of documentary data and narrative tradition. I describe how my attempts at shaping my data in this way proved only partially satisfactory, and I how I decided to return to the historical literature, although with a more focused and critical approach.

Looking at writers with an interest in literacy and curriculum in the past I ask more analytical questions about what they are actually doing. How do they use the past, and why? I discuss writers who have explicitly used the past to inform the present, and the possibilities and limitations which this approach offers. I then turn to writers who work on the small-scale and specific, and argue that in taking a case study approach it may be possible to address the past on its own terms while also using it to question and illuminate present practice. In conclusion I argue that as my understanding of the

literature developed I was able to move beyond the limitations of seeking information to amass, stories to cling to, or gurus to follow. Engaging with a variety of approaches and traditions, in the end I found it most productive to take a critical approach to the literature which turned my questions back onto myself: how could I use the work of other writers to inform my relationship with the data and my approach to the past?

‘We don’t want to go back to the Seventies’:³ stories of 1970s schools in popular culture

When I first decided to focus on the teaching of literacy in the 1970s, I was drawn to a period which seemed to incorporate extremes of educational thought and interpretation. Dominant popular and political understandings of schooling in the period may differ in emphasis and allegiance, but all seem compelled to address the prevailing clichés of the era. The images are powerful. Scruffy radical teachers ‘teaching their ‘kids’ how to undermine capitalism’ (Beckett, 2009: 216), huge comprehensive schools overrun with ill-disciplined pupils, primary schools neglecting basic skills as children express themselves creatively with egg boxes, the generation of *Grange Hill* and Pink Floyd’s *Another Brick in the Wall*. Here we see the Seventies as a period of chaos and conflict, a ‘disorganised free-for-all’ where ‘something had gone wrong in the heart of British schools’ (Sandbrook, 2012: 202, 216). In this tradition, political debate today still uses the Seventies as a reliably apocalyptic warning of the dangers of ‘ideology which ruined the lives of generations of children’.⁴ An alternative view, less dominant in the mainstream but prevalent among older teachers, educationalists, and left-leaning politicians, is the understanding of the era as one of possibility, a time when teachers

³ Beckett, A. (2009) *When the lights went out: Britain in the Seventies*. London, Faber and Faber: 2.

⁴ Hurst, G. (Sat March 22nd 2014). ‘Lives were ruined by child-led learning, says Ofsted chief’, *The Times*, p.8.

were 'liberated' by an 'explosion of excitement and creativity' (Shirley Williams interview, Baker, 2009).

None of this seems to capture my own remembered experiences as a child of the Seventies in a small Staffordshire primary school, which were rather mundane and involved dinner ladies with blue rinses, endless maths workbook exercises, and a lot of sewing. Everyone learning or teaching in the schools of the period will have memories which they will shape to fit their current reality. The era in both popular and private memory is full of image and myth, overlaid by accumulations of generalisation which warp past realities. Broad historical accounts of the period typically have a few paragraphs, or at best a chapter, in which to sum up the entire education system over the decade. While such necessarily generalised accounts are not inevitably 'wrong', they tend to rely on a handful of anecdotal images to represent schools of the period. These vignettes enter the mainstream as politicians and educationalists reach for easy shorthand for educational ideologies which still resonate today. In order to clear away these remembered and received distortions, we rely on historians of education to 'record and interpret (events of the past) as fully and as accurately as possible' (Aldrich, 2003: 134). As I began to read around my research area, I looked forward to moving beyond the popular stories of the period to discover a more nuanced and complex past.

What was really going on? Turning to historians of education.

My initial approach to the literature was driven by an intention to 'learn everything' about the teaching of literacy in 1970s primary schools. As I discovered very little writing specifically concerned with this area, I concentrated on subjects which seemed to incorporate elements which would inform my research; developments in primary pedagogy, education policy, teacher professionalism, and contemporary debate. I read a great deal and accumulated files of notes which I organised and reorganised by theme;

policy, teaching, progressive education, media debate, and curriculum. As this process continued, I began to develop a landscape within which I hoped to situate my research, constructing a giant jigsaw puzzle to which my own work would hopefully contribute a small missing piece. The themes which arose from this reading were closely related and interdependent, and I searched for research questions which would capture and explore these connections. Rather than provide a chronological account of this process, I will outline four of the most powerful stories which I identified in the literature.

The story of Plowden and progressivism

The central character in this story is progressive primary education. The narrative traces its origins, its development, the challenges it faced and compromises it made. The Plowden Report of 1967 (DES, 1967) emerges as the high water mark of this advancing tide, a moment when this particular ideology seemed dominant and celebratory (Bernstein, 1996: 57; Bernstein & Davies, 1969; Cunningham, 1988: 156). Thus the late 1960s is characterised as 'an age of excitement' (Richards, 2010: 8), of 'educational optimism' (Simon, 1991: 366), of 'expansion' and 'experiment' (Jones, 2003: 70): a 'golden age?' (Lowe, 2007: 40). The final question mark is telling; unlike the creative egg-box-painting myths surrounding primary education in the 1960s and 70s which have in some circles led to Plowden's political vilification (Kerry, 2001: 66), the historical account looks more closely at the extent of progressive teaching in practice. What were its defining features, its dissemination, its and limitations, and how has its meaning and significance shifted over time (Cunningham, 1988, 2007; Halsey & Sylva, 1987; Simon, 1991)?

The story of the backlash

If the story of progressivism is one of flowering, potential and the liberation of the primary school from the confines of the eleven-plus examination and rigid traditions of schooling, it is inevitably accompanied by an alternative narrative which shadows its growth and threatens to overwhelm it even as it begins to bloom. The necessary counterpart to the Plowden story tells of its nemesis. The final chapter of Peter Cunningham's book on the progressive ideal in primary education is entitled 'Reaction from progressivism' (Cunningham, 1988). This is the story of the New Right and the 'discourse of derision' which would eventually overwhelm the progressive cause (Ball, 1990, pub. in this edition 2006).

The account often begins with challenges to Plowden, and becomes a story of the triumph of a discourse promising a return to 'common sense', structure, and authority. This is traced in various fields: for example the media (Wallace, 1993), the infamous Black Papers (Musgrove, 1987), or in Tory policy (Knight, 1990). The 1970s are a crucial decade in this narrative as the seeds of New Right challenge sown in the late 1960s flourish and gain the ascendancy, and discussion of Plowden becomes a 'battleground' between two very different understandings of schooling (Cunningham, 2007: 22). Taken together, the two stories of progressivism and its New Right adversary characterise the 1970s as a time when 'a defensive left and an ascendant right fought over education's meanings, methods and purposes' (Jones, 2003: 72). The dominant discourse in education began to shift, and a classic division between 'madness and reason' was established which still informs much political action and rhetoric in education today (Ball, 2008b; Jones, 1989, 2003; Knight, 1990; Lowe, 2007; Simon, 1991).

The story of the tightening grip of central government

This story looks at how education policy developed in the context of the battle between progressivism and the New Right. The post-war period is generally portrayed as one of broad consensus in education, when 'a clear path of educational advance... could be discerned by any sensible person of goodwill whether his policies were of the right or the left' (Bogdanor, 1979: 159). Although the stability of this 'settlement' has been questioned, (Ball, 2008b: 72; Ozga, 1987: 144), it is argued that the consensus held together, however shakily, until the mid-1970s when it finally began to collapse (Ball, 2008b; Chitty, 2009). Particular significance is accorded to the Ruskin College speech made in 1976 by James Callaghan which saw the Labour prime minister attempt to recapture the initiative from the New Right by signalling the readiness of central government to intervene in areas of education which had traditionally been the preserve of local education authorities (LEAs) in partnership with teachers (Chitty, 1989; Simon, 1991). This 'moment' (Batteson, 1997) is a key episode in a broader narrative which traces the rise and fall of the post-war consensus to the present day through the increasing influence of national policy initiatives on schooling (Chitty, 1992, 2004). Thus the Seventies serve as a decisive chapter in the ongoing story of the 'colonisation of the primary curriculum' by central government (Campbell, 2001).

The story of the lost Golden Age of teacher professionalism

Another story looks at the place of the teacher within all of these accounts. What was happening to teacher professionalism among these turbulent shifts of pedagogic discourse and policy? Traditionally the 1970s are seen as a period of high teacher autonomy, particularly in the area of curriculum (Lawton, 1980: 10; Simon, 1991: 352), a final flourish before the onset of changes which would force teachers to redefine their

role and identity (Grace, 2008: 218). While the extent of teacher autonomy associated with the post-war consensus has been questioned (Gardner, 1998), and discrepancies between teacher accounts, memory and policy examined (Cunningham, 2012; Gardner, 2002; Grace, 1987; McCulloch, 2001; McCulloch, Helsby, & Knight, 2000), the story is still one of loss, a diminishing of autonomy and a need for adaptation to altered circumstances. Again, this takes us into the present day and encourages us to ask how the nature of teacher professionalism has changed (Cunningham, 2012). The Seventies emerge as a time when control was relinquished by teachers who failed to defend it (Lawton, 1980: 22), or as an era when a 'concerted effort' to undermine teacher autonomy began to take effect (Helsby & McCulloch, 1996: 58) and teachers 'lost control' of the situation (Lowe, 2007).

Finding a space for literacy?

All of these stories had powerful implications for my research into the teaching of reading in 1970s primary schools. As I began to focus more specifically on inner London, looking at ILEA and the CLPE, I searched for ways of relating my work to one or more of these accounts. The teaching of literacy was largely absent in these narratives; could I write my own story which would follow the arc of the dominant accounts with literacy as the central character? Standing back from the literature to survey the landscape which my reading had brought into being, I hoped to find a space where I could tuck myself safely into an existing story. Where could I situate my own research?

Clearly there was potential in each of the stories. Looking at the teaching of literacy in ILEA primary schools I could examine how the realities of the classroom related to ideals of progressive education, or how advice given to teachers reflected the concerns of the Plowden Report. Such an approach would strongly echo my previous work on the teaching of reading in the 1930s, exploring the gap between prescription and practice in

a very different era. I could also ask how far the ILEA approach to the teaching of literacy was influenced by or resistant to the ascendant New Right discourse, particularly as expressed in the media. To what extent did ILEA's advice to teachers respond to these increasingly insistent concerns? Or I could examine the relationship between one LEA and central government during a period which saw the assumptions of the 'cosy partnership' model increasingly undermined. How far was ILEA able to maintain its independence against calls for increased intervention and accountability? I could ask how teachers understood and used their autonomy when it came to teaching literacy in the primary classrooms of inner London. Alternatively, I could write my own story on how the CLPE and ILEA didn't fit neatly into the dominant narratives, which might need to be revised in the light of this discovery, or focus on LEA in-service training, teacher education and curriculum development, areas which had been noted as neglected in the field (Crook, 2012; Cunningham, 2002: 226; Gewirtz & Ozga, 1990).

However, the more I worked with the ILEA data, the more it seemed to resist being used in this way. Did I really want to use it as a footnote to the larger stories of education in the Seventies? By now I was sure that I wanted to work on a scale which would enable me to look at 'events and specifics and locations, ...contingencies, concatenations and contexts' in a particular place and time (Ball, 2006: 4). I certainly needed to situate and contextualise my work within dominant accounts of 'what was really going on' in education in the period. But as I read through boxes and files of documentary data, I felt dissatisfied at the prospect of using it to tell a tiny story which would fall neatly into place within or alongside these giants, thus 'filling a gap in the record' (Herbst, 1999: 739). My initial understanding of how I would contribute to the field seemed limited, and made me question what I wanted to do with the data.

The sociology diversion

At this stage I knew that I wanted to work on a small scale, but also that I wanted to do something more than tell a detailed historical story of 'what happened' in primary literacy teaching in inner London in the Seventies. I found myself looking for new ways of understanding my data and the questions which I would use it to ask and answer. What alternatives were open to me? Moving away from the history of education canon, I became interested in what sociology might have to offer. Dealing with structure, relationship and analysis suggested an approach which would allow me to use the data in a different way.

Turning to policy sociology, and in particular the work of Stephen Ball, I explored another way of thinking about education. By identifying the 'changing ideological, economic and political parameters of policy' and understanding the workings of their relationship, could the 'dynamics of policy' in education be captured (Ball, 1990a: 8)? If I broke down those forces which operated together to create literacy policy, I might find a way of working with my sources which would clarify category and relationship. Could I marshal my data to expose how economic, political and ideological forces were working to shape the teaching of literacy?

Discovering that in the late 1980s Ball had written about the English curriculum, explicitly using sociological techniques to develop a means of analysing curriculum change, I felt that there might be a way of applying his approach to my own work (Ball, 1985, 1987; Ball, Kenny, & Gardiner, 1990). Ball used the writing of a 'political history of English teaching' to develop a 'general schema for the analysis of conflict and change in school subjects' (Ball, 1987). This schema comprised three elements: the relations of change (power struggles within the subject community), the structures of change (those institutions and procedures which constitute the formal channels of educational policy) and the conditions of change (the broader political, economic and social context within

which the system operates). This seemed to offer me a way through the chaos of my data, and a way to avoid getting mired in detailed storytelling.

I was also drawn to possibilities in the work of Basil Bernstein, particularly his writing on pedagogic identities, competence and performance models in education, and dominant ideologies in the official and pedagogic recontextualising fields (Bernstein, 1996, 2000). If curriculum change comes from a 'struggle between groups' to assert their vision and priorities (Bernstein, 1996: 65), then Bernstein offers a way of modelling the ideologies and function of these groups which clarifies their operation. By analysing structure and relationship, we can see those forces which shape pedagogic discourse, and shed light on relationships between research, policy and practice. The work of other writers who had used Bernstein's models illustrated its potential (Grace, 2008; Marsh, 2007). Reading Bernstein, I had moments of imagining that if only I could fully grasp and apply his theory, my data would magically resolve itself into a pattern and everything would 'make sense'.

In practice, applying these schemas wholesale to my research proved frustrating. The more I tried to force my data to fit into categories, the more it slipped away, and the more I allowed for the complexities and ambiguities of my data, the more I lost any firm workable grip on the theory. When I looked at what Ball had actually done with his work on the English curriculum it didn't seem as convincing in practice as it sounded in theory: the clarity of his schema was often buried under the names, dates and explanations of his subject. I worried that if I tried to organise my work along similar lines I would be compelled, like Ball, to construct complicated diagrams linking individuals by institution, publication and influence. I was also wary of becoming so attached to a particular structure that it would dominate my work, and I would end up distorting my data by using it in the service of someone else's theory.

As I turned back to history, my reading of Ball and Bernstein did continue to inform my approach. I was aware of the potential of using Bernstein's structural analysis as a tool for understanding the past and shaping its detail into a more workable form. And Ball's insistence on the importance of sociology as 'a process of struggle to make sense of things' (Ball, 2003: 2), his suspicion of grand narrative (Ball, 2006: 2), and his use of a 'toolbox of diverse concepts and theories' to tackle questions (Ball, 1994: 14) offered me alternatives to the story-telling traditions of history.

Ball also introduced me to the potential value of elements of Foucault's thinking (Ball, 1990a, 2013). I was drawn to Foucault's understanding of what can legitimately be said or thought in a particular context, who can speak and with what authority, and how it is that one statement appears rather than another in a particular time and place (Ball, 1990a; Kritzman, 1988). I was increasingly sure that I wanted to use my research to 'make problematic the everyday thoughts and practices of schooling' (Popkewitz, 1987: 2), and to use the past as a resource for questioning the present (Foucault interview in Kritzman, 1988: 83).

Back to history: literacy and the past

I was beginning to reappraise my relationship to the literature. Instead of simply using it to answer initial questions, provide gaps for the placement of my research, or offer structural templates to follow, I took a more critical approach. I could use the literature to provide me with questions as well as answers: what were other writers doing? How were they doing it? And what were they trying to achieve? In this section I will look briefly at the work of some writers with an interest in literacy in the present who have used the past in different ways in their work.

Most immediately relevant to my own research area is the work of Janet Soler and Roger Openshaw on literacy crises in the media and parliament (Openshaw & Soler, 2007;

Soler & Openshaw, 2006). They take a chronological approach which traces the literacy debate through the policy landmarks of the 1970s, using newspaper articles and parliamentary debates as their main sources of data. Their work is an attempt to reach back into the past in order to identify the 'seeds' of the most prescriptive policy on primary literacy to date, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS). By identifying those 'complex processes that surround education decision making' (Soler & Openshaw, 2006: 5) they hope to illuminate how dominant discourses around literacy work to shape policy over time. If I were to write the story of the 1970s with literacy teaching as the central character, my work might assume a similar shape, an account of successive literacy crises with the NLS as the punchline designed to answer the question 'how did we get there?'

A second approach which uses the past to address issues in literacy teaching in the present can be found in the work of Bill Green and Phil Cormack on Australian schooling (Cormack, 2011; Green, 1990, 2006, 2010; Green & Cormack, 2008; Green & Cormack, 2011). This is less concerned with the storms of media and political debate, and more focused on pedagogy and classroom practice. Past discourses are analysed and uncovered through the examination of assumptions underlying method. Like Ball and Bernstein, the contested nature of curriculum is exposed and the inevitably political nature of English teaching is revealed. Influenced by Foucault, a central concern of the writing is to 'make the present strange' by revealing what is taken for granted in curriculum (Reid & Green, 2001: 1). The writers hope that by reminding us of those 'roads not taken' in the teaching of English, the past can provide us with alternatives and possibilities which we could otherwise miss through our immersion in the 'common sense' of the present.

Another writer who looks to the past to inform literacy policy in the present is Hayley Woodside-Jiron (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1999; Woodside-Jiron, 2011). Explicitly concerned with the teaching of early reading in the United States, Woodside-Jiron uses

close textual analysis of those past policy documents on which present practice is founded to reveal its assumptions. By tracing the origins and production of these texts, particularly regarding the teaching of phonics, she is able to identify those apparently neutral, 'stable and correct' discourses on which they depend (Woodside-Jiron, 2011: 154). By exposing these discourses she can position herself as a critical outsider and identify the 'power relations between dominant and passive participants' in the educational policy process (Woodside-Jiron, 2011: 177). Critical discourse analysis, with reference to Bernstein, Ball, and Norman Fairclough, gives her tools to investigate the mechanics of how these power relationships operate, to 'pry open spaces' which would otherwise remain hidden (Rogers, 2011: xx), as she explores 'what is thinkable and unthinkable' in literacy teaching (Woodside-Jiron, 2011: 154).

Many elements in the work of these writers resonated strongly with my own interests. Using documentary research to understand how particular discourses operate in context gave me a strong focus for my work on advice on literacy teaching. It also reinforced my interest in using the past to question present assumptions. However, I did have some concerns over opaque or selective use of data which was either explicitly limited, in the case of Soler and Openshaw and Woodside-Jiron, or unclear, in the case of Green and Cormack. Did such a strong emphasis on contemporary concerns risk using data to distort and simplify the past to serve present purposes?

Another way to use the past?

While the practising teacher in me welcomed the insistence on current debate, the historian was more hesitant. When I tried to use my data to make explicit points about literacy teaching in the present, I felt that I was moving away from dealing with the past on its own terms. I wanted to try to look at my data for what it could tell me about how advice on literacy teaching was informed by the contexts of its own particular place and

time, rather than trying to extract lessons or warnings from it. The work of three writers looking at literacy and curriculum in the past helped me to see that there might be a way to do this.

Gretchen Galbraith's book on childhood, books and schools in Britain between 1870 and 1920 looks at the social, political and economic influences on the development of children's reading in this period (Galbraith, 1997). She is interested in those contested spaces which illustrate a struggle over definitions and understandings of reading for children, for example the schools of London which involved the School Board, educators, politicians, philanthropists and parents. She argues that literacy must be seen in context and viewed as a 'social practice' which is situated in the particular circumstances of time and place. This approach strongly resonated with my own research interests, both in its examination of what the disputes around literacy can tell us about society, and in its insistence on the particular in terms of time and location.

Another writer dealing with specific structures and contests around schooling is Barry Franklin (Franklin, 1986, 1999; Popkewitz, et al., 2001). In working to expose the forces shaping schooling at certain points in history, Franklin uses a case study approach to demonstrate 'how the interplay of a host of local conditions serve to construct the curriculum in certain ways' (Franklin, 1999: 466). Using the example of the maths curriculum in Minneapolis, he argues that small-scale local analysis can capture the ambiguities and incompleteness of reality more effectively than broader studies (Franklin, 1999: 468). He uses a range of sources as his data, comprising different elements working within the area of curriculum in one city at one time. In his insistence on the potential of curriculum history to reveal wider social assumptions and disagreements, he echoes Ivor Goodson who argues that debate over the form and content of curriculum offers 'visible, public and documentary evidence' of struggles for more profound purposes of schooling (Goodson, 1985; 1995: 12). Like Green, Cormack and Woodside-Jiron, Franklin argues against any sense of inevitability in curriculum

development. Looking at my own data, I was keen to find ways of working on an inner London case study which would illuminate larger struggles over the nature of schooling and literacy.

Finally, the writing of Herbert Kliebard on curriculum in the United States from the nineteenth century was useful in showing me a way of tracing the emergence of different strands of educational thought and identifying interest groups who struggled to impose their particular discourse upon schooling (Kliebard, 1987, 1992). Kliebard is concerned with exposing the operation of power behind curriculum, which he describes as ‘a nebulous cross-section of what various interest groups in a given society prize rather than a unified and unambiguously articulated expression of the values of that culture’ (Kliebard, 1992: xii). This focus upon the particular and contingent nature of curriculum was important to me as I worked to identify sources of authority and legitimacy behind the operation of the literacy interest groups in the ILEA context, and how the approach of the ILEA existed in relation to wider national concerns.

Together these three writers seemed to offer me the possibility of achieving more historical integrity than those authors who were explicitly seeking connections between past and present. I was interested in the ways in which they sought to capture the ambiguous realities of the educational past in a particular setting. Their work confirmed the potential benefits of a case study approach, and of working with the documentary traces of curriculum.

What to do with the literature?

The process of engaging with the literature around my research area involved several stages and much questioning. I moved from initially seeking information, to looking for a place to situate my work, to a search for structure and theory, and then to looking at examples of how to work with the past. While I did move through all these stages, my

direction was not always logical or linear, and involved a great deal of uncertainty. And all of this was happening at the same time as my work with the data was leading me to ask different questions, and to look to the literature for different solutions to problems as they arose. Looking back, it is clear that each stage of the process has been necessary to the development of my research. Rather than adopting and then high-handedly dismissing each approach until I found one that satisfied my requirements, I realised that I could work with the literature at different levels and always in relation to my own research. If I neglected my data and became too immersed in the writing of others, I found that those texts which seemed to promise such authority and clarity in the library failed to help when I returned to the messy realities of the archive. Instead I found it more productive to seek to understand how these other writers worked, and what possibilities and limitations their approaches might offer.

In my research there are elements of all the strands of literature described above; stories in the history of education tradition, an awareness of structure and relationship, thinking about how the past can speak to the present, the challenge of dealing with the past on its own terms, and an attempt to use history to 'unsettle our certitudes and dogmatism' (Foucault, 1988 p,83). At every stage I have had to decide what to do with my data in a process of ongoing relationship with the literature. As I made decisions about my research questions and approach, I had to re-evaluate this connection. Rather than simply finding literature to copy, supplement or discredit, I have tried to use it to reflect and ask questions about how I want to work with my own data, and to keep my relationship with it as an integral component of the 'uncertain' process of research.

Chapter 2

Methodology: making history

Introduction

Writing a chapter on methodology both encourages the writer to confront *how* the research has been undertaken and allows the reader some insight into this process. In the introduction I wrote that the researcher's individuality should not be hidden but revealed to allow the reader to understand some of the concerns, enthusiasms and questions which motivated and shaped the research. In this chapter I argue that an awareness of the researcher's methodology is also crucial to an informed reading of their work. The research process is necessarily ongoing and complex from the outset, as engagement with the data both answers questions and informs new directions for inquiry (Tosh & Lang, 2006: 89). The collection, selection, organisation, verification, analysis and interrogation of data shape the researcher's work and lie behind the finished text (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007: 191).

It is neither possible nor desirable for me to take an audience through every tiny decision I made during this long process. To attempt even a fraction of this would ensure that the unfortunate reader spent almost as long reading my work as I did researching and writing it. The best that I can do is to offer some glimpses into the process of my work's construction. It is hoped that these glimpses will allow the reader to formulate some answers to the questions: 'what am I doing'? And 'can I be trusted'?

In this chapter I discuss the centrality of interpretation to the process of historical research. I describe the issues which confront the researcher when selecting sources and assembling data, and offer insight into my own experiences. The range of sources available has an impact on method, and I discuss the implications for the historian of education of a broadening understanding of what constitutes a valid source. I outline the

main types of source which I have used to construct my four data sets and the questions I have asked of them. To illustrate how I have used the data both to answer and to ask questions, I look in some detail at one example of a source and discuss how I worked with it. In conclusion I consider how the historian can make themselves present in their writing without obscuring the story they wish to tell.

Interpretation

In a traditional 'academic realist' text, the researcher effectively writes themselves out of the script (Scott, 2000: 56). The assumption that research follows an ordered and linear trajectory from hypothesis to data collection to analysis and then to a conclusion seems to offer the researcher a role of rational and impartial neutrality. If procedure is followed correctly, the researcher can gaze through the sources to the 'historical reality behind' (Evans, 1997: 104), and present this to the reader as an uncontaminated reflection of the truth. Today few historians would claim a role as omniscient and neutral sage, and most agree on the necessarily 'partial nature' of the historical enterprise (Aldrich, 2003: 141). However, they often remain so 'notoriously reticent about methodology' that any reader will struggle to determine how they have arrived at their interpretations (Rury, 2006: 328).

To move away from this disingenuous reserve we must accept and explore the centrality of interpretation to the historian's work rather than stating it briefly and then continuing regardless (Gardner, 2010: 7). Our attitude to our data should be problematized (Jupp & Norris, 1993: 45). After all we are not simply dipping into our 'sources' as if we were 'filling (our) buckets from the stream of Truth' (Burke, 2001: 13). What we are doing is more interesting and complex. Writing on Paul Ricoeur, Philip Gardner discusses the essential 'silence' of the historical text, and the active interpretation necessitated by its reader in the present (Gardner, 2010: 118). Thus 'the truth of the past resides in its

ongoing conversation with the present and the future, uncovered through hermeneutic interpretation' (ibid: 58). As individual researchers we are actively and inevitably choosing, rejecting, organising and questioning our data. The relationship between the data and its analysis is often presented as implicit when it is anything but, and its complexity and dynamism should be addressed (Gale, 2001: 380).

If we accept that the 'truth' is not out there waiting to be unmasked by the historian, the interpretative role of the researcher becomes central to the historian's work. In understanding that there is no one 'true narrative' account of the past (Fulbrook, 2002: 28) we are presented instead with myriad interpretations, as many and varied as the historians who write them. How can we pick our way amongst these alternatives, and what tools can we use to evaluate their reliability? As a historian, I am clear that I am not writing fiction. The traces of the past with which I work do constrain my practice and limit my interpretation, and I rely upon these restrictions to steer me towards credible conclusions. But if I refuse to offer the reader any insight into this process they will be unable to 'weigh the reliability' of my work (Rury, 2006: 325). I accept that I cannot be 'objective', but I can be more (or less) reliable in the way I interact with my data. If I want to gain the trust of my reader, it makes sense to offer them some means of understanding my own processes of interpretation rather than hiding behind a cloak of invisibility and hoping that they don't ask any questions.

Selecting the evidence

As I described in the introduction, the initial process of my research was primarily exploratory rather than systematic (Greenhalgh, et al., 2005: 427). The questions changed and developed, the focus shifted. I found data which I didn't know existed, and failed to find data which I had expected. I stumbled upon items in the archive which led me in unpredictable directions. I worked my way through huge piles of documents only

to decide, reluctantly, that they had no place in my research. Through all of these experiences I was continually choosing and rejecting sources while 'identifying and shaping a historical problem' (Jordanova, 2000: 174). My selection of data was inextricably linked to my developing lines of questioning, and my understanding of what was important and what was irrelevant was in a state of flux. The sources lay silent and passive in their boxes or on their shelves, and my decisions on which to seek out, to analyse, to privilege with attention, demand to be addressed.

The historian inevitably begins with questions, raised and/or answered by a source. My questions constantly shaped what I identified as being 'worthwhile investigating' (Saran, 1985: 211). During this process I was inevitably seeking to make meaning, imposing category and distinction and working to 'remake the 'things' of the world into 'data' that are to be interpreted and explained' (Popkewitz, 1997: 132). How I selected what would become 'data' and what would be glanced at and returned to the shelf was a process which shaped my research from the outset. As I read through pages of material, what I skimmed through, flicked past, failed to notice, or ran out of time to investigate, contributed as much to my work as the much smaller number of 'significant' discoveries.

The shape of my research was not only influenced by my conscious decision-making. Working with sources in an archive, my direction was also determined by myriad choices others had made before me. After all, the content of a library and an archive are carefully selected by those who are tasked with deciding what is important enough to save and what can be discarded. Chance also plays a part in this, in the accidental preservation of those 'mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve that just ended up there' (Steedman, 2001: 68), and equally in those inexplicably empty folders or missing file numbers. And long before we get to the archive or library we are at the mercy of other, more distant choices. Why was that comment jotted down in the margin? Who decided to preserve the minutes of one meeting but not another? How did a secretary choose to

phrase a particular interruption of procedure? Who saved an obsolete training video rather than throwing it in the staffroom bin?

So we have layers of choice and layers of decision making, stretching back through time. The historian can only work with what he or she can find, and must then subject this already-sifted collection to further and increasingly rigorous selection. If we see this as necessary to our understanding of source material, we are able to be more honest about the limitations of our enterprise, as well as unapologetic about the direction of our research. After all, it is impossible to be an expert in everything, and one would not make much sense if one tried. The historian is forced to choose (Tosh & Lang, 2006: 179) and these choices should be embraced as fundamental features of the research process.

Sources for the history of education: what counts?

Although historians of education have traditionally been associated with sources such as government documents and policy texts, the understanding of what constitutes a 'valid' source has changed considerably over the last twenty years. Official documentation has long been associated with the investigation of past policy, but towards the end of the twentieth century its dominance left the field vulnerable to accusations that it involved 'no classrooms, no children, no teaching, no learning' (Silver, 1992: 104). As new questions have been asked about education in the past, historians have turned to new sources, and as the definition of what constitutes a 'valid' source has expanded these have raised different types of question (Goodman & Martin, 2004: 10; McCulloch, 2011: 79-82).

This shift in emphasis initially led to a backlash against the supremacy of documentary evidence, which was challenged as elite, top-down and disconnected from lived realities by the use of alternative sources which seemed to offer the possibility of a more authentic connection to the past (McCulloch, 2004: 25). Oral history appeared to allow the reader

to eavesdrop on a directly-experienced past which could bypass the dry and dusty archival texts and bring the history of education 'back to life'. Other sources such as autobiography, film, photographs, text books, teaching resources and statistical information have also emerged (Goodman & Martin, 2004: 6-9). As historians have extended the limits of their inquiries they have turned to a wider range of evidence (Cohen, 2003: 256), and each type of evidence offers the potential for different perspectives and interpretations.

The opening up of new sources in the history of education has reinvigorated the field and allowed for inquiry into previously neglected areas. The challenge to documentary sources has encouraged those who work with them to reject their previously privileged 'authentic' status (Jordanova, 2000: 97), and to question their authority. What the proliferation of source material offers the historian of education is the possibility of a 'methodological pluralism' which can cast its investigative net wide to encompass new areas of enquiry (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000: 119). However, this potential richness of data can threaten to overwhelm the historian with infinitely-multiplying possibilities, each of which demands a different methodological approach. In order to avoid taking an approach to historical enquiry which 'throws in the kitchen sink', the researcher must be selective and rigorous, and must seek to communicate this to the reader.

My sources

My original research questions focused on finding out 'what was going on' in the teaching of literacy in inner London in the 1970s and led me to sources which seemed to promise authentic insight into the classroom. I looked at photographs, teaching materials and autobiography, and intended to conduct interviews. As the focus of my research shifted and I became more interested in investigating advice on literacy teaching, the sources I turned to also changed. In investigating those structures and relationships which shaped

guidance on literacy, I used sources which constituted traces of action by four different groups involved in this area. I looked for sources which could tell me what these groups were saying about literacy teaching in the 1970s and what they were doing to influence its development.

My case-studies, the Centre for Language in Primary Education (CLPE), the ILEA Education Committee, the ILEA Inspectorate and the Bullock Committee, took shape as I worked with a wide range of sources connected to literacy teaching in the 1970s in inner London. Mirroring relationships between the interest groups as they operated in practice, surviving traces of their work are linked, both informing and defining one another. I used these traces both to ask questions and to look for answers. Published sources included official reports, printed committee meeting minutes, ILEA reports, text books, academic papers, books and articles, and a wide range of materials for teachers including magazine articles, pamphlets, books, journals, manuals, videos, photographs, teaching resources and reading-scheme books. Unpublished archival material included minutes of meetings, letters and correspondence, evidence to committees, confidential circulars, flyers, first drafts of texts, lists and private notes. In the next section I consider various approaches suggested by the nature of these different materials, and provide some insight into the process of my research.

Asking questions

The majority of my sources are texts, in a variety of forms. Working through documents, those 'elemental raw materials with which all historians are familiar', is traditionally seen as the archetypal activity of the historian (Cunningham & Gardner, 2004: 3; McCulloch, 2004: 13-20). Dusty bundles of papers are often taken for granted as 'primary sources' which offer us a direct scoop of Burke's precious 'stream of truth' (Burke, 2001: 13). They do certainly have the distinction of being 'temporally pristine' (Gardner, 2010: 63),

produced and completed in the past and surviving into the present, characteristics which they share with such iconic historical source material as the ruins of Pompeii or a frozen mammoth carcass. This purity seems to offer us the chance to go back in time, to hear the quill pen scratch the paper by candlelight, or see the newspaper roll off the press. Unlike the notorious unreliability of memory, filtered through layers of accumulated experience, the text is not 'actively solicited' in the present (McCulloch, 2004: 3). It does not come into being as a product of the interviewer's questioning. It seems to be closed and finished, a product of its own time which denies us in the present the chance to ask for clarification or further information (Gardner, 2010: 71).

Any understanding of source material which stopped at this point would be inadequate. As I sit in the library or archive with a typed letter from the Chief Inspector of ILEA in front of me, the page makes no sense on its own, lying on the table out of its own place and time. It is adrift and meaningless without that context which produced it. Documents are 'social products, located in specific contexts' and cannot simply be accepted at face value (Cohen, et al., 2007: 203). Any history student will be familiar with the initial questions which must be asked of a primary source concerning authorship, authenticity, reliability and representativeness. But this is just the starting point for what must be a deeper and more profound reading of text.

If we are to engage in an actively 'critical reading' of source material, far more is required of us (Jordanova, 2000: 193). In considering a document from another time and place it is not merely my own act of interpretation in the present which should be considered.

Unlike a purely 'scientific' analysis of 'an object world which... does not construct and interpret the meanings of its activities' (such as the frozen mammoth), reading a text inevitably involves a double hermeneutic (Giddens & Dallmayr, 1982: 12). As a reader, I am not only interpreting the text as I read it, but working to understand how the author was interpreting the situation which gave rise to the text. There may be further layers of

interpretation: the publisher edits the author's words, the archivist keeps a selection of papers while discarding others, the librarian decides to hold only one representative book in store. Thus 'understanding documents is a hermeneutic exercise at several stages' (Cohen, et al., 2007: 203).

If we are trying to use sources as a magical gateway to the 'reality' of the past, the challenges of layered interpretation are likely to present themselves as inconvenient obstacles which we might be tempted to dismiss or ignore. If we accept that we are not engaged in an ultimately futile attempt to somehow get back *into* the past, we can see how the challenges of historical research offer us, in the present, many opportunities. How were (then) present realities being perceived and portrayed in the texts we are reading? What was shaping the writing of those authors who worked to articulate problems and solutions as they understood them? What were the perceived limitations and the possibilities within which they operated? In many ways texts which are temporally removed from us are more clearly accessible to questioning, although finding the answers may be more difficult in practice. In the present, if as a teacher I am reading an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* on the teaching of early literacy, my mind struggles to disengage from current practicalities. Would that work in my classroom? Is that what OFSTED will be looking for? Does the author share my understanding of priority and possibility? In contrast, reading an article on pedagogy in a 1971 issue of *Contact* magazine, I can see the distinctiveness of time and place through the keen eyes of a tourist rather than the habituated gaze of a resident who walks past oblivious while focused on present concerns.

Different sources for different courses?

Clearly different sources should be read, understood and interrogated in different ways. For example, much of my data consists of policy texts and rather than accepting them

as the representative and conclusive statements of intent which they aspire to be, their partiality, ambiguity and complexity must be acknowledged (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992: 13). They are texts generated by particular processes, and arising from the structures, activities and routines of the state (Scott, 1990: 59-60), the committee chamber, the political speech, the official meeting, the sub-committee report. If we use several sources in relationship, for example the published text of the Bullock Report in conjunction with the recorded meetings of its various committees, the correspondence of committee members, transcripts of speeches and exchanges from 'expert witnesses', we can gain insight into those forces which acted on the final document. We can see behind the authority of the handsomely bound volume on the shelf to the arguments, compromises, omissions and struggles as committee members negotiated pressure from interest groups, academics, professional organisations, the media, publishers and politicians. The finished report can then be read as a document framed by time, place, audience, purpose, ideology and tradition (Scott, 2000: 8-11).

Texts are 'situated products' which should be read in relationship to their setting and the boundaries of their production (Prior, 2003: 26). This is as true of a magazine article as of a letter, a text book or a set of meeting minutes. It also applies to those non-textual source materials which have sometimes been viewed with suspicion by historians of education. For example, film is can be dismissed due to its 'constructed nature' (Patterson, 2011: 570). If we view educational films hoping to gain a privileged glimpse into past realities in schooling, we are right to be wary. But if we accept that 'reality' is not what we are chasing, then film offers as many possibilities as more traditional sources (Cohen, 2003: 257). We can ask similar questions: what is the purpose of the image-maker (Burke, 2001: 15)? What am I seeing, and how am I receiving it (Rousmaniere, 2001: 111)? The experience of watching a training video from the past is complicated by making me an observer twice over: I am both the practitioner receiving advice

constructed to persuade me of its worth, and the historian seeking to understand how learning was represented in a particular past context (Burke & Cunningham, 2011: 540).

Whatever their nature, all traces of the past require the historian to interpret them in the present, and also to consider how their authors were interpreting their own present through the act of writing, speaking, filming, manufacturing, photographing or editing. If we are open to the use of a wide range of source materials, we can use them in relationship with one another. This pluralism allows the historian to situate each source within the context of other sources, and to use these relationships to question, inform and compare. In the next section I illustrate how I have used this approach by looking in detail at one piece of source material and exploring how I used it in my research both to ask and to answer questions.

A moment in the data

As I was researching the CLPE I found references in its Steering Committee minutes to several films produced for in-service training purposes on language and literacy. I will describe how I worked with one of these films to illustrate the limits and opportunities of my research process in practice.

The film

The film is held in store in the Institute of Education library. It must be ordered in advance from the store room, where it sits on a shelf among other recordings produced by ILEA for the training of teachers and now rendered obsolete by both technology and content. A plain cover has '*Becoming a reader, 1-3*' printed on the spine, along with a catalogue number. When I first tried to watch it, the tape couldn't be persuaded to work in any of

the library's video machines. I was eventually shown to a small office where another video player was plugged in. After several false starts, the tape began to play. As the headphone sockets weren't working the film soundtrack filled the room, and I watched and listened with a degree of self-consciousness as library staff worked at the desks around me, possibly imagining that I was a PGCE student who had stumbled upon some very outdated material by mistake.

The film is in black and white. It begins with a strip of photographs of smiling children, girls and boys, black and white, and the title '*Tackling print*'. Above this is the logo of the ILEA Learning Support Service, which seems to show an owl flying hopefully through a rainbow. When the footage begins, we see a boy, aged six or seven (we are told he is called Alek) sitting next to a teacher at a low table in what seems to be a primary school library. There is a book between them on the desk, and he is reading it out loud, following the print with his finger as the teacher encourages him ('that was a very good go'), points out inconsistencies ('that didn't match up, did it?') and discusses the content ('I like fish and chips for tea'). Her tone is gentle and supportive, she bends her head towards Alek and the book and remains smiling, entirely focused on his slow progress through the text. Alek, chewing his finger and occasionally pushing it into his cheek, looks to her for help when he encounters a discrepancy between the word he is saying out loud and the text on the page, for example, 'no, that ain't water... sea'.

Periodically, the film cuts to another older woman with neatly permed hair and butterfly glasses. She addresses the camera directly and comments on the process which is taking place between teacher and pupil. She looks on with satisfaction and an indulgent smile as she tells us 'how splendidly the teacher supports Alek as he works on his text. They work on the notion that it is alright to make mistakes... Alek's goal is to get the message'. The film returns to the child and the teacher and they move on to the construction of a sentence using an upright cardboard folder which is placed in front of Alek. He says a word that he wishes to write, then looks for a small cardboard word-card

on the table in front of him before placing it into a slot in the folder to build a sentence. As he works, one word at a time, he talks to his teacher: 'ah, that's gonna 'ave two 'e's... that's easy'. Again, the film returns to the older woman, who tells us that Alek is 'paying attention to detail... to how letters go together'. The film then moves on to the next sequence which shows a girl composing her own version of the Three Little Pigs in a similar way.

Asking questions

Watching this section of film, about 10 minutes in total, any viewer in the present will immediately make assumptions based on his or her own experience. The black and white video, and the style of the recording, place the film in the past. So do the voices and clothes of the participants. Alek's blonde hair is brushed over his ears, he wears a tight stripy t-shirt, and beneath the desk we catch a glimpse of flared trousers and sneakers. His accent definitely places him in London, although his tone is somewhat different from the voices of children today. The book he reads from is a thin paperback with worn and slightly tattered pages. Entitled '*the fish book*', if we pause the video we can see from the names printed inside the front cover that it is written by David Mackay, Brain Thompson and Pamela Schaub. The thick lower case letters tell us 'gerard rose did the pictures'. The font and the illustrations remind me of books in my own 1970s childhood, in fact Gerard Rose came and spoke to us at my primary school and we had a copy of the *Jabberwocky* illustrated by him at home.

The book, the word-cards and the cardboard folder would be not be found in schools today, except perhaps at the back of a cupboard or in a store room. However, the book display cases in the background, and even some of the books (certainly *Titch* and *The Hungry Caterpillar*) are instantly recognisable and still very much in use. We are able to place the film in context, it is clearly a staged example to demonstrate 'best practice' in

the teaching of literacy to young children for the benefit of students or teachers. Thus while the moment was clearly created in another time, it also contains links to the present.

We cannot help but view the film through the lens of our own experience. It is at once familiar; a child reads to a teacher, an authoritative figure discusses their work together and draws attention to particular features in order to inform an audience. It is also strange; we may not recognise the book or the cardboard word folder, and the clothes, voices and style of production alert us to a gap of time between the moments on the film and the viewer watching in the present. A more informed reading of the film can add more detail, but does not alter the sense of the particular, and of the familiar and the strange which relate it to our own time.

Watching the film in the library I was already interpreting it through my own experience at a variety of levels. The film resonated with my own 1970s childhood, I heard the echoed voices of all those London children I have taught over the years, and recognised the teacher's tone and actions in the context of my own work in primary schools. Some aspects of the film were unfamiliar, some distantly remembered, some still part of my professional life. My own work as a literacy coordinator modelling lessons and 'good practice' for other teachers and leading staff meetings and training, and my experiences over the years as a recipient of CPD, also made the film's apparent purpose familiar to me in ways which permeated and shaped my understanding of its nature and content.

As I watched the film when I had already done a significant amount of research into the CLPE, I was able to see it on another level which would have been inaccessible to me a few months earlier. I was in a position to fill in some of the unknowns. I knew that the older woman commenting on the film was Moira Mackenzie, who at the time the film was made was the warden of the CLPE. I knew that the Centre had been established by ILEA in 1971 to run courses, provide advice and resources, and produce materials which would improve the teaching of reading in London primary schools. The reading book in

the film was written as part of the *Breakthrough to Literacy* scheme designed by David Mackay (who was head of the CLPE for its first two years). The cardboard folder and word-cards on the table were also *Breakthrough to Literacy* materials. This scheme, which used the language of the individual child as a starting point for learning to read and write, was recommended by the CLPE throughout the 1970s.

I could also contextualise the film in different ways. In reading the archived minutes of CLPE Steering Committee meetings, I had found reference to a series of these films, produced in 1977, which were intended to be used as in-service training materials for London primary teachers, and had some insight into the discussion around their production. In building up an understanding of a particular 'CLPE' discourse on the teaching of language and literacy, I was looking at the film to support or contradict this. More broadly, I also knew that the 1970s were a period of concern for ILEA over standards of reading in its schools, and over shifts in the social and economic conditions in inner London which were affecting pupil intake. At a national level, the Bullock Report had recently been published in response to growing anxieties about literacy standards and teaching methods, and there was a great deal of discussion and debate on the issue in the press.

Looking again at Alek, his finger with its chewed fingernail pointing to each word, we can adjust our focus to incorporate the many distinct particularities of his situation. We can look at the book he is reading, at the words on the page, at the word-cards that he uses to construct his own sentences. This will lead us to an investigation of method - why those teaching materials? Where have they come from, who designed and produced them, and why have they been chosen for this occasion? We can look at the microphone clipped to his stripy t-shirt. Who was recording him and why? Who was funding the advisers, the camera crew and the video production? Who were the intended audience for the film and what response was expected from them? What were they being encouraged to learn?

We can look at Moira McKenzie, talking to the camera and directing the viewer to reach certain conclusions about the teaching of reading. Who is she, what are her central concerns? Where does her authority reside? What does the content and tone of the discussion about the reading process imply about in-service training and teacher professionalism? We can try to situate this video in time and place. Where is the school and what is likely to be happening beyond its walls in inner London, as the population shifted and altered during the 1970s? Thus an attempt to contextualise a particular and in many ways unexceptional moment in time and place can lead us to questions, and then to data which holds the possibilities of answers, further questions, and a deepening understanding of context. The film is an interpretation of 'best practice' in literacy teaching, how has this interpretation been reached and what can it tell us?

We must also ask questions on another level. Without my intervention, the film would still be on the shelf in the library store. Somebody has already chosen to preserve and catalogue it, and to make it possible (although difficult) to view it. Somebody else may have taken the time to watch it in a different context, and would see and use it differently. In writing about it, I am having to somehow 'put the visual to paper' (Warmington, Gorp, & Grosvenor, 2011: 468), to try and give you some insight into what I see. In terms of my own interpretation, why have I selected this piece of evidence? How am I going to place it in relationship to other sources? Why have I chosen to focus on this section of film? Am I hoping to discover something new, or to confirm what I have already decided? At what stage of my research did I study this film and what does that imply? Realistically I do not have time to watch every piece of film in such detail, or to watch this particular piece again and again as my understanding changes over time.

Writing history

Such questions could go on indefinitely. It is clearly impossible for the researcher to address them for all the hundreds of sources that will be discovered or missed, selected or rejected, trusted or doubted, written about or neglected over the course of the research. Even if this were achievable, it would not lead us to any form of usable written history. We can insist upon the importance of incorporating the 'procedures of research itself' into writing so that the 'researcher's point of view becomes an intrinsic part of the account' (Levi, 1991: 106). We can try to be explicit about the ongoing process of selection and exclusion which constitutes any research (Prior, 2003: 163) and actively position ourselves within this process (McCulloch & Watts, 2003: 132). We can recognise that the layers of interpretation involved in our work should be 'actively celebrated and not grudgingly acknowledged' (Gardner, 2010: 14), and that our text should be 'transparent' enough to allow the reader access to the framework around which it is constructed (Scott, 2000: 56). But in the end we are trying to produce a usable history, accessible to others, and this endeavour has profound implications.

It is through writing that we are forced to make sense of our thoughts (as anyone who has sat and agonised in front of a blank screen or sheet of paper can attest). Making meaning is what humans do, we look for pattern, connection, answers, purpose and form (Fulbrook, 2002: 195). This 'making sense' is at the heart of historical writing, and it is the act of writing itself that forces the author to shape research into intelligible form (Tosh & Lang, 2006: 147). This intelligibility is crucially important. If we want readers to access our work (and why bother to write otherwise?), we need to take their experience into account. For Foucault, the importance of reaching as wide an audience as possible was a key concern, and writing must make sense if readers were to understand, respond, and criticise (Kritzman, 1988: 101). Certainly, unless the history of education engages with an audience, it is doomed to a slowly withering future of 'splendid isolation' and irrelevance (McCulloch, 2011: 69).

How then to make historical writing intelligible and accessible? For Ricoeur, 'expertise in narrative is at the heart of the skills of the historian' (Gardner, 2010: 86). Indeed some type of narrative may be the only form through which humans are able to understand time (ibid: 105). Attempts to write history which adhere too rigidly to a 'social sciences' model, with emphasis on method at the expense of narrative, may have serious consequences for the comprehensibility of the final product (Rury, 2006: 327) . As we have seen, it is not possible for me as a writer fully to convey to a reader the layers of complex hermeneutics at work in the research process. Even trying to look closely at one ten-minute section of film raised more questions than it answered, and could only be dealt with superficially. I imagine your heart would sink if I attempted to repeat the exercise with every printed page, photograph or handwritten note I have looked at in the long course of my research. Quite apart from the sheer impossibility of the endeavour, it is unlikely that this would lead to any sort of clarity or meaning for the reader, who may well have preferred to cut out the middleman and look directly at the sources themselves to save time.

What I have tried to do in this chapter is to raise methodological issues which are fundamental to the process of historical research. While arguing that we must strive to be as open as possible about method, we must also accept that this has practical limits. In the end, there is little point in the research process if the researcher refuses to accept responsibility for their particular interpretations. I have tried to show how I have approached my source material, and how I am likely to have worked with it to make meaning from the mass of potential evidence confronting me. My centrality to the process must be accepted, I have had to think in order to research and to write and it is this process of thought which you must decide whether or not to accept. After all, I am not writing a novel, the stories I am building do 'conform to the historical evidence' (Rury, 2005: 21). By including some insight into my methodology I have tried to provide you,

the reader, with tools to decide whether or not I am likely to be reliable, and to offer you more than the simple assurance, 'I'm telling you stories: trust me'.⁵

⁵ Winterson, J. (1996). *The passion*. London: Vintage.

Chapter 3

Background: introducing the main players and their stage set.

Introduction

In this chapter I set the stage for my thesis, describing four groups with an interest in the teaching of literacy in London in the 1970s, and outlining the features of the environment in which they existed. If the four groups are my characters, the setting is the scenery which encompasses the limits and possibilities of their function. While wishing to avoid subjecting the reader to a long detailed description of organisations and individuals, it is useful to set up a workable historical account to serve as a background against which my subsequent chapters can be read. To establish the parameters of the set in which my characters will operate, I begin by looking at the levels of political structure in education during the period. To familiarise the reader with an era very different from our own I discuss some key areas of contrast. I outline the relationship between central and local government in education and how this shaped the work of schools and LEAs. I describe how the education authority for inner London, ILEA, fitted into this structure, and how it operated in practice.

I then look at each of my central characters: the ILEA Education Committee, the Centre for Language in Primary Education (CLPE), the ILEA Inspectorate, and the Bullock Committee. While each of these groups had an interest in, and an influence on, the shaping of advice on literacy teaching in primary schools, they occupied very different spaces. I outline the structure, role and operation of each group during the 1970s. What was it, and who were its members? What did it understand to be its function? What did it actually do? I then look at how the four groups related to one another, outlining those connections which influenced their work. I conclude the chapter by considering what traces of the groups' thought and action remain in the present, and how I will use these traces in subsequent chapters to analyse the shaping of advice on literacy teaching.

