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## ABSTRACT

Primary school teachers are the group who must alter their pedagogy to improve the literacy performance of Australian children. Statistics suggest that 70% of Australian primary school teachers are female and that 41% are 45 or older and therefore likely to retire within the next decade. This paper seeks to document histories of women primary school teachers with regards to literacy curriculum. And the paper examines the nature of the mentoring relationship between young teachers and mentors. It explains that the historical interview techniques which were developed invited teachers to historicize their literacy curriculum and teaching within the wider conditions of their labor as women teachers during different phases of their teaching careers; four extended interviews were conducted in South Australia. The paper adds that the cross generational interview techniques were conducted in Melbourne by inviting four early career literacy teachers to access stories of older literacy teachers' work. The paper aims to give a sense of the data and themes emerging from the study at this point, but it mostly focuses on questions of method--on the experimentation with and analysis of two different methods of interviewing to examine their effectiveness--the work they accomplished and the quality of the data elicited. Includes 30 interview texts. Contains 11 references. (NKA)

# Cross-Generational and Historical Interviewing: Stories of Literacy Teachers' Work

Barbara Kamler and Jacqui Dornbrack, Deakin University

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Paper presented to AARE Conference Education Research:

Towards an Optimistic Future

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## **Cross-Generational and Historical Interviewing: Stories of Literacy Teachers' Work**

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Despite the intense focus on literacy education over the past decade in Australia and internationally and the huge amount of policy attention and program funding, there has been relatively little research which takes account of teachers' perspectives on literacy teaching. This is both interesting and worrying. Primary school teachers, usually women, are frequently the intended readers and users of policies and programs. They are the group who must alter their pedagogy in order to improve the literacy performance of Australian children. They are also an ageing population. Statistics suggest that 70 % of Australian primary school teachers are female and that 41 % are forty five years or older, compared to 10% in 1986-87, and therefore likely to retire within the next decade.

It seems to us as feminist, late career literacy researchers, that late career primary school teachers are in a position to provide rich accounts of the field of literacy education from their perspectives as practitioners. They have accumulated, sometimes over careers spanning forty to forty-five years, a wealth of practical knowledge which is typically overlooked or discounted and may well be lost to the profession entirely if it is not documented within the decade. Such knowledge can make an important contribution to the historical archives, but just as importantly it can also contribute to the ongoing induction and education of new and early career teachers. At the start of the new millennium, with the likelihood of major changes in the

primary education work force over the next decade, we believe it is timely to document histories of women primary school teachers with regards to literacy curriculum. What do they make of the theories, the crises, the solutions in their everyday lives as classroom teachers and what did the proliferation of competing discourses of literacy education make of them? Where do they stand with respect to the ongoing debates and policy moves?

Such a focus is particularly relevant given recent moves in teacher education to re-examine the respective roles of the universities and the schools in the development of new teachers. In Australia, a move towards greater multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral site-based training is one of the recommendations likely to stem from the Ramsay Review in New South Wales, a wide ranging review of teacher education (Elson-Green 2000). Internationally, teacher education programs are also under review, with a number of studies asking what are the best ways to induct new teachers into the profession (Blair-Larson 1998; Corrie 2000; Goodwyn 1997; Halford 1998; Jones, Reid & Bevins, 1997; Jones, 2000; Oberski, Ford, Higgins & Fisher 1999; Smith 2000; Wright & Bottery 1997; Whitaker 2000). In the current climate, some educators have proposed that universities take up new approaches to teacher-education (Smith 2000) and that evaluation of innovative teacher education projects are ongoing (Corrie 2000). Others have asked, what kinds of complementary and reciprocal relationships will best support the career-long learning of teachers (Wright & Bottery 1997)?

The practice of mentoring, as a component of teacher induction programs, has also received attention internationally. In the United States, where mentoring programs for beginning teachers are officially supported in some jurisdictions, there has been great interest in what makes effective mentoring programs (Blair-Larson 1998; Halford 1998; Whitaker 2000) and on the benefits and disadvantages of various models of induction. In the UK, where in-school support by teachers is a key component of student-teacher education, researchers have examined the support and training needs when school-based educators take up mentoring responsibilities (Brooks 2000, Cross 1999). Such reviews been accompanied by enhanced interest on the part of teacher educators in the history and practice of mentoring in education (Goodwyn 1997, Roberts 2000).

Some research has also begun to examine specific pedagogic interactions between mentors and young teachers, including student teachers' perceptions of good practice in mentoring (Maynard 2000), the perceptions of professionalism brought to mentoring by teachers (Wright & Bottery 1997, Jones, Reid & Bevins 1997), beginning teachers' views of relationships with their teacher mentors (Jones 2000, Oberski, Ford, Higgins & Fisher 1997). For the most part, however, the nature of the mentoring relationship is a relatively unexamined area where many questions remain: What kinds of dialogic encounters occur between young teachers and mentors? Is it possible that such occasions might be reciprocally beneficial for early career and late career teachers? Is there a possible place for recently retired teachers in such programs?

In order to begin to investigate such questions, our research team conducted a pilot project from March-December 2000 entitled *Cross-generational pedagogies: Stories of Literacy Teachers' Work*. The project aims to explore the 'silenced' perspectives of literacy teachers by developing historical and cross generational accounts of literacy with regard to broader policy and curriculum change. We investigated late career and recently retired primary school teachers' retrospective accounts of literacy education by piloting two innovative interview methods, which are the focus of this paper. Our interviews were grounded in a recent explosion of research on teachers' lives and stories but we were mindful of Hargreaves (1996) warning against an apolitical presentation that romanticises teachers' voices, emphasising the need to 're-present' these voices critically and to explore the multiple power relationships that govern teachers' work.

The historical interview techniques we developed invited teachers to historicise their literacy curriculum and teaching within the wider conditions of their labour as women primary school teachers during different phases of their teaching careers. Four extended interviews were conducted in South Australia by Jennifer O'Brien, who is herself a recently retired primary school teacher. Two of the teacher interviewees were late career teachers aged, currently employed in state primary schools. Two were recently retired teachers aged who had been out of the teaching workforce for two to three years, respectively. The interviews focused on literacy curriculum and teaching over their working lives.

The cross generational interview techniques were conducted in Melbourne by inviting four early career literacy teachers (age 25-30) to access stories of older literacy teachers' work. The early career teachers conducted two interviews with a later career teacher whom they admired and selected. In the first interview the young teachers invited their more experienced colleague to give an historical account of the shifts and changes in literacy education during their professional training and working lives. In the second interview the early career teachers developed a protocol of questions and prompts around their current questions and concerns about teaching literacy.

In this paper we give a sense of the data and themes emerging from the study at this point, but mostly we focus on questions of method - on our experimentation with and analysis of two different methods of interviewing in order to examine their effectiveness - the work they accomplished and the quality of the data elicited.

### **The historical interviews**

The first phase of the project (May-August) involved conducting the historical interviews in South Australia with late career (teaching for at least 25 years) and recently retired teachers. It was our intention that the interviews have an informal structure, rather in the nature of an extended conversation between two colleagues who, though not necessarily knowing each other well, have enough in common to produce trust and empathy on both sides. We believed it was crucial that the interviewer share both stage of life and professional experiences with interviewees. To this end, Jennifer O'Brien was ideally positioned to conduct the historical interviews, having recently retired from teaching after a career spanning some thirty five years during which time she worked in various capacities including as a primary and secondary teacher librarian, classroom teacher, curriculum writer, teacher-researcher and teacher educator.

