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ReflectEd provides a forum for the publication of interdisciplinary articles that celebrate the challenging and changing nature of educational research and practice. It is published by the School of Education, Theology and Leadership to encourage, celebrate and disseminate research, scholarly activity, and exciting pedagogical practice that is in keeping with our mission. This mission is to advance education through continuing reflective practice and professional development in diverse schools.

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Guest editorial: special post-graduate research edition

Dr Jane Renowden
St Mary's University, Twickenham

I was asked by Christine Edwards-Leis (editor of *ReflectED*) to be the guest editor for this edition back in November 2015 and it was with great pleasure that I accepted. In September 2015 my role within the School of Education Theology and Leadership changed from Programme Director for Research to Programme Director for Postgraduate Certificate Darlington. The one thing I knew I would miss above anything as a result of the change was the contact I had with the School's Postgraduate Research (PGR) students. Over my time as Programme Director for Research it was my responsibility to engage with the paperwork issues but also I had the privilege of chairing a number of progress panels. These enabled me to develop an understanding of the significance of the doctoral work the students are engaged in and to see the wide range of foci within our School.

St Mary's, and specifically the School of Education, Theology and Leadership, has the strategic aim of increasing the percentage of Doctoral, Scholarship and Research activities in the School. On the external website it says:

'...the research strategy embraces the St Mary's University strategy and is articulated in a vision of intent:
"We believe that our educational practice is embedded in and informed by excellence in research and scholarship. We add to the body of national and international knowledge and we engage in collaborative dialogue to encourage and empower committed practitioners and researchers".

The PGR students make a big contribution to this vision and as you will see from this special edition which focuses on some of their work, it does indeed have the potential to contribute to national and international knowledge of the fields in which they are located.

Within the field of Theology the School has strength in depth with a number of experienced and highly regarded academics who support and encourage our doctoral students. As you will see from this edition of *ReflectED* the research the students are doing covers a wide range of foci and it reflects the wide reaching areas of excellence we see across the field from Catholic Education to the study of the Old Testament to Spirituality.

Within Education we have a growing number of practitioners who are doing their doctorates at St Mary's. This includes staff here and colleagues from schools. It is anticipated that this will grow with the introduction of the Professional Doctorate this academic year which offers a taught route to a Doctorate.

Students engage in doctoral study for a number of reasons; possible career development, to fulfil work expectations and intellectual curiosity. For me it was to hold myself to account for what I do and I see doctoral study as a process that creates the possibility of the development of the following dispositions:

- personal engagement of the individual;
- the development of the capacity of individuals to exercise agency;
- significant learning and the valuing of informed personal knowledge;
- the development of 'capable human beings' (Ricoeur 2005);
- those involved contributing to the setting of the standards of judgement by which their practices are judged in collaboration with others; and,
- rigorous improvement in practices.

This can only inform and contribute to the discourses which underpin the teaching and learning which is at the heart of the School of Education, Theology and Leadership and the following contributions are examples of some of the doctoral research going on at the moment.

This special edition opens with one of the supervisors, Professor Steve Walton, writing a special report on researching and writing a conference paper. Steve is a popular presenter at our annual PGR student conference and offers valuable advice to students as they commence their academic careers. Marc Jacobs, one of the PhD students from the Education field writes with his supervisor, Christine Edwards-Leis, about his use of Focus Groups in his doctoral research. This paper emerged from his presentation at BERA 2015 (Belfast) where he explained how he used this method as part of his methodology in his research into secondary mathematics. Jacki Thomas, one of our Theology PhD students writes about how Hospice Chaplains understand the work that they do. Jacki presented aspects of her research in one of our School's research seminars this year and her expertise in the field was richly welcomed by those who attended.

Tim Mills, one of the students on the inaugural Professional Doctorate programme, writes about the establishment of his professional identity. His piece showcases one of the assessment points in this taught doctorate and illustrates an important aspect of the journey that students choosing this route make. We close this special edition with a section of Fiona Wilson's PhD application. Fiona offered this piece to showcase the level of reflection and research that is required prior to a submission of an application to study at this level.

We hope you enjoy this special edition of *ReflectED*. Past editions have included outstanding work by our undergraduate and Masters' students so it was only fitting that our postgraduate research students were offered an edition of their own so that they could share their research journey.

References:

Ricoeur, P., (1995). *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

ReflectED report

Thinking it through: researching and writing a conference paper

Professor Steve Walton
St Mary's University, Twickenham

This brief essay aims to reflect on the process of researching and writing a paper which I gave at a conference of the Centre for the Social-Scientific Study of the Bible at St Mary's University, Twickenham on 22nd-23rd May 2015. The conference was called 'Cities of God? An Interdisciplinary and International Assessment of Early Christian Engagement with the Ancient Urban Environment(s)',¹ and I had committed myself (as the conference host and organiser) to contributing a paper. The two major themes of the conference were:

- (i) how the urban setting of earliest Christianity affected its development; and,
- (ii) how the earliest Christians reflected on and theologised about cities.

The plan from the start was that the papers would be published in a book.

Getting the idea

I was required to submit a paper title and abstract by 1st December 2014, so this focused my mind wonderfully. I began thinking about the paper in the early autumn of 2014, which enabled me to have thought enough about it to submit an abstract and title that would resemble the final paper. I then did focused work on the paper from February 2015 onwards, and really focused work in the second half of April and during May.

The idea for the paper came from noticing the 'citizenship' language in Philippians 1:27 and 3:20. It looked to my eye to be Paul using language which would be used in Graeco-Roman cities, but it is clearly being applied to the believing community in Philippi and more widely. This gave me a research topic relevant to the second conference theme. Three factors came together to make this definitely worth pursuing. First, this issue was a development of a paper I'd written in 2013, where I'd considered the way early Christian groups designated themselves in the book of Acts.² There I'd noticed that *ekklésia*, the Greek word usually translated as 'church' in the New Testament, is generally used in the Graeco-Roman world for the citizen-assembly of a city – indeed, Acts 19:39 uses it this way. So this gave me the clue that Paul might be using 'secular' language (rather than specifically 'religious' language) from cities to describe the kind of community the church is. Secondly, after noticing the 'citizenship' language, I remembered an essay by Bruce Winter about Philippians 1:27,³ and re-read it. I discovered that Winter dealt well with 1:27 and made some of the connections I'd seen, but did not deal at all with 3:20, and I was encouraged that there may be a paper in my idea.

Thirdly, my bigger long-term research project at present is a critical commentary on the book of Acts. I realised that this topic would also allow me to explore the Acts account of Paul's visit to Philippi (Acts 16), where Paul, having been beaten and thrown into prison, plays the card of his Roman citizenship to demand an apology on his release. It's a puzzle why Paul waited so long to do this, when he could have saved himself a beating and a night in prison. Thus to pursue Philippians 3:20 would feed into my longer-term research interests.

Researching the topic

I consulted the (numerous) commentaries on Philippians 3:20, and was somewhat surprised to discover that there is virtually nothing on the 'citizenship' language in the wider cultural context, and that almost no-one mentions Paul's visit to Philippi in Acts 16 when they discuss 3:20. This meant there was clearly a gap to be filled. I then isolated three kinds of questions I needed to answer to produce an adequate response to my questions over the 'citizenship' language.

First, what kind of citizenship is in view? I needed to think about the language and practice of citizenship in the first century AD, and that took me to studying *politeuma*, the Greek word translated 'citizenship'. Because Philippi was a Roman colony, I needed specifically to learn about Roman citizenship, and so I hunted for textbooks on Roman law, and books specifically on citizenship.⁴ Secondly, I asked where else 'citizenship' language is used in related literature. I used electronic resources to find uses in Paul (it isn't found outside Philippians, I discovered), in the New Testament, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), and in wider ancient Greek literature.

Thirdly, I looked to find previous scholarship I needed to interact with. I had reviewed Peter Oakes' fine book on the social composition of Philippi and the believing community there, so I used that as a recent (and widely welcomed) study.⁵ I also knew of Brian Rapske's work on Paul's Roman imprisonment,⁶ and used that to inform my study of Acts 16. It turned out there was debate in the literature over whether Paul really was a Roman citizen; Acts presents him that way, but it's something he never mentions in his letters. So this was an issue which would need further exploration and thought.

Organising the paper

The next challenge was how to organise the material I'd gathered through my research into a coherent and clear structure. To do this, I needed to identify the focus of my paper, so that I could then organise the material to keep my hearers' eyes fixed on that focus. Thinking this over, a threefold structure emerged.

