

## **Dimensions and complexities of togetherness and ‘voice’: A symposia**

**Iain Jones, Parminder Assi, Roger Willoughby and Richard Sanders**

A sole authored paper provides a starting point for inter-related papers, by four authors, on different dimensions of togetherness and ‘voice’. The first paper considers three questions by reflecting on a case study of how students and lecturers worked together to develop curriculum within a subject in a University in England. It analyses what the conditions of possibility were that shaped this work; asks what the implications of these conditions are for notions of togetherness and ‘voice’ and argues how narrative research enriched interpretations of institutional dis-connections and practice. The paper argues why these questions may sensitise an understanding of these narratives of ‘voice’ and offer the basis for extended small meta-narratives that re-constructs these narratives.

**Iain Jones**

**'A commitment to a form of togetherness'? How students and lecturers worked together to develop a curriculum within a subject in a University in England**

In February 2014 I sat, during a break, talking to a student. Approximately 30 other students had been working in small groups of three or four. Each had talked about their different experiences of working in schools. But Nabeeha was frustrated. Earlier she had worked with two younger students. She was eager to listen to and learn from them- and other students- but they were awkward. Even silent. Their notes were spread on the floor. Some students sat on the floor- others on chairs with broken tops. After break, individuals and groups moved around the room and read one another's notes on large sheets of flipchart paper. Four years later Nabeeha has graduated, qualified as a teacher and is in the second year of full time teaching. I remember Nabeeha, and what I learnt from talking to her and listening to her. I don't remember the names of the other two younger students who sat in that loose huddle four years ago. I do know that the room we were in has changed. It has been re-built and re-designed. The broken partition, the long mirror and odd and old chairs have gone. The chairs all match, the seats are fixed and the two screens are neatly positioned. That is now.

Another starting point for this paper is how the incident I recall in 2014, and the critical events that followed, were interpreted and are understood. Following Smith et al (2010, p. 57), and their study of collective praxis, the paper analyses reflective diary entries, informal meeting notes and institutional texts to interpret these characteristics and representations. It asks how critical events (Woods, 1994, 1996; Cunningham, 2008) continue to shape current and future practices and how narratives are presented and re-presented.

The paper builds on Squire's review of narrative research methods (2008) and argues why this outline of an experience-centred approach to narrative, and work by Caine, Estefan and Clandinin (2013), may be combined. Squire outlines characteristics that enable us to interpret the experience-centred approach to narrative. These suggest narratives may be understood as sequential, re-presenting experience and offering- or limiting- spaces for transformation or change (2008,p.17).The first two of the characteristics are also reflected in Biesta, Field and Tedder's representations of chronological and narrative time for learning (2010). Whilst a chronology in a narrative may provide a context for, or description of, a sequence of events, 'organising' or 'evaluative' principles (2010, pp.321-322) offer a justification for why a

selection or combination of incidents are understood and felt to be ‘critical’. Like Caine et al (2013), this paper shares their methodological commitment and ontological position: of being curious and wanting to understand our own experiences- in specific settings. Such commitments are bound up in our own senses of flux and uncertainty:

as we attend to lived, relived, told, and retold stories of experience; and as we begin to craft our always negotiated research texts. To engage deeply with experience, an ontological commitment is, then, a relational commitment. It is a commitment to a form of togetherness in research that seeks to explore how we are living in the midst of our stories (2013, p.576).

## **Context and chronology: Positioning students and lecturers as partners**

An experience centred narrative forms the basis for the following biography of practice (Squire, 2008, p.18) in which I worked together with others. First, a chronology. In April 2014, three undergraduate students began work with four lecturers on a small scale teaching and learning project. The previous month a call for projects summarised and framed the ethos of the work:

The scheme intends to integrate students further into the teaching and pedagogic development communities of the schools and student support services as a way to enhance collaboration between students and staff. Students must be active and preferably lead members of project teams. The role of students in the project must be explained in the project application. Students engaged in this scheme will be working as partners **not** assistants (Central, 2014, p.2. Emphasis in original text).

The students wrote an information sheet summarising the project from their perspective:

The purpose of the research we are carrying out is to evaluate the curriculum, to ensure it is culturally diverse, that it includes a variety of perspectives and is appropriately more inclusive. (Begum et al, 2014a,p.3).

In July 2014, on completion of the first phase of the work, the students submitted their report and made a presentation to a group of lecturers at their end-of-year review. The students made four recommendations. To

- Continuously expose students and staff to multiple views of the world and harness experiences of all the students in Education Studies.
- Increase opportunities for collaborative learning (communities of practice, group work in seminars) which exploit the diversity within the student population.
- Diversify the theorists and theories used to gain multiple perspectives and avoid repetitiveness. Include the ideas of Black and Asian thinkers and academics from local, global, past and present much earlier on in the modules.

- Include the concept of multiple identities, especially religious identity across the modules from level 4 onwards as, this will allow students to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of identities as students come from a super diverse city (Begum et al, 2014b,p.21).

In this first phase of our work together the small scale project began by developing a problem posing education. An essential element of the method used was a form of praxis: a recurring process of action and reflection leading to further action. Our joint aim was to begin to critically analyse a knowable object (the curriculum) and develop our own critical consciousness. As Freire argues:

To be an act of knowing... demands among teachers and students a relationship of *authentic dialogue*. True dialogue unites subjects together in the cognition of a *knowable object*, which mediates between them... learners must assume from the beginning the role of *creative subjects* (1985.p.49. my emphasis added).

