

**‘Where Has All The Education Gone?’
(Exploring the Language of Learning within Further
Education)**

Andy Smith
Blackpool & The Fylde College, UK.

Debra Swift
Blackpool & The Fylde College, UK.

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Abstract

'The customer selects what they want, we deliver it to them, and they leave happy and grasping the qualification they selected.' (Member of a management team speaking to academic staff within an FE college in 2010)

Biesta (2005) indicated that the rise in the language of learning has impacted on the way *'we understand and speak about education'*. It has led to education being seen as a commodity and the learner as a customer, which in turn has led to a market model in FE; one which has influenced policy decisions, funding and created an audit driven culture (James & Biesta 2007, Hodkinson 2008). To ascertain the impact the language of learning has had upon practitioners' understanding of education, their practice and their professional identity, semi structured interviews were carried out. Twelve practitioners of differing levels of experience in the FE sector across the North of England were interviewed, from PGCE trainees through to teachers with ten or more years of experience. Thematic analysis and coding of responses revealed the presence of two additional languages; one related to a therapeutic ethos and the other connected to aspects of the market model. Both these and the language of learning were inter-relational in nature apparently legitimizing and reinforcing each other, defining and valuing what can be done. The languages appeared to be creating a blinkered view of life, one stripped of complexity, leading to a simplistic, reductionist and instrumental perspective. This perspective is in conflict with the complex concepts and theories from teacher training, so much so that it appeared such concepts quickly became forgotten as they had no apparent purpose or relevance within the actual practice, a practice that is defined by these languages. Of particular concern was the focus on the individual at the expense of the social, greatly narrowing educational possibilities. Without ways to discuss education that are informed by its connective, social and complex nature we will continue to be impoverished by the languages that now pervade Further Education.

Introduction

Concern has been rising amongst educational researchers in recent years around the dominance of neo-liberal ideology and how it has influenced how we talk about education (Avis 2003, 2005, Ball 2005). Biesta (2005) notes the rise of the language of learning, which now dominates policy documents and much contemporary educational discourse. For instance when analysing the professional standards on which all FE teaching training is based, published by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK 2006), we found that the word 'education' appears just once whilst 'learning' appears 81 times!

Asking the question of why language matters to education, Biesta responds;

'since Foucault we know that linguistic or discursive practices delineate – and perhaps we can even say constitute – what can be seen, what can be said, what can be known, what can be thought and, ultimately, what can be done.' (Biesta 2005, p.54)

Many consider language to be crucial in how we see the world. To Bruner and colleagues (Bruner et al. 1956) language was *'a mould in terms of which thought categories are cast'* (p. 11). Building on the work of Sapir (1958 [1929]), Whorf (1956) came to see language in a manner consisting of two associated principles; *linguistic determinism* where what we can think about is determined by language, and *linguistic relativity* where those who speak different languages perceive and think about the world differently.

Some such as Kelly (2004) would argue that by turning every social institution into a commercial enterprise we have what philosophers would call a 'category error', the mistake of discussing one area

of activity in the language, terms and with the concepts which are appropriate to another. Looking at this through a 'Whorfian' lens one might suggest that the thoughts of those working in FE colleges are in a state of confusion, the language into which they are being inculcated through training and via policy initiatives being very different to those of their mentors, more experienced lecturers whose language was developed before 'incorporation' (when colleges were released from local authority control in 1993) which is when Randle and Brady (1997) argue neo-liberalism began to take hold in FE.

So we find ourselves with a language that describes the process of education in the manner of an economic transaction with learner as consumer, educator as provider supplying a commodity. With this comes ideas such as responding to the needs of the learner, giving them value for money, and the customer is always right. Seen in this economic light, the learner/consumer know what their needs are and know what they want. Yet Biesta (2005) is quick to point out how it is up to the professional judgement and expertise of teachers to make decisions about what a particular student needs. Quoting Feinberg he highlights the difference between the market model and the professional model;

'In market models consumers are supposed to know what they need, and producers bid in price and quality to satisfy them. In professional models the producer not only services a need, but also defines it /.../ Sam goes to the physician complaining of a headache. Is it an aspirin or brain surgery that he needs? Only the doctor knows.' (Feinberg 2001, p.403)

One can argue that the language of learning has led to a market model in FE which has influenced policy decisions, funding and created an audit driven culture (James & Biesta 2007, Hodkinson 2008). If one considers a more moderate form of 'Whorfism' one could also argue that it is the neo-liberal market model which has influenced the way lecturers see the world and thus strengthened the language of learning which then increases the influence of the market model in an ever growing reinforcing and spiral.