As interviewer, O'Brien brought to the project an extensive knowledge and experience of local educators, institutions and pedagogical enthusiasms gained during twenty years working in various educational institutions in South Australia. We were unsure about the likely effect of other aspects of her history, particularly the fact that she had been well-known for some years as an advocate of a socially critical perspective on literacy teaching,

known as critical literacy; but we believed so much shared history would produce detailed, historicised accounts of contemporary literacy teaching practices. As it turned out, references to O'Brien's own experiences in and out of school as well as implicit understandings and local knowledge are threaded through the interviews and work powerfully to produce rich data.

O'Brien's positioning as ex-teacher/ colleague was also invaluable in selecting interview participants and devising a list of interview questions. The research team collectively established criteria for possible teacher interviewees: either retired from teaching within the past two or three years or having had at least twenty five years teaching experience; having made a significant contribution to the profession with plenty of interesting material to draw on. Selection procedures were shaped by the South Australia researchers, and O'Brien drew on her networks in the South Australian government schooling system and at the University of South Australia, to select four teachers who had made significant and diverse contributions to the educational community. Miriam Gordon (pseudonym) had retired at the end of 1998 after a career as a junior primary teacher spanning some forty years. Pat Trengrove (pseudonym), highly respected as a committed and innovative teacher, had retired from primary teaching in 1997 and now worked part time at the University of South Australia. Marg Stewart (pseudonym), an ESL teacher at a primary school in the northern suburbs with a particular interest in anti-racism education, had been teaching for nearly 25 years. Chris Sullivan (pseudonym), an experienced teacher-researcher, taught in the upper primary section of the same school as Marg and had been teaching for thirty years.

The questions designed to guide the historical interviews were loosely framed by the research team in the first instance. We were aware that primary teachers in South Australia retiring around the turn of the 21st century had taught through a number of significant shifts in theorisation and practice in English/literacy teaching, so we envisioned questions which would encourage teachers to produce detailed pictures of movements, topics, themes, ideas, practices and people associated with literacy teaching. Our aim was to position teachers as having a significant and authoritative store of ideas, experience, practice at their disposal and to allow them to direct the interview as much as possible. Further, we wanted the questions to construct teaching as more than a technical accomplishment and teachers as more than technicians.

O'Brien, however, devised the final form of the questions, drawing on her knowledge of literacy curriculum and pedagogies gained from twenty years involvement as teacher, advocate, critic, and/or teacher educator. Being aware of the complexity and the passions aroused by recent literacy debates, she was well placed to provide specific examples of educational movements and practices that might serve to help teachers flesh out their accounts or spur elusive memories and so provide a more complete historical account.

The questions she developed were detailed and repetitive, and organised into nine groups. They focus on both small aspects of English/literacy teaching and large movements; they provide a range of overlapping terms; they tease out aspects of a topic; they foreground teaching as a process involving change; they take into account the materialities of a teacher's life; they ask about people who are a significant part of teaching, including colleagues, students, parents, principals; they ask about routines and the mundane, about the public and well known; they ask about the pleasures and the difficulties; they use both everyday, non-specialised language and more specialised vocabulary; they take teaching out of the confines of the institution and suggest that teachers might derive their practice from a variety of different sources. They suggest that literacy teaching is inseparable from many other practices, themes and movements in teaching in general.

Importantly, the questions were distributed to interviewees ahead of time (a week or two beforehand) in order to allow them time to remember and recall their histories, time to select from the vast array of details that make up a career, time to talk with other teachers, to go through artefacts from their careers and rehearse particular performances for the interview. O'Brien encouraged interviewees to select the questions or aspects of questions they preferred and to decide on the order they preferred to talk about their histories. Teachers were neither expected nor encouraged to answer all questions and selection was part of a methodological move to increase their agency within the interview structure. An accompanying note to them acknowledged that the list of questions contained far too much material, but we judged that the risk of overkill would be offset by the huge choice participants would be offered. The effect of such a move, of course, depends on the extent to which the interviewee takes up the invitation to reflect and select.



In the event, three of the teachers used the questions as preparation for their interview. Miriam covered her copy with copious notes, explaining that she had found them enormously helpful. Both Chris and Marg highlighted and underlined salient questions and made notes in the margins. Marg used her notes as prompts during the interview. In Text 1, for example, she concludes an anecdote with reference to words she had jotted down on her interview schedule and then consults her highlighted list of questions in preparation for moving to the next topic.

### **Text 1**

49Marg: It's always good to be a bit subversive too. I've actually got the word 'subversive' there, and I've got the word 'different', you know I like to do things a little bit different to everyone else.

Where do we go from here? Talk about people who have influenced me? [referring to the list of possible talking points on letter of invitation]

50Jenny: Sure, that would be fantastic.

### **Shaping the interview**

O'Brien's positioning as insider to the profession and her prior relationship with interviewees was significant in shaping the interviews in a variety of ways.

She had known Miriam over a much longer period than any of the others and at quite a different level of intensity. Miriam was both a friend and former colleague with whom she'd taught for eight years, from 1981 to 1989 at a middle class suburban primary school. Miriam and Jenny worked together in a loose partnership, she as a junior primary teacher and O'Brien as a teacher-librarian, who made it her business to access up-to-date theoretical and curricular texts and explore current ideas with teachers. At the time of the interview they had a relationship that stretched over 18 years, marked by professional respect as well as personal friendship; by a shared interest in new educational ideas and how they worked out in practice.

Text 2 illustrates how their relationship provided a rich fund of shared assumptions that either could allude to without having to spend time in explanation.

## Text 2

Miriam: ... And so I suppose the next stage on, now that we're into process, you know dear old Donald Graves saying let the children write, then following that up in Maths and having the process maths. That was exciting. And then learning to model maths like we modelled writing. That was wonderful. I began to really get into that with Marion Stanford who was extremely good at bringing all the children together and getting the material and firing them up as to what could be done with this material, and having them go back and so full of what they were about to do, and everyone with their own ideas and so on. Exploring materials or she'd do it with several things. She had a gift for that, and watching those children be turned on to their own experiments and research and so on.

Jenny: Eleanor was good at that sort of thing too.

Miriam: Some people are more inspirational than others, aren't they?

Here, Miriam refers only briefly to process-writing guru, Donald Graves, whose work O'Brien had lent her in the 80s. References to colleagues are seamlessly inserted and accepted. Miriam understands O'Brien's mention of Eleanor, a former mutual colleague with expertise in early years mathematics education, as a complement to her own account of Marion Stanford's work in process maths. At the same time, she knows Marion's work will be unfamiliar to Jenny and so spends time fleshing out and making explicit Marion's pedagogical practices.

O'Brien's acquaintance with both Marg Stewart and Chris Sullivan, by contrast, was much shorter. She first met Marg and Chris at meetings of a teacher-researcher network established by Barbara Comber at the University of South Australia in 1998. O'Brien had been invited to join the network as a mentor of teachers in the early stages of teacher-research. Marg's research was concerned with exploring anti-racism and anti-sexism programs she had helped students to establish and maintain at her northern suburban school. Chris also had a long-standing interest in educational change and exploring the impact of new ideas in her classroom about. O'Brien shared professional interests with both teachers, particularly in socially critical literacy practice in classrooms. She approached the interviews with the assumption of mutual professional respect, especially as all three were known in local teaching circles and beyond as do-ers, risk-takers and innovators.

An excerpt from the interview with Chris in Text 3 bears traces of their relative lack of contact before the interview (compared with Text 2) and their uncertainty about the extent of our shared knowledge and understandings. The text is marked by numerous question and answer turns, many focussing on the workings of the educational system.

### Text 3

Jenny: Now, a couple of dates. Can you remember when you were at Murray Downs Dem School?

Chris: Yeah, about '73 to '78.

Jenny: About how you were trained. Was your only teaching practice at the dem schools? You didn't go out into ordinary schools the way people do nowadays?

Chris: No, it was all only at demonstration schools.

