An investigation into the experiences of Large Goods Vehicle drivers directed to undertake National Vocational Qualifications.

By

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate the influence on the operational effectiveness of experienced Large Goods Vehicle drivers undertaking National Vocational Qualifications and the role of Further Education in the delivery of vocational qualifications to experienced practitioners. With the exception of studies conducted on behalf of Skills for Logistics (Grey, 2005; Winters, 2007, 2010) there was little research, which was openly available, that examined the deployment of National Vocational Qualifications to Large Goods Vehicle drivers. The specific focus of this research was concerning the effectiveness of work-based competency assessment NVQ programmes delivered to Large Goods Vehicle drivers working within the Road Freight sector of the logistics industry. Using an interpretive, qualitative based study and drawing on an Action Research approach, I analysed interview and observational data gathered during three Action Research cycles, undertaken over an eighteen month period. During the Action Research cycles, participant reflection was used as a key change mechanism.

The research findings indicated a low level of satisfaction with regard to the objectives and outcomes of the National Vocational Qualifications programme for Large Goods Vehicle drivers and an unwillingness by the research participants to engage in overt reflective activity. There was very little credibility afforded to the National Vocational Qualifications by either the participating Large Goods Vehicle Drivers or their Managers. However, following the inclusion of an additional ‘demand led’ element into the programme, there was further evidence to demonstrate that as experienced practitioners the Large Goods Vehicle drivers did value professional development predicated upon the validity and credibility of the provision available. The key findings

from the study provide evidence for concluding that professional development is valued by experienced Large Goods Vehicle drivers, who are both willing and able to engage with work-based learning if it is within the context of their experience, aspirations and praxis.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Jayne Pointon, MBA, who has always been there to help, advise, support and encourage me and who continues to define the person I am today. Thank you.

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This dissertation has, in some ways, been very much a team effort and I would like to acknowledge the help, assistance and encouragement I have received.

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List of Abbreviations

3PL	-	Third Party Logistics
AoC	-	Association of College
AR	-	Action Research
BERA	-	British Educational Research Association
BIS	-	Business, Innovation and Skills (Department of)
CTD	-	Compulsory Training Directive
DCPC	-	Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (*vide:* also CTD)
DGV	-	Driving Goods Vehicles
DTI	-	Department of Trade and Industry
EU	-	European Union
FE	-	Further Education
FTA	-	Freight Transport Association
KBE	-	Knowledge-Based Economy
IT	-	Intelligent Technology
LGV	-	Large Goods Vehicle
LSC	-	Learning and Skills Council
NOS	-	National Occupational Standards
NVQ	-	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	-	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
QCF	-	Qualification and Credits Framework
RHA	-	Road Haulage Association
RF	-	Road Freight
SAFED	-	Safe and Fuel Efficient Driving
SFA	-	Skills Funding Agency
SfL	-	Skills for Logistics
SME	-	Small to Medium Enterprise
SSC	-	Sector Skills Council
T2G	-	Train to Gain
UKCES	-	United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills
VET	-	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	-	Work Based Learning

CHAPTER ONE – THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR AND ROAD FREIGHT LOGISTICS

> *"…the nature of many adult classrooms places numerous limitations on the usefulness of conventional research" (Jacobsen, 1998, p.125).*

Introduction

This thesis reports on research carried out between 2011 and 2012, I situate its findings and influences at the time of the research and reflect on the relationship between my College and three companies operating within the Road Freight Sector of the Logistics Industry during the research.

In 2008, following his appointment as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the Logistics sector, Skills for Logistics (SfL), Dr Mick Jackson wrote an article for the logistics industry trade press, which was cited in several publications (Roadway, Focus, Supply Chain Management, *et al)*. This article (Jackson 2008) situated the Road Freight (RF) sector at the time, with regard to skills, and warned of the potential consequences of the failure to act on what he considered to be a deficiency within the sector:

> *The sector will need to more than double training engagement year on year in order to train 230,000 people to meet its share of the Government targets to get 79% of people of working age qualified to Level 2 by 2011. The Government is keen to address the issue of low skills across all sectors and is increasing the funding available in England. But this funding will only be provided for publicly recognised qualifications such as Driving Goods Vehicles, Storage and Warehousing or Skills for Life. If we in logistics do not take up our fair share, the money will still be spent, but in other sectors where the worth of qualifications is recognised and appreciated.* (*ibid,* pp. 46 -47)

The message resonated with me and qualified my recognition that the sector was failing to plan adequately for succession and progression, concerning skills. It was also, in part, my motivation for conducting this research as it confirmed earlier research I had undertaken (Pointon, 2008). My concerns were about the funded developmental options available to the RF sector. I was of the opinion that the delivery of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) to experienced and skilled Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) drivers would elicit little if any benefit for the LGV drivers, their employers or the sector as a whole. If this was the case, then I believed the programme could be evolved to ensure a benefit to the participants. In light of the Leitch (2006) report and the subsequent 2009 report from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), there was clearly a recognition of the importance of skills to the national economy. However, I believed the fundamental question was what skills were needed and how should they be delivered and funded. Jackson (2008) also observed:

> *We face a stark choice, either do nothing and continue as a low-skilled unattractive industry that is often a job of last resort and whose services are sold as a low-priced commodity, or we ensure that people have the qualifications they need and build it into a profession. These qualifications can become part of formal training and development programmes to ensure that logistics has no truck with low skills, raises margins and becomes a profession of choice* (*ibid,* pp. 46 – 47).

While stating that the sector must 'up-skill', Jackson (*op cit*) suggests that the funded options alone were not sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the sector and could only be part of the solution. My research, therefore, examined the effect on the practice and attitudes of a limited number of LGV drivers, with established practitioner identities, who had been directed to undertake NVQ programmes. I also considered possible options for change in the delivery or content of the programme to ensure that there was the potential for a beneficial outcome.

Introduced in the late 1980s, NVQs were intended to reduce the complexity inherent in the vast numbers of qualifications then available to accredit vocational learning (Boreham, 2002; King, 2000). The NVQ was part of a range of initiatives, introduced by the then Government, to bridge the gap between supply and demand for qualified employees by planning and delivering training locally to a carefully prescribed and appropriate level (Fowler, 1988). NVQs were a central feature of England's attempt to develop a systematic approach to the development and certification of vocational skills. If, as Jackson (2008) suggested, the available funded options were only part of the solution, then a function of this research was to define how far these options satisfied the sector in providing the necessary skills to attain and maintain an effective and skilled workforce.

My research design for this study was based on an investigation conducted in one large College of Further Education (FE) with an existing relationship with the RF sector. The study was situated within the geographical parameters of North Staffordshire (England) and its economy. All of the research participants and their respective companies having their operational centres within a radius of twenty miles from Stoke-on-Trent. Within this area, the RF and warehousing sectors had become major employers, (Winters, 2007) following the demise or contraction of the more traditional industries. The area had been known for ceramic production, steel, coal and heavy industry (Source: City of Stoke-on-Trent Economic Profile - 2010)

There were a number of reasons for this region becoming attractive to the RF sector and warehousing operations. Not least was the need, created by the imposition of 'Working Time Directive' (93/104/EC) on the RF sector, for central hubs of operation. The location was ideally placed to benefit from any relocation. It was geographically

attractive; it had an established and efficient road infrastructure (A 50; A500; M6; M1), and a plentiful supply of 'brown field' regeneration sites, (Trentham Lakes, The Lyme Valley and The Chatterley Valley) together with a range of grants and aid packages available for inward investment projects (Source: Staffordshire Work and Skills Group – Initial Work and Skills Plan, May 2010 – March 2011).

The one major drawback of the location was the lack of qualified and experienced staff, pertinent to the RF sector, within the available local labour pool (Grey, 2005; Winters, 2007). It was in response to this deficit that the local College of FE in partnership with several other regional bodies, (including: Advantage West Midlands; Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency); North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone) made the decision to establish a 'Department of Logistics'. The objective was to ensure that there was a broad range of training/education provision available for the RF sector, to ensure the continuing inward movement of logistics operations (and investment) into the region continued. I was appointed to establish the 'Department of Logistics' within the College.

I 'The Researcher'.

Although I explore my identity as the researcher, in greater depth later in this thesis, and in Pointon (2012) I believe it to be important to situate 'me' at an early stage in this narrative. My interest in this research developed from my operational experience in the logistics industry and my subsequent involvement with FE. It continued to evolve, and with it, my respective identities in both of these sectors, during the process of this research. Fine (1994) suggests that: *"…for any social researcher the relationship between the field and the self is complex"* (p. 72). Finne, *et al.* (1995) suggest that research, particularly Action Research (AR), is predicated on the mutual learning that takes place between the owners of a problem and the external facilitator of the

researcher. This dual role creates a participatory identity for the researcher (Dick, 2000) in that the research becomes one participant among several in a collaborative project, all of whom have a shared input into the process and a potential benefit from the outcomes. I, therefore, situate myself as a participant researcher at the very start of this thesis.

This account, written in the first person as is the practice for AR, (McNiff, *et al*., 2003, p. 20), acknowledges my presence within the research data, and the presence and contributions of the research participants. To situate the research, and to ensure any unconscious bias is contextualised, a brief acknowledgement is given to the identity of me 'the researcher'. Burke-Johnson (1997) suggested that a potential threat to validity that researchers adopting a qualitative approach need to be aware of is researcher bias. He further suggested that this arose because "…*qualitative research tends to be exploratory, more open-ended and less structured than quantitative research"* (*ibid,* pp. 283 - 284). The risk of bias can arise from undertaking selective observations or, the selective recording of information. Also, there may be a danger of the researcher allowing their views and perspectives to influence data collection and analysis (Costello, 2011).

Throughout the course of my research, I was aware of my potential bias, as a researcher. I was conscious of having particular views about both Work Based Learning (WBL) for experienced operatives, and the validity of the qualifications, NVQs, available and fundable to the RF sector. I was not alone in having concerns about the legitimacy of NVQs. Since their implementation, NVQs have enjoyed a mixed reception. For some, they have been found to be relevant, easier to compare to other qualifications and more straightforward mechanism for individuals to use to update skill and career

requirements. Hall (1994) stated that this led to vocational students being at the heart of FE colleges *"…shaped by the local and sub-regional labour markets"* (*ibid*, p. 158). However, Hyland (1994) suggested that the replacement of traditional Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes with NVQs led to a widespread de-skilling of occupational roles. Fletcher (1991) considered that a system concerned only with *"…the assessment of competence in the workplace has nothing whatsoever to do with training or learning programmes"* (*ibid,* p. 26).

There have been many others who have derided the NVQ and suggested that it has led to a dumbing down of vocational education (Raggatt, 1994; Beaumont, 1996; Grugulis, 2002; Oates, 2004). It was also suggested that NVQs did not find favour with many employers. Smithers cited in Flude & Sieminski (1999) commented that *"…the more employers know about NVQs, the less they like them".* (*ibid,* p. 2). Despite these reservations and in the face of more recent criticism (Roe, *et al.,* 2006; Winch & Hyland, 2007), NVQs remained embedded as one of the primary qualifications for work-based programmes within the FE funded offer.

Therefore, to establish the basis of my identities as both a practitioner and a researcher, I have included the following biography of my career. I entered the Logistics industry, joining a large multi-national provider, following many years in the Armed Forces. After entering the industry as an LGV driver, I experienced a rapid series of promotions that incorporated several roles, both operational and supervisory. Progression within the company strengthened my belief that there was a specific need to ensure that staff at all levels, should be exposed to developmental activities. The reasoning for this opinion was that within my company and the RF sector, in general, there was a requirement to ensure employees were able to realise their full potential, perform effectively within their

given roles and be exposed to any identified progression routes. There was a degree of pragmatism in this concept, namely to ensure an effective succession and progression strategy in an industry that was experiencing severe skill shortages (Jackson, 2008; Winters, 2010). Also, workforce development had become a significant imperative concerning attaining and maintaining competitive advantage, as articulated by Leitch (2006):

> *We face enormous challenges, but also brilliant opportunities. We cannot and should not try to protect our people from change. Instead, we must prepare people so that they can make the most of change. Skills are the way to do that (Ibid,* p. 56*).*

My appointment to the role of National Training Manager, for the second largest logistics provider in the UK (third largest in Europe), enabled me to exert some influence concerning operative skills, both within my company and within the RF sector as a whole. I was co-opted onto a number of national enquiries tasked with looking at skills shortage issues within the RF sector.

Progression from industry to FE, as the Logistics Programme Manager, and subsequently Assistant Director responsible for work-based learning, for a large College of FE, further enabled and maintained my ability to influence skill strategies within the RF sector. I sat on a number of national and regional forums, tasked with developing curriculum and National Occupational Standards (NOS) for qualifications (NVQ/QCF to Foundation Degree) specifically for the logistics industry.

On the basis of my experience in both FE and the logistics sector, I held an 'insider perspective' (Adler & Adler, 1987; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) which led me to recognise my subjective bias in the collection and interpretation of data (Costello, 2011). During the course of my research, I had to ensure that I maintained a degree of objectivity, both

in the selection of data and during the process of data analysis. Being located within the research, I found that a process of constant reflection and reflexive action ensured that any subjectivity was identified.

Knowledge and Knowing

There have been many studies on the effectiveness of work-based learning (Avis, 2002; Coffield, 2007; Clancy 2008; Wolf, 2007, 2009). It has long been recognised that the development of human resource is essential for the maintenance of economic advantage (Becker, 1975; Cohen & Soto, 2001). I was of the opinion that the experience of teaching and learning, and how I as an educational practitioner understood this experience, was key to issues of knowledge and knowing. Schön's (1995) consideration with regard for a new epistemology in institutional settings is pertinent here. Schön explained how: "…*we cannot avoid questions of epistemology"* (*ibid,* p.1). As the new forms of scholarship, outlined by Boyer (1990), challenge institutional epistemologies. What can be taken from this perspective is an understanding that 'teaching' is more than just the transfer of knowledge (Stenhouse, 1983; Rogers & Frieberg, 1994). Carr (1995) suggested that:

> *Practitioners are only able to engage in educational practice by virtue of their ability to characterise their own practice and construe the practice of others in ways that presuppose, usually implicitly, a set of beliefs about what they are doing, the situation in which they are operating and what it is they are trying to achieve* (*ibid,* p. 41).

Therefore, to facilitate an effective offer to participants within a vocational environment, there needs to be recognition that potential students are situated in an understanding and belief of their status as effective practitioners. This perception of effectiveness having been established through the unconscious acquisition of knowledge gained through experience (Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Merriam, *et al*., 2007). Experience is still

considered by many to be the foundation of effective practice (Dewey, 1938; Usher, 1999; Wolf 2011).

Practitioners within FE, including my organisation, tended to explain learning in terms of foundational experience. The basis for this was an assumption that nothing could be more basic and therefore more honest than experience. As Dewey (1938) suggested:

> *Education must be based upon experience if it is to accomplish its ends for both learners and for society. Experience always consists of the actual life experience of individuals* (*ibid,* p. 89).

In alignment with those teaching strategies, the teacher's own philosophical beliefs of teaching are harboured and governed by the student's background knowledge and experiences, personal situation, and environment, as well as learning goals set by the student and teacher. This conception of experience was seen by many (Stavenga de Jong, *et al.,* 2006; Boud, *et al*., 2006) as the stimulus for learning, and was central to pedagogies informing experiential learning. Experiential learning could be seen as the process of making meaning from direct experience, Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning could be found in many discussions of the theory and practice of adult education, informal education and lifelong learning (Kelly, 1997).