But what impact has it actually had on the ground, amongst practitioners? Has it influenced their understanding of education and thus their practice? To investigate this an invitation to participate in a study was sent out to FE practitioners from across the North of England.

Method

To gain an understanding of how teachers, think, talk and reflect on their professional experiences a qualitative research paradigm was adopted focusing on meanings and concepts that are salient to practitioners. The aim was to uncover some of the underlying conceptions of learning and education that may in turn determine educational practice.

Qualitative interview was selected as the approach, for as Byrne (2004) notes it, *'is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals' attitudes and values...and provides better access to interviewees' views, interpretation of events, understandings, experiences and opinions...'* (p.182)

It was decided to examine conceptions of practitioners with varying levels of experience which formed the categories into which participants could be grouped. The differing levels of experience were chosen because practitioner's conceptualisations are likely to develop over time, as a result of personal and professional experience, interactions and reflections. Time is an especially relevant variable within FE given the significant and wholesale changes and upheavals which the sector has experienced over the preceding twenty years.

Sample

The need to generate a sample that would enable generalisation from the results was not required for this small scale qualitative, exploratory study as access to the population was the prime concern. The debate regarding the generalisability of qualitative studies is well established (Hargreaves, 1996, 1997; Oakley, 2003; Hammersley, 1997; Stake 1994) and in this instance scientific generalisability is rejected in favour of fuzzy generalisations (Basssey 2001, pp.5-22) where generalisation from a single or limited number of cases is possible. Through this it is hoped one might extrapolate consistent features which could have relevance for those working in the sector.

The selected sample was derived from a pool of 74 interested practitioners within FE from across the North of England who responded to an email call for participants. All participants were fully informed of the aims and objectives of the study and were required to sign a consent form which guaranteed their confidentiality and non identification in the written research paper. Each participant was ascribed a coding number and assigned to the prescribed categories selected for the study. A random number generator was used to identify two participants for each identified sample category (see Tab.1);

| Length of service/experience | n |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| Pre-service Trainees | 2 |
| In-service Trainees | 2 |
| First Year of Service | 2 |
| 2-5 years service | 2 |
| 5-10 years service | 2 |
| 10+ years service | 2 |

Table 1: Participant Categories

The participants were then classified as follows (see Tab.2);

| Code | Teaching Area | Length of service/experience | Gender |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| PS1 | Art | Pre-service Trainee | Male |
| PS2 | Access Studies | Pre-service Trainee | Female |
| IS1 | Computing | In-service Trainee | Male |
| IS2 | Engineering | In-service Trainee | Male |
| FY1 | Performing Arts | First Year of Service | Male |
| FY2 | Functional Skills | First Year of Service | Female |
| TF1 | Hair & Beauty | 2-5 years service | Female |
| TF2 | Construction | 2-5 years service | Male |
| FT1 | Access Studies | 5-10 years service | Female |
| FT2 | Personal & Social Ed. (PSE) | 5-10 years service | Male |
| TP1 | Humanities | 10+ years service | Female |
| TP2 | Literacy | 10+ years service | Female |

Unfortunately we can claim no objectivity of distance in this work as both of us work within an FE College and have experienced firsthand much of that to which the interviewees refer. One of us has had over 20 years experience within the FE Sector, mainly within FE teacher training, whilst the other 8 years of FE teaching.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted over a ten day period in a range of settings and times convenient to the busy practitioners. Each was recorded onto audio data recorders for later transcription. Whilst the same prompts and questions were used with each participant at the same time the researchers were mindful of the need to *'allow them the space to talk'* (Rapley 2004, p.22). In some instances where practitioners revealed misconceptions, it was decided not to challenge these due to the impacts this type of interaction could have on the relationship built up in the interview.