1. An explanation of and justification for the plausibility of my topic. I clarified that my focus was to look at early Christian use of 'city' language for the believing communities. Key dialogue partners were to be Paul Trebilco and George van Kooten on the use of *ekklésia* 'church',⁷ to show that early believers did use 'city' language for their own gatherings, and Bruce Winter on Philippians 1:27,⁸ to show the plausibility of my focus on 'citizenship' language in that letter. At the end of the introduction I wrote this paragraph to show the key issues I planned to investigate:

In what follows, then, we shall address three issues concerning Paul's apparent use of 'city' terminology in relation to the believing community:

- (i) what does Paul mean by heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:20)? Why does he use this metaphor and what does it signify about the believing community?;
 - (ii) how should we understand Paul's use of his Roman citizenship in the account of his visit to Philippi in Acts 16:37?;
 - (iii) how do the two citizenships—heavenly and Roman—relate to one another in Paul's thinking and in early Christian self-understanding (Phil 3:20 with 1:27, and with Acts 16:37)?
2. The heart of the paper then fell into three sections, as described above.
 - (i) considered Paul's use of heavenly citizenship in the contexts of first century Philippi, Roman citizenship, and the use of *politeuma* in Philippians 3:20-21.
 - (ii) considered Paul as a Roman citizen, briefly summarising the debate over whether he was (since this was not a major thrust of the oral presentation—a fuller discussion will be in the published form of the paper), and concluding that he was a Roman citizen. This section went on to look at whether Paul's exercise of his Roman citizenship in Acts 16:37 is plausible in Roman law.
 - (iii) looked at the relationship of Roman and heavenly citizenship, which connected well with the theme of suffering as believers in Philippians, and linked Philippians 1:27 with 3:20-21.
 3. A brief one-paragraph conclusion summarised the key point which I argued for:

So let us come full circle and review the journey we have taken. We have seen that the direction in which Trebilco and Winter pointed us leads to a reading of both Philippians and Acts 16 which prioritises heavenly citizenship over any earthly citizenship. In doing this, Paul is strikingly using 'city' language well known to the Roman and non-Roman inhabitants of Philippi and its surrounding districts, but applying it to the believing community – they are the 'city within a city' called to shine as a light on a hill (cf. Matt 5:14) in order to present and embody the claim Jesus makes for the city.

Doing the handout

I then planned and designed a two-page handout to give my readers a clear outline to guide them in listening. I used Microsoft Word's styles feature to ensure a consistent layout, using indentation to guide the reader's eye concerning the relationships of sections and sub-sections, and using consistent fonts and font sizes (11 point) to fit everything onto two pages. I provided key texts or analyses which would be important for my argument and which readers would find impossible to note as I spoke. The handout also included key references to primary sources (mostly biblical) and secondary sources.

Presenting the paper

The paper I initially wrote was too long to deliver in 25 minutes – the time slot I was allowed, and so I went through the paper and highlighted bits which I could summarise briefly or skip over. I did this because I find myself irritated when a speaker has to cut their talk short or announces that they are skipping sections because of time – I'd much rather the speaker presented a paper for the time they have. So I had a presentation which I reckoned would fit the time, and I then rehearsed it by reading it aloud to be sure how long it would take, and so that I could plan intonation, pace, rise and fall of speech (and annotate the script to remind me of those things). I'm quite softly spoken, so when I delivered the paper, I deliberately picked out a person sitting in the back row and spoke at a level where they could hear me clearly.

Getting the feedback and revising for publication

There was a short time for discussion and questions after my talk, and I took notes of the issues people raised in this time. We'd also organised that some of our doctoral students would take fairly detailed notes in the discussion times so that we could share them with the speakers to enable them to revise their papers for publication. As a result of giving the paper and having the feedback, there was some further research to do to fill gaps in my paper for the edited book which was planned for the conference papers. Some I already knew about—there were places in the paper as delivered where I'd put \$\$\$CHECK\$\$\$ in red to remind me that something needed checking. I also discovered some further books and articles in pursuing these issues and needed to weave them into the paper – happily, they rarely added anything radically new. This further research took a little while, but the finished product was much better for it.

Footnotes

1. See www.stmarys.ac.uk/news/events/event/cit/ (accessed January 2016).
2. Steve Walton, 'Calling the Church Names: Learning about Christian Identity from Acts', *PRSt* 41 (2014), 223-41
3. Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 81-104.
4. William W. Buckland and Peter G. Stein, *A Text-book of Roman Law from Augustus to Justinian* (3rd edn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Paul J. du Plessis, *Borkowski's Textbook on Roman Law* (5th edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (2nd edn; Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).
5. Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (SNTSMS 110; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). My review is in *EvQ* 78 (2005), 90-92.
6. Brian M. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (BAFCS 3; Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Eerdmans, 1994).
7. Paul R. Trebilco, *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); George H. van Kooten, 'Ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ: The 'Church of God' and the Civic Assemblies (ἐκκλησίαι) of the Greek Cities in the Roman Empire: A Response to Paul Trebilco and Richard A. Horsley', *NTS* 58 (2012), pp. 522-48.
8. See n. 3.

Using focus groups to guide action research

Marc Jacobs, Reading University (PhD student St Mary's University, Twickenham)

Abstract

The aim of this doctoral research is to determine how pupils learn mathematics successfully and what strategies work best in secondary classrooms. Mathematics classrooms and teachers' practice were investigated through several research methods. One method was pupil focus group interviews to reveal pupils' views of teacher practice. It is widely appreciated (Dowker, 2009; Wilson & Räsänen, 2008) that there is limited research available on effective strategies for supporting pupils with their learning in mathematics compared to that available for literacy. Wilson and Räsänen (2008) suggest that there are several reasons for this limited research including cost in terms of monetary considerations and implementation particularly with large numbers. Therefore implementing any form of successful mathematical investigation and intervention is challenging when attempting to use a strategy that works across a modern secondary school with a diverse population of teachers and pupils. This paper reports on the use of focus group interviews for the purpose of obtaining data from pupils about their learning experiences in mathematics lessons and their views of their teachers' practice. Teachers' practice is fundamental to successful learning experiences and Ball (1988) acknowledges that their practice is influenced by their beliefs about teaching and learning, about their students, and about their context thereby shaping how they teach.

Key words: mathematics, focus groups, research methods

Introduction

In the past few years, focus group interviews have been used increasingly in fields other than market research, where the technique was first developed (Berg, 1995). Berg (1995:65) also notes, focus group interviews have traditionally been dismissed as part of the "vulgar world of marketing research". However, it is a method that is increasingly being appreciated for the advantages it offers to researchers in other data collection situations (Morgan, 1993; Gibbs, 1997; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1998). During the 1990s, one begins to see what may be a reversal in the elitist attitude that focus group interviewing belongs to the somehow vulgar realm of marketing research. Instead, social scientists have begun regarding the approach with greater respect. Sussman, Burton, Dent, Stacy and Flay (1991: 773) state that "focus group methodology is one of the most widely used qualitative research tools in the applied social sciences." Similar arguments have been offered by Basch (1987, 1989) and by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990). Clearly, there are some advantages to the use of this data-collecting orientation in certain situations. This research aims to explore how pupils believe they learn mathematics successfully and what classroom strategies work best by initially drawing upon reviews of this method and then subsequently using it with a group of secondary student participants. This paper is part of a wider doctoral project entitled *Intervention in Mathematics: Creating successful strategies to ensure success in Secondary Schools* where focus groups were used as one of the methods of data collection.

Definition of focus groups

There are many definitions of a focus group interview and Kitzinger (2005) suggests the focus group method is an 'ideal' approach for examining the stories, experiences, points of view, beliefs, needs and concerns of individuals. The method is especially valuable for permitting the participants to develop their own questions and frameworks as well as to seek their own needs and concerns in their own words and on their own terms. Group work allows the researchers to access different communication forms which people use in their day-to-day interaction, and these include joking, arguing, teasing and recapturing past events (Kitzinger, 2005). Being able to gain access to diverse forms of communication is valuable since it may not be possible, or can be difficult, to capture the knowledge and attitudes of individuals by asking them to respond to more direct questions as in positivist science such as surveys and questionnaires.

Powell, Single and Lloyd (1996) define a focus group interview as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research. Morgan (1997) notes that a focus group (also called a focus group interview or a focus group discussion) is a form of group interviewing but it is important to distinguish between the two. Group interviewing involves interviewing a number of people at the same time and the emphasis is on questions and responses between the researcher and participants. Focus groups, however, rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher. The key characteristic, which distinguishes group interviewing from focus groups, is the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants (Morgan, 1997).

A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people is asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a phenomenon. Furthermore, focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. Focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method (Kitzinger, 1994). This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another by asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each others' experiences and points of view (Kitzinger, 1994).

During the 1980s focus groups reappeared in social sciences after being absent for some time and are now commonly used in cross-cultural research in a variety of fields, such as academic, policy-related or marketing research. Malhotra (1996:171-172) remarked that “focus groups are the most important qualitative research procedure. They are so popular that many marketing research practitioners consider this technique synonymous with qualitative research.” Even though this statement refers to the mid-1980s in the USA, it still has relevance today, although the arrival of new techniques, among them online focus groups, has certainly redesigned the overall picture.

The origins and history of focus group research

The first use of group interviews was in the 1920s by social scientists Emory Bogardus and Walter Thurstone who used it to develop survey instruments. The methodology is mainly attributed to Bogardus who in 1926 described focus groups in his social psychological research to develop the social distance scale (see Wilkinson 1998). During World War II Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld used group interviews to assist the allied forces in the development of propaganda materials, training manuals and to understand social issues. In the 1950s, focus groups became commonplace among marketers to understand customers while social scientists continued to prefer formal survey research. Sociologist Robert Merton worked with colleagues on the effectiveness of focus group in the years following World War II and the group (Merton, Fiske & Kendall) later wrote a seminal text entitled *The Focused Interview: A manual of problems and procedures* which was published in 1956. Of particular interest in the post-World War II era was the study of mass-mediated ‘propaganda’. The term *focus group* replaced *group interview* as the name of this technique. Over the last twenty years there has been a steadily increasing interest in establishing qualitative research’s place in the academy which has resulted in the growing use of focus groups, especially in social sciences.