Jenny: And did you do blocks or was it spread all through the year?

Chris: We use to do the Wednesday morning bit. They used to be prior to our teaching blocks, and then we'd do two-week teaching blocks. They were two-week teaching blocks.

Jenny: Would you be with the same teacher or would you spread ...?

Chris: No, you'd just stay with the same teacher, and the same class, but what they organised in our teaching practice was that you would have - if you were primary, we did go into junior primary and observe, on our Wednesday morning. There was a block for observing junior primary practice, but we didn't - because we were primary trained - we didn't teach in junior primary classrooms at all. Our teaching practice had to be in the primary area, but over the two years they made sure that you had blocks from [grades] three to five and then you had upper primary, so you would have the range during your teaching practice.

Jenny: And were the demonstration schools spread throughout the metropolitan area?

Chris: Yeah they were, but they weren't in disadvantaged areas, they were in the good areas.

In each turn, it is O'Brien who consistently takes up the questioner position - with the greater institutional power to shape the interview that this entails - and Chris who is positioned as respondent. It is, however, O'Brien's insider knowledge of contemporary teacher education models in South Australia which leads her to interrogate Chris further about the nature of her teacher education experience. This series of questions gives rise to comparisons between teacher education in the mid 1970s and today, thus producing a more textured historical account than would have occurred without this insider knowledge of the profession.

## **Historical interview with Marg: Creating a dialogic space for reflection**

The interview with Marg explores in greater depth some of the ways in which the historical interview conversations produced a chronology of a teaching life alongside a retrospective view of a primary teaching career - complete with explanations, reflections and analysis of personal and institutional matters. Themes produced in the dialogic space produced by the interview include becoming a teacher; the significance of professional relationships; the intentional intertwining of the personal and professional, the public and private in Marg's life.

The interview was conducted at O'Brien's home. She aimed at setting up an atmosphere that was informal, comfortable, intimate, uncluttered, pleasant yet efficient for getting the interview done. Jenny and Marg sat facing one other at a dining table in her sitting room, overlooking the back garden. O'Brien provided nibbles, tea, coffee and orange juice. The food, drinks and the tape recorder lay on the table between them, the interviewee's notes and artefacts beside Marg. As was the case with the three other interviews, O'Brien made notes in a notebook as the conversation proceeded in order to remind herself of points to return to. The typist who transcribed the four interviews was asked to note occasions when laughter could be heard, extended pauses, interruptions, overtalk. The transcriptions were sent to Marg and the three other interviewees with a request that they make any corrections necessary. Marg and Chris both corrected misspelt names and added a few words to clarify sections of the conversations that had not been clearly heard by the typist. Miriam made no requests for amendments, while Pat requested that three paragraphs be inserted to elaborate on her statements in the interview.

Over the space of an hour and a half, the topics covered, many in rich detail, included teacher education in the mid 1970s; teaching in 'disadvantaged schools' in the early 1980s; relationships with fellow teachers, including young teachers and with students; operating as a support teacher; links between professional and personal life; working with a supportive and innovative principal; working with a student anti-racist group; the impact, personal and professional, of specific colleagues and tertiary educators; learning to be a teacher; teacher professional development; using functional grammar in teaching; the impact of tertiary study on personal and professional development; literacy pedagogies and technologies; significant theories, theorists and researchers; the challenge of writing distance

education materials; career turning points. Some are explored over the course of a number of iterations; some are discussed in extended statements and exchanges.

Text 4 provides an instance of Marg's consistently generous assessment of the contribution friends and colleagues have made to her personal and professional development and highlights her capacity for carrying her passion for living into her teaching.

#### **Text 4**

85Jenny: That's **very** interesting.

So is there anyone else apart from Pauline that you want to talk about?

86Marg: I suppose - who else over the years - a friend who I have never worked with, but a friend, is Trevor King, at Catholic Ed, and a friend and ex-housemate, shared a house for six years.

87Jenny: That's right. When I was working with Trevor I think you shared a house at Caroline Beach.

88Marg: And we're still good mates of course.

89Jenny: OK, well talk about how you and Trevor worked together and the influence that he had and you had on him perhaps.

90Marg: Well I guess this is the real world connection in more ways than one. Real World is a music label by Peter Gabriel and we were into world music and Womad and all that travelling and all that kind of stuff, so it's kind of where we bounce around from this is 'real world' and this is how we live and this is what our interests and all our passions and what we love in our life, and we take that across into teaching, and into our work life too, and Trevor's very much - we do that together in our teaching. He's been great, I guess on a level as friend, but also

colleague. I'd just like to work with him more, you know, have to get some more projects going with Catholic Ed.

The interaction also illustrates the way O'Brien works with the general interview questions supplied beforehand to produce collaborative histories with the interviewee. At turn 85, O'Brien recognises the previous information offered (*anyone else apart from Pauline*) and provides a further invitation for stories about personal and professional relationships with colleagues. O'Brien's acknowledgment of the colleague, Tony King, hints at a shared history (87), made possible by her insider knowledge of the local South Australian primary schooling systems gained through teaching there herself for many years. Such prompts act as an encouragement to further talk and provide more direction about how Marg is to tell her research story (89).

Shared professional histories operated at another level in the interviews to produce a jointly constructed space of **pleasure** and mutually enjoyable tales of teaching. In particular, the interview conversation was marked by constant spurts of laughter (the typist transcribing the audio tape noted laughter on 29 occasions). Text 5, for example, is replete with in-jokes, local references and laughter.

### **Text 5**

140 Marg: ...Avery Hanson from Catholic Ed and I actually started up a [functional grammar] group, just an interest group, and that's been going up until the end of last year. I haven't had much to do with it this year, but we just had an interest group and we met a couple of times a term at Zambracca's to talk functional grammar. I mean, God, get a life.

*(Jenny laughs)*

Marg: We find it really exciting and, you know, this is it!

Jenny: Amidst all the trendies here's this gang of people talking functional grammar. I love it. *(laughs)*

Laughter operates here to heighten Marg's point about the power of strong ideas and how like-minded colleagues assist in one's own professional development. She tells of a group of teachers from the state and Catholic education systems who met a couple of times a term at a trendy café in an upmarket part of Adelaide to talk about their mutual interest in systemic functional linguistics. She creates a sense of the incongruity, which O'Brien well appreciates through her laughter, of a group of teachers discussing their professional life surrounded by people who are out and about and might be supposed to be really living. But, as Marg suggests, the teachers are so excited by the theory and practice of functional grammar that they are happy to talk about it in their own time.

The interview dialogue is, in fact, characterised by good humour and fun at a variety of points. Interviewer and interviewee laugh when revealing how important their social lives have always been; when Marg describes her teaching style as "hyper"; when she tells about smuggling Pokemon cards into the classroom; when she performs a mock 'telling off' after Jenny asks her age at a particular point in her career; when Marg tells what it is like to get unexpected public recognition by a respected tertiary educator and researcher, Barbara Comber, in this instance. In Text 6, their mutual laughter signals appreciation of Marg's ability to construct a vivid narrative and their shared acknowledgement of a defining professional experience.

## Text 6

119 Marg: [Chris and I] were sitting down the back at a conference at the Convention Centre, and we were taking notes on her [Barbara Comber's] talk and all of a sudden she said something about 'Chris Sullivan and her dah, dah, dah'. We wrote our names, and we were like looking at each other staring and going 'Wow!' (*laughter*).

O'Brien and Marg co-produce much of their conversation through anecdotes about social lives, mutual friends and colleagues and similar professional experiences; by mutually understood local references to schools, personalities, literacy practices; by in-jokes about class and geography, and about conference experiences; by shared understandings and displays of



empathy, for example about popular culture in classrooms and constructing positive relationships with students; by mutually constructed positions, for example on the disappearance of fun and pleasure from teaching. The latter is evident in Text 7 when O'Brien turns the conversation back to an earlier point Marg had made about the fun she and other staff members had at a very difficult school twenty years before.