Direct questioning around the concepts of 'learning' and 'education' were avoided as respondents may have provided the answers they perceived the researchers would want to hear in the form of espoused (Eraut 2000) concepts. The categories of questions were selected based on the work of Schraw and Olafson (2002) who explored teachers' epistemological views and educational practices, capturing key aspects of the practitioner role and experience. The question categories used to structure the interview discussions were; 1. Role of the Teacher, 2. Role of the Student, 3. Role of Peers, 4. Curriculum, 5. Assessment, 6. Pedagogy, 7. Knowledge. Finally, each participant was asked to provide a brief narrative account detailing a typical week in their professional life.

Analysis

An etic analysis, focusing on the prescribed researcher derived categories was conducted in the first instance and from this key themes and concepts were coded for frequency, validity and representativeness. The data which were derived from the brief narrative account 'a typical week in the life of...' produced emic categories. The exception to this was the strong emergence of a therapeutic emic category which arose across all interview discussions.

Themes which emerged initially were; Therapeutic Model, Accountability, Pressures of Administration, Time Pressures, Concepts of Learning, Concepts of Education, Political Dimensions, Funding and Managerialism. These themes were further refined to 1. Concepts of Learning, 2. Therapeutic/pastoral and 3. Performativity. By 'Performativity' we mean that which relates to a performance culture marked by an emphasis on targets and accountability (Ball 2003).

Phrases and statements that were repeatedly used by respondents (in vivo codes) (Miles & Huberman 1994) were identified which pointed to regularities in the data. Looking for contestability and counterintuitive responses was equally as important and provided an additional refocused lens for examining the material. The coding categories used were sub themes related to Concepts of Learning, Therapeutic/Pastoral and Performativity.

To provide some degree of internal consistency, a re-examination of a sample of transcripts occurred. This was in order to prevent a degree of tunnel vision and reliance on what appeared to be collectively agreed and, in some cases, reified codes. This was essential to both reliability and, to some extent validity, as the analysis progressed over time.

Both the etic and emic codes provided some illuminating, unanticipated and previously unaccounted for emergent realities, some of which required shifts in analysis. The emic codes emerging from the respondents' data were useful in helping to uncover some of the conceptualisations that are significant for them as practitioners which the initial somewhat imposed coding structure had not revealed.

Only when satisfied that all the data had been classified, categories had been 'saturated' and a number of seemingly significant regularities in the data discovered were the coding and recoding activities considered complete. The thematic analysis, subsequent coding, chunking and clustering revealed conceptualisations that were systematically compared and aligned to current, contemporary research literature.

Findings & Discussion

We entered into this research looking at evidence of the language of learning and its influences, however what quickly became apparent was the presence of possibly two other languages, one of a therapeutic ethos and one related to the economic market model and performativity. To say these are separate languages is to fail to acknowledge their inter-relational nature and how, as we shall see, they apparently legitimize and reinforce each other. This has clearly had impact upon how the interviewees view themselves as professionals, how they view their practice, their purpose and how they perceive their students and each other.

The languages had resulted in numerous metaphors which appeared to dominate thinking, many interviewees apparently living by these metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) rather than questioning their relevance or use, for instance; *'empty minds'*, *'open mind'*, *'fill their minds'*, *'monkey see monkey do'*, *'acquire knowledge'*, *'learning organisation'*, *'mother hen'*, *'counsellor, dad, mother'*, *'selling it to them'*, *'cascading information'*, *'brought the topic alive'*, *'good practice'*, *'polishing students'*, *'our customers'*.

Some of these metaphors were linked to folk views on learning which were prevalent. For instance, particularly entrenched was the acquisition model (Sfard 1998); *'a student needs to have an open mind, open so I can fill it'* (FY2) with little reference made to the notion that students might arrive with their own knowledge and understanding that could be built upon. The way interviewees talked of modelling behaviour often came across in terms of mimicking behaviour; *'It's a bit monkey see, monkey do, but it works.'* (TF2) and one even expressed annoyance that her students did not mirror her behaviour (FY2). In that instance the interviewee blamed her students rather than assuming her simplistic ideas about students being easily malleable could be wrong.

Some folk views were apparently perpetuated through transmission from fellow practitioners and teacher training and others from experiences remembered from their own learning encounters at school, college or even university. We felt several interviewees saw their folk views on learning as 'common sense' and thus were not to be contested.