In the 1980s focus groups re-emerged as a distinct research method in the social sciences (Conradson, 2005). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) state that focus groups have been popular and used extensively in several disciplines. Many social scientists and other professionals have found this qualitative approach very useful. Political scientists, for example, employed focus groups to examine the public perceptions of political candidates and their opinions on particular political issues (Madriz, 2003; Gaiser, 2008). During President Ronald Reagan’s administration in the 1980s, focus groups were adopted to learn about the perceptions of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and their citizens (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). Focus groups were also used by the New Labour government from the early 1990s to early 2000s in the UK to examine British opinions about health spending, education policy and military action. The aim was to explore ‘a better understanding of the multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives held by the public on particular issues’ (Conradson, 2005:130). The use of focus groups has been established over a period of time so their value to researchers for uncovering significant information is of interest.

Advantages of focus groups

Focus groups are valuable when you want to consider not only people’s personal accounts of reality, but also the way they negotiate these accounts with others, therefore showing divergence or convergence between their views. Cambridge and McCarthy (2001) describe a focus group interview as a group dynamic that can help build confidence, safe environments that are not threatening or intimidating and peer support and validation, enabling all people, regardless of perceived competence, to contribute to research discussions. Focus groups appear to be of value for all members of society and this success was evidenced by Fraser and Fraser (2001) whose research engaged participants with communication difficulties. Focus groups require both individual contributions and group dynamics and they found that with participants with communication difficulties groups smaller than the six-ten usually recommended were better and that the addition of an interpreter familiar with the participants’ communication was also important. Moreover, Fraser and Fraser (2001) found that participants’ ability to interact with others in a group was more important to success than their various types of communication challenges such as the ability to produce more than a few words, reliance on *Makaton* sign language, or even repetitive language. They concluded that ‘focus groups are a very good method for some people with learning disabilities in some situations but not in others; it is important to be able to distinguish this before setting up the group’ (Fraser & Fraser, 2001:225). So, there are clearly some limitations that need to be considered before the method is developed as a data collection instrument.

Limitations of focus groups

Like any other research method focus groups do not suit all research aims and there have been times when they were found to be inappropriate or problematic. For example, compared to individual interviews, focus groups may not be as efficient in providing maximum depth on a particular issue. A particular disadvantage of a focus group is the possibility that the members may not express their honest and personal opinions about the topic at hand (Smithson, 2008). They may be hesitant to express their thoughts, especially when their thoughts oppose the views of another participant. Smithson (2008), a researcher who uses focus groups extensively, contends that some research topics are unsuitable for focus group environments. For example, topics which are seen as too personal (such as living with HIV/AIDS, sexuality, infertility, financial status, divorce, domestic violence and abortion) may be better carried out by other methods such as individual interviews. In institutional contexts (such as the workplace or schools), people may be reluctant to express their opinions or discuss their personal experiences in front of colleagues.

Hopkins (2007) and Krueger and Casey (2009) found that often focus groups are criticised for only offering a shallower understanding of an issue than those obtained from individual interviews. In a focus group discussion, personal information and experiences may not be discussed thereby reducing the natural narrative that emerges from rich discourse. An example of this is Hopkins' (2007) qualitative research project about the life and times of young Muslim men living in Scotland which showed that they revealed personal experiences of racism during individual interviews far more than they did in focus group discussions.

The fact that focus groups are driven by the researcher's interests can also be a source of weakness. What may be of intense interest to the researcher may be a non-issue to the participants. However, the fact that the researcher creates and directs the groups makes them distinctly less naturalistic than participant observation so there is always some residual uncertainty (Morgan 1996) about the accuracy of what the participants say. In particular, there is a very real concern that the researcher, in the name of maintaining the interview's focus, will influence the group's interactions. This problem is hardly unique to focus groups because the researcher influences all but the most unobtrusive social science methods. In reality, there is no hard evidence that the focus group researcher's impact on the data is any greater than the researcher's impact in participant observation or individual interviewing. Indeed, the dyadic nature of individual interviewing would seem to create at least as many opportunities for researcher influence.

The concerns for focus groups include both a tendency toward conformity, in which some participants withhold things that they might say in private, and a tendency toward 'polarization' in which some participants express more extreme views in a group than in private (Sussman, Burton, Dent, et al., 1991). It is clear, however, that for some types of participants discussing some types of topics the presence of a group will affect what they say and how they say it. This is an inevitable aspect of focus groups that should be considered as a potential source of weakness for any given research project. Morgan (1988) states that the researcher, or moderator as they are often termed, has less control over the data produced than in either quantitative studies or one-to-one interviewing. The researcher has to allow participants to talk to each other, ask questions and express doubts and opinions, while having very little control over the interaction other than generally keeping participants focused on the topic. By its nature focus group research is open-ended and cannot be entirely predetermined.

On a practical note, focus groups can be also difficult to assemble. It may not be easy to get a representative sample and focus groups may discourage certain people from participating, for example, those who are not very articulate or confident, and those who have communication problems or special needs. The method of focus group discussion may also discourage some people from trusting others with sensitive or personal information. In such cases personal interviews or the use of workbooks alongside focus groups may be a more suitable approach. Finally, focus groups are not fully confidential or anonymous, because the material is shared with the others in the group (Morgan 1997) and this has ethical implications that need to be considered when developing a methodological approach.

Types of focus groups

There are different formations of focus groups and this section explores those types. *Traditional Focus Groups* are the more straightforward, question-oriented groups. Usually there is a 'warm-up' then the concept, idea, situation or product is presented to the group for their reaction. A neutral moderator who probes for issues of interest and follows up on interesting or relevant comments made by the participants guides this process. The key factors to successful traditional groups include clearly defined research issues, an experienced moderator who understands the issues at hand and decisions to be made; and diligent recruiting (Morgan, 1984).

Projective Focus Groups bear a resemblance to traditional focus group discussions in that they are an informal, subtly structured conversation on a specific subject lead by a neutral moderator. They differ in the methods used to explore thoughts and feelings about the subject, and in the emotional depth that can be reached using these methods. Projective Groups rely more on indirect questioning and strongly emphasize the interpretation of group input. Some of the techniques that may be used in Projective Focus Groups include collage-building, brand personification, guided journey and pictorial symbols (Morgan, 1984). Projective Focus Groups are used extensively in exploring brand image and the development of creative concepts for products, services and advertising. A few of the questions addressed in Projective Focus Groups have included: Is this the right name for the product? What feelings are evoked by our brand? What mood should our advertising and collateral material invoke? I have used the traditional focus group interview as I wanted to *hear what students think* – literally. There is nothing more powerful than hearing first-hand what students have to say about how they learn mathematics.

Uses of focus groups

Morgan and Kreuger (1993) state that the main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods such as observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails. Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and

emotional processes within a group context. The individual interview is easier for the researcher to control than a focus group in which participants may take the initiative. Compared to observation, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time (Morgan & Kreuger, 1993). Observational methods tend to depend on waiting for things to happen, whereas the researcher follows an interview guide in a focus group. In this sense focus groups are not natural but organised events. Morgan and Kreuger (1993) suggest that the method is particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals, when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic.

Ethical issues

According to Homan (1991) ethical considerations for focus groups are the same as for most other methods of social research. For example, when selecting and involving participants, researchers must ensure that full information about the purpose and uses of participants' contributions is given. Being honest and keeping participants informed about the expectations of the group and topic, and not pressuring participants to speak is ethical practice. At the outset moderators will need to clarify that each participant's contributions will be shared with the others in the group as well as with the moderator. Participants need to be encouraged to keep confidential what they hear during the meeting and researchers have the responsibility to anonymise data from the group.

The Research Study

a) Selecting participants

Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that most focus groups rely on purposive sampling with researchers selecting participants on the project and on the potential contributions of participants. Alternatively participants can be randomly selected from a larger group that should be able to give insight into the topic. For example, if someone wanted to know more about a particular religious congregation purposive sampling, such as obtaining a church membership listing and randomly selecting parishioners to participate, would be an efficacious approach (Patton, 1990).

This action research project has a wider population of 240 pupils in Year Seven (2013-2014) but the focus group interviews included 10 participants selected anonymously; one child from each of ten mathematics sets was selected to form two focus groups of five. The members of a focus group were invited because they are known to have experience from a particular context which in this case was secondary mathematics classrooms.

b) Structure

Researchers such as Kitzinger and Barbour (1990), Lindlof (1995), Kreuger (1998), Green and Hart (1999) and Brown (1999) disagree about the practicable number of participants for a successful focus group. Many experienced moderators prefer a group ranging from eight to twelve suggesting further that the group should consist of four to twelve if the group is homogeneous and six to twelve if heterogeneous. A balance between the need to have sufficient participants for a lively discussion and the unwieldy milieu of a large group is the goal of the researcher.

c) The role of the moderator

The moderator's management of the focus group can determine the success or otherwise of the method regardless of the context. Morgan (1998) describes the moderator as the person who has the task of leading the focus group. This leadership or management involves:

- a) setting the scene;
- b) explaining the purpose of the focus group;
- c) introducing participants to the topics for discussion;
- d) keeping the group on time; e) focussed on the topics;
- f) encouraging participation from all the group members; and,
- g) ensuring that all the key issues are addressed (Morgan, 1998).