The 1970s teacher: ‘we’re not in Kansas anymore’

To orientate ourselves to the very different landscape of curriculum in the 1970s, let us picture two primary school teachers in state schools, one working in the early 1970s and one working today in 2015. Within the education system, the teacher’s role is defined beyond the walls of classroom or school by forces which form the space in which they work (Cunningham, 2012: 1). Today’s teacher operates in an environment which has been profoundly shaped by successive waves of central government policy, including the introduction of a National Curriculum in 1988, the establishment of OFSTED in 1992, the abiding influence of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in the late 1990s, statutory tests and assessments, and the central collection of data by which the success of teacher and school are measured. The system operates on the individual teacher as a ‘regime of accountability’ which ensures that appraisals, inspections and data scrutiny work together to shape both curriculum content and pedagogy (Ball, 2008a: 49; Bangs, Macbeath, & Galton, 2011: 46).

In this context the LEA primarily functions as an agent of central government (Cunningham, 2012: 113), to which it itself is ultimately answerable over the results achieved in its schools. It is therefore in the authority’s interest to advise teachers effectively on new initiatives, recommend those materials and pedagogies likely to achieve success on central government terms, direct and moderate test and assessment data, and prepare schools for OFSTED inspection against current success criteria. The LEA, increasingly augmented by private consultants, works to help the teacher and school to shape practice to fit the demands of central government so that they can be recognised and rewarded, and avoid failure and shame.

For the primary teacher in the 1970s the landscape was very different. Moving back in time over forty years one might feel an increasing sense of weightlessness as successive constraints on practice seem to fall away. There was no national curriculum to follow, no

external testing to complete, no statutory assessments to contribute to centrally-collected data on achievement, no OFSTED inspection to fear, no performance-related pay to pursue. The move towards comprehensive secondary schools and the end of the eleven-plus exam for most LEAs in the mid-1960s had removed the pressure of selection at the end of the primary phase and seemed to have opened up 'new spaces at all levels of education' (Bernstein, 1996: 71). In practice of course, teaching was not a wild and uninhibited free-for-all. It was profoundly influenced by precedent, expectation, advice and opportunity. However, in many cases the places where we find these agents of influence are not the places where we would search today. The environment within which the primary teacher worked in the 1970s contained structures and spaces which no longer exist in the English education system. In the following pages I will sketch the outlines of those structures and spaces to allow the reader to orientate themselves to this alternative environment.

Central and local government in education: painting in the backdrop

The Education Act of 1944 established a national education system in England which saw elementary schools replaced by a tripartite system of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools after the completion of a distinct primary phase. Although the school system was established at a national level, it was designed to be 'locally administered' (Briault, 1976b: 431). The Act charged LEAs with 'securing that efficient education... shall be available to meet the needs of the population in their area' (Auld, 1976: 3). A complex web of interdependence existed between central government, local government, and schools (Bogdanor, 1979: 157), a partnership which has generally been characterised by historians as 'benign' until the 1970s (Chitty, 2004: 20; Lawton, 1980: 7). There was almost no central government intervention in curriculum or pedagogy at

the primary stage, and neither was mentioned in the 1944 Act (Alexander, 2010: 29). The Department for Education and Science (DES) adopted a principle of non-intervention and limited its role to issues of finance (Ball, 1990b: 12). The curriculum was assumed to be the responsibility of the LEA, who in practice passed this on to schools, offering advice and support rather than any statutory direction (McCulloch, 2001: 104).

The mid-1970s saw a shift in this consensus. The early years of the decade were a time of increasing public and media anxiety over 'progressive' education and standards in schools. This seemed to be confirmed by the crisis of William Tyndale junior school in 1975 and the ensuing Auld Report which described radical teachers, chaotic 'child-led' pedagogy, and the failure of ILEA to confront the situation before it escalated into the effective collapse of the school (Auld, 1976; Dale, 1989; Davis, 2002; Gretton & Jackson, 1976). In a speech at Ruskin College in Oxford in 1976, the prime minister James Callaghan signalled that central government was prepared to consider a challenge to the monopoly of teachers, educationists and LEAs over what went on in schools (Ball, 2008a: 73; Chitty, 1989: 72-101; Phillips, 2001: 13-15; Salter & Tapper, 1988: 63).

This 'moment of 1976' is often taken by historians to mark the end of the consensus era and the beginning of a period which would see increasing intervention by central government in education (Batteson, 1997). While the speech and the 'Great Debate' on education which followed did not lead to immediate policy change, the role of LEAs and schools had been challenged and a signal had been sent that other voices in education were valid (Simon, 1994: 457). In 1977 a DES circular required local authorities to inquire into and monitor curriculum in schools (Alexander, 2010: 31), and they were increasingly exposed to criticism and scrutiny (Cunningham, 2002: 228).

Although in practice policy changes would remain limited for a further decade, the educational landscape had shifted (Jones, 2003: 94). By the end of the 1970s all three corners of the triangular 'tension system' in education, teachers, LEAs, and central

government, were assessing their position (Chitty, 2009: 119-120; Lawton, 1980, 1984). Thus while in principle structures of power and responsibility in education remained unchanged by policy, those groups which worked within the boundaries of these structures were doing so in an environment which was increasingly characterised by questioning, criticism, and calls for greater accountability.

ILEA: 'a huge oil tanker'⁶

The Local Government Act of 1963 saw the introduction of a new administrative system for Greater London. As part of this reorganisation, the Greater London Council (GLC) was to replace the London County Council (LCC) as the local government body. It became the education authority for twelve inner-London boroughs, as well as the City of London, charged 'to act by means of a special committee known as the Inner London Education Authority'. Once constituted, ILEA's operation was virtually autonomous from the GLC although it relied upon it for services such as architecture and engineering. ILEA consisted of 53 members, 40 of whom were GLC members, and 13 of whom were representatives appointed by the boroughs and the City. It effectively operated through its Education Committee which was 'empowered to exercise, on behalf of the Authority, all the powers and duties of the Authority under the Education Acts 1944 to 1964', although the Authority made decisions on raising money through rates, appointing the Education Officer, and the pay scales of staff (ILEA, 1964: 1).

In 1970, Labour won control of ILEA and Ashley Bramall became leader, remaining in this post for the rest of the decade. The headquarters of the Authority were at County

⁶ Brighouse, T. (1992). 'The ILEA balance: credit or debit?' *Education in the capital*. M. Barber. London, Cassell: 56.

Hall, opposite the Houses of Parliament on the river. The Authority's administration was led by an Education Officer, a Deputy Education Officer and a Chief Inspector. Below them were ten assistant Education Officers who dealt with particular areas such as Schools, Higher Education, or Welfare, and ten Divisional Officers who covered each of the inner-London divisions and were 'responsible for applying general policy within their areas' (Tinker, 1968). Described in detail, the structure of ILEA reflects its size and the correspondingly huge range of its work, encompassing administrators, inspectors, advisers, teachers' centre staff, a research and statistics department, catering services, finance, media and television services, librarians, welfare services, youth offices, a careers service, and a publishing centre. A glance through the 'Green Books' published by the Authority every four years to list contact details for its staff and schools gives some insight into the structure and substance of this large administrative machine, which was described by HMI in 1980 as 'cumbersome' (HMI, 1980: 10).

As the country's largest LEA, and due to its position in the nation's capital city, ILEA had a particular relationship to central government and the DES (Foley, 1972: 67; Maclure, 1970). It constituted a 'powerful force' in education in its own right, often developing innovative approaches which were adopted by other LEAs (Cunningham, 2012: 110; Mortimore, 2008; Thomas, 1990: 66). In spite of its exceptional nature, ILEA still operated very much within the broader context of the education system. The Authority was clear in stating that it did not 'lay down an overall policy on curriculum, organisation and methods of teaching' (Peter Newsam, quoted in Davis, 2002: 282). It effectively chose, in accordance with the 1944 Education Act, to 'divest itself of the exercise of the control of the conduct and curriculum of each of its county primary schools' (Auld, 1976: 269). In practice this meant that the head teacher had control of the school, while school managers (governors) had oversight. Like other LEAs, ILEA had 'no policy' on the aims, objectives or standards of attainment of primary schools, or on teaching methods (ibid: 271). Rather it was 'the Authority's long-established policy (to give) responsibility to

individual schools and colleges' (ILEA, 1973a: 17). In the words of the chairman of the Schools Sub-Committee, Harvey Hinds, 'you appoint a good head teacher, and then he runs the show' (quoted in Davis, 2002: 278).

The operation of ILEA's various branches depended on a shared understanding of role and structure which was not always clear and which was held up to painful public scrutiny during the Auld Inquiry into the William Tyndale crisis. In the late 1960s it was still possible to present this as a strength, 'the relationship (between ILEA's constituent parts) is flexible, circumstances may alter the division of functions', 'those who work the system find it easily understood – those outside find some difficulty' (Tinker, 1968: 1, 14). It was certainly not unusual in working with a 'lack of detailed instructions which often characterises British administrative practices' (ibid: 13). The collapse of William Tyndale, by exposing this system to the challenge of a school which was unwilling or unable to exercise its licensed autonomy in line with the expectations of its LEA, parents or the wider public, forced ILEA to confront issues of freedom and responsibility which were not always easy to reconcile (Newsam, n.d: 5), and the size and power of the ILEA machine meant it was not easy for it to be responsive.

Introducing my four main characters: their structure, role and operation

The ILEA Education Committee

When it was set up, ILEA immediately established an Education Committee 'for the efficient discharge of its functions'. The Committee consisted of the ILEA members, along with up to 19 other co-opted members 'experienced in education' (Maclure, 1970: 5). It was in the Education Committee that 'effective policy decisions' were made (Auld, 1976: 10). The Committee met fortnightly in County Hall and the structure of these meetings was essentially parliamentary. The Leader and Deputy Leader of the majority party (Labour throughout the 1970s) were faced by their Opposition counterparts

(Conservative throughout the 1970s). Members raised questions, debated, and put motions to be voted upon in the chamber, and exchanges were often heated between parties. Each member of the Committee was also a member of a sub-committee (dealing with, for example, finance, further or higher education, general purposes, schools, schools planning, or teaching staff). These sub-committees met regularly to 'consider and deal with' matters within their remit, and to 'report to the Committee as soon as practicable on matters of special or topical interest or of a controversial nature' (ILEA, 1964: 3), presenting reports for discussion, debate and approval. Minutes of the Committee meetings were recorded and bound in large volumes for public record in a style similar to *Hansard*.

The key role of the Education Committee in relation to primary schools during this period was understood to be facilitating the work of heads and teachers. It was frequently stated that '... it is the view of the English educational system that head teachers are the proper people to run their own schools' and the Committee 'trusts the teaching profession to run its own affairs and schools in its own way' (Harvey Hinds, ILEA, 1972: 422). Curriculum and pedagogy were seen as 'the area of teacher power' (Briault, 1976b: 433) and the Committee's 'overall concern (was) to ensure that teachers do not lack what they need to carry out their work' (HMI, 1980: 12). After the William Tyndale crisis, the Committee continued to focus on providing this support, but discussions reveal more debate over the nature of the LEA's role in relation to schools and how it could best respond to criticism.

The Education Committee operated as the body through which ILEA effectively enacted its policy decisions, over-seeing the education system in inner London. It passed motions, commissioned and discussed reports, responded to public petitions,⁷ debated questions, authorised surveys, and agreed funding for resources and training. In relation

⁷ During the early 1970s these were particularly concerned with issues relating to secondary school reorganisation.

to primary schools, the Committee's work mainly consisted of approving funds for the establishment of teachers' centres, educational television, *Contact* magazine for schools, the appointment of school inspectors and advisers, and the expansion of the library service. The Committee also commissioned research as a tool for supporting policy and directing its resources for school improvement; 'no other education authority has ever promulgated such a body of research' (Brighouse, 1992: 57). It was 'prepared to be a high spending authority' (Mallen, 1992: 69), and nationally it was seen among educationists as 'generous and responsive', ensuring its 'schools have more money available than in other authorities' (HMI, 1980: 15, 27). For many teachers this made it an attractive place to work; it 'represented an educational Mecca for every young person... embarking on a career in schools' (Brighouse, 1992: 51).

The ILEA Inspectorate

During the 1970s the ILEA Inspectorate consisted of a Chief Inspector (Dr L Payling until 1972, then Dr M Birchenough for the rest of the decade), a Staff Inspector, inspectors for each of the ten ILEA Divisions and their staff, and a larger number of specialist inspectors for different areas of the secondary curriculum or stages of schooling. Over the course of the decade the total number of staff on the Inspectorate roll grew from 88 to around 120 (ILEA, 1970-78). Day-to-day dealings with schools were largely the business of the divisional inspectors who served to keep the Authority informed on developments in schools, and also disseminated Authority policy to heads and teachers (Cunningham, 2002: 222). Specialist inspectors concerned particularly with primary literacy during the 1970s were Vivian Pape who was Senior Primary Inspector until 1975, and Nora Goddard who replaced him, having previously been Senior Inspector for Infants and Combined Junior and Infant Schools, as well as the Senior Inspector for English, John Welch. In the wake of the Auld Inquiry on William Tyndale, numbers of primary

inspectors on the team were significantly increased.⁸ Members of the Inspectorate were generally ex-teachers, usually ex-heads, and were described in the Auld Report as ‘a body of highly qualified and experienced educationists’ (Auld, 1976: 11), well-paid and respected locally and nationally.

The role of the ILEA Inspectorate encompassed a range of functions which did not always sit comfortably together. When the newly established General Purposes Sub-Committee of ILEA reported on the Inspectorate in 1965, it noted that ‘their task has long since ceased to be solely that of inspecting, criticising and reporting’ and now included acting as ‘professional adviser’ with a responsibility to ‘assist and encourage’ young teachers, to organise courses, to advise on buildings, to ‘appraise critically but with understanding’ the work of individual schools, and to ‘act as the link between the administration and the schools’ (ILEA, 1965a). This role was seen as different in emphasis from that of HMI inspectors in that the latter’s main role was to make ‘occasional sallies’ into schools to ‘collect objective information’ for the DES (ILEA, 1970a: 3). By contrast, the main focus of the ILEA Inspectorate’s work was ‘the giving of advice and support to the teachers in the schools’ (Auld, 1976: 15), although there was an expectation from the Education Committee that they would intervene in schools which seemed to be failing. The ‘dual role as adviser and also appraiser’⁹ was painfully exposed during the William Tyndale crisis. Post-Tyndale, the Inspectorate’s role shifted to include a move back to some full school inspections, and the development of school self-assessment, curriculum and record-keeping, which it was hoped would provide schools with more guidance while at the same time allow them to preserve their autonomy.

⁸ In 1970 there had been one inspector for primary education and one for infants’ education, by 1978 ILEA employed 16 specialist primary inspectors who worked as a team under Nora Goddard.

⁹ Meeting of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 25th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

The flexibility (and ambiguity) of the Inspectorate's role was reflected in their many, various, and sometimes conflicting functions. Inspectors visited schools, carried out (a limited number of) inspections, ran teachers' centres, organised and led in-service training for teachers, ran programmes for probationary teachers, prepared reports on candidates for senior teaching positions, published guidance for schools, gathered information for research projects and surveys, contributed to national committees and educational bodies, and advised schools on buildings and resources. An analysis of specialist inspectors' diaries carried out by ILEA's Education Committee in 1976 showed that visits to schools took up 37% of inspectors' time, followed by administrative work such as letter and report writing (25%), committee and panel meetings (12%), organising and running in-service training (11%), work on curriculum development (10%), and full inspections (5%) (ILEA, 1976a: 403). It was noted that this included a large amount of overtime, and throughout the decade there are many references to inspectors being 'over worked and very heavily pressed'.¹⁰ During times of anxiety and crisis, such as the teacher shortage in the early 1970s or the William Tyndale inquiry, the Inspectorate was expected to modify its operation in accordance with pressure from the Education Committee. The William Tyndale crisis in particular exposed a lack of clear operational procedure in the system which left inspectors unclear over responsibility and asking, 'for what should the Inspectorate be accountable?'.¹¹

The Centre for Language in Primary Education (CLPE)

The CLPE was established by ILEA as an organisation to promote and support the development of language and literacy in primary schools. In 1967 a report on a survey

¹⁰ Letter from ILEA Education Officer Eric Briault to ILEA Chief Inspector Michael Birchenough, January 25th 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA/1/03/2).

¹¹ Meeting of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 24th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

commissioned by the Authority on literacy had found that 'eight-year-old children in London are on average six months behind children generally elsewhere' in their reading (ILEA, 1969a: 224). A central feature of ILEA's response to the survey was the establishment of 'a centre... where teachers can obtain advice on all types and methods of teaching reading' (ibid : 225). The CLPE was founded in September 1970, and began to run courses for teachers in early 1971 although it was not formally opened until September 1971. Initially based in a temporary building in Elizabeth Street near Victoria station, the Centre was moved to the larger Ebury Centre on Sutherland Street at the end of 1972.

The CLPE was staffed by a team consisting of a warden, a deputy warden, an assistant warden, a media resources officer, a librarian, two senior lecturers, a remedial lecturer and an 'outside' lecturer. Its first warden was David Mackay, who had previously led the Schools Council project which resulted in the publication of the *Breakthrough to Literacy* teaching materials. When he left in 1972 it was run by the acting warden Joyce Welch, who was replaced in 1974 by Moira McKenzie, an ex-ILEA head teacher and author who remained in post until 1986. The Centre also employed temporary staff to run courses, give lectures and contribute to publications. The CLPE was managed in conjunction with a Steering Committee who met regularly to discuss its work and direction. This group comprised senior staff from the Centre, ILEA inspectors, librarians, head teachers and educational psychologists, as well as senior education academics such as Margaret Spencer and Joyce Morris.

In initial correspondence over the establishment of the Centre, ILEA's Senior Inspector for Primary Education, Vivian Pape, envisaged its role as being 'to provide a range of services to the Inspectorate, schools, and colleges of education', to help with 'practical

school problems' and 'to keep schools well informed'.¹² In evidence submitted to the Bullock Committee, ILEA stated that it 'attaches great importance to the establishment of this Centre', describing its main purpose as providing courses and resource facilities to teachers (ILEA, 1972a). A booklet drafted by CLPE staff in 1972 outlined the Centre's role as being to 'consider ways in which... teachers might be helped to a better understanding of the nature and functioning of (children's) mother tongue: to examine the ways and means by which such an understanding might find expression in the classroom, and to provide a variety of courses directed to these ends'.¹³ In a Steering Committee meeting in September 1975, the Centre's role was described as being 'to foster children's language through continual renewal of teachers' (skills)... understand the nature and function of language and foster literacy in the fullest sense', and to 'participate in' and 'initiate' research.¹⁴

In practice, the main components of the CLPE's work were the provision of in-service training to teachers through courses, publications and school visits, the development of television programmes for use in training, the collection and administration of a comprehensive set of resources for teacher reference, the organisation of open days, exhibitions and conferences for teachers, and the establishment of working parties of teachers. Among these activities, priority was explicitly given to the courses for teachers. These were identified as either short courses to address 'practical school problems' or longer courses, usually comprising around 30 days of lectures and written assignments, which aimed to establish a core of trained teachers and heads with a deep understanding of language and literacy upon which a whole school approach could be built. These

¹² 'Draft notes on the aims and proposed functions of the Centre', February 15th 1971, annotated 'received from Mr Pape' (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

¹³ Booklet, '*This document is intended to outline the work of the CLPE*', October 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

¹⁴ CLPE Steering Committee Meeting, September 29th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

courses were described as 'a major innovation in the provision of in-service training'.¹⁵ The Centre also worked to spread its message through publications, particularly its magazine *Language Matters* which was published every term from 1975 and contained articles on language and literacy by Centre staff and regular contributors. Staff at the CLPE also contributed to ILEA's *Contact* magazine for teachers.

The resource collection accumulated in the Ebury Centre (which grew from an initial collection of 6,000 books in 1972 to over 35,000 by the mid-1980s) was intended to serve as a comprehensive reference point for heads and teachers wishing to evaluate classroom materials or develop their understanding of current research. It was a recurrent staffing issue that there should always be a member of lecturing staff available for consultation when this library was open. The CLPE was also committed to developing close links with researchers, academics, children's authors and professional bodies concerned with the teaching of literacy.¹⁶ Teachers' working parties and study groups were established to encourage teachers to learn from research and to pursue their own small scale projects on subjects relevant to their own schools.¹⁷ The Ebury Centre served as a meeting place for the United Kingdom Reading Association (UKRA) and the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE), and hosted visiting authors and academics.

¹⁵ Booklet, '*This document is intended to outline the work of the CLPE*', October 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

¹⁶ For example the Centre was closely involved in a Schools Council project on 'communication skills in early childhood', based at Leeds University in the early 1970s, and later with a research project based at the Institute of Education on 'language related problems of inner city children', CLPE Steering Committee Meeting, 9th February 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA/S/LR/02).

¹⁷ Booklet, '*This document is intended to outline the work of the CLPE*', October 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

The Bullock Committee

The Bullock Committee was set up by Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher in 1972 in response to 'desperate anxiety' over school reading standards in the press and in parliament (Rosen, 1975: 3). The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a rise in a 'crisis discourse' on levels of literacy (Ball, 1985: 74; Soler & Openshaw, 2006: 27-37), and fears over falling standards appeared to be confirmed by a National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report on reading published in 1972 which concluded that 'in the end we are faced with the fact that reading standards today are no better than they were a decade ago' (Start & Wells, 1972: 336). This was extensively reported in the press, and Thatcher announced that as 'the main conclusions of the Report cannot be ignored' she would appoint a committee to investigate the issue (Macpherson & Ingram, 1972: 6). This 'committee of inquiry'¹⁸ would comprise a 'small, expert' selection of individuals who would gather evidence and present a comprehensive report.¹⁹ The Chair of the Committee was Sir Alan Bullock, a historian and vice chancellor of Oxford University, and previously chairman of the Schools Council. The Committee had twenty members, sixteen of whom had experience of teaching, and included head teachers, lecturers in education, advisers on literacy, a publisher, a magazine editor, a member of HMI, and an LEA director of education. An eighteen month time frame was drawn up for meetings and drafting. The Committee was organised into sub-committees covering primary schools, secondary schools, language, and monitoring, and Sir Alan 'expected the sub-committee to discuss and formulate recommendations for consideration by the full committee'.²⁰

The Bullock Committee's role was set out in the terms of its appointment, which was:

¹⁸ (HC) Hansard, Deb 18 May 1972 vol 837 cc160-1W.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 'Editorial: The first of the three Rs', April 5, 1972.

²⁰ Primary Sub-Committee meeting minutes, October 18th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/1).

'To consider in relation to schools:

- a) all aspects of teaching the use of English, including reading, writing and speech;
- b) how present practice might be improved and the role that initial and in-service training might play;
- c) to what extent arrangements for monitoring the general level of attainment in these skills can be introduced or improved; and to make recommendations' (DES, 1975: xxxi).

It was tasked with considering these issues, making recommendations for positive change, and drafting a comprehensive report to describe its findings 'to indicate plainly what we believe needs to be done' (ibid: 513). This role was subject to various interpretations both among the Committee's members and outside the walls of its meeting rooms. Should the finished Report offer direction for the best methods of teaching language and literacy, or should it summarise current research in this area and leave schools, teachers, and the public to make up their own minds? The Committee did have some scope to decide on its own priorities, but was also aware that it should be seen to respond effectively to the public anxiety which had prompted its establishment.

The Committee set about gathering evidence in an 'observational-descriptive tradition of research' (Davis, 1978: 15). Appeals for written evidence were published in the national press, and a 'large amount of correspondence' was received and categorised. Questionnaires were sent to 1,415 primary and 392 secondary schools, one hundred schools were visited by Committee members, as were 21 colleges of education and six reading or language centres. A list of research on language undertaken in the last five years was compiled and consulted (ibid: 2). The Committee operated through regular meetings. Members gathered written evidence submitted by a wide range of correspondents and heard the testimony of invited expert witnesses. This was then discussed in the sub-committees, where recommendations were drafted, and then considered and redrafted by the main Committee. In 1975, the Committee's official report was published, entitled '*A Language for Life*', 609 pages long, decorated with the

Royal Crest and introduced by a foreword from the Labour Secretary of State for Education, Reg Prentice (DES, 1975).

Relationships

Each of the four main 'characters' I have described constituted a particular group of people paid to work within the framework of an organisation which had some interest in the teaching of literacy in inner-London primary schools. While they functioned as independent entities, they were also deeply embedded within the context of time and place, and connected to one another on many levels. The CLPE and the ILEA Inspectorate were established and funded by ILEA's Education Committee, while the Bullock Committee was appointed by central government. However, all groups were connected more informally through membership, contribution and collaboration. While the implications of these relationships will be examined more closely in the chapters that follow, I will outline here the major structural relationships which operated between the four groups.

The three ILEA groups: the Education Committee, CLPE and the Inspectorate

All the components of ILEA's educational machine were ultimately funded and, to a greater or lesser extent, directed by the Education Committee. The CLPE and the Inspectorate were both bodies tasked by the Committee with reaching schools and improving practice. The Committee identified the need for a dedicated teachers' centre for language and literacy, and approved its establishment and funding while directing its Inspectorate to recommend its working structure and to appoint a team of staff. Throughout the 1970s, the CLPE was mentioned in Committee meetings as evidence that the Authority was acting to address problems with literacy teaching by taking steps

to improve the professional base. The CLPE, created and funded by the Educational Committee, was embedded in the workings of ILEA and integral to its approach to improving teachers' knowledge of language and literacy.

Once established, the Committee had no direct involvement in the running of the Centre. Any disputes over funding or requests for additional staff were mediated between the Centre's staff and Steering Committee members with links to ILEA. The Inspectorate was closely involved in the Centre, which was 'developed under the guidance' of Pape who remained as a Steering Committee member after his retirement from the Inspectorate in the mid-1970s (ILEA, 1975: 258). The Inspectorate relied on CLPE staff for advice on, and contributions to, their own curriculum guidelines for schools. The Centre served as a means for the Inspectorate to stay in touch with developments in research on primary literacy, and references to academic texts, authors and citations illustrate that CLPE favourites often subsequently appeared in Inspectorate publications. The Inspectorate also worked with CLPE on a practical level through in-service training provision.

The Education Committee relied upon its Inspectorate to manage its teachers' centres. It also depended on inspectors to connect it with schools, using them both as a means of disseminating information to teachers and as a way of keeping informed. The Committee controlled appointments to the Inspectorate, decided how many inspectors would be employed, their salaries, and the extent of their duties. It exerted pressure on its inspectors to influence the workings of schools, and could also imply that it held them 'accountable for the state of education' in the Authority.²¹ The Education Committee relied on the Inspectorate to anticipate and address school failure before it could reach the public domain, something which clearly failed to happen in the case of William Tyndale. At the same time, the Committee defended its Inspectorate in the face of

²¹ Meeting of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 31st 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

criticism and protected its fundamental commitment to offering support and advice to schools.

The Bullock Committee: an outsider?

The Bullock Committee differed from the other three groups as it was not affiliated to ILEA. It was an officially sanctioned group of 'experts' temporarily appointed by central government to address concerns about educational standards at a particular point in time. Nevertheless, while distinct in terms of governance and organisation, in practice many individual group members were linked through informal networks and overlapping membership. The groups also interacted through their shared concern with primary literacy. The Education Committee submitted a substantial amount of written evidence to the Bullock Committee, not only providing an account of the approaches it was taking to literacy in its own schools, but also making suggestions and recommendations in its capacity as the largest urban LEA in the country (ILEA, 1972a). The Bullock Committee heard evidence from ILEA's Education Officer, Dr Eric Briault, as well as Harvey Hinds, Chair of the Schools Sub-Committee. It visited ILEA's Centre for Urban Education Studies (CUES), considered ILEA's literacy survey as part of its work on standards, heard evidence from ILEA primary teachers, and referenced articles in ILEA's *Contact* magazine.

When the Bullock Report was published, the ILEA Education Committee supported its Inspectorate to take action in line with its recommendations (as far as this was financially practicable). The Education Committee used the finished Report to support its policies, referring to 'the action already begun by the Inspectorate in connection with the Bullock Report to assist teachers' (ILEA, 1976: 479). Reference was made in the Committee to the Report being discussed in schools, and schools being encouraged to work towards

developing their own policies on language in line with its recommendations (ILEA, 1978b: 25.4.78).²²

David Mackay, the first warden of the CLPE, was also a member of the Bullock Committee until his resignation in November 1972 when he left both to take up a post in the West Indies. The Bullock Committee received a detailed account of the work of the CLPE as part of its evidence,²³ heard a presentation by Mackay on teachers' attitudes to language, and considered guidance notes to an ILEA television programme made in cooperation with the CLPE. Once published, the Bullock Report was discussed in CLPE publications for teachers such as *Language Matters* (for example Lavender, 1976).

Moira McKenzie, CLPE warden from 1974, made frequent reference to the findings of the Bullock Report in her guidelines for teachers (McKenzie, 1979), and spoke at the UKRA Conference on 'implementing the Bullock Report' (Hunter-Grundin, 1977).

As a body of experienced professionals working for the largest LEA in England, the ILEA Inspectorate provided substantial written evidence to the Bullock Committee, and individual inspectors were called as witnesses. In turn, the publication of the Bullock Report was discussed by the Inspectorate, welcomed as providing 'a solid base from which to intensify support for the professional',²⁴ and was the focus of a special meeting where its implications for inner-London schools were considered.²⁵ The Report was heavily referenced in the 1979 guidelines on language in primary schools produced by the Inspectorate (ILEA, 1979a). Thus the Bullock Committee reinforced the status of the

²² *Arrangements for the School Curriculum*, Appendix to Report (No.1) of the Schools Sub-Committee presented to the Education Committee on 25th April, 1978: 11. (ILEA, 1978).

²³ David Mackay, *Account of the CLPE* (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/5/1).

²⁴ John Welch, Senior Inspector for English, speaking at a meeting of the ILEA Inspectorate, 28th February 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁵ Meeting of the ILEA Inspectorate, 10th October 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

Inspectorate through the careful consideration of their evidence, and the Inspectorate in turn used the Bullock Report to lend authority to its advice for teachers.

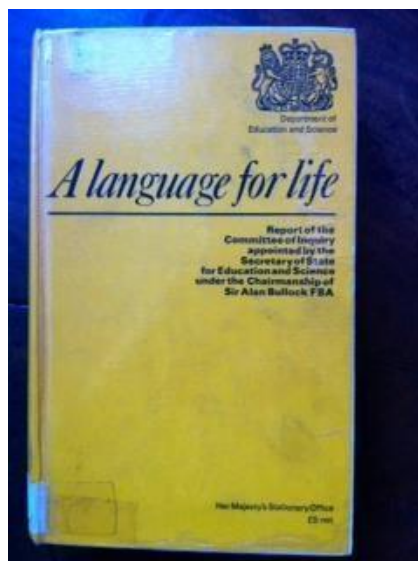
Traces of evidence

We are now at a distance of over four decades from the beginning of the 1970s, and the educational landscape has shifted profoundly. All of the four characters outlined above have either gone or changed beyond recognition. The ILEA and its Education Committee were abolished in 1990 when the inner-London boroughs became LEAs after an amendment to the Conservative government's 1988 Education Act. The ILEA Inspectorate was disbanded, and this role has now passed entirely to OFSTED, which has no local equivalent. Today the CLPE (now the Centre for Literacy, rather than Language, in Primary Education) is an independent charity which continues to offer courses and advice to teachers, functioning as a private in-service training provider from premises near Waterloo station. And the Bullock Committee of course dispersed once its Report was published.

We know that these four groups existed. We can use secondary and primary source material to build up a descriptive account of their structure, function and role, and look at ways in which they related to one another. We can use this to tell a story of 'how it was different in the 1970s', visualising the altered structures and the vanished players of another time. The deeper we go into the source material, the more detail we can gather and the more 'real' our story will appear, we can imagine the echo of debates in the council chambers in County Hall, the anguished meetings of the inspectors, the enthusiastic drafting of CLPE course programmes, or the polite disagreements of the Bullock Committee.

This staged historical recreation of a particular place and time in education forms a necessary backdrop to discussion of primary literacy in this context. The shelves and

archives are full of books, papers, reports, letters, journals, films and photographs where we can find what we need to piece together the details of the groups' work. We can set the scene and reconstruct the movements of the actors, but to seek explanations for their actions on a more profound level which can speak to our own era in literacy education we need to do more. In the following chapters I will use the traces left behind by the operation of the Bullock Committee, the ILEA Education Committee, the ILEA Inspectorate and finally the CLPE to investigate their work and those forces which shaped it. By looking at the Bullock Committee first, I can explore debates over the teaching of primary literacy which were taking place at a national level, before turning to three different components of the ILEA machine to investigate how these were operating in the context of inner London.



Chapter 4

The Bullock Report: 'accommodating all reasonable opinion'?²⁶

Introduction

In this chapter I look at the Bullock Report, *A Language for Life* (DES, 1975). Having outlined its establishment and structure in the background chapter, I now consider its significance. While we need to understand what the finished document was recommending, the nuts and bolts of its 333 'Conclusions and Recommendations' are not its only, nor necessarily its most important, feature (Prior, 2003: 26). Rather than embarking on a detailed description of content, I am interested in using the Report to explore the contested environment within which advice on the teaching of literacy was formed in England in the 1970s. I look at the Report less as a sacred text which will reveal to us the 'truth' of the past than as a starting point for asking questions. I consider the value of different theoretical approaches to my research and outline those which seem to offer me the most productive purchase on the data.

²⁶ Spencer, M. (1975). 'Learning to read and the reading process'. In H. Rosen (Ed.), *Language and literacy in our schools: some appraisals of the Bullock Report*. London: University of London Institute of Education [Windsor]: [Distributed by NFER]: 11.

Surrounding the monolith of the published Report are further traces of evidence which I consider as alternative data sets. I describe these, and explain how I will use them in conjunction with the finished document to unmask the process of its production and the pressures and tensions experienced by the Committee which shaped its final recommendations. I consider how different ideologies on the nature and purpose of primary literacy education informed the Report's construction, arguing that while familiar narratives of division can be identified in the data, these were also resisted and complicated by the work of its members who sought to produce a document which could accommodate and reconcile a range of positions.

The questions which I use the data to answer are:

- How did the Bullock Committee understand its role? What did its members think they were there to do? What were their terms of reference, and how did they shape the parameters of their inquiry?
- How did Committee members understand responsibility for the teaching of literacy in English primary schools? For whom did they produce their Report, and what action did they expect to follow its publication?

I then identify three particular areas of tension in the discussions of Committee members, and look at how this tension informed the published Report. Finally, I ask how the Report was received in the context of contested understandings of literacy teaching in the period.

By using alternative data sets in conjunction with the finished Report I argue that we can illuminate relationships between different interest groups and reach an understanding of what was sayable or unsayable in the context of literacy teaching in this moment. This can help us to answer broader questions about the process of change in education and

how 'what counts as knowing, doing and being' (Woodside-Jiron, 2011: 158) in literacy teaching is shaped over time.

Looking at the Bullock Report

'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look at my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

(Shelley, 1817)

I found my own copy of the Bullock Report in a second-hand bookshop in Hay-on-Wye for a couple of pounds, a reject, to judge by the library stamps inside its front cover, from 'Glasgow College of Technology'. Holding the book in my hands it feels simultaneously weighty (and literally heavy at 609 pages between hard covers) and irrelevant, its printed royal crest and official declarations of purpose now out of time and unimpressive, 'useless in regard to present-day concerns' (Foucault in Kritzman, 1988: 83). Like Ozymandias' broken statue, its purpose has been rendered obsolete by the passing years. It exists for us now not as a commanding source of information on literacy teaching but as 'a monument to a culture' which tells us how that culture once operated in its own present (Popkewitz, 2013: 14).

Looking at the Report as an artefact as well as reading it as a document, we can see it as 'a visible sign of what happened or existed at some previous time' (Scott, 1990: 3). It is a 'monument' to how the teaching of primary literacy was understood in a particular context, place and moment. Its style and production positioned it as a policy document; authoritative, dependable and dispassionate. To question it is to seek to unmask 'the

apparent neutrality of educational reform' which it embodied (Ball, 1990a: 7; McCulloch, 2004:80).

In interrogating the document in the present we need to pull it apart, to disrupt its seeming solidity. We can read the text and ask ourselves 'how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?', and 'what was being said in what was said?' (Ball, 1990a: 3; Foucault, 1972: 27, 28). These questions help us to identify and examine the assumptions which underlie the printed pages. If we remember that the text of a policy document may be fixed in ink on a page but was fluid up to the moment of publication, we can 'un-make' the Bullock Report and reveal how it came to be (Foucault in Kritzman, 1988: 37). Using other data sets to examine the process of the Report's construction we can 'disturb what was previously thought immobile' (Foucault, 1977: 147) and get behind the impassive 'common sense' mask of the official publication (Scott, 2000: 27) .

Using theory

The metaphor of using theory as a 'tool box' in which to rummage to find a useful implement for attacking a problem is a valuable one (Foucault, 1974: 523). It allows us to use theory 'not as a perceptual straitjacket but a set of possibilities for thinking with' (Ball, 2006: 1), and is particularly helpful in policy analysis, an area where complexity often 'precludes the possibility of successful single-theory explanations' (Ball, 1994: 14). Taking an eclectic 'tool box' approach when faced with the challenges of historical enquiry allows us to use different theories to 'illuminate' different structures, relationships and stories (Beadie, 2011: 212). In this chapter, as well as using Foucault to inform my questioning, I will also use the work of Basil Bernstein and Stephen Ball to explore particular aspects of the context surrounding the Bullock Report.

The work of Bernstein is useful in making explicit who controls knowledge at any one time and how this control operates. The curriculum is understood as a site where conflict

over who influences the framing and classification of knowledge is played out (Murakami, 2014: 48). Official knowledge is characterised as 'the educational knowledge which the state constructs and distributes in educational institutions' (Bernstein, 1996: 65). Groups compete to make their version of knowledge into state policy, and it is this struggle which forms curriculum. The struggle takes place in the 'field of recontextualisation'; that is, the space where knowledge formulated in the 'field of production' (particularly universities) is recontextualised into a form where it can be transmitted by the 'field of reproduction' (particularly schools). The 'field of recontextualisation' where this process plays out is not a homogenous space, but is shared by the 'official recontextualising field' (ORF) and the 'pedagogic recontextualising field' (PRF). The ORF is dominated by the state and its agents, while the PRF consists of the subject community who work on pedagogy in universities, research, and the education media. Within both fields particular interest groups compete to promote their favoured interpretation (Bernstein, 2000: 33).

Bernstein's theory of struggle over curriculum, and his characterisation of the different areas in which this struggle takes place, is helpful in illuminating the Bullock Report, emerging from the melee in 1975 triumphant in published form, wearing its stamp of authority like a medal. By 'un-making' the Report through an investigation into its production we can see how the ORF and the PRF were operating through it, and understand how the published text came to be victorious. Was it a simple, uncontested process? Which voices were winners? Which remained unheard? These are all questions which we can use the data to answer.

As well as providing a model for the forces which compete to define the limits of curricular discourse, Bernstein's work is valuable in categorising different types of curriculum, and tracing their dominance in the ORF and/or PRF at any one time (Bernstein, 1996: 57-81). The dichotomies in which he deals are useful in encouraging us to identify key polarities in the field, and to understand the relationships between apparent oppositions

(see Moss, 2002: 550). The performance model of curriculum (with which anyone working in English state schools in 2015 will be very familiar), emphasises the importance of skills in education, lays down specific criteria for success through assessment and testing, sees the teacher's professionalism in the context of clearly marked pedagogic spaces with strong boundaries between subjects, and orientates school learning towards future goals. The competence model (now mostly confined to areas of the Early Years curriculum) allows the learner more control over pace and selection and is orientated towards the realisation of competence that the learner is already thought to possess. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator who constructs an environment where the learner is active and creative. The model is present-orientated and focused on the moment rather than on the acquisition of future qualifications or employment (Bernstein, 1996: 57-63).

For Bernstein, the late 1960s and early 1970s were an unusual period in the history of modern education in England in that the competence model was dominant in the PRF and the ORF simultaneously. The end of the eleven-plus examination and the rise of comprehensive schools created a space where curriculum could be newly constructed, and the PRF dominated this space (Bernstein, 1996: 70). By positioning the Bullock Report in relation to this model, we can use it as a framework within which to investigate struggles over curriculum. Does an analysis of the Bullock Committee's work support Bernstein's characterisation of the mid-1970s as a time when relationships between and within the PRF and ORF were shifting as the dominance of the competence model was beginning to waver?

The work of Stephen Ball on the English curriculum is useful in breaking down those forces operating on curriculum change into three categories. Thus we can see changes in education policy in terms of the 'conditions of change', those shifts in the social, political or economic climate which set the 'limits of tolerance' within which the subject community works, the 'relations of change', the activities and strategies of groups within

that subject community, and the 'structures of change', those institutions, organisations and procedures which 'constitute the formal channels of educational policy-making and administration through which or in relation to which change must be accomplished, mediated fought for, and negotiated' (Ball, 1987: 18). Reflecting the close working of the PRF and ORF in this period, the Bullock Committee was part of the 'structures of change' while being formed by individuals who were predominantly situated within the 'relations of change'.

Although I will not be leaning heavily on Ball's 'analytical schema', it is useful to bear it in mind when looking at the Bullock Report as it offers a simple way of categorising those influences which affected its formation. In particular, the 'conditions of change' is a valuable concept in relation to pressures from outside both the subject community and the state which were instrumental in the Committee's establishment, operation, conclusions and reception. Those 'external constituencies' (Cunningham, 1988: 7) exerted pressure which could act to encourage or to inhibit change in curriculum by seeking to impose limits around the teaching of primary literacy.

Using the data

What traces of the Bullock Report's creation and reception remain in the present? Along with the Report itself, we have sources relating to public opinion on literacy, evidence statements provided by 'expert witnesses' to the Committee, and records of Committee meetings. I have grouped these sources into three data sets which I describe below.

By considering these I can situate the published text within the context of that 'particular locality or concrete relation of time and space' in which the Report was written (Popkewitz, 1997: 135), and reveal the struggles of different interest groups which informed its production. These struggles took place between Committee members and 'external constituencies' and witnesses, as well as among members themselves.

Looking at one particular document framed by the voices which informed its creation I can investigate the 'hidden inconsistencies' and 'contradictions' which the authority of the finished text seeks to conceal (Levi, 1991: 107).

Data set 1

My first data set consists of evidence which relates to the 'conditions of change', reflecting publically expressed opinions through articles in the press, exchanges in parliament, and published polemics on education such as the Black Papers which spearheaded the right's 'counter-revolution' in education (Knight, 1990: 50). The late 1960s saw an increase in anxiety over literacy standards expressed in the media (Soler & Openshaw, 2006: 30). The publication of the first *Black Paper* in 1969 claimed to represent the voice of the common-sense majority, announcing that 'many people have become increasingly unhappy about certain aspects of the general trend' in education and deploring apparently declining standards and discipline in schools (Cox & Dyson, 1969b: 1). The back cover urged readers to make their voices heard: 'a copy of this black paper has been sent to every Member of Parliament... please write to your MP... We believe that the spirit of anti-education must be fought'. The second *Black Paper*, published six months later, claimed that the movement had 'broken the consensus on education', and 'encouraged parents, teachers and MPs to speak out on the present day abuses in education' (Cox & Dyson, 1969a: 15).

The impact of the Black Papers was amplified by extensive press coverage and explicit support by the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Star* and the *Telegraph* (Ball, 1990, pub. in this edition 2006: 29). According to the *Times*, 'the Black Paper people are not alone in being nagged by the suspicion that the continuous expansion of the education system

financially and in every other way has been accompanied by diminishing returns'.²⁷ Although the impact of the Black Papers can be overstated, they did crystallise and fuel a 'steep rise' in anxiety about education (Openshaw & Soler, 2007: 147). They represented an alternative discourse for those who were worried by what was happening in schools, and their contributors worked to become a legitimate political voice within the Conservative Party (Knight, 1990: 52) and through pressure groups such as the Council for the Preservation of Educational Standards, founded by Brian Cox, Anthony Dyson, and Rhodes Boyson in 1970.

In 1972 the NFER published its report, *The Trend of Reading Standards* (Start & Wells, 1972). The NFER had been commissioned by the DES to investigate standards of reading in primary schools and had conducted a survey using existing tests in order to attempt to standardise results (Soler & Openshaw, 2006: 35). While the outcome of the survey was complicated by the nature of the tests and the non-participation of many schools, the report's authors concluded that at best reading standards showed no sign of improvement over the past ten years (Start & Wells, 1972: 336). This conclusion was discussed in editorials and letters in the press, and Margaret Thatcher, Secretary of State for Education, was repeatedly asked in Parliament 'what action she proposes to take'²⁸ and 'what steps she is taking to remedy the decline in standards of reading ability'.²⁹ Having stated herself that 'the Report says that the progressive improvement in reading attainment... has not been maintained over the past ten years' (Jessel, 1972: 5), she was under pressure to be seen to be taking action (Bourne, 1972a: 5). Although it was widely understood that 'there is little, in theory at least, that Mrs Thatcher and her civil servants can do about curriculum and styles of teaching', there was also a growing sense

²⁷ *The Times*, Editorial: The first of the three Rs, April 5, 1972.

²⁸ (HC) Hansard, Deb 18 May 1972 vol 837 cc160-1W.

²⁹ (HC) Hansard, Deb 26th May 1972 vol 837 cc504-5W.

that 'many people... are worried that enthusiasm for innovation and curricular change may have led some teachers to venture a little too far' (Jessel, 1973b: 3).

The crisis discourse which can be traced in this data set illustrates how forces outside the subject community and schools were attempting to reassert the limits of legitimate discourse on literacy teaching during the early 1970s. The 'conditions of change' were certainly shifting as increasingly powerful voices emerged to challenge previous consensus, claiming legitimacy through the appropriation of educational research as the NFER Report was adopted in the media as 'evidence' of declining standards. Once these voices began to crystallise their concern into a cry of 'crisis' some response was required. The DES, while limited in practice regarding curriculum, accepted that 'something must be done', and responded by setting up the Bullock Committee. Looking in more detail at the work of the Committee we will see the 'crisis discourse' groups attempting to influence the finished Report and assess the extent to which they were successful.

Data set 2

The main work of the Bullock Committee consisted of hearing, considering, discussing and summarising a large body of evidence on language and literacy education. This evidence was provided by 'expert witnesses', a group which included many Committee members, as well as those individuals (66) or representatives of organisations (56) who were invited to speak or submit a paper. In addition, various Committee members circulated papers for their colleagues to read. As well as those personally invited to provide evidence, a press notice announced that the Committee would 'welcome written evidence', and received several hundred letters in response.³⁰ The Committee used the

³⁰ DES Press Notice, July 19th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/3).

evidence along with the results of questionnaires sent to schools to build up 'an accumulation of experience, a wealth of research' on which it could draw (DES, 1975: xxxiii).

The bulk of the evidence considered by the Committee consisted of interviews with those individuals and organisations invited to contribute. These sessions typically consisted of a presentation by the interviewee, followed by questions and discussion with Committee members. Those invited for interview included academics, representatives of teacher organisations, literacy organisations, LEAs, HMIs and some teachers and head teachers. The great majority were academics concerned with pedagogy, constituents of Bernstein's PRF. Of the correspondence received in response to the Committee's appeal, most came from head teachers, LEA advisers, lecturers, teachers, authors and concerned members of the public.

By analysing the mass of evidence represented by the witness statements we can see which voices were privileged and which were side-lined or ignored. The witnesses invited to give evidence were 'chosen as representing areas of major interest to the Committee',³¹ and therefore give us insight into those areas which the Committee assumed to be important, such as language development. While witnesses did not constitute a homogenous group it is possible to identify broad areas of shared understanding, and to categorise some voices as marginalised. Likewise, the Committee's sorting of correspondence into three categories (A, B and C, with A as 'useful' and the others less so) allows us to see those 'featured if they made a useful contribution'.³²

³¹ *Summary of Evidence*, circulated to members by R. Arnold (Secretary), 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/4/13).

³² Table, *Correspondence and offers of assistance*, 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(72)32).

Discussion and correspondence between members illustrate the importance they attached to including all sides of the debate. The Committee's Chair, Sir Alan Bullock, argued that the Report would be 'discredited if it was revealed that evidence it received had been seriously biased towards what is termed 'progressive practice', and argued that 'witnesses were needed to challenge the assumptions and trends of the last decade'.³³ To this end, the member with the strongest affiliation with the crisis discourse, the head teacher Stuart Froome who was often a lone voice in the Committee, was invited to choose witnesses. He called Professor Brian Cox of Manchester University, co-editor of the Black Papers, and representatives for the Council for the Preservation of Educational Standards, including Rhodes Boyson, head teacher and another Black Paper contributor. Froome also circulated his own materials such as '*Why Tommy isn't learning*' (Froome, 1970), and '*A plea for dictation*' for members to read over the summer, ensuring that his voice was heard along with other more academic texts on language development (for example Barnes, 1969).

The witness statements show those working in the PRF competing to make their voices heard and to achieve influence. We can see how members pushed to ensure that their views were represented by 'expert witnesses', the questions they asked the witnesses, and how their acceptance or rejection of witness testimony shaped the final Report. Considering the witness statement evidence allows us to see on what body of opinion the Committee chose to base the Report's legitimacy, which voices were allowed to dominate, which were relegated to the side-lines, and which never made it past 'category C' and remained effectively unheard. The witness evidence illustrates the struggles going on within the 'relations of change', as accepted authorities argued over curriculum, and marginalised voices attempted to break into the circle of debate.

³³ Committee meeting minutes, October 6th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

Data set 3

The minutes of the Bullock Committee meetings show us the Committee at work and allow us insight into how decisions were made on its structure and operation. The meetings of the whole Committee usually began with hearing evidence followed by questions and discussion. Meetings of the various sub-committees, working on areas such as primary, secondary, language or monitoring, were generally concerned with 'discussing and formulating recommendations for consideration by the full committee'.³⁴ As time went on, meetings were occupied with drafting and redrafting as the Committee's discussions were shaped into the text of the final Report by Sir Alan in his role as Chair, and by the Secretary, the HMI Mr R. Arnold.

The minutes show that the Committee was repeatedly reminded of its role and responsibilities. We can see the enthusiasms of different members as they argued for the inclusion of particular topics: for example, James Britton (Goldsmiths' Professor of Education, University of London) arguing for a sub-section on 'talk', and June Derrick (Senior lecturer at York University) asking for more on English as a second language.³⁵ The structure, length, form and wording of the finished Report were all discussed, and initial drafts were criticised and re-drawn. There is also some evidence of the influence of outsiders, for example, the 'suggestion' by Margaret Thatcher that the Italic Handwriting Society should submit evidence.³⁶

While these insights into procedure allow us to 'un-make' the apparent solidity of the published document by tracing the process of its production, the minutes are also valuable when it comes to understanding areas of agreement and of tension in the Committee's discussions. Which areas of the finished Report were written by an

³⁴ Primary Sub-Committee meeting minutes, October 18th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/1).

³⁵ Committee meeting minutes, April 4th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

³⁶ Committee meeting minutes, November 29th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

uncontroversial process of consensus, drafting and approval, and which were debated, revised and amended? The Committee members consisted of 22 men and women, nine from universities and schools of education, six head teachers, three LEA advisers or officers, one editor and one publisher. Within this group, which voices dominated and whose authority was privileged? By identifying 'tension points' in the meeting minutes (Fairclough quoted in Woodside-Jiron, 2011: 157), we can be alerted to those moments of dislocation in the discourse which could potentially lead to change. The extent to which these areas of friction were acknowledged in the final Report gives us insight into how the PRF and ORF were operating in practice and where future conflict might occur.

'Two views that can never really match':³⁷ conflicting ideologies and the Bullock Report

When we look at the tension points in the discussions of Committee members, the statements of witnesses, and the pages of the final Report, we can see them in terms of those broad ideological positions which have informed debate surrounding the development of the English curriculum over time (Green, 1990: 147). English is typically an area where powerful groups have 'sought to achieve ends which were ideological and political' (Goodson & Medway, 1990: viii; Stannard & Huxford, 2007: 181), and in the context of the Bullock Report we can trace these ideologies playing out in practice.