A combination of field notes and a research diary were used to reflect on critical events. In research diary entries in September and October 2014, three prompt questions were used to reflect on my sense of our work together. It is illuminating to review these entries and reflect on *why* I became involved in this work, *what* I learnt from it and *how* it also related to my own dilemmas about ‘voice’. Re-reading these diary entries, I sense affective interpretations embodying *why* I chose to become involved in that work at that moment:

[T]he essence of why I wanted to contribute to the project was (in part) a reaction against other practices. For example, in single events earlier last year small groups of student representatives were called together to discuss institutional developments. They were then represented as ‘the student voice’. But, by comparison, when the messy, incomplete but detailed comments of 60 students were typed up and sent to senior managers – these were ignored. My sense and hope was that by comparison the project was an opportunity for sustained work with a small group of students that promised to be ‘more authentic’ (29 September 2014).

When I reflected on what I learnt from the work I recognised that

It felt interesting. It felt genuine. Perhaps I am self-consciously referring to feelings – but again the essence of enjoying an activity was an essential part of it. In part that was because of working with such a highly motivated group of students. The project felt that it was important to each of us. N, R and M reflected on their own experiences at Central and of what was ‘absent’ from it. They were each explicit that many of their experiences were either absent or in some instances mis-recognised. (19 October 2014).

Initially, the notes were descriptive but in my recurring review these interpretations were developed further (Atkins and Wallace, 2012, p.156). In this sense, field notes in the first form were ‘less emergent findings than raw musings, food for analytical thought and work’ (Mills and Morton, 2013, p.88). I then used these notes in Jones (2017) to review how my

conceptualisation of events, and what made them ‘critical’, was informed by the perspectives of Woods (1994 and 1996) and Cunningham (2008).

Woods argues that methodologically ‘it is difficult to study critical events as they are happening’ (1996, p.119), but understanding the meanings and context of the event can be explored in retrospect. Cunningham agrees and argues ‘what renders critical an event in professional life is its propensity to create a disturbance in our professional equilibrium’ (2008, p.165). However, Cunningham adds that rather than conceiving of events in the singular it may be helpful to extend this notion to a series of events (2008). These interpretations are combined together because their views are not in opposition but are elaborations of one another.

### **Re-presenting and re-constructing stories: offering or limiting space for transformation or change?**

A further characteristic of the experience-centred perspective is that narratives involve a *reconstruction* of stories within and across time and place (Squire, 2008, p.22). In retrospect, our work together can be told, re-told and understood in its specific and wider context, by combining the emphasis of Caine et al (2013) on methodological commitments within narrative inquiry and the earlier work of Smith et al on collective praxis (2010). This commitment ‘to explore how we are living in the midst of our stories’ (Caine et al, 2013, p.576) relates to how Smith et al combine praxis and collective praxis (2010) and juxtapose individual and collective processes of becoming. They argue that ‘This type of collective action often emanates from a felt dissatisfaction with an existing situation that proves difficult to change alone’ (2010, p.57). Whilst a ‘felt dissatisfaction’ was one starting point for our collective praxis, these specific and situated senses can be understood more widely: in terms of how the ‘voices’ of students and lecturers are framed; in relation to ‘time’ and ‘speed’ and finally, in relation to recurring tensions between democratic and managerial forms of professionalism.

First, Fielding and Moss’ six-fold typology of student voice (2011) and inter-relationships between students as data sources, active respondents, co-enquirers, knowledge creators, joint authors and inter-generational learners in education relates to our practices. Whilst their examples are drawn from early childhood and secondary education, they can also be applied to analysing and theorising the voices of students and lecturers within marketized practices in higher education. The dilemmas Fielding and Moss pose, and that Fielding addresses in other

work (2001; 2012), were also significant for this work within the institution. For example, concerns as to how the 'voice' of students, and lecturers, may be mis-appropriated and mis-recognised were evident. I was troubled by this:

What are the implications of the report for 'curriculum enrichment'? Senior managers asked to meet with the students to discuss the report. Another manager has encouraged this too. (29 September 2014).

This concern was extended when I wrote:

On reflection, I am also interested in how the projects are being appropriated. Interesting to reflect on how the whole idea of the projects is being framed (19 October 2014).

A further dilemma was whether this work could extend *beyond* committed individuals working within a course or Department. I recognised this in another reflection in November 2014:

The completion of the first phase of the project was marked by the submission of a report in July. However, before that, a presentation was made at the end of year Subject Review and comments there contributed to the final report. All of the lecturers at the Review shared our enthusiasm for the project and the report. What is now interesting is how the report will shape our practices in the future (10 November 2014).

In re-presenting these stories recurring dilemmas remain: voice' is not only about who may speak, whether voices are heard- and if there is an 'obligation to listen'- but what is spoken (Couldry, 2009,p.590). However, two other concepts also sensitise an analysis and interpretation of these practices.