This then was the problem. As a qualified and experienced practitioner was it necessary to undergo a process of assessment to attain a qualification for the skills and experience already attained. Despite significant criticism of its validity (Hyland, 1994; Raggatt, 1994; Grugulis, 2002; Oates, 2004) the NVQ, was a process of assessing levels of competence, gained through prior experience. The FE sector had been funded, through a variety of programmes, to deliver these competence assessment based NVQs to industry, including the RF sector, for some time. With opinion very much divided on the

benefit (Wolf, 2002, 2009; Coffield, 2008; Coffield, *et al.*, 2008). A review by Roe *et al.* (2006) described the reception they received as a mainly hostile critique and frequently scathing academic commentary "*In common parlance, NVQ has received the ultimate damnation as the butt of jokes – simply an acronym designating the holder as not very qualified"* (*ibid*, p. 14). However, one positive outcome of the NVQ debate is that it drew attention to the role of the workplace as a site for learning (Fuller & Unwin, 2006).

The Process of Learning Engagement

To deliver the available and fundable programmes (including NVQs) within the workplace, there was a consideration of the relational requirements that ensure effective engagement. The effectiveness of engagement was entirely dependent upon the recognition of a negotiation and an agreed mutual benefit (for the purpose of this research between my college and the local/regional RF sector). Wolf (2010) suggests that: *"…failure to recognise what people want will have consequences for providers"* (*ibid,* p. 7) and for provision to have a basis in demand:

> *A public service cannot mirror a pure market system…...However, the more directly it responds to individual demands, the closer it will come to acquiring the positive attributes of markets* (*ibid,* p. 8).

For learning engagement to be effective, it had to be accepted that the challenge facing FE was to develop a new way of identifying and supporting potential learners with no history of post-compulsory education (McNair, 2002; Oates, 2004). The policy of funding prescribed training programmes was best articulated by the title of Fletcher's article (2007), "*Choose any course, as long as it's this one"*. Fletcher's assertion that the *"demand led"* funded FE offer, available to individual and employers, was only available if they wanted *"…what the government thinks is good for them"* (*op cit*). My position was

that if funds were available for vocational development they should have been used to enhance existing skills.

This may be a simplification of the issue, the policy discourse of post-compulsory education reflected the fact that globalisation had impelled society to review skill levels, and the purpose of FE (Moser, 1999; Leitch 2006), and had required FE to consider its identity and function. Usher (1999) offered a view of FE, about both identity and risk of getting it wrong:

> *Changing conceptions of knowledge and the need to understand knowledge in terms of its location in different social practice means that lifelong learning cannot be seen simply as a structure of provision but as a signifier with many different significations* (*ibid,* p. 65)*.*

For my College to be successful in engaging with the RF sector and delivering an effective product, there had to be recognition that the engagement had a range of stakeholders (the student, the employer, the industrial sector and the provider at the very least). A success benchmark of my research was that those stakeholders were not only given a voice but were also able to influence change and contribute to that change process (Squire & Reigeluth, 2000; Cook-Sather, 2002). The many facets of effective engagement should have been seen as a contract between the customer (student/employer) and the provider (FE). When considered from this perspective, the onus was on the provider, in this case, my College, to ensure the customer's needs were met. In other words, effective engagement was about the willingness, and ability, to provide a demand led offer, rather than prescriptive programmes, that had little value to the customer (student/employer):

> *As repeated studies have shown, many of the qualifications which it selects for designated groups of people (to the exclusion of other learners,*

> *and other types of learning) provide them with no economic benefits at all* (Deardon, *et al*., 2004, cited by Wolf, section 1, 2010, p. 32).

Griffin (2002) considers the evolvement of FE (as a function of lifelong learning) should be seen as the 'democratisation' of post-compulsory education, with a direct relationship to such learner identities as democracy, citizenship, inclusion, and individualism. However, it was also important to recognise that those identities were a function of the conditions under which individuals participate in FE (Jephcote, *et al.,* 2008).

An alternative perspective to the priority of learner identity is that any change in post-compulsory education provision had been informed by global capitalism (Coffield, 2008; Wolf, 2009). The concept of lifelong learning was still essentially concerned with the same objectives as that of traditional FE but with a consideration of "*…a common framework of learning opportunities should be created, aimed at enhancing people's control over their own lives"* (Schuller & Wison, 2009, p. 8). Research undertaken by James & Biesta (2007) and Coffield, *et al.* (2008), utilised the concept of learning cultures to capture some of the complexity of relationships involved in learning, and for analysing the roles of all those involved in teaching and learning. The important point they made is that learning cultures are not static and that individuals reproduce them, as much as teaching and learning shape them. A particular strength of this perspective is that it takes into consideration issues of power, and the influence of social, economic and political forces in accounting for specific configurations of teaching and learning practices. It also alerts us to the possibility of variation in practices, as the facilitators achieve a degree of agency in the way they implement policy (Felstead, *et al.,* 2007). Allowing the flexibility for the teacher to give a degree of voice and ownership of the learning experience to the student, a major factor in participatory research.

Engagement of Stakeholders: The Social and Economic Perspective

As stated, a successful engagement strategy between my College and the LGV Drivers undertaking NVQ programmes needed to encompass some characteristics, not least a validity for the individual participants. Educational philosophers have argued that FE is, in reality, the development of the individual (Friere, 1970; Jarvis, 2004). It has also been posited that quality within public sectors, such as education, should have a definition, 'civic quality', as defined by Pfeiffer & Coote, (1991), that falls outside the normal parameters of evaluation (cost/effectiveness), and be more focused towards the interests of the community: "…*it exists, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder: Different people experience it in different ways"* (*ibid*, p.1). In other words, public service provision (in particular education), should be informed by the recognition that those most demanding clients are not necessarily the most in need. Therefore, adequate provision cannot be measured solely on a formal outcome (Boudieu, 1983; Coleman, 1990; Tooley, 2009). For this study, it was important that the participants completed the programme with a tangible outcome of the learning experience and not merely a certificate telling them they were competent at the jobs.

However, Hyland (1996) noted the rise of performativity culture in FE, and claimed that the behaviourist conceptions of human performance, which have informed the introduction of competence-based qualifications (NVQs), and the development of quality assurance mechanisms, such as, target setting, performance indicators and outcome related funding, resulted in widespread feelings of 'de-professionalisation' with *"Large numbers of professionals feeling 'overstretched and under-value"* (*ibid*, p.168).

This position validated earlier research I had conducted involving FE providers (Pointon, 2010) where I found that the provision of WBL by FE to the RF sector was not unique in

either deployment or process. Unanimously all the research participants reported a sector situated in low morale, disillusionment and ineffectiveness. The cause of this disillusionment was attributed to an overly bureaucratic, government agenda driven by target setting and autocratic inspection. Coffield (2008) still considers there to be a place for FE that is not totally market led: *"Institutions are more likely to succeed, both educationally and financially, if they operate first and foremost as centres of excellence in education and only secondly as businesses"* (*ibid*, p. 1).Some time ago Highet (1951) defined the 'unquantifiable' element for successful teaching when he expounded that: "…*teaching was a vocation where the requirement to instil knowledge in students was pointless without the development of individual character"* (*ibid,* p.102).

This philosophy of vocation could be seen as being opposed to the view of education, and particularly FE, as a function of the economy (Coffield *et al.,* 2008; Wolf, 2009). It is worth noting that Becker (1993) a leading exponent of human capital theory, accepts that education is more than just a means to increased financial returns: "*Investment in human capital involves activities that influence monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people"* (*ibid,* p. 11).

If this research was to understand the process of effective engagement between FE and the RF sector, I did not believe it could rely solely on a prescribed offer (Helyer & Hooker, 2008). Rogers (cited by Harrison, *et al*., 2002) suggested that the process of teaching must be with the teacher being in possession of the *"Qualities that facilitate learning" (ibid,* p. 27*).* Rogers (*op cit*) further suggested that learning is a process that should be a delegation of responsible freedom to the student. Again this would appear to be at odds with the role of the FE sector, which seemed to be, as Schőn (1991) stated, "…*confined within a positivistic paradigm based on a technical rationality"* (*ibid,* p. 3). In

its crudest sense, this is a position that holds that the goal of knowledge is simply to describe the phenomena that we experience, or what can be seen and measured. In this situation, the focus was constantly changing to address an increasingly rapid change of priority and an almost endless stream of, at times contradictory initiatives (Gleeson & Shain, 1999) from central government with the student being a function of a Human Capital strategy.

Although there are many who considered that the objectives of FE (Highet, 1951; Coffield, 2008) should be to enrich the lives of the individual, there was a lot at stake. Leitch (2006) had suggested that a better-skilled labour force could bring an estimated gain of £80 billion to the UK economy over the next 30 years. With this sort of 'prize', it was inevitable that national economic objectives were going to inform the priorities of education, training provision and educational management.

There was a distinct possibility that FE would continue to see an increasingly directed approach from central government towards the sector (Coffield, 2007, 2008; Wolf, 2009) and this had an impact on the development of an effective engagement strategy between FE and Industry. The management process of governmental direction was inevitably the leverage of funding streams (Wolf, 2009). Central direction ensured that the management of vocational teaching and learning would continue to be informed by national strategy, with the management process being devolved right down to the classroom. The teacher as manager becoming the norm (Baker, 2006) and choice for students, especially about funded options, continued to narrow (Fletcher, 2007).

The global education informing economy debate had a long history within advanced industrial societies (Guile, 2003), with research from the 1970s onwards (Carnoy, 1999;

Hargreaves, *et al.,* 2001; OECD, 2001). The collective conclusions identified the emergence of a 'knowledge economy' (Reich, 1991; Drucker, 1993) as the link between, and acceptance of, a convergence of knowledge acquisition and economic development (David & Foray, 2002). Longworth & Davies (1996) suggested, however, that at the point of delivery, lifelong learning (FE) should have a more tangible quality and should be seen as an opportunity to develop as individuals acquiring the skills and knowledge they require in order to enrich their lives

The literature (Bils & Klenow, 2000; Cohen & Soto, 2001; Leitch, 2006) would suggest that those of us who worked in the FE sector, could be left in no doubt concerning the priority the leaders of our institutions placed on the continual improvement of delivery (and outcome) and the importance of effectiveness of provision. This effectiveness of provision has a direct correlation with the purpose of this research. I believed the function of FE was to support the professional development demands of industry and was central to the establishment of effective engagement with the RF sector. To continue to explore this definition of 'effective engagement', it was first necessary to consider the other principal (RF) in this research design.

Skills Development for Road Freight Logistics

The Logistics sector had been identified as being crucial to the national economy (Grey, 2005; Winters, 2007; Jackson, 2008). In a keynote review of the RF industry (SfL, 2007), it was stated that the UK market for road freight transport, had a turnover of £23.9 bn in 2009. The volume of goods within the freight sector had increased year on year, with a proportional increase in international freight movement (ONS, 2011). The roles within

the industry were diverse and wide ranging, having 293,000 directly employed workers (*op cit*).

SfL, (2007) reported that there were substantially fewer people with level four and above qualifications in the logistics sector than in all other industrial sectors within the UK. A higher proportion of the logistics workforce, compared to the workforce in the rest of the UK economy, had no qualifications or were qualified to below level two standard.[1] Given the imposition of the Compulsory Training Directive (CTD 2003/59/EC) legislation, which required candidates to achieve to at least level two standards (Hetherington, 2005). The impact on the industry was dramatic, in particular, it led to many changes in licencing and recruitment of LGV drivers.

As I have already discussed, the provision of publicly funded qualifications, such as NVQs had their champions who insisted that these qualifications can be shown to dramatically improve productivity, staff retention and recruitment for businesses (West 2004; Clancy, 2008). There was a counter argument to this perception, Wolf (2009, 2010) is one of many who argued for a more market orientated approach to FE within the UK. Also, some parts of industry did not seem to be convinced. Logistics employers, for example, remained unaccountably slow to apply for funding for these programmes. Jackson, (2008) suggested that the logistics industry, including the RF sector, needed to actively engage with FE and attract a proportional share of the available funding in order for the sector to ensure professional development opportunities are available to the sectors employees: *"Unfortunately, the industry has been very slow of the mark and*

[1] Levels of achievement – The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) identifies nine levels of vocational achievement from entry-level to level eight. The NQF is mirrored by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) http://www.qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/qca-06-2298-nqf-web.pdf

does not 'punch its weight' when accessing funding for development activities" (*ibid*, p. 47).

Given that the UK economy is the fifth largest in the world, and the logistics sector is the fifth largest sector of the UK economy (Grey, 2005; Winters, 2007), it brings into question why there appeared to be such a reluctance by RF to engage with centrally funded training activity (Jackson, 2008). In comparison, the construction industry, which employed similar numbers to the logistics sector, received 13% of publicly funded training; logistics received less than 2% (SfL, 2008). Jackson (2008) alluded to this within the article he wrote for the trade press following his appointment as Chief Executive Officer for SfL: "*If we in logistics do not take up our fair share, the money will still be spent, but in other sectors where the worth of qualifications is recognised and appreciated"* (*ibid,* pp. 46 – 47). It would, therefore, follow that if the logistics industry was going to support the viability of the UK economy, and access a proportional share of the available funding, the requirement to address the identified skills development needs was urgent.

I believe that the question industry needed to address was who knew best what the skills deficits were and who was best placed to address them. It has been suggested that by imposing the CTD, the government seem to have decided that they knew best (SfL, 2007). The industries' professional bodies, (FTA, RHA & SfL) were involved in some very high-level lobbying (RHA, 2005) in order to ensure that the directive delivered at least some quantifiable benefits to the sector: "*The minimum level of knowledge may not be less than level 2 of the training level structure"* (2003/59/EC) and the path of least resistance to achieve this was the NVQ.

Jackson (2008) suggested that vocational driving has been perceived as a 'blue collar' occupation, with a minimal requirement for the operative to have more than elementary basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. The reality is that logistics and RF, in particular, had become a sophisticated, skills critical element of the economy. Companies had identified logistics as being a key function for improving customer service and reducing costs (Winters, 2007). Historically there had always been a severe shortage of people wanting to work in the logistics industry as a whole, and the RF sector in particular. Ian Hetherington (2005) the then Chief Executive of SfL, the SSC stated:

> *Unless action is taken to make up the severe shortage in Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) drivers the direct cost to the UK economy could run to more than £1 billion a year and, some believe, seriously dent the UK's ability to compete with mainland Europe. Compliance with the incoming European Road Transport Directive and the Compulsory Training Directive will have a direct knock-on effect, further exacerbating the problem* (*ibid*, p. 4).

In other words, there was a belief within some elements of RF sector that the introduction of the CTD would further compound the problems of attracting new recruits into RF.

As already stated, skill levels among the LGV drivers within the UK, tended to be below level two. A significant proportion of these having no formal qualifications, other than their vocational driving licence (*Source; Labour Force Survey Sept – Nov 2008 to June – August 2009*). Despite the role of LGV drivers requiring a degree of skill, there was not a tradition of formal learning (Winters, 2010). Implementing formal training programmes could motivate a significant level of ambivalence, about the vocational relevance of the training. Wolf (2009) put forward the view that the government's rationale is that: *"left to itself, the country and post –compulsory education will not produce the skills the economy needs"* (*ibid*, p.140). Yet one of the government's qualifications of choice and funding were NVQs, which, as I have already discussed,

many commentators saw as having had no discernible effect, on either individual income or productivity (Wolf, 2009; Jenkins, *et al.,* 2007; Deardon, *et al.,* 2004).