Related to this issue was therapy language which veered into that found in New Age circles; *'We are battling against any negativity.'* (FT1), *'I use NLP¹ with my learners'* (TF1). We had both heard similar utterances from other lecturers ourselves and pondered on whether the therapeutic language had legitimised ideas which stem from the current cultural obsession with self-help books and personal improvement quackery, such legitimisation having also been suggested by Ecclestone & Hayes (2009).

There appeared to be an uncritical acceptance of learning styles; *'Meeting kinaesthetic needs, meeting visual learner needs, meeting auditory learner needs: that is what my role is'* (FT1) as if the findings of Coffield and colleagues (Coffield et al. 2004) had never existed. We saw this as a sign of the technical rational approach as it can be written on student paper-work, the display of being learner-centred despite having no educational benefit. It is as if many activities, certainly connected to paperwork, are there to have the appearance of being seen to be doing something rather than actually doing something, something Ball (2005) noted. Interestingly the majority when asked if recorded learning styles were ever referred back to were unable to recall an occasion when they were.

Misconceptions were rife; *'I would call the first 10 to 20 minutes of the lesson, pedagogy teaching'* (FT2), *'Pedagogy, yes you need a bit of that in the lesson'* (PS1). The word pedagogy appeared to strike fear into the hearts of some interviewees who seemed to skirt around it for fear of being 'found out' for not understanding or were brutally honest; *'I don't know what the word means.'* (IS1). Didactic, teacher directed and teacher led aspects of practice were viewed as pedagogy; pedagogy did not seem to include active, collaborative, student-centred or student-negotiated activity. This apparent

lack of understanding around issues of pedagogy was also noted by Goodrham and Hodkinson (2004) in their own study, referring to it as an 'absent presence'.

Misconceptions of pedagogy; '*Pedagogy or whatever it is, not something you ever refer back to after your Cert Ed PGCE, it is something I've quite forgotten.*' (TF1), were more than matched by misconceptions related to the term curriculum. Several interviewees understood it merely as the instrumental production of lesson plans and schemes of work; '*My curriculum is made up of my Lesson Plans and Schemes of Work*' (TF1), with one even belittling his more experienced colleagues; '*up until recently there was no curriculum, to my knowledge,*' (FY2). This appeared strange as we were aware of teacher education programmes focussing on the wider concept of curriculum, the purpose and the ideological underpinnings. We sensed the possibility that when trainees enter the department they are to teach within, these conceptual understandings of curriculum are shoved out and the reductionist lesson plans and schemes of work come to stand for 'curriculum'.

A similar, possibly taught and then forgotten, situation was encountered concerning social constructivism as this was not seen as relating to any activities designed for such a pedagogical approach, instead it was connected to mere support, '*I'm quite a strong believer in communities of learning, so I do sort of try and group people together that can support each other within class.*' (TF1). We found this to be one of the most dichotomous areas of the interviews. Whilst a couple of interviewees made reference to 'team spirit'; '*we're all part of a team going through this together*' (TP1) and another even suggested; '*They have a shared sense of need and learn from one another.*' (FT1), when asked about the role of peers many regarded them as a barrier to learning, merely linking peers to peer pressure; '*peer pressure can break a group.*' (TF1), '*Peers can hinder the learning.*' (FT1).

We wondered where this dichotomy originated from; after all social constructivism is an espoused concept within many staff development activities. We sensed here the possible influence of a concept which underpins both the language of learning and the therapeutic ethos. Both have a focus on the individual as the focus of activity and change; '*In adult education, a therapeutic ethos reduces horizons from local and communal to individualised, emotional ones.*' (Ecclestone et al. 2005), '*One problem with the word 'learning' is that it is basically an individualistic concept.*' (Biesta 2009). As far as the interviewees were concerned, groups were only referred to as some kind of single amorphous entity almost in competition with the needs of individual students. It is interesting to note that both 'languages' have their basis in psychology and this focus on the individual is becoming an ever widening trend, after all consider the decision of the UK Higher Education Funding Councils to put education research in the field of psychology rather than social science (Ecclestone et al. 2005). The conditions for social constructivism have very little chance for success if the languages that surround them are unrelated to the conditions necessary for it to occur.