Secondly, Pollitt suggests different manifestations of 'time' and 'speed' (2009) accelerate and fragment work and 'doctrines of radical change' embody both 'contempt for the past' (2009,p.207) but also forms of 'compressed time' (see, for example, Sabelis, 2002 cited in Pollitt, 2009). Consequently, in a state of 'haste' and 'being busy' (Sabelis, 2002,p.91), 'seasoned judgement' may not be part of this 'compressed world' (Pollitt, 2009) and there is a 'declining ability- and willingness- of public sector institutions in many countries to access and make use of possibly relevant past experiences' (Pollitt,2000,p.6). However, paradoxically, institutions may also have difficulty in 'letting go' of procedures that may not be suitable for their original purpose. Consequently, different forms of what Pollitt calls 'cognitive and behavioural conservatism' may be juxtaposed with 'a quite radical loss of touch with the past' (2000,p.8).

Thirdly, Sachs (2001) analyses the tensions between these practices and competing discourses of ‘managerialist’ and ‘democratic professionalism’. In Jones (2017,p.60), I reviewed Sachs’ work and argue that whilst managerialist discourses are generated both from outside of the institution, but also from within, the second ‘democratic’ discourse is produced within the profession itself (2001,p.149). Consequently our identities are not fixed but are formed, in part, by recurring interactions between these two discourses. They are also shaped by the context we work within, how we work with others and how we make sense of our work within that setting. However, our capacity to exercise agency may be shaped by external and internal conditions and those managerialist discourses that circulate, swirl and become embedded within an institution.

### **Narratives of ‘voice’ and the basis for extended small meta-narratives**

In this first of three papers in our symposium, the ‘voice’ and experiences of students, and lecturers in HE, are not simply understood as *problems* to be managed but remain a set of recurring dilemmas that need to be *problematized* (Bacchi, 2000:2012). For example, this small scale project embodied several of the features of a ‘reformist’ narrative outlined in other research on widening participation in higher education in England (Jones, 2017). The project began as an example of *additional* practice situated outside of the formal curriculum but in relation to it.

The first feature of an ‘extended small meta-narrative’ is based on what ‘the problem’ is. Whilst a dominant and ‘restricted’ narrative of ‘voice’, in higher education in England, is based on the metaphor of ‘the student experience’, a re-casting of the narrative rejects this position. Instead, policies and practices may be framed by beginning to recognise that experiences and forms of studenthood are neither fixed nor linear but are complex and contested (Field, Merrill and Morgan-Klein, 2010).

Field and Kurantowicz (2014), Finnegan, Fleming and Thunborg (2014) and Gale and Parker (2014) extend this analysis further by tracing the value of ‘transition as becoming’. The argument of Gale and Parker is that this conception of transition, compared with other forms that conceptualise transition as either ‘induction’ or ‘development’, has more potential for new thinking about transitions and ‘voice’ in H.E. They begin this process by arguing the need for H.E. institutions themselves to change by reflecting on questions about the design of the curriculum and forms of pedagogy that may be developed given the diverse needs and interests of students (2014,p.745) : our starting point for our small scale work.

Such practices extend beyond ‘restricted’ narratives of ‘voice’ exemplified by, and framed within, national and institutional policy texts. Instead, for example, recurring process of reflection, debate and planning, that were the basis of the ‘Students as Partners’ project reviewed in this paper, echo the perspective of Shanahan in which the question of widening participation and ‘voice’ should be inverted into that of universities accessing the knowledge of those who have been excluded (1997,p.71). Asking what ‘the problem’ is represented to be, and how policies and practices are framed, re-casts the question of access, widening participation and ‘voice’ by taking account of the ‘multiplicities of student lives’ (Gale and Parker, 2014,p.745) and extending beyond specific examples of additional practice. This suggests that multiple identities are shaped by inter-sections of class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability and sexuality. It is these re-presentations and re-framings of ‘the problem’ that have implications for contested ideas of transition and ‘voice’ within institutions.

Quinn’s argues that ‘there is no such thing as an identity, or a discrete moment of transition’ (2010, p.127; emphasis added). This position, which I share, relates to the work of Zepke and Leach (2005). Their notion of the ‘emergent discourse of adaptation’ is productive. Gale and Parker argue that this is not about individuals or groups *adapting* to institutions, or the incorporation of individuals into the cultures of an institution. By asking who gets to speak about these processes and why this matters, Nixon argues what so-called ‘under-represented’ groups lack is not ‘representation’ but *presence* (Nixon, 2011, p.123. emphasis in original).

These recurring dilemmas continue to resonate and matter to us: because of how we work with one another; make sense of our work and identities within a specific setting and ask recurring questions about notions of ‘togetherness’ and ‘voice’. They also have implications for our practices within the curriculum and it is this theme that is now addressed in the second paper in our symposium.

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## **Abstract: Paper 2. Parminder Assi and Roger Willoughby**

Secondly, a joint authored paper considers multiple dilemmas of togetherness. *We live in an interconnected, globalised world yet one that is profoundly fractured along lines of culture, ethnicity, gender and economic inequality. Such lines of fracture pervade our student body that, in one context, may segregate themselves into respective 'ghettos'. The students are not alone in this; these fissures also pervade our own sense of selves. A pedagogic and academic challenge is to articulate and where possible address these structures leading to an active process of reflection and recognition of our 'habitus' and potential 'spaces' for transformation. We are looking at this in terms of an International Education module using colonial and gender studies as theoretical framings to explore experiences of disconnection, 'mistrust' and resistance (Fanon,1952; Willoughby,2017).*

## **Paper to follow**

### **Abstract: Paper 3. Richard Sanders**

The final paper relates to doctoral research progressing from a pilot study, focusing on biographical approaches (Merrill & West, 2009), into full implementation next academic year. The research aims to consider technological attitudes of those studying on a postgraduate education course, to understand the formation of dispositional natures displayed in encounters with students and the potential for transforming disconnections. The paper starts by reflexively accounting for the related dispositional nature of the researcher towards technology, which has led to the development of a conceptual framework drawing upon Hart (2013). Following on from the two previous papers, encounters in this doctoral research highlight fractures and tensions within learning relationships that are underpinned by polarised ideological positions. This leads the paper to outline a CDA methodology (Fairclough, 2009) that utilises biographical methods to bring together macro & micro considerations. With the final part of the paper focusing on the outcomes of the pilot study, the work will be opened up for reflective discussion on its current direction, to help inform future research.