### Text 7

58Jenny: (*laughs*) I'll work it out! Sorry! No I'm just wondering, you were just talking about sort of survival and so forth. The other thing that occurs to me sometimes, and Chris was talking about this too, you know you were talking about broadly how much more fun it was when you were at Elsworth Park (pseudonym) and I wonder how much of it was to do with the age of the staff. Were the others there ... often it is at difficult schools that you've got much younger staff.

59Marg: Exactly. When I started there were ten of us who were straight out of college and we all started together, and I think when you asked me that question it makes me focus a little bit more, and I think the fun was more on a social level because the survival stuff, the day-to-day stuff, was difficult but great, I mean I loved it, but it was the social side of things.

Here O'Brien uses her knowledge of what it's like to be a teacher in order to work with the interviewee to produce new analyses of experience. Drawing on her history as a young teacher in a large 'tough' high school in western NSW, O'Brien suggests (very hesitantly, wanting not to contradict, but rather suggest an alternate reading of the situation) that the fun might not have been so much a function of that particular era (as Marg had suggested) as the age of the teachers. Marg takes up this point and proceeds to co-construct with her an alternate account of fun in teaching.

Enjoyment, liveliness and empathy between interviewer and interviewee do not preclude intensity and careful, pointed reflection. In fact we would argue, they were a central part of creating a rich and nuanced set of stories

that might not be available if the interview was located within a university setting with an interviewer who shared less history and institutional positioning. Text 8 illustrates how shared memories and understandings are central to Marg's reflections about the impact of commercial publishing on primary school literacy practices.

## Text 8

Marg: ...and at the time I remember the Bill Martin Jr. repetition that kind of stuff. We used to use that a lot.

Jenny: Those American ...

Marg: Yeah, quite good. I remember that, we used to use that a lot.

Jenny: Stunning books and they were very expensive, I remember that.

Marg: And the big books, I remember the big books. I always used to think 'I wish they'd make some of them', the non-fiction big books which of course they're into now.

Jenny: And they did.

Marg: Yeah, finally.

Here Jenny and Marg play "I remember" (which they do a lot), producing mutually constructed memories and analyses of literacy practices past and present. The exchange is notable also for the way Marg uses the moment for more than nostalgia or complaint. Instead, she recalls her desire that publishers would bring out non-fiction as well as fiction 'big books' and acknowledges that in time they did indeed do so.

Throughout the interview Marg produces a witty, lively, self-deprecating but aware self-presentation of self that suggests a serious reflexivity and commitment to literacy teaching as an ongoing project of learning. This can be illustrated by Text 9.

## Text 9

231 Marg: One area that I'm trying to improve in my teaching is like less talk and be more concise in it because I can see the kids eyes roll and like 'Here she goes again!', and that's similar to writing courses for Open Access for supervisors, you want to be succinct, you know, a little dot point can cover ... and it's the same, if we're concise, we just ask pertinent questions and then hand over to the kids and let them run things. I think that's much more powerful. I'm a great believer in training up kids. What I often do to sort out problems, like one particular thing I'm doing at school is training up a group of ESL children to run a session with a group of boys who have major behaviour problems and literacy problems, and so they teach that group. So I have one session training them, the next session they run the lesson, and so it's good skills for all of them, and they love it and they knock me over, and they're all, particularly the almost illiterate group of year 5s they love it, and we've got that suck in rate again. They're doing dictaglosses and they're doing functional grammar, they're doing it, but having a bit of fun while they're doing it. The pressure is off and I'm not talking. I'm just buzzing around the background sorting, you know facilitating.

*(laughter)*

In sum, Marg's uses the dialogic space offered by the interview to perform some tough analysis of both her development as a teacher and contemporary teaching practices.

Within the structure of the historical interview, she took the opportunity to exercise her wit and her wry self-mockery, to make strong statements about what she holds dear, to reveal herself, to range across relationships with colleagues over the years; to tell extended stories; to analyse; to be polemical; to affirm her achievements, to reveal vulnerabilities; to acknowledge influential colleagues and their work drawn from many spheres of life, to make jokes, to critique current educational practices and

institutions, to analyse personal and systemic difficulties she faced and elaborate how she dealt with them; to reflect on the present as well as the past; to evaluate the kind of teacher she is, referring to herself alternately as being "subversive" and "different" (49), "a facilitator" (219), "a creative designer" (200); "a member of a mini-community"(27).

### **The cross generational interviews**

The second phase of the project (July-September) involved conducting the cross generational interviews in Melbourne. It was our intention to pilot interview techniques which facilitate dialogue between generations, where older and younger generations of teachers attempt to understand and learn from one other. Four early career teachers who were recent graduates of Deakin University were selected as interviewers. These research participants were contacted through local Melbourne networks - and conversations with colleagues who suggested recent graduates they thought might be interested in questions of mentoring and professional development. Although such selection procedures were developed initially as a matter of convenience and time efficiency, in retrospect they were valuable in providing a discursive space for exploring the respective roles of the university and the school in inducting these young teachers into the profession.

Unlike the historical interviews conducted by O'Brien, where the interviewer was experienced as both teacher and researcher, here the interviewers were inexperienced and required some training to become part of the research project. Consequently, we structured a series of three, two-hour workshops. The first two workshops were held prior to the interviews and their purpose was to prepare young teachers to conduct two kinds of interviews with their late career teachers:

- an historical interview that develops an historical narrative about teaching literacy over the duration of a career;
- a problem-based mentoring interview where the early career teacher identifies areas of their own literacy practice that they want the older teacher to address and discuss.

The third workshop occurred at the conclusion of these two interviews and was framed as a debriefing/evaluation workshop where both early and late careers teachers were invited to reflect together on the process of talking across generations. The Melbourne researchers, Kamler and Dornbrack and the South Australian researchers, Comber and O'Brien, were all present. Below we briefly describe the structure of the workshops and attempt to give some sense of the participants' response to the project in its various stages.

### **Workshop one**

In the first workshop, Kamler and Dornbrack introduced themselves and the project, elaborating the research team's desire to hear the silenced voices of primary school teachers and create a dialogic space where older teachers and younger teachers could talk. We asked each participant to introduce themselves and elaborate on why they chose to join the project. Kelly Armstrong and Jessica Silver were in their second year of primary teaching in government schools and taught Prep students. They were particularly concerned about Early Years curriculum and the politics of curriculum implementation. Sharon Stewart was also in her second year but taught at a private girls school and was particularly interested in questions of career advancement and research training. She enrolled in a Masters of Education at the conclusion of the project. Linda Parker was somewhat older and quieter than the other teachers and had attended university as a mature age student. Her interviews are a focus of analysis later in this paper as she demonstrated a fascinating increase in confidence as the project progressed.

When these teachers discussed their motivation for participating, they did so in terms of research training and professional development. Some expressed a desire to see the 'other side' of research and understand the process from a different and insider positioning; some saw it as a necessary part of their careers, while others welcomed the social and potential support benefits. Text 10 represents some of these positions:

#### **Text 10**

Kelly: I was more interested in the process of it all on the research side of things. We always get the end products at uni or the articles that you read and now actually being part of the process would be a good experience. See how the other side works.

Linda: We sort of, just our Head came in and said 'M's doing this and I think it'll be good for you.' Pretty much the principal said that so I thought I'd better read it.

Sharon: Because it's really hard when you're working with a group of people who all hold the same views to actually go outside and get, you know, and build on that and I think the talking to other teachers (in this group), I find that really is beneficial.