This 'social versus individual' was apparently manifest in the utterance '*I turn students into learners.*' (FT1) which showed a denigration of the student term in favour of the learner term when one could say that at best the terms are synonymous and the comment a tautology. At worst, the term student, which suggests a relationship (Biesta 2009), is viewed as relating to something of lesser value than learner which focuses on the individual and the self. It is interesting to note that our own experience has been that many of those entering FE like to see themselves as students as for some this aligns them with a community and for others universities, whilst 'learner' lacks the same cultural kudos.

The focus on self is prevalent within the language of therapy which brings with it, Ecclestone (et al. 2005) suggests, a concept of self as a '*diminished self*' a view that, '*erodes belief in resilience, agency and collective support*' (p.184). For instance we found many interviewees portrayed students as victims of circumstance and in certain instances pathologised them; '*a lot of tutors say like he's got dyslexia so that's the problem and not take the time to capture anything else.*' (FT2), '*We help to rehabilitate them.*' (FT1).

Whilst it is true that the intake of the FE colleges includes disaffected and demotivated young people and adults, the causes of that disaffection and demotivation appears to now be framed as problems with emotional well-being, these young people and adults are, '*individuals who are deemed to be emotionally illiterate and vulnerable.*' (Ecclestone et al. 2005). Atkins (2009) is also highly critical of the nurturing and support ethos, especially those underlying initiatives heavily promoted within FE such as ECM² (Every Child Matters). She claims it leads not to empowerment but instead to low expectations which are legitimised in the context of often misunderstood notions and misinterpretations of inclusion. Low expectations of students stemming from a deficit model were evident across several of the interviews, for example, '*I underestimate my students a lot,*' (TF2).

We suggest that the therapeutic language which surrounds the deficit model brings limitation on the potential for agency which in turn dilutes practitioners' concepts of learning, especially when one considers the importance Dewey (1939) and others place on student agency as a crucial component in education.

At least one interviewee however found himself at odds with the edicts related to a therapeutic approach; '*I'd been told never to involve autistic students in group work, yet Barry (student) really wanted to.*' (IS1) This interviewee reacted against the homogenising effect of a 'diagnosis' because here was a student he had begun to understand. He reported how the student had thrived in the group work and had taken on a leadership role. What was of interest was his reaction to his successful judgement; '*I just hope they don't find out.*' It appeared he was afraid of learner support services reporting him to his line manager for not following guidelines. Here was not only an example of therapy language reducing student agency but also possibly an internal conflict around the idea of teacher agency impacted by an amalgam of therapy and performativity.

The therapy ethos certainly appeared to dominate practice for many of the interviewees and affected their perception of their role; '*I'm a mother hen to my Post 19 learners.*' (IS1), '*A counsellor, a dad, a mother, who has to administer tough and gentle love,*' (TF2). We saw this reinforced at an FE college's awards for excellence in teaching and learning where the winners had quotes read out from the student nomination forms on which governors' based their judgements. Such quotes were awash with tales of lecturers' listening to students' problems at home, helping students overcoming issues of lack of self-esteem or confidence, possibly reflecting what is being valued at an organisational level.

We considered the possibility that the notion of student 'fragility' which underpins much of the therapeutic notion was colouring how some of the LLUK professional standards were being viewed. For instance AS6 'Maintenance of a safe environment', appeared to now be being viewed as 'Maintenance of a **psychologically** safe environment'. The majority of the interviewees made reference to making students 'feel safe' and comments such as; '*You don't want to upset them as they'll leave*' (FY1). We feel that this is in direct conflict with the idea that challenge and the overcoming of frustration are crucial areas of the education process, as Sennett (2008) notes, '*The good teacher imparts a satisfying explanation; the great teacher... unsettles, bequeaths disquiet, invites argument*' (p6). Could this preoccupation with creating safe, psychologically therapeutic environments be why we found pedagogy, methods and philosophy to be lacking in the discourse, after all as Ecclestone claims; '*The closer that professionals have to move towards the expressed or attributed emotional needs of their students, the harder it becomes to offer pedagogic and assessment activities that are challenging or perhaps necessarily threatening.*' (Ecclestone et al. 2005, p.194)

This therapeutic focus led to frustrations at what some interviewees perceived was expected of them; '*We need specialised mentors, I know how to cut hair, I don't know how to deal with someone who wants to commit suicide, I'm not equipped for that and I've not been taught how to.*' (TF1). Some were finding the expectations arising from the therapeutic language were coming to dominate their practice; '*I have 10 jobs to do and they go down the list due to learner disclosure, it could be medical, homelessness, assault. I don't know what I'm going to come into. After half-term, it's worse after half-term, they could be sent down, issues like that.*' (TP1), '*Behavioural and language issues, sending home due to not taking Ritalin, EMA³, dealing with EMA problems as parents rely on that.*' (FT1).