## Introduction

With my EdD doctoral journey at Bournemouth University beginning its supervision phase, the opportunity to present this conference paper provides a moment to take stock of development and pilot study activities, before embarking on the full study within supervision over the next 2-3 years. The aforementioned EdD work focuses on understanding MA Education students' dispositional and critical decision-making towards technology, within their *educational practice* (Carr, 1993) and academic study. From inspecting these decision-making beliefs, the work will be aiming to generate a number of 'Conditions of Possibility' (Griffin, 2017, p.106) to transform pedagogical engagements with technology on the MA programme. As such, this doctoral study is not seeking to assess the impact of technology for these learners from formal educational backgrounds (primary and secondary), it rather seeks to draw out critical understandings that may be useful for pedagogical development (Selwyn, 2011, p.151). This in turn may then help contribute to a re-drawing of the 'borders of institutional control' (Goodson et al, 2002, p.6) within the practice of postgraduate students, as well as my own teaching practice on the MA programme. This re-drawing of borders within my own professional context can be aligned to collaborative work on togetherness and 'voice' that has been developed within our education studies department; the joint papers presented here; and discussed within our ESREA conference symposium. Through the development of a form of *collective praxis* (Smith et al, 2010, p.55), we are seeking to find space for academic freedoms that will feed into the development of our professional areas (ibid, p.62).

The desire to pursue this line of enquiry within my EdD is borne out of my own tacit understandings of disconnections and mistrust within staff / student relationships – a form of dispositional tension - which is also connected to reflexive understandings of my own experience. These understandings of identity can be seen as key in terms of developing our sense of *collective praxis* (Smith et al, 2010, p.56), and should also help to understand disconnections and mistrust within relationships and research moving forwards. In one sense, tacit understandings of relationship disconnections can be conceptualised as critical survival choices for practitioners in an intense era of performativity (Selwyn, 2011, p.105-108) and I would agree that an element of critical conscious choice around technology may contribute to tensions within educational encounters. However, as my reflexive work outlines, I take the position that more uncritical dispositional attitudes and beliefs also have an important role to play with decisions made by postgraduate learners on the course. This can frequently be seen

within the assessment outputs of students on the postgraduate programme, who deterministically sign up to Presnky's native immigrant / native divide (Prensky, 2001) within written work – despite the critical inputs provided on the course regarding technological determinism (Buckingham, 2007, p.86-93). This particular divide can be seen as constructing tensions in learning relationships, in terms of setting up a dichotomous 'them and us' between learner and teacher (Selwyn, 2011, p.31). Forms of dispositional determinism have, and continue to cloud my own academic development, which are drawn out in the reflexive section below. Following on from this, the reflexive sketch of my attitudes and beliefs provides key connections for an established conceptual toolset drawing upon Sen and Bourdieu (Hart, 2013) – which then leads into a brief outline of methodology, before discussing outcomes from pilot study data

### **Reflexive Starting Point – My Own Dispositional Determinism**

When thinking about learners dispositional sign up to technologically deterministic ideas (Buckingham, 2007, p.90-91), this parallels my own habitual beliefs in technology and the desire to identify positive impact of technology use in education (Livingstone, 2012, p.11). These beliefs can be traced to *capital* acquired via family, social connections and schooling - encouraging an unwavering belief in hard knowledge structures, where self-evident positivist *a priori* knowledge existed (Audi, 2003, p.94). The world seemed to be full of rational decisions (Paton, 2007, p.25-34) in terms of how technology was going to feed into my own career development, and contributed to my perception of climbing rungs of a professional ladder (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.38).

This technologically deterministic alignment to hierarchical and strong grammar knowledge structures (Bernstein, 1999) can be traced back to my childhood, with the emergence of affordable digital technology in the home. The microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.39) of family and social networks at this time positioned these developments as aligning with an uncritical popular orthodoxy around technological neutrality (Selwyn, 2014a, p.2) and the potential for this to open up new avenues of employment within a developing *knowledge economy* (Ball, 2013, p.23). For me, these perspectives affirmed a sense of functionalist, objective reality – with the belief that the technological skills I was acquiring would also contribute to a causal transformation of how we work within society (ibid, p.41). This transformative belief can be related to the seductive nature of discourse surrounding Californian Ideology (Curtis, 2011; Buckingham, 2007, p.90) and here, I lacked any form of critical awareness of the technologically deterministic stance (Buckingham, 2007, p.87-90) I

was taking. This contributed to my initial career development in the private sector, where I had the opportunity to set up a dot com company with a number of colleagues, via what can be best described as a form of agentic *habitus*. Here, my sense of agency can be very much aligned to the acquisition of *capital* that allowed me to make informed critical choices within the boundaries of a professional field; coupled with a dispositional habitual following of prior beliefs, which limited my own perspectives on what was possible.