Working from poststructural and critical approaches to literacy, we introduced the interview as a co-produced and researcher-shaped literacy event, highlighting, in particular, how interviews are framed and shaped by the interview questions. We used photographs to illustrate language as a representation - and demonstrated how by including or excluding parts of the photo the whole message gets changed and reshaped. The pictures and images helped to tangibly create the concept of framing and shaping.

We also introduced two metaphors of research using Kvale's (1989) images of the interviewer as a miner and as a traveller. We looked at conceptual differences in the construction of knowledge and the interviewer's role implied by these two images. If one were to view the interviewer as a miner then her role would be to extract the information, to treat it as 'found' and then objectively present it as data. By contrast, the image of interviewer as a traveller stressed the co-participation and co-construction of knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee. Both participants shape and construct the data, so that data is not just there waiting to be taken; rather it is formulated and produced during the interview itself. Following the workshop, the participants were given extracts from Kvale (1989) and from Mishler (1991) to read at home.

Although we decided not to overdetermine the interview by giving early career interviewers full copies of Jenny O'Brien's transcribed interview with late career teachers, we used excerpts from her interview with Miriam to illustrate such techniques as creating empathy, seeking clarification, elaboration and joint construction of meaning. This enabled young teachers to see tangible examples of techniques and discuss ways they might

encourage interviewees to elaborate and develop their research stories. We also discussed how Jenny, because of her position as a recently retired teacher herself, was easily able to draw on shared knowledge not available to the younger teachers.

We did, however, provide the teachers with copies of historical interview questions Jenny had formulated (condensed slightly to fit on one page) and asked them to read through these and add, change or suggest revisions at our second meeting. We also asked the early career teachers' to think about selecting a late career teacher interviewee through their own networks. As one purpose of the cross generational interviews was to pilot ways of fostering mentoring relationships, we believed it important that the teachers have some agency in selecting who they interviewed. We specified that their late career teacher needed to have at least twenty five years of teaching experience and asked that they finalise their choice by the second workshop, as well as consider the kinds of questions they wanted to discuss in the second mentoring interview the following week.

There was some hint at the end of the first workshop that the workshop itself was creating a space for speaking and reflection unavailable to young teachers outside the university. Over coffee, juice, cheese and biscuits, the early career teachers engaged in lively, informal conversation about the new demands they were facing in the workplace. This space seemed to expand in the second workshop as teachers discussed the kinds of questions they wished to ask in the mentoring interview.

## **Workshop two**

In the second workshop we briefly revisited the historical interview questions and stressed that teachers need not feel bound by them. Rather these were prompts for discussion, which if distributed beforehand, would allow older teachers to probe their teaching history and help us build an archive of historicised literacy practice. The young teachers did not suggest any revisions but seemed keen about the opportunity to explore the past. We did not at this point fully realise, however, the power that such a dialogically-produced history might have on the developing confidence of the younger interviewer/witness.

A discernible shift began to occur in the second workshop with early career teachers occupying more of the dialogic space as we moved to questions of interviewee selection and the kinds of questions they might ask in the second interview. As each participant shared with the group their choice of late career teachers, questions of power and authority between interviewer and interviewee began to emerge. This is evident in Text 11 where Kelly indicates potential problems in making her decision and voices concern about what she can say to whom, particularly with reference to the Early Years which her school had taken on with an enthusiasm she did not necessarily share.

### **Text 11**

Sharon: If I ask him...he will go off on a tangent and I would be there forever...What do you think of the levels, I'd be asking..I'm struggling with the philosophy behind it...But I don't know if I need to let her know about that.

The group discussed ways in which they might phrase sensitive issues so as not to give offence but instead take ownership, such as "I'm having trouble with..." rather than "I don't like it and I won't do it". This kind of 'out loud' rehearsal led teachers such as Kelly to explore her experience of power relations in schools, and her positioning as younger teacher with less authority, as in Text 12.

### **Text 12**

Kelly: It works both ways. I know a lot of teachers at our school struggle with the Early Years and I know I've got it down pat and they actually come to me. You've got a teacher who has taught for 20 years and been in prep for 10 years and she's coming to ME saying, "... I need help. How do I do this?" So it sometimes can work both ways. Maybe a good question to be asking is how they, I know that some of the senior staff won't come and ask for help and think you're young, you've got no experience, you know nothing. They don't want any of our ideas... I know I have put forward ideas and have been told, 'oh look no good' and then 2 weeks later at the staff meeting he's up there presenting my idea and I approached him and said



any credit for me and ah no, you couldn't have thought of that REALLY, you're only a second year teacher... I don't like playing all those games.

While some teachers said they felt less constrained than Kelly and believed they could ask anything in their school, it became obvious to all participants that the context in which one works powerfully shapes what one may and may not say. What was particularly interesting to us as researchers, however, was the way the workshop began to create space for critique and reflexivity - for teachers to talk about things that were bothering them without simply complaining. While our ostensible purpose was research training and interview technique, the young teachers began to use the space in a way that suited them. Given the intensity with which Early Years curriculum was being promoted in Victoria at the time, it was not surprising to us that conversation often moved in this direction. When issues of running records, levelling and ability grouping were raised, the discussion became highly charged and at times critical, with everyone keen to have their say as in Text 13:

### **Text 13**

Jessica: I think it's easy to implement but the kind of philosophy behind it, some of the things that go on, it just hits me in the face. Like the timing of it, the way they group it, it's decontextualising ...OK ten minutes up, STOP no matter if the child is full on and loving it. You see that happening and it's just so scary and you think "Oh my God!"

Many common questions and issues emerged for the four early career teachers in their mentoring interviews. The following is a tabulation of the interview questions devised by the early -career teachers' for their second interview, highlighting issues they were most concerned with and the frequency with which these were discussed.

(See Table)

Early Years	Staffroom Politics	Dealing with parents	Training	Others
<p>[3 teachers]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability grouping x2</li> <li>• Running records x2</li> <li>• Need to be rigid x2</li> <li>• Resources X 2</li> <li>• Effectiveness of learning plans x1</li> <li>• Making EY interesting x1</li> </ul>	<p>[2 teachers]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reactions of older staff to younger staff</li> <li>• Who to speak to with a problem x2</li> </ul>	<p>[3 teachers]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies to cope with parents x2</li> <li>• Dealing with difficult parents</li> <li>• Using parents effectively in the classroom</li> </ul>	<p>[2 teachers]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for reassurance that they had sufficient training</li> <li>• Difference between current training and that in the past</li> <li>• What did older teachers think were essential skills</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers and the law</p> <p>Coping Strategies with new classes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where to pitch</li> </ul> <p>Changing schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• disadvantage or perk?</li> </ul> <p>General Advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What advice would you give to me?</li> </ul>

## Workshop three

The purpose of the third workshop was to evaluate the process of interviewing, in particular the cross generational aspect of the experience. As our concern in this pilot project was to explore implications for cross generational mentoring, we believed it was important to document carefully the kinds of interactions that went on between interviewer and interviewee and examine their effects on both early career and late career participants. To this end, a group interview which brought together the four early career and four late career participants was lead by the full research team on September 21. As it occurred during the school holidays, not all the teachers were able to attend. One of the pairs, Sally and Sharon, sat closely together as late career teacher Sally spoke of her enjoyment at being part of the project in Text 14:

### Text 14

Sally: ...the process of reflection was very good for me and I even asked a colleague who I trained with, I said 'Just spur my memory on a couple of things', because you do forget over the years, but I've seen very many changes in the teaching of literacy and my Head said to me one day 'What's going to happen when people like you and I leave the profession with the wealth of knowledge that we've got, and our understanding of those different processes, what's going to happen with the young people who haven't had that experience, and particularly some of the training, where we have been trained in so many different facets', and I said 'I don't know, I just don't know what's going to happen', and so this is an excellent opportunity to pass on the knowledge that we've got and help the, hopefully, inspire some of the young people to pursue their skills in teaching, and so I was delighted to participate in the project.