It was becoming apparent that interwoven amongst the therapy language were connections to performativity, for instance consider the quote; *'we got GP support and the learner was retained.'* (IS1). Here was possible evidence of the therapeutic ethos being seen as a means to improve retention not as a means to improve learning. We considered whether we were beginning to see indications that the language of therapy was perhaps legitimizing the market model and vice versa. After all retention is a 'Quality' funding concept driving the action, therefore the therapeutic ethos has value as it helps the organisation meet the requirements of performativity.

Strong links were becoming evident between performativity and therapy, certainly reflected in the discourse around time which was a major issue for many of the interviewees; *'I have to cover every child matters, health and safety, I have to cover seven components in each of my lessons that relates to every child matters. I feel there just isn't enough time!'* (TP2) *'Time is the barrier, it stops the creation of clever and interesting assignments and assessment'* (TP1). Not having enough time was clearly an issue, yet impact on personal lives was accepted as part of the job; *'I've spoken to those in my area and outside and prep is happening at home, there aren't enough hours in the week,'* (TF2), *'I spend on average about twelve hours outside of work time on preparing for lessons, up-dating the paper work.'* (IS1), *'Very very busy, very hectic, sometimes I don't have time to think or breath, extremely busy and extremely pressured.'* (TP2).

Conflicting demands were ever present amongst the interviewees, especially concerning paperwork; *'You know the emails, the admin! I never thought when I grew up I'd be a secretary,'* (TP2). One interviewee (TF2) noted how he was taken from his class every two week to go out and recruit students for next year, causing great disruption to his current students' learning experience. He stated how he felt that the organisation was only concerned with recruitment and that once they had got students in, the organisation did not seem to care about them, whereas he did and this appeared to create role conflict for him.

We began to consider issues around the sort of language which was valued and whether this was causing roles to be 're-perceived' or at least self-perception being in conflict. Certainly language was indicating some interviewees appeared to be pursuing aims and outcomes which had little value educationally yet were being valued by the organisation. Subject content was apparently being squeezed out and purpose was not being addressed beyond vague organisational mission statements and performativity goals.

Something strong was emerging from the data relating to levels of experience which was starting to indicate who was valuing what language. For instance frustrations with bureaucracy getting in the way came mainly from those with over five years and upwards of experience; *'The development of resources I can't do at work anymore I have to do that at home, there's no time for that at work, it's admin, admin, admin!'* (FT1), a trip that failed to occur because of one missing signature; *'they're bloody adults, some of them older than me! It would have brought their topic alive yet they've missed out!'* (TP2).

Whilst we found some grumbling from those with less than five years of experience, there was also acceptance of it as part of the role; *'I wouldn't like to say red tape because we have to have it to be transparent, to justify and make ends meet.'* (TF2). Such acquiescence was also evident regarding a lack of questioning of policy, only those over five years and upwards in experience making reference to it; *'I teach in the gaps of the policy.'* (TP1), *'I mend or bend to try and achieve something that fulfils the students' needs and also fulfils policy's need.'* (FT1), *'I'm totally hampered by policy. I'm absolutely under the cosh of every single policy that you can probably imagine.'* (TP2).