Looking at areas of tension between members in terms of Bernstein's models of curriculum clarifies ideological differences and helps us to identify those strands of discourse which commonly cluster together.

The crisis discourse in literacy united around several key beliefs, which while pre-dating

³⁷ Spencer, M. (1975). 'Learning to read and the reading process'. *Language and literacy in our schools: some appraisals of the Bullock Report*. H. Rosen. London, University of London Institute of Education [Windsor]: [Distributed by NFER]: 11.

Bernstein's performance model did share many of its features. The skills-deficits presented by the child entering the school gate should be rectified by structured, focused and rigorous teaching. Progress with this task could be assessed through regular testing of particular skills, and ordered progression through the system would be assured by clear structural boundaries. This model was characterised as being nothing more complicated than 'common sense', it could be understood by those outside the educational establishment, particularly parents, and conformed to the traditional, 'tried and tested' pedagogies of the past. Those who subscribed to this vision of schooling were keen to present disagreement as an 'ideological battle',³⁸ with those on their side upholding order, rigour, accountability and measurable achievement, while their opponents stood for chaos, anarchy and collapse.

The situation in schools was presented as a potent cocktail of falling standards, teaching methods which were at best confused and ineffectual (and at worst harmful and politically-motivated), complacency by those in power, and a lack of structure, direction and accountability in the system which allowed poor teaching and results to go unnoticed. Recent developments such as the end of the eleven-plus exam, the decline of streaming by ability, the rise of comprehensive schools and the adoption of those 'progressive' methods of education in primary schools recommended by the Plowden Report, were deplored. The discourse portrayed a crisis in schools alongside a corresponding collapse in order, tradition and civilisation in society, and urged a return to established structures and certainties.

In the context of the Bullock Committee the crisis discourse was most insistently expressed by Froome and those witnesses whom he had been asked to assemble. Other members, such as Keith Gardner (a lecturer in primary education at Nottingham

³⁸ Evidence of Professor Brian Cox (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/4/3).

University, and contributor to *Crisis in the classroom*, published by the Daily Mirror in 1968), witnesses such as Dr Start, co-author of the NFER Report on reading standards, and representatives of the CBI, offered support for various features of the argument. Calls were made for the explicit teaching of measurable skills, particularly in phonics, grammar, spelling and handwriting. There was great suspicion over suggestions that 'language' teaching should promote talk as an equal partner to reading and writing, and Froome argued that this too should be subject to correction, thinking it 'essential that if a child used language incorrectly he should be told that it was wrong'.³⁹ The 'extent to which correctness and 'conventional language' should be emphasised in the Report was a strong theme in Froome's attempts to influence the Committee.⁴⁰

For other Committee members, the crisis discourse arose from a fundamental misunderstanding, not only of flawed research findings, but of the purpose of schooling itself. While the education system required reform, this should be in the opposite direction from a return to traditional models of teaching. Rather, problems in schools stemmed from the fact that the competence model of pedagogy as applied to language and literacy teaching, despite rising to prominence in the recontextualising fields, was not properly understood or applied in practice. Teachers lacked sufficiently in-depth training to make informed judgements about pedagogy and schools were under-funded and often stubbornly attached to obsolete practice linked to a performance model which forced children into a predetermined mould rather than enabling them to achieve their full potential (Lowe, 2007: 42). Low pupil achievement, particularly among disadvantaged groups, was a symptom of a system which was not sufficiently responsive to their needs and ignored 'the development of the student as a person' (Medway, 1990: 14). For Britton, the 'best teaching of the humanities' should be 'directed towards a student's better understanding of himself and his potential in a multi-cultural and

³⁹ Committee meeting minutes, July 5th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

changing society' (DES, 1975: 555). Within the Committee he emerged as the strongest proponent of this view, supported by several other members, in particular David Mackay of ILEA's CLPE (who clashed with Froome frequently, asserting for example that 'one should not fault the child for his local speech').⁴¹

The 'language and personal growth' model had a strong institutional and professional base by the early 1970s (Ball, 1985: 70). Language was linked to personal experience, with pedagogic implications for a teaching method which should relate to the lived experience of pupils and encourage talking, activity, purpose and meaning. In practice this could mean work linked to topics of direct relevance to pupils, resources developed by teachers in the context of their pupils' needs, and responsive flexibility in curriculum (see Bernstein, 1996: 58-63). Literacy was understood in the context of the child's whole use of language. Creativity was encouraged, pre-packaged schemes of work were suspect, tightly structured programmes of study were seen as restrictive, and testing understood to be complicated as it required the measurement of achievement which is 'difficult to evaluate objectively' (ibid: 62). The teacher should have a sophisticated understanding of child development and learning in order to lead each pupil towards the fulfilment of their personal and unique capacity.

While we can identify the different understandings of language and literacy teaching expressed in these two positions in many of the Committee's tension points, we must be careful not to over-privilege these opposing ideologies. The literacy story can be told through a range of polarities which have a tendency to collapse back into the familiar 'traditional versus progressive' narrative. These dichotomies offer clarity and a means of organising a range of positions into broad categories, but when we look at the traces left behind by the operation of the Bullock Committee we find a more complex picture.

⁴¹ Committee meeting minutes, September 20th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

The Bullock Report was explicit in its recognition of these two different understandings of the English curriculum, discussing them in its first chapter, *Attitudes to the teaching of English*. It acknowledged that 'some teachers see English as an instrument of personal growth' while 'others feel that the emphasis should be placed on direct instruction in the skills of reading and writing' (DES, 1975: 4). Carefully avoiding expressing allegiance to either view, the Report admitted that it was 'a very complex matter', and noted that few people would align themselves completely with either end of the spectrum. The discussions of Committee members and witnesses confirm this, with most taking a practical approach to matters as they were debated rather than associating themselves unequivocally with either position.

The aim of those drafting the Report was to present a discourse so inclusive and persuasive that it would appear unbreakable by alternatives. To achieve this, they tried to acknowledge and then to move beyond the crude outlines of the 'traditional versus progressive' model, working to structure a text which included and reconciled different understandings of language and literacy in schools. We can see them endeavouring to shake off the buzzing flies of polemic which threatened to drown out informed debate in order to focus on producing a document which would support real improvements in teaching. In the following sections, while I do consider how tension points within the different data sets relate to broader ideological positions, I am more interested in exploring the context of limits and possibilities within which Committee members were working. What was sayable and thinkable at this particular point in time, and in this situation? These questions can lead us to a more nuanced understanding of the Report's significance than one which merely uses it to identify familiar ideological divisions.

‘What are we here to do?’ How did the Bullock Committee understand its role?

While the Committee was established, selected and funded by the DES, its Chair and members did have significant control over the interpretation of their role. The published Report reproduced the initial terms of reference on the first page of its introduction, ‘to consider in relation to schools’ all aspects of teaching, how to improve present practice, how to monitor attainment, ‘and to make recommendations’ (DES, 1975: xxxi). It then described how the Committee had chosen to understand this brief - ‘we interpreted..’, ‘it was obvious that..’, ‘we therefore decided..’, ‘we felt..’, ‘it became clear to us..’, ‘we chose instead..’, ‘we had to decide..’ - the choice of verbs indicated the extent of the autonomy felt by members in deciding the limits and focus of the inquiry on their own terms.

Among Committee members we can identify different interpretations of role which were discussed and debated throughout the consultation and drafting process. For James Britton and the majority of academic experts in language and literacy, the final Report should serve as a means of explaining educational research to teachers, parents, and the wider public. It should be ‘suggestive and not definitive’, and should avoid ‘studying in great depth the detail of classroom practice’.⁴² Rather than advocating any particular method, ‘the most important job this committee has to do is to offer informed... opinions concerning the teaching of language in schools’.⁴³ The role of the Committee was to collate and present this ‘informed opinion’ so that positive change would be initiated by those working in LEAs and schools as practice was exposed to research findings. The Bullock Report should explain the conclusions of the subject community/PRF to the wider world, improve understanding of what schools should be trying to do, and link teachers to research.

⁴² Committee meeting minutes, September 19th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁴³ Note by Professor James Britton (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(72)26).

For Stuart Froome and his allies among the witnesses, the role of the Committee should be understood from a different perspective. Rather than explaining the over-complicated and slippery conclusions of academic experts, the Report should function in the opposite direction, modifying the pronouncements of the subject community in line with the 'common sense' concerns of teachers and parents who believed that their voice was being ignored.⁴⁴ Teachers should be able to turn to the document for clear guidance on the specifics of classroom practice, and parents should find in its pages helpful and accessible advice on how their children should be taught to read and write.

The witness statements also reflect a range of understandings of the Committee's role. Some described methods as specific 'cures' for literacy problems, others recommended particular approaches or discussed existing structures in schools. Those writing in response to the general appeal for correspondence took the opportunity to explain their own approach, share their opinions about standards, or air particular grievances.⁴⁵ Some witnesses hoped that the Report would contain specific guidance on method in literacy teaching, some saw it as an opportunity to explain theory or research to a wide audience, some sought to convince members to subscribe to the crisis discourse, and some urged them to ignore it.

Outside the walls of the Committee's meeting rooms there were also different understandings of its role. For Thatcher it was a means of assuaging anxieties related to the NFER Report on reading standards. Announcing the inquiry at the National Union of Teachers' (NUT) Conference in Blackpool, she stressed the importance of reading,

⁴⁴ Committee meeting minutes, November 2nd 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1), Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, December 15th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/5, RI(SCM)72).

⁴⁵ For example one correspondent 'gives details of her own reading method', one 'claims that fifty years ago poor home conditions did not prevent children from learning to read', and another 'expresses his views on pronunciation of English by BBC announcers' (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(72)32).

and stated 'I hope that this inquiry will show whether sufficient priority is being given to these matters, and whether the most effective teaching methods are being used' (Bourne, 1972a; Macpherson & Ingram, 1972). However, there was no question of the DES taking action immediately in response to the NFER Report, it had fulfilled its role by passing the matter on to the 'experts' for deeper analysis.

The press saw the establishment of the Committee as a response which was 'needed' in the current climate of anxiety,⁴⁶ a reaction to the 'something must be done' moment triggered by the publication of the NFER Report. Commenting on the Committee's work as it got underway, some hoped that it might recommend 'a more rigorous approach to the teaching of reading' (Jessel, 1973a: 3), while for others it was a chance to 'rejustify the primary school movement' against those who saw falling literacy standards as a 'skeleton in the progressive education cupboard' (Hartley, 1973). For teachers' associations and reading organisations it was recognised that 'the Bullock Committee cannot by itself do anything. What it can achieve is to heighten the public's (and the politicians') awareness' (Cashdan, 1973).

With these understandings of role pulling in different directions, Sir Alan tried to steer the Committee on a course which could reconcile or at least incorporate the two. The voices of the academic subject community were strongly privileged in the Report and, with the exception of Froome, these tended to dominate Committee meetings. The number of expert witnesses from higher education heavily outnumbered those from schools, LEAs, private organisations or HMI, and questionnaire results from schools were used to provide evidence of practice rather than recommendation. In many ways Britton's understanding of the Report as providing a bank of expert research and opinion which would inspire teachers and enlighten parents was realised.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, Editorial: The first of the three Rs, April 5, 1972.

However, the meeting minutes do reflect a sense among Sir Alan and other members that the Committee's role encompassed some responsibility towards addressing the concerns of the public. Members were reminded that they 'would have to take public opinion very seriously on this' or told that they 'can't ignore' general debate.⁴⁷ The 'problem of what parents, press and public think we are doing' was regularly considered and concessions were made in the redrafting of sections which seemed too dismissive of public anxieties.⁴⁸ To what extent 'public opinion' should be acknowledged was not clarified, and the conclusions and recommendations of the final Report did overwhelmingly reflect the evidence of the academic educational establishment (while stopping short of endorsing its more radical suggestions). The Report did however seek to address and allay the fears expressed in the crisis discourse through detailed explanation and discussion. As we shall see, this contested understanding of role strongly influenced its conclusions, particularly around areas of tension.

'Action on a broad front':⁴⁹ How did the Committee understand responsibility?

Differences of opinion over the Committee's role were echoed in its discussion of potential readers and those seen as responsible for effecting change in line with its recommendations. The finished Report referred to its 'wide audience', encompassing 'all who are professionally engaged in education and many more who have an interest in it – from parents to publishers' (DES, 1975: xxxii). It made it clear, however, that it was teachers 'who have been in the forefront of our thinking' and that the Report's primary purpose was to support them (ibid). In terms of recommendations, the Report

⁴⁷ Sir Alan Bullock in Committee meeting minutes July 5th and November 29th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁴⁸ For example Sir Alan Bullock in Committee meeting minutes September 9th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁴⁹ DES, 1975: 513.

called for 'action on a broad front' (ibid: 513). In practice its conclusions and suggestions spread responsibility for the teaching of literacy between teachers, schools, LEAs, education colleges and central government, reflecting the devolved educational structure of the period by making recommendations without clearly marking boundaries of responsibility.

When the Report was published in 1975, this structure remained fundamentally unchallenged by central government. Although the fact that Thatcher felt the need to 'do something' in response to a survey which had been commissioned by the DES illustrates that the state was ready to react if it feared that constituent parts of the education machine were not operating in line with broad consensus, there is no evidence that central government wished to assume any direct responsibility for curriculum. The enactment of its implied responsibility was limited, presented as keeping an eye on what was happening in schools, and assembling 'experts' to offer guidance to any who may have stepped too far out of line. The press took a similar approach, accepting that classroom practice was an 'area that is traditionally the responsibility of teachers' (Jessel, 1973b: 3). Most commentators avoided direct criticism of any particular component of the existing system, preferring to call for improvements in initial teacher training, or more money to fund advisory services for schools.

Members of the Committee and most witnesses also assumed that the existing system of devolved responsibility should continue. The only witness explicitly proposing significant change was Rhodes Boyson. In his evidence he called for increased parental school choice, the establishment of a centrally controlled curriculum to be followed for the majority of the school day, national tests at 7, 11 and 14, and nationally agreed standards.⁵⁰ These suggestions were so far out of line with those of other witnesses that

⁵⁰ Committee meeting minutes, June 6th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

Committee members sought clarification; ‘you are arguing for a centralised national syllabus that lays down minimum standards?’⁵¹ Other witnesses, even if they argued for a return to more traditional teaching methods, assumed that this could be achieved through the structures of the current system. The most that those who were seriously dissatisfied with the status quo offered were criticisms of progressive literacy teaching, an insistence that standards were falling, and pleas for a return to a ‘traditional’ English curriculum. Boyson’s alternative system of increased central control remained essentially ‘unsayable’ in the context of the Committee’s discourse.

For Committee members, ultimate responsibility for the teaching of literacy remained with the teacher. A paper by Geoffrey Bantock, Director of the University of Leicester School of Education and Black Paper contributor (circulated to members at the request of Froome), was entitled ‘*Reading: the teacher’s responsibility*’.⁵² At the other end of the ideological spectrum Basil Bernstein, then a professor at London University’s Institute of Education, stated in his evidence that ‘central control acts very indirectly, so that if you want radical change every teacher has to be convinced’.⁵³ Although members recognised that there was no guarantee the Report would be consulted or acted upon by teachers,⁵⁴ they concentrated on reaching this audience above all others. It was recognised that by appealing to teachers the Report risked appearing to hold them responsible for problems in schools and with standards. Members were reminded by Sir Alan that it would be ‘undesirable to place blame’ on teachers, and that ‘it is important to ask what it is reasonable to expect’ of them.⁵⁵ While it was hoped that teachers would

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Circulars (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/5/1, RI(72)INF27).

⁵³ Evidence transcript, December 13th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8).

⁵⁴ For example, Committee member and editor of *The Economist*, Alastair Burnet, wrote that the Report ‘may or may not be thought authoritative’ by teachers (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(72)34).

⁵⁵ Committee meeting minutes, November 14th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

adapt their practice to the Report's recommendations, there was a strong focus on appealing to other components of the education machine to support them in their work.

The finished Report stated, in list form, what 'should' be done. Some of these exhortations were directly aimed at schools: 'each school should have an organised policy for language across the curriculum', 'every school should have a suitably qualified teacher with responsibility for advising and supporting his colleagues in language and the teaching of reading' (DES, 1975: 514). Others were directed at LEAs: 'every LEA should appoint a specialist English adviser', 'teachers in every LEA should have access to a language/reading centre'. Some implied shared responsibility ('LEAs and schools should introduce early screening procedures'), some were more broadly stated and did not directly name their target audience ('children of families of overseas origin should have more substantial and sustained tuition in English', 'there should be a national centre for language in education', 'additional assistance should be given to children retarded in reading').

No statutory obligation was implied by all these 'shoulds', the Report provided recommendations for future action but nothing more. It was up to those involved in education to decide whether they were willing or able to take on the disruption and cost of change, and to decide how best to achieve this. The Committee had fulfilled its responsibility by constructing an authoritative and measured set of recommendations to those with an interest in the teaching of English. Central government had fulfilled its responsibility by launching, funding and publishing this enterprise. The ORF had called on the PRF to produce a document which would sum up its understanding of the teaching of English and serve as a reference point for legitimate best practice, to be consulted by those working in the 'field of reproduction' (ie. teachers). Thus both parts of the recontextualising field had performed their function and it was now up to schools, colleges and LEAs to adjust their operation in line with its conclusions.

Three points of tension:

Standards: 'an epidemic of nonsense'?⁵⁶

The shifting and contested meaning of the term 'standards' ensured that it was a slippery subject for the Committee to confront (Aldrich, 2000). Cries of 'falling standards' of literacy in the press, fuelled by the NFER Report, were the trigger for the Committee's appointment, and the issue went straight to the top of the agenda in its first meetings. It caused considerable tension between members and witnesses, and the nature of this tension, and how the final draft of the Report attempted to resolve it, is revealing.

The discussions of Committee members and witnesses reflect disagreement over whether or not the NFER Report did indeed constitute evidence of a crisis of standards. From the outset Sir Alan grappled with the question, 'was there ground for serious concern about the state of literacy in schools?'⁵⁷ Members argued about the reliability or otherwise of the NFER survey. For some like Alan Puckey, primary adviser for Nottinghamshire LEA, 'the Inquiry was linked in the public mind with the NFER Report, which in his opinion should not have been published'.⁵⁸ Others accepted the survey, with varying degrees of reservation, as an indication that there was indeed a problem.

The Committee was frequently reminded that although it 'needed to be put into perspective', the NFER Report would have to be satisfactorily addressed as it had been 'the occasion of the Inquiry'.⁵⁹

Many witnesses were dismissive about notions of 'crisis' and falling literacy standards, seeing the furore as an inaccurate distraction which could threaten progress in schools. Some, like Sir Alec Clegg, CEO for the West Riding and champion of progressive primary

⁵⁶ Sir Alec Clegg, Evidence to Bullock Committee, November 29th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/2).

⁵⁷ Committee meeting minutes, October 6th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁵⁸ Committee meeting minutes, June 16th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁵⁹ Sir Alan Bullock (ibid)

practice (see Cunningham, 1988: 49-57), addressed the issue head-on, declaring 'every forty years or so there is an epidemic of nonsense in this country about the teaching of English' and worrying that 'panic about this business of reading' would 'result in a rigorous narrow conception' of literacy teaching in primary school.⁶⁰ Literacy expert Margaret Clark insisted 'I am quite certain that there is no reduction in standards at the moment'.⁶¹ Representatives from the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) concluded there was 'far too much anxiety felt by many parents' and agreed with Clegg that this may lead to a narrowing of the curriculum. Other witnesses simply removed themselves from the debate; the NUT declared it 'idle to speculate' on the subject.⁶²

John Dixon, author of the influential *Growth through English* (Dixon, 1967), reminded members that the vast majority of schools, including those who were pursuing a more 'progressive' approach, were making great efforts 'to maintain and not reject standards'.⁶³ Many members expressed similar opinions, deploring the public's reception of the NFER Report and criticising the survey as flawed and misunderstood. Professor Jack Wrigley of Reading School of Education declared that 'those results have been widely misinterpreted by some influential people in this country',⁶⁴ and that there had been no fall in standards. Britton agreed, maintaining that the survey had been 'used to feed other, political, purposes'.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Sir Alec Clegg, Evidence to Bullock Committee, November 29th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/2).

⁶¹ Committee meeting minutes, December 13th (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/2).

⁶² *Summary of Evidence* (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/1/3).

⁶³ John Dixon, head of Bretton Hall college of Education, Committee meeting minutes March 21st 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/2/1).

⁶⁴ Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, September 5th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/3/5).

⁶⁵ Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, May 17th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/3/5).

On the other side of the debate stood a pile of 'many letters from the public (that) bore on the theme that standards had fallen',⁶⁶ and witnesses who agreed. Dr Start, co-author of the NFER Report, acknowledged that there had been some misinterpretation of findings, but still insisted that 'more and more children are leaving infant school unable to read'.⁶⁷ The Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS) stated that there had been a 'general decline' in standards among children applying for school places.⁶⁸ Unsurprisingly, the National Council for Educational Standards⁶⁹ was adamant that the NFER survey proved that 'standards of literacy have declined'.⁷⁰ Among members, Froome was the most outspoken on the standards issue, maintaining that 'the quality of English is much worse than it was when I was a child... structure is non-existent'.⁷¹

In contrast, many members expressed frustration over the perceived need to respond to public anxiety. As Keith Gardner put it, 'the questions people on the outside were asking were not the valid questions so why should the committee pander to their views?'⁷² Britton argued that the Committee should take a stand and ignore public anxiety; it 'had to take responsibility for its own views even if these were not immediately popular'.⁷³ The first draft of the Report, drawn up by Wrigley, included reference to 'widely misinterpreted results' of the NFER survey, and to a strong 'vein of anxiety' in the witness responses sent in by the public.⁷⁴ After objection from Froome, this section was reworded. The initial draft also stated that 'in short we are not worried by the results on research in

⁶⁶ Mr R Arnold, Secretary, Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, September 20th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/3/5).

⁶⁷ *Summary of Evidence* (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/1/3).

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ The renamed Council for the Preservation of Standards (Knight 1990: 77).

⁷⁰ *Summary of Evidence* (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/1/3).

⁷¹ Committee meeting minutes, April 11th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁷² Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, May 30th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/3/5).

⁷³ Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, February 1st 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/3/5).

⁷⁴ Drafts on 'standards', November 5th, 11th and 29th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/6/1, RI(74)RPT24).

reading standards, but neither are we complacent'. In the finished Report, 'not worried' was replaced with the less provocative conclusion that 'statistical results from the survey... are not greatly disturbing' (DES, 1975: 26).

Sir Alan insisted that while they may not agree with public anxieties and were right to be 'determined not to be stampeded by Press reports', members should be wary of appearing complacent.⁷⁵ He argued that to dismiss the concerns of 'people on the outside' risked jeopardizing the Report's reception and diminishing its influence. The finished text 'would need to be as invulnerable as possible to challenge' if it were to constitute a powerful and authoritative voice, and this would mean dealing seriously with the crisis discourse. This was stressed by Arnold during the drafting process; he 'pointed out that many letters from the public bore on the theme that standards had fallen... in the eyes of the public and press the Committee was investigating *falling* standards' and 'it was important to anticipate possible challenges'.⁷⁶ Many members agreed, anticipating the Report's reception and arguing that 'what critics are going to ask is 'where are the formal standards?''⁷⁷ The Report should try to 'quantify problems' in a straightforward way which could be understood by parents, 'in Daily Mirror rather than Guardian form' if necessary.⁷⁸ Diana Hutchcroft (head of Saltcroft primary school in Bristol) reminded members that 'in the present climate of educational thinking we shall lose credibility and be accused of woolly thinking unless we can substantiate our findings'.⁷⁹

Without any nationally agreed form of monitoring in place it was difficult to make broad and authoritative judgements on standards over time. It was recognised that 'only a

⁷⁵ Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, May 17th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/3/5).

⁷⁶ Committee meeting minutes, September 20th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁷⁷ June Derrick, University of Leeds, Evidence Sub-Committee January 24th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁷⁸ Alastair Burnet, letter to Sir Alan Bullock, May 31st 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(73)11).

⁷⁹ Diana Hutchcroft, note to Committee (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(72)30).

small number' of LEAs were able to produce 'good quality evidence' of attainment in reading or writing,⁸⁰ and that some more reliable 'system of monitoring' should be introduced as 'where there is no information there will be speculation, and the absence of facts makes room for prejudice' (DES, 1975: 36). The Monitoring Sub-Committee struggled to reach agreement on what such a system should look like, and the extent to which it should be used to 'set right the widespread but mistaken expectations of many parents'.⁸¹ They were particularly concerned to avoid any narrowing effect on literacy teaching, with Britton reminding them that it was 'impossible to state an age at which all children should read'.⁸² The need for 'a wider and more demanding definition of literacy' was stressed in the finished Report, which recommended that responsibility for monitoring should 'lie with a national research organisation' (DES, 1975: 36, 517), and broadly followed Sir Alan's plea for 'more imaginative methods and research'.⁸³

The need for the Committee, in the words of Arnold, 'to reconcile what it thought educationally right with what the public demanded,'⁸⁴ pushed the Report to address concerns on standards while at the same time seeking to avoid recommending any direct measures relating to monitoring which might exert restrictive pressure on pedagogy. The published Report signalled its determination to address the standards issue head-on from the beginning of its first chapter, where it asked whether 'it is possible.. to make some kind of provisional generalisation about standards?' (DES, 1975: 7). It acknowledged that 'a good deal of concern has been expressed' in this area and went on to examine various sources of existing data, particularly the NFER Report for which it detailed numerous problems but concluded despite these that it 'still provides the best

⁸⁰ Report to Monitoring Sub-Committee, September 12th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/5)

⁸¹ Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, December 15th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/5, RI(SCM)72).

⁸² Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, April 4th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/5, RI(SCM)73).

⁸³ Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, May 30th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive BUL/B/3/5).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

evidence' available' (ibid: 25). In its conclusions, the Report teetered on a high wire, neither accepting nor dismissing the NFER Report's conclusions outright, and arguing that 'a new system of monitoring should be introduced' (ibid: 26) but leaving the design of this system in the hands of researchers who could work to ensure that it did not distort curriculum.

Method: 'an enormous red herring'?⁸⁵

Another area of tension was the issue of how and to what extent it was the role of the Report to recommend the 'right' way to teach literacy. The question of method, like standards, was a risky one for the Committee to tackle as it often became mired in polarised debate over 'traditional' versus 'progressive' approaches to teaching. In the years leading up to the Committee's appointment, the link between perceived falling standards and progressive teaching methods had increasingly been made in the mainstream press, as well as in polemical writing associated with the 'crisis' discourse (Jessel, 1972). The publication of the NFER Report was welcomed by those who 'longed to discredit progressive primary teaching' (Bourne, 1972b) as evidence of a causal link between modern teaching methods and falling standards of literacy (Musgrove, 1987: 106; Soler & Openshaw, 2006: 30; Wallace, 1993: 325). How did the Committee deal with the issue of method in primary schools, and how far was this influenced by widespread public perception of the issues involved?

Many of the Committee's members and witnesses from the subject community rejected the view that progressive methods were to blame for falling standards. As we have seen, some asserted the opposite: achievement in schools was being inhibited by continuing adherence to 'traditional' methods of teaching which failed to take into account the

⁸⁵ Sir Alan Bullock, Committee meeting minutes, November 29th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2/).

complexity of language and the needs of the individual child. For David Mackay of the CLPE, the ‘uncritical assumptions underlying attitudes and methods of some teachers’ were responsible for problems with children’s language development in schools.⁸⁶ For Britton, ‘the times themselves were compelling a changed approach’, and unless schools modified their practice they would become increasingly irrelevant to the needs of their pupils.⁸⁷ Schools were criticised for clinging to ineffective and old-fashioned methods; according to Douglas Barnes (co-author with Britton of *Language, the learner and the school*), much ‘direct transmission teaching just bounces off and has no effect at all’.⁸⁸ In any case, most members and witnesses agreed, there was no evidence that truly progressive methods had spread outside a few small enclaves. According to witnesses from HMI, ‘in almost all cases, the teaching of reading as a mechanical skill was seen as a major part of the school’s task’, and reading for enjoyment was still rare, even in ‘consciously ‘progressive’ schools’.⁸⁹

Reading experts among witnesses were overwhelmingly opposed to advocating one particular method. The evidence of Betty Root from the Centre for the Teaching of Reading at Reading University was typical: ‘I have never thought that any one method alone is sufficient for all children’, and ‘we do not know whether one method is superior to another’.⁹⁰ Claims that any particular approach offered a ‘solution’ to reading problems were dismissed, and systematic phonics teaching was certainly not the answer (for Root, ‘not all children need phonics teaching and in my opinion phonics is rather a narrow thing’). According to Bernstein, ‘it is no good looking around for a reading kit’.⁹¹ The complexity of language and literacy acquisition demanded a profound and thoughtful

⁸⁶ Committee meeting July 5th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁸⁷ Committee meeting minutes, October 6th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁸⁸ Douglas Barnes evidence, October 18th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁸⁹ Chief Inspector’s account of English teaching in 16 junior and primary schools (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/5/2 RI(73)INF6).

⁹⁰ Evidence Sub-Committee January 24th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁹¹ Evidence transcript, December 13th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8).

response: 'the problem is organic in nature; you cannot have a mechanical solution to an organic problem' (ibid). For Professor John Downing, 'systematic and planned programmes' should be avoided, and 'the real need is for teachers to understand more about the linguistic background of English'.⁹²

Others disagreed. Geoffrey Bantock, a Black Paper contributor, feared that far from clinging to traditional methods, teachers were being swept along on a tide of 'nonsense', and were 'beginning to surrender to the 'pop' world'.⁹³ For Froome it was self-evident that teachers 'need a sequential scheme of work' to deliver to children,⁹⁴ and he favoured 'traditional' teaching through structured phonics, dictation, and grammar exercises. This opinion was widely shared, and not only among the usual suspects. When summing up witness evidence on the teaching of reading, those who agreed that 'reading should be taught by a planned systematic programme, with the purposeful introduction of phonic skills' included the NUT and some ILEA representatives.⁹⁵ The word 'system' cropped up repeatedly. For Cox, 'children learn to read best when they are taught by a system which involves learning the code'⁹⁶, for Start it was 'unfashionable to be systematic... yet I think reading is one of the skills that all research evidence suggests is enhanced by a systematic approach'.⁹⁷ According to Bantock, infants 'need order and progression' above all.⁹⁸ Repeatedly, a return to traditional methods was characterised as objective common sense which would reassert order in the face of threatened chaos (Ball, 1990, pub. in this edition 2006: 48).

How then did the Committee seek to negotiate a path between these different understandings of method? The 'public criticism of teaching methods to which – whether

⁹² Committee meeting May 9th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁹³ Evidence of Geoffrey Bantock, Leicester University, June 13th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁹⁴ Committee meeting minutes, April 11th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

⁹⁵ *Summary of Evidence* (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/1/3).

⁹⁶ Evidence of Professor Brian Cox (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/4/3).

⁹⁷ Evidence of NFER, November 1st 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

⁹⁸ Circulars (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/5/1, RI(72)INF27).

justly or not- the relative decline in reading standards had been widely attributed' was much discussed.⁹⁹ As he did with the debate on standards, Sir Alan repeatedly reminded Committee members that it was not acceptable to disregard this criticism entirely, however tempting that may be: 'I regard the polarisation between traditional and progressive as an enormous red herring' but it cannot be ignored.¹⁰⁰ The need to tackle the perceived link between standards and 'progressive practices' was often mentioned.¹⁰¹ Froome insisted that 'the brass tacks of organisation and system is what parents want', and that 'the public is going to expect this committee to come out in favour of one particular method'.¹⁰²

Different understandings of method reflected two very different understandings of the nature of English as a school subject, explained by Arnold as either 'an attempt to draw in the boundaries, to impose shape on what seems amorphous, rigour on what seems undisciplined' or 'accept that English is process not content... let it flow where the child's needs will lead it'.¹⁰³ In resisting the first option and refusing to recommend one correct method of teaching, the Committee faced a problem summed up by Sir Alan:

'one of the most difficult things the Report has got to do is to make clear to people the depth and subtlety of the questions that arise in this matter. Every post seems to bring us mechanical solutions to the problem of reading. We have got to make it clear to these people exactly what is involved without taking it so far from the classroom context that it is incomprehensible'.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Committee meeting minutes, July 19th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

¹⁰⁰ Committee meeting minutes, November 29th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

¹⁰¹ See for example letter from Sir Alan Bullock to members, dated March 1973, 'we would be tackling two commonly associated theses; that there has been a falling off in standards, and that progressive practices are largely responsible' Committee meeting minutes, November 29th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/6).

¹⁰² Primary Sub-Committee meeting minutes, October 18th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/1).

¹⁰³ R. Arnold (Secretary), *An introductory paper* (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, R972)2).

¹⁰⁴ Committee meeting minutes, December 13th (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/2).

Explaining to 'these people' that simple structured methods did not provide a straightforward answer to literacy problems would be a challenge. Nancy Martin of the Institute of Education, giving evidence on the Schools Council project, '*Writing across the curriculum*,' responded to a question on how to address the public's concerns with a rather lofty, 'we cannot explain what we are trying to do in a sentence. Anyone who is going to understand it has got to read a very large amount of material'.¹⁰⁵

The finished Report represented a serious attempt at addressing the complexities of language teaching in schools. While acknowledging that 'there was an expectation that we would identify the one method in whose adoption lay the complete solution' (DES, 1975: 77), the Report resisted this approach, repeating that 'there is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read' (ibid: xxxii, 77, 521). This opposition to the idea that 'reading and the use of English can be improved in any simple way' ensured that the Report would need to go into 'considerable technical detail' (ibid: xxxii). The polarity between an approach which favoured 'breaking the code', against one which focused on children's interest and reading for meaning, was described as a 'false conflict', and the 'considerable agreement' of experts was asserted (ibid: 77). While accepting that many of its readers would prefer the simplicity and clarity of a recommended structured method for literacy teaching, the Committee would not compromise its understanding of language teaching by offering this. In presenting a long, serious, nuanced and in-depth Report it demonstrated an expectation that its most important audience, teachers, would be willing and able to engage in this level of complexity.

¹⁰⁵ Evidence Sub-Committee January 24th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

Teacher professionalism: ‘making the teacher more sophisticated’¹⁰⁶

Most witnesses and Committee members agreed on the desirability of increased training for teachers. Teachers should be ‘free to exercise their judgement’ in language and literacy teaching,¹⁰⁷ and ‘most would agree on the importance of the role played by the teacher, and his or her training, experience and expertise’.¹⁰⁸ With some relief Committee members found that they were united on the importance of improving teachers’ understanding of language and literacy, with Henry Fowler, Director of Education for Derbyshire, noting; ‘Although there is a deep difference between Professor Britton’s thesis and Mr Froome’s starting point... there may, nevertheless, be a basic point of agreement in the degree of professionalism that a good teacher of English must seek to acquire’.¹⁰⁹ However, the nature of this professionalism was not uncontested, and tension in this area illustrates some very different understandings of the teacher’s role and potential.

There was broad agreement among members on the importance of expertise in language development to teachers, and the ideal that this should underlie their teaching.¹¹⁰ It was argued that the Report should recommend a ‘substantial’ increase in in-service training with longer courses and more in-depth provision.¹¹¹ Witnesses maintained that more centres were needed to develop links between teachers and the research community in universities and colleges.¹¹² It was also stressed that teachers would benefit from

¹⁰⁶ Monitoring Sub-Committee meeting minutes, April 30th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/5).

¹⁰⁷ Note by Professor James Britton (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/7, RI(73)EVID29).

¹⁰⁸ Paper by Committee member and literacy expert Vera Southgate, Evidence Sub-Committee January 24th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/5/2, RI(73)INF8).

¹⁰⁹ Note by Mr Henry Fowler (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(72)28).

¹¹⁰ Committee meeting minutes September 9th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

¹¹¹ Committee meeting minutes October 6th 1972 and November 15th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

¹¹² Committee meeting minutes October 18th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

increased exposure to current thinking on linguistics, psychology and sociology,¹¹³ and that ‘all teachers should have a course on the features and functions of language as part of their basic training’.¹¹⁴

While the majority of members and witnesses were in support of these recommendations, some voices expressed concern. One worry was that teachers were being overwhelmed by a profusion of ‘new methods they did not fully understand’, and should be helped through the maze of theory by practical concrete advice.¹¹⁵ Long discussions on language development among Committee members and witnesses were often interrupted by Froome, who was keen to assert the importance of ‘basic practical experience’ in teacher training, wondering ‘how much time is spent on teaching the teachers the actual mechanics of reading with children?’¹¹⁶ He was also concerned that trainee teachers were not being given sufficient instruction in phonics.¹¹⁷ These fears were echoed by one Chief Inspector witness, Mr Luffman, who worried that ‘so much.. may seem to the student to be an academic study unrelated to the practical situation’.¹¹⁸ On the Committee Froome’s position was supported by Audrey Johns, a London infant school head, who joined him in criticising the ‘over-academic approach’ of other members, characterising their discussions as ‘an ivory-tower talking shop’.¹¹⁹

Underlying these tensions were difficult questions over teacher competence, calibre and potential. Mackay expressed frustration at teachers’ reticence in improving their own

¹¹³ Committee meeting minutes November 11th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

¹¹⁴ *Summary of Evidence* (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/1/3).

¹¹⁵ Evidence of HMI Staff Inspector for English, Mr E Wilkinson (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/4/1, RI(72)EVID2).

¹¹⁶ Evidence Sub-Committee January 24th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

¹¹⁷ Committee meeting minutes, April 11th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

¹¹⁸ Committee meeting minutes, October 4th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

¹¹⁹ Committee meeting minutes, November 2nd 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1)

understanding of language and literacy, there was 'no area of the curriculum that is so well written about... no reason why teachers who don't know cannot refer to these sources and pick up a few clues on their own without any further help. What dismayed me in meeting teachers on in-service work is that practically none of them had made any move to do this at all'.¹²⁰ Britton argued that it was 'impossible to cram content into training forever. Teachers would have to rely somewhat on their own resources'.¹²¹ For Keith Gardner, 'it is not that (teachers) should sit back and be told what to do, but that we should create a more effective means for teachers to tell us what should be done'.¹²² Committee member David Gadsby, head of A & C Black Publishing, wondered if it was reasonable to expect teachers (or Committee members) to engage so actively with research; 'I wonder whether we can realistically hope all to become experts in Vygotsky and Chomsky'.¹²³

In meetings it was privately acknowledged that 'there are a lot of not very good teachers in the country', so the question was 'how do we help them?'.¹²⁴ Sir Alan addressed the delicate question of how best to support 'indifferent teachers' as being crucial, given that 'where you have a good teacher this counts more than anything'.¹²⁵ For most witnesses it was a priority to improve all levels of training for teachers, initial, probationary and in-service. The finished Report recommended that 'during their pre-service training all teachers should acquire a more complete understanding of language in education than has ever been required of them in the past... we emphasise that we regard this as only

¹²⁰ Committee meeting minutes, November 1st 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

¹²¹ Circular, May 22nd 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/5/2, RI(73)INF12).

¹²² Committee meeting minutes, November 1st 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

¹²³ Letter to Mr R Arnold, Secretary, from Mr David Gadsby, Committee member (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/3).

¹²⁴ Committee meeting minutes, November 29th 1973 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/2/1).

¹²⁵ Committee meeting minutes, November 1st 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/A/2).

the first stage in a continuing process' (DES, 1975: 343). Accepting the conclusions of the James Report that training for teachers should continue throughout their career (DES, 1972b), the Report recommended expansion in language training in all areas along with more advisers to work with schools. There was no mention in the Report of 'not very good teachers', it was accepted by members that teachers were their main audience and 'whatever else the Report may achieve we regard its first purpose as a support for them' (DES, 1975: xxxii). Although Committee members differed in their recommendations for the nature of support for teachers, their professionalism and autonomy was not up for discussion. The ideal of the professional teacher in the English tradition with responsibility for curriculum remained intact (McCulloch, 2001: 105; McCulloch, et al., 2000: 15).

Reception of the Report: 'the battle lines have been drawn'¹²⁶

Sir Alan's efforts to produce a finished document which emphasised consensus among experts and professionals were undermined by the inclusion of a '*Note of Extension*' by Britton and a '*Note of Dissent*' by Froome, both of which appeared at the end of the Report after the final conclusions and recommendations. Meeting minutes and correspondence show Sir Alan's attempts to avoid this outcome, particularly in the case of Britton who admitted to 'agreeing with the main recommendations of the Report'.¹²⁷ Froome also claimed to agree with the recommendations, but was adamant that standards in writing and reading had fallen and the Committee should have 'stated its concern unequivocally' and 'made an urgent appeal for a return to the methods employed in schools before the war' (DES, 1975: 556). He stated his support for streaming by

¹²⁶ Rosen, H. (1975). *Language and literacy in our schools: some appraisals of the Bullock Report*. London, University of London Institute of Education [Windsor]: [Distributed by NFER] :

¹²⁷ Committee meeting minutes, July 7th 1974, Note by Professor James Britton, July 17th 1974 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/6/13).

ability, and criticised the Committee for 'putting undue emphasis upon talking as a means of learning language' (ibid: 559). For Britton, the Committee had not gone far enough in offering support for those 'pioneer' teachers exploring new ways of working with their pupils through language and literacy in ways which fostered 'a student's better understanding of himself and his potential' (ibid: 555). In a letter to Sir Alan, Britton discussed his reservations with the finished Report which he felt did not 'sufficiently allow for or encourage' those 'unorthodox methods' which, in his opinion, offered the best chance of engaging pupils.¹²⁸

These additions by two of the Committee's most vocal and committed members were echoed in the reception of the published Report. For those who agreed with Froome, the Report had dodged fundamental issues and failed to confront the crisis in schools, the *Daily Mail* declared 'W-H-I-T-E-W-A-S-H spells whitewash... Sir Alan Bullock's Report on the teaching of English shrouds the reality in trendy pieties' (Chitty, 1989: 64). Others declared that the Report showed support for the crisis discourse position through those expert witnesses who were 'overwhelmingly in favour of the formal structured teaching of reading', and 'should mark the end of complete permissiveness in schools' (Brian Cox quoted in Fairhall, 1975).

For those who agreed with Britton, the Report had failed to seize an opportunity to refute the crisis discourse and to support new directions in teaching. It was weakened by an inability to avoid 'being side-tracked into advice about instruction', emphasising skills and stages and only giving passing attention to an approach which would encourage the child to 'take the process in hand for themselves' (McKenzie, 1975: 21; Spencer, 1975a: 10). In staying safely within the boundaries of the conventional and acceptable, it was criticised for failing to support 'young teachers, often bewildered and dismayed' who

¹²⁸ Note by Professor James Britton, July 17th 1974 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/6/13).

needed encouragement to pursue new and challenging directions in language and literacy teaching (Medway, 1975; H. Rosen, 1975: 6).

Those who hoped that the Report 'should end the sterile debate that has been rumbling on since the start of the decade' were disappointed.¹²⁹ Its refusal to take sides made it difficult for the press and public to latch onto its conclusions, there were no magic formulas, and little prescription. The *Observer* wrote, 'As Sir Alan unhelpfully remarked at the press conference last week, 'any headline saying that we have decided this or that particular thing will certainly distort our meaning'.¹³⁰ Its wealth of information and research was welcomed by reading experts and teaching unions as a starting point for discussion, and many LEAs organised courses and conferences on its contents for their teachers. But there was widespread recognition that it was 'unlikely to satisfy the strident educational right or the vociferous left',¹³¹ and that in practice even its uncontroversial recommendations were liable to be kicked into the long grass (Hunter-Grundin, 1977). The Report's foreword, by the Labour government's Secretary of State for Education and Science, Reg Prentice, hailed the Report as 'an authoritative statement' but immediately followed this with the proviso that due to 'current constraints, for the time being action on those (recommendations) which would involve additional resources must be postponed' (DES, 1975: iii).

Conclusions

By looking behind the published pages of the Bullock Report and using alternative data sets to unmask its apparent authority we can reveal the limits of consensus on what was legitimate and reasonable in literacy teaching at that moment. The traces left by Committee members meeting week after week, gathering evidence, reading reports,

¹²⁹ *The Guardian*, 'Literacy and liberty', February 2nd 1975.

¹³⁰ *The Observer*, 'The growing uses of literacy', February 23rd 1975.

¹³¹ *Education*, 'Editorial, February 21st 1975.

listening to witness statements and discussing and deciding on the Report's shape and content illustrate the mechanics of struggle as various interest groups sought influence over which version of curriculum would prevail. Those questions which were not even asked in Committee discussions tell us what was still effectively un-thinkable in debate over curriculum, those which were raised and immediately dismissed show us what was un-sayable within the context of the PRF, and those which were debated and left unresolved show us where the existing consensus model for the teaching of language and literacy was under pressure.

The protected space where teachers, schools and LEAs could work to explore curriculum in the context of their own expertise and environment remained essentially unquestioned. Even those who argued for a return to more structured traditional teaching methods stopped short of suggesting how this might be achieved if teachers resisted, their assumption was that most teachers would welcome a return to certainty and structure if such an approach was recommended. The PRF maintained its role as the legitimate forum for direction on curriculum, voices from outside may be considered, but in the end the subject community retained its authority to pronounce on best practice. And the ORF stamped its Royal Crest on the finished Report as it rolled off the press, sending it forth into the world as a statement of expert knowledge to be consulted, referenced, and used to legitimise practice.

While the Report was established, shaped and authorised by the structures and activities of the state, the extent to which its content was dominated by the subject community confirms Bernstein's characterisation of the PRF operating through the ORF in this period. But if dominant voices in the PRF were given the space in which to pronounce on curriculum, the ORF had no obligation to react to these pronouncements with the funding which could see them realised in practice. The schools and LEAs were urged to read and consider the PRF's recommendations but there was no way of ensuring that any action would be taken by teachers as a result of the Report's publication as this was

left to the discretion of individual schools, funded through LEA resources. In this the Report illustrates the profound limitations of the operation of the recontextualising field during the early 1970s. The ORF could decide that 'something must be done' and the PRF could be pressed into service to pronounce conclusions and recommendations. But nothing existed in the system to ensure that all those debates, meetings, drafts, discussions, newspaper articles and speeches would result in practical change; the constituent parts of the field of reproduction still operated in a space which allowed them to choose how and whether to respond.

Although reacting to calls to 'do something' in the face of public anxiety, central government's response was nothing more radical than the commissioning of a Report which would hopefully provide evidence of consensus and reassurance that members of the subject community could be trusted to offer advice to teachers. As such, the Report's existence embodied the devolved responsibility consensus model of curriculum. However, those points of tension expressed by Committee members, witnesses, the press, and in the finished Report were beginning to undermine the viability of the model. Sir Alan attempted to produce a Report which would effectively 'steer a middle course' through conflict (Ball, et al., 1990: 66), and 'reconcile the opposing claims of structure and flexibility' in the teaching of English (Soler & Openshaw, 2006: 39). If consensus were successfully achieved, the boundaries of legitimate literacy teaching would be redrawn to allow for a range of appropriate approaches. Britton regretted as cowardly the Committee's efforts to reach consensus in order to 'achieve those 'tones of an echoing oracle' necessary to convey unity and legitimacy' (Britton, 1978: xi). Froome criticised the Report for failing to reflect the common-sense concerns of those who rejected progressivism and wanted to 'apply the brakes' to changes in schools (Lowe, 2007: 55). But reading it today, the finished text seems remarkable in comparison with subsequent policy documents in English primary education in that it tried so hard to

accommodate very different understandings and resisted the allure of clear but limited solutions to problems with literacy.

We have seen that the tensions expressed most visibly in the notes of dissent and extension by Froome and Britton ran deep, so fundamentally opposed to one another that even when attempts were made to envelop them within the comforting arms of the Report's consensus structure, they wriggled free and continued to run in different directions. Britton saw the main purpose of the Committee as being 'to define the issues we consider to be crucial' (my italics) in the teaching of language and literacy; an examination of the workings of the Committee reveal that this 'we' was contested and that reaching convincing universal conclusions was not always possible.¹³² The Report's claims to legitimacy were undermined by deep and unresolved tensions around the fundamental question, what is literacy and language teaching *for*? By looking at how the Committee struggled to clarify and resolve points of tension in its discussions, we can expose the fragile and uncertain space in which it worked, and the limits on its ability to effect change. Those 'discursive patterns through which schooling is constituted' were shifting under pressure, and 'what counts for knowing, doing or being' in language and literacy teaching was contested (Popkewitz, 1997: 138). Analysing the operation of those forces shaping the Bullock Report allows us to see the significance of the mid-1970s as a period of transition in primary language and literacy discourse and policy.

¹³² Note by Professor James Britton (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/8, RI(72)26).

Chapter 5

Developing literacy policy in inner London: the work of the ILEA Education

Committee

In this chapter I consider how the ILEA Education Committee operated to shape the space available to those concerned with the teaching of literacy in London primary schools in the 1970s. I am interested in how the Committee identified problems with primary literacy and how it worked to address these through policy. I consider some of the myths and polarities surrounding ILEA in personal, professional and public memory, and in the literature. I describe my efforts to distance myself from dominant accounts of ILEA which emphasise its role in larger narratives of political and ideological change, and consider how useful or otherwise theories of power and policy have proved in supporting my understanding of the past on its own terms.

I look at the traces left behind in the present by the operation of ILEA's Education Committee and ask how these can be used to raise and answer questions about the past. I describe the two data sets most directly concerned with literacy: the ILEA Education Committee's evidence to the Bullock Committee on 'the teaching of reading and the use of the English language' (ILEA, 1972), and the reports by the ILEA Schools Sub-Committee on the literacy surveys which were undertaken between 1967 and 1977.

I use these two sets to consider the following questions:

- How were problems with literacy teaching and attainment in ILEA primary schools articulated? Where were solutions believed to lie, and how did this shape the Authority's literacy policy?

- Where did the Education Committee draw boundaries around its responsibility in relation to literacy teaching in its schools? What did members think they were there to do? And how did this understanding of its role shape its actions?

While these official accounts of literacy policy constitute the clearest and most detailed expressions of the Education Committee's literacy policy and action, their apparent coherence and confidence operates to obscure as well as to illuminate. I argue that we benefit from moving beyond them and looking at other documentary evidence which can disrupt their consensus.

The next data set I consider consists of the questions and debates of majority and opposition Committee members as recorded in minutes of its fortnightly meetings. I identify which issues in this contested terrain emerged as focal points for dispute in the challenges of Conservative opposition members over the course of the decade, and how the Labour majority responded to attack. I argue that in order to contextualise these political debates we need to look more closely at the ways in which those points of tension they embody were reflected or disregarded in the work of the Education Committee.

As Committee members set about the task of managing education in London they produced records of their actions which allow us in the present to gain insight into their priorities and problems as expressed through policy. In order to understand the Education Committee's policy on literacy as it operated in its own present I situate it within the context of three broader issues which I have identified in these records: how to promote school improvement, how to reach the community of inner London, and how to deploy Authority resources most effectively. If we position what members of the Committee were saying and doing about literacy in this broader context we can gain a more accurate understanding of the space within which literacy policy was situated. With

which questions were Committee members struggling in practice, and how did these struggles shape policy over time?

I argue that the account which emerges from debates in the council chamber over-privileges the tensions between majority and opposition members and risks drawing us back into the ideological conflicts which characterise the dominant ILEA story. I conclude that the Education Committee was addressing literacy teaching less from a position of ideological power exercised through single-minded policy than from an understanding of its own role and potential which developed over time.