Her response suggests that the interviews created a space for reflection and a valuing of experience, that may not have occurred otherwise. Another late career teacher, Sandra saw the benefit not only in the research context but in its potential long term applications. In Text 15 she highlights the future opportunities for mentoring that she has begun to think about as a senior member of her school.

## **Text 15**

Sandra: I started teaching in 1970 and I came on the project because Linda asked me to, but after talking about it with her I could see the benefits and I can see a great benefit in running some sort of a mentoring program in the schools. I think that's one of the most important things that should be happening at the moment which I don't think happens enough in schools. We've got so many graduates coming out now, you know most of us have got three or four in our school, and so I think it would be a great opportunity to run something like that, so maybe this is the beginning of it, this project.

The fact that the dialogic space opened up by the interview might have material effects on the ongoing relationships between teachers in their schools is evident in Text 16 where Sandra discusses her feelings about the first interview:

## **Text 16**

Sandra: We don't ever sit and give of ourselves, do we?...I think that's what's missing from our team, so to speak, that we don't have that - it's like a bonding. We don't just sit and talk like we are here. I mean you and I would never look at each other the same after this because we have shared so much and I always think they're the sort of experiences that change you, they're what make you.

In Text 17, her early career partner Jessica, explicitly addresses the effects on her own practice of participating in a history-making interview:

## **Text 17**

Jessica: It really helped me hearing the history of what's happened and you know, how some things have come and gone and what used to happen when you were a new teacher and how that is similar or different to what we're going through and to realise that, 'hang on, you went

through issues when you were a new teacher too, so I'm not alone here.

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the evaluation workshops was the importance of history for the professional development of early career teachers. For late career teachers historical reflection provided an unexpected opportunity to reread the past through the lens of the present. For the early career teachers a sense of a history helped them view their career trajectory differently. It helped them reread the present through the lens of the past. The cross generational dialogue enabled them to see themselves as potential life long learners rather than simply as unskilled novices and to realise they were not expected to know everything in the first few years. In Text 18, one of the early career teachers, Kelly, speaks about the relief she felt after the interviews:

### **Text 18**

Kelly: One thing I found interesting, even just talking today, we all sort of have the same issues and maybe face the same problems and they may - and what the more experienced teachers faced when they started, and now we are...

At the conclusion of the workshop, the research team was left with the feeling that while we had gone after literacy history, we had also begun to develop a model of mentoring that had enormous potential for building the teaching profession. The significance of history for mentoring is explored in Text 19 by Barbara Kamler in her attempt to re-articulate what she has learned from the evaluation workshop.

### **Text 19**

Barbara: What I'm learning listening to you today is ..if you're an early career teacher and you have a sense of a career which is something that will evolve over time and having some history, then it allows you not to be quite so panicky about what you don't know when you start and maybe it allows you to be more open to go to people or to have agency to go to people and create more spaces

## Cross generational history making: The first interview between Linda and Suzanne

Given the positive response of most participants to the cross generational interviewing, it is our concern to examine more closely the nature of those interactions and the work they accomplished. We are working from the premise that the meanings in the interviews were co-produced by the early and late career teachers in partnership; that although our research created an authorised dialogic space, participants began to use that space in a ways that suited their own purposes. A number of questions emerge for us about these conversations:

- Why were the conversations valuable?
- How did they work?
- What kind of knowledge was produced in the dialogic space authorised and created by this research project?

To explore the mentoring potential of these cross generational dialogues, we have selected excerpts from the dialogue produced by one early career - late career pair, Linda and Suzanne, for closer examination. Suzanne and Linda taught at at Mondeor Primary School (pseudonym), a coeducational government primary school in the outer suburbs of Melbourne with a high proportion of immigrant, working class and young middle class families. The interviews were conducted after school hours in Suzanne's classroom. Interviewer and interviewee sat at undersized Prep tables on small chairs in a room bursting with the colourful artwork of the children and print saturated walls. The interviews lasted approximately an hour and a half and were videotaped by Jacqui, who recorded all eight crossgenerational interviews.

While Jacqui's presence inevitably shaped the interaction, her presence also seemed to "legitimise" the interview. As the embodied representative of the university research team, she made the interview 'official' and justified the time teachers devoted to talking to one another in ways that don't typically occur in staffrooms. It was interesting to note that some of the teachers directed their conversations to her more than to the interviewer. One of the late career teacher faced the camera throughout the interview and only

occasionally addressed her interviewer. One of the early career teachers stopped the tape every now and then to check with Jacqui that she was doing alright and before the interview began, recounted an unpleasant experience she had had with a staff member the week before and how the interview had helped her confidence and her relationship with her late career teacher.

Linda, did not feel confident about her positioning as interviewer. When asked why she chose to be involved in the project she implied she felt some pressure from her principal to participate, in contrast to others, for example, who said they were keen to understand research from the inside out. Linda was highly nervous before the first interview and told Jacqui that she didn't feel ready and didn't know if she could cope. Afterwards when it was clear to Jacqui that Linda had conducted a very fruitful and rich interview, she congratulated her on her effort. Linda was genuinely shocked but seemed pleased to receive her approval, an approval that seemed to verify her early moves towards a researcher subjectivity.

The transcript from the first interview bears traces of the ways in which Linda both shaped the interview and progressively took up the researcher subjectivity offered by the interview structure. Given that she had minimal training in the workshops and felt insecure, there is evidence to suggest she performed the role of interviewer quite competently. While she lacks the experience and shared history that O'Brien brings to the historical interviews, she does take on the positioning of an interviewer committed to getting history. Text 19 includes a number of such instances where she (a) uses what has already been said by the interviewee to fill in the gaps; (b) is attentive to keeping a time line; (c) picks up on Suzanne's language and asks for further elaboration and a context for Suzanne's behaviour and attitude; (d) attempts to make the history being produced useful for herself; (e) provides encouraging response that stimulates further dialogue.

### **Text 19**

(a) Linda: What changes have occurred or have you seen occur in your teaching of literacy, over the years you've been teaching? So you started with John and Betty and now went to early years. What's happened in between, what sort of things?

(b) Linda: And when was that? In the 80s as well?

(c) Linda: On the change - you're all for change obviously, it just sounds like that, and I know that - what about the colleagues around you, were they as willing to change, as willing to go with this, all these new things that were happening?

Suzanne: Yeah I think most people were, but there were a lot of things that came in that people really questioned. I mean I went through words in colour and I mean we all questioned words in colour because it was really outrageous. We did try it.

Linda: Could you tell us a little bit about it.

(d) Linda: And what about oral language when you first started, because that's really important now in our teaching of oral language? Did you spend much time on... ?

(e) Suzanne: ...but I found in a small group they talked about it more. They talked about what the child had.

Linda: Yeah, more people could actually say something without, yeah.

Positioning younger teachers such as Linda as interviewer sets up a dialogic space where methodologically she has more power and control than her senior colleague, Suzanne. Although institutionally she is the novice teacher, less experienced, less confident, less knowledgeable about the working of the classroom and enactment of curriculum, she has the power in this interview to ask the questions, to shape the older teacher's responses by her elicitation and probing techniques. She also has the power to evaluate her responses as in Text 20. Their respective institutional positionings at Mondeor Primary School, however, makes such rhetorical acts rare.



## Text 20

Suzanne: I think it's the same with children, like some children are frightened to talk in a big group.