With regards retention and achievement, the more experienced interviewees expressed frustration, one explaining that she had been made to deliver an easier qualification to ensure more students would pass, *'but the assessment is too easy, you bore learners because of this, attendance figures drop off and the man wants to know why!'* (FT1). Another also suggested the demands pressed upon them in

this regard; *'They have to walk away with a qualification or the tutor is in trouble.'* (TP1) This was strongly highlighted by the interviewee (TP2) who stated; *'I'm absolutely terrified of withdrawing a student when they've not had the achievement.'* Tearful, she gave an impassioned account of the extraordinary lengths she went through to chase up two students, who had left her course, to sit a final test so that they would get their achievement; *'they're just young girls and they don't want to do it and I'm terrified.'* She then proceeded to explain the various time consuming procedures of reporting all that she had done, only to have her Curriculum Manager refuse to sign the student withdrawals, *'it is like the Spanish Inquisition, why have you let these students go and not got the achievement, we are expected to have 100% achievement and its impossible. Some students will just go'* She stated that she felt; *'we are under a tyranny of fear.'*

Strikingly, those mainly under five years experience often dealt with tensions related to retention and achievement by blaming other members of staff; *'They tell students anything to get them on the course and I have to pick up the pieces.'* (IS1), *'Other lecturers don't seem to give students enough time on a topic.'* (PS1) *'the barriers to learning that we do tend to find are from other members of staff teaching on my programmes.'* (TF1), *'For lesser motivated staff, shall we say, it would be easy not to bother.'* (FY1)

The pressures of performativity clearly have had an impact; for talk of fabrication was also evident mainly in those with over five years experience; *'We all know other lecturers give students the answers to ensure they get their target achievements.'* (FT1), *'Quite a lot of 'letting it through' goes on, especially at certain times of year when learners haven't attended.'* (TF1), *'amending students on the system to fix the figures.'* (TP2). This led us to wonder if the lack of it being mentioned amongst many of those under five years means they see such processes as the norm. For instance whilst a negative sense of competition did appear in discourses from those with over five years experience; *'it's like every Department for itself!'* (TP2), *'We talk of recruitment with integrity but if you don't get the numbers...'* (TP1), there was apparent buy-in to this competitive ethos of those with under five years of experience; *'We beat the other Departments on our figures.'* (TF2), *'We could have been a Grade One if it hadn't been for that part of the School.'* (FY2).

This focus on instrumentalist performativity was reflected in the less experienced interviewees commenting on the 'older hands' not understanding the importance of the figures. We felt those with under five years of experience were assuming that figures, even if fabricated, were the source of excellence. As Ball (2000) suggests; *'There is something very seductive about being 'properly passionate about excellence, about achieving 'peak performance'.'* (p.148)

We believed that we were seeing Worf's linguistic relativity, the two clear camps speaking different languages which brought with them different understandings of what could be said, done and thought and thus what was ascribed value. We believe that these values along with the pressures to perform within a competitive environment have led to the externalising of blame and have resulted in the lack of collegiality evident across the interviews. As Ball (2003, p.224) noted, *'there is a real possibility that authentic social relations are replaced by judgemental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone. Their value as a person is eradicated.'* He goes on to quote Lash and Urry (1994, p.15) with talk of *'emptying out'* of social relationships, which are left *'flat'* and *'deficient in affect'*, things which resonate strongly with the interview data.

Any sense of valuing social collective action and the importance of human relations was absent as value was placed on the individual and the self. This was reflected in the economic pragmatic view of education (a view that ignores such ideas as care for others, democracy and even how to live in peaceful co-existence) which unfortunately appeared accepted by the majority; *'they've basically come to pursue that which will give them a better job, a better lifestyle, a qualification, status.'* (TF1). Comments like *'to get the good job, the good car,'* were common, the qualification being seen as the 'token' with which these goods and lifestyles could be 'bought'. Only one interviewee (TP1) challenged that view and bemoaned the 'buying power' of learning as a simplistic concept used to engender motivation.

Students were occasionally referred to as customers; *'You need to treat them as customers. If they weren't there we'd lose our jobs.'* (IS1). When talking about functional skills, one interviewee stated; *'The single biggest issue is selling it to them, and it doesn't matter how we market it, we've tried all sorts of different ways of selling it to them.'* (FY2). We felt that by seeing students as customers would cause the students to see themselves as customers and thus learning would be considered the mere buying of a product. This could be extended to the idea of 'buying the learning' which 'buys the qualification' which allows one 'to buy the goods and the lifestyle'. We worried that the customer mentality, where the only action is the purchase would limit student agency, an agency possibly already limited by the therapeutic ethos.

It would appear the economic market language was another influence on narrowing the possibilities of education for, as with the other languages identified; this also focuses on the individual and the self. If we humans are, as the title of the book by David Brooks (2011) suggests; *'The Social Animal'*, then in Further Education we are using languages which blinker us to that wider 'truth'. And until the language with which we discuss education, is informed by its connective, social and complex nature we will continue be impoverished by a language of learning and the other languages which are subsumed by it, reify it and reinforce it.