It is useful to have a note taker recording all discussions so the moderator can give all their attention to the group.

The notion of conducting a focus group interview effectively includes an assumption that the interview will be facilitated. The moderator had assumed most of the practical roles concerned with the planning of the physical environment of the interview room and the organisation of equipment and refreshments. The moderator also took responsibility for the welcoming of participants on the day and therefore began the process of setting participants at their ease and opening up channels of communication. According to Kitzinger (1995:299) the moderator 'leads' the focus group, their role is only to keep the discussion on track and should not influence the opinions of the group, this has been referred to as "structured eavesdropping".

During the start of proceedings of the focus group, the moderator's first question is critical in breaking the ice. After each participant has said something it becomes easier to make further contributions and feel that their opinion is valued. With the use of focus groups in this research it was particularly important to avoid domination by any particular participant, making sure that everybody had their say and enabling some level of consistent data collection between focus groups. This study worked with young teenagers and it became apparent that the moderator's role was to ensure that all children felt their ideas were valued and that no one child dominated the discussion.

d) Running the Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held as part of the initial data collection period of this study. I undertook the role of the moderator and my supervisor took the role of the assistant who was responsible for the audio recording of the event and note taking during the discussions to capture non-verbal signals and nuances. There were five participants in each of the two focus groups which were conducted during the students' regular mathematics lesson time in a quiet library space on their campus.

e) Conducting and Observing the Focus Group

The moderator and assistant sought to provide a friendly introductory environment which was established as the pupils arrived at the library. The moderator introduced himself and his assistant. Thanks were extended to the pupils for attending and the purpose of the meeting was explained. The conventions of the group discussions were outlined together with reassurances about guarantees of confidentiality. Any initial anxieties or questions about the proceedings were invited. Each participant was asked to introduce themselves before the questions were addressed. The focus groups went smoothly and generated a great deal of data within the allocated timeframes.

Moderator intervention was mainly restricted to prompts, probes and moving the discussion on when a particular issue had been exhausted. An example of moving them on to the next topic was when one of the participants could not think of a time he had a 'good learning experience'; I told him that I would give him time to think and that I would come back to him. He then told us about a 'good learning experience'. There was no domination in the group. The assistant moderator contributed or intervened in the discussion and sat at the main table to support the clarity of the pupil contributions and to witness the discussion. Once the formal proceedings were brought to a close, participants were once again thanked for their contributions to the focus group.

Ethics

Focus group research raises a number of ethical issues. We were particularly concerned to ensure confidentiality in and after the discussions. To this end no questions probed for any personal or sensitive information. Anonymity remains paramount and pseudonym use ensures that participants cannot be identified in any publications. Data from tapes and transcripts of the interviews are retained by the researcher and all data stored on university computers.

Analysis of the data

There are a variety of methods of analysing data for focus groups (see Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The audio recordings were transcribed and the data together with the notes were discussed with the researcher's supervisor. The discussions on a number of topics revealed the high level of detail which focus groups can engender as a result of the group interaction. For example, in the first focus group discussion on the topic of 'how maths should be taught at secondary school' this led to a lively debate in which the pupils were very open about their own views and experiences. An example of this was, all the participants in the focus group wanted to express their views that maths should be interactive, fun and hands-on. Any reservations that we had that pupils would be reluctant to open-up in front of their peers on such a sensitive issue were not borne out.

Although it might be expected that participants would be guarded concerning their knowledge around maths teaching, they revealed that they felt trapped and teachers are unable to relinquish textbook teaching. The participants were therefore particularly interested in hearing the experiences of their peers as they were all taught by different teachers. The pupils reflected upon the use of textbooks as the primary resource, in most lessons and they reflected on how they felt in using textbooks on a daily basis, four times a week.

It is commonly assumed that textbooks (with accompanying teacher guides) are one of the main sources for the content covered and the pedagogical styles used in classrooms. It is not surprising, then, that considerable attention has focussed on textbooks, including the economic and political circumstances of their production (Apple, 1986 and 1992), their linguistic features (Castell et al, 1989) and their sociological features (Dowling, 1996). Pupils in this study were put in sets for mathematics during their first year in secondary school according to their results in national curriculum tests. Once in those sets, they followed the same national curriculum but from different starting points and with different end points in mind. Textbooks reflected this way of organising pupils so that in any year group, a particular textbook scheme might have different textbooks aimed at different sets of pupils. Teachers used textbooks regularly, and almost all that use in lesson times was for pupils to practise exercises selected by the teacher following from teacher explanation of a

particular skill or technique. Listening to the pupils and their concerns regarding the use of textbooks and their need for more 'hands-on' activities, gave me sufficient information to enact change in the mathematics classrooms as part of the Action Research for this project.

Discussion

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. Focus groups rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher (Morgan 1997: 12). Hence the key characteristic which distinguishes focus groups is the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants. This is to ensure that participants have a specific experience of or opinion about the topic under investigation; that an explicit interview guide is used; and that the subjective experiences of participants are explored in relation to predetermined research questions. An example is when the participants were asked 'Which class or which teacher helped you?' and one of the participants responded:

Well, there's, like, most of them, they're really nice and supportive, but some lessons are, like, a bit, like, they help a few people that are, like, really struggling, but they never really help the rest of the people. Like, they focus on a few people and that's about it. But that's only a few. That's, like, three classes or two.

And another participant replied:

Yes, most of my teachers are quite supportive in that way, but like A, some of them can be a bit focusing on some people and, like, thinking other people can do well, so it doesn't mean they're... It means they're not struggling. So they, sort of, put you aside and, like, ..., you're fine, you can do it yourself, even when you're struggling on the topic.'

Therefore, focus groups are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants, when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic (Morgan & Kreuger 1993).

An advantage of focus groups to clients, users, participants or consumers is that they can become a forum for change, both during the focus group meeting itself and afterwards. For example, in this research the participants were asked: '*... to design how Maths should be taught at Secondary School, how students can really learn well...*' and they replied:

Like, maybe a bit more interactive lessons because, like, it's really, like, when they're, like, with their friends and they can learn with their friends, but then still be with someone that they hang around with and, like, and then, but still have, like...

Sort of, sometimes it's really like they could be really interactive because people... Like, textbooks, example, are a little bit boring and, like, put you off, like, you just, sort of, read that. Like, say the teachers maybe help a bit more because, like, they say I can't really explain this to you. It's a bit, like, it's, kind of, annoying when they can't really do that. Not in my test, but, like, just in general class work. So yes.

I think they should make lessons more interactive because we usually always do textbook work and when, like, you're stuck in your seat and you're stuck in a textbook it gets, like, really boring, so I'd like to every once in a while, like, have an interactive lesson.

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic, and then to guide future action that can bring change to an organisation (Morgan & Kreuger 1993). A main advantage of this method derives from group relations evident in the sessions. Pupils were encouraged to explain, challenge and share their honest views on questions asked. Listening to the ideas, opinions and experiences of others demands that we interrogate our own beliefs and this was evident in these interviews. The reason for a significant level of candidness may derive from a move in the influence of the relationship between researcher and participants. In focus groups the researcher is in a marginal position and participants are amongst their peer group. This seems to make participants more willing to discuss topics openly in their own language, than they would in one-to-one research environments.

Here the manner was particularly useful as a means of allowing pupils to express their views and experiences without hindrance by the constraints inherent in one-to-one discussions with a researcher. Thus, focus groups are an effective way of ascertaining detailed views and experiences on relevant mathematical questions asked. Although the groups were guided by an agenda, they were able to 'snowball' their views on issues, presenting a wider context for their own position. For example, views on motivations and learning often generated a wider discussion. The advantage of this method over face-to-face interviews is that each speaker provides a platform for another to contribute, rather than responding only to a predetermined list of questions. Here participants were prepared to add to or qualify what had been said previously, providing a much more complete picture of their mathematical world.

Participants provided long, detailed narratives about their experiences in mathematics, which often revealed their views and motivations. However, the analysis of the data emerging from group interaction can also provide a rich understanding of how pupils learn mathematics and, on balance, I would argue that focus groups should be used more widely. From the experience so far, the method generated data of range, depth, specificity and personal context which can stand alone or complement other research methods. Ultimately, using focus groups with pupils in education can help close the 'culture gap' between researchers and the subject they seek to understand.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of focus groups as a method of understanding teachers' practice in secondary mathematics through the interrogation of pupils' ideas, beliefs and experiences. The results illustrate that a series of ongoing focus groups should provide a valuable longitudinal viewpoint. Although focus groups seem to have been used seldom in educational research, the results of the groups reported here illustrate the contribution that this method can make as a method to provide a picture of the views and experiences of pupils in a secondary school.

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How do hospice chaplains understand the work they do?

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Although now retired from hospice chaplaincy I am still passionate about the vision developed by Cicely Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement. Early in my career I heard Saunders speak about being inspired by the origin of the word hospice. Rooted in the Latin word *hospes*, which means both host and guest, fourth century hospices were establishments where Christians offered hospitality, love and medical care to travellers. Saunders noted that this was spreading Christianity more through care than through preaching. She wanted to create a space which a stranger/guest might enter and become a friend, a space in which he was not expected to adopt the host's lifestyle but rather find his own. Her vision of hospice was of a place where change could take place, where a person could find himself and become well enough to die. It was crucial that those who accompanied and cared for the person on this spiritual journey reflected on and were comfortable with their own spiritual journey.