Linda: OK, that's a very good point actually. Just this question here, question 6, what ideas - I know we've spoken about this but perhaps more focussed on it - practices, books, other material that gave you particular pleasure - like I know from my experience now I really quite like, at the moment, Cambridge. I think it's great, I think the resource material is fantastic, the book are really good. Is there anything like that, early doors, disregarding the John and Betty?

Here Linda appears to be acting more like Jenny O'Brien in the historical interviews, adopting the positioning of colleague and peer rather than novice. She first evaluates Suzanne's response (*very good point actually*), shares her own opinions about the Cambridge reading materials and openly discusses what she likes, using strong evaluative language (*fantastic, really good*) to assert her ideas and lead into her next question. While not much of this kind of language was evidenced in interview one, it does suggest a trace of a shift in subjectivity beginning to occur.

The cross generational interview dialogue also created a space for the older teacher, Suzanne to perform a number of evaluations of her own practice over the trajectory of her career. Her dialogue is significant in producing an historicised sense of literacy practice which contextualises the present in the past. In Text 21, she reflects on the changes that have occurred in the teaching of writing.

## Text 21

Suzanne: Yes I hadn't thought about the writing, how it had changed, but when I think about the preps were only allowed to have thick, really, really, thick crayons and they wrote really big and round and really wide lines, so they could hardly ever fit much on a page anyway, whereas if you compare to now you give them a sheet of paper and they just go and they might cover the whole

page with writing. I don't know that we gave them much of an opportunity to do that. I can't remember to be honest, but it was always very, just fairly stilted sort of language because the books we were giving them were these books with stilted language, and I found that the children's language was a bit that way. I probably didn't give them opportunities that I should have if I'd known better. [laughter]

Her commentary suggests the interview and Linda's presence has allowed her to look back and think about particular practices (*I hadn't thought about the writing, how it had changed*) in ways she might not have done, had there been no interview. The speaking allows implicit meanings to be made tangible - as objects of reflection for both herself and her more junior colleague. Her talking not only allows Linda to witness her historical comparisons, but also demonstrates a willingness to critique her own practice without caution or embarrassment (*I should have if I'd known better*). This willingness to critique the past from the vantage point of the present is even more evident in Text 22 where she discusses her past approach to reading and phonics.

## Text 22

Suzanne: I think that was wrong. It was wrong. And you think back and you think 'Why didn't I see, why didn't I see that that wasn't right', you know, and I've said this to people. I think I did some kids a disservice you know, because what I know now and what I was doing the I think 'I should never have done that' or 'I should have done it that way'. It's interesting when you look back.

Suzanne does not, however, simply condemn the past using the benefit of hindsight. In fact the interview is filled with instances where Suzanne helps Linda read some of their current practices in relation to something outside the present. Selected excerpts in Text 23 highlight the way she demonstrates that while things change, that there is also continuity, traces of the past in the present.

## Text 23

Suzanne: (a)The parents were hardly ever in the room, not like now.

(b) There wasn't a lot of team sharing with, like we do now, with leadership roles and things.

(c) The other changes I think were ELIC, early literacy in children, and the CLICK, they were two courses that were run by the Department and they - a lot of ideas in ELIC, like running records are used now in the early years program.

Suzanne also provides Linda with numerous details about the content of literacy teaching that are clearly valuable to her. What particularly interests us, however, is the kind of mentoring her dialogue provides beyond the recounting of the specifics. It is what we would call a performance of change and learning - where the younger teacher has demonstrated for her a way of speaking about a career which emphasises evolution and teaching as an ongoing process. The insecurity of the early career teacher, her apparent need to know how to teach and be fully formed is confronted in this interview by the performance of a narrative of agency, illustrated in Text 24.

## Text 24

Suzanne: And then from there probably I think the next huge change that made to my teaching was process writing, Donald Grave's ideas of process writing, which a lot of people grabbed. and didn't do anything else, but because of my infant training I thought 'No, I can't throw out phonics and I can't throw out kids blending sounds', so I then went to the children's work and did my teaching from their writing, so I used part of Donald Graves, but it gave me a good insight into the process the kids actually had to go through in their writing, and that was one of the big changes I think that happened to me, and that was in the 80s, and it was at this school I started that, and I found that brilliant, and I mean to this day I think Donald Graves - there's a lot of things with Donald Graves ideas

that are still important. You know that we let children write, that we pick out words, we don't give kids lists of words.

Here Suzanne discusses the introduction of new ideas about writing through her engagement with Donald Graves' work in the 80s. Importantly, she emphasises both her openness to the introduction of external ideas while insisting on her right to decide which aspects to use and which to discard. There is detail provided about practice that the younger teacher Linda can pick up, even try out and links are made to the present - (*there's a lot of things with Donald Graves ideas that are still important*). Importantly, Suzanne also performs a stance about what it means to be a teacher. In Text 25 she demonstrates a way to engage with curriculum change and performs a narrative of agency where the teacher is open to change, expects change, selects, discards and remakes practice to suit her context and her children.

### **Text 25**

Suzanne: Yeah, I always used to run like the old Show and Tell and I used to run it slightly differently because I don't like Show and Tell, and I used to hate this row of children all standing up and I remember them at college saying how important it was, that whatever a child brings along they have to be able to show it and tell about it, and I think 'Yeah, that's OK', but I think it needs to be a little bit more interesting than that, so I used to run what was called Discussion Time, and the children would sit in just groups of five and I'd have a leader, and then each week the leader would change, but the leader would say whose turn it was, so everybody was allowed to bring something along everyday or whenever I had it

Such a stance to learning legitimises a different view of a career for a young teacher searching for certainty. Here the teacher is constructed as a learner who lets her practice evolve and change, who engages with curriculum change in a thoughtful manner and is less afraid of being right or wrong.

## **Cross generational mentoring: The second interview between Linda and Suzanne**

This second interview created greater agency for the early career teacher to the extent that she determined her own questions, rather than having them supplied. These are questions that potentially impinge more immediately on her everyday practice - where teacher subjectivity is more vulnerable and in need of assistance and where there may also be more at stake in the answers the late career teacher provides.

While Linda focused on what she needed to know, her dialogue is characterised by a struggle for guidance and mediation - sometimes a pleading for right answers or the right way to do things, despite the earlier interview where Suzanne modelled teaching as a dynamic process of shaping and reshaping practice. This is evident in Text 26 where her angst is realised in (a) the wording and rewording of her questions, an excess of repetition and; (b) a pleading for right answers.

### **Text 26**

(a) Linda: What about ability grouping in the program itself? Do you ability group? Is it ability group? Do you think it's for ability grouping?

(b) Linda: But, so you should get this, this, and this, how does a beginning teacher know about this and this and this, is probably what I'm asking, probably more what I'm asking? How does a know about spelling in context, which I only found out about a week ago, and perhaps it's not beneficial to me anyway, but how do I know about this, this and this, I mean without looking, but there are so many things you can look at in the library, but how do you know what's good, and what's not.

While such tangible instances of anxiety may not be surprising in an early career teacher looking for guidance, it is illuminating to place this segment of transcript back into context in Text 27, where we see Suzanne the experienced teacher mentoring Linda more directly, suggesting that it is dangerous to be so prescriptive and leading her gradually to take a similar position.

## Text 27

Linda: I've read the information, the beginning writers information, the beginning readers information, I just always feel that there's something lacking, like perhaps a manual that has activities within that program.

Suzanne: Do you think people might just stick to those activities then and not really look at the children? I think you really should be looking at the children you've got and sorting out activities from that.

Linda: It's always, it's like the (*inaudible*) came out with your guidelines and what you're supposed to teach. Now the course advice came out after, like to me it doesn't make ... that is one concern I've got, a big concern. If you bring something out, like the outcomes, out, bring a course advisor as well. You're never going to stick to one thing.