Thinking about ILEA



When I began my first teaching job in an inner-London primary school in the early 1990s the presence of ILEA, abolished only a few years before, still seemed to permeate the building. It was spoken of with affection and regret by staff, a symbol of a vanished era rapidly slipping away under a tide of national curriculum documentation, SATs and the

looming prospect of OFSTED inspections. The fact of its elimination at the hands of a Conservative government determined to vanquish the last bastion of the Labour-controlled GLC lent it a mythic status from the moment of its abolition in 1990. Anger and lament tends to pervade the writings of its ex-employees and educationists for whom its destruction was 'a grave error brought about through political spite' (Mortimore, 2008). It continues to be remembered with 'tremendous affection' by many (Thumwood, 1992: 74), as a 'bold and generous authority' which offered 'first-class support' to its teachers (Mallen, 1992: 73, 71), committed to 'enriching and extending the teacher's perceptions' and offering 'enlightened courses and fascinating views on education' (Gammage, 2007: 50, 49).

An alternative memory tradition represents ILEA as a symbol of madness, portrayed in the right-wing press as the nadir of 'loony left' local politics, and a warning of the consequences of allowing Labour to retain power into the 1980s. This depiction was fuelled in public memory by (generally apocryphal) accounts of the Authority trying to ban Peter Rabbit books for being middle class (Krips, 2000), or by the furore over its alleged promotion of the book *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin*, 'vilified' in the press in the 1980s (Bosche, 2000; Curran, Petley, & Gaber, 2005: 165). In this myth, ILEA was 'profligate, inefficient and politically subversive' (Ball, 1990a: 54), and was abolished by the forces of reason and common sense as expressed through Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.

More serious discussion of ILEA since its dissolution has tended to position itself, however even-handedly, within a debate still polarised along these lines of political division. Most academic writing on the Authority comes from those who have been closely associated with it and are motivated by a desire to evaluate its achievements and understand the trauma of its destruction. These accounts tend to address the fundamental question of whether the ILEA 'should' have been abolished, what it

achieved, and how its legacy should be presented (Brighouse, 1992; MacGilchrist, 1990; Mallen, 1992; Radford, 2009). Alternatively, the ILEA story is considered in the context of the rise and fall of the influence of LEAs more generally (Heller & Edwards, 1992).

I am not writing within the arena of popular memory and debate surrounding the ILEA tradition. In thinking about how the ILEA Education Committee was operating to define the space in which advice on literacy teaching developed in the 1970s, I am concerned neither with defending it and mourning its abolition, or deploring its approach and celebrating its demise. I have not gathered evidence to pile onto either side of the balance in the 'credit or debit' debate (Brighouse, 1992), or to retrace the progress of past ideological and political struggles. Nor am I piecing together actions and events to try and 'glimpse' a real and vanished past or to 'tell the story' of ILEA in a definitive narrative history (Fulbrook, 2002: 28; Tosh, 2009: 153). Instead I am trying to disentangle myself from dominant stories and memories surrounding ILEA by using traces left behind by its operation to think about it in its own 'present tense'.

Standing outside the monumental building of County Hall which once embodied ILEA's authority and looking up at its office windows, now empty or converted into hotel rooms, it is hard to imagine the force and purpose which once filled it with meaning. Noticing the small blue plaque on the wall commemorating the 'home of Inner London's Education Service', ignored by the tourists who walk past on their way to the aquarium or the London Eye, it is clear that power in education, wherever it now resides, has left this building. Forty years later, in order to understand the nature and operation of that power in its own time and on its own terms, I have had to think about what it meant, how it was expressed in practice, and what traces it left behind when the ILEA Education Committee 'closed its doors at County Hall for the last time' (Ross, 1990).

Initially I thought that approaching the Education Committee's work from a theoretical angle could offer a means of positioning myself outside the large-scale narratives of

defeat or victory which cast such a long shadow over the ILEA story. Thinking about the nature and function of power might allow me to analyse the operation of the Committee from a perspective free of ideological freight. After all, power seemed to be a centrally important feature of ILEA's identity, communicated through the grandeur of County Hall, the handsomely bound weight of the Education Committee's meeting minutes, and the authority of its written evidence statements and reports. And ILEA certainly expressed power through the deployment of resources, the knowledge of appointed experts and researchers, the language used in official publications, and through its status as the nation's largest LEA, serving its capital city (see Foucault, 1982: 792).

How did this power operate in relation to literacy teaching in the Authority's schools? For Foucault, power is 'a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless a way of acting or being capable of action' (Foucault, 1982: 789). In this sense, to exercise authority is 'to structure the possible field of action of others': subjects are faced with 'a field of possibilities' and power acts to guide and shape this field (ibid: 790). Would it be useful to think about the ILEA Education Committee in the context of a 'history of contemporary education policy as a set of relations among games of truth and practices of power' (Ball, 2013: 44)?

If I could identify ways in which the Education Committee had 'shaped the field of possibilities' of those who worked in primary literacy in ILEA schools through policy, I could see its members using their power, if not directly to control the actions of others, then indirectly to 'create circumstances in which the range of options available... are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set' (Ball, 1997: 21). However, once I returned to the data to read it from this perspective, this approach felt heavy-handed. Although I was liberated from the force-field of ILEA's ideological battle narrative, I felt the theory pulling me towards characterising the Education Committee as

the seat of power, and those groups within its sphere of operation as its subjects. Of course, as subjects they would have opportunities for resistance, compliance or adaptation, but with the Education Committee 'structuring their possible field of action' they would still be essentially 'acted upon' through the exercise of power. When I tried to write 'power' in these terms into my accounts of the Education Committee, the word itself had a tendency to assume its own agency and become a character in the story, with the Committee as its puppet. I felt that there was a 'privileging of intent and purpose' implicit in such an account, and an assumption of a coherent directionality and hyper-competence in the Education Committee which sat uneasily within my understanding of the data (Popkewitz, 1997: 149).

The data suggested a group of people making sense of their perceived situation more than an institution exerting power to achieve its ideological ends. In practice ILEA did operate to 'structure the possible field of action' of those concerned with literacy in its primary schools, particularly in its ability to direct funds and research. But I wanted to find a way of talking about how the Committee used this power to think and act on the 'field of possibilities' in literacy teaching which also expressed the ambivalent and limited nature of their actions in the context of a particular place and time. Borrowing Foucault's concept of a 'possible field of action' shaped in part by the operation of state agencies, while avoiding the use of 'power' as a lens through which to see the workings of the entire ILEA machine, allowed me to think about the data with a lighter touch and to acknowledge the 'plural and unstable patterns in which schooling is constructed' (Popkewitz, 1997: 151).

If we look at the ILEA Education Committee in these terms, we can see its members using policy to direct the resources at their disposal to shape the 'field of possibilities' in London's schools while remembering that this process was not always calculated or straightforward. Resources (a combination of state finance and local rates) were limited, and decisions made in Committee over levels and priority of funding were contingent and

often contentious. Priorities selected for pursuit through policy were shifting and ambiguous. How dominant voices in the Committee understood and used the space available to them, and the consequences of this for advice on the teaching of literacy, is what concerns me in this chapter. Using a range of data sets contained within the bound volumes of ILEA Education Committee meeting minutes, I will show how the 'possible field of action' in primary literacy teaching was structured in practice through policy. By focusing in some detail on particular documents, I can place the Authority's action (and inaction) in the context of specific time and place, thus revealing the variation and complexity of policy at work (Ball, 1997: 18-21).

Traces of ILEA

What remains of ILEA apart from that blue plaque on the wall of County Hall? How does it exist in the present? We are left with two distinct options when trying to understand the ways in which it operated in a particular period. One is to immerse ourselves in the remembered actions of those who were there at the time. Some of these memories are immediately accessible, published in journals, posted online or presented to an audience.¹³³ Others could be actively solicited through interview and questioning. However, in seeking to understand the ways in which ILEA used its power to shape literacy teaching I have chosen to focus on the material traces left behind by its actions. The idealised accounts produced by the interaction of memory and myth (see McCulloch, et al., 2000), while fascinating, are less useful to my inquiry than the documentary traces of discussion and action which can help to identify issues within a particular policy domain during a particular period (Gale, 2001: 385). The documents produced by the

¹³³ For example, the '*ILEA legacies study session*' held at the Institute of Education in 2010, Peter Mortimore's 'In Memoriam' article in *The Guardian* (June 2nd 2008), or blog posts such as '*Recollections from the last days of ILEA*' by Neil Fletcher, its last leader (www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk).

workings of the Committee were not written for the historian, and this 'temporal integrity' allows us, while interpreting it in the present, to gain insight into past discourse as it was constructed and presented at the time (Cunningham & Gardner, 2004: 5; Gardner, 2010: 63; Scott, 2000: 9).

The material traces left behind by ILEA's Education Committee are at once overwhelming and limited. Overwhelming in the sheer bulk of paper produced by the large and complex administrative machineries of state, which while sifted, organised and collated in the archive, still fills binders, boxes and bound volumes. And limited in what they exclude and obscure; we are left with the typed, printed and published reports, meeting minutes, agendas and accounts which are the worm casts of activity as policy actors slither forward through time. The messy and organic business of day-to-day activity, the complex minutiae of decision, discussion, compromise and contingency remain largely hidden from our gaze. Nevertheless, by taking particular strands of documentary evidence and putting them into relationship, we are able to illuminate some aspects of this complexity.

ILEA at work: the Education Committee minutes



In looking at those traces left behind by the operation of ILEA's Education Committee we must place them in the context of their production, while remembering that this context was a fluid movement of people, activity, ideas and events. The members of the Committee were not working outside this shifting stream, observing, analysing and commenting on its course, but were rushing along within it in their present. Each strand of the policy cycle was in simultaneous and continual motion which informed policy debate, construction and enactment (Bowe, et al., 1992: 19).

Reading through the bound volumes of the ILEA Education Committee minutes one is struck by their relentless density, as wave after wave of text is presented fortnight after fortnight to meetings of the assembled members. The documents may seem fixed and static now, as we consider them in the present, but they are very much the products of action (Prior, 2003: 173). Each report, from a one-paragraph description of repairs to be carried out on a particular school to an exhaustive account of policy running to up to one hundred pages, is a statement of Authority attention and activity. Through these documents we see the constant work of ILEA members as they recorded headship appointments, projected staff requirements, governing body organisation, housing initiatives for teachers, reviews of educational technology, grants for uniforms, staff travel

costs, estimates of annual expenditure, future pupil numbers, fire precautions, the buying and selling of land and premises, and the reorganisation of individual schools.

The reports presented to the Education Committee at fortnightly intervals were produced by the sub-committees, the 'workhorses of the Authority' (Radford, 2009: 44). These each numbered around 20 members, who were drawn from both parties represented on the Education Committee, and covered areas including Schools, Finance and Administration, Further and Higher Education, Policy Co-ordination, and Staff and General. They met to discuss and draft reports before presenting them to the Education Committee who would debate whether each report should be received and passed on to ILEA as a statement of Education Committee policy.

Alongside the constant routine requirements of running a large education system, the sub-committee reports show members articulating, innovating and prioritising as they grappled with the realities of policy production.¹³⁴ They also proposed and published research (initiated variously by the Education Officer, by the Inspectorate, and by Education Committee members), drew up evidence for presentation to national committees, responded to government papers, and outlined new policy initiatives. The reports offer us a significant source of data for exploring what members were discussing in sub-committee over the course of the 1970s, and what the Authority was doing as a result of these discussions. The various reports, the products of hours of meetings, research and discussions, show us Committee members working on particular issues identified as priorities at certain times and in certain situations. They defined problems and proposed solutions through the targeted deployment of available resources.

The presentation and consideration of sub-committee reports took up the bulk of time at

¹³⁴ During the 1970s, a large proportion of their reports were concerned with the upheavals generated by the reorganisation of secondary schools 'in order to achieve as rapidly as possible a fully non-selective system' which dominated the decade (ILEA, 1970: 349).

Education Committee meetings, and constitute the heaviest portion of documentation. But the meeting minutes also include other valuable traces of policy and action. Written evidence produced for national committees presented the authoritative public face of ILEA policy and showed it explaining its understanding of problem and solution on its own terms. The routine administrative issues and presentation of petitions, usually from parents and school managers and often in relation to secondary school reorganisation, remind us of the events to which the Committee as a represented elected body was expected to respond. And during the first half hour of the meetings, we see members making public statements, asking questions and proposing motions, often in the context of political sparring between the Labour majority and the Conservative minority which was a feature of meetings as the council chamber reflected the growing politicisation of educational issues over the course of the 1970s (Alexander, 2010: 21; Jones, 2003: 72). This 'greater spirit of animosity and polarisation' was evident in the exchanges of Committee members, particularly as many had one eye on a future career on the national political stage (Heller & Edwards, 1992: 138).

How can we situate primary literacy teaching within the vast enterprise of the ILEA Education Committee? If we look up 'literacy' in the substantial index of the Education Committee minutes, we find the two data sets which deal most directly with the subject. The first and most extensive is the Authority's evidence to the Bullock Committee, presented as a report in December 1972. This is a lengthy document which operated as a policy text in that it defined issues in primary literacy in terms of the Authority's values, outlined goals to be achieved through future action, and detailed resources utilised in the pursuit of these goals (ILEA, 1972). It can be seen to exist in the context of policy text production, a closed document representing official policy at a particular moment in time (Bowe, et al., 1992: 19-20). The second strand of data directly addressing literacy consists of reports on the ongoing literacy surveys produced by the Schools Sub-Committee at intervals of around eighteen months between 1969 and 1977. These show

members outlining and justifying policy in relation to particular research findings over time, and also fall within the category of policy text production.

Looking at both data sets allows us to see a closed policy text (the evidence to the Bullock Committee), a summary of literacy policy at a particular moment in time designed for public consideration, in relation to ongoing policy texts produced over time for the attention of Education Committee members. We can further complicate our understanding of the Authority's approach to literacy by looking beyond the minutes' index, and finding less formal discussions of literacy in the questions and comments of members in the council chamber. These references occur frequently although at irregular intervals over the course of the decade. They disrupt the apparent consensus of the closed policy texts by allowing us some insight into the disputed terrain surrounding policy production. Finally, if we look beyond direct references to literacy and analyse the broader scope of the Education Committee's work over the decade as evidenced in the minutes, we can identify policy developments and the changing ways the Authority was shaping the field of possibilities in literacy.

By putting these different texts into relationship I can show the policy documents left behind by the operation of ILEA as a work in progress, continually moving through time and the demands and requirements of its own present tense. Looking at the closed policy text of the evidence to the Bullock Committee in relationship to more fluid data sets reveals areas of tension over discourse which uncover the constructed nature of what might otherwise be naturalised (Fairclough, 1992: 67, 230). In the next section I describe the nature and significance of each data set and consider how they answer my questions on the Education Committee's understanding of problem and solution in primary literacy, their interpretation of role and responsibility, and how these changed over time.

Data set 1: Evidence to the Bullock Committee

The Education Committee's written statement of evidence to the Bullock Committee was finalised in November 1972 and approved by the Committee for submission in December. Headed '*Evidence by the Inner London Education Authority to the Committee of Enquiry into the Teaching of Reading and the Use of the English Language*', the document consisted of 60 pages, including 14 Appendices. The evidence was presented as 'an account of the Authority's views on the problems of literacy in a large inner-city area, and its achievements in attempting to deal with them' (ILEA, 1972: 654). Drafted in sub-committee and approved by the full Education Committee, it served as a public expression of ILEA's approach to the teaching of literacy. Its tone was calm and authoritative as it stated its position before the Bullock Committee's experts, and through their Report to a wider audience. It constituted a policy text, 'an official text which operates to influence public perception of a policy agenda' (Scott, 2000: 18). As the official response of the ILEA Education Committee to the Bullock Committee's call for evidence, it was designed to 'foster commitment to the notion of a universal public interest' through the public justification of policy (Codd, 1988: 237), essentially working to seal off and protect the ILEA's particular account of literacy in London schools from potential alternatives. It also had the assurance to assert its value to others, offering the work of the Authority as a potential example to follow and stating, 'it is hoped that this account may be of value to the (Bullock) Committee as an indication of the role which a large authority can play in meeting the problems of the development of language and literacy among the school pupils of an urban area' (ILEA, 1972: 12).

Problems

The evidence was set out in terms of problems with language and literacy in schools, explanations for these problems, and the role that the Authority was already playing, and

could reasonably be expected to play, in working towards solutions. That there *were* problems with standards of literacy in inner-London primary schools was accepted. The first appendix summarised the work the Authority had carried out through its own ongoing literacy surveys, produced by its Research and Statistics Group and Inspectorate. The surveys assessed a group of eight-year-old children's attainment in reading and returned to this group every two years to track their progress. First reporting back to the Education Committee in 1969, the survey found that, on average, eight-year-olds were six months behind those children from other parts of the country on whom the tests had been standardised. The literacy surveys were described in the evidence as an Authority initiative to discover the extent and nature of problems with literacy attainment.

A range of problems contributing to poor results were outlined in the evidence. Some relatively practical issues were raised which could be solved by more generous funding, including smaller class sizes for younger children and the need for more books of better quality to be made available to schools. Flaws in the existing school system were noted, in particular a lack of communication between infant and junior schools which could lead to discrepancies in teaching and difficulties for those children who had not mastered the basics of reading in the infant school. However, the two most significant issues characterised as problems in the document were teacher training and experience, and the nature of the urban environment.

Problems with teacher expertise were discussed in three ways. First, there was the issue of initial teacher training. It was doubted 'whether, in their initial training, teachers get enough knowledge, technical expertise and practical experience' to teach language and literacy effectively (ILEA, 1972: 4). Second, this deficiency was exacerbated by a proliferation of methods and resources available, the 'differing views of experts', the 'range of resources (which) is vast, bewildering and continually increasing', and the possibility that 'teachers may cling to outmoded practices or they may be driven by each

new wind of fashion' (ibid: 4-5). And finally, there were the distinct problems faced by those inexperienced teachers who made up a disproportionately high number of London's primary school staff. This was particularly true in areas of 'severe social deprivation' such as Deptford, where one in three primary teachers was under the age of 25 (ibid: 8). This situation was characterised as a problem for the teachers, many of whom left their jobs or moved out of London; 'the pace of life in London evidently tells on young teachers',... 'some have a day-to-day struggle for survival' (ibid: 7-8). It was also presented as a problem for the children they taught who missed out on experienced instruction: 'some children are taught by beginners throughout their six or seven years of primary education' (ibid: 32).

The inner-London environment was repeatedly emphasised in the evidence's portrayal of the literacy problem facing schools. A large proportion of children entering primary school were described as coming from 'a pre-school environment in which the uses of reading are minimal', and 'many children arrive at school with limited oral skills', a situation exacerbated by the 'present age' of television (ibid: 3). The child's home language may not be English, or may be English of a type which did not conform to the language used in schools: 'many teachers face the dilemma of supporting a child's image of his parents and home on one hand and of requiring the development of more elaborated patterns of language on the other' (ibid). The 'problems of inner-city areas' were outlined as disadvantaged and unstable homes for children, the complexities of a 'multi-racial society', including lack of spoken and written English in the homes of recent immigrants, difficulties faced by teachers in relating to children with very different backgrounds from their own, and problems retaining teachers who could cope with these issues on top of high costs of living and accommodation (ibid: 6-8). London was characterised as a 'crowded and restless' city in a league of its own. The Authority had 'special problems shared with other congested urban areas but in some cases in an exaggerated or intensified form which merit special consideration' (ibid: 21).

Solutions

The description of the most pressing problems facing inner-London schools in raising achievement in literacy was followed by a discussion of action taken by the Authority to address these. This included providing 'resources which allow schools to have books, materials and equipment adequate in both amount and range, together with guidance' (ibid: 13) along with book loans through the library service. The Research and Statistics Group 'sets out to find facts and to make objective evaluations of methods and material' (ibid: 17), sending report findings to schools to serve as a 'basis for discussion'. Otherwise, the Authority's policy efforts outlined in the evidence were overwhelmingly focused on the provision of further training and advice for its teachers. It stated that every LEA had a 'duty' to 'make good deficiencies of some courses of initial training', and to 'ensure that experienced teachers are up to date' (ibid: 4).

In-service education in inner London was 'available through a variety of sources, and has increased dramatically', including the establishment of new teacher centres, English centres, the CLPE ('the Authority attaches great importance to this establishment of this Centre'), the Centre for Urban Education (CUES), and language centres for recent immigrants. More in-service training was planned to meet high levels of teacher demand. The ILEA Inspectorate played a crucial role in supporting teachers through 'the help and advice they give the schools', as did advisory teachers (ibid: 16). Innovations included the establishment of an Educational Television Service (ETV), and 'recently the Authority has ventured into the field of journalism by financing and issuing to all teachers a weekly magazine called *Contact*... bringing controversial educational issues to the notice of all teachers' (ibid: 17). Thinking ahead, the Authority stated that it was considering issuing some form of 'guidelines' for language teaching; these would not be 'prescriptive', but would be there 'to support the schools and especially those with a high turnover of teachers' (ibid: 20).

Responsibility

If the source of the literacy problem was rooted in the urban environment compounded by a lack of experienced and skilled teachers, then improvements must be located in the difficult interaction between these ill-equipped professionals and the challenging pupils with whom they worked. The evidence portrayed the children coming through the doors of the Authority's primary schools each morning as representative of the deep, complex and possibly intractable problems of the inner city. Social and economic factors, characterised as 'deprivation', shaped these children in ways which made it exceptionally difficult for teachers to make them literate. The nature of this inner-city school intake was seen as being beyond the Authority's responsibility, but there was scope to respond to the problem; 'The education service cannot of itself strike at the roots of deprivation: it can however ameliorate its effects' (ibid: 36). The efforts involved in this amelioration were overwhelmingly focused on teachers: it was 'clear... that London teachers face problems which present a challenge and there is, therefore, all the greater need to improve the Authority's services to them so that they may improve their skills' (ibid: 28). It was in working to 'improve teachers' skills' that the Authority saw its role, and it was in this area that it expressed its policy through listing its ever-expanding range of courses, advisers and teachers' centres.

The Authority was careful not to claim that these efforts would necessarily produce tangible results. First it stressed that while it could provide services to support teachers, it had no authority to require them to make use of this support. If schools felt no need to take up the advice on offer there was nothing to compel them to do so. Therefore 'the problem for local authorities is to make teachers aware of the need to take a new look at their practices and then provide further training' (ibid: 4). The evidence was unclear on *how* it could 'make teachers aware': 'it is difficult to judge between the relative value of measures that provide direct advice to teachers and those which offer help by stimulating teachers to devise solutions to their own problems... teachers' problems sometimes

need advice and sometimes stimulus. The Authority seeks to provide both' (ibid: 17). It was not clarified how 'direct advice' might be given, or when, or exactly how teachers were to be 'stimulated' to identify their own problems and search for solutions. The Authority insisted that there was 'no one prescription for good practice', each school was assumed to face a unique situation rooted in 'individual children, different teachers and the needs of neighbourhoods' (ibid: 10).

Second, it was recognised that improvements in literacy teaching may not always be clearly evident. The rapidly changing urban environment meant that 'it may be necessary to run in order to stay in the same place, let alone progress' (ibid: 36). Even where teachers were skilled and up-to-date, 'the problems of oracy and literacy among inner-city children are not soluble in terms of linguistic and reading teaching expertise alone. The tasks have social and environmental dimensions' (ibid: 23). And if these social and environmental dimensions were characterised as lying outside the remit of the Authority, 'the solution to some difficulties are dependent either on national action or on other agencies over which the ILEA has no (or severely limited) control' (ibid: 21).

The evidence shows ILEA publically setting out its literacy policy stall, shaped by its understanding of problem and solution, outlining present and future work in this area, and defining its boundaries of responsibility. The text was written on the Authority's own terms and represented an opportunity to state its position. It projected confidence and logic. The Authority was aware of problems with literacy and was assessing them through its surveys, and tackling them through the provision of resources and training for teachers. It was, however, unable to require teachers to take up this support, or to attack the root of the literacy problem. The problem was embedded in the nature of the urban child, the expertise of the teacher, and the tricky relationship between the two. The Authority was responsible for providing support for the teacher in addressing the challenge of whatever was coming into the classroom; anything else lay outside its control. The evidence, an apparently self-assured policy text summing up a particular

moment in time, served as a shield of justification to protect ILEA from public criticism. How much did this coherent and confident expression of purpose bely struggles going on underneath the surface? What does the evidence obscure? In considering the next data set, the sub-committee reports on literacy presented to the Education Committee, we can gain more insight into how ILEA was working over time to confront the literacy problem.

Data Set 2: Literacy survey reports

There were five Schools Sub-Committee reports on the Authority's literacy surveys between the years 1969 and 1977. These were presented to the Education Committee at intervals of approximately eighteen months and reported on the latest findings on literacy attainment in relation to the original survey of 1969. This survey was the result of a 'motion calling for a report', 'that the School Sub-Committee be instructed to investigate and report upon standards of literacy...' (ILEA, 1966: 658), demanded by a group of Conservative members (then in opposition) in 1966 under a clause which allowed for a report to be requested by four signatories. The request was made in the context of a perceived 'alarming lack of literacy' in inner-London schools (ibid: 630). The survey, designed and conducted by the Research and Statistics Group, tested a sample of 32,000 eight-year-olds from a range of primary schools. By 1969 (when the Conservatives were in the majority on the Education Committee) a preliminary analysis of results was published. Subsequent reports tracked the sample group's progress as they continued through the ILEA school system and outlined measures taken by the Authority to improve literacy attainment at primary and secondary level.

As written documents, the reports show us the Education Committee at work on the issue of literacy over the course of a decade. They demonstrate the Authority devoting significant resources to the project over time, and across party boundaries. No other

curriculum area received the same regular, focused attention; the reports illustrate the high status of literacy as a marker of the Authority's achievements. They also illustrate different elements of the ILEA machine, in this case the Inspectorate, the Research and Statistics Group and a team of educational psychologists, gathered together and funded by the Education Committee to work on a single project. We can see different agencies involved in literacy being given time and resources by the Authority to monitor and address the question which the publication of the original survey had posed: eight-year-old children in inner-London schools were on average six months behind their peers nationally, where did the roots of this problem lie and what was the Authority going to do about it?

Problems

The impact of the 1969 literacy survey report reverberated through the 1970s. During this period any discussion of literacy in the Education Committee was, either openly or implicitly, framed by the context of the 'problem' which the survey had revealed. The literacy reports illustrate the ways in which the Schools Sub-Committee sought to understand and represent this problem over time. Rather than being an issue rooted in poor teaching methods or delivery, the city's 'literacy problem' was characterised as a symptom of deeper social and economic challenges. The initial report analysed the survey results by relating them to factors outside school such as 'father's occupation', pupil mobility, family size, immigrant status, and the 'cultural stimulus of the home' (ILEA, 1969a). The report stated that 'the situation (the survey) reveals indicates the size of the challenge which London teachers are tackling'. Having defined the problem in these terms, it turned to address the issue of how these 'London teachers' might respond to this challenge. While the report was careful not to criticise teaching methods directly, it

did emphasise the 'need for a knowledge of the intricate skill of teaching reading' among primary teachers.

The next report, eighteen months later, was produced with the input of the primary inspectorate and a team of educational psychologists who had visited nearly 100 primary schools (about 10% of the ILEA total). Reading tests had been repeated on the same group of children, with similarly disappointing results. The report reiterated that the roots of literacy problems lay in the environment: 'strong relationships between attainment and parental occupation persisted', 'immigrant attainment was on average markedly lower', and 'the results need to be interpreted within the particular context of London schools' (ILEA, 1971b). The report concluded that the importance of these environmental factors indicated that 'the position of a school in respect of high or low reading achievement is only an approximate indicator of the quality of the effort made'. According to the inspectors, 'more schools are making creditable efforts in the aspect of their work than are lagging'. It was also noted that the survey had identified a lack of diagnostic testing or schemes of work for literacy in many schools and that this could be contributing to the problem.

The 1973 report, which again failed to show improvement, reminded Education Committee members of 'the particular context of London schools and the changing national situation', particularly noting the 'skewed class distribution' of inner London (ILEA, 1973b). The report also mentioned the publication of the NFER report which suggested a 'drop in reading performance' nationally (Start & Wells, 1972), and argued that the ILEA results should be seen in this context. The report at the end of 1975 on the 1973-74 survey of the children, now aged between 13 and 14, showed improved rates of progress and was hailed as 'an important and encouraging result' (ILEA, 1975d). However, the final phase of testing, completed in 1977, showed that this improvement had not been sustained, and suggested that for most children, 'the broad level of reading attainment is fixed by eight' (ILEA, 1977e). Repeating the emphasis on environmental

factors in the context of a rapidly changing school population characterised by high levels of pupil mobility and immigration, it argued that ‘standing still... is a mark of achievement given the problems of the inner city’. Taken together, the survey reports consistently characterised the literacy problem as being rooted in the nature of London’s population, while minimising direct criticism of those teachers tasked with teaching that population.

Solutions

While the literacy survey reports served as regular reminders of the policy problem presented by low rates of literacy achievement in ILEA schools, they also functioned to outline the Authority’s response. The first report in 1969 proposed ‘to strengthen the Authority’s advisory service’, increase in-service training provision, devise a new ETV series on the teaching of reading, and consider the possibility of setting up ‘a centre... where teachers can obtain advice on all types and methods of teaching reading’¹³⁵ (ILEA: 1969a). Eighteen months later, the 1971 report detailed ‘action taken and planned’ by the Authority over the period. In-service training had been ‘expanded’, new courses had been provided in teachers’ centres, the CLPE had been opened, the ETV series had been broadcast, more advisers had been appointed and a course on the teaching of reading for newly qualified teachers had been piloted (ILEA, 1971b).

The 1971 literacy survey report included a section on ‘inferences and suggestions’ and was presented as an appendix to the Authority’s evidence to the Bullock Committee (ILEA, 1972). These suggestions included recommendations for improved communication between infant and junior schools, the development of schemes of work, record-keeping and assessment procedures in schools, an increased use of ETV, and

¹³⁵ This centre would become the CLPE.

more cooperation between home and school. It was noted that 'in-service training is needed on a massive scale', particularly for inexperienced teachers.

Subsequent reports made little reference to proposed solutions, and functioned primarily as up-dates on the original survey sample. As the decade went on, the relevance of these reports to primary literacy diminished as the sample moved into secondary school. Initiatives outlined as a response to the original survey and its immediate follow-up continued, and were discussed across a wider range of sub-committee reports which I shall look at below. In terms of solutions to the literacy problem, the literacy survey reports contain suggestions in line with the Authority's evidence to the Bullock Committee. As long as the literacy problem was overwhelmingly characterised as one of intake, proposed solutions were limited to those areas in which the Authority could intervene. The most straightforward of these to address in terms of policy was to improve teacher knowledge, both of the process of teaching reading and writing, and of the nature of the population of children they taught. Policy decisions in this area were relatively simple (although, as we shall see, not uncontested): resources were pumped into an expanding machinery for the delivery of in-service training and guidance for teachers to be delivered by the Inspectorate and expert staff such as those at the CLPE.

Role and responsibility

What do the literacy reports tell us about how the Education Committee understood their role in addressing the literacy problem? In general, they reinforce the approach of the Authority's evidence to the Bullock Committee; as long as problems were primarily located in the inner-city population, and were exacerbated rather than caused by a lack of skilled teachers, there were limits to the Education Committee's responsibility for the

problem.¹³⁶ It was clearly beyond its remit to tackle the environmental challenges faced by schools directly, and the traditional delegation of its powers to the managers and head teachers of individual schools allowed it only a restricted advisory role in curriculum and pedagogy. It frequently stressed that it was operating in line with other LEAs in the context of a national education system which saw the school as being the proper place for curriculum innovation and change.

The literacy reports reminded Education Committee members that their role was limited, and that they were working hard in those areas for which they could assume responsibility. They also functioned as regular reassurance that another role was being fulfilled, that of information-gathering and analysis. Although the initial literacy survey of 1967 had been undertaken at the request of four Conservative opposition members, in subsequent reports we can see the Labour majority using the surveys in line with their particular understanding of literacy problem and solution. The reports demonstrated that the Authority was aware of the problem and actively engaged in monitoring and analysing ongoing results. When questioned by opposition members over 'what steps are taken to check the level of reading ability' in schools, the stock response was to mention the literacy survey and its follow ups (for example ILEA, 1972: 379).

Taken together, the evidence to the Bullock Committee and the literacy reports presented by the Schools Sub-Committee are mutually reinforcing. If we looked at no further data, we would assume a coherent and somewhat static approach to the teaching of literacy in ILEA primary schools, the Authority worked hard to help teachers, but in the end it was up to them to listen to advice and to use it in teaching what was a uniquely challenging school population to read and write. The Authority would assess the situation at regular intervals, and pump in more resources for teachers in response to inadequate standards

¹³⁶ In this it was part of a long tradition in education in London; in the 1880s the School Board for London judged that 'the problems lay with conditions outside the school and were therefore beyond the Board's jurisdiction' (Galbraith, 1997: 118).

of achievement. The evidence shows us that policy relating to the deployment of resources was overwhelmingly focused on providing teachers with support. In-depth training was the bedrock on which this support rested; if teachers were trained to understand the nature of the issues confronting them and given strategies to adapt their practice to their school, then it was assumed that improvement would occur. In considering the next two data sets, I will look at alternative expressions of ILEA policy which allow us insight into struggles going on underneath the coherent and confident surface of this position.

Data Set 3: Education Committee meeting minutes

Each recorded session of the Education Committee meetings included half an hour allocated for 'questions'. The procedure of this part of the meeting was rather like Prime Minister's question time in the House of Commons, providing an opportunity for majority members to clarify and express support for current policy initiatives, and for the opposition to challenge the Chair through questions. These transcribed exchanges disrupt the experience of working through the Education Committee minutes, catapulting the reader from the calm official language of the sub-committee reports into a dialogue of rapid exchanges which feature indignation, outrage, derision and humour. These statements, questions, retorts and proposals are 'speech masquerading as text' (Gardner, 2010: 72), and allow us in the present to imagine that we are eavesdropping on the immediacy of political debate in action, rather than studying the revised and polished paragraphs of a finished policy document. However, we should be wary of imagining that we are somehow gaining access to the raw 'realities' of the Committee's operation. As much as published policy texts, the meeting minutes reflected and were shaped by the organisation and activities of local government (Scott, 1990: 60), and by the routine and custom of the council chamber. Both the Labour majority and the

Conservative opposition were operating within the parameters of highly structured and regulated ritual which demanded the observation of protocol and role-playing, and concealed as much as they revealed about the workings of the Authority.

The staged, combative, point-scoring of the meetings (where members also knew that their comments were being recorded and published) precluded frank discussion of private anxieties or shared uncertainty among members. It did, however, illustrate the political battles being played out over the course of the decade. Although the practical and operational levers of power were controlled by whichever party held the majority and were not up for grabs until election time, we can see the Education Committee meetings as an arena where ILEA policy was attacked and defended in the context of unfolding events. During the 1970s the Education Committee was dominated by Labour members, and although from the end of 1978 the Conservatives increased their presence they remained in the minority and were unable to vote through their proposed motions.

This political dynamic both fed and was reflected in the 'mutual myth making and myth bashing' of media, and articles and books were used by Committee members as a platform from which to launch attacks on the prevailing discourse (Wallace, 1993: 334). The opposition was quick to connect debate in the chamber to events outside its walls. Over the course of the decade, the concerns of parents, ratepayers and employers were raised increasingly frequently in relation to standards and expenditure. In particular, reports in the press (most commonly the *Evening Standard*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*) were used as a starting point for discussion or questioning. A typical opening would be a question to the Chair, for example, 'has he seen the report headed 'Scandal of the Dunces' in the *Daily Mail*?' (ILEA, 1975: 112), or a reference to a photograph in the *Evening Standard* entitled 'Outside the school a quick drag: Boys of Holland Park light up at lunchtime today' (ILEA, 1970: 324). In return, the press was condemned by Labour members for 'gross exaggeration' and 'tendentious reporting' (ILEA, 1972: 422, ILEA, 1975e), and the opposition was criticised for 'constantly using the mass media and

this chamber to bring (totally unsubstantiated) charges about... schools' (ILEA, 1972: 382).

Publications such as the Black Papers, the NFER survey on reading attainment (Start & Wells, 1972), and *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* by Neville Bennett, which claimed to 'show clearly the general efficacy of formal methods in the basic subjects' (Bennett, 1976: 157) were all used as springboards from which to launch the attacks of Conservative members, as were radio and television programmes on schooling. How were issues relating to literacy used in this theatre of accusation and counter-attack, and how useful are these exchanges to our understanding of how ILEA was operating to shape the actions of those involved in literacy teaching?

Problems

The issue of low or declining literacy standards was a recurrent theme in the challenges of the Conservative opposition throughout the 1970s. While references were made to attainment in 'basic literacy and numeracy' as a benchmark for primary school achievement (ILEA, 1976: 508), it was specifically reading that attracted the most attention. Evidence for the existence of a problem with reading standards was either taken from the Authority's literacy surveys or, more frequently, from anecdotal accounts, petitions from parents, or articles in the press: for example reports of secondary schools receiving whole classes of non-readers from primary school (ILEA, 1970: 453, ILEA, 1971: 30). The assertion that literacy standards were 'low' or 'deficient' (ILEA, 1977: 64) and in need of 'urgent' improvement (ILEA, 1978: 203) was related to the literacy surveys, or simply stated as self-evident. Fears over falling standards were linked to poor discipline, and voiced in the context of the process of secondary school comprehensivisation which raised concerns nationwide over educational decline, and galvanised the Conservative 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1990, pub. in this edition 2006).

The crisis discourse around literacy standards was a key component of the Conservative opposition's attempts to characterise the Labour-controlled ILEA as a 'failure and a disgrace' (ILEA, 1974: 460). This was stated explicitly in several motions, for example, 'noting the failure of the present leadership of the Committee over many years to implement any measures to improve standards... (opposition members) invite Londoners to ensure through the forthcoming borough council elections a Conservative administration of the Authority pledged to raise standards to the levels required' (ILEA, 1978: 203). If there was a crisis in literacy standards, the dynamics of political opposition insisted that this be explicitly rooted not in the complex social and economic conditions of inner London but in the failure of the Labour majority to effect improvements in schools.

The first years of the decade saw regular accusations of ILEA inaction from the opposition: 'is anything being done by the Authority?', or 'what steps are being taken to improve the standard of reading in schools?' were typical questions (ILEA, 1971: 29, ILEA, 1972: 380). Several motions accusing the Authority of 'complacency and inaction' were raised (for example, ILEA, 1972: 447). When such questions were answered, as they invariably were, with an exhaustive (and often deliberately long and tedious) list of initiatives taken by the Authority in connection with the literacy surveys, the rejoinder was to ask whether there was any 'evidence that these steps are actually improving the standard of reading?' (ILEA, 1972: 380). The opposition questioned whether the Authority had any real grasp on what was happening in schools, and criticised it for failing to gather clear evidence with which to make comparisons and construct coherent policy. References to socio-economic factors outside the Authority's control were dismissed as an excuse for low standards of literacy which had their roots in badly organised and confused teaching in London schools.

The meeting minutes show Labour members defending themselves against attack by reframing criticism of literacy attainment in the context of the socio-economic conditions of the inner city. Thus a Conservative member's motion calling for the Schools Sub-Committee to 'examine closely the attainment levels of reading throughout the Authority's schools and to draw up a report with specific recommendations to improve' was amended by the Chair of the Schools Sub-Committee, Harvey Hinds, with the statement 'that standards of literacy are necessarily connected with the extent of language deprivation in Inner London' (ILEA, 1974: 498). The literacy surveys were used by Labour members as evidence of the Authority's commitment to the issue, and to its engagement with evidence-based research. And any suggestion that teachers, swayed by new methods, were part of the literacy problem was met with outraged defence. In one typical exchange a member of the opposition drew attention to an article in the *Evening News* 'concerning educational standards in Hackney'. Ellis Hillman, the Labour member for Hackney, retaliated by asking, 'would not the chairman agree that the Conservative candidate would have been wiser to make some investigation into conditions of housing, employment and other social factors.... before casting aspersions upon the ability and dedication of our Hackney teachers, and should he not be asked to apologise to the teachers concerned forthwith?' (ILEA, 1977: 43). In other exchanges, the opposition were accused of being 'mainly concerned in running down our schools and our teachers' (ILEA, 1975: 216).

Solutions

While working with their Labour colleagues on the various sub-committees, Conservative members would have been actively engaged in organisation, administration and resource allocation. Within the context of the council chamber, their task was very different. Rather than seeking to find common ground for policy with their Labour colleagues, the Conservative members focused on attacking the Authority's approach

and exposing perceived failures in its provision. Although they sketched out broad outlines of an alternative, as long as they remained in opposition they had little incentive to develop details. Their characterisation of problems did however imply the direction in which solutions might be found. If environmental factors were no more than a convenient excuse for failure and the real problem lay with schools, then policy should be targeting poorly achieving teachers by inspecting their work, publishing their results, and identifying failure.

While opposition members agreed with the Labour majority on the need for improved training of teachers, they argued against pouring ratepayers' money into resources which could not be proved effective in raising literacy standards (ILEA, 1974: 503). The Authority was portrayed as extravagant and wasteful, particularly in the context of rises in taxation during the first half of the decade (Davis, 2002: 281). The opposition consistently questioned the cost and effectiveness of ILEA initiatives to improve teaching. The publication and free distribution of *Contact* magazine to teachers was a particular bone of contention, opposition members argued that it was 'a complete waste of money and is unread' (ILEA, 1972: 455). Reports in the press were often cited by opposition members, for example 'Zip goes a million "wasted" on schools' was a *Daily Express* headline raised in Committee (ILEA, 1973: 4).

The Authority defended its expenditure as necessary to the improvement of teacher expertise, pupil opportunity and smaller class sizes. *Contact* was championed as being 'the medium for conveying information which is vital to the whole teaching structure of the Authority' (ILEA, 1978: 164). Levels of central government funding were criticised for failing to provide teachers with adequate pay increases (ILEA, 1972: 597), or recognising the full extent of schools in need of additional Educational Priority Area (EPA) funding (ILEA, 1970: 336).

The opposition called for more standardised, regular and transparent testing of pupils as a means of identifying failure and targeting resources. A proposal was made to test the reading ability of all pupils on entry to secondary school in order to discover 'which primary schools are mainly involved' in supplying under-achieving pupils and to take steps 'to improve this situation' (ILEA, 1970: 453). Proposals for identifying schools were linked to calls for 'regular testing of reading ability in London schools' (ILEA, 1972: 380), a recurrent theme throughout the decade. In January 1976 an opposition motion demanded 'that with a view to the achievement of higher standards... the Schools Sub-Committee... ask all junior primary and secondary schools to institute standard tests by which levels of attainment can be monitored' (ILEA, 1976: 282). The motion was amended by the Chair to replace reference to tests with a promise to 'request statements of schools' language and literacy policies', and a reminder of the ongoing literacy survey follow-ups. Throughout the decade, regular opposition calls for the publication of schools' exam and test results were dismissed on the grounds that they failed to take into account the intake of individual schools: 'without a valid comparison with the attainment of the intake... the figures could not be taken as a real guide to the success of a particular school' (ILEA, 1975: 47).

Conservative members also called for more Authority intervention in teaching method and school curriculum. There were repeated appeals for an enquiry into 'the comparative effectiveness of the various methods of teaching' (for example ILEA, 1972: 447), and questions were asked as to whether new ideas in teaching had adversely affected discipline (ILEA, 1976: 354). These calls gained added impetus with the publication of *Teacher styles and pupil progress* in 1976 which seemed to suggest that more formal

'traditional' styles of teaching led to higher attainment¹³⁷ (Bennett, 1976, ILEA, 1976: 383), and with Callaghan's Ruskin College speech in the same year, which was taken to support traditional teaching of 'basic literacy, a 'proper national standard of performance', and even the adoption of a 'basic curriculum' (ILEA, 1976: 508-510). Ashley Bramall, the Chair, responded that the Prime Minister's remarks had been 'misinterpreted', and that 'the position about standards is the concern of us all and not just the Tory Party' (ibid). Attempts to link perceived low standards with progressive pedagogy continued; for example, a motion proposed in 1978 demanded 'the encouragement of more traditional teaching structures and objectives' in response to the concerns of 'parents and employers' (ILEA, 1978: 203).

By repeatedly demanding 'standard tests' and the publication of results, Conservative members could characterise the Labour majority's position as a cover-up motivated by fear of exposure of levels of achievement in their schools. This issue was gaining traction nationally during the 1970s; the refusal of LEAs to publish exam results was described by Professor Brian Cox in the *Daily Mail* as 'a national scandal' (ILEA, 1979: 111).

Conservative ILEA members also demanded an increase in full school inspections 'in order that the standards of education currently prevailing may be more fully examined and published' (ILEA, 1977: 64). These calls for the reinstatement of full inspections gathered momentum around the time of the William Tyndale crisis, when the 'nature and frequency of inspection reports' was questioned (ILEA, 1975: 134), and continued to be linked with demands to 'raise the standards which are found to be deficient' (ILEA, 1977:

¹³⁷ In his book, Bennett recognised that the 'ubiquitous use of dichotomous descriptions of teaching styles' often failed to account for the complexities of practice. He used definitions of 'traditional' or 'formal' and 'progressive' or 'informal' teaching methods derived from 'theoretical and philosophical' writing on education, contextualised by interviews with teachers and head teachers. He drew up a table outlining eleven characteristics of both teaching styles. The traditional style included, for example, 'accent on memory, practice and rote', 'teacher as distributor of knowledge', 'regular testing', 'little emphasis on creative expression' (Bennett, 1976: 38). In his conclusion, he argued that 'informal teaching... (engenders) comparatively poorer outcomes in academic development' (ibid: 162).

64). Challenges over the regularity and depth of inspections were answered in Committee meetings with the reminder that the work of the ILEA Inspectorate reflected a 'significant change of view' nationally as well as in ILEA that the prime role of inspectors should be to advise and support (ILEA, 1975: 134).

Role and responsibility

The evidence shows the Labour majority defending the strong insulation between state power and curriculum, pedagogy and teachers (Grace, 2008: 211). Questions and comments criticising teaching methods or curriculum were answered by reminders that 'it is the view of the English educational system that head teachers are the proper people to run their own schools' (ILEA, 1972: 422), and that 'the Authority is doing a very great deal to assist the teachers in their task of improving reading standards' (ibid: 380). Even the William Tyndale debacle, a gift for the Conservative opposition, did not lead to any serious reimagining of the boundaries of Authority responsibility. While the crisis forced the Authority onto the defensive, exchanges in the council chamber show that the Conservatives were unable to press home their advantage to any real effect. In its responses to the Auld Report we can see the Labour majority carefully drawing limits around its areas of responsibility and maintaining the essential structure of its operation.

While 'action was taken' to make 'improvement in the administration' as a result of the Report, this was explicitly framed by the 'accepted view of the distribution of power and responsibility in the education service', and the 'licensed autonomy' of schools remained intact (ILEA, 1976: 519). It resisted opposition efforts to use the crisis as evidence of a fundamental crisis in London primary schools, insisting that it was a unique case and that 'the most diligent efforts of the media and others interested in attacking the Authority have failed to find a similar case' (ILEA, 1977d).

For the opposition perceived failures and inefficiencies could be deplored, but the structural means of addressing these was not in place. While the Labour majority continued to stress the importance of training, support and communication with teachers in improving literacy standards, the opposition pushed for an approach which relied more on the stick of test result publication and full school inspection than on the carrot of increased in-service training. Neither side envisaged a situation where the Authority would be directly involved in curriculum or pedagogy, and although there were hints in Callaghan's Ruskin College speech that central government might in future consider some form of 'basic curriculum', this remained a highly speculative possibility. The suggestion was dismissed by ILEA in a report which opposed any narrowing of the primary curriculum to concentrate on the '3 Rs', and insisted on the principle that any monitoring of curriculum must be the result of '100% local' initiatives (ILEA, 1977c).

When responding to a more direct threat, in the case of the Marshall Inquiry,¹³⁸ the Authority mounted a strong defence. Seeing the Inquiry as an opportunistic attack on the back of negative publicity surrounding William Tyndale, the Authority restated its position in line with 'the existence of the strong non-interventionist philosophy in the whole of the English education system', claiming that since the Auld Report the ILEA had more developed 'alertness to danger signals' than any other LEA in the country. It defended itself strongly against accusations of financial profligacy, immunity from responsibility to the electorate and low school standards (ILEA, 1977d).

¹³⁸ This was commissioned by a Conservative-controlled GLC to investigate whether responsibility for education should be handed over to London boroughs.

Putting the Conservative opposition back in their box

With hindsight and in the shadow of ILEA's eventual abolition by politically motivated forces in the Conservative government, we might see the Authority as embattled but doomed, defending its work against an implacably rising tide of attack. The furore over William Tyndale and the public enquiry which 'displayed ILEA's dirty washing in such painful detail' (Davis, 2002: 292) could be seen as delivering a body-blow to the legitimacy of the Authority from which it would never fully recover. The Conservative members were the Greeks within the Trojan horse poised to storm the Authority as it crumbled beneath the logic of an unassailable right-wing discourse. If we read the Education Committee evidence in this light, we could portray the Authority struggling to defend itself against an increasingly powerful alternative understanding of the problem and identify particular areas of weakness in the ILEA position which were under sustained attack by the opposition and which would eventually lead to its collapse.

When we consider the period on its own terms, the work of the Education Committee, recorded in its minutes and reports, does not support such a fatalistic narrative. Within the walls of the council chamber the voices of the opposition became more strident, and their numbers had increased by the end of the decade. Accusations, questions and proposed motions were all tools in a political battle which saw members posture and compete to convince the electorate of their version of reality. But as long as Londoners voted to keep a Labour-controlled ILEA, this majority was able to maintain its position without making concessions to its critics. In fact the overtly political parliamentary structure of the Committee allowed Labour members to dismiss Conservative comment and questioning as being motivated by political malice rather than by genuine concern, and to accuse its critics of making 'destructive comments' about teachers in public for political gain (ILEA, 1977: 43). Conservative criticism was unable to secure a place in official discourse in the ILEA context, and remained excluded from the exercise of power through policy.

While the questions and debates of the minutes originated in the 'context of influence' where policy discourse is debated, challenged and formed (Bowe, et al., 1992: 19-20), they were in practice peripheral to the policy cycle. Identifying those points of tension which occurred most frequently in debate, it is impossible to discern an impact on policy, or a gathering force against which the Labour majority would eventually be powerless. Instead, the debates in the chamber had a staged and formulaic quality consistent with the theatrics of parliament, but less relevant to the operation of actual policy. The sound and fury of political discourse in the chamber as recorded in the meeting minutes is a distraction from the real work of the Education Committee which is more usefully found elsewhere.

If we see the Education Committee meeting minutes on their own terms, and resist the lure of projecting their opposing ideologies into the known future, we can see that there was a space, formally set aside in Authority procedure, for the voicing of dissent, and this space served a function more in relation to the ILEA's existence as a representative elected body than in relation to actual policy. It is interesting (and also frequently entertaining) to see the Conservative minority pushing for symbolic advantage and the Labour majority defending itself against accusation. But while it tells us how literacy was used and understood in relation to contemporary local politics, it tends to distract from the actual workings of policy. Instead of using it as a 'real' story with which to contrast the constructed and vulnerable nature of ILEA policy documents on literacy, when we consider it in relation to the huge enterprise of the sub-committee reports recorded in the minutes (and produced by members comprising both sides of the political spectrum), we do not find its particular point-scoring concerns reflected back at us. Those tension points evident in political debate do not correspond with recurrent problems in the ILEA's policy documents, they exist in a different space and serve a different purpose. In the final section I identify three core areas of policy struggle for the Education Committee, and consider how these informed its approach to literacy over the course of the 1970s.

Situating literacy policy within a broader ILEA narrative

When the literacy 'problem' is mentioned in Education Committee reports it is generally as part of a package of issues. Thus in 1972 the 'major problems facing schools' were described as being 'literacy, and maladjusted and deprived children' (ILEA, 1972: 305), or as 'literacy, social and educational deprivation, and maladjustment and learning difficulties' (ibid: 614). By the end of the decade, the emphasis was falling more consistently on the 'needs of a multi-ethnic society' and the underachievement, particularly in literacy, of minority groups (ILEA, 1977: 6). In using the Education Committee minutes to isolate 'literacy', we remove it from the context within which it was situated in the minds of those committee members who were working to find a way forward for schooling in inner London.