Conclusion

In looking for the language of learning, we found the presence of the languages of the therapeutic ethos and that of the economic market and performativity. What was noticeable was the manner in which the languages acted upon each other, from reinforcing each other to legitimising each other and as they align, linguistically determining the only way of explaining, discussing, reflecting and valuing practice. These linguistic determinants are; the individual valued over the social, folk view metaphors, reductionist perspective, instrumentalism valued, deficit model of students, and customerisation (Love 2008).

Within the linguistic determinants revealed in the interviewee data there was a presence of linguistic relativity. This relativity appeared related to levels of experience, though we cannot say with any degree of certainty that this was the result of the presence of a different language or may simply be the result of maturation. The linguistic relativity suggested those with up to 5 years of service had embraced a mechanistic view of learning whilst those over 5 years of service felt tension between the mechanistic and an organic view of education.

Illustrative of the focus on the mechanistic over the organic was the considerable focus on the individual at the expense of the social. As Biesta notes; *'the language of learning makes it difficult to acknowledge the relational character of education and also makes it difficult to raise questions about the particular role and responsibility of the educator in such relationships.'* (2009, p.3). Such focus clearly limits the educational possibilities for practitioners.

We felt the identified linguistic determinates had strong focus on only the 'what', for instance; what works, what techniques, what methods, the 'why' being worryingly absent. The teleological character of education (Biesta 2010) requires engagement with the aim and purpose of activities to enable the 'what' to be understood, to be internalized and incorporated into practice with meaningful engagement. One without the other could lead to disengagement with the 'what', as it is not rooted in purpose, it is not given meaning, it is not rationalized; it is sterile.

The languages appeared to have a simplistic approach to the 'what', as if all problems had simple solutions. When this did not match the reality of the situations encountered, blame of other individuals would often arise, such blame having a detrimental effect on collegiality which we feel would prevent the trust required for effective development of practitioners. This blame appeared to be as a result of a failure to question the limitations of the languages. For them the languages are all around them, they

are valued by their organization and those in power, thus they cannot be wrong! We wondered if the languages were expedient for managing an organization with instrumental goals. Do they serve the interests of those managing learning whilst limiting educational practice and agency for practitioners and students alike? This would clearly require further investigation of both practitioner and student experiences and the possible effects of the languages we have identified. Such an opportunity should be taken to challenge our findings which after all are the view of two practitioner researchers based on a small scale study.

We originally were asking the question as to the impact of the language of learning and having discovered the presence of the other two languages, we thus extended our analysis. Our findings suggest that practitioners are presented with a life stripped of complexity as the languages give a simplistic, reductionist and instrumental perspective; 'if you do this, it will do this!' These simplistic perspectives conflict in such a way with complex concepts and theories from teacher training that such concepts quickly become forgotten as they have no apparent purpose or relevance within the actual practice, a practice that is defined by these languages.

So closely aligned are these languages that they have become inextricably linked and a language of the job has formed; one which limits practice, reduces possibilities and constrains notions of what it is to be an FE professional.

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Notes

1. NLP refers to Neuro-Linguistic Programming, an alternative therapy for changing patterns of mental and emotional behaviour popularised by such individuals as celebrity hypnotist Paul McKenna. *'To the best of our knowledge, there is little or no independent evaluation of, or evidence base for, the effectiveness of NLP'* (Tosey & Mathison 2003).
2. Every Child Matters is a set of UK government reforms supported by the Children Act 2004. The legislation covers children and young adults up to the age of 19, or 24 for those with disabilities to ensure that every child, whatever their background or circumstances have the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. It has been promoted very heavily within FE colleges as it is linked to 'safeguarding' which is a limiting grade (that is a grade which contributes to and affects other judgements such as overall effectiveness) with Ofsted (the organisation which inspects and judges nursery, school and FE college provision within England).
3. EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance) was a means tested financial scheme that would provide up to £30 a week to help students with the cost of learning. Any missed lessons except for extenuating circumstances would void payment for that week. The EMA was closed to new applicants in England on 1 January 2011.

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