Through my membership of the Association of Hospice & Palliative Care Chaplains (AHPCC), a UK-wide body, I had become aware of the developments in chaplaincy in NHS Scotland, developments which were not happening in England¹. I was also aware of the increasing pressure, in both hospitals and hospices throughout the UK, to prove the value of the chaplain's work. Through my own reading I had learnt of the lack of published literature authored by hospice chaplains and the profusion of literature on the subject of spiritual care from the nursing profession. It would not be fair to describe the situation in England as a 'turf war' but there was confusion caused by the lack of an agreed definition of the concepts of spirituality and spiritual care, further complicated by a lack of clarity about the role of the chaplain.

My initial research proposal framed the research question in terms of establishing the understanding of the terms 'spirituality' and 'spiritual care' amongst hospice chaplains in England. Such a question would seek to establish: the understanding of the terms 'spirituality', 'spiritual care' and 'chaplaincy'; the theology underlying this understanding; whether or not the understandings related to generic chaplaincy and what chaplains perceived to be their unique contribution to spiritual care. However, the process of designing the research made me realize that I wanted to give voice to hospice chaplains so that they would describe their work, how they were sustained in their work, how they understood their own spirituality and its place in their work, and the issues that concerned them. Therefore the fundamental research question is: How do hospice chaplains understand the work they do?

The answer to this question would fill several gaps in the existing published literature, which consisted largely of conceptual articles and commentaries and little practical work. Furthermore, the published literature was dominated by professions other than healthcare chaplaincy and what had been published from a chaplaincy point of view was mostly contributed by hospital, not hospice, chaplains. It was therefore important that this research, giving voice to hospice chaplains rather than hospital chaplains, nurses, nurse educators, doctors, and social workers, be conducted in an academically rigorous way that would be acceptable for presentation and publication purposes. In this way it would make an important contribution to the literature.

The research was conducted using a semi-structured, or guided, interview, which was chosen because it offered the best method of obtaining rich data. To facilitate the selection of interviewees a Profile Survey of the Association of Hospice and Palliative Care Chaplains was conducted using Bristol Online Survey through St Marys' University College. Using the results from the survey twenty-five hospice chaplains were selected so that the overall profile of interviewees reflected the overall profile of survey results.

Each interviewee was asked to recount how he came to be in hospice chaplaincy, his previous work experience, experience of congregational ministry and the comparison with hospice work. Information was sought on how he introduced himself, what he wore, what he thought patients expected of him, before asking how he understood spirituality and spiritual care. Some interviewees told their story, supplying this information in the process, but others needed encouragement and the occasional direct but open-ended question. Descriptions of their own spirituality and their spiritual self-care were elicited, often with some difficulty. Information on the hospice ethos, evidence-based practice, record-keeping and spiritual assessment tools was rarely spontaneous and had to be prompted. Also requested were the interviewee's thoughts on the age profile of AHPCC membership.

Having analysed the findings from the interviews I used my own understanding of spirituality and the work of other writers on spirituality and pastoral care to throw light on the data. I also anticipated that data from the interviews might throw light on the wider hospice situation especially in the light of recent developments such as changes in funding arrangements and the Report on the Future of Hospices.

¹. The Scottish National Health Service, which operates independently of the NHS in England, started to address issues of spiritual care over ten years ago, producing 'Guidelines on Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the NHS in Scotland' in 2002.

Yourself as a researcher – professional identity and values

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The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE.

BERNARDO: Who's there?

FRANCISCO: Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself. (*Shakespeare, 1850*)

There seemed a profound and satisfying personal symbolism in the rapidity of the ascent of the lift carrying me to the upper floors. I straightened my tie, adjusted the braces into the saddles of my shoulder blades and polished my brogues on the back of my pinstriped trousers. The lift slowed, glided to an almost imperceptible stop, and, as I waited for the doors to slide open, I once more enjoyed the rich aroma of my success. It was 1984 and I was where I and every young graduate in the City of London wanted to be, and where so many I had left behind would never reach. The doors glided open.

The dealing room sparkled with new technology, was urgent, noisy and infused with a palpable excitement. I stared at the myriad screens flashing and changing and demanding attention, and I listened to the barking of men's voices and smelt the scent of expensive cologne, shoe polish and cigarette smoke. I was, at last, exactly at the destination I had striven so hard to reach. Money, power, influence, respect, status, prestige and the envy of others were now mine. And yet here at the finishing line, at the moment of my triumph, at the final pay-off for the huge financial investment in my education and the realisation of my identity, my overriding sensation was one of irresistible panic. I had made a terrible mistake.

I was not the person I thought I was.

Burke and Stets (2009: 3) describe identity as a set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society; however, when a crisis confronts one's identity, the self is faced with danger and opportunity (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). There is much to be gained but new dangers will be courted. In my case, it seemed that my identity had been formed on the false premise of others' expectation and personal delusion or as Oscar Wilde (2005: 198) suggested in *De Profundis*, 'Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.' My ontological security (Giddens, 1991) was dependent on evasion and denial. A failure of identity verification (Stets & Carter, 2011) where the perceptions of who one is do not match one's moral identity standard suggests a crisis of identity. My identity certainly felt in crisis.

Was it then my education that had so carefully directed me to that moment of perceived success that was at fault? Certainly it had followed the traditional theoretical model of teaching and learning that focused on knowledge, standardisation and exam success so beloved by Taylor (1967) and further developed with such zeal by Thorndike (1911) with his certainty in the existence of inherent talent that identified above average students and streamed them through to university via their ability to score highly on standardised exams; higher than average educational outcomes then identified them as highly employable in well-paid professions. Nonetheless Bennett's (1976) assertion that formal teaching fulfilled academic success criteria without having a detrimental effect on the emotional development did not seem to have any empirical basis in my case. Aristotle (1989) had questioned this focus on training for employability insisting that education should be more concerned with character of the soul, virtue and exceptional accomplishments. I had clearly been well schooled; however, had I been well educated? I had learned under the compulsion that Plato (1945) so abhorred without the playful enjoyment that he recommended for a free soul. Had this created the context for my crisis of identity and what then is the point of education as opposed to schooling? Rousseau ([1762] 1979) would have concluded that with greater struggle and more falls a student like myself would have been better prepared for a crisis and thus better educated. I had received an effective education as a preparation to join the job market, but a poor preparation to empower me to select the job relevant to my identity. The banking of knowledge that Freire (1972) so railed against as oppressive had been the *modus operandi* of my schooling and Locke's ([1693] 1989) assertion that children are 'tabulae rasae' ready for empiricism and learning by discovery was not evident in either theory or practice. I had not therefore cultivated my own unique voice (Oakeshott, 1989) as I had not been party to the 'conversation of mankind' that Oakeshott (1989: 160) considered the essence of education. I was able to read but unable to distinguish what was worth reading (Trevelyan, 1942) as my learning had been through extrinsic motivation and not through a desire to pass on the traditions of human thinking whilst teaching me how to engage critically with those traditions (Dewey, 1938).

And if my identity were in crisis then my values were also per se in crisis as a result of this failure of identity verification (Stets & Carter, 2011). This disequilibrium inevitably produces negative emotions in people which, 'motivate them to behave differently in their environment in order to produce perceptual outcomes that result in a better match with their internal identity standard,' (Stets & Carter,

2009: 3). There was nonetheless the opportunity for heightened anxiety and/or personal growth (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). This disequilibrium of identity and values and opportunity for personal growth ultimately led me into teaching.

The moral imperative of education as espoused by Fullan (2003) was certainly a factor in my seeking this personal growth (Stets and Carter, 2009) through teaching, and I sincerely wished to transform lives (Duignan, 2006); nonetheless the moral purpose required for this was obfuscated by a need to transform my professional identity. I was still being driven by the 'ethic of individual self-fulfilment' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 22). Freud's (1974) constructs identified the ego to be in constant conflict with the id and the super ego as rational identity struggled with the hedonistic, solipsistic and self-delusional intents and justifications of the more instinctive self, and although Freud's (1974) praxis was intended for psychoanalysis this conflict illuminated a large part of my own developing professional identity. After an early crisis of self and values, class teaching certainly gave me an 'opportunity' (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1998) to build a more ontologically secure identity (Giddens 1991), however, it was many years before I ever described myself as a teacher. I certainly resisted joining the 'ingroup' (Tajfel, 1982) and thus avoided establishing my self through a social identity. On reflection, my career as a class teacher was never solely driven by Fullan's (2003) moral purpose but more substantially by ego (Freud, 1974). That is not to say that I did not educate children, and educate them well (empirically I did), but my motivation was an enjoyment of the status and influence of my position. I became the 'Maverick Teacher' (Taylor, 2015) and enjoyed that status and the professional identity it afforded me. Children benefited educationally as a result of my competitive self that sought the best outcomes to ensure I appeared as the best (and most popular) practitioner rather than as a direct result of my intention to improve their outcomes. It may have been mutually beneficial, but it was not driven by any principled purpose (Fullan, 2003). This 'potentially damaging conceptualisation of identity and identity formation' (McGiff, 2011: 1) required critical reflection for me to engage with the living 'I' and develop a professional identity driven by moral purpose (Fullan, 2003). Whitehead's (1989) 'living contradiction' was clearly in evidence through the holding of educational values whilst at the same time negating them. However, this 'living contradiction' enabled the imagining of an alternative way of altering and improving my situation (Whitehead, 1989).