The company in question - ECeurope.com (WaybackMachine, 2000), a Business-to-Business eMarketplace for organisations to make trade connections worldwide – linked in to a false sense of linear career development after finishing my undergraduate degree. Many aspects of the routine in this workplace can be considered as *confirmatory* (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.40) regarding my technological beliefs, but certain experiences became dislocating due to the lack of certain understandings within my horizons of action (ibid, p.34-35). Certain uses (or non uses) by individuals with the online platform we had created could not be explained by our quantifiable positivist analytical metric tools (webtrends, 2018) and the forms of *capital* I had acquired had not engendered a *habitus* that had the necessary dispositions to address this problem. This sense of a *dislocating* routine (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p.40) continued through to work undertaken as an eLearning Technologist within university. Here, the *field* I was operating in was providing a discursive technological perspective that society and learning would be re-configured for the better (Selwyn, 2011, p.7) – and this aligned with my own deterministic expert perspectives (ibid, p.81) surrounding technology, but lecturers seemed to have very little interest in taking advantage of them. I remember at the time believing that the only true way to embed technology into Higher Education was for a new breed of younger, more technologically savvy lecturers to come to the fore – representing my own ‘them and us’ tension in my professional life. Although I had not read Prensky’s ideas regarding a native / immigrant divide (2001), I was entering into a similar technologically deterministic train of thought as a result of my deep-seated dispositional views informed by dominant discourses, also confirmed by the critical understandings from where my technological knowledge base resided in.

With the take up of an opportunity to move into lecturing on a media studies course and the gradual move from teaching technology based skills into more critical and literature focused professional activities, I can characterise my routine as being *evolutionary* (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.40-41), culminating in a more explicit recognition of my dispositional determinism. Despite this being more recent history within my professional development, I



find it exceptionally difficult to coherently pin down the conditions that brought about this change. The complexities associated with transforming dispositions can be seen within my EdD work during its taught phase, and examples of this include: uncritically persisting with the desire to have a representative sample of participants within the full study; and trying to conceptualise typologies and theory into neatly bounded boxes. This indicates the importance of research work to be given the space for continual reflexivity (Ward & Sanders, 2017, p.92-94) – a form of reflexive *double objectification* to avoid being controlled by my own discursive beliefs (Holm, 2013, p.136). I would contend that this *double objectification* is supported by ideas of *collective praxis*, where an individual's reflexive identity cannot be separated from the community they are practicing in (Smith, 2010, p.56).

To draw out key points as a result of this reflexive outline, it is important to initially mention the deep seated nature of dispositions. This cannot be underestimated and I would consider *habitus* as 'unthinkingness in action' (Mills, 2008, p.82). I can anecdotally identify similar types of dispositional nature replaying for postgraduate students in my current practice over a similar extended period of time – which can be characterised as a deterministic persistence with hard knowledge attitudes towards technology, despite critical inputs on the programme. This helps to situate the relevancy of the study in terms of identifying potential 'Conditions of Possibility', where powerful discursive structures encourage the continuation of 'implicit habitual conduct' (Selwyn, 2011, p.57) to maintain the status quo. As such, a critical study seeking transformative conditions will need to include the conceptual framework of cultural reproduction provided by Bourdieu (1973) as a key element for considering the development of attitudes and beliefs. Nevertheless, recognition of teachers' ability to make informed decisions is also required. For example, Selwyn recognises that teachers will make critically informed strategic choices on whether to use technology or not that may be a conscious reaction to performativity requirements – and may also be used as a method of resistance to these (2011, p.104-108). For these critical moments, it is questionable whether the core concepts provided by Bourdieu have the capacity to deal with this in detail, and Sen's *Capability Approach* (1999) was identified as providing an extra conceptual layer. Sen provides detail in relation to *capabilities* – or perceived possible choice as a result of critical conscious consideration. These then may be realised as *functionings*, which can be considered as choices that have been enacted as a result of this conscious consideration (Robeyns, 2005, p.108). The work of Hart (2013) has been exceptionally useful in solidifying this conceptual

position, and this has provided a key building block for the study in blending the positions of Sen and Bourdieu.

## Methodological Outline

With reflexive discussion so far highlighting structural discursive underpinnings to technological engagement, methodology for the full study can initially be positioned within a poststructuralist paradigm (Fulcher & Scott, 2011, p.196; Merrill & West, 2009, p.32). At the level of an individual, biographical interview approaches (Merrill & West, 2009) were selected to draw out individual perspectives towards technology, but something else was needed to critically consider the structural underpinnings to this data. In this regard Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has become the primary methodological position, as it emphasises dialectical relationships between agency and structure, rather than alternatives to be chosen from (Fairclough, 2005, p.918). For Selwyn, this type of research approach can be considered as anti-determinist to draw out transformative conditions (2011, p.46), which is particularly useful when considering my reflexive deliberations. To add further specificity to the methodological approach, Fairclough (2009) details a staged dialectical-relational approach to CDA, which provides the necessary trans-disciplinary space (2009, p.162) to integrate the conceptual framework and aforementioned biographical interview approach. As Merrill & West highlight, biographical approaches can also propel research into these trans-disciplinary domains, ‘to make sense of and represent the diverse dimensions of lives’ (2009, p.75)

Working within a CDA approach such as this requires the identification of discursive entry points to analysis – or semiotic points of entry (Fairclough, 2009, p.170) – and 5 key entry points have been pre-identified, and are summarised in the table below. As well as acting as discursive entry points for the analysis to understand attitudes and beliefs of the participants, these will also provide contexts for imbuing discourses with critical questions on technology within society when looking for transformative conditions (Selwyn, 2011, p.50).