The unavailability of skills especially LGV drivers, as evidenced by a study on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (2006), was seen as a major issue across the logistics sector. According to this survey, 83% of commercial vehicle operators reported that they were having problems recruiting LGV drivers and 74% were having similar problems finding transport management staff. Around three-quarters of survey respondents, 77% had cited a lack of suitably qualified staff as the primary reason for the problems they were experiencing. *"Drivers, who are the key to the whole logistics chain, are perceived to have low status, which affects the industry's ability to attract new entrants and retain existing drivers"* (Freight Transport Association, 2004, p. 46).

Additionally, a survey among some 200 members of the Freight Transport Association (FTA) found that 166 (83%) were experiencing difficulty in recruiting LGV drivers or at least 'finding it harder' (FTA, 2004). The concern within the sector (and its training providers) was that the imposition of the Compulsory Training Directive (CTD) would force the industry to re-evaluate their staff development programmes with a possibility of demand (and by definition an identified need) provision suffering at the expense of compelled training.

Human Capital - Professional Development in the Road Freight Sector

In order to situate my thesis, it was necessary to examine the history of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in England and its function as a process of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1975) within the central (government) strategies such as championing and extending apprenticeship programmes and funding vocational qualifications

through FE. Throughout the developed world, education had been re-theorised under Human Capital Theory (HCT) as primarily an economic device. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001) defined Human Capital as the "*Knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being"* (*ibid.* p. 18). The basic premise of HCT is that economic growth is fuelled by education and training because it (education) creates human capital. Becker (1975) stated that: *"…the attention paid to the economic effects of education and other human capital is not meant to imply that other effects are unimportant, or less important than economic effects"* (*ibid,* p. 11). Higher skilled workers are more productive, and because they are more productive, they can demand higher levels of reward (*op cit*). In modern HCT, all human behaviour is based on the economic self-interest of individuals operating within freely competitive markets (Livingstone, 1997).

This reality could be demonstrated within the sector that was being examined for this research. As discussed in Pointon (2010) the vocational licence was seen by LGV drivers as a tangible asset that was portable, valid, and was a recognised 'licence to practice' for the sector. In the UK, only 13.5 percent of workers in the economy were required to hold a licence to practise (Fazaeli, 2011). This level of licenced practice was low compared with competitor economies, such as the United States of America (USA), the most deregulated economy in the world (*op cit*), where some 29 per cent of people in trades and professions were expected to hold a licence to practice (*op cit*). To gain a licence to practice, all vocational drivers within the RF Logistics sector were required to have undertaken skills development in the form of professional driver training, to gain the requisite entitlements to drive LGVs. This process was usually self-funded, the cost

was not insignificant. Obtaining full Large Goods Vehicle entitlement could cost anywhere between £2000.00 and £5000.00 (TRANSED, 2009) and represented a major investment by individuals in themselves. This investment was made on the assumption that it would pay dividends, in terms of financial reward or status, (moving from unskilled to semi-skilled role) or even simply job satisfaction (Pointon, 2010)

There was evidence to suggest that levels of spending on employee training continued to increase (Livingstone, 1999; Keeley, 2007), some of which could be attributed directly or indirectly to policy initiatives. It was also true that training and education increased the mobility of workers (Kerka, 2000), however, there was also evidence to suggest that there was a gap between demand for and supply of skills. This led to what Livingstone (1997), saw as the biggest challenge to HCT, the underemployment of credentialised knowledge. It appeared that a growing proportion of people, who had invested many years of their lives acquiring formal qualifications, were now unable to obtain employment commensurate with their knowledge. In other words, individuals were encouraged to improve their skills continuously, yet they may be competing for a limited number of high-skill jobs (Kerka, 2000). This brings into question why individuals undertake educational programmes that have little or no beneficial return. The research participants in this study, for example, were undertaking competency assessment for the purpose of gaining an NVQ, despite already holding the requisite qualifications (licence to practice) and being effective in their roles.

With regard to the individual development and central HCT, the situation was complex. The term ‘learning’ was seen to define the learning prescribed by the government to address the HCT mechanism that drove economic progression, not the individualised process of professional development (Coffield, 1997; Tight, 1999). Freire (1970)

advocated a more ‘world-mediated’, mutual approach to education that considers people to be incomplete. This ‘authentic’ approach to education must allow people to be aware of their incompleteness and strive to be more fully human. Freire (*op cit*) termed this attempt to use education as a means of consciously shaping the person and society as ‘conscientisation’.

I suggest that this perspective of individual recognition of incompleteness, can be adequately demonstrated by the example cited earlier in this thesis (LGV licence acquisition). In Pointon (2010) the decision to undertake the training was found to be an individual choice and conducted on the assumption of a return on investment (*op cit*). While undertaking this research, this proved to be the case, with vacancies for skilled LGV drivers being a real cause for concern within the RF sector (SfL, 2007) and thus attracting higher than average rewards, in terms of salary and conditions of employment (*op cit*). It was apparent (*op cit*) that the motivation for individual development was based on individual need. However, it could also be argued that by addressing the individual need, there was a contribution to global human capital. I believe that by addressing individual need and demand rather than delivering a prescribed product, the benefits would not only be to the individual but also the industry and economy as a whole.

Road Freight Logistics - Perception of Need for Basic Skills

Within other industrial sectors where specific roles require knowledge-based, ‘traditional’ occupational qualifications, there were examples of good and effective practice (King, 2000). Fuller, *et al.* (2003) cited engineering frameworks, NVQs and Modern Apprenticeships, as delivering technical training with embedded basic skills. They did, however, recognise that some employers and employees were still resistant

to some elements of training, arguing that employees should enter their respective industries with at least some of the 'core competencies' (*op cit*) already in place. These issues were not new, in the early 1990s, it was recognised that there was little incentive for FE to consider how curriculums reflected skill requirements. According to Unwin (1993): "*The education and training programmes on offer may bear little relation to the real needs of the local or regional labour markets"* (*ibid,* p. 3). This viewpoint may have changed somewhat over the intervening years, but there still appeared to be a consensus from employers that their real workforce development needs were not being addressed (Wolf, 2009; Coffield, *et al.,* 2008).

In the future, higher levels of basic and vocational skills may become the accepted norm within the RF sector. With the introduction of the Compulsory Training Directive (CTD), Individuals entering the industry should know what is required to attain full vocational driver status, just as an individual embarking on an engineering apprenticeship is conversant with the required outcomes of their training. The transition phase, following implementation of the CTD, proved to be the most problematic, and the introduction of the programme was not handled diplomatically (Winters, 2010). As a result, many of those individuals already in role and performing effectively, but having basic skills deficiencies, decided to leave the industry (SfL, 2012), exacerbating an already worrying skill shortage.

There was little evidence about basic literacy and numeracy skill levels within the RF sector, and forecasts were heavily reliant on generic (Moser, *et al.*) reports. The SSC, 'SfL,' reported:

> *The growing impact of technology in the sector has highlighted the relatively low levels of basic and higher level skills in the workforce. Staff across the*

> *industry from warehouse staff to professional logisticians will all require skills at higher levels than are currently the norm (SfL, 2007).*

This view seemed to come from industry feedback and anecdotal evidence rather than formal evaluation. Although Martin (cited by Leyshon, *et al.,* 2008) did report that:

> *At a national level, we have the Leitch agenda leading a policy focus on skills - But, despite this focus, it can sometimes feel like the learning and skills sector and employers are speaking two different languages (ibid,* p.29*).*

There appeared to be a consensus that a strategy needed to be established nationally, to ensure that the logistics sector recognised its skills deficits (Jackson, 2008). Also, that the logistics sector was able to access a proportional share of the funding available at regional, national and European levels, to effectively address these deficits.

Road Freight Logistics – Vocational Skills and the Economic Imperative

Despite rises in the participation of post-compulsory education and training, (Hodgson & Spours, 2003) it was apparent that there was still plenty of evidence (and rhetoric) of skill deficits throughout all industrial sectors (Blunkett, 1998; Leitch, 2006). It was necessary to recognise the scale of the problem within the RF sector, in order to inform an engagement strategy going forward (Hetherington, 2005). Compared with other OECD countries, the UK had a high percentage of the population with low levels of educational attainment (Porter, 2003; Jenkins, *et al.,* 2007; Wolf, 2011). In the economy as a whole, including the RF sector, the Institute of Employment Research (Robinson, *et al.,* 2004) predicted that in the next 20 years, the higher skilled occupations (managers, technical and professional occupations) would need to expand the most. Employment in lower level occupations was, however, expected to decline as these tasks are replaced with new technology (Robinson, *et al.,* 2004). The RF sector (SfL,

2007) could identify with this finding; the industry had seen a comprehensive take-up of Information Technology (IT) solutions for virtually every activity along the supply chain:

> *There is strong evidence of the impacts from technological progress on logistics. It is however abundantly clear that firms risk failing to maximise the potential of technological developments without adequate skill training for their operatives* (*ibid*, p.15).

It is unclear whether this general observation applied to RF in proportion to other industries (SfL, 2008). Without a doubt, the basic level of skills in manufacturing and the service industries were expected to rise. Not least because of the growth in knowledge-based work, and jobs involving tailoring products and services to the needs of individual customers meant that demand would increase for problem-solving, communication and collaborative skills. It is estimated that 95% of new jobs in the logistics sector would be at level 2 or above, as defined by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), within the next decade (SfL, 2008).

It was also envisaged (Moser, 1999; Wolf, 2009) that adaptability and flexibility would be increasingly needed at all levels in the workforce, to ensure that individuals had the skills required to move into new or expanding areas. Adaptability comes with higher levels of skills and with transferable skills, which could be used in a range of different jobs, such as, problem-solving or team working. Updating skills while in work would also be important if people were to remain adaptable and flexible, and to keep abreast of technological developments (SfL, 2008). During its time in office (1997 – 2010) the Labour Government, placed the onus for addressing identified skills deficits with Further Education: *"…the workplace has an increasing role to play in training and skills development, with further and higher education still seen as the main vehicles for realising the lifelong learning project"* (Hodgson & Spours, 2003, p.19). It may be that

this expectation was (or should have been) the driver for FE to ensure active engagement with both employers and their employees. This thesis explores the possibility of effective provision being available to the RF sector. Accepting the objectives of the national agenda, it would appear unlikely that a funded, bespoke option would be available to address local demand.

Facilitating Delivery of Learning to the Road Freight Logistics Sector

If it is accepted that the FE sector had been tasked with developing a demand led curriculum, (Tuckett, cited by Raggatt, *et al.,* 1996, p. 54) there may yet have been some issues to address. The imposition of CTD for the RF sector could have led to the FE offer reverting to the prescriptive provision it had been trying to disregard for some years (Gorard, & Rees*,* 2002). It would certainly seem to be the case that curriculum for the CTD had been established with very little account taken of the business needs of the sector (Jackson, 2008). This by its very definition is prescriptive and could lead to a situation where demand is defined as a centralised function of the economy (Wolf, 2010) rather than a developmental need perceived by an individual or an employer, and addressed by a training provider: "*The recent history of Further Education in this country reveals that policy makers deeply mistrust individual learners' ability to make decisions on their own behalf"* (*ibid*, p.8). Given that the purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of LGV drivers undertaking NVQs and the role of an FE College in the effective delivery of the programme, then consideration needs to be given to the role and priorities of the FE sector. Brownhill (2002) saw post-compulsory education as 'lifelong learning', clearly identifying the terms 'lifelong learning' and 'lifelong education' and accepting that they are used interchangeably.

It would appear that FE faces a crisis of identity as Brownhill (2002) states:

> *This can be confusing, for we are really bound to practice lifelong learning as we go through the experience of life. Education, on the other hand, can be associated with our experience of institutional formal education at school and beyond* (*ibid*, p.69).

Langford (1985) associates the concept of education, with the process that goes on at educational institutions until we leave school. This would seem to suggest that what goes on in post-compulsory education needs re-defining, and its function in society being agreed. As Bills (2005) stated:

> *Education, under the prevailing regime of post-industrialism and a disorderly life course, can no longer be seen as something that strictly precedes work. It becomes not only a preparation in the general and generic skills needed to make the transition to the workplace, but also a process that is interspersed with spells of working through the life course* (*ibid*, p. 179).

There is an acceptance in this statement that the economy of the United Kingdom has made the economic transition from a manufacturing based economy to an entirely post-industrialist society and serviced based economy (Bell, 1973; Touraine, 1971). If this were the case, it would support the efficiency objectives for the 'lifelong learning' sector (Blunkett, 1998).

An ever-evolving set of initiatives and actions at local, regional and national level have been aimed at improving the performance of the FE sector (Shoesmith & Walker, 2011). To examine this notion of 'effectiveness' within FE it was first necessary to consider what it was, how it could be measured and the relationship with (or impact on) all of the stakeholders within the process.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have identified those issues which will influence the outcome of the thesis. In particular, I have drawn attention to the impact on my research design, particularly about those qualifications which are supported and funded centrally as a function of a human capital strategy. I have shown that this raises the question of 'credentialism' at operative level, a paper chase rather than the acquisition of new skills and questions if the qualifications are needed. I have also acknowledged that there is a demand for professional development within the sector, but I questioned whether those demands are being appropriately addressed. The purpose of my thesis was to establish the validity of NVQs for experienced practitioners. I have suggested that if funded development options were available, they should have been used to enhance skills rather certificate those already held. I have also considered the discourse of 'human capital' and the practice of education with regard to this thesis. Throughout the chapter, I have examined the validity of the qualification, NVQ, being undertaken by the research participants. The next chapter will examine the research methodologies I considered for my research design. I will examine the history and process of Action Research (AR), the methodology I eventually chose for this research. In particular, I will explore the rationale, validity and appropriateness of AR for the research design and my reasons for choosing it.

CHAPTER TWO – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> *"In living educational theories, the explanations are produced by practitioner researchers in enquiries that are focused on living values more fully in the practice of enquiries of the kind. How do I improve what I am doing here"? (Whitehead, cited by McNiff et al., 2003, p.165).*

In the first chapter, I set out the objectives for this research and examined the literature pertinent to my thesis. I also gave a background of my engagement with both the Logistics sector and FE. I also included a brief biography of myself, the researcher to give context to my enquiry. In this chapter, I will explain how I considered a number of research methodologies before electing to use Action Research as my preferred methodology. I will continue to describe the history and characteristics of Action Research that made it a valid methodology for this research.

Conceptual frameworks

One objective of this research was to establish a process of effective engagement between my college and those participants undertaking NVQ programmes. Only by establishing effective engagement, could I ensure that the research participants derived maximum benefit from their learning experience. I had believed this to be an issue of phenomena and therefore considered a phenomenological approach to the research (Cohen, *et al.,* 2007). I also considered the research to have elements of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and possibly a combination of several methodologies or Bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999; Kincheloe, 2001). While each of these methodologies would have been valid for my research design, it became clear that the research methodology would have to include the flexibility to initiate organic change in response to the on-going analysis of data. I intended that the research should be interpretive, but recognised that the process of research would need to allow for the

potential of methodological parameters becoming blurred. I was attracted to AR because it gave the freedom to evolve my research design (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996).