The situation has certainly altered: as an educational leader I am now emphatically driven by Fullan's (2003) moral resolve.

So what has changed? Is my individuality no longer shaped by other people (Wilde, 2005) and, if that is the case, do I now have my own identity? Descartes (1998) would argue that my identity was always there and I have merely uncovered its truth, whereas, I am more inclined to Locke's (1997) belief that it has been constructed as part of experience and the reflexive capacity of the mind. In my case that has been the understanding that the suppression of self-interest to enable critical reflection (McNiff, 2011) to shape identity and purpose has and will enable me to secure a genuine distributed leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2005). It is clear that ego and leadership make unwelcome bedfellows. In his study of great leadership, Jim Collins (2001) was clear that the most effective leaders channelled their ego away from themselves and into the wider goals of the organisation. As McKinney (2015: 3) warned, "Our ego hinders our ability to influence more than anything else under our control."

So if I now possess the intent, values and purposes (McNiff, 2012) that are motivated by moral purpose and a desire to transform children's life chances (Duigan, 2005), what then is it that concerns me (McNiff, 2012)?

The school I attended was founded by a driven and visionary Victorian cleric, determined to ensure that the boys of the new middle class had access to an academic education founded on Christian principles. The School Board of London founded the school at which I am now Headteacher at a similar time. The driving motivation for the establishment of universal elementary education in England at the time was not altruism but a fear and envy of the advances of the United States and Prussia both of whom had introduced free education years before and were seen as reaping the substantial economic and (particularly concerning for Gladstone) military rewards.

One hundred and twenty years later both schools still educate young people. My alma mater continues to turn out high attaining young people, the majority of whom proceed to Russell Group and Oxbridge universities. The school at which I work has had a chequered and infamous past twenty years that has included financial irregularities revealed by the BBC, a long spell in 'special measures', past pupils convicted of a brutal and infamous killing of a young boy and all this as the school has languished at the bottom of the local authority league tables.

More than half a century of educational reform has done little to improve social mobility in Britain. Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2015) have suggested that the lack of social mobility is largely due to affluent families using their economic, cultural and social advantages to ensure that their children remain at the top of the socio-economic ladder. Consequently, young people from less affluent families have far less favourable prospects than their parents and grandparents (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2015).

What concerns me (McNiff, 2012) as a professional and as a researcher is whether, given this evident social injustice, I am able to transform children's life chances within this paradigm.

If my intent is to transform (Duignan, 2006) the educational lives of children what then is my ontology and epistemology? Within education, where there are as many individual identities and contexts as there are students, does there exist an object reality that we can understand along with a set of laws by which this reality can be governed (Popper, 1974)? To some extent there are irrefutable realities that apply to education and knowledge that can be scientifically proven and thus held as irrefutable facts in line with Descartes' (1958: 63) positivist paradigm where, 'those who are seeking the strict way of truth should not trouble themselves about any object concerning which they cannot have a certainty equal to arithmetic or geometrical demonstration'. For instance, 'by GCSE, there is a 28 per cent gap between children receiving free school meals and their wealthier classmates in terms of the number achieving at least 5 A*-C GCSE grades' (DfE- 2015) and OFSTED's chief statistician admitted it is, 'probably easier for schools with advantaged intakes to receive OFSTED's top grades' (TES, 2015). And it is certainly a reality that Grammar schools, with vastly lower intakes of students from deprived backgrounds, attain a far greater percentage of 'Outstanding' OFSTED judgments than secondary moderns (Bartley, 2016) along with far higher exam grades. Furthermore, Hemsley-Brown's (2014) recent comprehensive study of impediments to entry into Russell Group Universities clearly revealed that social deprivation is the greatest barrier to attaining the required UCAS entry scores.

These positivist realities are certainly interesting, if depressing. Nonetheless they merely leave us 'better informed' if 'none the wiser' (Read, 1961). What are educationalists to do with this information? The interpretivist ontological position would argue that language does not passively label objects but actively shapes and moulds reality and thus implies that knowledge is gained through a strategy that 'respects the differences between people and the objects of natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman cited in Grix, 2004: 64). It is this subjective meaning (Bryman cited in Grix, 2004) that frees the researcher to attempt to answer the question 'why?' So why do students from socially and economically deprived contexts perform so poorly in academic assessments against their more privileged peers? Hart and Risley's (2003) research into language experience concluded that by the age of three a child from a family on welfare had experienced thirty million fewer words than their middle-class counterparts and that any measures of accomplishment at age three acted as an accurate prediction of future accomplishment. Bernstein's (1971) work on language codes used and understood by students indicated that a child for whom a 'restricted' code was the only language code was excluded from much learning as opposed to more privileged children who also understood the 'elaborated' code. Furthermore the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (Bamfield, 2012) highlighted the huge divergence of parental resources available to children from privileged and deprived backgrounds thus underscoring The Centre for Longitudinal Studies' report (2007) which indicated that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were up to a year behind their more privileged classmates by the age of three.

But does highlighting a social inequality and then explaining the reasons behind it bring any force to bear on that inequality? And if the inequality has existed since universal, state sponsored education has been in place it would seem to suggest that there is a political and social imperative sustaining the inequality. If then as Dewey (1915) maintained that democracy was fundamental to education, and as Giroux (2011) further suggested that education was fundamental to democracy, where is this democracy?

Researching and addressing imbalances of power in society was first formalised by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school of the 1920s who observed that reality had been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values and bias (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Knowledge was therefore both socially constructed and influenced by power relationships from within society and furthermore, what counted as worthwhile knowledge was thus determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge (Cohen et al, 2009). Education, the critical theorists argued, was riven particularly by political motivation to maintain the status quo and that schools had become models of social engineering designed to condemn most to be subordinate (Gatto, 2002). The critical paradigm therefore seeks not to construct a subjective reality but to identify who gains in power from the perpetuation of that reality. The paradigm eschews the passivity of the positivists and the interpretivists and maintains that education can never be a neutral process (Friere, 1970).

In terms of my concern, the critical paradigm has profound implications for my values and identity. It further intensifies McNiff's (2012) question as to what my concern actually is. Is it that:

'Schools play an explicit part in this construction of knowledge based on power in society. In other words, education serves the interests of those who have power, usually rich white males. Schools function to reproduce these inequalities and maintain the status quo...' (Gage 1998: 235)?

When Nicky Morgan, the Secretary of State for Education stated that, "To be really confident that students are progressing well through primary school, we will be looking at the assessment of pupils at age seven to make sure it is as robust and rigorous as it needs to be..." (Daily Telegraph, 2016), was she asserting her social and political power to further maintain the status quo?

On the face of it, it would appear reasonable for the state to assess the progress of children at the end of the first key stage; however, is this merely the ruling class' assertion of perceived normality and Gramsci's (1994) 'cultural hegemony'. What are the implications for

the personal and political power of the children being tested and the schools that they are in? Is that 'robust and rigorous' assessment merely the social elite redefining what counts as success to ensure that children of social disadvantage fall short of the newly raised bar (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009: 39) and remain on the 'precipice of failure'?

Morgan went on to say that:

"When my son did his Key Stage One tests he didn't know he'd taken them until afterwards. It's the same when we get to the end of primary. I don't want to see after-test parties being held. I want it to be something that children take as part of their schooling..." (Daily Telegraph, 2016).

Could the relaxed attitude of the parents come as a result of their social and political power? There is little pressure on the elite classes to engage in testing that is not 'high stakes' for their children (although high stakes for their schools). However, it is clear that the social and political elite take a much less relaxed attitude when their children undertake GCSEs and A' Levels which hold direct influence over university offers and admissions and perceived life outcomes (Evening Standard, 2012).

Bourdieu's (1993) theory that the education system assumes the possession of 'cultural capital' (the ability to engage with 'educated' language) that is created by the dominant attitudes and values or 'habitus' seems increasingly relevant. A major component of this dominant habitus is a positive attitude towards education, which acknowledges:

'...the system of dispositions towards the school, understood as a propensity to consent to the investments in time, effort and money necessary to conserve and to increase cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1993: 495).

As a school leader of an academy where the vast majority of children are from socially and economically deprived home contexts, am I complicit in perpetuating an education system designed specifically to ensure that these children remain in their contexts and have no access through education to the habitus of the dominant class? The answer, rather worryingly, may well be, 'yes'.

That is my deeper and real concern (McNiff, 2012).

But why am I concerned (McNiff, 2012)? As an apparent member of the social and educational elite, why do I wish to undermine my, and my family's, advantage? How has my identity evolved from the 'self' driven by ego to one driven by moral purpose (Fullan, 2003)? I may not be free of my 'historical, political and socioeconomic heritage' (McNiff 2012: 130) but nonetheless I wish to create a 'good society' (Chomsky & Foucault, 2006).