Table 1: Pre-Identified Discursive Entry Points for Analysis

Discourse	Description
<b>Digital Skills</b> <b>Banking /</b> <b>Employability</b> <b>Discourse</b>	<i>digital literacies</i> and <i>digital capabilities</i> (JISC, 2014) that connect to a skills ‘ <b>banking</b> ’ discourse within education (Freire, 1970, p.72) – connected to both neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies (Ball, 2013, p.15-23)
<b>Digital Democracy</b>	Discourse surrounding <b>technology having a democratising and inclusive</b>

<b>Discourse</b>	<b>effect</b> (Selwyn, 2014b, p.9) – connected to neoliberal and Californian ideologies. Can also be associated to digital dangers and ‘moral panics’ (e.g. anonymous)
<b>Nativeness Discourse</b>	Discourse surrounding <b>technologically competent ‘native’ technology users</b> appearing within education, <b>juxtaposed with older immigrant technology users who struggle with technology use</b> (Prensky, 2001) – influenced by business; neoliberal ideologies; and Californian ideologies (Buckingham, 2007)
<b>Digital Degradation Discourse</b>	discourse positioning technology as <b>degrading critical educational engagement</b> (Selwyn, 2014a, p.vii) – associated to neoconservative ideologies (Ball, 2013)
<b>Digital Danger Protectionist Discourse</b>	<b>protectionist discourse surrounding perceived dangers</b> with technology – associated to neoconservative ideologies (Ball, 2013) and perceived dangers.

Within the full CDA methodology for the study, it was envisaged that these five entry points would be used to do a broad analysis of key policy documents over a period of time, to uncover how the political domain instigates discursive belief systems for educational professionals within *macrosystems* and associated *exosystems* (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p.40). To complete this initial part of the CDA policy analysis, a *corpus linguistics* approach was firmed up within the full research design, where my own views aligned with Mulderrig (2008) that this type of quantitative structural analysis can provide a wide variety of additional insights for qualitative CDA analysis. This analysis could then be connected to the individual beliefs of educational practitioners with regards to technology via biographical interviewing of participants - with the expectation that this micro analysis phase would require a ‘looping back’ (Fairclough, 2009, p.167) to further policy analysis. As Smith et al. highlight, praxis is a social act located in historical life histories (2011, p.56) – and *collective praxis* within the context of research will necessitate an investigation of relationships between these and my own reflexive position.

Even with my more enlightened reflexive consideration of prior beliefs, I still saw value in in a *corpus linguistics* quantitative data starting point to the CDA analysis. Despite it aligning with ‘big data’ approaches, where parallels can be drawn to analytical techniques used in my

less enlightened times at ECEurope.com, use of this in a short form within my masters level study, along with CDA proved to be extremely beneficial. With this aspect of the study seeming to be fixed and familiar, attention turned to experimenting within open and relatively unstructured biographical interview approaches (Merrill & West, 2009, p.119) with an appropriate interview guide (Patton, 2002, p.342) for the pilot study. As a more creative act (Merrill & West, 2009, p.114) within the interview process, I decided to include visual representations of each of the discourses identified above to make discussion feel less threatening. This approach triggered a rich vein of data and the following section investigates the narrative generated from one of the pilot study interviews, to illustrate the depth and complexity of tensions caused by discursive influences.

## **Pilot Study**

During the pilot study, three interviews were conducted using biographical narrative interview techniques, and one of these has been selected for this conference paper based upon the critical insights it has provided for the study moving forwards. Selected extracts are provided from the narrative analysis and the pseudonym of Jane has been applied to maintain anonymity. The account has been separated into two sections, with the initial section detailing Jane's discursive dispositional alignment to discursive ideas of nativeness and the section that follows this details a particular moment in Jane's pedagogical practice that seems to contradict this discursive alignment. This pedagogical moment relates to the implementation of a flipped learning scenario (Sams & Bergmann, 2013) and although this could be explained via notions associated to practitioner craft, I am now questioning whether a closer association to discursive structures of new public management (Ball, 2013, p.55-57) is required. As a result, my preconception that my reflexive positioning would provide stronger interpretive connections to the experience of participants can be brought into question.

## **Key Discursive Influence – Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants**

*"I'm just not of a technological age am I?"*

When drawing out the narrative analysis for Jane, a number of the pre-identified discourses seemed to have little, if any connection to her lived experiences. Discourses associated to technology having a democratising and inclusive effect (Selwyn, 2014b, p.9) had virtually no resonance; some dispositional structural following of skills banking / employability discourse was also apparent; and some reference to digital mediums contributing to a degradation of the English language can also be identified within the transcript – indicating some more

conservative ideological alignment for Jane. In terms of digital dangers, Jane actively rejected discourses of danger and risk, and this can be primarily related to experiences within the home with her own children – coupled with beliefs centring on the nativeness of the younger generation. Discourses of nativeness can be seen as a primary influence for Jane, which is explored further below. This was repeated in other pilot study interviews and helps to indicate the strength of this discourse in wider society, but I was surprised in the diversity of influence on attitudes and beliefs.