Carr & Kemmis (1986) suggest all descriptions of actions *"…must contain an interpretative element"* (*ibid,* p. 88). They (*op cit*) describe three different research traditions: positivist, interpretive and critical. They favoured the latter and developed a model of AR (The 'Deakin' model, evolved at the Deakin University in Australia.) in order to *"…improve rationality, justice and satisfactoriness of the participant's practice, their understanding of that practice and the context in which it takes place"* (Kemmis, cited by Boud, *et al.,* 1985, p.156). AR focuses clearly on the problem and is seen as a means of empowering the participants. When working with adults as learners, Kemmis' philosophical standpoint is very attractive because it emphasises democracy and autonomy. Carr & Kemmis (1986) clearly defined both the process and purpose of action research methodologies: *"…action researchers aim to transform the present to produce a different future"* (*ibid*, p.183). Essentially, the AR approach is concerned with the two factors, those of change or action and collaboration between those who are undertaking the research, and those with whom the research is being undertaken.

What is Action Research?

O'Brian (1998) suggests that:

> *Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction* (*ibid,* p. 2).

Integral to the methodology is the relationship between the words, action and research. The action informs both understanding and change, while research ensures an

academic discipline to the action. Most exponents of AR (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliot, 1991; McNifff, *et al.,* 2003) consider the process to be cyclical, with clear stages of progress through an AR research design: plan; implement; evaluate; amend. The crucial defining characteristic of AR, according to commentators and exponents (Dick, 1991; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; Atkinson, 1998), is strategic action. This action is based on the use of multiple cycles to ensure a continuing evolvement of practice. If we relate this to adult learning, part of the strategic action would be to encourage active and collaborative participation in the research process, as a form of *"…collective self-reflective inquiry"* (Webb, cited by Zuber-Skerritt, 1996, p.137). This stresses the importance of participant involvement and ownership of the process.

A critical aspect of my research was the engagement with the participants to give them a voice, allowing then to express their views and opinions about their respective learning experiences. Friere (1970) suggests that the most fundamental constituent of communication is trust and the recognition of value placed on the voice of the participant. It is also important to emphasise the role of the tutor in listening to the student, breaking down barriers and *"…starting where the learners are"* (Jarvis, 1998, p.151).

This participatory approach seemed to be particularly relevant for the LGV drivers who were involved in this research. However, because of the requirement of the methodology to be responsive and implement change to the situation being examined, I had to be careful to ensure that any data was accurate, and the interpretation was sound. A further concern, early in the research process, pertains to AR's uniqueness since it accommodates a variety of research approaches (Philips & Carr, 2009; Feldman, 2007). Being unique can mean that it is harder to report and it *"…ignores some requirements which have become part of the ideology of some conventional research"* (Dick, 1992, p.

6). My reason for undertaking this research was to situate the relevance of the qualification being delivered and, if necessary, effect changes in programme delivery that would result in a beneficial outcome for the participants. I believed that there was a requirement for real change to occur as a result of my research.

Arguing the case for Action Research

While considering several research methodologies already mentioned (Phenomenology, Grounded Theory and Bricolage), I recognised that a number of attributes distinguished AR from other types of research. The focus was of utilising research participants as researchers, who had a degree of ownership in the research process and were more willing to apply the research outcomes. Also, the research takes place in real situations and aims to resolve real issues. Action researchers, because they have a vested interest in the research outcomes, cannot remain entirely objective, but openly accept their potential bias. I came to believe that AR was an ideal methodology for use by me as a practitioner in my everyday work situation because it allowed me, the researcher to influence the situation being studied (Lomax, cited by Coleman & Briggs, 2002). AR is flexible and responsive which means that participants (and others) can recognise its practical value and learn from it, and it can be made occupationally relevant (West, 2011). These factors were attractive and could perhaps have given an illusion of security and ease over the other research paradigms. However, AR cannot be considered to be a 'soft' option since it requires a process by which change is initiated by the researcher (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Feldman, 2007). Most important to me was the added pressure that initiating change would bring to the programme being researched. Challenging the status quo was threatening to those individuals involved. It had to be done ethically and for appropriate reasons rather than

simply because the methodology appeared to demand it (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Feldman, 2007). I also recognised that it would require a long-term commitment to the project by both myself and the sustained active engagement of the research participants since its validity rested on a series of iterative cycles of planning, acting and reflecting, that took some considerable time to complete.

Therefore, my reasoning for electing to use AR for this research design, was that it was 'participatory', and I was of the opinion that the research validity was dependent upon all those involved in the research accepting a degree of ownership of their respective participation (Chain, 2011; Philips & Carr, 2009). Somekh & Zeichner (2009) articulate this well when they state: "*Action research became a means of realising the Habermasian ideal of democratising the power differentials in social groups and institutions"* (*ibid*, p. 8). Central to the success of my research was that the participants took a degree of ownership of the process.

Methodology Choice

Ontologically, I situated the research on the assumption that I, the observer, and the research participants, the observed, perceptions of reality are both diverse and inseparable (Hursserl, 1936). All of the participants were selected for the research because it was considered that they would be able to make a valid contribution. As such the ontological assumption is the individual contributions to the research are situated in the reality of their (the participant's) experience (Tobin, cited by, Tobin & Kincheloe, 2006). Philosophically, the ontological assumptions of interpretivism are that social reality is seen by multiple people and these multiple people interpret events differently leaving multiple perspectives of an incident (Ernest, 1994). From my perspective, I

considered that the individual ‘voices’ of the participants would enable the research to establish a valid consensus within the participant cohort.

From engaging with the literature (Philips, & Carr, 2009; Brannick, & Coghlan, 2007), I had confidence that my perception of the research would be conceived as 'new research', situated within an ‘interpretive’ paradigm. It would, as Reason & Bradbury (2001) suggest, involve: “…*mutual sense-making and collective action by the participating cohort being studied”* (*ibid*, p.2). It would also, ideally, involve all the stakeholders in the questioning and sense-making that informed the research, and in the action which is its focus. I do however accept that this is my perception and may have been construed differently by others.

The AR approach involved working with individuals in a non-hierarchical manner, a dynamic which was critical regarding producing a research design that was relevant to work-based learning (Philips & Carr, 2009; Baum, *et al.,* 2006). It also contributed to the understanding of the engagement process required to deliver work-based learning effectively to the RF sector.

Rationale for Choice of Methodology

This study was designed to establish, or not, the validity of the NVQs being delivered and to show how effective improvements to the delivery of work-based NVQs, could be brought about in response to perceived needs and nationally proclaimed policies, by working co-operatively with the interested parties. Unlike other qualitative research approaches, which separate research findings and recommended actions (which may never be undertaken) AR has an agenda for change that includes an evaluation of the changes. This comprehensive perspective is particularly suitable for a small scale

research. Stenhouse (1975, pp. 142-165) first suggested the possibility of the tutor working within their learning environment, using the curriculum to study the problems and effects of implementing particular areas of student development. Stenhouse (*op cit*) did not implicitly condemn the notion of outsiders examining the effects of a tutor's work but suggested that there was a need for reflective consideration by the tutors of their work. Further, Stenhouse (1975) suggested that the outstanding characteristic of the extended professional should be: "…*the capacity for autonomous self-development through the study of the work of other teachers, the testing of ideas by small-scale research procedures and through systematic self-study"* (*ibid,* p.32).

The contribution to the evolvement of practitioner research by Stenhouse (1975) cannot be underestimated. It was he who famously advocated that: *"…curriculum research and development ought to belong to the teacher"* (*ibid*, p. 142). He was most adamant that *"…it is not enough that teachers' work should be studied: they need to study it themselves"* (*ibid,* p. 143). Stenhouse's (1975) views suggested the possibility of tutors examining their personal delivery practices, at a micro level. Cobb (1994) suggested that learning is both a mental process and an enculturation into social processes, as with the situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation approaches to learning.

Elliott (1991) considered that the fundamental aim of AR is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge: *"The production and utilisation of knowledge is subordinate to and conditioned by this fundamental aim"* (*ibid*, p. 49). However, many commentators (Zeichner, 2001; Smith, *et al*., 2009) have suggested that an increased number of educational AR reports are being published, and AR is increasingly regarded as a legitimate form of enquiry that can potentially inform tutors, policy makers and educational researchers.

Action Research - Methodological Considerations

AR is recommended for small-scale practitioner research and larger community-based studies (Stringer, 1999). The AR approach offered the possibility of exploring the socially constructed nature of knowledge and learning by examining the influences exerted upon the curriculum from the awarding bodies, the college, the assessors (delivery staff) and the research participants. It also offered the possibility of a partnership with those directly involved with the curriculum to identify where changes could be made to improve delivery and validity and provides the opportunity to plan, implement and evaluate changes.

AR for this research, was reflective, being a function of both the practice of the delivery team and the lived experience of the students within their organisations. The AR approach, which enabled differing personal experiences and understandings and agendas, underlined the importance of education as a human and social process and recognised that observation is both theory and value-laden. Henderson (1996) suggested that the greatest concern of the Practitioner-Researcher is: *"…how can I help students move forward toward a deep understanding of the learning experience and away from a superficial learning of isolated facts and skills"?* (*ibid,* p.109). Thus, there was an acknowledgement of the collegial importance of the participants. AR had the potential to advance the personal and collective understandings of all concerned. Although one objective of this research was to establish the level of benefit derived from delivering NVQs to the research participants, a secondary objective was to establish an engagement process where there was the potential, beneficial, outcome for participants undertaking the programmes.

The Co-operative Perspective

In commenting on what they described as illuminative, democratic and other forms of qualitative research evaluation, Atkinson, *et al.,* (1988) suggested that it was the view of such researchers that any improvement of education would arise not from the introduction of better curriculum schemes but rather from the teachers': *"…own development of their craft knowledge, through reflection on their practices"* (*ibid,* p. 23). Much of the curriculum change in FE had been brought about by major shifts in Government thinking: "*The government issues white papers with a regularity akin to the flooding of the Nile"* (Wilson, 2006). The attitudes of the professional bodies, along with policy decisions made by local educational providers, also had an impact at sector level (Wolf, 2009; 2010; Coffield, *et al.,* 2008). Because a commitment was made for 'top down' educational change, this did not necessarily indicate that changes would be effectively implemented at 'classroom' level. Fullan (2007) quoted examples of such difficulties in achieving significant change, suggesting that the more planners were committed to particular changes, the less effective they may be in getting others to implement them if their commitment is uncompromising in the face of difficulties in implementation.

AR aims to value openness, honesty and shared goals and accepts that educational research is likely to change the perceptions of both the researcher and the researched. However, this ideal situation is sometimes difficult to achieve, given that the relationship between tutor and student is already unequal. AR, which has some overlap with a co-operative enquiry as described by Heron (1996), offered the best possibility of working to achieve this purpose. Whilst this study was intended to be co-operative in its approach to the participants, it was not possible for it to be a co-operative enquiry within the

definition offered by Heron (1996) "…*co-operative enquiry involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it*" (*ibid,* p.1). At the start of this research, the aims and objectives were my own and mutual participation only evolved as the project moved forward. Reason & Heron (1995) suggest that co-operative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself with each person is a co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. My research design was dependent on the participants gradually accepting a degree of ownership of their participation.

Validity

There is no single definition regarding validity for qualitative research as it covers such a large range of approaches and methods. Within AR, concepts of validity are being developed and discussed as the methodology is used. Reason & Bradbury (2001) asked what they call: *"…questions about emergence and enduring consequence"* (*ibid,* pp. 447 – 544) to produce some clarification. Waterman (1998) suggests that the reflexive stance of the action researcher should ensure that biases or prejudices are identified and analysed for the reader to understand the researchers' influences on the research, and will help the researcher to make a decision on the appropriateness of their influence.

It is evident that AR depends on the ability of the person reporting the research to present the account with clarity and candour (McNiff, *et al.,* 2003) since to a certain extent, it is incumbent upon the reader to reach a personal conclusion regarding the validity and reliability of the study. Earlier research I had undertaken (Pointon, 2010), revealed that the process of research had the potential to change unintentionally the way in which participants had viewed their professional development. This may have

been as a result of the 'Hawthorne Effect', (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939), where the research subjects were shown to respond to the interest shown in them by the researcher, which may affect the reliability of the findings. For this reason, I clearly identify myself within this research design, acknowledging my presence within the data, since to: "…*write the researcher out of the report is to deny the dependency of the data on the researcher's presence"* (Ball, 1990, p. 46).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have considered the processes of AR and argued its appropriateness as an effective research methodology for this thesis. I have discussed the participatory focus of AR and its relevance to my research design, particularly with regards to my identity as an embedded researcher. The longevity of the research and the requirement of the research participants to be active agents of the research process were also primary considerations when choosing this methodology. The next chapter will describe the practical application of AR as a function of the interpretive research design, formulated to collect and collate evidence to support my thesis aims and objectives. Having established AR as the methodology of choice for my research, I will describe the process of implementing my research design to establish the effectiveness of the programme being delivered. Also, to initiate those changes necessary to ensure a beneficial learning experience for the research participants: *"Evidence shows that vocational education and training has a significant role to play in building stronger communities and promoting cohesive society* (Walker, 2010, p. 1).

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN AND DEPLOYMENT

> *There is a theory consistent with what people say and a theory consistent with what people do. Therefore the distinction is not between 'theory and action' but between two different 'theories of action'. (Argyris, Putnam & McLain-Smith, 1985, p. 82)*

In the preceding chapter, I examined AR and the implications of using the AR methodology for this research, and I included a critique of the validity of AR as an academic discipline. In this chapter, I will examine the processes undertaken during the deployment of my research design. This will include an: explanation of the various stages of each of the three cycles of the investigation, the data collection methods used during the research, the random selection of participants for each of the three AR cycles and those participants from the delivery team and the managers of the research participants undertaking the NVQ program. I will define the data collection and analysis processes. I will also explain how I used reflection as a mechanism for change throughout the three cycles of AR. I will begin the chapter by explaining how I applied ethical standards to my research.

Ethics

The literature (McKinney & Howard, 1998; BERA, 2011) explains that ethics involves the process of, and search for, moral standards that aid us in identifying and clarifying right and wrong actions and to facilitate and promote consistent application of moral norms, basic standards, or principles to guide right actions. Ethics, according to McKinney & Howard (1998), is the *"…continuous pursuit of moral standards"* (*ibid*, p. 4). Nevertheless, there is a distinction between ethics and morals as, according to Pring, (2000) ethics are the philosophical enquiry into the basis of morals or moral judgements, whereas morals are concerned with what is the right or wrong thing to do. Adhering to best practice associated with research, ethical standards, for this thesis, were addressed and carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research

Association (BERA) revised 2011, and Nottingham Trent University guidelines for the conduct of research. Informed consent is: *"…the most fundamental principle for ethical acceptability"* (Anderson & Arsenault, 2001, p. 18). According to Kvale (1996), confidentiality and the consequences of interviews, are main areas where ethical issues can be problematic. The method applied in this research met a moral accountability to those being researched in so much as it was ascertained, before the potential participants being contacted, that they were all adults with no limiting vulnerabilities and able to choose freely to participate in the research. Initially, letters were written to all of the potential participants of the research study, requesting their voluntary consent to be interviewed (Appendix One, p. 121). The letters included the objective of the research, and the primary obligation of myself as the researcher to protect the anonymity of all research participants and to keep research data confidential (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias, 1992) (Appendix Two, p.123). The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were respected in this research by the use of coded identifiers to protect the identities of both the companies involved and the research participants.