Teaching is inherently a value-laden activity (Whitehall, 1988) where justice and freedom (Peters, 1967) and love and productive output (Fromm, 1944) create much of the professional form. As a professional educationalist my explicit teleology and thus purpose has always been clearly defined by the teacher standards which charge teachers 'to make the education of their pupils their first concern' (DfE, 2011: 2) and my explicit teleology as a Headteacher is defined by my employers: an academy trust with the stated mission of 'Improving the life chances of children' and by the Headteacher standards that charge school leaders with being 'the guardians of the nation's schools' (DfE, 2015). Nevertheless, I also have an implicit teleology and purpose as part of my identity. This is articulated by the academy's mission statement, which is 'to offer local children a world class education.'

Is it my profession therefore that determines my values and am I indeed a professional?

The Teacher Standards (DfE, 2011) include a 'personal and professional code of conduct' and the National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (DfE, 2015) are littered with references to headteachers being 'lead professionals' and maintaining 'professional conduct'. Clearly the government regard teaching as a profession and hold headteachers accountable to professional standards. This, however, is on the 'micro level' (Wackerhausen, 2009) and refers to the way in which headteachers operate and the accepted qualifications, conduct and experience expected. On the macro level (Wackerhausen, 2009), Hoyle and Wallace (2007) argue that professionalism is determined by autonomy and that that autonomy has been undermined over the years by increasing centralised monitoring and accountability and thus teaching has moved from a professional to a managerial construct by reducing teachers' jurisdiction over professional work. This view is further supported by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009: 23) who catalogue the erosion of professionalism in education into its current state of autocratic 'slickly spun system of top down delivery'. Beyond Europe Noam Chomsky (1987) has suggested that teachers are in danger of becoming 'commissars' for government control and Jonathon Kozol (2005: 86) has highlighted the United States' obsession with Taylorism and standardisation leading to deskilling of teachers and 'pre-packaged lessons to ensure that all teachers – even novices and the most inept would be able to teach...'. So if I am unable to influence the status quo of social injustice, as is my concern, is it because I have been de-professionalised at the macro level? Or is it, as Wackerhausen (2009) suggests that it is the order of my reflexivity that is at fault?

Although Dreyfus (1986) asserted that professionalism and reflexivity were contradictory, I certainly consider myself a reflective professional practitioner (Schon, 1983) and concur with Butler (1964) that the ability to reflect is what establishes human conscience. However, my reflections of everyday practice have been 'first order' (Wackerhausen, 2009) and thus merely served to perpetuate professional tradition without the capacity to challenge and transform. In order to move to a second order concept of reflection, Wackerhausen (2009: 466) suggests that the professional must reflect 'on, with, from and in' and become 'a stranger to oneself'. To do this requires one's identity to travel to 'foreign territory' (Wackerhausen, 2009:466).

To ensure positive outcomes for all children is the sine qua non of my identity and values. This is nonetheless Wackerhausen's (2009: 466) 'first order' reflection as it fails to address a chronic ambiguity. John Stuart Mill's consequential teleology of the 'greatest good for the greatest number' (Gray, 1998: 38) cannot be the default value as it is inherently exclusive and implies social injustice may be acceptable – the very kernel of what my values seek to undermine. A further balance is thus required. The balance is fairness, which in itself is a value judgement. This certainly has echoes of Kant's (1963) deontology of 'goodwill' or as Denis Healey (2015) said of difficult decisions, so ambiguously and yet so clearly and usefully, "When in doubt; do the right thing."

But what is 'the right thing' to do? Inequality of attainment is directly correlated to inequality of income as highlighted by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), and as the UK has one of the most divergent income divides in the developed world, although schools can make a difference, the greatest influence on educational attainment is home background (Benn & Millar, 2005). This suggests that any influence on education outcomes should be tackled at the socio-political level and not through schooling. Am I thus better off becoming a politician or a philanthropic capitalist if I wish to have real influence over the social injustices that motivate me? Is there any real value in education as a lever for social transformation?

My answer to this must be 'yes', as I believe in the transformative power of education to overcome social injustice (Mathews, 2009). However, for educational leadership to motivate this transformation, leaders must 'bring their deepest principles, beliefs, values and convictions to their work' (Duignan, 2007: 56). Nonetheless, this might imply 'hero' leadership (Collins, 2001) driven by ego, which is far from the reflexive 'foreign territory' described by Wackerhausen (2009).

The key to my understanding of 'self' and hence my 'foreign territory', is that as a school leader I am unable to transform children's lives alone. This is a paradigm shift from an inherent empirical absorption of Hume's (1741) solipsism whereby all that exists are our perceptions of reality and that I alone exist and the world is nothing more than part of my consciousness. Therefore this journey to this territory leads away from Descartes' (1958) ego driven understanding of self, 'cogito ergo sum' to the more holistic interpretation of Ubuntu philosophy (Tutu, 1989): 'I am because we are.' This, however, is dangerous territory for leadership as it places emphasis on trust rather than didacticism and a belief in shared, co-constructed values and aligned beliefs. With trust as a social concept comes risk (Giddens, 1990) and risk can lead to identity anxiety and a desire to retake control (Burke and Stets, 2007).

Shared beliefs are the key element to strategic planning (Porter, 1980) and vision creation (Lichtenstein & Dade, 2007) and the formation of whole school values. Without alignment of those values, co-construction of a consensual vision would be impossible and an unrealised dream (Lichtenstein, 2012). The fundamental impact of my values therefore on leadership is as a perceptual filter (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) that shapes my decisions and behaviour in regards to others. A class teacher can improve or transform the lives of every child in their class through planning, delivery, pedagogy, energy and persistence. In positions of leadership, my professional identity is only relevant where it is able to affect others and motivate them to align with a shared intent. This requires a leader to have multiple 'selves' (James, 1890) or identities (Burke & Stets, 2009) with which to interact, motivate and inspire. A leader's social identity (Tajfel, 1984) is therefore essential and any lingering competitive self-aggrandising instinct damaging and detrimental. The social position (Stryker & Statham, 1985) that I occupy within my organisation is directly linked to my role as Headteacher. This role is a set of expectations that are tied to that social position (Burke & Stets, 2008) that guide people's attitudes and behaviour. Within that role I thus have the influence to guide, and as the Headteacher cannot and must not be lauded as the best teacher but instead create an environment in which all thrive, strive and are empowered to be better. As Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) maintain, if professionals are passionate about their work then they must want to improve. Not only must I improve but it is also my responsibility to create the environment in which all stakeholders can improve.

The catchall, moniker 'school improvement' appears with overwhelming ubiquity within educational language both spoken and written, from politicians to school leaders. As Whitehead (1989: 2) suggested, 'philosophers interpret the world whilst the point is to improve it'. The transformation required to right the social injustices catalogued above make it incumbent upon me to expedite coherent alignment of social identities that encourage and enable actions and outcomes beyond mere school improvement theories, shallow reflexivity and propositional logic (Whitehead, 1989). School improvement is not enough; 'world improvement' (Whitehead, 1989: 2) in its most individualistic and personalised affecting sense must be the aim.

This is a long way from the dealing room from which I stepped in 1984 with a sense of 'self' in crisis. That young man seems a 'stranger' (Wackerhausen, 2009) to the person I am today. John Locke (1989) would argue that knowledge of the world is based on experience, and it is those experiences that have shaped the changes to that identity; identity not being something 'people carry around with them' (Billig, 1995: 7). This may be an evolved altruism and an inevitable genetic realisation that cooperation is more successful than competition as a survival strategy (Dawkins, 1984). Nonetheless, altruistic it is, and has resulted in the transition from an authoritarian conscience and the slavish obedience to conformity to a humanistic conscience, which enables personal integrity, moral honesty and the ability to realise potential (Fromm, 1946).

Lawler (2014) suggests that identity is often only reflected on in times of crisis and insecurity and warns that analysing identity at these moments of anxiety can appear an individualising move that suggests social issues become 'located within individual persons' (Lawler, 2014: 2). She clarifies the perspective further:

'...identity itself is a social and collective process and not, as Western traditions have it, a unique and individual possession.'
(Lawler, 2014: 4)

This then is the 'foreign territory' (Wackerhausen, 2009) that I must now call home.

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Research proposal for PhD application

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RESEARCH PROPOSAL

NB: Before completing this section of the application form, please discuss your proposed area of research with the relevant contact within the school to which you are applying.

Part 1

Please provide an outline of your proposed area of research (approx 2000 words). Please include the following:

Title: A concise title is necessary at the end of the project; a looser one is fine in a proposal.

How do I, as a Higher Education Lecturer, support my learning and the learning of students through the development of a pedagogy of emotional literacy?

Research rationale: What is the area that you want to explore? What value will it add to existing knowledge and scholarship?

The rationale behind this piece of research is that I wish to gain a greater level of understanding of my own practice and how this impacts on my learning and the students' learning. I wish to do this through a piece of self-study action research where I will explore my own practice and in doing so I hope to open up the possibility of influencing others to consider how they may explore this area of their own teaching.

Context for the research:

As a teacher, lecturer and tutor I have a long-held belief that emotional literacy is a key part of my own professional practice, whether I use the lens of emotional intelligence to examine my planning techniques and teaching style or as a tool for learners to explore their own learning processes. I have always believed that my work should be based on holistic principles where I see the learner as a whole being engaging in the learning process with me, rather than just in their role as a student within the teaching room. As a result of this my focus throughout my teaching history has been to understand the motivations and barriers to learning experienced by the learners so that I might empower them to create sustainable behaviour for learning.