Dispositions for Jane in this area can be traced back to the age of 11-12 within school maths lessons that utilised computers. These lessons only provided limited computer access and learners had to take it in turns on computers for programming and coding activities related to the curriculum. This particular classroom routine can be considered as *dislocating* (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.40) for Jane, expressing little understanding of what work was required of her and expressing feelings of being ‘scared’. This can be subsequently linked to a *self-initiated* turning point (ibid, p.39) in attitudes, via an expression of belief that digital technology was not part of her horizons of action (ibid, p.34) for subsequent career opportunities. The use of computers and turning point in attitudes at this time can be juxtaposed with a stronger personal connection to humanities subjects and a confirmatory routine (ibid, p.40) within these areas of learning, which help to position her dispositional nature away from engagement with technology.

Stepping forwards in Jane’s professional career when working as an educational practitioner in primary school, each teaching room was provided with access to one computer and learner activity would involve the use of programmable robots, akin to Papert’s LOGO programming language and robot ‘turtle’ (Buckingham, 2007, p.35). As Buckingham highlights, Papert argues that these systems have the potential to bring sciences and the humanities together – but for Jane, this has not helped her to bridge experience between two differently positioned areas of knowledge within society. When using the equipment in the classroom, Jane has used what she has referred to as ‘avoidance tactics’ by asking learners to show her how to operate the system. The experience here has not contributed to her own dispositional evolution, and would seem to align to some of the criticisms of Papert’s transformative assertions (Buckingham, 2007, p.39-40).

Conceptually, these experiences can be primarily positioned as a habitual following of discourse surrounding technology competence, further polarised with discursive notions of

gendered subjects that more position competence for Jane in Humanities based subject areas. When moving into Jane's contemporary practice below, what initially seems to be a contradiction to her dispositional sign up to nativeness can be explained by a partial evolution in prior attitudes and beliefs, and more critical conscious choices that can be positioned within the conceptual framework of Sen.

### **Immigrant Dispositions and Craftsmanship in Contemporary Practice**

*"I just read about it [flipped learning] and thought, well how can I do this, how can I use this in my classroom and just decided to do that."*

When considering Jane's more contemporary decision-making in relation to technology, a choice made by Jane and her colleagues not to buy iPads for use within the school may be seen to align with more immigrant, conservative attitudes to education (Ball, 2013, p.14-15). However - underneath, there is a deeper critical realisation of the complexities with technology use. For Jane, the decision not to include this particular technology within her educational contexts has been based upon prior experience. Jane expressed a realisation that it was not a good fit for the structured requirements of learning and teaching, and that technological affordance cannot be generically applied to every context (Livingstone, 2012, p.13).

Other choices and activities with technology that Jane is engaged with can be classed as more innovative technology work, and these are associated to pedagogical practice with learners. For example, Jane has researched, designed and implemented a flipped classroom learning scenario in maths, which has proved beneficial for targeted and differentiated problem solving support within the classroom. What is particularly interesting here is that when it is primarily framed within a professional teaching context, then the work is not necessarily seen as technological endeavour. This activity can be framed in terms of *poietic* craftsmanship (Carr, 1993, p.168), with *techne* and *poiesis* being placed 'hand in hand' (O'Brien, 2004, p.17) to achieve pedagogical goals. For Jane in this situation, there is no ideological framing associated to the activity – a reason why the activity is not perceived as something technological, and seen more in terms of a 'free relationship' (ibid, p.26).

Despite feeling comfortable with elements of technology use when brought into the craft of teaching practice, certain elements of technology firmly sit outside her fields of experience that invoke an immigrant dispositional reaction to learning possibilities. Video games and simulations fall into this category, and the dispositional rejection of potential affordance due

to lack of familiarity may also be related to Jane's historical alignment with gendered discourse in relation to technology (Margolis & Fisher, 2002, p.2), which can position aspects of use as sitting in a male dominated scientific domain. When considering Jane's professional experience of moving into a leadership and management domain, a slightly different picture can also be painted in relation to technology and discourse – via 2 key *evolutionary* routines (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.40-41).

The first of these routines can be associated to a re-orientation of her career into management and leadership structures, and this change in role required the use of computers on a daily basis as part of her new professional practice responsibilities. Her involvement with new IT based management systems and the expectation that these would be used on a daily basis, have primarily contributed to her dispositions evolving to accommodate digital technology - primarily in a form that substitutes existing processes (Selwyn, 2014b, p.43), rather than transforming them. The second of these *evolutionary* routines can be positioned around re-entering education to complete a SENCO PGCE. Yet again, engagement with technology within this academic development context can be seen as substituting existing processes – such as accessing electronic literature – that has then also impacted on more dispositional acceptance of technology. For Jane, these routines are also coupled with an experience of a particular managerial colleague not being able to access and send emails, which was a particular position that she did not want to find herself in. This can very much be related to the deterministic perception of the inevitability of technological change (Selwyn, 2011, p.42-43) and the resulting dispositional feeling of not wanting to be left behind. For Jane in contemporary practice, these experiences have contributed to a demarcation between technology for management and administration when compared to technology for pedagogical practice. In these management situations, immigrant dispositions still persist - but professional necessity, the powerful nature of 'big data' analytical discourses (JISC, 2015) and the ability to utilise wider resources for delivery in a management context make these situations seem relatively uncomplicated for Jane to interact with. The perceived ownership of these technologies by structured institutional provision, 'booster' (Selwyn, 2014b, p.8-10) enabling discourse from business (Buckingham, 2007, p.1-13) and the previously mentioned *evolutionary* routines have helped Jane to navigate long lasting perceptions of immigrant inability within technology-based management situations.