Once collected, the storage and use of personal data while the research was ongoing, was conducted in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998), and all research data was stored electronically, under secure password. Information not needed for the study was securely disposed of, as required by the Act (*op cit*). Throughout the research, my key ethical intention was to ensure that participants were quoted correctly. To minimise the risk of incorrect interpretation of interviewees' responses, all interviews were digitally recorded, so as to offer the facility of 'playback' and allow transcription to be verbatim, and therefore to a high quality. Nevertheless, due to the practicalities of the research, I agreed with the participants before interviews commenced, that critical interpretation of

data, to form a research account, would be necessary. Subsequently, the full verbatim transcription was used as a sound basis from which to outline, categorise and quote indicative research issues.

Participant Selection

Operative participants, the LGV drivers, were selected using random sampling from a finite pool of available and willing subjects. To ensure that LGV drivers from all three participating companies were involved in each stage of the research the 'randomness' needs to be qualified. Three RF companies (P, A and R) allowed me to conduct my research with their workforce. Each company allowed full access to their respective workforces and with very few exceptions all of the operatives had agreed to participate in the research. Because of the variation in the size of the participating companies and to ensure each of the companies was represented during each AR cycle, a fixed number of participants was selected from each of the participating companies (Figure 1, p. 44). Therefore, random selection was maintained but from three pools of available participants (P, A and R). Random sampling is a procedure for selecting participants whereby each participant has an equal probability of being included in the sample. Within each of the groups, this was true but was qualified by the requirement to ensure representation from each of the three companies taking part in the study.

Of the available potential research participants, only two were female. Consideration was given to including both as research participants (convenience sampling) but after careful consideration; I decided that the study should focus on the role rather than gender. When the random selection took place, neither of the female drivers were selected. Although I am aware of and took into consideration the critiques of AR from

feminist researchers who argue against its gender-blind politics (Reid, 2000), I did not consider that there was a potential for significant deviation of results by not factoring gender into my research design.

Other participants were, by necessity, chosen for their convenience (convenience sampling) and included both the delivery staff (Figure 3, p. 52) and those managers/employers who contributed to the research (Figure 4, p. 52) although not a rigorous definition of 'convenience sampling' given that the participants were part of the sector being examined

Company	Available Pool	1st Cycle	2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle	Total Selected
P	145	3	3	3	9
A	7	1	1	1	3
R	41	2	2	2	6
Total	193	6	6	6	18

Figure 1 - Participant selection: random sampling

Although the percentage representation from each of the participating companies is not equitable, due to the variation in pool sizes, I believe the respective participant numbers allow for a credible response for the purpose of this research design (Appendix 3, pp.124 - 126).

Research Methods

Although an AR methodology was considered to be ideal for the identified objectives, a number of research methods were used to collect the necessary data with which to inform each cycle of the AR programme. The two primary methods were semi-structured interviews and direct observation. Throughout the AR cycles, the data informed a

mechanism for change, reflection and, where appropriate to the research design, reflexive action.

When establishing this research design, I took some time to consider what would be the most appropriate interview technique. I decided that a structured interview would not have been appropriate, as the range of data expected from the questions would be precluded if the interview was conducted within a set and rigid framework (Silverman, 2000). The unstructured interview was also discounted as the time for both the interviewer and the interviewee was always limited, and it seemed to be important to gain as much pertinent data from the respondents within the time available. This process did elicit information that influenced the cycle evolution.

Throughout the course of all three AR cycles, all research participants were interviewed (the LGV drivers, their NVQ delivery team and their operational managers). At all times each individual research participant was given an outline of the questions at least one full day before the interview. Every research participant undertaking the NVQs (LGV drivers) was interviewed three times during their programme, either just before or just after starting, at approximately the mid-point and on completion. Although the participating companies were willing agents of the research, I was aware that time was a critical element of their respective operations. For this reason, I limited the interviews to a total of five questions, with an average interview lasting for twenty minutes. A semi-structured approach was adopted in order allow a range of responses and a degree of latitude within the principle question. As Wragg (1980) states:

> *A semi-structured interview schedule tends to be the one most favoured by educational researchers as it allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling* (*ibid,* p. 185).

An investigation into the background, functions and concerns of LGV drivers, required an understanding of the meaning and perception they attributed to a certain phenomenon. Interviewing was one of the most appropriate ways of gathering data on phenomena which are not directly observable (McCracken, 1988; Patton, 1990). I was aware of the potential disadvantages of interviewing, particularly concerning identity, power and context. As Kerlinger (1986) stated:

> *Power relations between interviewer and interviewee can bias responses and can temporarily lift the respondent out of his own social context…so that he talks to, interacts with the interviewer in an unnatural manner'* (ibid, p. 387).

The potential for subjective findings arising from my research methods was mitigated by my own reflective and reflexive actions discussed in some detail within this thesis.

The management research participants (Figure 4, p. 52) were interviewed four times during the course of the research programme, at the start of each research cycle, and at the conclusion of the final cycle) and the delivery team five times, twice before starting the first research cycle and at the conclusion of each cycle. Both the management participants and the NVQ delivery team were interviewed to give context to the primary research focus, the LGV drivers undertaking the NVQ programme. A total of 93 interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed using 'open coding' during this research.

Observation has been defined by Mason (2002) as a research technique to: "…*generate data which involves the researcher immersing himself in the research setting, and systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, action events…within it"* (*ibid,* p. 60). Observation was an ongoing process throughout the three cycles of research to provide me first-hand data, as I worked in the field where I was

able to interpret evidence directly. Naturalistic observation is observation carried out in real-world settings: it is an attempt to observe things 'as they are', without any intervention or manipulation of the situation itself by the researcher. This has been described as: *"…a 'pure' or 'direct' observation"* (Punch, 2009, p.154), which can be contrasted with observation carried out as part of experimental research in which the researcher actively intervenes and contrives the conditions of the context being investigated. Miles & Huberman (1994) give a full account of the features of 'naturalistic research': "…*the researcher tries to acquire an 'empathetic understanding' of the situation as perceived by 'local actors' as if 'from the inside"* (*ibid*, p. 6).

As stated, each of the research participants undertaking NVQs was observed on three occasions during their time 'on programme'. The observation environment was usually situated in the Assessor feedback sessions and conducted following a formal assessment observation (driving, ancillary equipment demonstration, route planning, etc.). A total of fifty-four observations were carried out during this research. At no time during these observations did I intervene in the delivery of the programme, although in the majority of occasions, interviews were conducted directly after the assessment or review conducted by the delivery team and my interviews with the participants were conducted just before or directly following my observation.

Coding

Coding was the process I used to organise and sort the data I retrieved during the interviews and observations. As exemplified in Appendix 4 (pp. 126 - 127), I was able to use coding to label, compile and organise my data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999). Coding also allowed me to summarise and synthesise those trends that were evolving from

data. In linking data collection and interpreting the data, coding became the foundation for developing the evidence to support my research objectives (Saldana, 2009). My coding process involved establishing word or phrase themes within transcribed data, interviews and observation notes. My decision on what trends to look for was dependent upon the function of the research. So, I if was interviewing a participant concerning their satisfaction with the NVQ programme (Appendix 4, p. 126 - 127) I was looking for positive or negative phrasing. Individual participant analysis would then be joined with coded transcripts from other research participant interviews, and observation notes and the data would evolve into evidence that would support my research objectives.

Reflection and Change

Ghaye (2000) suggests that: *"…reflective practice offers us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos"* (*ibid*, p. 7). However, there is a consensus that in general, reflective practice is considered to be the process of learning by experience and developing both self and practice (Jarvis, 1992; Pollard, 2005; Hillier, 2012).

Throughout each of the research cycles, the primary triggers for the evolvement of delivery of assessment and learning were reflection and reflexive action. Piantanida & Garman (1999) offer three stages of post-experience reflection: reflection as recollection; reflection as introspection and conceptual reflection. These stages fit very well into a research process. Alternatively, and for the purposes of this research, I was in favour of Gibbs (1988, 1993) who suggested that the three stages of reflection should be: retrospection; self-evaluation and re-orientation. These I believe, lend themselves to reflective practice at the level of the participants involved in this study. As a

researcher, I would naturally go through each of these stages as an accepted function of the research process. I used the same process as a change mechanism to evolve the delivery through each of the three cycles of AR.

All of the LGV drivers participating in the research were asked to reflect consciously on their individual learning experience. The expectation was that the process of reflection would allow them to establish connections between any new knowledge gained from the NVQ programme and their existing knowledge and experience (Griffin & Brownhill, 2003). Defining the difference would inform the succeeding cycles of AR and where possible reflective data was captured as a function of the identified research methods, (observation and interview). Initially, the research participants found the concept of conscious reflection quite alien and difficult. It certainly influenced their level of engagement, with several stating that they found the process unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and unexpected in the context of their learning experience to date. Research (Reiman, 1999; Moon, 2004) indicates that it cannot be assumed that reflection happens automatically for all individuals, or that they will all use reflection in such a way as to improve performance. Halton, *et al.* (2007) considered that reflection is a learning process that is contrary to how most students choose to engage with people. It has been reported (Bjerlov & Docherty, 2006, cited by Boud, *et al.,* 2006), workplace research participants: "…*even when directly undertaking reflective activities, avoided the term reflection"* (*ibid,* p. 102).

I was aware that many commentators (Burrows, 1995; Griffin, 2003; Hobbs 2007) suggest that students should be developmentally ready to engage in critical reflection. However, I am reminded of Loughran (2000) who suggests that reflective practice is

best undertaken through practical and practice experience. The LGV participants involved in my research were very much situated within their practice and with a firm perception of their own expertise. I was also of the view that by using reflection as a research tool, it would provide the link between an experience and learning from that experience (Blackwell, *et al.,* 2001), therefore, providing meaning to something that is personal and subjective (Platzer, *et al.,* 1997). As a function of this research, I wanted to explore how participant reflection would allow me to consider and provide a range of options to amend the programme delivery and enable a more effective provision of the NVQ programme to the RF sector.

I was also concerned during the research process, about the potential for incompatibility between the assessment process and reflective activity (all of the participants were being observed during the delivery and assessment of an NVQ programme). Hobbs (2007) stated that "…*reflection and assessment are simply incompatible"* (*ibid,* p. 413). It has been suggested that in a learning situation, students may be inclined to say what they think the Assessor wants to hear (Roberts, 1998; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). Having considered this issue, I was of the opinion that with the right motivation the LGV driver research participants could be encouraged to want to take part in and take ownership of the reflective process. I was, however, also aware that Stebbins, *et al.* (2006) reported that learning and reflection were: "…*not seen to be important when they tried to introduce them as part of a change programme*" (*ibid,* p. 88). For me, this was a critical point of the research. If the NVQs were found to have little or no value to the LGV driver participants, then I would need to initiate changes in the delivery so that they, the LGV drivers, benefited from the learning experience. The focus of any change had to be informed by the research participants which in turn was informed by their reflection.

Research Process

Research into practice-based pedagogies or work-based learner-centric approaches' involves a relational learning experience for both tutors and students (Dehler & Edmonds, 2006).This necessitates a quite different teaching and learning experience than the 'normal' teacher–student interaction (Ramsey, 2008). My research was initiated by a review of the processes being used to deliver work-based NVQs to the RF sector prior to the research start date. At the start of the research, I conducted a pilot of seven semi-structured interviews with LGV drivers who had recently completed their NVQ programmes in Driving Goods Vehicles (Figure 2, p.51).

	Participant and role	Organisation	First interview
1	A1 – LGV Driver	A	03/11/2010
2	P8 - LGV Driver	P	01/11/2010
3	P21 – LGV Driver	P	01/11/2010
4	P29 – LGV Driver	P	01/11/2010
5	P52 – LGV Driver	P	01/11/2010
6	R8 – LGV Driver	R	03/11/2010
7	R12 – LGV Driver	R	03/11/2010

Figure 2 – Research participants – Initial interviews (Operatives)

During the pilot I also interviewed the delivery team *(*Figure 3, p. 52) and management team (Figure 4, p. 52) and the resulting data from these sources coupled with my own observations and data from earlier research (Pointon, 2009) was used to establish a basis on which to construct the research design and first stages of the AR cycles.

	Participant and role	Organisation	First intervention
1	D1 – Tutor / Assessor	S	22/10/2010
2	D2 – Tutor / Assessor	S	22/10/2010
3	D3 – Tutor / Assessor	S	22/10/2010

Figure 3 – Research Participants: Delivery team

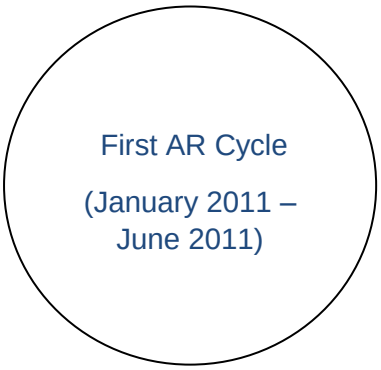
	Participant and role	Organisation
1	M1 – Transport Manager	P
2	M2 – Shift Manager	P
3	M3 – Transport Manager	R
4	M4 – Shift Manager	R
5	M5 – Owner/Transport Manager	A

Figure 4 – Research participants: Management Representatives

First Action Research Cycle

This first AR cycle employed the most basic spiral construct (Kemmis & McTagggart in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) beginning with the monitoring and observation of existing practice (reconnaissance) before assuming a progressive four-stage process of analysis, plan, act, observe and reflect before re-planning and recommencing the cycle.

All of the LGV driver research participants had already engaged with and were all overtly aware of the researcher and had been fully informed as to the nature of the research. For the initial reconnaissance, a group of six participants (Figure 6, p. 53) were periodically observed to establish what if any changes in practice occurred during the programme. They were also interviewed three times over a six-month period while undertaking a programme of work-based delivery leading to the award of an NVQ in ‘Driving Goods Vehicles.



Plan - Initial reconnaissance with graduating cohort (Figure 2) interview delivery team (Figure 3) and management participants (Figure 5)

Act – Introduce concept of reflection to research participant (Figure 6) Brief delivery team (Figure 3) about research requirements. Interview all participants at start, middle and end of the programme. Interview management and delivery teams

Observe – Any discernible change to participants arising from learning experience or reflection of the learning. Any responses during interviews that articulate change

Reflect – Transcribe interviews and observation notes. Code and analyse observation and interview data. Establish changes required to motivate continued participant reflective activity.

Figure 5 – Chronology of First Action Research Cycle

	Participant and role	Organisation	First intervention
1	P17 – LGV Driver	P	04/01/2011
2	P1 - LGV Driver	P	04/01/2011
3	P22 – LGV Driver	P	04/01/2011
4	R18 – LGV Driver	R	06/01/2011
5	R21 – LGV Driver	R	06/01/2011
6	A2 – LGV Driver	A	07/01/2011

Figure 6 – Research participants –First Action Research Cycle

Observations were specifically focussed on assessing the level of involvement each of the participants was willing to commit to. The interviews (semi-structured) were also developed with the objective of establishing individual levels of commitment to the programme, their motivation for undertaking the programme and the value they placed on the qualification both before completion and on being awarded their NVQ. Interviews were developed to encourage research participants to be reflective.

Responses from the LGV drivers in the first AR cycle were primarily in the negative or non-committal. The responses were disappointing in that they did not produce results that evidenced any change in the participants as a result of undertaking the NVQ

programme. Evidence gathered from the programme delivery team was also recorded, coded and analysed. It very soon became clear that both the participants undertaking their NVQs and the delivery team were outcome focussed and the delivery programme was simply a means to an end the end being completing the programme. There was no apparent reflective action arising from the programme, and all activity appeared to be confined to gathering the required evidence to populate the candidate's respective portfolios and ‘get the certificate’.