Suzanne: But can't you marry those two together? I mean we use the outcomes.

Linda: But the course advice wasn't in.

Suzanne: No, but now it is, isn't it, and so you can marry - use the course advice and use the document at the same time.

Linda: You can, but it wasn't at first, and it's like the early years. I just believe that they've got the manuals for the teachers as in 'OK, this is how we want to do it'.

Suzanne: Yes, that's right, yep.

Linda: But not - this is how we want you to do it, but not 'You can do this, this and this and that will help you achieve doing this, this and this'.

Suzanne: I think there are ideas in that you can use.

Linda: Are there?

Suzanne: Yes, but I think I'd be a bit loathe to say 'This is the program you can use and these are the activities' because I think people might stick to those.

Linda: But I think a guide, more of a guide.

Suzanne: But then I think you need to pull in all the other resources that you've got in your school. You need to get your spelling context book out, and all those other resources we've got, use those. Then you could make your own school one.

Linda: Yes you could.

Suzanne: I mean you could make your own school document and that could be the step that we would look towards.

Linda: But, so you should get this, this, and this, how does a beginning teacher know about this and this and this, is probably what I'm asking, probably more what I'm asking? How does a beginning teacher know about spelling in context, which I only found out about a week ago, and perhaps it's not beneficial to me anyway, but how do I know about this, this and this, I mean without looking, but there are so many things you can look at in the library, but how do you know what's good, and what's not.

Suzanne: Well I think you've got to do PD. I mean you've got to go to these, you

Here Suzanne uses questions (*Do you think people might just stick to those activities then and not really look at the children?*), she soothes, she talks of marrying course advice with curriculum documents and encourages Linda not to be so prescriptive. She enacts through her questioning technique the

importance of teacher agency (*Then you could make your own school one*) and leads Linda to agree, at least provisionally (*Yes you could.*)

Suzanne also provides detailed advice about how to deal with difficult situations by rehearsing ways of speaking. In Text 28, she responds to Linda's question about how to handle parents who come into the classroom and only work with their own children.

### **Text 28**

Suzanne: And then I can actually take them back to the staff and say 'Look if you've got any concerns with your parents'. You know how some people say 'Oh there's a parent and I really don't know what to do with them because they do this, this and this, and I really want them to do that'. Some parents just stick with their own child and it's really hard to say 'Excuse me, I really want you to work with someone else'.

Linda: How do you deal with that?

Suzanne: Well that's something that if we ...

Linda: Do you know?

Suzanne: Yeah, well I would say to them, I'd just say 'Look, I really need you, would you mind ...'. I'd put them in a group, put their name up and say 'You're actually working with that group', and not their child's group.

Linda: Because I find that - I've got a problem with that at the moment.

Suzanne: Well that's what I would do, I'd actually give them a group and then they might get use to that idea that we really don't want them to just sit with their own child the whole time.

Linda: And how many parents would you have in the room per day?



Linda's response is significant as the first time she names her experience as a 'problem.' Here she is both willing and courageous enough to admit weakness (*Because I find that - I've got a problem with that at the moment.*) She speaks, however with less of the earlier anxiety for the right answer and positions herself more as a colleague than a novice who feels inadequate. Such a shift, slight as it may be, is possibly shaped by Suzanne who has modelled this kind of reflection and self-critique in the interviews as a normal part of teaching.

While Linda's questions are quite specific at the level of teaching method and classroom organisation throughout the interview, there is a discernible shift in the way she frames her questions, so that she offers more of her own practice for public viewing just as Suzanne has done throughout the interview. Text 29 begins with a question about the way running records are used in the Early Years but opens a space for a critique of this practice by Linda.

### **Text 29**

Suzanne: And with the running record it's just a little bit more specific.

Linda: And I think too a running record can be a bit doing them properly, as in not properly I suppose, you know, if you're doing this and 'Oh yeah, it's this, this and this', but if you have your assessment that's when it got 'OK, get your ...' - I get a piece of paper, I don't actually get a running record.

Suzanne: Oh yeah I've done that.

Linda: Grab some paper out, OK, some rough copy, it doesn't matter what paper it is, and I'll listen to - go round the room, and just take my paper and then at a glance I can see where they are anyway, whether they are reading what they should be reading ...

Suzanne: That's right.

Linda: ... and, like the other day, you know I watched somebody struggle - like struggled isn't the word, because they said a word that they knew but it wasn't, because they knew that letter didn't start with that word, and they thought 'Oh, but I don't know what else ...' it was 'father' and they said 'dad', because it looked - the picture was a dad and, you know, and they said 'dad' and they knew it wasn't and I'm watching them and they thought 'Oh ...', they just went off, they didn't worry about it because they haven't got the skills yet to think 'Oh well', you know, 'I couldn't do it', but you know...

Suzanne: But they had the meaning though didn't they to fit it in?

Linda: Yeah, exactly. It was good but they just knew without the first letter, that first sound, they knew the word 'dad', they knew it couldn't be right, but I could just see their little mind ticking, but I know ...

Suzanne: That's a good way to use running records.

Linda: Yeah, yeah.

Here Linda is not asking to be told, but rather takes up the positioning of teller. She is willing to critique an aspect of running records (*can be a bit tedious*); she displays the specifics of an alternative practice and is affirmed by Suzanne from her position as more experienced colleague (*Oh yeah I've done that.*) Suzanne's final positive evaluation (*That's a good way to use running records*), affirms Linda's innovation and the risk she's taken in making her practice public and open to joint scrutiny.

There is some evidence that such a stance has been scaffolded previously in the strategies of co-production adopted by both Linda and Suzanne. Text 30 provides some instances of how the dialogic space promotes joint subjectivity through finishing one another's sentences and jointly producing a narrative of change - almost as an oral chant - a text of how to work with school policy and get around it, how to produce change.

## Text 30

a) Suzanne: ... so that's something that perhaps we should do, and maybe we could do for next term, is to pull out all those English resources, and you're right, because I know the ones ...

Linda: That are good.

Suzanne: ... that have got good things in them, and there's a lot of new ones out...

b) Linda: Because it's just that if you don't know then you really don't know where to go, and like I say ...

Suzanne: It's an assumption that, you know ...

Linda: That you've learnt it, and you don't always.

Suzanne: No, that's right.

(c) Suzanne: Some people liked it, some people didn't. I know here I have children in before 9 and I know some people here don't really like it, but if I'm in here then I don't find that's a problem.

Linda: So you went along with the school's sort of. You had to.

Suzanne: Yeah I did but I tried to ...

Linda: Bring new things in.

Suzanne: ... change and say 'Why don't we try this'. I know even at the moment I've been trying to change a few things

Such examples suggest that Suzanne's ways of speaking have begun to be taken up in small ways, and that these have material effects, shaping her teacher subjectivity, her presentation of self. Linda appears to take up a similar stance toward curriculum innovation modelled by Suzanne: I have read about this practice, used and changed it, and you my dear young teacher can do the same. Lesson learned.

## Conclusions

- The importance of history for the teaching profession for both younger teachers and older teachers and of obtaining history through enacted stories of the everyday. For the older teachers, the interview provided space for historical reflection - producing a then and now perspective - and an opportunity to evaluate aspects of their own practice over the years. For the younger teacher, the interview produced a space to learn about their professional history and examine present anxieties through the lens of the past.
- The value of repositioning early career teachers as researchers and creating an ,authorised dialogic spaces for observation, reflection and critique (moving beyond the moan)
- The power and politics of speaking and the impact of legitimising teachers stories and making public the details of teachers' work - of making time for mentoring conversation
- The potential for more innovative university-based and school based dialogue beyond the initial preservice teacher training period.
- The value of building professional knowledge across generations and the potebtail contribution of both retired teachers and those who are inexperienced.

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