In more contemporary times, Jane sees technology as an acquired *capability* in the context of pedagogical practice and re-engagement with study, realised by the *functioning* of flipped

learning within the classroom. The (non) use of iPads can also be interpreted in a similar way, based upon critical understandings of technological affordance (Selwyn, 2011, p.106).

However, given that this particular incident relates to Jane's experiences within management and leadership structures of formal education, a previously unconsidered discursive influence on attitudes and choice can also be established. Within the interview, I was ill-prepared to properly pursue this discursive managerial line of enquiry, which is very much related to the fact that this was not previously considered within my reflexive experience. As a researcher, I clearly needed to establish further critical understandings of discourse to draw out an additional level to the analysis, and I had missed the opportunity to fully explore this within the pilot study.

## **Outcomes and Dilemmas**

As I've started to outline in relation to the pilot data, a key outcome of these pilot activities relates to the expansion of the potential analytical discursive points of entry for the study. A key area of further work will need to focus on new public management (Ball, 2013, p.55-57) discursive technology positioning. Here, Selwyn discusses a number of discursive positions - such as: technology for surveillance (2011, p.97); conservative managerial distrust (2011, p.98); and other key roles that technology has within performativity & assessment cultures (2011, p.93-94). When looking back at the interview data, it is possible that the flipped learning activity could be related to managerial discourses, but due to my lack of preparedness, I was not able to investigate this possible link within the data gathering.

The critical choice around not using iPads could also be explained in a similar way, with perceptions of managerial value for money in assessment driven contexts (Selwyn, 2011, p.106), and this does also highlight a potential 'condition of possibility' for Jane in transforming attitudes and beliefs. Here, an ideological disjuncture could appear, as managerial conceptions of value for money will not necessarily sit neatly with Jane's pedagogical experience of a flipped learning scenario. Jane acknowledges 'booster' discourses (Selwyn, 2014b, p.8-10) when talking about the benefits of flipped learning – but because these positive discourses & pedagogical experience with flipped learning scenarios could challenge her management practice of not using iPads, her dispositional reaction is to create a strong professional demarcation between the managerial and pedagogical lenses that she uses to interpret technology use. For Jane, the iPad problem is positioned away from structures, and is alternatively positioned around a lack of knowledge by practitioners, and professional development needs. Neoconservative managerial ideologies (Ball, 2013, p.55)



and *Knowledge Economy* (ibid, p.23) conceptions of education seem to hold some sway here for Jane.

This has implications for the full study moving forwards in terms of the methodological drawing out of data. The discursive complexities (Selwyn, 2011, p.119) being dealt with here confirms an original intention to conduct two interviews for each participant within the full study, where the second provides an opportunity to clear up these types of uncertainties that will inevitably exist within the data. This aligns with the view that one-off interviews may only ‘scratch the surface’ in research contexts (Merrill & West, 2009, p.121). Where I have been a little naive and have re-entered into my own dispositional unthinkingness relates to the perceived homogeneity for individual experience surrounding the role of discourse - and the possibility of including a *corpus linguistics* entry point to the analysis. Although I do still believe in its potential to give quantitative insights into qualitative CDA approaches (Mulderigg, 2008), what I have discussed so far clearly highlights that it is not suitable analysis entry point for a study such as this. The diversity of individual experience that can be associated to the interpretation of discourse, coupled with the more conscious critical choice from experience, means work such as this dictates that the entry point for analysis needs to exist at the level of an individual. This will ensure that discourse analysed within macro structures will be particular to each individual, rather than analysing a range of discourses that may hold absolutely no relevancy to the participants in question. This reflexive recognition of my on-going dispositional nature towards researching technology provides a reoccurring dilemma that I need to be sensitive to, which has parallels to participants within the pilot study. I have never critically considered the role of management discourse within my ECEurope.com experience, and although these discursive influences are likely to play out differently in relation to Jane, it highlights the importance of entering into a *double objectification* within research contexts. Despite the obvious differences in experience, attitudes and choice at an individual level relating to technological determinism – a sense of ‘togetherness’ is possible via reflexive dialectical relationships that can be established within macro level discourse. Here I would very much agree with Merrill & West’s view that biographical research prompts us to think about our own lives (2009, p.125), providing analytical insight.

These research dilemmas, in terms of methodological approach; my own beliefs; and on-going tensions in relationships with learners can be very much related to the messy realities of research and practice in education (Bryman, 2012, p.15). I would contend that the

*collective praxis* within our department advocated for at the start of this paper has become essential for the critical interpretation of this work and future development. I would agree that issues of identity (either own or research participant) cannot be separated from practice, community and meaning to develop *collective praxis* (Smith et al, 2010, p.56). I would welcome further discussion on this paper and its implications as part of our conference symposium.

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