Standing back from my three original data sets I considered the bulk of the subcommittee reports, thinking of them as evidence of what was being accorded time and attention by the Education Committee and summaries of its action. By analysing them over the course of the 1970s I could gain insight into those persistent policy problems with which the Education Committee was wrestling. Situating literacy in relation to broader policy, I have identified three particular questions which illustrate the Education Committee working to address the 'literacy problem' on its own terms. Tracing the development of these policy questions over the course of the decade shows us that removed from the political tit-for-tat of the debating chamber, the grandstanding of the evidence to the Bullock Committee, and the defensive self-justification of the regular literacy survey reports, the Education Committee's approach to literacy teaching was formed in the context of more profound policy struggles around the control and management of schools and the purposes of education. What were these persistent policy questions and in addressing them how did the Education Committee shape the space in which primary literacy initiatives operated?

Question 1: How do we get schools to improve?

The minutes and sub-committee reports show the Authority busy with the organisation, funding, staffing and maintenance issues which characterised the day-to-day operation of schools. But working to maintain the status quo, however relentless and challenging, was not enough; schools should be improving. A concern for the 'quality of education in the institutions for which it is responsible' (ILEA, 1977b) was fundamental to the work of the Education Committee. The literacy survey had confirmed that literacy in London primary schools was a 'problem', and while the Conservative opposition accused ILEA of complacency in the face of this problem, in reality the Authority was working hard to find ways to address this. If we situate the Education Committee's work on literacy within the context of school improvement we can see how both developed over time.

In a 1972 interview in *Contact* magazine Peter Newsam, recently appointed as ILEA's Deputy Education Officer, summed up how the Authority saw its role: 'the really worthwhile things are being done out there', he says, gesturing out of the office window. 'What we can do is to remove the obstacles. Education is what goes on in schools rather than in education offices' (Newsam, 1972). The first years of the decade saw the Education Committee working hard to 'remove the obstacles', primarily characterised as a lack of skill and resources for teachers. This approach was rooted in a focus on the individual teacher, and the assumption that if their skills and resources could be improved this would lead to school improvement and the improvement of outcomes for each child.

This policy approach remained important throughout the 1970s, which saw levels of in-service training increase along with adviser numbers, teachers' centre provision and more generous resourcing for schools, and the Authority remained committed to supporting its individual teachers through an expanding range of services (ILEA, 1978a). However, alongside this commitment the Education Committee was working to develop other ways of improving the achievement of pupils in ILEA's primary schools. As the

decade progressed, the 'fashionable disillusion with education which argues that factors outside school are of such importance that schools can be of little effect' was increasingly discredited (Newsam, 1977: 43). Educational research was showing that levels of attainment differed widely between schools of similar intake, and by the end of the decade it was hard to deny that even in the most disadvantaged areas 'schools can be a force for the good' (Rutter, 1980: 146). Clearly if some were doing better than others in a similar situation lessons could be learnt from their performance which could be usefully applied to all schools.

A commitment to school improvement tested the limits of the Education Committee's role. If schools were to improve, how should this change be effected, and who should assume responsibility for it? In 1971 a Schools Sub-Committee report on school managing and governing bodies set out the 'rules of management' of a primary school; 'the Authority shall determine the general educational character of the school and its place in the Authority's educational system... the managers shall, in consultation with the head teacher, exercise the oversight of the conduct and curriculum of the school' (ILEA, 1971c). According to the Auld Report on William Tyndale, ILEA had 'virtually divested itself of its power under Section 23(i) of the 1944 Act to control the secular instruction of its county schools and (had) handed such power over to the managers and head teachers of each school' (Auld, 1976: 6).

There was nothing exceptional about this arrangement, which was shared by all LEAs at the time and had been since the early twentieth century (Cunningham, 2002: 218-222). Nor did it change substantially over the course of the decade: in 1978 a Schools Sub-Committee report stated that in practice the Authority delegated oversight of pedagogy and curriculum to school governors, and control to head teachers in consultation with their staff, although it did 'reserve the right to give directions' (ILEA, 1978a). In terms of curriculum there was 'no policy' statement on attainment, objectives, curriculum or

method, and nothing existed to 'prescribe the means by which ILEA expected primary children to gain knowledge' (Education Officer Eric Briault, quoted in Davis, 2002: 285).

How to reconcile the responsibility of the Authority for school improvement with the tradition of school and teacher autonomy was a central policy preoccupation for ILEA throughout the 1970s (Newsam, n.d: 8). The tension inherent in an Authority attempting to improve literacy teaching in schools while at the same time allowing schools and teachers to choose their own methods and curriculum was not responsive to straightforward policy solutions. The importance of teacher autonomy was stressed by the Education Committee in meetings and reports, but a shift in emphasis can be detected in this discourse over the course of the decade. In 1972, the 'disappointing' uptake of ETV services was noted; 'the problem of encouraging the good use of television is much harder to solve in a situation in which the teacher has always regarded himself, quite rightly, as in full control' (ILEA, 1972: 445). As the Authority 'trusts the teaching profession to run its own affairs and schools in its own way', the only approach then available was to increase the quality of programmes and improve publicity for the service (ibid). In other words, the Authority could do little but provide services in the hope that enlightened teachers and schools would make use of them.

Four years later, the tone of the Education Committee towards its teachers was shifting. A report of the Schools Sub-Committee on the William Tyndale inquiry stated that the Auld Report had 'led us to reaffirm our support for the action already begun by the Inspectorate in connection with the Bullock Report to assist teachers in schools to clarify their objectives and to assess their performance more systematically, and to issue guidelines in the main subject areas, so that the staff of our schools can apply themselves to analysing their objectives and the extent of their achievement' (ILEA, 1976). The 'action already begun' by the Inspectorate pre-dated the William Tyndale crisis; the question of how to 'stimulate' schools to improve had been considered (ILEA, 1973), a lack of effective assessment procedures or schemes of work had been noted (see for

example ILEA, 1971), and a working party of education officers, inspectors and teachers had already devised new standardised primary records (ILEA, 1976: 358). But the publication of the Auld Report on William Tyndale, often characterised as a 'watershed' in the Authority's approach, was certainly responsible for its more vigorous articulation of the importance of standards within schools (HMI, 1980: 115). The Auld Report encouraged the Education Committee to 'signal our recognition (of problems) and to indicate clearly how we proposed to set about dealing with them', including a determination to consider the constitutional position of the Authority 'in relation to the exercise of control of its schools' (ILEA, 1976).

In the years after Tyndale we can see the Education Committee working to find ways to influence practice in schools more strongly while at the same time staying within the parameters of the devolved system of shared responsibility which characterised its operation. This approach included a stated expectation that each school should produce a written language policy and consult the primary curriculum guidelines being developed by the Inspectorate (ILEA, 1978a). The Education Committee tasked the Inspectorate and the Research and Statistics Group with developing a London reading test which would 'enable the Authority to monitor standards of attainment in the primary schools' (ILEA, 1978: 240), as well as collecting public exam results and the results of annual English, maths and verbal reasoning tests (ibid: 230). It also introduced a common record sheet for primary schools and 'it expects all schools to use these records' (ILEA, 1978a: 20).

It was still maintained that 'of course, improvement is something which originates in schools themselves' (ILEA, 1977: 14) and that 'the needs of different schools range so widely' that they should respond to their own challenges in their own particular ways (ibid: 5). In 1977 the Authority published *Keeping the school under review*, a framework to be used by schools for the purposes of self-assessment (ILEA, 1977a). Ideally, by following

this model for school improvement, 'the school itself becomes a self-educating community with influence from the outside brought in where necessary' (Newsam, 1977: 45). In terms of the curriculum, the Schools Sub-Committee stated that 'although no attempt is made to impose a uniform approach to English teaching, there is general acceptance of the following notions which are actively advocated', before listing current language-based approaches and stating that the Inspectorate were 'in the final stages of preparing *'Guidelines in language teaching'* for publication (ILEA, 1978a). These guidelines provided a clear framework for teaching language and literacy in line with current 'best practice' as understood by the Authority's Inspectorate and advisers which, while not compulsory, was intended to serve as reference for schools to use in the development of their own language policies (ILEA, 1979; McKenzie, 1979).

As long as it was accepted that curriculum and teaching methods remained the domain of the individual school rather than the state, the Authority faced limits as well as possibilities in its approach to school improvement. By looking at the development of its approach over time we can see how the Education Committee worked to extend its influence over schools' approaches to literacy teaching beyond the provision of voluntary in-service training for individual teachers. The recognition that 'the converted teacher finds it difficult to institute change in his school', and that not all schools were able or willing to identify and address their own problems (ILEA, 1973) encouraged Committee members to develop policy which would reach the edges of the existing framework, and the William Tyndale crisis gave this work added impetus. By introducing expectations that each primary school would develop its own language policy in line with Inspectorate 'guidelines', assess pupil performance through standardised tests, record pupil achievement using the Authority's record sheets, and evaluate its progress against the suggestions in *Keeping the school under review*, the Education Committee was actively using the space available to it within the overarching structures of school and teacher autonomy to shape school improvement. And although the political demands of its

position would have forbidden recognition of the fact from either side, the Authority's initiatives had much in common with many of the demands of the Conservative minority.

Question 2: How can we connect with the inner-London community?

As we have seen, throughout the 1970s the 'social and environmental dimensions' of the literacy problem were central to the Authority's evidence to the Bullock Committee, the literacy survey reports, and the responses of the Labour majority to the criticisms of opposition members (ILEA, 1972). Looking at the Education Committee minutes beyond those immediately concerned with literacy allows us to see how members were using policy to grapple with the question of how to reach communities beyond the classroom where they believed the roots of the literacy problem lay.

A useful starting point from which to consider the commitment of the Education Committee to working for the particular needs of its constituents is the substantial 1973 report, '*An education service for the whole community*,' produced jointly by the Schools Sub-Committee and the Further and Higher Education Sub-Committee (ILEA, 1973).

This report stated its purpose as attempting to 'look at the education service in Inner London as a whole and to propose developments designed to enable it to serve more fully the needs of the whole community'. Its aim was to 'draw together the threads of policy and the diverse patterns of responsibility... into a view of the whole service', and to promote links between the Authority and the population it served. The nature of this population was explored in some detail. Challenges faced by the Authority were characterised as being high levels of mobility, rising immigration, poor housing conditions, high teacher turnover, and an environment which conspired against the health and well-being of children: 'on a hot summer's day, with mum at work, the exhaust smoke hits the five-year-old right in the face'. The inner-London environment was described as 'hostile' and 'harsh', where a shifting population struggled with 'social handicaps'. The report insisted that 'a realistic review of an education service for the

whole community must face the facts about that community, unhappy though some of them may be’.

‘Facing the facts’ about the community they served was seen as crucial to the effectiveness of schools. In terms of literacy attainment, a central problem had been identified as the disconnect between the language of the child and that of the school (ILEA, 1972: 7). Only a school rooted in the local community and responsive to its requirements would be able to deliver an education appropriate to the needs of its pupils.¹³⁹ The report stressed the importance of each school responding creatively to its own particular circumstances ‘so that it becomes capable of innovation which is essentially of its own making’. This should be supported, but not directed, by the LEA, whose role was rather to ‘encourage’, ‘support’, ‘co-operate’ and ‘communicate’ with its schools.

The 1973 report was introduced as ‘a recognition of the need to look beyond limited and traditional roles, to reach out into the community, to see the responsibilities and opportunities of the education service in a wider context’, asking ‘whom do we miss?’ in education provision and discussing ways of improving this (ILEA, 1973). The report led to a series of 37 whole-day conferences, chaired by members of the Education Committee and involving parents, teachers and voluntary organisations (ILEA, 1974: 533). A joint report by the Schools and the Further and Higher Education Committees on the conferences stated that ‘we are really looking out for a mosaic of consultation and reaching out to the community’ (ibid). By 1977, ‘207 individual projects arising from this report’ had been funded by ILEA (ILEA, 1977b: 11).

¹³⁹ There are parallels here between the ILEA position and more recent concerns over the sidelining of the LEA, for example those expressed by the former Labour Education Secretary, Estelle Morris, who argues that a ‘sense of place and community is... essential for schools to flourish’ (Morris, E. (January 27th 2015). ‘Schools need to be part of a community, not stand alone’. *The Guardian*).

The importance of the participation of parents and the wider community in working with the school to 'develop methods and curricula appropriate to children's needs' was a theme in Education Committee policy from the beginning of the decade (ILEA, 1969a).

Nursery provision was seen as a valuable means of connecting with parents and young children, and the need for more nursery places was often linked to questions on literacy attainment and language development (for example ILEA, 1973: 59). There was an ongoing commitment to the expansion of nursery education, which was increased 'as fast as possible' as funds were made available (ibid). The Development and the Schools Sub-Committees reported regularly on the annual increases in nursery places (ILEA, 1977b: 11).

Throughout the 1970s, Sub-Committee reports show that 'considerable efforts' were made to promote the relationship between parents and schools (ILEA, 1971). A booklet entitled '*Home and School*' was published in 1968 and revised and extended in 1975 (ILEA, 1975c). This stressed that teachers 'must know enough of the home circumstances of their pupils to be able to vary their methods and approaches to meet individual needs', and that parents should be encouraged to be 'sympathetic towards the work which the school is trying to do'. It recommended increasing parental involvement in school life through open evenings, exhibitions, meetings with teachers, outings, after-school clubs and assemblies. In 1973 the Education Committee agreed to fund the establishment of parental consultative committees for each ILEA division in order to give parents more of a voice in school development, and extended and reviewed this provision in 1975 and 1977.¹⁴⁰ And after the William Tyndale crisis it was agreed that parental complaints procedure to the Authority needed to be improved (ILEA, 1976b).

¹⁴⁰ Minutes of meeting of the Education Committee, September 16th 1975 and November 11th 1977.

By the mid-1970s, the Education Committee was confronting research findings that schools were failing to meet the needs of pupils from immigrant communities (for example, ILEA, 1976: 501). Evidence of underachievement in particular ethnic minority groups was an increasing feature of research undertaken by ILEA's Research and Statistics Group and was published in regular Sub-Committee reports (for example ILEA, 1977f, ILEA, 1979b). The growing recognition that 'some children do not perform as well as they should' in ILEA schools led Education Committee members to question the Authority's 'response to cultural pluralism' (ILEA, 1977b). Work to address this through a range of policy initiatives was increasingly a priority for the Committee.

By 1970 the Centre for Urban Education Studies (CUES) had been established, 'concerned with children of the inner city and ethnic minority groups'¹⁴¹ and 'established to stimulate interest and generate initiatives in the field of inner-city education' (ILEA, 1972). The centre had a community division and a language division. Its staff ran in-service courses for teachers, directed research projects, and produced resources and guidelines, for example on 'books for a multi-cultural society' (ibid). By 1974, the 'work at the centre had greatly expanded', and it employed eight full-time professional staff and was running courses for teachers on linguistics, English as a second language, and child development (ibid).

By 1978, two senior ILEA inspectors had been appointed, both based at CUES, one responsible for 'Community relations' and one for 'Social and cultural deprivation' (ILEA, 1970-78). The Education Committee regularly reported on the Centre's work, for example on the use of community languages in schools (ILEA, 1978a). The Schools Sub-Committee reports illustrate its regular approval of CUES proposals for funding; for example a project to train 35 teachers on working with the 'West-Indian dialect' (ILEA, 1974: 422). In general discussions of in-service training provision and funding, the

¹⁴¹ Typed letter on the establishment of CUES, undated (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA S/LR/02/11/011).

'needs of a multi-ethnic society' were increasingly prioritised by the Education Committee.

The Education Committee also funded research into the importance of developing early links between schools and 'parents who have traditionally found 'education' mystifying and alienating' (ILEA, 1975b). The Deptford Education Priority Area (EPA) Project, undertaken by ILEA's Research and Statistics Group as part of a national research project initiated by the Social Sciences Research Council between 1968 and 1971 aimed to 'discover more about an EPA area and ways of helping children in these areas' (ILEA, 1972). The project asked 'is the curriculum of our schools suitable for these children?' and sought to explore ways in which schools could more effectively reach out to their communities. It included the appointment of home/school liaison teachers in schools, pre-school programmes for vulnerable children, curriculum enrichment activities, the involvement of social workers with schools and the establishment of 'community schools' and after-hours play centres. The project was frequently referred to in Sub-Committee reports on community initiatives and questions on achievement in EPA schools (ILEA, 1971b, ILEA, 1975: 47), although it was allowed that there were problems in identifying some of its 'tangible results' (ILEA, 1972a: appendix 5). The Education Committee funded further projects, such as the Deptford Educational Home Visiting Project, which worked with families and young children to improve communication between home and school (Jayne, 1976).

Throughout the 1970s, Schools Sub-Committee reports show that the Authority's members were not confining themselves to the classroom in their approach to the education of London's children. We see reports dealing with play centres, adventure playgrounds, holiday clubs, school milk, medical checks, speech therapy, school dental services and grant aids to community projects. Such services were approved and funded by the Authority, acting through the policy direction of its Education Committee members. Looking at the meeting minutes over time allows us to identify a consistent concern with

the welfare of the community outside the walls of the school, and consistent efforts to reach that community and address its needs. This commitment was noted in an HMI report on ILEA published in 1980, which stressed the Authority's 'deep concern for the needs of those with whom they deal... they seek to make a humane response to those needs', and noted that in this ILEA was leading the way for other LEAs (HMI, 1980: 11).

Question 3: How do we target our resources more effectively?

The Authority's 'capacity to analyse problems' was crucial to its policy direction (Newsam, n.d: 18) and we can see this developing over the course of the 1970s. Its evidence to the Bullock Committee detailed 'attempts to measure ILEA problems' in literacy, although it also stated that 'some aspects of a school's work are measurable whereas others are imponderable' (ILEA, 1972). By looking at the whole range of the minutes and sub-committee reports dealing with the 'analysis of problems', we can trace the Authority's commitment to the use of research as a tool for identifying and measuring problems, and its work in addressing previous 'imponderables' through the targeted deployment of resources.

The increasing commitment to school improvement and to the needs of the inner-London population evident in the Education Committee data over the course of the 1970s was both rooted in, and supported by, the work of the Research and Statistics Group. The development of this group, established at the same time as ILEA in 1964, reflected the rapid increase in the scale and ambition of research into education from the 1960s onwards (Shipman, 1985: 8). A report on the group by the Staff and General Sub-Committee in 1970 stated that its purpose was 'to keep the Authority informed of current educational developments... to advise and assist with surveys, and to carry out its own programme of research', and that 'we consider that the group should continue to emphasise the study of literacy, the provision for EPAs, and the needs of immigrant

pupils' as well as to respond 'from time to time' to specific requests for information needed to 'assist in policy decisions' (ILEA, 1970b). In 1973, the group comprised 19 professional staff and 15 administrative staff. At the end of the year ending March 1973, the group had completed ten major research projects, with ten more 'ongoing', including the literacy survey, studies on teacher mobility, in-service training provision, viewing data for ETV, and the evaluation of new teaching resources.¹⁴²

A major part of the group's activities was the gathering and collating of 'statistics' on pupil numbers, types of school, and staffing levels. Using these statistics, 'by means of computer print-outs, trends... can be studied' within and across the London boroughs (ILEA, 1970b). This routine monitoring, which allowed the Authority to project pupil and staff numbers and future budgets was essential to the effective operation of its administration. But this was not the only function of the group. Over the course of the 1970s, the 'research' element of the Research and Statistics Group would increasingly come to form a crucial component of ILEA policy.

The nature of the group's research projects was decided by the Education Officer, in conjunction with the Inspectorate, and areas for research were generated by Sub-Committee reports, the Education Officer, the Inspectorate, and sometimes the DES. By the end of the decade the projects were increasingly extensive (and costly). Peter Mortimore, appointed director of the group in 1978, records how his ambitious plans for 'a large scale study of primary schools' were supported and resourced by 'the Authority, and particularly its Schools Sub-Committee' despite considerable costs and the additional appointment of four field officers, a research coordinator and a computer programmer (Mortimore, 1998: 49). The aims of this project were wide-ranging: to 'produce a detailed description of the students, the teachers, and the curriculum and organisation of the schools' in ILEA; to document pupil progress, and establish

¹⁴² Minutes of meeting of the Education Committee, July 17th 1973.

connections between school operation and outcomes; and to investigate the educational achievement of different groups.¹⁴³ These 'different groups' were considered on the basis of ethnicity, gender and class, three focus areas for positive action to which the Authority would increasingly commit itself as it moved into the 1980s (Morrell, 1984: 202).

The policy of positive discrimination, described by Peter Newsam as 'the most important single assumption underlying the whole work of the education service' in the 1970s, was rooted in the research work of the Research and Statistics Group (Newsam, n.d: 6).

The recommendation of the Plowden Report in 1967 that 'as a matter of national policy, 'positive discrimination' should favour schools in neighbourhoods where children are most severely handicapped by home conditions' (DES, 1967: 464) resulted in the DES providing funds for LEAs to supplement the resources of schools identified as serving an EPA. While in 1970 this funding was made available to 77 ILEA primary schools as identified by the DES, the Authority was committed to developing its own more extensive and detailed 'index of disadvantaged schools' (ILEA, 1970b). The work of the Research and Statistics Group was fundamental to this endeavour. By 1970 over 300 ILEA primary schools were receiving extra funding from the Authority (ibid). This index was updated and revised four times over the course of the 1970s, and formed the central means by which ILEA targeted extra resources to schools considered to be in most need: 'the indices are a means for implementing a policy of positive discrimination' (ILEA, 1979c).

The Research and Statistics Group was also committed to clarifying those 'imponderables' mentioned in the evidence to the Bullock Committee. Although it was acknowledged that 'how children benefit from the extra resources is difficult to evaluate' (ILEA, 1972: 434), the research undertaken by the group focused on exploring the relationship between funding and pupil attainment and 'determining the way that positive

¹⁴³ This project resulted in the publication of 'The ILEA Junior School Study' in 1983.

funding was built into the ILEA's school resourcing' (Mortimore, 1979, 1990). The high-spending nature of the Labour-controlled Authority was frequently criticised by Conservative members who accused it of focusing on 'input rather than outcomes' (Heller & Edwards, 1992: 134), and by measuring the quality of its service 'by the amount of resources put into it' rather than by results (Gretton & Jackson, 1976: 78). Throughout the 1970s overall costs per pupil in ILEA were acknowledged to be 'by far the highest in the country',¹⁴⁴ a source of great dissatisfaction for opposition members who cast 'doubt on the effectiveness of the Authority's policies for special help to disadvantaged children' (ILEA, 1975: 47) and argued for intervention based on results rather than on need.

The Education Committee's funding of London-wide evidence-based research to tackle perceived problems and identify strategies for policy direction illustrated its faith in the power of data to illuminate problems and solutions and thus resource deployment. The Education Committee employed people to conduct surveys, analyse results, and produce reports which provided a bedrock of direction, legitimacy and authority on which to build its policy initiatives. The minutes show the close relationship between members engaged in policy production and the work undertaken by the Research and Statistics Group. Together they worked to 'plan and undertake research which was likely to prove beneficial to the ILEA's 1,000 schools' (Mortimore, 1998: 49). In the Education Committee data we can see the Authority moving from a focus on using research to identify areas of need, increasingly refining this need in terms of class, ethnicity and gender, and linking it with the burgeoning area of school effectiveness research in order to gain a more accurate understanding of how best to target resources.

¹⁴⁴ Minutes of meeting of the Education Committee, February 28th 1980.

Conclusion

The heavy grey volumes of the ILEA Education Committee minutes come to an abrupt end on the archive shelves after 1990. The minutes of the final meeting of the Authority ended with a statement by its then leader, Neil Fletcher, that 'no other Authority in the country or further afield can match ILEA for its immense contribution to educational ideas and good practice.' A vote of thanks was taken, and the meeting closed.¹⁴⁵ The subsequent empty shelves represent silence. The voices have stopped, the flow of reports has ceased. The fact of this absence, together with the ultimate victory of an alternative discourse in primary education associated with central rather than local government, distorts our understanding of what went before. Reading the minutes of the Education Committee in the 1970s as though the volumes did not come to an end a decade later is not always easy. But ILEA members in the 1970s had no sense of the eventual shipwreck of the Authority on the rocks of Conservative discourse, and to see their work through the shadows of doomed inevitability is to distort its operation.

The documentary evidence left behind by ILEA's activities was produced on its members' own terms and in their own present. These remaining traces give us insight into how the Education Committee used its powers to structure the 'field of possibilities' in education within which advice on literacy teaching developed. Looking at the different data sets, and moving my focus from those directly concerned with literacy to the debates in the council chamber and then to the broader expressions of educational policy has allowed me to resist imposing a simple monolithic understanding of power and agency onto the Authority (Coloma, 2011: 91). Instead, I have shown Education Committee members working to define problems and solutions on their own terms and within their own context, situated within a wider settlement of educational governance which set the boundaries of policy and action for the Authority.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of meeting of the Education Committee, March 27th 1990.

The Education Committee did not contemplate any direct intervention in the work of schools through statutory requirements relating to curriculum or pedagogy. Such a proposal remained essentially unsayable. As a large and complicated structure run along parliamentary lines and operating within a pluralist system of government, the Authority could only operate within the boundaries of its configuration to formulate education policy (Bogdanor, 1979: 166-167; Brighouse, 1992: 59). Although central government was beginning to venture that 'there is legitimate ground for criticism and concern' in relation to schools (DES, 1977b), it was tiptoeing around the implications of this criticism while being reluctant to voice any radical shifts in policy direction (Phillips, 2001: 13). And aside from a few fringe voices, Conservatives were still restricting their suggestions to influencing the work of schools through outside pressures such as testing and the publication of exam results rather than direct state intervention.

We have seen that the Authority's literacy policy was anchored in a commitment to school self-assessment, positive discrimination and evidence-based research, all policies which were developed over the course of the 1970s. It is not accurate to see ILEA as inward-looking and self-protecting during this period, digging in its heels and stopping its ears to the increasing clamour of an opposing ideological discourse. While the response of the Education Committee to the criticism of the Auld Report on its handling of the William Tyndale crisis does show us the Authority on the defensive, the greater part of its policy direction in the 1970s should be seen in the context of national political developments such as the funding of EPA schools, or the requirements of the 1976 Race Relations Act which informed and complemented ILEA's position. Likewise, in relation to literacy and to school improvement, the Authority was not occupying the isolated embattled position which has become a defining feature of its story. Its policies were informed and supported by official mainstream documents such as the Bullock Report, and by the direction of educational research in the academic community.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the Authority had introduced school development plans based on self-assessment, more consistent record-keeping, increased parental involvement in schools, school frameworks for language and literacy, and research-based initiatives on school effectiveness (MacGilchrist, 1990). These policies were promoted and enacted by professional experts and specialists working within the rules of the dominant discourse in education (Kenway, 1990: 175). In the next chapters I will look at how the Authority's Inspectorate and the CLPE, in their role as experts, used the 'field of possibility' framed for them by the policies of ILEA's Education Committee to influence literacy teaching in primary schools.

Chapter 6

The ILEA Inspectorate: 'shaping their complex duties into a meaningful strategy'?¹⁴⁶

Introduction

In this chapter I look at the ILEA Inspectorate and consider how those inspectors concerned with the teaching of language and literacy in primary schools understood and fulfilled their role during the 1970s. The Inspectorate formed a crucial but contested component of the ILEA machine, functioning as a link connecting schools to the Authority. This position, requiring that inspectors face both ways and serve two masters, was often an uncomfortable one. I look at how the Inspectorate understood its own role, and how its role was understood by teachers and the Authority.

I then discuss whether, and to what extent, we can analyse the Inspectorate data in terms of power, category or relationship. Do theoretical models allow for the shifts and complexities of the Inspectorate's work over time, or do they limit and distort its operation? I argue that by investigating areas where the data resists simple classification we can understand how the Inspectorate worked in practice to shape primary literacy.

I consider my data on the Inspectorate and discuss how I will use it to answer the following research questions:

- How did inspectors see problems with literacy in ILEA primary schools over this period?
- How did they understand the possibilities and limitations of their role as they worked towards solutions to these problems?

¹⁴⁶ Winkley, D. (1982). 'LEA inspectors and advisers: a developmental analysis'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 8 (2), 121.

- How did these questions develop over time as various inspectors interacted with changing situations and pressures?

I argue that by addressing these questions at different times and in different contexts we are able to see the shifting and responsive nature of the inspectors' actions, and to understand the relationship between their fluctuating fortunes and the advice they offered to teachers on literacy.

I describe the data I am using to examine the Inspectorate's work, and how it has helped me to find out what they were doing and what they were saying about primary literacy. It has also given me some insight into what the inspectors were talking about among themselves; how did their private understandings of role, problem and possibility inform their public action and discourse?

In tracing the activities of the Inspectorate over the course of a decade I deal with the data chronologically rather than thematically. I have identified three distinct timeframes at which I look in turn. For each of these I outline major features of the situation within which inspectors were working. I then use the data to explore how they identified problems and possibilities and how this affected their activities (what were they *doing?*) and publications (what were they *saying?*). Rather than 'telling the story of the Inspectorate', I use these timeframes to capture the ways in which contingencies of time, place and context operated on thought and action.

In conclusion, I argue that tensions and ambiguities within the Inspectorate's role constituted a space within which inspectors could react to changing circumstances. The boundaries of this space shifted over time and the inspectors' work can best be understood in relation to these shifts as they struggled to find ways to improve the teaching of language and literacy in ILEA primary schools.

What is an inspector?

For any teacher working in the English state education system today the idea of inspection is synonymous with OFSTED, and a central feature of the teacher's 'continually accountable and constantly recorded' professional identity (Ball, 2008a: 50). The relationship between a teacher or head teacher and the OFSTED team who descend upon their school is fully reflected in the dictionary definition of the verb 'to inspect', 'to view or examine closely and critically, especially in order to assess quality or to check for shortcomings'¹⁴⁷ There is no ongoing relationship between an OFSTED inspection team and the visited school; the team arrives, 'inspects' the school, makes a judgement of its worth and publishes a public report on its findings. It operates as a 'powerful regulatory force' (Alexander, 2010: 33), employed by central government to ensure that schools are held to account for the public trust and expenditure they receive (Cunningham, 2012: 102).

The establishment of OFSTED in 1992, replacing HMI and eclipsing the influence of LEA inspectors, marked a decisive shift in the remit of the school inspector and 'radically transformed' the relationship between inspector and school (Chitty, 2004: 100). The Conservative government had become dissatisfied with HMI, who had primarily operated as a source of advice for central government rather than control (Briault, 1976b: 436; Kogan, Boyle, & Crosland, 1971, 173), and sought to use school inspection more decisively as 'a mode of governing from a distance' (Clarke & Ozga, 2011: 3). And LEA inspectors were hardly suitable for a role which would involve imposing the will of central government, particularly if, in the words of one Conservative chief of HMI, 'the local Inspectorate... didn't inspect... they'd almost become social workers' (Baroness Pauline Perry, quoted in Bangs, et al., 2011).

¹⁴⁷ L. Brown (Ed) (1993), *The new shorter Oxford English dictionary*. (Vol.1). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The LEA inspector of the 1970s was a very different creature from the OFSTED inspector. In 1926 the Board of Education had swept away the remnants of the Revised Code and supported a more advisory role for inspectors at both national and local level, based on an understanding of teacher professionalism and partnership (Grace, 1985: 10-11). Between the 1930s and the 1980s there was less and less observation and assessment of teaching as a more collaborative relationship was forged with inspectors, who were themselves usually ex-teachers and heads. Full school inspections became increasingly rare, and local inspectors worked over time with particular schools in a supportive, rather than overtly critical, role. For teachers this could be seen as 'the realisation of that professional autonomy for which they had struggled since the nineteenth century' (Grace, 1985: 12), and the era still resonates with teachers as 'a golden age' when they were able to work without direct intervention and scrutiny from central government (Lawton, 1980: 22; McCulloch, et al., 2000: 46; Peel, 2000: 95).

The ILEA Inspectorate's role: 'hedged about with doubt and uncertainties'¹⁴⁸

The ILEA Inspectorate's work with schools involved very little 'inspection' by the 1970s. During the 1960s the tasks of 'inspecting, criticising and reporting' had progressively 'become the much more positive one of initiating and stimulating developments' (ILEA, 1965a: 310; Tinker, 1968: 10). The Inspectorate's priority was helping teachers and schools to improve through advice and training (Brighouse, 1995: 9; Dale, 1989: 134; Davis, 2002: 278; Grace, 1985: 12; Gretton & Jackson, 1976: 79). They worked to keep teachers up to date with new educational ideas through the provision of training courses, supported staff development, and advised heads on staffing and resources (Brighouse, 1992: 56; Cunningham, 2002: 227; Maclure, 1990: 163). They also kept members of the

¹⁴⁸ Gretton and Jackson (1976: 85).

Education Committee informed of developments in schools, producing reports and working with the Research and Statistics Group to collate information about schools (Mallen, 1992: 71). In 1965, a Report by the General Purposes Sub-Committee on the Inspectorate listed their seven main functions, the first six of which concerned schools and involved 'advising', 'assisting', 'encouraging', 'organising courses', 'keeping abreast of current educational thinking' and 'appraising critically but with understanding'. The final function was 'to act as the link between the administration and the schools' (ILEA, 1965a).

The inspectors connected the LEA to its schools (Cunningham, 2002: 222; Gretton & Jackson, 1976: 83). For teachers, the inspectors were mostly occupied with supporting heads, collecting information for surveys, and disseminating ideas on 'good practice' through publications and training courses. They were also responsible, along with head teachers, for making recommendations for appointments and promotion. If their role was characterised by their 'knowledge, judgement and authority' (Clarke & Ozga, 2011: 4), in practice for ILEA teachers inspectors were 'benign advisers' and generally absent, rarely entering the classroom (Brighouse, 1995: 9; Ellis, et al., 1976: 113; Grace, 1985: 11). Members of the Education Committee relied on the Inspectorate in a different way. For them, the inspectors were expert witnesses responsible for quality control, for overseeing the workings of schools and for keeping them informed of developments.

As we saw in the background chapter, the dual nature of the Inspectorate's role led to some confusion over priority. The inspectors themselves, the teachers, and the members of the Education Committee held their own particular, and shifting, interpretations of the Inspectorate's purpose. When functioning to the general satisfaction of all parties, this arrangement could be characterised as an 'intricate and informal machinery of checks and balances', but when problems arose it appeared to be a system 'in which accountability is so blurred that ... it becomes difficult to ascribe responsibility for failure to any particular element of it' (Bogdanor, 1979: 160). This was

exposed during the investigation into the William Tyndale crisis, when ‘not even the three inspectors who gave evidence were able to describe their job in the same way’ (Gretton & Jackson, 1976: 78). While for Education Committee members ‘the catch-all answer’ to the problem presented by a school in difficulties was ‘send for Dr Birchenough (the Chief Inspector) and his troops’ (Gretton & Jackson, 1976: 85), the Inspectorate did not consider themselves in such military terms, and if they had the teachers would have resented their incursion onto school territory.

When we look at how the Inspectorate worked over the course of the 1970s to influence the teaching of language and literacy in schools we can see how occupied (and on occasion, paralysed) it was by these issues of role and responsibility. The complex relationships between constituent parts of the education system formed an unsteady raft on which inspectors struggled to stay afloat as it was buffeted and displaced by the events of the decade. The ambiguities and contradictions in their role allowed them some flexibility in shaping their work, but also left them vulnerable to attack from those who held alternative understandings of the nature of their task. For the ILEA Inspectorate, the question of how to translate their various, and sometimes conflicting, responsibilities into coherent and purposeful action was far from straightforward. How they worked to achieve this, and what effect this process had on the advice and support they offered to teachers, is the central concern of this chapter.

Theorising the Inspectorate

Immersing oneself in the traces of discussion and action left behind by the operation of the ILEA Inspectorate in the 1970s is a particularly vivid experience. More than any of my other data sets, the texts seemed to drag me into their complicated (and sometimes desperate) domain. I found it difficult to move from the specifics of this world to the generalities of analysis (Tosh & Lang, 2006: 216), fearing that the imposition of structure

would lead to a static description of forces 'with the life and meaning drained out of it' (Beadie, 2011: 211). My efforts to confine the experiences of the inspectors within any of the theoretical concepts I had been working with felt reductive. In trying to capture some of the messy reality and humanity of the Inspectorate data, I wanted to reassert the power of descriptive history to 'offer reminders of the complexity and variety of human experience and institutions which theories often simplify' (Burke, 2005: 188). However, my initial attempts to write about the data 'on its own terms' were not successful, resulting in over-long accounts of the particularities of individuals and situations which merely mirrored the immersive experience of reading the data without offering the reader any critical purchase on the text.

Instead of using theory as a box within which to cram and muffle the lived experiences of the Inspectorate, I have tried to use different theories in relationship with the data to illuminate various aspects of my inquiry. Accepting that 'historical research usually demonstrates that a given theory does not hold when confronted by the richness of actual experience', I hoped that the process of working with both would allow new areas of enquiry to develop (Tosh & Lang, 2006: 248). Below I outline how I found ways of thinking about the Inspectorate in terms of power, category and relationship without losing sight of the complex lived realities reflected in the documentary traces of their work. Accepting that the theory and the data might not always exist in comfortable or productive relationship, I was reassured by E.P. Thompson's statement that historical understanding advances through the process of 'a quarrel between the model and the actuality' (quoted in Tosh & Lang, 2006: 249).

Thinking about power

In thinking about the ILEA Inspectorate in terms of power, we must disabuse ourselves of those contemporary understandings of the 'inspector' as an agent of state control

whose authoritative judgements have direct, and sometimes transformative, consequences for schools or teachers. The ILEA Inspectorate did not assess teachers or schools according to any agreed criteria. They did not write published reports, issue grades or hold those who failed to meet set standards to account. They rarely observed teachers at work in the classroom, and the passing of judgement was not the central feature of their function that it is for today's OFSTED inspectors. The power that they had in relation to teachers was discursive, and centred upon their status as elite, experienced, professionals (Clarke & Ozga, 2011: 12): an inspector could influence a teacher because, by virtue of this status, the inspector 'knew' more (Foucault, 1982: 792). As an 'expert', and a 'person of considerable distinction... powerful, persuasive and usually very well educated' (Gammage, 2007: 49), the inspector was able to exert influence and authority (Kenway, 1990: 175; Popkewitz, et al., 2001: x). Inspectors designed and delivered training, guidance and advice to teachers, thus operating to define 'best practice'. They also recommended teachers for professional advancement, thereby influencing the actions and identity of a 'good' teacher (Ball, 2013: 15). This exercise of power consisted in 'guiding the possibility of conduct', and had clear implications for shaping teacher behaviour (Foucault, 1982: 789).

The ILEA inspectors were both agents and subjects of power; they were able to 'structure the possible field of action of others', but they also found their own 'possible field of action' shaped by others (Foucault, 1982: 790). The use of power in relation to teachers and schools, and to the Education Committee, did not operate in one fixed direction. Teachers and head teachers had their own power with which to limit the operation of the Inspectorate upon their work. Their own professional status, while it could be informed by the expertise of the Inspector, was strong enough to construct an autonomous space

within which to act, and from which the inspector could be excluded. This space was protected by contemporary understandings of teacher professionalism (McCulloch, 2001: 103-105), and guarded by trade unions, alert to any potential incursion (Maclure, 1990: 198). The extent to which the Inspectorate could shape the work of teachers was also decisively informed by practical circumstances such as teacher supply and quality, which was in turn influenced by broader socio-economic factors over which the Inspectorate had little control.

The Inspectorate was influenced by ILEA's Education Committee through decisions on the appointment and funding of inspectors, which affected its structure, workload, and the calibre of its members. It was also subject to pressure from the Authority to emphasise various aspects of its work in line with the perceived requirements of particular situations. However, as 'experts' in education, the inspectors also had some power to resist the demands of the Committee and to interpret their role on their own terms, often relying on the authority of HMI with whom they shared regular conferences, or the recommendations of university-based education professionals.

All three elements of the ILEA education machine, the Inspectorate, the Education Committee, and the schools, used their own power and were influenced by the power of others. By putting them into relationship over the course of a decade, we can see how these shifting and contingent structures operated in practice, and what the work of the Inspectorate can tell us about those 'mechanisms through which power is exercised' in education (Jupp & Norris, 1993: 39).

Thinking about category and relationship

Seeking to understand the Inspectorate in terms of Ball's models of change, or of Bernstein's recontextualising fields, I found myself facing familiar problems. Positioning

the data within a structural context which could shed light on relationships between constituent parts of the educational system seemed to offer the possibility of clarity. For Ball, the LEA Inspectorate would best fit into the 'structures of change' component of his model, as one of the 'formal channels of educational policy-making and administration through which or in relation to which change must be accomplished, mediated, fought for and negotiated' (Ball, 1987: 17). However, his 'relations of change' category, incorporating the 'strategies, pressures and influences of particular groups or individuals with investments in the teaching of English' (Ball, 1985: 63), would also be relevant. Individual inspectors were often experts in their field, they wrote influential books on pedagogy,¹⁴⁹ contributed to conferences of the subject community, produced evidence for committees and designed in-service training for teachers.

A similar problem confronted me when I considered the Inspectorate in terms of Bernstein's recontextualising fields. Clearly the Inspectorate belonged within the confines of the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF), as a 'selected agent' of the state (Bernstein, 1996: 33). They were funded and appointed by ILEA to keep its members informed and to influence school practice. But the closeness of its relationship to those 'pedagogues in schools and colleges, and departments of education (and) specialised journals' (ibid) who worked within the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (PRF) complicated the model. The work of the Inspectorate supports Bernstein's argument that the late 1960s and 70s saw a high degree of 'ideological rapport' between the ORF and PRF; in practice ILEA inspectors were so closely involved with the PRF as to make category distinctions difficult to apply. For example, as well as 'being an inspector', Nora Goddard published research papers and educational texts, had been a head teacher,

¹⁴⁹ For example, the ILEA inspector Nora Goddard was described as, 'the greatest single influence on modern reading... Her book 'Reading in the modern infants' school' has probably had more to do with the look of a modern classroom and the organization of its reading activities than any other influence' (Thompson, 1970: 29).

and worked closely with CLPE staff. Those distinctly separate 'fields' which make Bernstein's work so engaging began to seem increasingly muddy and ill-defined when confronted with the complexities of the Inspectorate data.

The harder I tried to confine the Inspectorate to a particular pigeon-hole, the more it resisted. Individually and collectively ILEA inspectors worked across category boundaries, their roles were varied and changeable in ways that complicate theoretical models and reduce their clarity. Rather than simplifying the data in order to classify it, or giving in to its particularity and abandoning any attempt to theorise it, I tried to approach the 'quarrel between the model and the actuality' itself more productively. By looking closely at how inspectors understood the lived realities of their work over time in the context power, category and relationship, I can accept or reject theoretical models in terms of what they can usefully offer to my research.

Research questions and data

In the 1970s there was no national curriculum, statutory testing, or levels of attainment imposed by central government, and no LEA policy on standards, aims or methods in primary schools (Auld, 1976: 271). I was interested in understanding how the Inspectorate, working within this system, identified and articulated problems with the teaching of, or achievement in, language and literacy in schools. And once problems had been acknowledged, how did inspectors understand their role and responsibility in working towards possible solutions? How did their understanding of possibility and limitation affect their advice and actions as 'experts' involved with school improvement?

In order to address these questions, I needed to find sources of data which would allow me some insight into how the inspectors - these particular people, doing this particular job - were working in 1970s London. What traces have they, and those they worked with, left behind? As full inspection reports on primary schools were not a significant

feature of Inspectorate work in the 1970s, the most immediate source of evidence consists of the published literature produced by the Inspectorate over the 1970s. This includes articles written by inspectors for teachers in ILEA's *Contact* magazine, guidelines on language and literacy for primary schools either published in book form or in instalments in *Contact*, pamphlets on school improvement, and lists of courses for teachers run by inspectors. We also have reports made by the Inspectorate to the Education Committee on its role and activities, and contributions made by individual inspectors to reports and journals, as well as books and articles written in a private capacity which shed light on their pedagogical approach (for example Crowest, 1978; Goddard, 1974). In addition, we have references to the work of the Inspectorate in the context of the William Tyndale crisis, in the Auld Report and in books and articles written at the time, or from a historical perspective (see for example Auld, 1976; Dale, 1979a; Davis, 2002; Ellis, et al., 1976; Gretton & Jackson, 1976).

All this information can be read in an attempt to find out what the Inspectorate were doing and saying during the period, and I spent many hours looking through copies of *Contact* magazine piled high on a library trolley, and studying booklets offering guidance to teachers. I asked myself how inspectors were seeking to shape literacy teaching in primary schools and what this might tell us about the possibilities and limits of their action. What were inspectors *doing* for teachers, and for the LEA? And what were they *saying*? How were documents produced by the Inspectorate operating in practice (Prior, 2003: 173)? How prescriptive was their advice? Who was writing it, and in what capacity? Upon what references and authority was it built? These questions worked together to interrogate the text (Scott, 2000: 19) and helped me to build a picture of 'what was going on' in the ILEA Inspectorate over the course of the 1970s.

To move beyond that question, and to ask 'why' this was happening it was useful to put the published sources into relationship with the unpublished minutes of Inspectorate meetings. These meetings of the full ILEA Inspectorate were held fortnightly at County

Hall throughout the 1970s. The minutes are kept in the London Metropolitan Archives, and consist of typed and stapled A4 sheets of paper, headed 'CONFIDENTIAL' and tied into bundles in a cardboard folder.¹⁵⁰ The meetings were chaired by the Chief Inspector (Dr Payling until 1973, when he was replaced by Dr Michael Birchenough), and were attended by all inspectors, as well as occasional visitors or guest speakers. Interspersed between records of these meetings are minutes from joint conferences of the ILEA Inspectorate and HMI, and occasional confidential circulars, letters and reports for the Inspectorate's attention. Although the meetings sometimes show concern for a wider audience, such as when formally recording support for colleagues involved in the Auld Enquiry into William Tyndale, in general the nature and presentation of the minutes suggests something of a 'closed shop' where the inspectors felt free to discuss sensitive matters.

The meeting minutes are very different in tone from the published material and show the inspectors struggling to make sense of the situations they were facing and to shape their response, revealing a vulnerability largely absent in more polished and authoritative sources. Of course the meetings were still public occasions, and we remain excluded from private conversations among colleagues or personal discussions with family or friends which could have provided another layer of insight. They are more suggestive of a staff meeting than a frank chat in the pub. But they do give some sense of real people involved in their work in fluctuating and often difficult circumstances, and disrupt our notions of 'one dimensional caricatures who fail to display the complexities, contradictions and paradoxes that you and I demonstrate in the face of change' (Ball, 1997: 22). Taken together and considered in relationship, the data sets give us insight into what the inspectors were thinking, and how this affected what they were doing and saying. The unpublished minutes work to unsettle the expertise and competency of the

¹⁵⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1-2.

published texts, and reveal the (sometimes frantic) paddling underneath the gliding swan of authority which may have been hidden from general view but was surely directing its movement.

Using this range of data ensures that we remember that the inspectors may be positioned within a particular discourse or structure, but within this context they still can and do assert human agency as they make decisions (Green, 1990: 155). There does not need to be a contradiction between the confines of theoretical modelling and the voice and action of real people; instead we can see people trying to do their job within the perceived boundaries of their setting. Of course, as a space created by dynamic relationships between the constituent parts of the ILEA machine these boundaries were rarely stable or unanimously perceived (Grace, 1987: 196). When we turn to look at the ways the inspectors reacted to events over time, we can see how their understanding of their role and of possibilities for action was formed in the context of their human agency.

I could have written about the ILEA Inspectorate in several ways, identifying themes and tracing them through the data, focusing on the careers of individual inspectors, or concentrating on examining one key event in depth, such as the William Tyndale crisis. Instead I have chosen to identify three distinct phases in time over the decade, 1970-74, 1975-76, and 1977-79. Each of these periods was characterised by a particular combination of factors which allows me to focus on those variables which informed the actions of the Inspectorate. During each phase I look at what the inspectors were saying (through their publications), doing (through their actions) and thinking (through their discussions in meetings). This allows me to put all three strands into relationship, and to address my central research questions. I can deal with those 'events and specifics' which characterise the 'situation' facing inspectors in each phase (Ball, 2006: 4) and trace continuities and changes over the course of the decade. Clearly, the chronology is artificially imposed and would have a different narrative arc depending on where I chose to begin and to end. I do not want my account to be read as a story with 1979 as

the finale. Instead, I am using periods of time to frame distinct fields of possible action for the Inspectorate, and to examine how they worked in different situations.

Phase 1, 1970-74. 'Cross'd with adversity'¹⁵¹

Situation

Accounts agree that the first years of the 1970s proved a 'deeply unsettled start' to the decade for ILEA (Newsam, n.d: 18). The national situation saw states of emergency, the three day week at the beginning of 1974, rapid oil price inflation, and battles with trade unions (Brian Simon, 1991: 406). Cuts in education funding defined the decade, as the era of expansion and optimism which had characterised the 1960s seemed to grind to a halt (Dale, 1989: 131). Within inner London, shifts in population were rapidly changing the city as immigration rose, and many of those families with the means to do so left for more spacious suburbs (Deakin, 1980: 31). A falling birth-rate from the mid-60s, along with 'middle income flight' contributed to inner cities 'emptying out', and many of those who remained lived in shabby, decaying surroundings, with unrepaired bombsites and abandoned factories (Beckett, 2009: 15; Mortimore, Davies, Varlaam, & West, 1983: 20). Fears of irreversible economic and social decline gave rise to an 'inner-city crisis' discourse among sociologists (Cook, 1984: 285). In this context, inner London seemed to embody urban decay.

The most pressing issue facing ILEA in the early 1970s was a critical shortage of teachers and 'disruptively high' rates of teacher turnover¹⁵² (HMI, 1980: 28). A short-lived housing boom between mid-1971 and 1973, triggered by dramatic cuts in interest rates and taxes, saw house prices rise by as much as three quarters (Beckett, 2009:

¹⁵¹ School Council Working Paper (1970), *Cross'd with adversity: the education of socially disadvantaged children in secondary school*. London, Evans/Methuen Educational.

¹⁵² *Education*, 'Editorial', February 28th, 1975: 223.

127). As teachers' salaries failed to keep up, the cost of housing combined with the inner-city environment and difficult working conditions in schools led to high levels of turnover in schools (Deakin, 1980: 31; Newsam, n.d: 3-4). The annual turnover rate in the academic year 1972-3 was over a third, and ILEA was forced to recruit over 5,000 new teachers a year (Little, 1977: 35). Of these, a disproportionate number were newly qualified, particularly in primary schools in areas characterised by high levels of social and economic deprivation (Mortimore, et al., 1983: 20). According to Peter Newsam, who replaced Eric Briault as ILEA's Chief Education Officer at the beginning of 1977, in the early 1970s 'there were only a few hundred experienced primary teachers standing between the schools and breakdown' (quoted in Davis, 2002: 279). In addition, in an era dominated by powerful trade unions, young teachers in inner London working in difficult conditions for poor pay were more likely to strike, or to look for 'radical' solutions to their problems than their counterparts in other parts of the country (Davis, 2002: 279).