When LGV drivers were asked to reflect on the programme some, with a degree of reticence, agreed that they believed the programme had allowed them to think about the role and the skills they needed to perform effectively. Evidence from the research suggests that the programme was seen, by both candidates, the LGV drivers, and delivery staff, as being wholly linear in nature with little or no consideration of the reflective opportunities offered. From my observation notes, the process was almost a ‘tick box’ exercise, and valuable opportunities to enhance the learning experience were missed. When interviewed on completing their programmes and asked to reflect on their individual experiences, it became apparent that none of the participants was able (or willing) to articulate any difference in their skills or knowledge. If it is accepted that reflection is part of learning or thinking, then the learning process would seem to have failed. The term ‘reflective learning‘, emphasises the intention to learn from current or prior experience (Moon, 2004).

As the first AR cycle progressed, it became apparent that there had to be a recognition of pragmatism (Reynolds, 2004). In particular, within this research, an understanding that the participants are very much active agents in the construction of their existence in that they chose their profession and they also could also choose (or not) to engage in

learning (Edwards, 2000). In other words, there is an epistemological dominance surrounding an individual's approach to how they work and live. Foucault (1997, cited by Rabinow, 2003) described this as a struggle against the epistemology along which power is said to be formed. In response to this struggle, people have a choice to engage productively in practices of self-invention. This could be construed as a positive form of resistance; the individual has a choice to engage or not. With regard to this group of LGV drivers participating in the research, there was a 'resistance' to fully engaging with a conscious reflection of their experience.

One emerging feature of the first AR cycle was the lack of clarity among the LGV drivers, about the nature of the learning experience. For the majority of them, their experience of education was restricted to compulsory education, which for most had been a negative experience (Pointon, 2009) and LGV driver training, a formalised and highly structured process. The LGV drivers participating in the first AR cycle LGV, when questioned, did recognise that they had also been involved in informal training and knowledge acquisition during the course of their respective careers. This was generally, 'stand next to Nellie' task familiarisation, describes the process of working alongside a colleague to observe and learn the skills needed for a particular process. The colleague is always on hand to answer any questions or deal with any unexpected problems during their employment. Roberts, *et al.* (2007) suggested that learning is shaped, facilitated and constrained by, on the one hand, what learners and teachers bring to the interaction and on the other, the nature of the interaction. Vignoles, *et al.*, (2004) suggest that this non-certificated, business focused learning, has a much greater value to employers than the prescribed and funded offer:

> *The finding is clear. Uncertified training, provided in the workplace, is associated with significant gains in income (and, presumably, productivity). So skills can, and often do, pay* (*ibid*, pp. 266 -280).

Thus, prior knowledge and prior experiences of learning (and teaching) together with wider life-experiences 'collide' in the learning environment in ways which, at the time, are unique and individual, but are also characteristic of learning in FE settings. Any reflection on individual practice is primarily self-reflection, rather than reflection directed outwards at an on-going situation; it is more difficult to analyse one's learning experience than to think about an external situation. This is clearly recognised by Schὸn (1987) when he states: *"…it is one thing to be able to reflect-in-action and quite another to reflect on our reflection-in-action so as to produce a good verbal description of it"* (*ibid,* p. 31). Reflection is a complex process, which many of the research participants did not find easy. Facilitating learners' reflection requires a sophisticated pedagogy (Walsh, 2009).

Summary – First Action Research Cycle

The outcome of the first AR cycle indicated that the research participants, undertaking the NVQ programme, did not have any confidence in the learning experience being beneficial to their practice. Delivery of the provision was prescriptive in that it followed a tried a tested formula, with the clear objective being to achieve an outcome rather than develop the individual. Wenger (1998) argued that what differentiated learning from mere doing is that: *"Learning, whatever form it takes, changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning"* (*ibid,* p. 226). It was apparent that the participants were situated in a position where they considered that the learning experience was not contextualised to their practice. There was, therefore, resistance to any overt input into the programme. The reaction from the LGV driver participants was

wholly negative and the evidence gathered from the first AR cycle did not indicate any change in their individual practice. The only positive evidence emerging from the first AR cycle was that LGV drivers had 'got a certificate', but they did not feel that the programme had enhanced their skills or altered their perception of themselves as practitioners in any way.

Second Action Research Cycle

Plan – Use data from cycle one to inform change or enhancement of delivery during cycle two.

Act –Introduce reflection and reflexive action to second cohort participants. Delivery team to allow participants 'ownership' of programmes. Maintain interview and observation profile (three observations and three interviews per participant) during the cycle.

Observe – Qualify reflective and reflexive change in participants as a result of the learning experience.

Reflect - Collect, collate and code all data from second research cycle. Are outcomes as expected? Is there viable and quantifiable reflection and reflexive action originating from the learning experience?

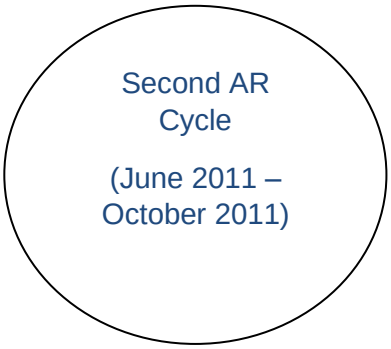


Figure 7 – Chronology of Second Action Research Cycle

After some personal reflection on the first AR cycle, I had two primary objectives for the second cycle. The first was to ensure a process of active reflection on the part of the participants. This was especially important with regard to the 'why' (are we doing this?). It was apparent from the outcomes of both the first AR cycle (Figure 6, p. 53) and the pilot interviews conducted with those LGV drivers who had completed the programme just prior to the start of the research (Figure 2, p. 51) that none of the participants appeared to attach any value to either programme or the qualification it led to. Secondly, and in recognition of the second objective of this research (establish an effective engagement strategy between FE and the RF sector). I needed to be aware of what the participants considered to be worthwhile professional development.

	Participant and role	Organisation	First interview
1	P15 – LGV Driver	P	09/06/2011
2	P37 - LGV Driver	P	09/06/2011
3	R4 – LGV Driver	P	10/06/2011
4	R28 – LGV Driver	R	10/06/2011
5	R30 – LGV Driver	R	10/06/2011
6	A3 – LGV Driver	A	14/06/2011

Figure 8 – Research Participants: Second Action Research Cycle

Before commencing the second AR cycle, and in line with the overall research design and objectives, all of the LGV driver participants (Figure 8, p. 58) were interviewed and asked what they thought would change following successful completion of the programme.

A number of options were presented that included:

1. I will be a more professional LGV Driver.
2. I will have a qualification that has currency in my industry.
3. It will enable me to consider other roles within my industry.
4. It will not change me at all.
5. My Manager will be pleased because he/she wanted me to do it.
6. It will enable me to think about what I do and where I want to go professionally.

Without exception, all six participants responded to either options four or five.

As with the first cycle, none of the LGV drivers articulated a positive rationale for undertaking the programme. The final question asked of the participants was: “concerning professional development, what would you rather be doing”? No options were given to the LGV drivers, but all six were able to give a credible alternative which

included: access to Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (DCPC) training, Safe and Fuel Efficient Driving (SAFED) and vehicle familiarisation training. It was clear from these responses that practical training, especially programmes with a portable value like DCPC or SAFED, were a much more attractive option for the LGV drivers involved in this phase of the study. Interestingly, when questioned further DCPC was regarded with the same level of cynicism as NVQs having little or no operational value and was considered by many as '…*yet another hoop to jump through'* but it did have value because of the compulsory requirements of the CTD. Wolf (2010) suggests that:

> *It is clear that students have a far better grasp of what the labour market values than the government do, They queue up for courses and qualifications that are valuable and largely turn their backs on new initiatives created by central government departments with theories about education and how the labour market should behave* (*ibid*: p. 8).

As with the first AR cycle, all of the LGV driver participants received a brief presentation on the process of reflection. All were willing participants in the research and actively engaged with the research process. During the second AR cycle of investigation the delivery team (Figure 4, p. 52) were asked to allow the LGV drivers more ownership of the programme, specifically to move away from the prescriptive nature of assessment, evidence collection and collation. Fook & Askeland (2006) argue that the focus of critical reflection should be on connecting individual identity and social context:

> *Part of the power of critical reflection in opening up new perspectives and choices about practice may only be realised if the connections between individual thinking and identity and dominant social beliefs are articulated and realised* (*ibid*, p. 53).

All students undertaking funded NVQ programmes are required to have a 'review' with their respective Assessors at no more than 12 weekly intervals. In reality, this process is yet another 'tick box' exercise conducted to satisfy the requirements of funding audit

rather than to enhance the learning experience for the student. In order to encourage a degree of participant ownership of the training, I asked that the Assessor (delivery) team use the feedback sessions to allow the LGV driver participants the space to find their own solutions to the requirements of the programme. I also asked them to use the allocated time for assessment and course review to motivate their students to reflect on their learning and to discuss their progression through the programme. In particular, I asked that the LGV drivers were encouraged to consider what their individual strengths and weaknesses were and to consider where additional training/up-skilling might make them better at their job (Ghaye, 2000; Larrivee, 2000). The delivery team were asked to record all feedback in the review proforma's used for the NVQ programme. I would normally have access to this information as a function of my role within the college. However, these records were made available to me for research purposes as part of the research agreement I had with both the students involved and the college with the proviso that no raw data was used in reporting this research.

I believed that education should be a democratic process that allows sufficient 'space' to learners that allows them to contribute to the development of new knowledge, to develop their own voice (Barnett, 2000). By facilitating this autonomy, I believed that opportunities for participants to take responsibility for their own learning would occur and allow them to develop their capacity as learners (Reynolds & Vince, 2004).

Before commencing the second AR cycle, I also re-interviewed the participating management representatives (Figure 4, p. 52) maintaining a semi-structured approach and with just four questions:

1. How do you think the programme is going?

2. Do you think that your employees are benefiting from the programme?
3. Is your business benefiting from the programme?
4. How could the programme be improved?

Following the coding and analysis of the data arising from these interviews it became clear that the management participants' perceptions remained negative with very little acknowledged benefit being derived from the training for either the individual employee or the employer:

The delivery teams, despite some reservations, did agree to undertake more in-depth reviews with the students. However, there was a clear disparity between the responses recorded by the delivery team and the responses from the students during my interviews. When collated the review responses were very general and with no apparent ambition other than to complete the programme and carry on driving LGVs for a living. During the semi-structured interviews, I conducted, some of the drivers did have clear aspirations such promotion to an office-based role like Transport Planner or Transport Shift Manager.

It was becoming increasingly clear both from the interview transcripts and the coding and analysis of the data, that given the qualification being delivered, any intervention, within the parameters of the NVQ programme was going to have minimal impact on the outcome. The minimal value that had been identified was with regard to some reflection, albeit unacknowledged, recognising existing skills. Also, there was a degree of participant satisfaction concerning the recognition of those existing skills.

Essentially, the LGV drivers perceived being awarded their 'certificates' as a validation of their chosen role and the skills they already held and had been gained through a

formalised and highly structured, formally assessed, learning process (LGV driver training). There was also the ongoing development of those skills, to a high level of ‘conscious’ competence’ (Maslow, 1943) through a process of experiential progression. Without exception, at the culmination of the programme, none of the LGV driver research participants had considered that there were any progression options available.

Although the research data from the LGV drivers was becoming more useful, the results of the interviews with the respective management participants remained negative. They were very clear in that they considered the programme being delivered to have little value other than it was free at the point of delivery:

One of my primary objectives for this research was to establish an engagement strategy where participants derived a benefit from undertaking the programmes, at this point in the research there was an increasing probability that this would not be achieved within the parameters of the programme being delivered and the requirements of the industry.

Summary - Second Action Research Cycle

After coding and analysing the data arising from the observation notes and interview transcripts, the outcome of the second research cycle produced only a slightly more positive response to the NVQ programme than the first AR cycle. The data, in part, indicated a valid outcome insomuch that the LGV driver participants were willing to discuss their ‘reflections’ of the experience. However, none were able to articulate any perceived change in their practice or themselves as practitioners, as a result of completing the programme. I had ensured that my expectations, concerning reflection, were articulated to the LGV drivers before commencing the cycle. There was a small amount of recognition of their evolvement as practitioners through experiential learning.

However, this was considered to be a result of the participants evolving vocational experience rather than the NVQ programme. There did not seem to be any tangible change in the value of the qualifications 'earned', and there was no apparent or acknowledged improvement in their skills or vocational ability as a result of undertaking the NVQ programme. This view was reiterated by the managers participating in the research who continued to see the exercise as being a waste of time with no discernible outcome.

Third Action Research Cycle

For the third AR cycle (Figure 10, p. 64) I made the decision to deviate slightly from the prescribed programme. During interviews with the participants of the previous AR cycles it had become clear that there was a perception that 'nothing had changed'. I discussed this with the delivery team and asked that they incorporate an element of teaching within the final programme. While the delivery team did not feel comfortable moving from an assessment role to that of a teacher, they did not object to external trainers being brought in to deliver an additional practical element in support of the NVQ programme.

Plan – Use data from second research cycle to plan cycle three. Consider the research design, does the process need to change? What changes could be made to the delivery to elicit pertinent' data?

Act – Introduce the process of reflection and reflexive activity to the third cohort of participants. Maintain observation and interview schedules. Plan additional activity in the event of negligible returns.

Observe – Qualify reflective and reflexive change in participants as a result of the learning experience (including additional activity). Has there been any change in the participants, are they more reflective, is there a quantifiable benefit arising out of the learning experience, if so, is it quantifiable?

Reflect – Collect, collate and code all data. Is there sufficient evidence to support research objectives and answer the research questions? What can be taken from the research? Will the research inform future provision? Identify opportunities for further research.

Figure 9 – Chronology of Third Action Research Cycle

	Participant and role	Organisation	First intervention
1	A5 – LGV Driver	A	29/11/2011
2	R24 - LGV Driver	R	05/12/2011
3	P30 – LGV Driver	P	07/12/2011
4	R18 – LGV Driver	P	07/12/2011
5	R22 – LGV Driver	P	07/12/2011
6	A2 – LGV Driver	P	09/12/2011

Figure 10 – Research Participants: Third Action Research Cycle

Many of the LGV drivers who had participated in the two preceding AR cycles and their employers, had expressed an interest in SAFED training. With the agreement of the delivery team and the companies involved in the research, a one-day training session was organised for each of the LGV drivers participating in the third AR cycle during their respective programmes. The delivery team were asked to factor the training outcomes into the candidate's portfolio of evidence. NVQs are acquired by the collection and collation of evidence that satisfies units of competence that make up an NVQ programme. The usual method of presenting this evidence is in the form of a portfolio. Training was arranged through a local specialist training provider with the training being delivered as an integrated function of the NVQ programme. Although there is some central funding for SAFED training, it is normally a 'full cost' programme delivered by private training companies. My college agreed to support the cost of the training for the purpose of this research.

The research plan that I deployed for the first two AR cycles was maintained including an initial presentation on reflection. All of the LGV drivers participating were periodically observed throughout their programmes and a series of one to one semi-structured

interviews conducted to support observation findings. Once the respective LGV drivers involved in the final AR cycle had completed their NVQ programmes, I also re-interviewed all of the management participants (Figure 4, p. 52).