Within my practice I have tended to favour working within a role where progression is the key and have always been keenly aware of the importance of linking theoretical knowledge with practical application. I have therefore attempted to encourage a 'behaviour for learning' that can exist within a variety of different contexts and not just a traditional educational setting. In order to enable learners to gain understanding of their learning motivations and barriers and to take responsibility for their future learning behaviour it has been necessary to encourage a high level of self awareness and self-efficacy therefore developing and demonstrating emotional literacy.

I am concerned that a lack of emotional literacy impacts negatively on learning. My beliefs regarding active learning, are mirrored by Adler (1982) who suggests genuine learning is active, not passive and Ericksen (1984, p. 51) "students learn what they care about and remember what they understand." This requires that the learner emotionally connects with the learning. The learner therefore has to be in an appropriate emotional state to allow this process to happen. It has been my belief that emotional intelligence and the subsequent skill of emotional literacy are key to enable this type of learning environment to thrive and flourish.

The concern that underpins my research proposal

By the very nature of wishing to use emotional intelligence and be literate in this through authenticity and transparency in my teaching it is essential that I undertake self-study to ensure that I am teaching in accordance with my values and beliefs. I am concerned that over time in my teaching career those original values have become subjected to a variety of internal and external factors, which has led me to be what Whitehead (1989) would call a living contradiction.

I want to explore the effect of incorporating my beliefs and values into my teaching and tutoring. I wish to explore the importance I place on emotional literacy and see if it is as essential to good practice as I consider it to be. I would like to know the impact of this on the learning that takes place. Have I become more emotionally nurturing than emotionally intelligent? Does the discomfort that challenging myself and learners to be emotionally honest support their learning? Am I entirely misplaced in bringing my values into my teaching practice in this manner? Placing myself at the centre of my enquiry is essential that the living theory that I am generating is scrutinised, challenged and explored, to ensure that my professional practice reflects my values.

Why am I concerned?

My research will ask 'How can I improve my practice? It will focus on my own learning and that of the learners that I teach. I hope that through my work I may be able to influence others to consider their own pedagogical understanding of emotional literacy. Adult learners require a degree of self-efficacy in order to be successful in their studies and it is therefore necessary for teachers to use processes for self-direction in learners (Candy 1991). According to Longdon and Yorke (2004) learners are most likely to leave Higher Education as a result of reasons grouped into one of the following four broad general categories:

1. flawed decision-making about entering the programme;
2. students' experience of the programme and the institution generally;
3. failure to cope with the demand of the programme; and,
4. events that impact on students' lives outside the institution.

I hypothesize that each of these areas that are potentially causing disengagement can be influenced positively through an increase in emotional intelligence and emotional literacy. I therefore wish to understand more about how emotional intelligence within my practice might impact on student engagement, retention and success. The results should be of interest to a wider audience as these elements are at the core of Higher Education.

The majority of the modules that I teach use reflection as an assessment tool and it is my belief that reflection must be grounded in emotional intelligence and must be carried out in an emotionally literate manner to be effective. My research will be able to test this belief and through my own self-study I hope to be able to generate a theory of emotionally literate reflection, which I hope might create a useful example for others to consider. It will be my claim that I have improved my practice through research into it.

I am at a stage of my career when learner expectations are changing more quickly than my own practice and I want to rectify this. I feel that I am much slower at responding to learners' needs and motivations than I was, perhaps because I am complacent or perhaps over confident that my approach can meet the needs of the majority of learners. I want to re-ignite the questioning and challenging aspects of my own reflective practice and take responsibility for your own learning by conducting a self-study action enquiry. I will draw on the work of McNiff and Whitehead and engage in action research that will enable me to generate my own living theories of practice and in doing so engage with the discourses around emotional intelligence and adult learning.

I am concerned that whilst there has been some study into emotional intelligence within teaching, for example *The Emotionally Intelligent Lecturer* by Mortiboys (2002) and a great deal of research by Goleman into the impact of emotional intelligence within a wider context there is still a gap in exploring and understanding the impact of emotional intelligence for Higher Education practitioners and students. My research will work towards filling this gap.

Aims: What exactly do you want to achieve and why? I aim to:

- explain how emotional literacy impacts on my actions as a teacher educator and in doing so explore the validity of this as a professional practice;
- reflect on and improve my practice so as to create spaces which can open up opportunities for the students I work alongside to explore their own emotional literacy and how this impacts upon their learning; and,
- influence the discourses which surround the way that teachers use emotional literacy in their teaching practice.

Hypothesis: A testable claim or tentative solution to the research aim.

I am supporting my own learning and that of others as I teach in an emotional literate manner.

Research questions: key questions that you would like to investigate during your PhD.

- What are the values underpinning my teaching practice?
- How can my practices support the students' learning? How do I understand learning?
- How can I encourage emotional literacy within my students in a way that enhances their learning?
- How can I improve what I am doing as a teacher educator?

Methods: How will you get your evidence/data? How will you analyse it? Why is this the most appropriate way of gathering the evidence for your thesis?

I will be gathering data to look for evidence of learning, both my own and my students. I will do this through using the following methods:

- Reflection recorded in a variety of multi-media formats including video and audio recordings. These will allow me to explore the context around my key questions and to identify areas for future development in my own teaching.
- I will seek the support of a group of students that I am teaching to work with me on my research as a focus group. I will gather data from this group through interviews, questionnaires and their own reflections.
- I will video my own teaching and will use this to analyse my teaching. I will also request that a group of my peers analyse the footage and respond in interviews to questions about my practice.

Ethics: Are there ethical issues that will need to be considered by the University in relation to your research (e.g. acquisition and use of data issues; confidentiality)? All research involving human participants must go through University ethical approval.

There will be issues around confidentiality for participants. I can also foresee that there will be an issue regarding the power dynamics of student involvement in my research which I will seek to resolve through communicating the boundaries and implications of participation. Ethical approval will be sought through the St Mary's University Ethics Committee in the usual way.

Work schedule: A timeline of tasks that structures your work between completing the proposal and the date of submission.

Year 1 – Literature search, methodology and context.

Year 2– data collection and analysis and final write up

Likely outcomes: What are the likely outcomes as a result of your research, eg. does the work contribute to the development of a new theoretical model?

Improvement within my own teaching practice.

Increase in the knowledge that I possess regarding the impact of emotional literacy on my students.

A contribution to the discourse around emotional literacy within teaching and learning at adult level.

Costs: Are there any financial implications of the intended research? If so, how will these be met?

The cost will come under student allowance.

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Guidelines for contributors

Submissions are welcome from early years, primary, secondary and higher education sectors. Contributions are encouraged from any country and it is expected that the Journal will publish articles that offer readers insightful, inspirational as well as practical information about teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum.

The normal word limit for articles is negotiable dependent upon the nature of the article. Research articles should aim to be approximately between 3500 to 5000 words. We would welcome the opportunity to publish articles that describe good practice in schools, literature reviews that increase understanding of particular educational domains, research articles that explore new ideas, and articles from practitioners that demonstrate the contribution that reflective practice and informed action can make to effective teaching. The word limit for such writing would be negotiable.

Articles for consideration by the Editorial Board should be emailed to the editor christine.edwards-leis@stmarys.ac.uk.

The articles will be 'blind' refereed by two referees, who will remain anonymous and authors will receive feedback through the editor. Articles can be submitted at any time during the year.

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Developing research assignments for submission

Many teachers and students write assignments that include literature reviews or that report on inquiries into aspects of their practice undertaken in a range of settings. These pieces of writing could be considered for submission. Ensure you provide an abstract and key words and reference according to the Harvard Method of Referencing. Contact the editor for guidance and support in converting your assignment piece into a journal article.

Notes for research articles for submission

It is expected that research articles make an original contribution to education research. They should be based on evidence such as newly acquired data through empirical research, historical data, or published work.

Sharing good practice and school projects

Great things happen in schools. Teachers and head teachers are encouraged to share their practice with the education community through descriptions of projects that they have created, implemented and evaluated. While these pieces are not necessarily expected to be supported by evidence from the literature (as a research article would be) the theories that underpin the practices described should be included to demonstrate informed pedagogy.

Preparation of research articles

Title

Please write a succinct title and include author/s, affiliations and email address of lead author.

Abstract

An abstract should be 200 – 250 words. It should have 6 key words for reference purposes. The abstract should provide the argument put forward, a rationale for the research, method used and major findings/recommendations. A good practice abstract will include an explanation of the project (length, participants, curriculum focus), its purpose and pertinent outcomes

Article format

The article should include the abstract, all figures, tables, and reference list. Do not include a bibliography. It should be typed on A4 portrait in Word and pages should be numbered. Use Times New Roman (or similar serif font) 11pt font typeface. Headings for each section are recommended to guide the reader. Avoid footnotes and endnotes unless essential to clear communication. All figures and tables must be numbered and labelled and be on separate pages rather than embedded in the text. Indicate where they are to be inserted. Avoid grey or coloured shading on graphs. If photographs are to be included then ensure that you have both ethical approval for publication (this is particularly necessary for children) and copyright approval.

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The article is to be referenced and the Reference List compiled using Harvard Method of Referencing.

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