The Authority's understanding of this 'particularly troubled period' (HMI, 1980: 31), where 'crisis was never far from the surface' (Brighouse, 1992: 51) was encapsulated in a letter written by the Education Officer, Eric Briault, dated January 25th 1974, and circulated to the Inspectorate which I discovered in a folder of meeting minutes in the archive.¹⁵³ This letter was strictly confidential, and detailed 'certain current difficulties' facing ILEA. It began by stating 'we find ourselves in circumstances of some difficulty... in greater difficulty... in the service generally than we have been as long as I can remember'. Briault went on to outline these difficulties as follows: a teacher shortage leading to some schools approaching a 'near crisis point', 'extreme political groups' among teachers 'whose objectives is to make things worse', and head teachers feeling 'exposed', 'less secure', and 'unable to insist upon standards of performance' among teachers. He urged the Inspectorate to 'find ways in which we can raise the morale of teachers' and 'make it

¹⁵³ London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2.

very clear that the Authority supports them, understands their problems, their frustrations'. He asked them to hold back on curricular innovation and pressure on schools, and to keep communicating with the administration as 'we can't know unless you tell us', urging that 'in these circumstances we mustn't be particular about the boundaries between our responsibilities'. Above all, he implored the inspectors that 'vis a vis the world in general... we must avoid giving a general impression that we think, or indeed that it is the case as I'm sure it's not, that the service is breaking up and all is lost'.

Meeting minutes: problems and possibilities

The fears of the Education Officer were echoed in the meetings of the Inspectorate. At a conference with HMI in 1970 Vivian Pape, lone Primary Inspector, outlined the main problems facing schools as being the social situation in London, teacher mobility, and a confusion around the best methods for literacy teaching, noting that there was 'real cause for pessimism' in all these areas.¹⁵⁴ Private meetings over the period were overwhelmingly gloomy affairs, with many inspectors reiterating the enormity of the problems facing the Authority and expressing fears for the future. The miseries of the inspectors coalesced around two major issues; problems with the teaching force working in ILEA schools, and problems with the children whom they were tasked with teaching.

High rates of teacher turnover were frequently discussed. The effects of this on particular schools could be dramatic. One example was given of a primary school where 12 out of 15 staff were under the age of 24.¹⁵⁵ This situation was blamed on a lack of affordable housing as wages failed to keep up with rent and house prices.¹⁵⁶ Low morale among

¹⁵⁴ Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Meetings of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 26th 1972 and March 30th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

teachers was also seen as a reason why so many were leaving London schools, the situation in some schools was so poor that teachers were 'despondent' and heads 'increasingly depressed'.¹⁵⁷ The Authority's desperate need to recruit or promote large numbers of teachers to plug the gaps in schools was blamed for a 'paucity of calibre in respect of human resources'.¹⁵⁸ By 1974, although staffing levels had started to improve, the Authority's schools were left with a legacy of hastily recruited and overwhelmingly young teachers, in whose 'quality there was much to be desired'.¹⁵⁹ There were seen to be 'many problem heads'¹⁶⁰ in primary schools, and difficulties in appointing heads 'of the right calibre'¹⁶¹ or dismissing those who were struggling,¹⁶² as the strength of the trade unions meant that 'the safeguards that protected the many did militate against dealing with those who became clearly unsuitable for the classroom'.¹⁶³ There was also frequent mention of a 'small selection of militants... causing disproportionate trouble', 'difficult schools and staff with disruptive attitudes', and a sense that 'staff militancy had expanded' with 'political' teachers 'stirring up the thinking of the young'.¹⁶⁴

Alongside these concerns ran anxiety about demographic issues in the inner city. A Schools' Council Working Paper on 'the education of socially disadvantaged children' entitled *Cross'd with Adversity*, to which the Inspectorate had contributed data, was discussed at some length at the beginning of 1970 as being 'a document of profound significance' which seemed to confirm the inspectors' fears that London children were

¹⁵⁷ Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 and Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 9th 1974, (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

¹⁵⁸ Vivian Pape, Primary Inspector, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 26th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, January 9th 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

¹⁶⁰ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, March 26th 1970 and March 30th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1-2).

¹⁶¹ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 26th 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁶² Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 22nd 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁶³ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, December 15th 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁶⁴ Meetings of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, October 19th 1973, January 9th 1974, January 4th 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1-2).

'suffering environmental and emotional damage early in life', and were often 'emotionally and intellectually deprived' before they came to school.¹⁶⁵ London schools were described as being 'worse than most, and worse than the examples given in the report'¹⁶⁶ with 'social problems taking priority over other issues'.¹⁶⁷ The changing demographic in inner London was characterised as one where 'brighter and more enterprising citizens were moving out to the commuter areas', thus diminishing the 'balancing middle' and creating a city divided between rich and poor.¹⁶⁸ This remained a theme throughout the period and was described as a 'continuing and increasing' issue.¹⁶⁸ Fears were expressed that even young children were increasingly rebellious: for some young teachers, 'their first encounter with a five-year-old was a four letter word'.¹⁶⁹ The Chief Inspector, Dr L. Payling, stated that he was 'deeply concerned by behavioural problems and the description of this generation as 'a wrecking one'.¹⁷⁰ Additional unease was expressed over 'immigrant numbers and needs', characterised as 'a nettle which needed to be grasped',¹⁷¹ particularly as there seemed to be 'no consensus' among schools about how to tackle the implications for English teaching, and the 'language situation' was seen to be 'deteriorating'.¹⁷²

A report on ILEA's 1969 literacy survey, which the Inspectorate had been involved in collecting and collating, contributed to the gloom by seeming to confirm that London

¹⁶⁵ Vivian Pape, Primary Inspector, Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁶⁶ Dr G. Copley, English Inspector, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 27th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁶⁷ Mr I. Iles, District Inspector for Tower Hamlets, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 27th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁶⁸ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 9th 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

¹⁶⁹ Mr I. Iles, District Inspector for Tower Hamlets, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 27th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁷⁰ Dr L Payling, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 4th 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁷¹ Mr T Jaggard, District Inspector for Westminster and Camden, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 28th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

¹⁷² Miss J Jenkins, District Inspector for Lewisham, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, November 30th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

school children were lagging behind in their reading attainment compared with other parts of the country.¹⁷³ There were also complaints from secondary schools that a 'large number of primary children were illiterate when transferred'.¹⁷⁴ The teaching of language and literacy in ILEA primary schools was seen as being 'related closely' to the issues raised in '*Cross'd with adversity*'.¹⁷⁵ The challenges of school intake were profound, and schools struggling 'at survival level' with high turnover and disproportionately young and inexperienced staff were often ill-equipped to deal with them.¹⁷⁶ In addition, the 'revolution in methods and thinking' in literacy pedagogy had 'almost overwhelmed' primary teachers, who were confused as to which method they should be using, and in need of guidance and advice.¹⁷⁷ Comment was also made on the lack of continuity between infant and junior school methods, where 'methods and materials were frequently totally unrelated'.¹⁷⁸ By the end of the period, the Inspectorate was forced to admit that 'in spite of strenuous efforts, the standards (of reading) in the Authority's area were not rising'.¹⁷⁹

There was much gloom and despondency in the Inspectorate minutes from this period. On occasion, meetings seem to have been little more than an opportunity for inspectors to list the problems facing them, and reiterate the difficulties of their position. The primary inspector, Vivian Pape, seemed particularly overworked and disheartened. Problems were often characterised as lying outside the Inspectorate's control and could appear overwhelming, leaving the inspectors paralysed and demotivated in their response. It

¹⁷³ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, 28th November 1969 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁷⁴ See for example Meetings of the ILEA Inspectorate 26th March 1971 and 22nd October 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁷⁵ Mr G. Porteous, District Inspector for Hackney, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate 22nd October 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁷⁶ Conference with HMI, January 9th 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2). ¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁷ Vivian Pape, Primary Inspector, Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁷⁸ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, 30th April 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁷⁹ Vivian Pape, Primary Inspector, Conference with HMI, January 9th 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

was not only the morale of the teachers which was an issue in this period. The inner-city crisis discourse often seemed irresistible: if ‘sociologists were now showing that it was the children’s backgrounds which so largely controlled their performances’¹⁸⁰ and ‘the wider background of the state of society itself’ was to blame for falling literacy standards,¹⁸¹ then perhaps it was time to question ‘whether too much was being asked of the education service...’ which was expected to deal with ‘problems which were entirely social in origin’.¹⁸²

There is also evidence that inspectors were struggling to keep their heads above this tide of despondency by focusing on what could possibly be achieved, even in the face of such difficulty. Discussing the results of the literacy survey, Pape outlined two options facing the Authority, either accepting that ‘London children were too deprived and too unreceptive for much to be done about them’, or ‘teachers could accept the challenge of the survey to think more clearly about what should and could be done’.¹⁸³ Central to these efforts was a sense that ‘discrepancies between schools with a common socioeconomic intake’ implied that even in the face of difficulties there was still scope for some schools to perform better than others.¹⁸⁴ Individual inspectors made their voices heard above the pessimistic clamour by reminding their colleagues that many improvements could still be made in areas such as continuity between infant and junior

¹⁸⁰ Mr G Andrews, District Inspector for Lambeth, Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁸¹ Conference with HMI, January 4th 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1). ¹⁸¹ Mr

¹⁸² G Porteous, District Inspector for Hackney, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, October 22nd 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁸³ Vivian Pape, Primary Inspector, Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁸⁴ Vivian Pape, Primary Inspector, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, November 28th 1969 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

schools, and increased training provision for newly qualified teachers,¹⁸⁵ and that there was 'great danger in accepting a laissez faire attitude' to the situation.¹⁸⁶

The central task in this period was identified as supporting teachers and heads in difficult circumstances, and keeping them from lapsing into despair. Improving teacher morale was identified as being 'an area in which the Inspectorate should do something very positive',¹⁸⁷ and inspectors took it upon themselves to 'ensure that teachers should not become depressed' by the literacy survey.¹⁸⁸ This had implications for the nature of the inspector's role. As we have seen, the Inspectorate was moving away from full inspections, a concept which was declared 'gone for good' by 1971.¹⁸⁹ At a meeting in June 1973, 'the point was pressed that inspectors ought to avoid creating an image of censure and should concentrate on looking at good work and providing encouragement'.¹⁹⁰ In any case, it was recognised that the 'present load on District Inspectors was a crushing burden' which left no time for inspection of schools.¹⁹¹ And inspectors were reminded that 'categorically no written reports (on teachers) should be made... the Education Officer had given an absolute undertaking on this fundamental matter to teachers' organisations'.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ Nora Goddard, Inspector for Infants' Education (later Head Primary Inspector), Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁸⁶ John Welch, District Inspector for Lewisham (later Senior Inspector for English), Conference with HMI, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁸⁷ John Welch, District Inspector for Lewisham (later Senior Inspector for English), Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, October 22nd 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁸⁸ Vivian Pape, Primary Inspector, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, November 28th 1969 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁸⁹ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, April 30th 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁹⁰ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 29th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

¹⁹¹ Meetings of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, November 2nd 1970 and September 12th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1-2).

¹⁹² Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 15th 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

Actions: what was the Inspectorate doing?

Throughout this period the Inspectorate continued to focus its efforts on the provision of training and support to teachers. One of its most significant actions was to replace the *Education Bulletin*, ILEA's means of listing courses and appointments for teachers, with the shiny, colour-printed magazine, *Contact*, first published in April 1972. The new magazine was central to the understanding, expressed by the Chief Inspector, that 'one of the duties of the Inspectorate (is) to take the initiative in introducing teachers to new trends and ideas',¹⁹³ and was conceived as 'a vehicle for conveying information and comment from the Authority direct to every teacher', and 'for the teachers themselves.. to express their views' (Bramall, 1972: 2). In the context of over-worked inspectors who could not realistically meet face-to-face with the large and shifting teaching population in the city, the magazine formed the central means by which the Inspectorate could communicate with teachers.

Another channel of communication was the Education Television Service (ETV) which produced programmes for teachers and pupils. This was strongly promoted by the Inspectorate, who were urged to ensure that it was used effectively in schools, even at a time when this might appear to be 'just one more burden' on their time.¹⁹⁴ The Inspectorate worked hard to provide courses for teachers, publicised in the *Education Bulletin*, and then *Contact*, and particularly aimed at the newly qualified teachers who made up such a large proportion of London's primary school teachers.¹⁹⁵ The provision of courses was also promoted as being crucial to the recruitment of more young teachers to work for ILEA,¹⁹⁶ and was in line with the recommendations of the James Report on

¹⁹³ Dr L. Payling, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 16th 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁹⁴ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, October 3rd 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁹⁵ For example, September 1971 saw 2,400 newly qualified teachers recruited to inner-London schools (*Contact*, 'Probationers... who cares?', 1 (1), April 21st 1972).

¹⁹⁶ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, March 29th 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

teacher training that on-going CPD for probationers and fully qualified teachers should be a central feature of teachers' training (DES, 1972b). Events were held to introduce new teachers to their District Inspectors.¹⁹⁷ And among themselves, the Inspectors began to work with ILEA's Research and Statistics Group to identify what features made some schools more successful than others.¹⁹⁸

Publications: what was the Inspectorate saying?

The inspectors used *Contact* as a means of communicating with teachers, and we can see them working hard at their task of keeping up teachers' morale. Several reports were written during this period to reassure London teachers and to defend them against accusations of falling literacy standards in the press, which used ILEA's literacy survey, and then the 1972 NFER Report, as evidence of decline (Start & Wells, 1972). For example, Pape wrote '*Report on Reading Standards*' in which he defended ILEA's primary teachers against articles 'buffeting' them in the local press with headlines such as 'London children becoming more illiterate' and 'Reading standards shock' (Pape, 1974). Insisting that 'some of the reportage is confused to the point of absurdity', he reminded his readers that nationally standardised tests were not appropriate for inner-London children ('to the immigrant child and the disadvantaged urban child, much of the material would have no meaning'), and that results of such tests failed to take into account the unique intake of inner-London schools. He cautioned against 'selling ourselves short', arguing, 'if ground is not in fact being lost in London primary schools it

¹⁹⁷ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 19th 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

¹⁹⁸ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 22nd 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

speaks well for the little band of experienced teachers and the army of youngsters who man them' (ibid).

Another report a few months later by Alasdair Aston, ILEA Inspector for English, took a similar tone (Aston, 1974). Entitled '*Before we mourn...*', it referred to 'deep national concern' expressed about reading standards in the press, while warning, 'I should want to be very careful about jumping to conclusions about declining standards'. According to Aston, 'the area of failure that has been described by the term illiteracy is relatively small'. He reminded readers that language skills were far broader than the narrow criteria tested by literacy surveys, and of the need to maintain a 'healthy balance' between reading and writing, and speaking and listening. Teachers were reminded of London's unique set of circumstances which made comparison with other parts of the country unfair (ibid).

The Inspectorate also published a set of guidelines in *Contact* in 1974, a project undertaken by the English Inspectorate.¹⁹⁹ These were described as a 'series of papers' which would 'constitute a set of guidelines for English language teaching offered for use by teachers'. The guidelines were explicitly designed to serve as 'a useful basis for discussion', and it was stressed that 'how closely (they) are followed is a matter for heads and staff of individual schools to decide in their particular circumstances'.

The first of these papers, *Guidelines to literacy*, was written by John Welch, Staff Inspector for English (Welch, 1974). He drew clear boundaries around areas of teacher and inspector responsibility, stating that 'there is little that we in the teaching profession can do to ameliorate the social conditions of the community, but we must ensure that our own house is in order'. Referring to 'recent publicity', an 'apparent decline' in standards and the 'great concern' of the public, he insisted that neither teachers nor 'progressive education trends' were to blame for this. Instead, he focused his attention on the spoken

¹⁹⁹ *Contact*, 'Guidelines for language teaching', 2 (23), February 8th 1974.

language of young children entering school. Making reference to Bernstein, he stated that 'exposure at home to a restricted set of structures, often imperative in mood and with somewhat limited vocabulary, is not the best preparation for receiving instruction in an elaborated code which uses complex sentences and an extended lexis', and emphasised that a discrepancy between the language structures of home and school would hinder children's achievement. Literacy in schools should be significant to children, and teachers should avoid 'irrelevant and meaningless tasks'. Reading schemes were criticised for their 'banality' and 'social irrelevance', although he stopped short of condemning their use in all cases, allowing that they could provide teachers with a useful framework. He recommended the *Breakthrough to literacy* materials as a way of producing 'texts in the language the children actually use', and stressed that phonics teaching, although popular with parents, should only be used in the context of other, more meaningful, methods.

Welch's guidelines on primary literacy were followed by a contribution from Nora Goddard and Phyllis Mitchell (Senior Inspector for Infant Education, and Inspector for Infant Education respectively). In *The early stages: Language learning and teaching*, they also emphasised the importance of beginning with the spoken language of the individual child, noting that inner-city children may have 'less language experience' (Goddard & Mitchell, 1974). The school environment should be organised to promote and extend language development. Like Welch, Goddard and Mitchell pointed out the limitations of published reading schemes, and stressed that the 'written word' should occur as 'part of (the child's) day-to-day life' and be related to 'real interests' and 'meaning'. Phonics teaching should occur in context when an individual child encountered the need for it in their own reading. The importance of an approach which centred on the experience of the individual child was repeatedly emphasised, reflecting Goddard's other publications (Goddard, 1974) as well as those early literacy and

language courses provided by the Inspectorate on subjects such as ‘the education of the city child’, teaching in ‘inner-city areas’, or ‘new initiatives in language development’.²⁰⁰

Phase 2, 1975-76. The William Tyndale ‘watershed’²⁰¹

Situation

When first reading through the meeting minutes of the Inspectorate chronologically, I braced myself for a complete collapse of morale in the middle years of the decade.

Against a background of the Wilson government’s ‘humiliating bailout’ from the IMF in 1976 (Sandbrook, 2012: 569-72, xx; Turner, 2008: 188-89), and ‘unprecedented inflation’, ILEA was working with a ‘standstill budget’ and making ‘severe cutbacks’.²⁰²

School populations in inner London were continuing to change with ‘bewildering rapidity’, and by 1975, 41% of all children born in London were to foreign-born mothers (Maclure, 1990: 195-197).

Given this background, I expected the William Tyndale crisis to break over the already shaky Inspectorate like a tidal wave, leaving collapse and devastation in its wake. The breakdown of the school and the subsequent Auld Inquiry shone a merciless spotlight on the inner workings of ILEA, and on the Inspectorate in particular. They were criticised for failing to support the school, failing to respond effectively to the concerns of parents, failing to communicate with the administration about the seriousness of the school’s problems, and failing to intervene effectively once the crisis was obvious (Auld, 1976).

The teachers at William Tyndale were portrayed as destructive militants, supported by

²⁰⁰ See for example *Education Bulletin*, No. 203, January 29th 1971, and *Education Bulletin*, No. 235, November 19th 1971.

²⁰¹ HMI (1980), *A report by HM Inspectors on educational provision by the Inner London Education Authority*, London, HMSO: 95.

²⁰² Ewan Carr, chair of ILEA Finance Sub-Committee (1975), quoted in *Education*, 145 (6) 141.

radical groups such as Rank and File, intent on destroying the social order and beyond the sphere of influence of inspectors (Davis, 2002: 284). Surely 1975-76 would be the nadir of the decade for the Inspectorate.

The William Tyndale crisis was not the only, or even the most decisive, story facing London primary schools in these years, although it did of course receive the most publicity. At the same time as the workings of the Authority were being loudly and publicly examined and criticised (to the delight of its critics), more fundamental changes were shifting the educational landscape in London. From 1974 onwards, the number of school-aged children in the capital (and in the country as a whole) began to drop dramatically (HMI, 1980: 26; Maclure, 1990: 205). The joint effects of a falling birth rate and migration from the inner city led to the ILEA primary school roll falling from nearly 200,000 in 1974 to a projected 123,000 by 1981 (Blackstone, 1980: 23; Little, 1977: 38). As the teacher-pupil ratio fell from 1:23 in 1970 to 1:18 in 1976 (Briault, 1976a: 7), class sizes in primary schools began to decrease rapidly. Teachers' pay rates also picked up, and teaching jobs became harder to come by. This had an immediate impact on the problem of teacher supply as the Authority found itself only needing to recruit around 200 teachers in 1976-77 from a possible 4,000 applicants.²⁰³

There was a corresponding decrease in rates of teacher turnover, and within the space of a year primary school staffing began to stabilise. Writing in *Contact* on the eve of his retirement as Education Officer, Eric Briault declared that 'the primary school situation has been almost transformed by the dramatic drop in teacher turnover', and the future for ILEA primary schools seemed 'full of promise' (Briault, 1976a: 7). Certainly, as the crisis in teacher supply and retention receded and conditions in primary schools began to improve (Newsam, n.d: 4), despite the public relations disaster of William Tyndale,

²⁰³ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, December 12th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

new spaces were rapidly opening up to allow policy responses that were more positive than the fire-fighting of the previous five years.

One of the immediate effects of the William Tyndale crisis was to focus Authority attention on the primary Inspectorate. In 1975 Pape retired and was replaced by Nora Goddard along with a team of inspectors who would number 16 by 1978 (ILEA, 197078). This was a huge increase in manpower²⁰⁴ and had significant implications for the capabilities of the team. More good news came in the report that the most recent update of the ILEA literacy survey showed a slight improvement in reading standards.²⁰⁵ In his Christmas message to teachers, ILEA's leader Ashley Bramall declared that 'this term has been a much more settled and satisfying one than has been the case for some time' (Bramall, 1975).

Meeting minutes: problems and possibilities

The tone of the Inspectorate's meetings in 1975 and 1976 differed markedly from the despondent hand-wringing of the previous years. While difficulties were still articulated, the tendency to recite a long litany of insoluble problems was no longer a feature. Instead, the focus shifted to what could be done to improve the situation in schools, and problems were seen in this context.

Discussion of the Auld Report on William Tyndale was confined to one particular meeting set aside for the purpose. The inspectors were critical of the report, stating that 'the way in which the Inspectorate had been involved without proper legal support was to be deplored and colleagues were unanimous in wishing to record their view in this matter'.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Pape and Goddard had previously worked alone, as Primary and Infant Inspector respectively.

²⁰⁵ *Contact*, 4 (21), November 21st 1975.

²⁰⁶ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 24th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

The Auld Inquiry was criticised for failing to understand ‘the motivations of the protagonists concerned’, and the militancy of those teachers who were ‘bent on a confrontation situation and not on solution or improvement’.²⁰⁷ The fundamental problem was described as the ‘amorphous situation’ when it came to role and responsibility in the Authority. The question of ‘who was accountable for the control of and responsibility for the running of schools’ was still unclear.²⁰⁸ Inspectors stressed that their role had necessarily evolved to ‘reassure... all had been done amicably and without wounding the schools in question’.²⁰⁹ It was not the inspector’s role directly to intervene in schools, and the Authority ‘could not divest itself of ultimate responsibility’ in this area. Again, inspectors expressed the difficulties of their position, feeling that they ‘had heavy responsibility but without real power’,²¹⁰ ‘no fixed criteria’ with which to judge standards in schools, and no answer to the question ‘if a head persists in ignoring Inspectorate advice, how were colleagues to proceed?’²¹¹ The meeting showed the inspectors refusing to accept responsibility for the debacle, and accusing the Authority of passing the buck. Although the issues of role continued to be discussed, William Tyndale and the Auld Report were not referred to directly again.

The wider issues raised by the Auld Inquiry did feature in meetings both before and after the Report’s publication in July 1976. The Inspectorate felt itself to be under ‘continuing pressure’ from members of the Education Committee to produce more full inspection reports on schools, to ‘inform members about individual schools’, and to work towards ‘more monitoring of standards’.²¹² Birchenough reminded his colleagues that, even if they disagreed, there was ‘no doubt that members saw the Inspectorate as being

²⁰⁷ Mr A Radford, District Inspector for Hammersmith, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 24th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁰⁸ Mr Jaggard, District Inspector for Westminster and Camden (ibid).

²⁰⁹ Mr A Radford, District Inspector for Hammersmith (ibid).

²¹⁰ Michael Birchenough, Chief Inspector (ibid).

²¹¹ Mr Jaggard, District Inspector for Westminster and Camden (ibid).

²¹² Meetings of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 31st 1975, July 4th 1975, January 14th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

accountable for the state of education in schools',²¹³ and were expecting to be better informed in future; it was 'clear that the Schools Sub-Committee wanted to know what was going on in the schools'.²¹⁴

The problem of how to achieve improved communication and accountability in the system without inviting the 'disastrous onslaught of the press' continued to occupy inspectors.²¹⁵ It was noted that 'traditional forms of reporting now represented a problem; colleagues would have to consider how frankly they were able to report in a 'public' world'.²¹⁶ Fears that results of monitoring and information about individual schools would be used both by the press and by the Conservative opposition in the Education Committee made it difficult for inspectors to communicate openly about particular schools or even standards in general. The Inspectorate understood the need to respond to the Committee's pressure but were struggling, along with the Research and Statistics Group, to find a way forward that would 'shield individual schools' from outside criticism.²¹⁷

Problems with teachers persisted, although with less intensity and for different reasons than in the early years of the decade. By the middle of 1975, a 'considerable number' of schools were overstaffed.²¹⁸ By the end of 1976, there was a surplus of 759 teachers.²¹⁹ As teachers' organisations were committed to ensuring that their members' jobs were protected, and had expressed their 'intention not to accept redundancies', the Authority

²¹³ Dr M. Birchenough, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 31st 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²¹⁴ Miss M. Proctor, Senior Educational Psychologist, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate on monitoring, February 28th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²¹⁵ Dr M. Shipman, Director of Education Research and Statistics (ibid).

²¹⁶ Dr M. Birchenough, Conference with HMI, January 14th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²¹⁷ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate on monitoring, February 28th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²¹⁸ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 13th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²¹⁹ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, December 12th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

had a problem with overspending on staffing.²²⁰ This was in the context of a period of rapid inflation which necessitated 'no growth' budgets in ILEA,²²¹ a situation which had implications for several of the Inspectorate's pet projects such as the ETV service which had to be reduced.²²² The 'depressing... reality of cut backs in the present financial situation', and the staffing situation in the schools, gave the Inspectorate little opportunity to expand their in-service training provision for teachers.²²³ This was seen as an area in urgent need of continued growth as teacher 'calibre' continued to concern the inspectors, who while welcoming their radically improved ability to recruit from a large pool of applicants, deplored the legacy of the 'lean years of teacher recruitment'.²²⁴ In terms of primary language and literacy, levels of teacher expertise were still considered to be a pressing issue as inspectors worried about 'woolly and depressing confusion' in this area in many schools.²²⁵

Actions: what was the Inspectorate doing?

The Bullock Report formed the basis for many of the Inspectorate's initiatives on language and literacy from 1975 onwards. John Welch, Senior Inspector for English, commented that the Report was 'not exciting, but it provided a solid base from which to intensify support for the professional', and Pape noted that many of the Report's

²²⁰ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 13th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²²¹ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, December 10th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²²² Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 13th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²²³ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, November 4th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²²⁴ Mr G. Copley, District Inspector for Wandsworth, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 25th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²²⁵ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, November 4th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

proposals were already in place in ILEA.²²⁶ Goddard was unimpressed by the sometimes vague nature of the Report's recommendations and referred to its proposals on monitoring as its most useful contribution, 'the only bit of metal in a sea of plastic'.²²⁷ It was recognised that many of the Report's proposals would be limited in practice by the financial situation, and there was general concern that the Report should not 'fall to the ground' because of this. It was decided to send letters out to all schools along with a summary of the Report's main findings and advice on how individual schools could begin to implement its recommendations; it was 'important to start the schools thinking and talking', and a series of conferences for teachers on the Report was planned.²²⁸

The Bullock Report legitimised and supported a renewed focus among inspectors on tightening up language and literacy teaching in primary schools. To this end, it was recommended that each school should have a designated language and literacy specialist teacher and 'every school should devise a systematic policy' on language and literacy, as well as a written scheme of work.²²⁹ It was also recognised that primary heads might benefit from 'clear guidance' in this area, and plans were made to revise and extend the Guidelines published in *Contact* and publish them for schools in book form. Increased opportunities for the newly expanded team of primary inspectors to provide support for head teachers was welcomed.

In a move towards some standardisation of records, trials of record-keeping began in some schools, led by Goddard and her team. The need for some 'system of monitoring' was recognised, although it was noted that 'sedulous efforts will need to be made to convince teachers that monitoring can be used to their advantage' and anticipated that it

²²⁶ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 28th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ John Welch, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, October 10th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²²⁹ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, April 11th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

would take some time to develop a system which was acceptable to schools and protected teachers from blows to 'morale and expectations'.²³⁰ A system devised by the Research and Statistics Group was proposed which would involve sampling reading levels in 10% of primary schools while not being 'intended to discover standards in particular schools',²³¹ and Birchenough stressed that the Inspectorate should be involved in this process. The Inspectorate was beginning to move towards some system of self-assessment for schools, recognising that there was 'much value in encouraging schools to look at themselves critically'.²³² It also offered a way forward for the Inspectorate without a return to full inspections, which they were reluctant to pursue beyond the bare minimum. A system of self-assessment was to be trialled by Goddard and her team, although it was approached cautiously due to 'intense press interest' in the subject.²³³

The importance of in-service training continued to be stressed in 'efforts to develop' language and literacy expertise in schools.²³⁴ While it was recognised that ILEA had made great advances in this field, there was still much to be done, and the financial stringency which threatened this expansion was regretted. The Inspectorate continued to provide courses for teachers, and to liaise closely with teachers' centres and the CLPE. They continued to make programmes for ETV, although at a reduced rate due to budget cuts. In terms of teacher numbers, inspectors were instructed by the Education

²³⁰ John Welch, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, April 11th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²³¹ Vivian Pape, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 28th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²³² Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 14th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²³³ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, April 30th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²³⁴ Vivian Pape, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, April 11th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

Officer to 'proceed with utmost care', recognising that teachers were prepared to fight for smaller class sizes rather than redundancies, and that 'it must be clear that any staff movement was being made of a teacher's own volition'.²³⁵

Publications: what was the Inspectorate saying?

The dramatic improvement in teacher supply was reflected in several positive messages from inspectors in *Contact* magazine. Writing on the success of an exhibition at County Hall in the summer of 1975 entitled 'The pursuit of excellence in primary education', designed to showcase the best work produced by ILEA primary schools, Pape thanked those involved, and declared, 'I personally believe that a corner is being turned and that the future is thus full of hope for our London school children'.²³⁶ This optimism was echoed by Goddard, writing in *Contact* in her new role as Staff Inspector of Primary Education (succeeding Pape). She summarised current developments in ILEA primary schools, saying 'there are now many strongly favourable factors: smaller classes, improved pay for teachers, a sharp decline in teachers changing schools, and the Authority's enhanced ability to recruit – and to retain – teachers of high quality'.²³⁷

As part of their drive to attract the brightest and best teachers to London primary schools, in 1975 the Inspectorate published a pamphlet entitled '*Come and teach in inner London*' (ILEA, 1975a). Filled with photographs of smiling children, busy teachers, and London landmarks and resources, the tone was positive and confident. Claiming that 'we can offer excellent prospects to new teachers, whatever their professional interests may be. We can also deploy very large resources to improve and enrich our children's education.' It listed a wealth of initiatives such as ETV, *Contact*, teacher centres and libraries, and

²³⁵ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 13th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²³⁶ *Contact*, 4 (10), June 27th 1975.

²³⁷ *Contact*, 4 (25), January 23rd 1976.

stressed the generosity of 'extensive' in-service training provision: 'we run literally hundreds of lectures and classes for teachers every year'. It also stressed that 'many London schools are in the forefront of recent primary curriculum developments', and that working in these schools offered 'excellent opportunities for further training and promotion' (ibid).

There was no direct mention of the William Tyndale crisis or the Auld Report in any Inspectorate publications. Apart from some references in *Contact* to the 'quite disproportionate publicity' accorded to 'problems that beset the service', and the 'bad publicity at present being given to our schools',²³⁸ there was nothing that referred to the firestorm raging in the national media during the period. In fact, William Tyndale was only mentioned in *Contact* several years later in an article written by teachers to mark publication of its 200th issue, which noted the magazine's 'ostrich-like qualities' as 'an event that shook the educational world was greeted by a thunderous silence by the ILEA's journal'.²³⁹

In May 1976 the Inspectorate submitted a report to the Education Committee entitled *The Authority's Inspectorate: the present position and future developments* (ILEA, 1976a). The report, which had been 'urgently' requested by the Authority's leader, Ashley Bramall, was written by the Chief Inspector and discussed at a meeting of the whole Inspectorate.²⁴⁰ Birchenough used the opportunity to emphasise the dual role of inspectors ('to advise members and officers of the Authority' and 'to give a service to the staff of Authority schools'), and to note that this 'division is not clear cut'. He resisted perceived pressure from Education Committee members to focus more intensely on inspecting and reporting on schools, reminding members that 'a balance between the

²³⁸ Ashley Bramall, Leader of ILEA, *Contact*, 4 (26), January 30th 1976.

²³⁹ *Contact*, 7 (7), June 9th 1978.

²⁴⁰ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, March 26th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

two major kinds of activity - inspection and support - is necessary if the inspectors are to find their work satisfying', and that 'inspectors have all been successful teachers who enjoyed their work and they value activities which allow them to feel that they are being constructive'. He also noted the time limitations imposed by a heavy workload which constituted 'a real risk that they will not get into schools as much as they should'.

Birchenough outlined the priorities of the Inspectorate as being the establishment of continuous self-assessment for schools and more school-based in-service training. He noted that the increased primary team would be able to make more regular reports to the Schools Sub-Committee. There were no major changes in the stated role of the Inspectorate since a similar report in 1965 (ILEA, 1965a), but there was a shift of emphasis away from the professional development of the individual teacher, and towards whole school improvement and increased clarity and uniformity of expectation.

Birchenough also allowed himself to express optimism despite the difficult circumstances of the report's production: 'the outlook is hopeful: there is much greater stability of staffing and quality is probably improving overall', 'teacher morale seems to be improving generally' and 'the Inspectorate is now in a good position to help solve the problems which exist' (Birchenough, 1976).

Phase 3, 1977-79. 'Take stock and plan for the future'²⁴¹

Situation

The final years of the 1970s saw the population of inner London continue to fall, a situation which having provided the Authority with much needed breathing space and opportunities for development in schools, also meant increased unit costs, proportionately high expenditure on teachers, and difficulties with forward financial

²⁴¹ ILEA (1977a) *Keeping the school under review: a method of self-assessment for schools devised by the ILEA Inspectorate*. London: ILEA.

planning (Newsam, 1977: 42). By 1980, ILEA had the lowest teacher pupil ratio in the country, and it was continuing to drop (HMI, 1980: 6). Despite falling inflation and the promise of revenue from North Sea oil which encouraged some to conclude that 'Britain seemed to be turning a corner' by 1978, LEA finances continued to be tight (Sandbrook, 2012: 697). Admitting that the earlier part of the decade had seen the Authority facing 'some very tough issues', the Education Officer Peter Newsam met with the Inspectorate in the autumn of 1978 to outline his vision of the five fundamental issues now confronting ILEA.²⁴² Top of the list was the need to 'develop a correct approach' to 'multi-ethnic education' in schools. This was followed by a need to 'enliven' primary schools, to track the achievement of minority groups in school and address any discrepancies, to build on secondary school reorganisation, and to invest more in further and higher education.

The Authority was increasingly prioritising the issue of how to successfully integrate and educate the immigrant communities of inner London. The 'significant and sudden change' in the demographic since the late 1960s needed to be addressed by schools. The Race Relations Act of 1976 emphasised 'multi-cultural education' (Raynor & Harris, 1977: 2), with Clause 71 charging local authorities with a duty to 'eliminate unlawful racial discrimination', and 'to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups' (HMSO, 1976: 47). Efforts in this direction were lent added urgency by outbreaks of racist violence on the streets of London in the period, and the visibility of the National Front (Beckett, 2009: 447-448; Sandbrook, 2012: 588-589).

The end of the decade saw changes in academic thinking about schooling and the inner-city. An Open University course on 'urban education' published in 1977 noted that in 'only four years since the previous course was prepared', the content had shifted

²⁴² Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, October 20th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

decisively away from a discourse of crisis, urban poverty, Educational Priority Areas and high teacher turnover, to an emphasis on possible ways forward for multi-cultural education, initiatives against racism, implications of financial cutbacks in education, and the cultural dislocation experienced in the rapidly changing population of the inner city (Raynor & Harris, 1977: 1-2). Teachers in inner-city schools were urged not to succumb to 'self-indulgent despair' (Widlake, 1980: 115), particularly as studies such as the 'Fifteen thousand hours' survey on secondary schools concluded that the wide variation in achievement between schools with similar intakes strongly suggested that effective schools 'can be a power for the good' (Rutter, 1980: 146; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, & Ouston, 1979).

Meeting minutes: problems and possibilities

The meetings of the Inspectorate during this period were characterised by an increasingly optimistic 'can-do' approach. Pressure from the Authority was experienced in the ongoing need for 'financial stringency', particularly in the context of 'growing criticism of costs' from the press and Conservative opposition members of the Education Committee.²⁴³ The Authority agreed that it would work to maintain existing levels of resource provision, but would have to be disciplined about any increases in expenditure. Calls for more full inspections, in order to better inform Education Committee members about the state of schools and deflect criticism, continued. These were passed on to inspectors by the Chief Inspector, who acknowledged that this 'resurgence of pressure... may not be welcome'.²⁴⁴

The Inspectorate continued to work in the context of 'extreme teacher sensitivity' about their role and initiatives, particularly in the areas of testing, moderation, inspection, and

²⁴³ Meetings of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 28th 1977 and February 24th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁴⁴ Michael Birchenough, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 13th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

record-keeping.²⁴⁵ Teaching unions and organisations advised their members on areas such as ‘the role of advisers’, warning inspectors that ‘schools would be extremely sensitive’, and ‘teachers were very sensitive to the reasons why they were being looked at’.²⁴⁶ The end of the decade was characterised by several strikes and disputes by teaching unions over issues such as proposed school closure, and voluntary activities (these were accompanied by occasional break-outs of pupil strike action, for example students ‘ostensibly protesting against the lack of a hot meal... roving in and around County Hall’).²⁴⁷ Teacher opposition did have an impact on some initiatives. Goddard’s working party report on primary school record-keeping ‘met with strongly organised opposition from teaching unions’ who had ‘expressed their concern in writing’ to the Education Officer.²⁴⁸ The working party was temporarily disbanded, although it reconvened in the autumn.

This period also saw inspectors engaging with signals from central government that it might be preparing to influence what happened in schools. A discussion on the government’s green paper, *Education in schools: a consultative document* (DES, 1977) noted that this had been ‘produced against increasing public concern about standards and the gathering concern about the question of accountability’,²⁴⁹ and had not been well received by teaching unions as teachers feared that it ‘presaged some vague but sinister control’.²⁵⁰ The document was seen as ‘a natural development from the Great Debate’, and inspectors commented that ‘existence of central control would mean a diminution in

²⁴⁵ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, December 15th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁴⁶ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 13th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁴⁷ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, March 17th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁴⁸ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, April 21st 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁴⁹ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 23rd 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁵⁰ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 13th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

the freedom of schools to pursue their own individual education policies' and 'should not be pressed too far'.²⁵¹ The Taylor Committee's report on school management, which gave more powers to governors, was greeted with some anxiety (DES, 1977a).

Inspectors feared that 'governors would be in the position of standing between the head and the ILEA', had 'strong misgivings over the existence of governors with authority but without accountability', and were 'fearful of the effect of ill-directed interference in primary schools, many of which were in a delicate state'.²⁵²

The Inspectorate devoted time to discussing problems in the attitudes of schools to 'multi-racial education'. Inspectors identified two 'apparently polarised' approaches in schools, either rapid assimilation or the conservation of difference. It was recognised that the assimilationist approach, 'very firmly held in many schools' could be 'simplistic', 'blind to many realities' and could damage the 'cultural identity' of children. However, inspectors were divided over the extent to which cultural identity should be preserved and encouraged, particularly in areas of language teaching where 'a massive problem of dealing with West Indian dialects' remained unresolved.²⁵³ Language teaching in general remained an area of concern for inspectors, particularly in the context of a 'multiplicity of agencies' offering publications and teaching materials.²⁵⁴ Schools were criticised for having 'confused and individual policies', and a need for firmer guidelines to ensure consistency was expressed.²⁵⁵

The expansion of the primary team was complete by early 1977 and Goddard declared herself 'very pleased' with her new colleagues.²⁵⁶ This was accompanied by expansion

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, October 21st 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁵³ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 25th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁵⁴ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, November 25th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Nora Goddard, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 25th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

in other areas of the Inspectorate. In 1978, 117 inspectors appeared on the Authority's list, an increase of around 30 since the start of the decade (ILEA, 1970-78). Meeting minutes show the inspectors working hard to shape their own role, and able to achieve more in this regard than during the difficult years of the early seventies. Their concern to 'restate the Inspectorate's philosophy and function' reflected a confidence that the initiatives they had in mind were appropriate and achievable.²⁵⁷ The extra teachers 'which London had retained in spite of the shrinking rolls' could be used as a resource to improve the quality of teaching, boost teacher morale, and allow the Inspectorate to 'nudge forward' primary school practice.²⁵⁸

Action: what was the Inspectorate doing?

The last years of the decade saw the Inspectorate working to increase their influence in primary schools on their own terms. This remained something of a balancing act reflecting the Inspectorate's dual role. Inspectors had to be seen to respond to pressure passed on to them from members of the Education Committee, while at the same time avoiding taking action which would antagonise teachers and their unions. Birchenough reminded inspectors that 'the proposals for the present scale of full inspection represent a minimum credible response to the mounting pressure for accountability', and some full inspections were resumed.²⁵⁹ However, inspectors were still able to insist that these should mostly consist of recommendations rather than judgments.²⁶⁰ The Education Officer, Peter Newsam, ensured that regular meetings were established between district inspectors and education officers in an effort to improve the efficacy of the link between

²⁵⁷ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, February 25th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁵⁸ Nora Goddard, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, April 27th 1979 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁵⁹ Michael Birchenough, Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 13th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁶⁰ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, June 6th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

the schools and County Hall, and inspectors spent more time actively keeping Education Committee members informed about developments in schools.²⁶¹

The main focus of the Inspectorate in this period remained the provision of in-service training for teachers, the development of material for schools, finding a way forward to monitor school performance without upsetting teachers, and encouraging schools to develop policies on language and literacy, and on multi-cultural education. Some of their work was limited by financial factors; for example, the ETV service was forced to abandon weekly transmissions, focusing instead on building up a stock of tapes for training purposes.²⁶² Working parties were established to trial various initiatives in schools, focusing on record-keeping and self-assessment, which was increasingly seen as offering a way of combining autonomy for schools with some measure of accountability. The Inspectorate was also occupied with managing staffing levels in primary schools through trying to reduce the numbers of applicants (a direct turnaround from the first years of the decade), and persuading teachers to move between schools in an effort to avoid any school closures or redundancies. Over 200 teachers were moved in 1977, and inspectors congratulated themselves that confrontation with teaching unions had mostly been avoided.²⁶³

Pilot courses for teachers responsible for language in their school were trialled by inspectors working with CLPE staff and extended in 1978. The Inspectorate displayed a confidence that it could, and should, work proactively with primary schools to improve language and literacy teaching by steering it in the particular direction recommended by the guidelines. By expecting that schools develop language and literacy policies and supporting them in achieving this through published guidelines, visits, and in-service

²⁶¹ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 28th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁶² Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 27th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

²⁶³ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, September 23rd 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

training,²⁶⁴ inspectors were able to exert influence on the direction of primary school teaching, and by 1979 'most schools (had) produced comprehensive statements' on language and literacy (ILEA, 1979a: 1).

Publications: what was the Inspectorate saying?

Writing in *Contact* at the beginning of 1977, Birchenough described the Inspectorate's role to teachers and outlined how they would be working with schools in future (Birchenough, 1977). He welcomed the recruitment of the new primary team under Goddard, and described their role in 'visiting and helping new teachers, giving particular support to newly appointed heads, promoting continuity... helping to plan and provide curriculum development and in-service education' for teachers. The new primary inspectors would also work hard to 'build up knowledge' of ILEA primary schools through frequent visits. He reminded teachers that 'for many years, inspectors have used full inspections... to assess the quality of education in schools', and discussed ongoing trials of school self-assessment in relation to this, implying that it was an alternative to full inspections and as such had been actively sought by schools.

Goddard made the same point when she wrote an article on 'the current scene' in primary education (Goddard, 1977). She referred to the pressure of 'critical scrutiny by the general public', parents, secondary schools, and the Great Debate. Reassuring teachers that good practice in primary schools was increasing, she reminded them that the next stage was to encourage schools to be self-critical, a process which would be aided by their use of annual record-keeping and diagnostic testing. The guidelines currently being produced by the Inspectorate would help with both parts of this process, 'so that the next

²⁶⁴ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, May 13th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/2).

stage for primary teachers is one of renewed confidence and increased professional skill'. In terms of pedagogy, she continued to emphasise a child-centred approach as being the most effective way of working with London children, and a commitment to the importance of spoken language for young children was reinforced by Phyllis Mitchell in an article on the importance of play in the early years (Mitchell, 1978).

Discussing the HMI survey, *Primary Education in England*, (DES, 1978), Goddard reassured teachers that it should go some way to dispelling public anxiety over neglect of the 3Rs. Instead, it supported her own view that reading schemes were being overemphasised in schools, and there should be more reading for pleasure and meaning. She defended ILEA schools against criticism, reminding teachers, in an echo of the early years of the decade, of the challenges they faced: 'this is not to make excuses. It is to state facts.' She also discussed ILEA's move towards a system of schools-based in-service training, rather than the disruptive (and expensive) removal of individual teachers to attend courses (Goddard, 1977).

In 1977 the Inspectorate published a bright orange pamphlet entitled *Keeping the school under review* (ILEA, 1977a). In its foreword, the Deputy Chief Inspector, Guy Rogers, wrote, 'now that we have reached a point of greater stability of staffing and shortages are being overcome it is easier to take stock and plan for the future'. He stressed that this 'basis for the development of a school's own form of self-assessment' 'originated in a discussion between the Chief Inspector and some head teachers', and had been produced by inspectors working alongside heads. There were reassurances that this was in no way prescriptive; it was 'for individual schools to elaborate on any of the suggested sections'. However, it was stressed that self-assessment would be most effective when discussed with inspectors 'so that they (schools) may have the benefit of an external viewpoint to put beside their own'.

The pamphlet went on to list fourteen headings with accompanying questions for the school to consider. For example, in a section on 'schemes of work': Does the school use these? In which areas? Produced by whom? Supported by whom? How is planning carried out? Are there opportunities for in-service training? And on 'attainment' it asked, Does the school keep records? Can it identify common patterns? Does this contribute to teachers' knowledge of children? Are standardised English and maths tests used? Where does information gathered from testing and record keeping go? The final heading, entitled 'the acid test!', asked the teacher whether they would send their own children to the school, or recommend working there to colleagues. The emphasis was on developing a framework for school self-evaluation, which would not be explicitly linked to inspection, but would be directed by the staff as a whole (Moon, 1995: 163).

At the beginning of 1979, Nora Goddard and John Welch alerted teachers that a copy of *Language in the Primary School* was on its way to all schools.²⁶⁵ They described the content as 'the result of many hours of discussion by a small group of inspectors', and stressed that it was 'guidelines, not prescriptions' on 'how we might refine our practice'. The guidelines would be issued with accompanying booklets written by individual inspectors and CLPE staff, 'a series of personal statements written to amplify issues'.²⁶⁶

Language in the Primary School was published as a book of curriculum guidelines, the first in a 'series being prepared by the ILEA Inspectorate', written by Nora Goddard, Phyllis Mitchell, Chris Crowest, and Mr N Geddes from the primary inspector team, and John Welch from the English team (ILEA, 1979a). In the foreword written on the front inside cover, Birchenough assured teachers that 'these papers offer suggestions... they are not intended to be prescriptive. The aim is to provide a basis for discussion by teachers who will be able to use them in the ways suitable to their own particular

²⁶⁵ *Contact*, 7 (24), January 26th 1979.

²⁶⁶ The inspector Phyllis Mitchell wrote one on spoken language, and Moira McKenzie, warden of the CLPE produced one on reading, discussed in the next chapter.

circumstances'. This was stressed again in the introduction by Goddard and Welch, who hoped that the guidelines would be discussed in schools and teachers' centres, and pointed out that there was 'no one way' to teach language and literacy, which would vary according to individual teachers, schools, and children.

While 'different methods' were allowed for in theory, the guidelines recommended a child-centred approach to language and literacy, and stressed that it was 'important for a school to arrive at a general agreement of its policy' to ensure continuity. The central importance of the child's own language experience was highlighted throughout the book; 'perhaps the most consistent theme... is that children's use of language should be developed from their everyday experience as a central and integrated part of the primary curriculum'. Ideally, both reading and writing should 'arise naturally from the classroom activities' rather than being 'imposed' by a teacher. For early readers 'the most effective and satisfying reading material is often their own talk, written down by the teacher'. The *Breakthrough to literacy* approach was recommended, and the book featured photographs of children using its sentence-makers and word cards. The guidelines included extensive lists of references and 'further reading' at the end of each section, pointing teachers in the direction of academic texts and reports as well as practical manuals which could support their practice.

Conclusion

In positioning the work of the ILEA Inspectorate firmly within the particularities of time and place, I have tried to demonstrate how their action was influenced by situation.

Looking in some detail at such 'events and specifics' allows us to trace these 'situational' explanations in ways which resonate with the lived experience of human agency (Rury, 2006: 325). We can see how the inspectors' understandings of role, possibility and constraint affected their work at different times. The flexible and often ambiguous nature

of their role allowed the Inspectorate some space in which to formulate a response to particular circumstances. We can see how this space was bounded differently at different times by factors which included the expertise, determination and capabilities of individual inspectors, as well as pressures from the Education Committee, teachers, the city itself and the children entering the classroom, national government and the press. All of this, and more, affected the work of the Inspectorate, and 'guided the possibility of conduct' (Foucault, 1982: 789).

Within this shifting network of boundaries, inspectors worked to develop a space in which they could work towards improving the teaching of language and literacy in London primary schools. We have seen how at times this seemed to be a formidable task. But even when space felt most tightly constrained, inspectors were still able to make choices, both individually and as a group. We can see Nora Goddard, insisting that positive changes could be made in schools despite the turbulence of the staffing situation in 1970.²⁶⁷ We can see Vivian Pape urging teachers to 'accept the challenge' of their work, even while privately succumbing to moments of despair, and defending himself against accusations of 'whistling to keep one's spirits up' by declaring that 'to whistle is better than to weep'.²⁶⁸ We can also see how quickly the Inspectorate moved to exploit new possibilities which opened up from 1975, despite the very public collapse of William Tyndale. Throughout the decade, inspectors were defining their role in terms of potential for action as well as in the light of obstacles.

When we think of the inspectors' work in terms of power, we must be careful to resist assumptions based on post-OFSTED understandings of what it means to be 'an inspector'. While we have seen that the expertise and status of ILEA inspectors privileged their discourse, both with teachers and with the Education Committee, they

²⁶⁷ Meeting of members of the ILEA Inspectorate, January 5th 1970 (London Metropolitan Archives, ILEA 1/03/1).

²⁶⁸ *Contact*, 3 (10), September 6th 1974.

had little direct influence over schools. Certainly the Inspectorate produced policy in the form of guidelines, but again, we must be careful not to assume that this 'policy' was a direct vehicle of ILEA power. Every text produced by the Inspectorate allowed for a range of responses, including refusal, non-action, partial action or adjustment (Scott, 2000: 19); these possibilities were explicitly stated with the continual repetition over the decade that guidelines were merely 'offered for use'. Thus that discursive power exercised by the Inspectorate did not imply direct dominance of teachers, but was instead more subtly expressed in a joint dance of acknowledged professionalism between inspectors, teachers and the Authority.

This lack of influence should not be misunderstood as a measure of weakness. It was in fact a feature of relationships between the constituent parts of the education system at the time. The extent to which inspectors saw their work as essentially the same as that of teachers and the Authority as a whole is striking. While there were tensions between constituent parts of the ILEA machine, there was also a powerful sense of united purpose, underlined by the frequent use of the word 'we' in Inspectorate publications for teachers. Even when the Inspectorate began to take a more direct approach to offering guidance to schools, the intertextuality of its publications assumed an academic readership and a professional ability among teachers to work directly with research findings, there was no distance between those texts read by the inspectors and those felt suitable for teachers.