Summary – Third Action Research Cycle and Actions

Following the collection, collation and coding of the third AR cycle data, it became clear that the findings were radically different from the first and second AR cycles. There was a significant improvement on the usable data with positive trends, reflection and possible reflexive actions evident. It became apparent during interviews with both operative and management participants that the difference was the 'taught' element of the programme. For the first time in the research, I began to witness the phenomena that Schön (1983) described as: *"The practitioner allowing themselves to experience surprise, puzzlement or confusion in a situation which they find uncertain and unique"* (*ibid,* p. 68). The purpose of changing the delivery process was to elicit a response that would facilitate critical reflection. The evaluation of impact of the additional training undertaken by the participants, suggests that the learning experience had allowed the new knowledge and skills to make a difference to professional practice

I was aware that reflective practice if conducted badly or inappropriately, could miss the 'added value' effective reflection could elicit (Loughran, 2000). Or, as Finlay (1998) puts it: *"Ineffective reflective practice shows up in the guise of self-absorbed navel gazing. Reflective practice should be neither an opportunity to wallow in subjectivity nor permission to engage legitimised emoting"* (*ibid,* p. 445*).* My expectations from the research were that it would motivate learners to take ownership of their progress as

independent learners. Also, that they would take notice of and act upon formal feedback from their Assessors.

One of my aims for this research has been to give the participants a voice and a degree of ownership of their learning experience. It was important for the outcome of the research that participants themselves were able to give some consideration to what was considered a valid learning experience. The data indicated that when the participants were involved in a learning activity, they saw as having a validity to their role and practice, they were willing to engage in reflection on that experience. Numerous learning theories emphasise reflection as a key element of the learning process (Kolb, 1984; Honey & Mumford, 1986; Stewart, 2001; Boud, *et al.,* 2006). Such notions arise from the practices and discourses of educationalists. The preceding 'evidence' suggests that such discourses on learning and reflection only became a part of the practice of the research participants when the learning became credible to them as practitioners. Increasingly, programmes of study explicitly require students to do this. I believe that reflective learning is an integral part of work-based learning, and this was the reason it was included as the change mechanism in this research design.

Collating the Evidence

Once all of the AR cycles had been completed, I had to establish a process of critical appraisal for the evidence that I had amassed during the course of the research design (Marsden & Wright, 2010). All of the interview recordings had been transcribed, along with my observation notes. I also had to ensure that other data collected during the research, or more generally available in the public domain including my research journal, and the pertinent published research available, were analysed and included. I am aware that when undertaking any research, it is important that the data collected is totally

embedded in reality (Smith. *et al.,* 2009). That is to say, that as the researcher, my perception of events, actions and facts are based in the real world and not just subjective value judgements created by me (Blaxter, *et al.,* 2003; Corbain & Struass, 2007). This gave me a justified true belief (Gettier, 1963) in my validity of my findings.

As I have already discussed, qualitative approaches are based on a relativist philosophy (Cohen, *et al.,* 2007) which holds that reality can only be defined subjectively; observations can never be fully objective but are always interpreted by the observer. However, I wanted to ensure that the research findings had validity by ensuring that it was seen as being both dependable and valid. Lincoln & Guba (1985) use: *"...dependability", in qualitative research which closely corresponds to the notion of "reliability" in quantitative research* (*ibid,* p. 300). Healy & Perry (2000) assert that the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm's terms. In qualitative paradigms, the terms Credibility, Neutrality or Confirmability, Consistency or Dependability and Applicability or Transferability are to be the essential criteria for quality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I was able to utilise a number of tools to ensure that the evidence was valid. All of the transcribed evidence was subjected to 'open coding' and analysis and then aligned, as far as was possible, to other sources of evidence, in order to establish a process of data triangulation. Comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information I had derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods, I was employing. I was particularly interested to compare my observational research data with the interview data. Has Miles & Huberman (1994) stated that: "…*validity has to do with questions such as: do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we were*

looking at" (*ibid,* p. 278). In the following chapter, the research findings are discussed, and my claims of the validity of the research design are tested.

Data Analysis

The data was considered within the context of the research aims and objectives, and any findings had to be viewed as a formative analysis reflecting the epistemological, the justified true belief (Gettier, 1963) of the knowledge, situated within the both the research design and its findings. Also, the research ontologically situated the reality of the research, its participants and the researcher. (Bryman, 2008). Particular emphasis was placed on those aspects of the research that found a consensus within the participant cohort. There was the potential for the participant's contributions being invalid because of the subjectivity of their experiences. A criticism of interpretivism is that the ontological assumption is subjective rather than objective. However, as Mack (2010) argues, by the act of selecting a paradigm the researcher is: "…*subjectively orientated towards one way of undertaking research"* (*ibid*, p. 8). There is an expectation that interpretivism assumes and maintains an objective stance when analysing the data they collect.

The selection of a valid analysis mechanism informed this research about the reality of the research situation, instead of my preconceptions. For this reason, an open coding system was utilised to assist in the analysis of the returned participant data (interview transcripts, observation notes). While I believed open coding to be a useful tool for the data returns, I did recognise the potential for over coding data (Dick, 2000), I maintained a coding practice that allowed the available data to be refined to a point where it provided useable evidence to support my thesis. Coding for this research entailed me examining the data, transcribing the interview notes and observation records and looking for distinct

trends and categories which formed the basis units for my analysis. (Appendix 4, p. 126 127). Bogden & Bilken (2003) define qualitative data analysis as: *"…working with data, organising it, breaking it down into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, deciding what is important, what is to be learnt and what to tell others*" (*ibid* p.145). In coding and analysing the research data, I was initially looking for positive or negative attitudes and trends about the NVQ programme. I was also looking for indications from the LGV drivers participating in the research as to what constituted valid professional development.

Strauss & Corbin (2008) suggest that open coding represents: *"…the first level of coding when raw data are sorted and placed into conceptual categories or the 'breaking open of data' to identify concepts*" (*ibid*, p. 61). As a qualitative researcher, my analysis of the data tended to be inductive, in that the data was generalised (Mertler 2006; Johnson, 2007). The process of coding and interpreting data was a primary function of analysis because I believed it allowed credible evidence to emerge from my generalisations (Foss & Waters, 2003). As a researcher, breaking large amounts of data down into manageable pieces and allowing the pertinent data to emerge, ensured links between the various data categories could be established. By using an open coding mechanism to analyse the data I had available, I was able to present my findings in a way that was pertinent to my research and which gave validity to my conclusions (Gough & Scott, 2000). Although my research conclusions relied heavily on my analysis of the available data, they were also informed by the pertinent, published and available knowledge.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESEARCH FINDINGS.

> *Progress in skills attainment has been made, however too few adults still possess the skills needed to succeed in the future labour market or the motivation, confidence and opportunity to gain them. Older workers, already in the workforce need to be up-skilled, which raises issues about the future modes of provision. Over 80% of our 2020 workforce is now already in work. The 'stock' of adult skills and the 'flow' of young people into the market needs to be addressed (SfL, 2010, p. 8).*

In the previous chapter, I discussed how my research design was implemented and how the evidence was gathered during the three cycles of Action Research. I explained how the research evolved over these33 three cycles and how I included a taught element into the third cycle. I also explained how the research data was collected, coded and analysed to support the research objectives of this thesis. This chapter discusses the findings of those three cycles of research and considers how the available evidence supports the research objectives. Specifically, I will use the 'voices' of the research participants, supported by my observations and published commentary as evidence for my research objective.

Overview

As defined in the introduction of this thesis this research was designed to investigate what if any benefit was being gained from experienced LGV drivers undertaking NVQ programmes. The secondary objective of this research design was to establish an effective engagement process that would allow my College to deliver credible work-based NVQs to RF sector. Specifically, the research was focussed on an Assessor team, from my College, delivering an NVQ programme to LGV drivers employed by three companies (P, A and R) operating within the RF sector of the logistics industry and participating in this research. It was hoped that if I could introduce reflection and reflexivity into the programme, it could make the qualification, and the learning experience, more credible and more valid for the participants (Catts, *et al.,* 2011).

Findings from the Pilot Programme

Prior to commencing the primary research for this thesis, I piloted the research design with a cohort of participants who had just completed the NVQ programme (Figure 2, p. 51). The data collected and collated from this group of participants was in accordance with the findings from earlier research (Pointon, 2010) which while indicating a general subjective satisfaction of achievement in having their existing skills acknowledged and certificated, did also raise questions concerning more general benefit:

> *"Look, it feels good to have a piece of paper that tells me I am good at my job but what does it actually mean"? "I have got all of this evidence and done everything my Assessor has asked me to do, and I have now got an NVQ, but I don't think it has made me a better driver and I am not sure if it would make me any better if I was going for another job" (Participant P21, 21/06/2012)*

There was a unanimous consensus for this view within the seven participants interviewed. Their evidence suggested that there was a belief that the NVQ while accrediting levels of existing competence did not improve levels of skills, employability or increase potential for advancement in the industry:

> "*I am a driver, and I will probably always be a driver so, I now have a qualification that tells me I can do my job at a good level". "Don't get me wrong it's nice to know but, it won't get me a pay rise and it won't put me in the transport office". "I am not saying it hasn't been worth it but what does it mean to anyone except me"? (Participant R 12, 03/11/2010)*

> *The driver (R 12) was very relaxed during the assessment. He was able to answer all of the Assessors questions in an articulate and highly knowledgeable manner. However, at no times did the driver elaborate his answers and the Assessor did not ask for any information other than what he needed to satisfy the requirements of the NVQ. A number of excellent opportunities for reflection were missed. (Observation notes 07/03/2011)*

Data from the Assessor delivery team (Figure 3, p. 52) were satisfied that the programme had followed the prescribed route, resulting in all seven of the participants

receiving their NVQs. The data from the pilot research suggested that there was a validity to my research question concerning the benefit to experienced practitioners of undertaking NVQ programmes. I considered my research design to be sufficiently robust (Dick, 2009) to elicit the evidence required to answer my research objectives and so I initiated my primary research by commencing with the first AR cycle.

First Action Research Cycle

After commencing the first research cycle, it became apparent that using reflection as the primary development tool would be problematic as many of the research participants would not acknowledge that they were either willing or able to be reflective despite evidence to the contrary:

> *P22 was asked a number of open questions by his assessor (D2) and answered them all in a confident and articulate manner. Points raised by the Assessor were evaluated in a considered manner and discussed in some detail (Drivers Hours and Records legislation). P22 was able to demonstrate an innate ability for reflection during the feedback. (Observation Notes 03/03/2011).*

When considering the effectiveness of the programme, the consensus from all of the participants in the first cycle was that there had been no improvement of practice. For example from all of the first cycle participants the responses mirrored those of the initial pilot study and were all a variation of 'it did not', initial coding was categorised by positive or negative words or phrases.

> *"I don't think it has, I am still the same, nothing has changed". "All that as happened is someone thinks I am good at my job" (Participant P29, 01/11/2011)*

> *"I am here because the boss told me to be here. I have spoken to a couple of the lads who have already done it, and they said it's easy enough, but I really don't know what good it's going to do me". (Participant R28, 10/06/2011)*

> *"The course was OK, but I didn't learn anything, that's not what it's for". "You get a qualification for what you already know". (Participant P8, 01/11/2011)*

> *"I am a driver, and I do what I am asked to do". "my boss tells me to sign-up for an NVQ and that's what I have done, I don't need to think about it because the Assessor tells me what he wants to see and I make sure he sees it". "When he's seen enough, I get a certificate". "As far as I am concerned that's all there is to it". (Participant R18, 07/06/2011)*

> *"I am aware of the NVQ qualification, and I think it has a real value when delivered to young employees, like apprentices who need to have new knowledge checked". "I am not sure what value there is in assessing a very able and experienced driver"? (Participant M1, 03/06/2011)*

> *"I have done what I was asked to do; your Assessors have had access to the drivers on the NVQ". "I still cannot see how it is going to benefit them or the company". (Participant M4 (R), 06/06/2011)*

The above was typical of the management responses at this point in the research.

To establish evidence to support the objectives of this thesis I continuously reviewed the data to identify any trends arising from the participant responses. When the data from the transcribed interviews was coded, it became clear that the first cycle was not contextualised to the individual participants identified developmental needs. Also, at no point was the NVQ programme delivered as an agreed option, with an objective of enhancing the practice of the participants. Rather, it was a funded option which was a function of human capital strategy, not a business improvement mechanism. My findings indicated that the main reason there was a negative response to the learning experience from all of the research participants, was due to the perceived validity of the NVQ programme. There was an emerging theme of lack of value of the qualification (NVQ). Many commentators support this view despite the NVQ remaining as a primary qualification of choice and which remains centrally funded.

The Labour Party, in government at the start of this research, was adamant that qualification by competence assessment (NVQs) was the most effective mechanism to

develop the national skills pool even though a number of wide-ranging surveys had indicated result to the contrary, UKCES (2008) reported that: *as many as 26% of employers surveyed considered that NVQs had no discernible benefit to their respective businesses (ibid,* p.51).

Towards the end of the Labour government's' tenure, the opposition, soon to be Coalition (Conservative/Liberal) government, started to express their own misgivings about the value of NVQs: "*NVQs had some value, but we believe the funding of courses to accredit skills already obtained through work was a legitimate area for debate"* (Baker, 2009). This was a recurring view voiced by all to the pre-research cohort (Figure 2, p. 51) and the participants of the first AR cycle:

> *"Although I think the course has been ok I still don't really know what it is for"? "If you look at my LGV licence I had to do the course then take a test If I passed then I was qualified if I failed I had to take it again". "As far as I can see the only thing I need to do to get this certificate is my normal job". "I don't really know what I have got out of it". (Participant R12, 03/11/2011)*

Although I have discussed a widespread ambivalence towards NVQs earlier in this thesis, I believe it is worth reiterating some of the commentaries at this point to contextualise the views of the research participants. A number of high-profile commentators (Hyland, 1994; Coffield, 2007, 2008; Wolf, 2009) had expressed concerns about the direction and nature of skills development within the UK. Before coming into office, the government opposition (conservative) had argued that the NVQ was having little if any effect on the improvement of skills:

> *From the accreditation of existing skills under Train to Gain to 'programme-led' apprenticeships that can involve no workplace element, the Government has promoted schemes that add little value to either business or employees". "At the same time, Labour has overseen a catastrophic collapse in adult and community learning, denying people the chance to*

> *choose for themselves how best to develop their skills* (Green Paper No 7, p, 5).

Some commentators have gone even further, Hyland (1994) argued that NVQs were: "…*logically and conceptually confused, epistemologically ambiguous and based on largely discredited behaviourist learning principles"* (*ibid:* p. x). What was becoming evident from my research was that the objective of effective engagement would only be established if the programme being delivered could be shown to have a value to the participants. Deardon, *et al.* (2007) suggest that NVQs offered no benefit to most of those undertaking the qualification and were usually undertaken in place of much valid vocational qualifications such as BTECs and RSA Diplomas.

James & Pollard (2006) suggest that all learners should establish an active engagement with the learning process and able to acquire new knowledge about themselves as practitioners. Coffield (2008) take this further when defining the 'participation in learning 'metaphor' which should: "…*locate learning not in the heads of individuals, but in the simultaneous social processes of learning to belong to a community of practice"* (*ibid*, p. 8).The principle 'community of practice', defined by Wenger & Synder (2000) as: "…*groups of people informally bound together by a shared expertise and a passion for a joint venture"* (*ibid,* p. 139), for all the research participants, was their role as LGV drivers. The consensus from the initial data (Figure 2, p. 51) was that the learning experience had not added anything to their membership of the community'. Stasz (2011) commented that the uptake of any vocational qualification is directly linked to whether employers want them and whether they are valued by individuals and professional bodies; the evidence from the pilot study and the first research cycle supported this statement.