If we situate inspectors within the models of Ball's 'structures of change' or Bernstein's recontextualising fields, we are immediately confronted with category slippage, not merely in the interconnected relationships between inspectors, teachers, and the Authority, but also within the identities of individual inspectors. The picture becomes more complicated as it includes specifics of time, place and situation. Altering our focus to allow for these details forces us to confront the complicated human reality of

individuals at work, shaping their approach in their own present by using the space which seemed to be available to them. This sense of complexity and ambiguity in the Inspectorate's work illustrates a defining feature of its function. And once we have spent time using the data to consider the actions of these individuals, and how they were enabled or frustrated by their surrounding relationships and influences, it is difficult to retreat back to the reductive clarity of treating 'the Inspectorate' as just another predictable unit in the education machine.

Chapter 7

The Centre for Language in Primary Education: developing the professional teacher

Introduction

In this chapter I consider how traces left behind by the operation of the Centre for Language in Primary Education (CLPE) can help us to understand Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in literacy for primary school teachers in 1970s London. I investigate how the Centre worked to shape and disseminate a 'best practice' discourse, and ask how this can help us to understand how CPD, the academic subject community, classroom pedagogy, and teachers' professional identity operated and interacted in a period very different from our own.

I begin by recognising the centrality of my own engagement with the CLPE, an institution which still resonates with my work as a literacy teacher (Fulbrook, 2002: 187; Steedman, 2001: 77). I describe the data which I will use to ask and answer key questions about the Centre's operation over the course of the 1970s. I frame the Centre in two ways, first within its local and national context by considering it as it was perceived and represented within ILEA and beyond during the 1970s, and then within the structure of Bernstein's theoretical construct of recontextualisation. I argue that looking at the CLPE embedded in the complex, concrete realities of its actual situation and also considering it in more structural terms gives me scope as a historian to move between the particular and the general.

Rather than seeking to produce a definitive chronological description of the CLPE, I take four sources and use these to consider various aspects of the Centre's operation during the 1970s:

1. *The expert voice.* I consider a booklet on reading produced by the CLPE's warden Moira McKenzie in 1979. What was the nature of her 'expert' status? How did she carry out her work in the space available to her? What were her core messages to teachers? I examine how McKenzie and her colleagues worked to shape professional practice and what this can tell us about wider understandings of teacher identity and CPD at the end of the 1970s.
2. *The academic sources.* I study three reviews, written by primary teachers in 1975, of the 'long courses' for teachers designed and managed by the CLPE. What were the central features of these courses? Who was involved in their design and implementation? On what was the authority of their content founded? I consider the connections between the CLPE, the academic sources in which its practice was rooted, and the CPD it offered to teachers.
3. *The teaching materials.* I discuss the *Breakthrough to Literacy* teaching materials consistently recommended by CLPE staff over the course of the 1970s. Where did these originate and what did they involve? What would this version of 'best practice' language and literacy teaching look like in action? What do the materials and the CLPE's enthusiasm for them tell us about contemporary constructions of children as learners and the role of their teachers?
4. *The professional teacher.* Reflecting on a photograph of the CLPE library, taken around 1975, I explore the nature of the relationship between the Centre and those teachers with whom it worked. How did CLPE staff understand their needs? How did they work to address these? And what does the nature of the CLPE's CPD provision tell us about teacher professionalism in the 1970s?

In conclusion, I argue that by critically examining, rather than taking for granted, concepts such as ‘the expert’, ‘the latest in educational theory’, ‘best practice in the classroom’, and ‘the professional teacher’, we can move towards a more complex and productive understanding of the relationship between educational research, CPD, and the teacher in a particular place and time.

Thinking about CLPE

Unlike the Bullock Committee, the ILEA Education Committee, and the ILEA Inspectorate, the CLPE has occupied a significant place in my own professional life. In its present-day incarnation as ‘an independent charity that promotes the effective teaching of children’s literacy’ (CLPE, 2015), it functions as a useful resource for my literacy work in school, particularly through its publication of core booklists for each year group and through its CPD provision. The CLPE swapped the ‘language’ in its title for ‘literacy’ in 2002 when it ceased to be part of Southwark Council and became a charity. My most direct involvement with the Centre, in its current premises at Webber Street near Waterloo, was between 2000 and 2001 when I attended the ‘Role of the English Coordinator’ course which consisted of ten whole-day sessions at the Centre spread over two terms. Those files, course materials, written assignments and reports which have survived on my bookshelves offer a tangible reminder of the ways in which the terrain of literacy teaching has shifted over the course of my own career. The title of my final course presentation was ‘Beyond the Literacy Hour’, a plea for the continuation of drama, book-making and the reading of extended texts in the context of the National Literacy Strategy, complete with acetate print-outs from a pre-Power Point era. I still have several copies of the CLPE magazine *Language Matters*, to which I contributed a book review. Their pages echo with half-forgotten buzzwords and acronyms, ‘plenaries’, ‘foundation stage stepping stones’, ‘QCA guidelines’, the DfEE, TTA, and the NLS.

Larger and glossier than its 1970s predecessor, the magazine ceased publication in 2002.²⁶⁹

Personal reminiscences aside, the CLPE resonated from the outset as a space familiar to me as a teacher, both in relation to my own classroom practice, and to my mentoring and coordinating work with colleagues. While the council chambers of County Hall where ILEA's Education Committee met are alien to me as a teacher, as are the debates and political point-scoring of its members, the CLPE, even in its 1970s incarnation, seems familiar. Its placement and operation within the context of LEA-controlled teacher centres, a rapidly expanding feature of CPD during the 1960s and 70s (Crook, 2011: 6; Cunningham, 2002: 226; Lowe, 2007: 48), echoes my own lived experience as a teacher which has seen me on both the receiving and delivering end of a great deal of CPD through attending courses, meeting with advisers, reading research findings, joining seminars and conferences, and participating in staff in-service training sessions. This 'personal relation of historians to their sources' (Burke & Cunningham, 2011: 526, 540) complicates my work as a historian by inevitably placing me in a parallel role, either as the teacher seeking 'expert' advice on practice, or as someone seeking to influence the practice of other, less experienced teachers.

The CLPE is also the agency which brings me closest to the lived experience of the teacher. While I have chosen to focus my attention on the function and operation of advice on literacy teaching rather than its practice, the closer I get as a researcher to the door of the classroom the more I can empathise with the efforts of those who worked in its domain. The staff of the CLPE were working with teachers on a daily basis, on their courses, in their resource library and in schools. Their publications were addressed to

²⁶⁹ A selection of articles from the magazine was published in 2003: CLPE, Ed. (2003). *The best of Language Matters*. London, CLPE.

teachers, magazine articles, guidelines, video training and course outlines all sought to engage with working practitioners in improving outcomes for the children they taught.

While the work of the Bullock Committee, the Education Committee and the Inspectorate all influenced the actions of teachers, the CLPE had the most direct concern with the teaching of language and literacy in the primary classroom. It is also the organisation that comes closest to surviving the educational upheavals of the past 40 years, albeit in altered form, and serves as a living reminder of the 'constancy' as well as change in educational issues (Cuban, 1993; Robinson, 2014: 35) as the teacher in me recognises similarities as well as differences in both the form and the content of its advice. Immersing myself in the CLPE of the 1970s is an experience rather like looking at childhood photographs of an adult friend; some of its features can be traced and recognised despite the transformations effected by time and experience.

The CLPE data

What remains in the present of the work done by the CLPE in the 1970s? The Centre has left behind traces of its operation in various forms, reflecting its various functions. In its concern with the articulation and promulgation of particular approaches to the teaching of language and literacy, the CLPE published a range of written texts. These included articles by CLPE staff in its own magazine *Language Matters* and in the ILEA magazine *Contact*, as well as books and pamphlets for teachers offering guidance and suggestions on language and literacy teaching (McKenzie, 1979; McKenzie & Warlow, 1977; Warlow, 1979). Visual representations of 'good practice' also featured strongly in CLPE's output; the pages of *Language Matters* and other publications include numerous photographs of children and teachers busily engaged in language and literacy activity, along with pictures of children's work and classroom resources in action. The Centre was involved in the production of several in-service training films for the ILEA ETV

service, and these contain footage of teachers working with children on reading and writing activities along with commentary by CLPE staff. This published output of the Centre survives on pages and videotape on the shelves and in the store rooms of the Institute of Education library.

Records of the Centre's work survive in a variety of other published sources. Course lists detailing the Centre's termly programmes were published in *Contact*, as were periodic reminders for teachers of its resources and opening hours. Descriptions of the Centre's work appear in ILEA Education Committee reports and in its evidence to the Bullock Committee. Publications on literacy and language for teachers produced by the ILEA Inspectorate also contain references to the Centre, and CLPE staff are acknowledged for working alongside inspectors on their guidelines (ILEA, 1979a), as well as writing their own personal contributions (McKenzie, 1979).

Individual publications by Centre staff also survive. The CLPE's first warden, David Mackay, co-authored the Schools Council-funded programme in linguistics and English teaching which was to form the basis of the *Breakthrough to Literacy* teaching materials, publishing a report on his research, several editions of the teachers' manual, papers given at conferences, and a book for parents on helping their child to read (Mackay, 1971; Mackay & Simo, 1976; Mackay & Thompson, 1968; Mackay, Thompson, & Schaub, 1970). Moira McKenzie, CLPE's second Warden, also published books and papers on literacy and 'informal education' (McKenzie, 1975, 1977c; McKenzie & Kernig, 1975), and the CLPE lecturer, Aidan Warlow, co-edited an influential collection of essays on children's reading, *The Cool Web* (Meek, Warlow, & Barton, 1977).

Two files on the CLPE in the 1970s are held in the London Metropolitan Archives. These cardboard folders contain pages of type-written material which is likely to have been collected by Richard Mainwood, the Principal Organiser of Library Services at ILEA, who also served on the CLPE Steering Committee. This includes correspondence on the

establishment of the Centre between the warden, the Inspectorate and ILEA library staff, as well as draft notes and reports on the Centre's aims and functions, invitations, flyers and programmes for its exhibitions, open days and lectures, course lists, and layout plans for the CLPE library. The folders also contain minutes from the CLPE Steering Committee meetings, held every three months or so, although with a long gap between Mackay's departure at the end of 1972 and the appointment of Mackenzie in the summer of 1974. These minutes list Steering Committee members, and note the content of their discussions, which were mostly summaries of the Centre's recent activities and plans for future initiatives.

Taken together, these surviving traces give us insight into the discourse and operation of the Centre over the course of the 1970s. In writing about this data after such a long process of research, I have resisted the pull of detail and narrative which would have led me to produce an exhaustive (and for the reader, probably exhausting) account of the CLPE. Initially I looked for ways to shape an alternative telling of the CLPE story by problematizing the account through identifying areas of tension and disagreement in the data at particular periods of time. However, I found these attempts at best unproductive and at worst misleading as the sources resisted my efforts to categorise them into alternative versions of events. In contrast to the tensions of the Bullock Committee, the political point-scoring of the Education Committee, and the anguished private meetings of the Inspectorate, the CLPE data suggests a far less troubled and more coherent organisation. There were certainly practical problems to deal with, such as the wrangling with County Hall over funding for library staff, the delayed building works which forced the cancellation of many courses between 1972 and 1974, and the difficulty in finding a permanent replacement for Mackay after his resignation at the end of 1972. These frustrations occupy time in the Steering Committee meetings, but provoke little recorded disagreement among members. In fact the impression produced by the CLPE data is of

an organisation working, albeit within often trying limits of funding and time, towards remarkably consistent and settled goals over the course of the 1970s.

Which values and interests are suggested by those 'textual devices' which were produced by the Centre's work (McCulloch, 2011: 79)? What particular 'point of view' informed the production and publication of its photographs and films (Burke, 2001: 19)? The material traces left behind by the operation of the CLPE were all produced by people at work. Who were they, what did they know, how did they operate and what were they trying to achieve? In looking at their creations I am trying to get behind the blank face of the institution to the people who were coming into work each morning, drafting articles for *Language Matters*, giving lectures, attending courses, booking speakers, and demonstrating classroom materials. What did working at/for the CLPE imply? In the next section I consider two ways of framing the Centre's operation, first within the particular context of its contemporary location, and then in terms of a broader theory of educational structure and operation.

Framing the CLPE: the Centre in its contemporary context

As I outlined in the background chapter, the CLPE was established by ILEA in the wake of the publication of its literacy survey in 1969 which appeared to show that attainment in reading among London school children was significantly lower than national levels. In the Education Committee, the possibility of 'establishing a centre' where teachers could access resources and expert advice was discussed (ILEA, 1969a), and in 1971 the Centre was launched. In its evidence to the Bullock Committee the Authority listed the founding of the CLPE as confirmation of action taken as a result of the Literacy Survey, stating that 'the purpose of the centre is to provide facilities and meet the needs of teachers faced with the great diversity of problems which are brought together in the term 'literacy' (ILEA, 1972a: 14).

The CLPE was established and developed by ILEA in the context of increased national provision of teachers' centres and their emergence as a focus for professional development (Lowe, 2007: 42; Robinson, 2014: 29; Simpson, 1998: 96). Anxiety expressed by teaching unions, educationalists and politicians over patchy and inadequate initial teacher training (ITT) led to calls for 'the attention of a committee' on the subject, particularly in regard to the teaching of reading (Burgess, 1971; Cane, 1969; McBride, 1967). There were widely published calls for improvements in the depth and content of ITT, more support for teachers in their probationary year, and increased opportunities for CPD throughout the span of a teacher's career (Taylor & Dale, 1971; University of London, 1971). The James Committee was appointed by Thatcher in 1970 and its report was published in 1972. Setting out a vision which incorporated a first 'cycle' of ITT, a second 'cycle' of probationary year training, and a third 'cycle' of CPD, it accorded priority to the third cycle of training for teachers, and called for the expansion of 'professional centres', run by LEAs, which should be established as a 'national network' to provide for 'the continued education and training of teachers' (DES, 1972b: 107-108).

The James Report emphasised that primary teachers would 'need to continue to improve their understanding and competence in the language arts' and saw teachers' centres as crucial to this (ibid: 7). Its recommendations were accepted and reiterated in the government White Paper, *Education: a framework for expansion* (DES, 1972a). The Bullock Report referred to this recommendation (DES, 1975: 331) and suggested that 'teachers in every authority should have access to a language/reading centre' (ibid: 552). In setting up and funding the CLPE, ILEA was thus both reacting to perceived problems with literacy attainment in London primary schools, and developing support and training for teachers in line with national expectations. By the 1970s, most LEAs were running some courses on literacy and had established a range of teachers' centres although the

extent and quality of provision varied widely (Goodacre, 1974; Robinson, 2014: 85; Simpson, 1998: 97).

During the 1970s ILEA was seen as a leading force in curriculum and professional development at national level, and was 'highly regarded' for its work with teachers (Cunningham, 2012: 110). References to the CLPE in other ILEA data sets reflect the Authority's pride in the establishment of this flagship enterprise. It was described in ILEA's evidence to the Bullock Committee as an example of what could be achieved by an LEA in 'meeting the problems of the development of language and literacy' in its primary schools (ILEA, 1972a: 15), and an 'account' of its work, which included several pages on its origins and aims, organisation, summary of activities, diagrams of staffing and forecast of future developments was circulated to members of the Bullock Committee.²⁷⁰

An ILEA report on teachers' centres in 1972 noted that 'the work of the centres has increased and continues to expand' in line with 'the general expansion of the Authority's provision for the further training of serving teachers', and the following year the CLPE was described as offering the largest provision of all 40 of the Authority's centres.²⁷¹ The booklet, *Come and teach in inner London*, produced by the ILEA Inspectorate, emphasised the generous and supportive provision of teachers' centres by the 'biggest Education Authority in the country', and illustrated this with a photograph of the CLPE library (ILEA, 1975a: 10). The status of the CLPE was enhanced by the inclusion of its first warden David Mackay on the Bullock Committee, where he discussed its work and led a presentation on the development of ETV programmes for teachers undertaken by

²⁷⁰ *Account of the ILEA centre of which Mr Mackay is Adviser/Warden*, 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/5/1, RI(72)INF18).

²⁷¹ Staff and General Sub-Committee Report, *Teachers' centres – ancillary assistance*, November 6th 1973 (London Metropolitan Archive, ILEA/S/LR/02/11/006).

its staff.²⁷²

Within the Authority, the CLPE was visible and prominent in the *Education Bulletin* (which advertised positions at the Centre, and listed courses) and its successor, *Contact* magazine, which featured articles and correspondence by CLPE staff, listed courses offered by the Centre, and publicised events at such as lectures, debates and exhibitions. In a booklet on ILEA resources for teachers, the CLPE was described as covering 'all aspects of language in the primary school' with resources including a library, advisers, school visits and its own magazine, *Language Matters* (ILEA, 1976c: 35). When the ILEA Inspectorate published its guidelines on primary language teaching, CLPE staff were listed as contributors, and the Centre's contact details were first on the list of 'useful addresses' for teachers (ILEA, 1979a). The warden of the Centre, Moira McKenzie, published her own contribution on the teaching of reading to the Guidelines series, designed to be read in conjunction with the Inspectorate publication (McKenzie, 1979). The CLPE's profile remained high throughout the 1970s as its staff worked to provide courses, publish articles, mount exhibitions and displays, expand its resource library, contribute to research projects and maintain a space for teachers to meet and learn more about language and literacy.

The CLPE was embedded in the ILEA context as a leading asset for the support and development of its teachers. It functioned on several levels: as a response to concerns with literacy achievement in primary schools, a commitment to the improvement of ILEA teachers' knowledge of language and literacy teaching, and a nationally important site of expert advice and resources. Today we can see it framed by the context of the expansion of the teacher centre in the period as a focus for CPD, 'an expression of the LEA's concern for the professional development of teachers' (Simpson, 1998: 96).

²⁷² Primary Sub-Committee meeting minutes, November 15th 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archive, BUL/B/3/1).

Framing CLPE: the Centre in the ‘field of recontextualisation’

A straightforward historical account of the Centre would describe the specifics of its work, providing a detailed case study in terms of wider national developments. In this chapter I will consider the CLPE in these terms by asking how it operated in the context of its particular situation. This concern with the small scale and the specific is necessary to capture the complexity of the Centre’s operation and to avoid the ‘sacrifice of individual elements to wider generalisations’ (Levi, 1991: 109). But I have also found it useful to raise my head periodically from the detail of its particular story to consider the place it might occupy in a more structural analysis of the educational system.

Looked at from the perspective of Bernstein’s pedagogic device, we can see the CLPE as part of a mechanism for the recontextualisation of knowledge, operating to mediate between the field of production (mainly universities) and the field of reproduction (mainly schools) (Bernstein, 2000: 33-34). In this model, ‘what we know’ about education (both in terms of pedagogic discourse and theories of instruction) emerges from the research of academics, and is ‘recontextualised’ by agents in the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF) and the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (PRF) for use by teachers in the classroom. Bernstein argues that during the 1960s and 70s this process of recontextualisation was dominated by the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (PRF), consisting of pedagogues working in colleges, departments of education, educational journals and research foundations, who enjoyed ‘considerable autonomy’ in teacher education (Bernstein, 1996: 33, 70).

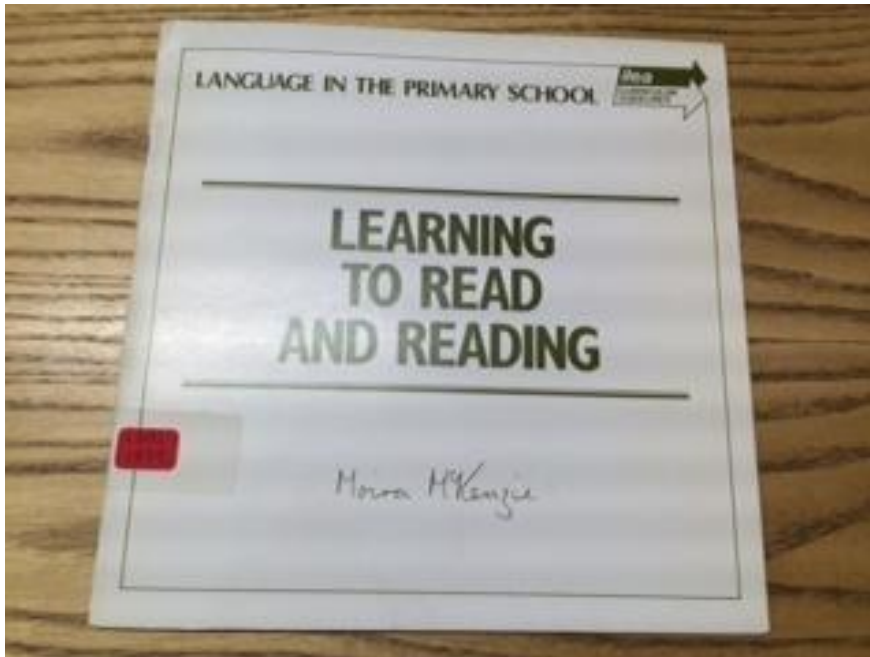
Situating the CLPE within this interpretative framework we can understand it as a mechanism for the recontextualisation of knowledge, functioning to select and interpret the output of the academy for teachers. Bernstein’s work is useful here in attempting to delineate this complex relationship between educational research and policy (Marsh, 2007: 272). Rather than uncritically imposing the entirety of this ‘prefabricated’ (and

intricate) model on the workings of the CLPE (McCulloch, 2011: 75), I have considered how the principle of 'recontextualisation' can be applied by thinking of the Centre as a link in a chain, connecting and interpreting the work of academics to the work of teachers in the classroom.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, knowledge did not only flow in one direction from the academy and the CLPE to teachers. There was also an expectation that teachers would contribute to the work of the CLPE and engage in their own research. Relationships were permeable, in that academics were in direct contact with teachers (facilitated by the physical and intellectual environment of the CLPE), as well as being directly involved in the Centre's courses and publications. And some CLPE staff also worked on academic research as well as having experience of teaching in schools. For example, David Mackay worked as a teacher before becoming involved in academic research, and then drew on both areas in his work as the CLPE's first warden. So while Bernstein's model is helpful in clarifying how knowledge was recontextualised and distributed, the data forbids tidy compartmentalisation. The story of the CLPE finds itself complicated by real people who resist being confined to one category of the model's functioning.

In the following pages I will avoid drowning myself (and the reader) in an endless account of the CLPE at work by focusing on four particular pieces of data and using them as starting points to explore four groups of people involved in, or affected by, the Centre's operation: its staff (the experts), its knowledge base (the academics), those with whose education it was concerned (the children), and its clients (the teachers). By examining how these groups functioned in the context of the CLPE, I can explore their 'identities, actions, events, realities and rationalities' on their own terms (Tamura, Eick, & Coloma, 2011: 149). By using elements of Bernstein's theory of recontextualisation as a broad and flexible interpretative framework in which to situate these particularities, I can seek to explain them in terms which reveal the workings of more general phenomena (Levi, 1991: 109).

The expert: McKenzie's 'Learning to read and reading'²⁷³



This booklet, *Learning to Read and Reading* by Moira McKenzie, published in 1979, now lives in storage in the Institute of Education library. Separated from more recent texts on early literacy, it belongs in a category of 'historical interest' rather than current functionality. Its removal from the shelves of curriculum resources and research texts ensure that there is no risk of a browsing PGCE student picking it up and being exposed to (and contaminated by?) the advice and recommendations of another time. Its designation marks it as no longer useful or relevant; whatever authority it once implied has evaporated. At 32 pages long, with clear headings, bullet points and black and white photographs, the contents remain straightforward and accessible to the reader. The inside front cover, only slightly discoloured with age, declares that 'this booklet is one of a series of personal statements written to amplify issues raised in the ILEA inspectorate

²⁷³ McKenzie, M. (1979). *Learning to read and reading*. London, ILEA.

document, *'Language in the Primary School'*. The booklet is published by ILEA and marked with its logo, stamped with the Authority's approval. It also bears a flourishing signature on the front cover alongside the official ILEA symbol, a mark of the personal existing simultaneously with the institutional. The signature declares itself, Moira McKenzie, as author, granted the freedom of a 'personal statement' while still enclosed and supported within the material and intellectual context of the ILEA 'series'.

Who was Moira McKenzie and what authority allowed her to produce this 'personal statement' within the frame of the ILEA? In the course of my research I have read her publications, her contributions to meetings and her notes on conferences, as well as watching her on film discussing early literacy. However, in considering this document I am not seeking to produce a comprehensive account of her work. And I am not trying to find traces of 'the real Moira McKenzie', illuminating though such a life history approach might be (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996: 15-17). Rather I am working to place McKenzie within the context in which she worked and in which she wrote this document, as warden of the CLPE. What was her role, how did she inhabit that space available to her, what discourse did she choose to promote through the relative power of her position? What can the existence of this document tell us, in the present, about the operation of power and knowledge in the past? In raising these questions and seeking to address them, I will situate this particular document within the context of the rest of the CLPE data and use this to inform and to interrogate its apparent clarity of content and purpose.

In the summer of 1974 Moira McKenzie was appointed warden of the CLPE after the long interregnum following the resignation of the first warden, David Mackay at the end of 1972. She remained as warden until 1986. Previously she had been head of Bousfield School in West Kensington, had gained a doctorate in early reading at Ohio State University, and had been a member of the CLPE Steering Committee since 1971. In her role as warden she wrote articles for *Language Matters* and *Contact*, reviewed books, produced and presented television series, arranged exhibitions and conferences, booked

speakers and designed and led courses for teachers. She also chaired regular Steering Committee meetings on the Centre's aims, future plans, and day-to-day operation, and worked closely with the ILEA Inspectorate, advising them on their guidelines for teachers, *Language in the Primary School* (ILEA, 1979) and contributing the supplementary *Learning to read and reading* guidelines in her own right. Aside from her work at the CLPE she co-authored a book, *The challenge of informal education: extending young children's learning in the open classroom*, with Wendla Kernig, who went on to become head of Eveline Lowe primary school in South East London, famous for its progressive approach and open-plan design (Cunningham, 1987: 60; McKenzie & Kernig, 1975). She also contributed to national conferences on the teaching of reading, and to publications on the Bullock Report (McKenzie, 1975, 1977c).

McKenzie's central concerns in *Learning to read and reading* were consistent with her other publications, films, and contributions to Steering Committee meetings. She emphasised the connection between the child's use of language and the process of literacy acquisition, seeing reading as 'a language process' and arguing that the teacher's role was to 'help children bridge spoken and written language'. She argued that the child's own speech must be valued regardless of dialect or deviation from 'standard English'. She stressed that both reading and writing should be 'meaningful' to the individual child, and should relate to their world and to their interests. In fact, meaning should precede decoding or graphic skills: the child would make connections (with the help of the teacher) between the meaning of the text and the letters on the page, a process of gradual refinement in the context of child-centred motivation. Reading was not 'just recognising and building words', 'the argument is that the child gradually learns necessary skills within the overarching concepts of meaning and purpose' (McKenzie, 1979: 28).

The teacher, tuned in to the individual learning journey of each child, should provide encouragement and support; 'she uses her knowledge of language and literacy to construe the signals given her by the learners and to give feedback and information' (McKenzie, 1979: 30). The child should be placed at the centre of the literacy process as an active learner, rather than a passive recipient of pre-determined 'skills', 'the teacher's commitment is to the child – not to a scheme' (ibid: 20). The *Breakthrough to Literacy* materials developed by Mackay featured heavily, McKenzie included several photographs of children using the resources and reading the books, which were recommended as 'matching children's language and sense of story, as well as linking into their own experience' (ibid: 15).

In the booklet McKenzie addressed teachers directly, arguing for a particular approach and recommending particular materials. Her authority did not lie in any power to enforce these recommendations. There was no compulsion implied, and the 'personal statement' allowed the document to appear as one particular view, implicitly sanctioned by ILEA by virtue of its publication, but offered to, rather than imposed upon, the teacher. The booklet's authority lay in its confident assertion of expertise. This was reinforced not by the implicit threat of state-sanctioned teacher appraisal, but by a host of academic quotations and references which under-pinned the document. These included reference to the work of Marie Clay on emergent reading, Michael Halliday on linguistics, Frank Smith on psycholinguistics, Kenneth Goodman on miscue analysis, Margaret Donaldson on child development, and Margaret Clark on the reading process. These texts were not practical teaching manuals but substantial, and often demanding, accounts of academic research. The reading list at the back of the booklet provided details of each text referenced, as well as others recommended to teachers, along with a reminder that texts and resources 'can be inspected in the library at the Centre for Language in Education'.

The booklet *Learning to read and reading*, with its confident signature, reminds us that the CLPE may have been an organisation, but it consisted of people. And within its precincts there was space and opportunity for these individuals to make their mark. As warden of the CLPE, McKenzie was heading an innovative establishment with a considerable reputation, within London and beyond. The Centre was established and funded by the Authority and depended on it for its existence and operation, but within this context the figure of the warden enjoyed significant autonomy. During the 1970s, the rapid development of the teachers' centre as an institution was profoundly shaped by the 'personality, drive and initiative of the warden', a feature noted with approval by the Schools Council (Robinson, 2014: 88, 95). The role of warden varied greatly between and within LEAs and often developed in line with the levels of confidence, experience and ability of the individual: the centres were 'only as good as the wardens who ran them' (ibid: 94).

Like the ILEA inspector, the CLPE warden had responsibilities to both the Authority, who had created and funded their position, and to the teachers whose interests they were serving. A large and prestigious subject-based centre such as the CLPE was also embedded within the academic community, and this connection lent it a legitimacy and authority which served to protect the space within which the warden operated from too much LEA interference. Although members of the Inspectorate served on the CLPE's Steering Committee and did discuss the Authority's current priorities with Centre staff (particularly in relation to the focus on 'multi-racial' education in the last half of the 1970s), there is little evidence of unwanted interference in the warden's role. The warden as 'expert' had considerable authority and in practice the work of the Inspectorate showed a reliance on this expertise, for example in its frequent citation of key academic texts favoured by the CLPE team.

It is helpful to see the role of the CLPE warden in terms of Bernstein's model of recontextualisation, operating to link the world of the academic and the world of the

teacher within a space created and preserved by the Authority. The 'considerable autonomy' of those working in teacher education is certainly evident in the work of McKenzie and her colleagues (Bernstein, 1996: 70). Within the ILEA, they were granted the status of ones 'who can speak' on literacy teaching through their knowledge of, and connection to, both the academic world and the primary school (Ball, 1990a: 2; Cormack, 2011: 135). This connection was evident in their professional lives as well as in their daily work. The Centre's first warden, David Mackay, had been a head teacher before running a Schools Council research project, and McKenzie had also been a head teacher before completing her doctorate. Both wardens published influential work on language independently of the CLPE (Mackay & Simo, 1976; Mackay & Thompson, 1968; McKenzie, 1975, 1977c; McKenzie & Kernig, 1975). The warden was connected to the academic community, to the schools, and to the Authority who paid their wages.

Within the Centre, McKenzie was one expert among several. Ian Forsyth, appointed as Senior Lecturer in 1972 and remaining in post throughout the 1970s, edited *Language Matters* and led courses at the CLPE and at the Centre for Urban Educational Studies (CUES). In his *Language Matters* editorials and articles he consistently argued for the importance of language study for all primary teachers (Forsyth, 1975: 2). In the later 1970s, he stressed the need to address the composition of inner-London schools through courses and articles dealing with 'the needs of the multi-racial classroom'.²⁷⁴

Aidan Warlow was a lecturer at CLPE from 1975 to 1980 who co-edited *The Cool Web* with Margaret Spencer and the ILEA librarian Griselda Barton, described as 'a rationale for story-making and for literature' (Meek, et al., 1977). His writing puts particular emphasis on the importance of reading for meaning and of stories. He wrote that children not only needed literacy to fit into society, but 'for their own private purposes as well – not just to cope with society's demands but to resist and survive them, most of all through

²⁷⁴ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, September 26th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

stories'.²⁷⁵ In 1979 he produced a pamphlet for parents to encourage them to read with their children (Warlow, 1979), and also promoted the child's agency in the reading process and in his or her choice of literature (Warlow, 1976).

Other members of staff at the CLPE during the period included Ralph Lavender, who worked at the Centre between 1975 and 1977 and wrote articles for *Language Matters* on the importance of story, recommending that teachers read their own books during reading time and ensure that they offer children rich reading material (Lavender, 1976a). He also defined the reading process as a communication skill linked to language and to meaning (Lavender, 1976b). Ruth Ballin, assistant warden at the CLPE from 1972, was involved in an Institute of Education and Schools Council project on English as a second language, ran courses, and wrote articles for *Language Matters* including 'Do reading schemes teach us to read?' (Ballin, 1975).

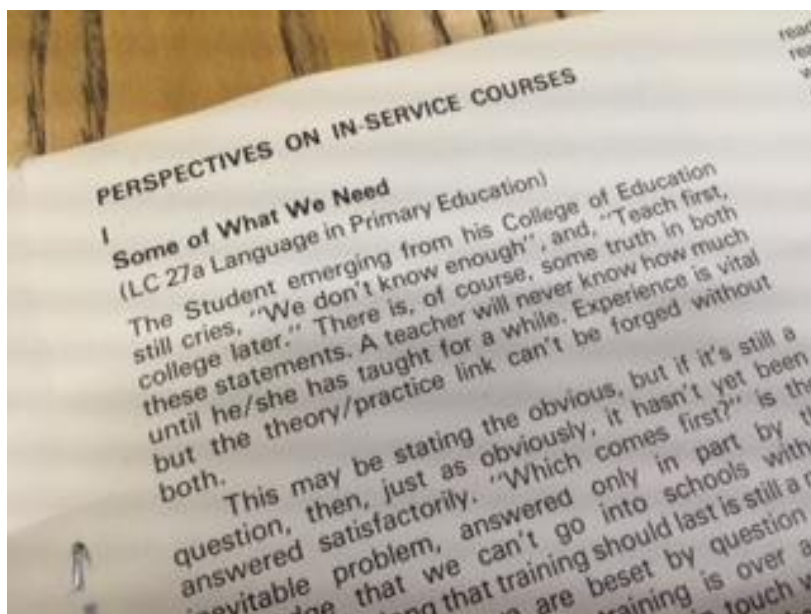
Joyce Jurica, a senior lecturer at the CLPE from September 1973, worked with Joan Tough on the Schools Council Project, '*Communication skills in early childhood*', and ran courses assessing the validity of reading schemes and on language development outside the classroom. She wrote for *Language Matters* including an article entitled 'Language: a basis for learning' which argued that some children 'develop only a limited awareness of the uses of language' due to a their home environment, and that teachers must be well-informed and sensitive about children's use of language (Jurica, 1975). She also co-authored '*The school book policy*' with Ian Forsyth (Jurica & Forsyth, 1977).

So McKenzie was one of a number of 'experts' based at the CLPE, all of whom were able to recontextualise ideas on language and literacy originating in the academy with explicit recommendations for teachers' practice, expressed through publications, lectures and courses. Each expert voice had its own particular experience and concerns.

²⁷⁵ Aidan Warlow, unpublished draft ILEA guidelines on 'Developing reading skills', May 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1978-, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

However, as each instrument in an orchestra has its distinct tone while still combining to produce one harmonious whole, so the various expert voices of the CLPE staff were largely united in the fundamentals of their message. The power of this message lay not in any direct ability of CLPE staff to impose their discourse on schools and teachers, but was a feature of their personal and professional experience and knowledge (Kenway, 1990). In looking at my next piece of data, I will trace the academic discourse which both informed the content of the CLPE message and gave it legitimacy and authority.

The academic sources: 'the latest in Educational Theory'²⁷⁶



The first issue of *Language Matters*, published in 1975, opened with an editorial by Ian Forsyth in which he outlined the three main functions of the journal: to 'establish a continuing dialogue' between CLPE and teachers and to provide a forum for teachers 'to share their thinking with colleagues', to review recent publications on primary language

²⁷⁶ Phil Dryer, 'Some of what we need', *Language Matters*, 1 (1), 7.

and literacy, and to 'keep teachers informed of relevant developments in linguistic and educational research' (Forsyth, 1975). After an article by a teacher on how to get children 'hooked on books', and an outline of the work of the CLPE, there were three short articles under the heading 'Perspectives on in-service courses'. Each article was written by a teacher who had attended one of the CLPE's six-week courses; either 'Language in primary education' or, 'Language and literacy in primary education', and it is these three short pieces that I will consider in relation to the larger CLPE data set. What were these courses and what do they tell us about the relationship between the CLPE, ILEA teachers, and 'the latest in Educational Theory'?

The six-week 'long courses' (in contrast to shorter sessions on more immediate or practical school-based issues), were described in a 1972 booklet on the work of the CLPE as a 'major innovation in the provision of in-service training'.²⁷⁷ It was agreed among staff members that it was 'in the longer courses that we do our most important work', and these were seen as 'absolutely central to our aims and objectives'.²⁷⁸ Describing CLPE's course provision in *Contact* magazine, Mackay hoped that increasingly all courses would move towards the long course model (Mackay, 1972). In 1972 Mackay outlined an ambitious programme for five of these courses to run per academic year, although by 1974 this had to be cut back to two due to financial cuts; a literacy course comprising 30 one-day sessions, and a language course for a six week block. In 1974, the literacy course was modified to include a larger language component. By the end of 1975, only the 'Language in Primary Education' course seems to have survived, and CLPE staff were discussing ways of improving recruitment by changing its structure as many schools were not willing to release teachers for a solid six-week block.

²⁷⁷ CLPE booklet, October 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

²⁷⁸ Typed document, *The work of the Centre*, July 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

In 1977, Ian Forsyth, who was running the course,²⁷⁹ announced that it would be one day a week for 20 sessions, finishing with a two week block. This course was still running several times a year in 1978 and 1979, alongside other substantial courses developed in association with the Inspectorate which aimed to help teachers develop literacy programmes for their schools.

The aim of the long language courses was to build up a skilled groups of 'expert' teachers who could lead practice, not only in their own schools, but in teachers' centres, and work with the CLPE to keep schools well-informed and evaluate new methods and resources.²⁸⁰ The courses explicitly drew on linguistics, psychology and sociology in relation to language and child development (ILEA, 1971a). The purpose of the 'Language in Primary Education' course for summer 1972 was described as being 'to examine the way in which the study of language may help teachers to a greater understanding of how a primary school child may achieve mastery of the Mother Tongue'.²⁸¹

The course comprised an 'introduction to linguistics', a section on spoken language including the acquisition of speech in children, accents and dialects, language function and 'the multi-language situation', and another on written language which covered 'writing and reading as developmental processes', 'children as readers and writers' and 'literacy resources for the classroom'. Speakers and lecturers from education colleges and universities would contribute, and the course was linked to research projects at Birmingham, Leeds and London Universities. A booklet outlining the work of the Centre described the longer courses as an opportunity for teachers to 'study in depth' and 'to make immediate use of the ideas emerging from current University Research projects'.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ By 1977 this was entitled 'Language and learning in the primary school'.

²⁸⁰ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, February 15th 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

²⁸¹ 'Mother tongue' was a phrase particularly associated with Mackay's work.

²⁸² CLPE booklet, October 1972 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

The three articles in *Language Matters* served to raise the profile of the long courses with the magazine's readers, and each of the teachers was enthusiastic about the benefits of the experience. The articles emphasised the urgent 'need' for such an in-depth approach. Initial teacher training was described as inadequate: 'the student emerging from his College of Education still cries, 'we don't know enough', and 'I really didn't know what teaching was all about' (Starkie, 1975). One teacher declared, 'we don't know enough and we ought to go on training until we do' (Dryer, 1975). The opportunity for time away from school was seen as valuable; 'teaching is a busy business... how do we keep in touch with new theories? What's happening out there?' (Dryer, 1975), and 'one of the problems of being employed full-time on the shop floor is that there is little time for reflection' (McNeil, 1975). According to Phil Dryer, a teacher in Bow, 'the ILEA scheme to release teachers for a six-week sabbatical was greeted with a kind of wild joy – a need was about to be satisfied' (Dryer, 1975).

The academic nature of the courses was emphasised in all three articles: 'I read like mad. What exactly were 'phonetics?', 'linguistics?', 'psycholinguistics?' I could hardly say them – what chance did I have of understanding?' (Dryer, 1975). For Erik Starkie, a teacher in Wandsworth, the course involved 'theory from people like Vygotsky and Britton... modern research', 'new ideas and concepts', and discussion of these which 'helped me to clarify and define my own ideas on this vast subject' (Starkie, 1975). Course lecturers were described as 'a galaxy of stars' (McNeil, 1975). The CLPE staff were involved in organising and delivering the courses, but the 'stars' came from elsewhere. What was the 'latest in Educational Theory' to which these teachers had been exposed? And what does the existence of the long-course model tell us about how CLPE worked to build a relationship between academic research and the teacher?

The CLPE drew heavily on the academic community in delivering both long and short courses, as well as lectures, seminars and working parties. A large number of university-

based language specialists were involved in the work of the Centre. These included Margaret Spencer, based at the University of London Institute of Education, John Sinclair, Professor of Modern English Language at Birmingham University, Michael Halliday, internationally renowned linguist, and Joan Tough of Leeds University (McNeil, 1975). Speakers at CLPE events included national experts on the teaching of reading, such as Joyce Morris and Elizabeth Goodacre, leading international academics in the field, such as Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, and children's authors including Leon Garfield and Philippa Pearce, as well as Kaye Webb of Puffin Books. Contributors to *Language Matters* included John Stannard, then Senior Lecturer at the Froebel Institute in Roehampton (Stannard, 1976) and Martha King, Professor of Education at Ohio State University where McKenzie had completed her doctorate (King, 1978). We can identify individual academics and literacy experts directly associated with the Centre through their membership of the Steering Committee, or their contributions to publications, courses, conferences and open days. The pages of *Language Matters* are filled with academic articles, book reviews, references, and suggestions for further reading, and following these leads us to the academic sources on which so much of the CLPE's work was founded.

Relationships between individuals in the academic subject community and the CLPE often operated on several levels. To take one example, Margaret Spencer, based at the Institute of Education, served on the Steering Committee throughout the 1970s. She contributed articles and book reviews to *Language Matters* (Spencer, 1975b, 1976), and co-edited '*The cool web*' with the CLPE's Aidan Warlow and the ILEA Schools Library Adviser Griselda Barton, who was also a member of the CLPE Steering Committee (Meek, et al., 1977). She gave a talk at the CLPE's inaugural Open Day in 1971 on 'children learning to read and... the place children's literature should have in this'.²⁸³ She

²⁸³ CLPE programme for open days, September 9th 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

contributed to the long courses, for example giving a talk on the 'power of stories, myths and fairy tales' in 1974 (McNeil, 1975). She fostered close connections between researchers at the Institute of Education and the Centre, and she proposed association with research projects such as 'Language related problems of inner-city pupils'. She also worked closely with ILEA Inspectors Vivian Pape and Michael Birchenough to discuss the possibility of making the CLPE part of a national centre for language study.²⁸⁴

Locating the CLPE in the context of the academic subject community allows us to see the influences on which the Centre drew and which legitimised its approach towards the teaching of reading. Since the 1960s links between research on language and literacy and teaching had strengthened, with the establishment of organisations such as the United Kingdom Reading Association (UKRA) in 1961, the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) in 1962 and the Schools Council in 1964 (Soler & Openshaw, 2006: 21). The Centre was involved directly and indirectly with such organisations, for example through Mackay's work with the Schools Council, and through the use of the CLPE building as a base for UKRA and the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE) meetings.²⁸⁵

The layered connections between CLPE staff members, members of the CLPE Steering Committee, Primary and English ILEA Inspectors, university lecturers and professors, authors, and members of national and local literacy associations are too extensive and complex to describe in detail. When explaining the relationships between individuals at the heart of the 'English as language' paradigm of English teaching at secondary level, Stephen Ball constructed a diagram of connecting dotted lines to denote communication, apprenticeship, collegueship, or co-authorship (Ball, 1985: 68). As my area of interest is the working of the CLPE rather than the intricacies of relationships in the academic

²⁸⁴ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, September 9th 1975, February 2nd 1977, September 26th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

²⁸⁵ LATE, founded by James Britton in 1947, had been incorporated into NATE in the early 1960s.

fields on which it drew, I have resisted following his example, while recognising the importance of key individuals in driving change in the subject community during this period, a feature which emerges in much of the writing about the development of English as secondary school subject (Ball, 1985; Marshall, 2004; Medway, 1990; Medway, Hardcastle, Brewis, & Crook, 2014). The status of CLPE staff and the nature of their discourse were rooted in the academic world. How did Centre staff work to expose teachers to 'the latest in Educational Theory', and which particular elements of academic research did they emphasise?

One of the strongest influences can be identified as the 'English as language' concept of English teaching' (Ball, 1985: 68), incorporating such figures as James Britton, Douglas Barnes, Harold Rosen and Nancy Martin, and centred on London's Institute of Education, where the English department has been described as 'more productive of fresh thinking in English than any other higher education institution' during this period (Medway, et al., 2014: 28; Peel, 2000: 96). By the 1970s, NATE had become a central focus for the dissemination of this concept of English teaching, which was concerned with 'naturally occurring, written and oral language of school children' (Ball, 1985: 69) and a 'gospel of growth' associated with John Dixon and the 1966 Dartmouth Conference (Gordon & Lawton, 1978; Green, 1990: 147; 2006: 12; Medway, 1990: 14).

Although chiefly concerned with secondary school English teaching, the influence of the this movement can be identified in many CLPE publications and materials. James Britton's '*Language and learning*' was a key reference text in the long courses, *Language Matters* articles, and the publications of CLPE staff members, particularly those of McKenzie. Statements such as, 'we must begin from where the children are... there can be no alternative in the initial stages to total acceptance of the language the children bring with them' (Britton, 1970: 134), an emphasis on the centrality of meaning, and on literacy as a vehicle for personal development in children, as well as a recommendation

of *Breakthrough to Literacy* (ibid: 157) resonated strongly with the central themes of the CLPE discourse.

Likewise, Douglas Barnes' work was repeatedly referenced by McKenzie and by Warlow, with the establishment of a CLPE study seminar on his book, '*From communication to curriculum*', published in 1976. In this, and '*Language, the learner and the school*', (co-authored with Britton), the need for children to take 'an active part in the formulation of knowledge' was emphasised (Barnes, 1969, 1976), as was the importance of a deeper understanding and awareness of language among teachers, particularly in relation to the teaching of working-class children (Barnes, 1969: 74-75). Another key text referenced frequently in the CLPE materials was Harold and Connie Rosen's '*The language of primary school children*' (Rosen & Rosen, 1973). This was of particular relevance to the CLPE in the age-range it covered, and stressed the importance of schools working with, and not in opposition to, children's working-class culture (ibid: 253), stating that there is 'a great deal to be learnt from schools... teaching reading entirely from the children's own dictated material' (ibid: 157).

Influences also came from the international subject community. Kenneth Goodman's work was much cited, arguing that the persistence of traditional 'common sense' approaches to the teaching of reading interfered with 'the application of modern scientific concepts of language and thought' (Goodman, 1967: 1). Seeing readers 'as actively predicting their way through text' (Snow & Juel, 2005: 506), Goodman famously described the reading process as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'. This phrase was often used by McKenzie, for example in her television series on developing readers, as was the use of miscue analysis in the assessment of children's reading strategies (McKenzie, 1975a, 1977a).

The writings of Frank Smith, who collaborated with Goodman (Goodman, 1973a), were also influential. McKenzie repeated his phrase 'you learn to read by reading' (for example McKenzie, 1979: 18), and Warlow described Smith's *Understanding reading* as 'the only satisfactory account of the fluent reading process'.²⁸⁶ In the second issue of *Language Matters* Margaret Spencer wrote, 'those of us who read Frank Smith's 'Understanding Reading' when it first appeared remember a feeling which has its counterpart in Pilgrim's Progress when Christian's burden rolled away and he could walk upright' (Spencer, 1975b). The central role of meaning in the reading process was a crucial concept in Smith's work, with profound pedagogic implications if teachers accepted that 'reading is not a matter of going from words to meaning, but rather from meaning to words' (Smith, 1971: 35). The analogy between a child learning to speak and learning to read, as 'reading is an aspect of language' (ibid: 28), was heavily stressed in CLPE material.

Marie Clay had a great influence on CLPE staff through her two books, *Reading, the patterning of complex behaviour*, and *What did I write?* (Clay, 1972b, 1975). McKenzie included many of Clay's insights in *Learning to read and reading*, and in her book *Informal education* she recommended Clay's approach to emergent reading (McKenzie, 1979: 2, 8, 19; McKenzie & Kernig, 1975: 124). Her television series, *Becoming a reader*, included footage of a teacher sharing a book with a child who is 'made to feel she is a reader right from the start', and discussed Clay's concept of supporting 'emergent reading' in practice through focusing on directionality, visual attention to print and 'talking like a book' (McKenzie, 1977b). The same series also featured a teacher and child working with Clay's diagnostic assessment test for early readers, *Sand* (Clay, 1972a). In an article in *Language Matters*, McKenzie discussed emergent writing in terms of mark-making and imitation, and recommended Clay's, 'What did I write?' (Clay, 1975;

²⁸⁶ Aidan Warlow, unpublished draft ILEA guidelines on 'Developing reading skills', May 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

McKenzie, 1978). Warlow also referred to Clay's work in an editorial for the magazine (Warlow, 1978).

The publication of Margaret Clark's *Young fluent readers* (Clark, 1976) was heralded as a breakthrough in understanding the reading process, and received enthusiastic reviews in *Language Matters*, where Warlow wrote that it had 'drastic implications for our teaching' (Warlow, 1976a: 8) and Lavender stated that 'a mistake has been made in the teaching of reading... reading should be taught in the light of insights about how successful readers learn to do it' (Lavender, 1976b: 9). The main points of Clark's argument were taken to be that as fluent readers focused on meaning, 'rather than the actual words on the page', 'converting strings of letters into sounds and sounds into words' was not a productive way of teaching, and phonics was more appropriate in the context of composition than in decoding (Warlow, 1976a: 8).

Another significant publication was Cliff Moon and Bridie Raban's *A question of reading* (Moon & Raban, 1975), referenced in CLPE publications on books for schools (Jurica & Forsyth, 1977; McKenzie & Warlow, 1977), which offered the teacher guidance on how to use 'real books' in the classroom to create a rich and tempting 'reading environment' for children. Familiar points were reiterated, such as meaning being crucial, the importance of grounding reading teaching in language skills and oracy, and the belief that an over-reliance on phonics cues could be damaging (Moon & Raban, 1975: 13-17, 21, 64). This text became associated with an emphasis on 'real books' in the classroom as opposed to reading schemes, arguing that schools should extend book provision with the addition of graded 'real books' until the schemes could be abandoned altogether (ibid: 76).

It would be possible to go deeper into the development of this academic foundation and trace its origins and evolution within the subject area. Here however, I am concerned with identifying those features of the academic community's work which informed the

practice of the individuals immediately responsible for the day-to-day running of courses and publication of texts, and with how these influences were expressed in core constituents of the CLPE discourse. Key phrases such as 'learning to read through reading', 'reading for meaning', 'real books', 'emergent reading', and 'psycholinguistic guessing game', were repeated, to the extent of becoming, in Warlow's phrase, 'almost clichés of modern teaching'.²⁸⁷ This commitment to the 'modern' is a strong feature of the CLPE's published output, and the 'latest in Educational Theory' is an accurate description of the knowledge base upon which the CLPE discourse was founded. It is notable that there are no references to any text published before 1967 in the CLPE data.²⁸⁸

While the CLPE staff may have been unusually forward-looking and well-connected in their relationship with academics, their commitment to new ideas coming out of the universities was not in itself unusual. Interviewed in 1970, the previous Secretaries of State for Education Edward Boyle and Anthony Crosland (Conservative and Labour respectively) agreed that during the 1960s, 'new ideas and intellectual breakthroughs normally come from the outside academics' (Crosland, in Kogan, et al., 1971: 186), and that policy originated in the relationship between the 'education world' and the 'external intelligentsia' (Boyle, *ibid*: 89-91). During the 1970s, the universities remained the primary 'field of production' of educational theory, and the source of the CLPE staff's knowledge and power as 'experts'. As a link in the chain of recontextualisation, the CLPE did an effective job of channelling the work of the 'external intelligentsia' to teachers and schools by exposing them to its current arguments and applying these to classroom practice. Is there any indication that this approach was modified in practice by the constraints within which the Centre worked, or was the CLPE able to pump its ideas

²⁸⁷ Aidan Warlow, unpublished draft ILEA guidelines on 'Developing reading skills', May 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

²⁸⁸ This is in contrast to ILEA Inspectorate publications which did occasionally recommend older favourites such as teaching guides by F. J. Schonell (Welch, 1974a).

straight into the minds of those teachers reading its publications and attending its courses?

There is little evidence of CLPE's engagement with alternative voices outside (or anti) academia seeking to influence education during this period. Warlow referred to 'being very nervous' about contributing a draft for the Inspectorate's guidelines as he anticipated 'tough scrutiny from the back-to-basics lobby',²⁸⁹ but there is no discussion of this 'lobby' in meetings, and no suggestion that it influenced CLPE practice. Of all the four groups which I have researched, the CLPE seems to have been the most effectively insulated from crises such as William Tyndale (not mentioned in Steering Committee meetings or publications), teacher shortages or surplus, strident criticisms of schools expressed in the press, or the questioning of teacher autonomy implicit in Callaghan's Ruskin College speech. Clearly CLPE staff would have been aware of all these developments, but they were able to go about their work without addressing them directly.

The CLPE did not function in an entirely autonomous bubble, and we can see moments in the Steering Committee meeting minutes when the Authority did influence the direction of CLPE courses and publications through the voices of their inspectors and head teachers. This was particularly evident in their prioritising of the needs of 'second language speakers' towards the end of the decade.²⁹⁰ When discussing the Centre's role in 'the attention that ILEA is now giving to a multi-racial school population', Jim Wright, the warden of CUES, spoke about the new joint CUES and CLPE course on the 'needs of the multi-racial classroom', and recommended 'a recent Halliday article' on the

²⁸⁹ Aidan Warlow, covering letter, May 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

²⁹⁰ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, May 4th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1978-, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

subject.²⁹¹ An issue of *Language Matters* was devoted to the 'multilingual situation in our schools' (CLPE, 1978).

Another area where the CLPE took its lead from the Inspectorate was in the provision of 'language post-holder' courses. These were discussed after the CLPE received a letter from the Chief Inspector on the importance of developing coherent literacy policies in schools under the guidance of a designated post-holder.²⁹² Courses were designed in 1976, trialled successfully in two divisions in 1977 and extended in 1978. The content of these courses was left to CLPE staff, who discussed the 'considerable problems' in meeting the needs of schools as the responsibilities of post-holders were so varied.²⁹³ Also in line with ILEA priorities towards the end of the decade was an emphasis on the importance of teachers working with parents. The Centre published and distributed a booklet for parents prepared by Warlow and a working party of teachers (Warlow, 1979). These areas of ILEA influence were easily incorporated, and even welcomed, into the CLPE's existing approach, and the Centre remained in control over the content of courses and publications.

There is evidence of some tension between the structure of course provision and the needs of schools and teachers. One issue was that 'a pattern for long courses was proving more and more unacceptable in the schools', which found it difficult releasing their teachers for an extended period, and teachers were concerned that 'their classes were merely child-minded during their absence'.²⁹⁴ The primary inspector Nora Goddard frequently raised this concern at Steering Committee meetings with CLPE staff, who remained reluctant to reduce the length and depth of the courses, although they did

²⁹¹ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, January 12th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

²⁹² CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, April 29th 1976 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

²⁹³ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, September 26th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

²⁹⁴ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, September 26th 1977 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

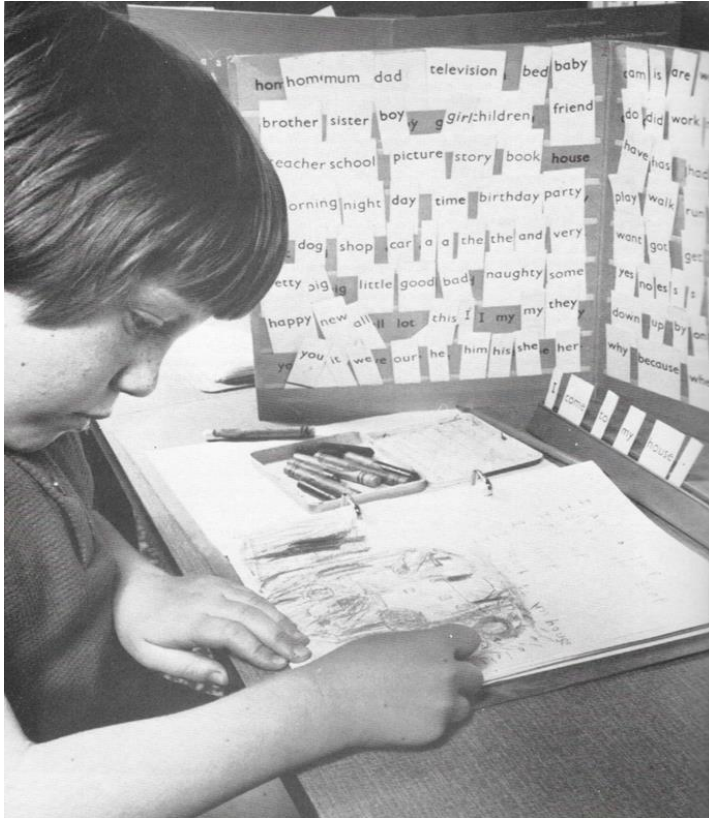
modify their structure. There was also regular discussion of the problems that course members might face on attempting to 'relate their fresh insights to the work of their colleagues back in school', and frustration that schools had such different levels of commitment to in-depth staff training and dissemination; this was an area where it was hoped that the new courses for post-holders would lead to improvement.²⁹⁵

Protecting the theoretical and academic nature of the language course against demands of teachers for more practical input (which was confined to shorter courses) was occasionally an issue. It was remarked of the 'Language in primary education' course that, 'unfortunately the value of this course is still not sufficiently recognised. Teachers tend to isolate the teaching of *reading* as their weakness whereas current research is showing more and more that a knowledge of language, the way it is acquired and how it functions, is of paramount importance in the teaching of reading'.²⁹⁶ The CLPE staff were committed to combining the two approaches, promoting in-depth 'knowledge of language' in teachers while also helping to address practical classroom issues. The three teachers writing reviews on the long courses would have returned to their schools having been exposed to the 'latest in Educational Theory': what practical effects would those running the courses have hoped for in their classrooms, and the classrooms of their colleagues? What might the CLPE discourse look like in practice?

²⁹⁵ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, September 25th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1978-, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

²⁹⁶ Typed document, *The work of the Centre*, July 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

The teaching materials: 'his language, his interests, his meaning' ²⁹⁷



The child in the photograph is about six years old. He is sitting at a table in a classroom, busily colouring in his picture with crayons, frowning slightly (either with boredom or concentration, it's hard to tell). The drawing is in a ring binder, and he has written sentences above it, all beginning with 'I' although the picture isn't clear enough to read. We might guess that one of the sentences is 'I come to my house', words which are printed on cards and arranged in order on a small stand in front of the file. Surrounding the boy is a large three-sided folder (although we can only see two sides, in the background we can glimpse another one propped open), filled with probably more than a hundred word-cards and effectively enclosing the child in his own space.

Looking at the photograph we see that the child is engaged in something that is recognisably 'work', and assume that this is taking place in the context of 'an orderly and

²⁹⁷ Mackay, D. B. Thompson, P. Schaub (1978) *Breakthrough to literacy Teacher's Manual*. Harlow, Longman for the Schools Council, 45.

busy classroom' (Twiselton, 2004). For a teacher the 'busyness' of the child is reassuring; he is producing something, and this can be read as 'evidence that work is being performed' (Sharp & Green, 1975: 95; Woods, 1990: 114). This work is clearly connected in some way to the word-cards which surround him and is therefore related to 'literacy'. He is encircled by individual words and located, physically as well as intellectually, within them. Depending on the viewer's age and experience the materials may or may not be familiar. Beginning my teaching career in the early 1990s I have memories of similar folders and cards, but they were in cupboards or on shelves rather than still used by children and I have never worked with them directly. Nor are they familiar to me from dim memories of my own childhood experience. A younger teacher would be unlikely to recognise the apparatus at all, and I have not seen it in schools (even in cupboards) for many years.

The image is taken from a 1978 edition of the *Breakthrough to Literacy* manual for teachers, a book which contains many more pictures of these materials (Mackay, 1978). The *Breakthrough* system had its origins in a curriculum development project entitled 'the Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching' at University College London which began in 1965 with a group of teachers and linguists working together, directed by the linguist Michael Halliday, and including David Mackay who was then the head of a London primary school. The group had close connections with the Institute of Education, in particular James Britton, Nancy Martin, Basil Bernstein and Harold Rosen. In 1968 the project was expanded and handed over to the Schools Council where Mackay worked with Brian Thompson ('a young Australian teacher') and Pamela Schaub to develop curriculum materials for use in primary schools (Halliday & Hasan, 2006: 18-23). Mackay and Thompson published a paper on their work, and the *Breakthrough* materials for teachers were launched in 1970 (Mackay & Thompson, 1968; Mackay, et al., 1970).

I have a copy of the manual at home, another very cheap buy from a second-hand bookshop. It begins with a foreword by Michael Halliday discussing his role in the initial

project, and describing *Breakthrough* as 'helping (the child) to break through the sound barrier into the written language, thereby adding a new dimension to his capabilities for language use' (Halliday, 1978: 3). There follows an introduction which used italics to emphasise that '*the crucial difference between Breakthrough to Literacy and traditional reading schemes is the way in which Breakthrough to Literacy places the learner himself in continuous control of the language he is developing in order to become both a reader and a writer*' (Mackay, 1978: 5). A summary of 'basic assumptions underlying' the materials included reference to children's '*own spoken language*', their '*own learning materials*', '*progress at their own rate*', materials '*written in (their) own language*', and based on their '*own interest and experience*' (Mackay, 1978: 9-10, my italics). The role of the teacher is described as 'offering guidance and help', and it is stressed that this should be achieved '*according to your own style*' (ibid). The bulk of the manual is taken up with detailed descriptions and demonstrations of the system's components which include children's sentence-makers and stands (which we can see in the photograph), word-makers, project folders, word books, reading books and nursery rhymes, large demonstration sentence and word-makers for teachers, and story magnet boards.

The basic principle of the *Breakthrough* system was that children would compose their own sentences, supported by the word-cards which they would keep in their sentence-maker folders, and display on a plastic stand. They would then copy the sentence onto paper where it could be illustrated, the task in which the child in the photograph is engaged. Words of particular interest and importance to the individual child could be copied by the teacher onto blank cards in their sentence-maker. In this way the child would be engaged in producing their own compositions, based on their own interests and spoken language, from the outset: 'in short, they are writing their own books' (Mackay, 1971). Their work would be kept in a ring binder and would serve as their own personalised reading material. As the child progressed, individual words could be constructed with the word-maker cards which were printed with 'consonant symbols and

vowel symbols'. The manual was illustrated with photographs of children and teachers using the material in the classroom (and a rather telling illustration of a tin labelled 'lost words', suggesting that the management of the word cards and folders in a large class of infants could be a challenge). The end of the manual included a bibliography entitled 'Books for the teacher' which listed further reading on 'language and education', literacy teaching and writing on children's literature.²⁹⁸

The materials had their origins in a desire to apply the work of linguists and sociologists to classroom practice (Halliday & Hasan, 2006: 18). Mackay and Thompson identified the lack of linguistic or sociological training for teachers as a problem which allowed methods and resources with no basis in theory to proliferate: 'our laziness, old-fashioned ideas, lack of knowledge... (are) a manifestation of our not caring enough for either our pupils or our task' (Mackay & Thompson, 1968: 139). The materials were designed to be a means of 'applying the theory' to practice (ibid: 103), and 'to make it possible for children to read and to produce meaningful language' (ibid: 117). The rise of sociology in education was characterised by a strong focus on the problem of working-class underachievement in school, particularly in literacy (Ball, 1990a: 4; Franklin, 1999: 461). Sociologists were asking 'very awkward questions' about the implications of a predominantly middle-class school culture for the experience and achievement of working class children (Lawton, 1975: 29). The 'traditionally beneficent role of the teacher' was being questioned (Cunningham, 1988: 2269), as sociologists asked 'what interests do the schools serve, those of the parents and children, or those of the teachers and head master?' (Sharp & Green, 1975: x).

The issue of discontinuity between a child's home life and the school was seen by many to be a defining factor of working-class underachievement (Bernstein, 1970; Lawton,

²⁹⁸ Like the recommended texts in McKenzie's *Learning to read and reading* booklet, the *Breakthrough* manual included a range of long and complex academic works encompassing linguistics, sociology and education.

1968; Plowden, 1970; Trudgill, 1975), and the *Breakthrough* materials seemed to offer a way forward by allowing the child to approach literacy on their own terms and in their own language, recognising that above all, 'the child is an individual with very personal needs' (Britton, 1970: 134; Mackay, 1978: 5; Rosen & Rosen, 1973: 253).

Recommended authors listed in the manual's bibliography included such CLPE favourites as Britton, Halliday, Goodman, and Smith, and also referred to Sylvia Ashton Warner, the New Zealand educator who 'confirmed our belief that each child must be helped to literacy by writing about himself and his own world' (Mackay, 1978: 43). The centrality of meaning was stressed, as was the ability of children to work out strategies in pursuit of this meaning as they did when developing spoken language, needing guidance rather than direct instruction from the teacher, a strong theme in the work of both Smith and Goodman (Goodman, Goodman, & Burke, 1977; Smith, 1971). Like these authors, the manual rejected the 'common sense' belief that children learn to read through an exact sequential process (Goodman, 1967). Instead the emphasis was on placing 'the learners in continuous control of the language they are developing as they become both readers and writers' (Mackay, 1978: 7).

The launch of the *Breakthrough* materials was accompanied with articles and reviews in the educational press, as well as adverts in the *Times Educational Supplement* addressed to 'the handful of lively, open-minded teachers who have *not yet* heard of Breakthrough... you don't know what you are missing'.²⁹⁹ Most commentators were positive, remarking on the 'enthusiasm and confidence' of the children and teachers (Devlin, 1970; Pienaar, 1977; Reid, 1974), although problems inherent in constant 'handling of small pieces of material' were noted, as well as the 'heavy demands' made on the teacher's time by a system which encouraged such an individual approach to literacy (Cunningham, 1971; Gardner, 1970; Reid, 1974). *Breakthrough* was publicised

²⁹⁹ Advertisement in *The Times Educational Supplement*, May 15th 1970.

in guides on the teaching of reading (D'Arcy, 1973: 118-135), recommended in radio programmes for teachers (Longley, 1976), discussed at conferences (Roberts, 1978) and displayed in teachers centres (Goodacre, 197?: 7).

The materials were also recommended in more academic texts. Britton praised them as offering a 'linguistically sound basis and orientation' to teachers which allowed for 'composing and reading ... more directly related to a child's spoken language' (Britton, 1970: 157-160). Connie and Harold Rosen described them as 'an example of good primary school practice' (Rosen & Rosen, 1973: 158). They were applauded for giving children confidence and offering a way of bringing child-centred methods into literacy teaching (Goodacre, 1970; Stubbs, 1976; Trudgill, 1975). The Bullock Report stated that *Breakthrough* 'has been of value in providing a stimulus to teachers to adopt the language experience approach and in offering them practical help' (DES, 1975: 103). Mackay estimated that by the end of the first year of publication over 7,000 children in primary schools were already using the materials (Mackay, 1971: 227), and the approach remained influential throughout the decade (Styles & Drummond, 1994: 4).

The *Breakthrough* materials were strongly endorsed by the CLPE. Mackay, as the Centre's first warden, was positioned to promote the scheme to London teachers, and courses on its implementation ran regularly from 1971, some delivered by the manual's co-author Pamela Schaub. Mackay also presented the *Breakthrough* materials to national conferences on reading (Mackay, 1971). When McKenzie took over as warden the *Breakthrough* courses continued, as did the recommendations and references. In her book '*The challenge of informal education*' she discussed the advantages of the scheme, writing that 'children profit by having material to use that allows them to compose their own language, make their own sentences' (McKenzie & Kernig, 1975: 114). Her 'personal statement', *Learning to read and reading*, included photographs of the materials in use as well as recommendations of the *Breakthrough* reading books and

sentence-makers (McKenzie, 1979). The ETV series presented by McKenzie showed teachers and children reading *Breakthrough* books and using the *Breakthrough* sentence-maker, as well as a group of teachers discussing how the method encouraged children to work independently (McKenzie, 1977b).

The CLPE library displayed the *Breakthrough* materials throughout the 1970s. Although Centre staff also (and increasingly, towards the end of the 1970s) advocated a 'language-experience approach' which could be based entirely on material produced by the child with the addition of 'real' picture books, it was recognised that some form of material and manual offered structured support to teachers, and that *Breakthrough* was a way of combining a child-centred approach to literacy with the realities of classroom practice. In the context of large classes and teacher concern to have a coherent 'system' which could be explained to parents, the materials could certainly be used as 'a half-way stage' until the time when teachers were confident and skilled enough to dispense of structured manuals altogether (Rosen & Rosen, 1973: 157).

If advice on curriculum 'gives us some idea of what given groups in a society value' (Kliebard, 1992: xii), what does the CLPE's promotion of the *Breakthrough* material tell us about contemporary understandings of children as learners? It is useful to locate the manual in the context of Bernstein's competence model of pedagogy. It emphasised those language 'competences' already possessed by the learner rather than those deficiencies which must be addressed, allowed the learner space for choice and movement, and encouraged the pursuit of the personal (Bernstein, 1996: 58-63). The *Breakthrough* materials implied the 'liberal/progressive mode', emphasising the potential of the individual 'which could be revealed by appropriate pedagogic practice and contexts' (ibid: 64). The materials insisted on the individual child being the starting point for language and literacy teaching, the child must be guided into literacy through his or her own language and experience in order that the learning process had more profound and personal meaning than getting a sticker or passing an external test.

This approach to literacy resonated with the tone of the Plowden Report which ‘endorsed the trend towards individual and active learning’ and marked the dominance of the competence position across both the official and the pedagogic recontextualising fields in the late 1960s and into the 1970s (Bernstein, 1996: 70-72; Plowden, 1987: 120; Simon, 1994: 149). The photographs in the *Breakthrough* manual show desks of children, each enclosed in their own worlds behind their sentence-maker screens, and each working at their own pace on their own composition using their own words.

The *Breakthrough* materials could be presented as an answer to the CLPE’s characterisation of ‘problems’ with language and literacy teaching in London primary schools. The central concern expressed in the pages of *Language Matters* until the end of the decade was that children were not being sufficiently engaged in their literacy and language learning. In 1978, Ian Forsyth wrote that ‘barren practice still goes on in our classrooms’ (Forsyth, 1978). What such ‘barren practice’ might look like was addressed over the years by different authors. If the school failed to engage the child at his or her own level, language and literacy development would be ‘inhibited’ and ‘constrained’ by the classroom environment, and the child may ‘feel a sense of failure and withdraw’ from an enterprise that seemed alien to, or critical of, their own life (Bindley, 1979; CLPE, 1975). Although it was allowed that reading schemes might offer teachers security, structure and progression, it was argued with increasing conviction as the decade drew on that they could put children off reading with dull, meaningless and irrelevant text which ‘no self-respecting child’ would choose to read (McKenzie, 1976). Ploughing through primers might appear ‘boring, hard, not for them, pointless or hateful’ to children (Ballin, 1975), there were very few which contained ‘the sort of humour that kids enjoy’ (Warlow, 1976), and children raised on a diet of ‘Janet and John’ books would become ‘mindless’, ‘aimless’ and ‘passive’ readers (King, 1977).

Language Matters articles criticised the concept of learning to read as the building up of a discrete skills set which implied the child as a passive learner being trained in specific, structured skills by the teacher (Stannard, 1976). This approach distorted the quality of reading material offered to children and saw story 'sacrificed' 'for the sake of the skills game' (Lavender, 1976a), resulting in 'dreary grind' rather than 'enjoyment' (Ballin, 1975). Teachers could be 'easily bewitched into thinking that reading is just a simple matter of the sequential decoding of sounds into words' (Stannard, 1976), and an emphasis on these 'lower decoding skills' could lead to decreased motivation and lack of engagement (McKenzie, 1976). Teachers who focused on reading primarily as a process of using sounds to build words were not teaching reading in the way in which it was actually learned (Lavender, 1976b). Similar concerns were expressed over the teaching of writing, where 'barren practice' was described as requiring children to produce 'non-productive writing' with little personal meaning (Forsyth, 1978), and no real purpose for the child (McKenzie, 1978).

Looking at the CLPE staff as 'experts' and at the academic base upon which this expertise was based, we can see how the *Breakthrough* materials both grew out of and complemented a particular discourse. Its implications for classroom practice were profound. It allowed children to move among their own personal resources to support literacy on their own terms, allowing literacy to be learned in the context of 'a contained liberality, the freedom of children to move and discover as they might in a good bourgeois home', an ideal which had been fundamental to much work with young children since the nineteenth century (Steedman, 1985: 90). It also allowed teachers to move on from the 'deficit' characterisation of working-class culture and language implied by this earlier model: this could now be accepted through the use of the child's own spoken word in the classroom (Ball, Kenny et al. 1990: 61). Reading materials, criticised as being middleclass and removed from the world of 'children of the poorer classes' since the 1870s (Galbraith, 1997: 127), would either be based on the language of real, urban

children, or better still, composed by the readers themselves, thus removing the contaminating influence of the middle class professional entirely. And the materials also offered primary teachers a way of allying themselves with developments in English at secondary level, epitomised by the 'growth model', which was 'committed to the notion of *agency*' above all, and emphasised the importance of ownership and authorship of the text (Green,1990: 148), putting 'self-discovery and growth... at the centre of the enterprise' (Ball, et al., 1990: 79).

Looking at the photograph we see the child engaging in literacy on his own terms, an ideal to which the CLPE experts and the academic base upon which they drew were committed. But the CLPE staff were working with teachers not children, and they would not be the ones cutting out the tiny word-cards, storing the folders, modelling the techniques, or overseeing the materials in action in the classroom. The cover of the manual shows a colourful cartoon of a smiling teacher, a lone adult among a sea of small children, whose gaze follows the pointing finger of a small boy as he shows her something of interest. The classroom is busy with children standing and sitting, alone and in groups, working behind their sentence-makers, reading books, putting word-cards into stands and showing their friends, choosing books from a shelf or looking for resources in a cupboard. The CLPE staff would have approved of the scene. The children are smiling, busy at individual tasks, talking, reading and writing. This teacher's practice is anything but 'barren', she has established a classroom in which the children appear self-directed and self-motivated while she moves among them, available to help but not there to direct.

This competence model had profound implications for the teacher's role. Privileging the individuality of the learner, it cast the teacher as a facilitator rather than instructor, required a measure of autonomy in teacher practice, was not easily evaluated or scrutinised by the outsider, and assumed a considerable level of skill in the teacher as a

professional (Bernstein, 1996: 63; Snow & Juel, 2005: 507). The demands placed on the teacher by the competence model implied a high degree of expertise and training, and for this reason developments in CPD had a 'particular resonance with child-centred pedagogy' (Burke & Cunningham, 2011: 531; Snow & Juel, 2005: 507). How did the CLPE work to help primary teachers in inner-London primary schools realise the competence ideal?

The professional teacher: 'Come and browse.'³⁰⁰



This photograph, published in ILEA's '*Come and teach in inner London*' pamphlet in 1975, shows the CLPE library (ILEA, 1975a). The picture does not offer us a 'transparent reflection of reality', a snatched glimpse of the authentic CLPE in action (Dussel, 2013: 37), but was presumably taken as a 'highly constructed' image of the

³⁰⁰ *Language Matters* (1976), (1) 4.

resources library (Cohen, 2003: 257). As I am concerned with what the existence and operation of the CLPE can tell me about the past, this deliberate composition is exactly what interests me. What does the photograph tell us, in the present, about teachers, resources and the nature of professionalism in the 1970s which informed the relationship between the two?

Glancing at the copy of the photograph as it lay on the kitchen table, my 16-year-old daughter described it (somewhat dismissively), as being 'obviously something to do with the seventies... it's a library but there are no computers, the numbers on the board are written not printed, and you can tell it's old by that man's beard and the woman's tragic blouse'. Out of context and out of time the image is distanced from its original purpose, a blurry black and white photograph which reminds us how far we have come in terms of technology (and, arguably, fashion). By placing it in the context in which the image was composed, taken and selected, we can look at it on other more productive levels.

What can its existence tell us about teacher professionalism in the past?

The booklet in which the photograph appeared was put together by the ILEA Inspectorate for the purpose of illustrating the opportunities London had to offer the teacher. Knowing this about its production we can make informed assumptions about the photographer's intent (Burke, 2001: 19). The CLPE library was finally established in the new premises in 1974, and presumably the image was intended to showcase the library as a 'unique' space which 'has attracted the attention not only of London teachers but of Colleges of Education, LEAs and Universities seeking advice in the setting-up of Reading Centres'.³⁰¹ In the mid-1970s, the CLPE library was brand new and generously stocked, with over 25,000 books (CLPE, 1976). This would have contrasted with the provision made by some other LEAs; during the same period a survey on national reading centres contained a contribution from a young teacher saying; 'we do have a section of our library

³⁰¹ Typed document, *The work of the Centre*, July 1974 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

called 'Reading Ability', but it only contains one book...' (Goodacre, 197?: 6). Opening remarks at McKenzie's first Steering Committee meeting as warden described the 'excellence' of resources in the library, and noted that 'visitors to the Centre were often astounded at the range of materials'.³⁰² The maintenance of the library's collection and the availability of a staff member to help visiting teachers remained a priority throughout the 1970s. The inclusion of the CLPE library photograph in the '*Come and teach*' pamphlet, where it was situated among other images designed to illustrate the generosity and modernity of the ILEA's provision for the professional development of its teachers, was designed to impress, to display and to persuade.

If we imagine ourselves in the picture, as presumably those teachers reading the pamphlet were intended to do, we envisage quiet, calm and contemplation. There is space in the picture, and there is time. The space contains a wealth of resources. We see a range of books, including children's picture books, and teacher-made resources designed to support literacy teaching. We know from reading the CLPE meeting minutes and correspondence that the library contained a wide selection of books for use in schools, teaching manuals, journals, and academic texts on educational theory and language. The shelves stretch out of the picture frame in all directions, suggesting that this photograph captures only a fraction of the riches on offer. The time is implied by the teachers in the picture, they are 'browsing'. There are chairs on which to sit and tables on which to read. There is no sense of urgency in the picture, the teachers seem unhurried and contemplative, existing in a space free of distractions.

They also seem independent. They are not gathered in a group, or addressed by a central figure of authority. Their individuality is a central feature of the image, they face in different directions and follow different concerns. These are professionals who are engaged in directing their own learning, moving among a wealth of published expertise

³⁰² CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, April 17th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

at their leisure and grazing on those texts which they feel best address their particular needs or desires. They are primary school teachers, removed from the bustle and clamour of the small children in their classrooms, and able to reflect, to plan and to think about their work. They are not directed, but 'trusted' to use the freedom and possibility available to them in the service of the children they teach (Grace, 1985: 12; 2008: 212).

Presumably the teachers in the picture are all engaged in an effort to improve and enhance their literacy teaching. They are considering resources, reading texts, and noting ideas. The space in which they consider their practice is not only physical, but intellectual. The Bullock Report, published in the same year as the photograph, concluded authoritatively that 'there is no one method, medium, approach, device, or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read' (DES, 1975: 77). This insistence that 'there is no single approach to learning to read which is always successful' (Moon & Raban, 1975: 57) was often stated in materials for teachers and accompanied by a 'vast amount' of research, and a profusion of different approaches in manuals and teaching materials (D'Arcy, 1973: 26). Within the context of relatively strong professional autonomy, particularly since the end of the restrictive pressure of the eleven-plus exam,³⁰³ the range of options confronting the teacher demanded an educated response. It was in this context that efforts to improve the knowledge of the professional teacher were seen as fundamental to improving literacy teaching (Moyle, 1974).

How could the teacher be helped towards making informed choices, rather than doggedly following traditional, out-dated, school routines? The physical and intellectual space provided by the CLPE library would allow teachers to work out their own approach in the context of their own experience. Surrounded by books and resources, and among other professionals on the same journey they would learn to 'build up their own repertoire of

³⁰³ This had been phased out in ILEA as the Authority moved towards a policy of non-selective secondary schools from the 1960s onwards (Maclure, S. (1990). *A history of education in London, 1870-1990*. London, Allen Lane, Penguin Press).

ideas, methods and materials' (Thompson, 1970: 128). If 'the teacher of reading should take a short break from his constant activity... and question his motives for doing what he is doing' (Moon & Raban, 1975: 24), then surely the CLPE library was the ideal place for such a break.

The need for teachers to make their own decisions was stressed, not only in the context of the ILEA and CLPE, but by national organisations, committees and authors (D'Arcy, 1973: 135; Southgate, 1967; Southgate, et al., 1970). There were voices raised against this approach. Some Black Paper authors argued that 'progressive' methods of literacy teaching 'demand more effort and higher intelligence from the teacher' and were 'not suited to the average teacher' (Cox & Dyson, 1969a: 3). In this discourse, the contribution of academics was viewed with suspicion; there was 'far too much theory' in teacher training (Pinn, 1969) and 'a great deal of fuzziness and uncertainty' among teachers as a result (Cox & Dyson, 1971: 110). For the moment, as we saw when we considered the Bullock Report, these voices remained excluded from the education agenda (Salter & Tapper, 1988: 58), and there is no evidence that they affected the delivery of CPD for teachers.

The ideal of the professional teacher in the 1970s implied a strong sense of individual responsibility in addition to a high degree of autonomy (Cunningham, 2012: 79). The model literacy teacher would work hard to become a 'genuine expert', and 'a Teachers' Centre with a warm room, easy chairs and a kettle is a necessary catalyst for any decisive changes in the way our children are to be introduced to books and to reading at school' (D'Arcy, 1973: 140). This ideal was reflected in the high levels of demand for 'further knowledge' among teachers which drove the expansion of CPD and teachers' centres in the 1960s and 70s (Robinson & Bryce, 2013: 350; Southgate, Arnold, & Johnson, 1981: 39-42). The increasing insistence on graduate status for teachers in the public sector (Aldrich, 1990: 13; Browne, 1987: 97; Robinson, 2010: 29) and the expansion of education as a field of academic study in the 1960s (Robinson, 2004: 5) were changing

understandings of teacher professionalism. The Plowden Report had argued for teacher independence in curriculum (Cunningham, 2012: 31). A Schools Council Report on curriculum innovation, published in 1968, argued that the teacher was 'a professional who must be directly implicated in the business of curriculum renewal; not as a mere purveyor of other peoples' bright ideas, but as an innovator himself' (McCulloch, 2001: 104).

By the 1970s, teachers' centres had a key role to play in curriculum development, as a space where teachers could meet together and with 'experts' to discuss their practice (Simpson, 1998: 97). The 'model teacher' who would work to improve their knowledge and take risks with their classroom practice in pursuit of improved outcomes for their pupils would also share their expertise with less able colleagues. As we have seen, this model could prove problematic in practice, when teachers attending long CLPE courses faced uncooperative colleagues back in their schools. Although there are no central records of teacher participation in CPD and the numbers who used teachers' centres, it is likely that it was a relatively small proportion of teachers who were such 'willing enthusiasts' as those in the photograph (Robinson & Bryce, 2013: 352). And high levels of teacher autonomy did also apply to those teachers who were resistant to change and determined to resist the CLPE discourse. But the ideal of a 'shared professional community in which professional learning and professional identity were inextricably linked' remained a powerful motivating force in the CLPE approach to CPD (Robinson, 2014: 172). The autonomy enjoyed by primary teachers over the post-eleven-plus curriculum was certainly embedded in their professional identity (McCulloch, et al., 2000: 26), and it was this understanding of professionalism to which the photograph of the CLPE library, with its promise of space, time and choice, was designed to appeal.

In practice, how was the support for teachers offered by CLPE shaped by this ideal? The characterisation of the teacher as a professional engaged in continual learning and development had implications for the role of teachers within the CPD model. Although CLPE staff worked hard to spread the words of its 'expert' staff and to disseminate 'the latest in Educational Theory' to teachers, this process was not understood to be one-way. In terms of Bernstein's model, the CLPE as part of the recontextualising field was not solely engaged in passing on their knowledge to teachers. Ideally, the teacher would also be directly involved in research and the development and evaluation of curriculum resources. This approach was echoed by other educationalists who stressed the importance of outlining the terrain of language and literacy research as a 'sketch map' for teachers, allowing them to ask questions, make comparisons, apply suggestions to their own settings, and ultimately construct their own professional approach (D'Arcy, 1973: ix; Longley, 1976). Teachers' reviews of the CLPE's long course emphasised the importance of 'the notion that teachers are capable of making up their own minds', and how grateful they were 'for the careful avoidance of remote control of any kind by those responsible for the course' (McNeil, 1975; Starkie, 1975). Course contributors shared this commitment to the ideal; in one Steering Committee meeting, Margaret Spencer reminded colleagues that the long courses were 'most successful when we say least'.³⁰⁴

So ideally teachers should be encouraged to 'solve their own problems' and experts should be 'supporting them in this' rather than presenting them with ready-made answers (Barnes, 1976: 188). How did this model work in practice? We can find evidence of a commitment to helping teachers to 'solve their own problems' from the very beginnings of the CLPE. A document on the 'aims and proposed functions of the Centre', probably drafted by Mackay and Pape at the beginning of 1971, was accompanied by a covering letter which stated that it would be 'desirable to do no more than outline policy and

³⁰⁴ CLPE Steering Committee meeting minutes, September 25th 1978 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1978-, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

indicate the scope of immediate plans' as the 'involvement of teachers', inspectors, other teachers' centres, and research projects would be expected to shape the function of CLPE.³⁰⁵ The principle of teachers and CLPE staff working together to improve practice underlay Mackay's initial vision of the direction the Centre would take. In a 'forecast of new developments' presented to his colleagues on the Bullock Committee he outlined plans to set up study groups of teachers, involve teachers in classroom-based research and the trialling of resources, and to work towards a situation where teachers would run their own courses at CLPE and in local teachers' centres.³⁰⁶ Later statements of the Centre's aims insisted that 'teachers will be actively involved in research' (Mackay, 1972), and stressed the importance of teachers 'participating in and facilitating the research of others' and 'initiating research in the classroom'.³⁰⁷ A list of 'points for discussion' at a conference in January 1979, attended by CLPE staff, CUES staff, inspectors, advisers and college lecturers included the question, 'to what extent should participants determine course content?'.³⁰⁸

It was recognised that teachers needed guidance and support in making their own decisions. The ideal of the well-informed, motivated and reflective teacher browsing the CLPE library and attending the long courses to gain a sophisticated understanding of the theory underlying 'good practice' was just that, an ideal. If all teachers had been created in this mould, the work of the Centre would have consisted of little more than running a well-stocked library, providing a 'warm room', and making sure the kettle was on. In reality, the central problem the CLPE had been established to address was the existence of teachers whose training in, understanding of, and commitment to the development of

³⁰⁵ Letter, 1971 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

³⁰⁶ David Mackay, *Forecast of new developments*, presented to the Bullock Committee 1972 (UCL Institute of Education Archives, BUL/B/5/1, RI(72)INF18).

³⁰⁷ Diagram entitled '*Language Centre*' handed out at CLPE Steering Committee Meeting September 29th 1975 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

³⁰⁸ Programme notes on *Conference on in-service education in literacy*, January 10th 1979 (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1978-, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/013).

language in young children was felt to be insufficient for the task with which he or she was faced.

In discussion, members of the CLPE Steering Committee dwelt on issues such as the need for better dissemination of course-work by participants, lack of opportunity for discussion among teachers, lack of commitment by schools to using the skills of course participants as the basis for whole school improvement, lack of understanding among teachers 'of the role of language in learning' and the importance of a 'deep knowledge of language', lack of links to 'ideas emerging from current university research projects', lack of 'awareness of books', lack of 'insight into ways of teaching', and 'confusions in the minds of teachers' about different approaches to literacy.³⁰⁹ The overwhelming impression we get from these discussions was of a 'lack' in the person of the teacher, and it was this perceived deficiency which the Centre staff made it their mission to tackle.

In combining a commitment to letting teachers 'solve their own problems' with an awareness that they might need to be told what these 'problems' actually were and how they could be addressed, CLPE staff were negotiating a delicate balancing act. The pages of *Language Matters* illustrate how this was approached. The tone of the magazine was never overtly critical of teachers but instead framed deficiencies as a project to be undertaken by those committed individuals reading the magazine with the support, understanding and guidance of 'experts' among CLPE staff, academics, and skilled teacher colleagues. The magazine was launched with the declaration that contributions from teachers would 'fulfil an important part of our editorial policy', they would 'share their thinking with colleagues' and establish a 'continuing dialogue' between teachers and CLPE staff (Forsyth, 1975). Articles written by teachers did appear regularly in *Language Matters* and generally featured accounts of 'language-experience'

³⁰⁹ CLPE Steering Committee meetings (London Metropolitan Archives, CLPE, 1971-78, ILEA/S/LR/02/011/012).

approaches in practice, sharing ideas and reflections. These articles were unanimous in following the CLPE discourse. This was in contrast to *Contact* magazine which did occasionally feature pieces which expressed a more traditional, skills-based approach to literacy teaching; for example, an article by a head teacher in 1974 declared that it was 'essential to have progression and continuity in any reading scheme, so the basis of our reading programme is the Ladybird Scheme' (Waggit, 1974).³¹⁰

As the Centre developed over the course of the 1970s it did facilitate the meeting of teachers' working parties and discussion groups, although the initial idea that teachers would drive the direction of the Centre was never realised. Members of the Steering Committee in January 1978 comprised four CLPE staff members, three ILEA inspectors, four university lecturers, the warden of CUES, an ILEA educational psychologist, the principal organiser of ILEA library services, and three teachers. This was typical of the committee's composition over the period, and ensured that while the voices of working teachers were heard, they were in a minority. Often it was the inspectors, in particular Nora Goddard, who raised issues on behalf of schools and teachers such as practical problems with course attendance.

Those teachers 'browsing' in the photograph of the CLPE library would have been aware of the version of 'best practice' disseminated by Centre staff through its courses, publications and the selection of books on the library shelves. They would also have been free to ignore this discourse, like the head teacher committed to the Ladybird reading programme. The Centre had no means of enforcing its recommendations to schools and relied on the persuasive powers of the 'expert' working alongside the committed individual teacher. It is perhaps unlikely that a teacher loyal to a highly structured approach to literacy would have come to 'browse' in the CLPE library,

³¹⁰ This particular article provoked several letters published in the next edition of *Contact*, a few in support of 'a splendid defence of the real purpose of teaching'. Moira McKenzie responded in a longer letter in a subsequent issue, criticising 'the mistaken idea that getting through primers has something to do with becoming literate' (McKenzie 1975).

attended a long course, or adopted the *Breakthrough* materials, and we certainly should not assume that the pages of *Language Matters* reflected typical classroom practice, the gap between the ideals of child-centred teaching and the realities of school life are well documented (Dale, 1979b: 202; Delamont, 1987: 12; M. Galton, 1987: 83; Jones, 2003: 94). Nevertheless, the teachers in the library do have a space, established and funded within the LEA, in which they can work together with 'experts' and academics to develop their teaching in line with research-based developments in the academy.

Conclusion

By looking at relationships within and between four constituent elements of the CLPE's practice I have been able to consider how the Centre delivered CPD to teachers from four different perspectives. We can understand it from the angle of the expert, working with colleagues to shape a particular discourse and to persuade teachers of its advantages. We can look at the academic sources from which the expert discourse drew privileged knowledge and legitimacy and see how tightly this was entwined with the Centre's operation and the dissemination of its message. We can think about the classroom materials recommended by the CLPE and see how closely these were related to dominant competence models of pedagogy. And we can consider the relationship between the CLPE and teachers and see how Centre staff worked with them as fellow professionals to guide them towards a more informed understanding of theory and practice.

We have seen how the CLPE was established and developed in the context of contemporary understandings of 'best practice' in CPD for teachers. The Centre was at the forefront of efforts to boost the personal and professional development of teachers, an endeavour which was widely accepted as holding the key to improved outcomes for pupils. The teachers' centre was at the heart of these efforts. It provided a material and

intellectual space, established and funded by the LEA, which seemed to embody the relationship between the expert adviser, academic research, developments in classroom pedagogy and the individual teacher.

Thinking about the operation of this space in terms of Bernstein's model allows us to see how those with an interest in the teaching of literacy used the structures available to them as they worked to promote their understandings of 'best practice'. We can see how the CLPE existed in a space created and promoted by the ORF (ILEA) and how this space was available to the PRF (the experts and academics) to use for the dissemination of their knowledge to teachers. This system differs markedly from later developments in the English education system which saw the ORF increase its role in recontextualisation to the extent that voices in the PRF were excluded or rejected. In terms of CPD, the system has tilted towards the needs of the system or of schools, as measured against externally imposed criteria such as test results or OFSTED inspections (Robinson, 2014: 184). Delivery of CPD tends to be 'certain and slick' (Crook, 2011: 11), ultimately driven and evaluated by its impact on school attainment (Robinson, 2010: 29). The 'personal professional development of individual teachers' is no longer its primary concern (Pedder, Opfer, McCormick, & Storey, 2010: 367). Links with academic research are rarely explicit, or are limited to controlled 'bite-sized' portions, implying a picture of 'hollowed out' professional knowledge where opportunities for teachers to critically engage with research or to question models of 'excellent' practice are limited (Pedder, et al., 2010: 369). Rather than being expected to contribute to subject development, teachers can feel that they are being steered towards a 'teacher-proof curriculum' (Adey, Hewitt, Hewitt, & Landau, 2004: 2-3).

The model of recontextualisation is useful in clarifying our understanding of how constituent parts of the education system function and change over time. However, when considering the framework in relation to the specific and the small scale, we can see that in practice structural boundaries were porous, flexible, and allowed for category shifts.

The system accommodated the individual voice at every level: the expert's voice, the academic's, the teacher's and even (more ideally than actually) the child's. These voices were expected to discuss, and even to disagree, but they were assumed to be united by a powerful sense of shared purpose. Teachers, experts, academics and inspectors were all understood to be working on the same project. This is reflected in the coherence of the CLPE data. Although previous chapters have shown shifting levels of ambiguity and fragility within this apparently common purpose, at the end of the 1970s voices questioning the PRF consensus in schooling remained marginalised and could still effectively be ignored by the CLPE.

In looking back at the operation of the CLPE I am not painting a picture of a lost golden age of teacher professionalism, or in identifying systemic flaws and weaknesses. Those individuals working within the context of the CLPE would have taken its existence for granted in the same way as we may find it difficult to conceive of alternative ways of working today. Looking back at past understandings of professional identity as expressed through the workings of one particular teachers' centre in one particular place and time allows us to see those assumptions inherent in professional identity. Who is the expert? From where do they draw their knowledge and power? Which voices offering guidance and advice are privileged and which are dismissed? Which version of 'best practice' in literacy teaching and learning is dominant? Which 'broader views about the purpose of education and a vision of the good society' might this imply (Marshall, 2004: 58)? Where is there space for the individual teacher to decide on compliance or resistance? Thinking about the operation of CPD within an educational structure very different from our own reminds us that the answers to these questions are neither permanent nor inevitable.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In investigating four groups with an interest in the teaching of primary literacy in 1970s London, I have shown how their approach was shaped by the specific contexts in which they worked. I have used traces left by the discussions of the Bullock Committee to reveal how the process of the Report's production influenced 'what counted' as knowledge in literacy teaching, illuminating the contested terrain behind the authoritative façade of the finished text. I have shown how the documentary trail left by ILEA's Education Committee can best be understood in terms of its actions, by considering what its members were doing and how this was informed by their understanding of function and possibility over time. I have identified how the publications and actions of the ILEA Inspectorate developed in relation to perceived constraints and opportunities in three particular periods of time. In looking at the CLPE, I have unpacked how concepts around expertise, academic research, best practice and teacher professionalism shaped the Centre's approach to CPD in primary literacy. All four of my case-studies overlap in terms of individuals, situation and influence, but each was operating in and framed by its own distinct context.

Each group consisted of individuals operating within an institutional framework. Their members discussed strategy, made decisions, directed resources and made things happen, all working to effect change in literacy teaching. I have shown how this work was influenced by different understandings of role, responsibility, problem and solution, and how in turn these were informed by beliefs about the nature and purpose of language and literacy, the professionalism of the teacher, the autonomy of the school and the needs of the child. Each group operated in the context of an inter-connected system of education which functioned very differently from today's model. The spaces in which actors worked to construct, recontextualise and disseminate advice no longer exist, and

those voices privileged with the status and power to shape practice have changed profoundly since the 1970s. Researching past spaces and voices bears witness to the work of people whose actions have long since been forgotten, misremembered, caricatured or dismissed, as the great project of primary literacy teaching continues to move forward through time.

There are many ways to 'make sense' of change in literacy pedagogy and curriculum in the past (Ball, 1985: 79). By examining the relationship between the work of each group and the context in which it operated - in its understood present - I have shown how responses to primary literacy teaching were formed and communicated. Considering all four groups in detail I have been able to reflect at least some of the complexity of their operation, both singly and in relationship. Looking laterally at each group's operation rather than taking a linear narrative approach has allowed me to reach a more nuanced understanding of those spaces in which advice on the teaching of literacy was constructed.

My intention was never to immerse myself in the singularities of each case study, then to raise my head and survey the landscape of my finished work to expose a structure and meaning hitherto concealed. My research has led me neither to the construction of a shiny new analytical model nor to the endorsement or refutation of an existing paradigm. I have used elements of theory to interrogate my data more effectively and to organise an otherwise amorphous mass of detail. It has been useful to relate each case study to those broad structures and operations of the education system which render past actions intelligible (Tosh, 2009: 12). But I have not found a single ready-made theory which could fully account for the particularity of my case-studies without fundamentally distorting them, or itself, in the process. By using theory as a tool, rather than an end in itself (Ball, 2006: 1-2; Beadie, 2011: 217; Foucault, 1974: 523), I have been able to identify those areas where my data complicates or confounds the theory, reminding us that history is valuable precisely for its tendency to assert the complexity and variety of

a past that considers real people and institutions rather than 'cardboard cut-out' replicas (Ball, 1997: 22; Burke, 2005: 188).

Reflecting on the operation of my four case study groups, I am confronted with the essential humanity of their endeavours. The stored, catalogued and archived texts and pictures from which I selected my data were all produced by individuals at work on the shared enterprise of improving the teaching of literacy in primary schools. The data shows us that this task was frequently contested, ambiguous and complicated. Each case study illustrates the efforts of those concerned with literacy teaching to understand their work in terms of possibility and constraint. By investigating the relationship between those understandings and the construction and dissemination of advice for teachers, we see that this cannot be assumed to be formed by a process of rational scientific advancement whereby successive understandings of pedagogy are replaced by evermore effective evidence-based versions. Rather it is shaped and promoted by real people working in real institutions in their own complicated present, using those spaces for thought and action which seem to be available.

While my research is historical, it is also rooted in my own identity as a primary teacher with a particular interest in literacy. From the outset I wanted my work to constitute more than a tiny micro-historical study of relevance only to a specialised few by locating it in relationship with the present as well as the past. To do this I realised that I would have to move between the particularity of inner London in the 1970s to something more generalisable. How might my work connect with the present day concerns of readers involved in the business of teaching literacy, as well as with those interested the details of historical research? If my conclusions were located more in the messy workings of humanity than in the abstractions of grand theory, how could I communicate this?

The field of the history of education is periodically convulsed with self-doubt and anxiety over its perceived inability to reach a broader audience, either of historians or of those

working in education (DiMascio, 2015: 6; McCulloch, 2011; Richardson, 2000: 34). As a primary teacher and a historical researcher, I am familiar with this uncertainty on both a professional and personal level. It seems to me that one way of connecting education more productively with its past is to use historical research to interrogate those accepted narratives of schooling in 'the old days' which distort, mythologise or condemn past practice (Alexander, 2010: 25, 30; Freathy & Doney, 2015). My research has shown that dominant stories in popular memory, political discourse, and historical texts have a tendency to simplify and misrepresent the past in relation to the present. Paying careful attention to the past on its own terms allows us to challenge these misrepresentations and see beyond stereotypes.

Another way of connecting productively with the past can be found in those everyday thoughts and actions which make up our present. Walking to work early in the morning, my mind (and rucksack) filled with the practical requirements of the day ahead in a class of 30 small children, I sometimes visualise those other teachers in London and beyond, all heading into school. We are teachers trying to 'do' best practice; what do we know, or think we know, about how to achieve this? Our understanding of what best practice looks like is shaped by a multitude of shifting and often competing pressures, layers of advice, direction, learning and experience working in conjunction with those 'half-articulated 'common-sense' theories' which inform our work with the children we teach (Steedman, 1985: 90). This knowledge offers us necessary direction, routine and security, but it can also function to 'police the boundaries of possibility' (Popkewitz, 2015: 3). In exploring the work of those concerned with advising teachers on literacy in the past, and identifying how their response was shaped by context and contingency, I have been questioning the 'common sense' of curriculum, of policy, of professional identity, and of pedagogy, interrogating how these 'boundaries of possibility' have been constructed, by whom, and in whose interests (Cormack, 2011: 135; Gale, 2001: 383).

By looking critically at the past on its own terms we can engage in 'a process of estrangement of the present' (Cormack, 2011: 152; Tosh, 2009). Like us, the members of the Bullock Committee, the staff at the CLPE, the ILEA Inspectorate and Education Committee members were all operating in their own present. Investigating their function and operation in the context of the particular time and place in which they worked illuminates the relationship between their work and its immediate context. If we accept that our own contemporaneity is not an irresistible culmination of purposeful events, resting upon 'profound intentions and immutable necessities' (Foucault, 1977: 148, 154), but is likewise an unstable and shifting framework which shapes and defines our thoughts and actions, we can 'make it strange' in ways which allow us to question and disturb its assumptions (Popkewitz, 2011: 18; Reid & Green, 2001: 1).

This process is unlikely to be easy or comfortable. It may threaten to tear away the security blanket of what we know and what we do. And it certainly disrupts the current emphasis on 'managing and changing what teachers do rather than engaging with their thinking' (Burgess, 2003). But it is surely possible to do one's job and also 'to carry out in that specific area work that may properly be called intellectual, an essentially critical work... I don't mean a demolition job, one of rejection or refusal, but a work of examination that consists of suspending as far as possible the system of values to which one refers when testing and assessing it. In other words: what am I doing at the moment I'm doing it?' (Foucault in Kritzman, 1988: 107).

Using the past to disturb the assumptions of the present and to question what we do, what we think, and why, is an extremely valuable use of historical research in education, and one that is particularly necessary in times when we may be encouraged to favour 'assertion at the expense of argument' when teaching literacy to young children (Styles & Drummond, 1994: 10). In an educational system where the demands of high-stakes testing and data analysis can 'mitigate against thinking about alternative ways of doing things' (head teacher, quoted in Bangs, et al., 2011: 46), recognising the operation of

those forces which constrain possibility can only be productive. Working within a model of school literacy which is so tightly linked to prescription and assessment that it can feel as though we are offering the children we teach a 'constrained and reductionist' version of literacy (Green, 2006: 10), it is particularly important to develop a sense of perspective, an awareness of other ways of working, and a critical approach to current models of pedagogy and curriculum. If there are limits to our practice as teachers, there are also more opportunities and spaces than we might realise. By understanding how perceptions of possibility and constraint have operated on literacy teaching in the past, we can engage more critically and creatively with our own present as we work to develop literacy in the classroom.

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