Boud, *et al.* (2006) developed the concept of 'productive reflection at work'. This collective approach to reflection: "…*brings changes in work practice to enhance productivity together with changes to enhance personal engagement and meaning in work*" (*ibid,* p. 5). Unfortunately, the notion of reflective practice is commonly associated with a problem, Loughran, 2002). The consensus of the research participants was that there was no problem, they were good at their job and did not see the need to change:

> *"Your chap (assessor) is asking me questions about how I do my job but I have to tell you I have been doing this now for a long time, and I know I am good at it". "I have never had an accident, I always get to my drops on time, and I treat the waggon like it's my own". I don't need a certificate to tell me what I already know". (Participant P22 03/03/2011)*

> *A2 demonstrated load securing techniques to D2. I was apparent that A2 was very competent and experienced. D2 was unable to offer any advice on how the process could be improved on. It was clear that A2 was the more expert practitioner. (Observation Notes, 08/03/2011)*

However, the participants were involved in a process of assessment to satisfy the requirements of their NVQs and for that reason there needed to be a strategy of effective engagement between themselves and the delivery team. When I interviewed the delivery team (Figure 3, p. 52) they were of the opinion that the participants were significantly better for having achieved their NVQs:

> *"They (the research participants) are now able to prove that they are professional drivers", "I think their employers will see the NVQ has adding value to their workforce, and they will be able to attract the better drivers to their firm and get their insurance premiums reduced" (Participant D3, 10/06/2011)*

There is no evidence to suggest that any freight transport company that adopts an NVQ programme for its drivers is any more attractive to job applicants of gets any reduction in insurance premiums.

Wenger (1998) argued that what differentiates learning from mere doing is that learning: *"…in whatever form it takes changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning"* (*ibid,* p. 226). During the first cycle of this research, the data indicated that the programme being delivered was not changing the student's practice in any tangible way.

> *"The NVQ has been OK, but I have not really done anything different from my usual job". "I don't think I have changed, the job is still the same, and I still drive my truck the same". "Not really sure what you want me to say"? (Participant P1, 01/06/2011)*

> *Having spent an hour observing PI with DI at their final review session, it was clear that P1 had not taken anything from the six months he has been undertaking his NVQ. Worse, from my perspective, was that M1 was satisfied that he had 'done a good job' because his student had 'got the certificate'. There seems to have been little point to the whole exercise other than getting the funding for the college and giving the participant a piece of paper, telling him what he already knows, he is good at his job. Another opportunity missed. (Observation Notes 01/06/2011)*

> *"I think the drivers who have completed the programme are pleased that they have been awarded their NVQs". "I am not so sure that it is making them any better as drivers". "I have not noticed any change in their attitude or approach to the job, and they were all very good drivers before they started the course". (Participant M3 (R), 07/06/2011)*

There is evidence to suggest that certain aspects of the development of practice are best learned in the workplace, rather than through more formal learning experiences (Eraut, *et al*., 2000; Little & Houston, 2003). Before commencing the research, and as a result of earlier research I had conducted (Pointon, 2008; 2010), I was of the view that focused reflection would supply the necessary data to evolve the process of delivering work-based learning and assessment to the RF sector. However, getting the first cycle research participants involved, continued to prove to be quite difficult:

> *"I am not really sure what you are asking me to do? I know you think we should be changed by doing the course, but I still feel the same. I don't think I am any different now that when I started." (Participant A2, 08/03/2011)*

This was a typical reaction from the participants in the first research AR cycle; there seemed to be either an inability or unwillingness to engage with the reflective process (Parker, 2010). However, when observed in informal situations, the participants engaged in some in-depth discussions about the NVQ programme:

> *After spending an incredibly frustrating day observing and interviewing at (P) and getting blank looks when I talked about 'reflection', I overheard three of the participants discussing the programme in forensic detail. If this discussion had been part of an interview or an observed discussion with the delivery team, it would have been really useful. As it is, I cannot use it. (Research Journal entry, 08/03/2011)*

I remained convinced that fundamental to developing the engaged relationships with the research participants was reflective thinking, which is considered as a self-regulatory process under the control of the practitioner (Masui & De Cort, 2005). I believed it would involve the participants, in the process of analysing and evaluating their past experience related to existing practice and lead to potential options to improve their practice (Evens, *et al.,* 2006; Coffield, *et al.,* 2004). Leith & Day (2000) consider in engaging in reflective thinking the practitioner is engaging in cognition that includes metaphors of ambiguity such as doubt and hesitation. For the research participants, there was no 'doubt' or 'hesitation'; they were experienced practitioners with a high degree of 'unconscious competence' (Maslow, 1943).

None of the research participants within the first research cycle were pre-disposed to conscious reflection and engaged with the NVQ programme with a variety of negative attitudes towards the NVQ programme and its validity as a personal development opportunity. LaBoskey (1993) recognised that students fall into two distinct types, the

‘Alert Novice’, who is willing to reflect, and learn from their reflection, and the ‘Common Sense Thinker’, who base their actions on what they see to be common sense, rather than by reflecting on the implications of that action.

At the conclusion of the first research cycle, the evidence suggested that my primary research objective concerning the non-validity of NVQs being delivered to experienced LGV drivers was well founded. In initiating the AR cycle, I sought to confirm this evidence and to consider how the NVQ programmes could be evolved in order to make more valid to the participants.

Second Action Research Cycle

Freire (1970) argued that learning and education is transformed through praxis that is, the reflection on action in order to change. Alternatively, Vygotsky (1978) identified a zone of proximal development – a gap in terms of experience between two people, which could be used to “scaffold” (Wood, *et al.,* 1976) the learning for the less experienced of the two. ‘Scaffolding’ works best when functioning in a situated context or a ‘community of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and remains the most practically useful way for many in training to learn. Unfortunately, for LGV drivers, practice is a solitary occupation and when a relative novice comes into the industry the opportunity (or option) of a more expert practitioner being available for the novice to question and support them in their development and practice, is rare:

> *“I have to learn on the job, once you go through the gates you are on your own”. “You have to work out what the problems are and find a way around them”. Researchers question: “so, in your normal work you have to be reflective in that you identify issues consider solutions and have an outcome in mind”? “No, I just do what needs to be done to get the job done”. (Participant R4, 18/08/2011)*

Prior to starting the NVQ all of the participants in the second research cycle were interviewed with regard to their expectations of the programme, the potential benefit accruing from undertaking the training including the potential increase or otherwise in their 'employability', and their perception of how the programme would affect their vocational activity. The results of these interviews showed that although all of the participants had readily agreed to undertake the programme, very few had given any consideration as to why they were doing it other than 'they were told to' and, perhaps more importantly what they hoped to get out of it:

> *"I don't know; the boss asked me to do it so I have signed up". "I know a couple of lads who have already done it the said it wasn't too bad". (What do you think you will get out of the programme? Researcher). "I haven't really thought about it; I know I will get a certificate if I finish that's about it really". (Participant R28, 06/01/2011)*

Participant R28 suggested his motivation was: *"…the boss asked me to do it".* Harrison (2009) suggests that: *"Knowledge creation enables organisations to continually improve"* (*ibid,* p. 7) but without a clear understanding of what value is being added is there not a distinct possibility of failure? (Coulson -Thomas, 2001). Participant R21 clearly did not know what his organisations' objectives were in implementing the training programme and was unable to offer any response that indicated either benefit to himself or to his employers. Without clarity of objective, there is a possibility of a nil or negative return on the investment in employee development (Armstrong & Baron, 2004). It is recognised that the level of learning in many organisations could be the only distinguishing factor between successful organisations (Massey & Walker, 1999).

Marsick & Watkins (2001) state that learning will: *"…take place wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning"* (*ibid*, p. 28). It became apparent that although the opportunity was available, the LGV drivers participating in the second AR

cycle did not have the need or the motivation for the process to be anything more than a ‘tick box’ exercise.

> *“What do I do next, I carry on with my job”. “I could not see the point of the NVQ, and I am glad I have got it, but if I had wanted to get certificates, I would have stayed at school”. “I like my job and don’t want to work in an office; I just want to get on with what I know best”. (Participant R18, 20/06/2012)*

> *The Assessor saw my work today and said I am doing OK. He told me to get copies of all next week’s Tachos[2] for my portfolio. (Participant R30, 19/08/2011)*

> *“I have been driving trucks for over twenty years, and now I have a certificate that says I am a good driver”. “I have been telling the kids I have been back to school, and they laugh at me”. “Still, it’s good that I have passed”. (Participant R30, 13/10/2011)*

The participants were canvased for their opinions concerning what professional development would be beneficial to them and their vocational practice. They were able to offer a number of options which they considered to have the potential to improve their practice. None of the suggested options fell within the parameters of the NVQ programme. From the evidence gathered from the first two cycles of research, a number of barriers to effective engagement were identified. First was a perception of validity or value concerning the NVQ. The evidence from the research observations and interviews were triangulated with existing published research (Wolf, 2009; Coffield, *et al.,* 2008; Evens, *et al.,* 2006) available in the public domain and was found to pertinent to this research. It was apparent that a change in pedagogy and the focus of the learning experience should have been directed towards valued issues for the drivers and their

[2] Tacho’s – Tachograph discs that LGV drivers are required to insert into recording devices on their vehicles, on a daily basis, that records their activity (driving, other work, resting) over a twenty four hour period.

companies and not the learning experience imposed by the parameters of the prescribed NVQ programme.

Evidence also began to emerge from the second AR cycle concerning the credibility of the Assessor delivery team. The delivery team alluded to this when interviewed:

> *"I do at times feel out of my depth with some of the student; they have been driving trucks for much longer than I have held a licence and they know much more about the business than I do". "I sometimes feel like I am bluffing my way through it, and I know that the students know it". (Participant D3, 02/062011)*

Kincheloe (1999) was of the opinion that vocational educators have a role to play in how students perceive work and how this perception can bring about change in work practices. Vocational education's function hitherto in Kincheloe's perception trained students to acquiesce to management and company dictates and play a passive role. He calls for vocational education reform in order to prepare students to expect and be able to perform 'good work' practices in employment experiences. Kincheloe (*op cit*) argued that students should become inquiring and curious and critical of their surroundings, and think independently, to be able to understand their practices better. Within the research this became apparent with the emerging issue of the credibility of the delivery staff being brought into question by the research participants:

> *"How much do you think I am going to learn from someone who hasn't worked in the industry for donkeys' years? He may know it all in theory, but he can't put it into practice". "It's daft, if you are going to try and teach us summit then at least send someone who knows what they are on about". (Participant P37, 15/08/2011)*

To a degree this was backed up by my observational evidence:

> *During the observation, there was a fairly heated discussion with regard to the characteristics of a particular vehicle (Leyland Daf 85 Artic Tractor Unit).*

> *Although the Assessor (D1) was adamant that he was correct, the student (R21) was able to demonstrate that he, the Assessor, was mistaken. It was clear that the relationship had been compromised by the Assessors lack of knowledge. (Observation Notes, 08/03/2012)*

Although the role of Assessor is not that of Master working with an apprentice, (Woodd, 1997) the relationship was very much dependent upon an establishment of credibility. There was a requirement for the delivery team to demonstrate that they were skilled, experienced and knowledgeable practitioners (Silver & Forrest, 2007).

From the evidence gleaned through observation and interview, there was some justification for this. It had to be recognised that all of the research participants were highly competent and experienced practitioners. For the delivery team to have established themselves within the 'community of practice' they would have had to demonstrate practical skill levels that were at least equal to that of their students (Myers, 2004). None of the Assessors were willing (or perhaps able) to do this despite holding the requisite 'licences to practice'.

It became apparent that the reservations expressed by the LGV drivers, concerning the benefits of the NVQ programme, were shared by those management participants who contributed to the research. When the responses to questions put to the management participants, based on the value of the NVQ programmes were coded and analysed, there was an emerging theme that the programme had not added value to their respective operations. Again the research findings were triangulated with other research (Hyland, 1994; Baker, 2009; Winters, 2010) and there was some support for this view. Wolf (1995) commented: "…*the competence-based system in the UK is one on which virtually everyone involved in secondary and post-16 education has strong views. 'It*

divides people into opposing camps: those who are not for you are against you" (ibid, p. 127).

Third Action Research Cycle – Establishing Engagement

Evidence for the first two cycles of research had proved disappointing with regard to the establishing effective engagement with the participants and established the legitimacy of the primary objective of the research concerning the value of NVQs for experienced LGV drivers. In order to establish sufficient evidence for my second objective, I decided to introduce an additional element into the third AR cycle. All of the LGV drivers participating in the third cycle (Figure 10, p. 64) were asked to undertake a one day SAFED course, with an external training provider. For five of the research participants, this was conducted between the first and second interviews and observations. The sixth participant completed the course just after the second interview at the mid-point of his programme.

The evidence indicated that the data coming from the first interviews and observations mirrored that from the participants in the first two cycles. The participants considered the training to have little value and did not enhance the skills or practice. However, once the drivers had undertaken the SAFED programme the returns were significantly different. The responses to questions during interviews established a genuine and unsolicited process of reflection. All of the six participants considered that they had 'learnt something' and that they had acquired a new knowledge from the taught sessions that would enhance their approach to the job. There was also an iterated acceptance that the instructors who had conducted the training were eminently credible:

> *"Bloody hell that bloke could drive, I have been in this game now for nearly twenty years, and he was showing me things I had never even thought of".*

> *"At the end of the training, I was getting a lot more out of the fuel than before which the boss will be pleased with". "I also learnt loads about how to use the gears and exhauster brake to make driving easier". "It was a great course". (Participant A2, 23/06/2012)*

The responses from all the participants were positive and reflective, every single interview included positive keywords and phrases (change, different, learnt and think, were all code headers for the analysis of this data):

> *"The SAFED course was good, I now think about the way I drive and look to get the best out of my truck". "I didn't think I could learn anything about truck driving but what I was shown on the course has made me change". (Participant A5, 18/06/2012)*

The above comments were replicated in all thirteen interviews conducted following the SAFED training. Responses from management participants to the training, was also positive:

> *"The drivers that have been through the SAFED training have not stopped talking about it; they were really impressed". "I have noticed a difference already in the fuel returns and have asked (the MD sic) to get all the drivers onto it". "I have always thought that this is what we should be doing with regard to training, it makes a real difference to the bottom line". (Participant M5, 06/07/2012)*

> *"R21 was really impressed with the SAFED training and made a point of coming to see me and recommending the all our drivers are allowed to go on the course". "My Director has asked for a report on fuel use on R21's vehicle, and if they are as good as he seems to think, we will seriously consider rolling the programme out to all our drivers". (Participant M4 09/07/2012)*

It became increasingly apparent that the key to effective engagement was the value that those being engaged, placed on the programme being delivered. It was also apparent that those barriers to reflection that were evident during the first two research cycles (and the initial interviews of the third cycle) were easily breached once the provision was valued. Unfortunately, the funded options allow very little flexibility in what can be

delivered and local awareness of sector demand is ignored in favour of a nationally prescribed offer as Gravatt (2006) stated: *"This is 'not so much demand-led as command-led… The government decide on behalf of employers what is to be taught"* (TES, 26/05/2006).

I was of the view that the outcomes of the third cycle of research justified the change I made in the research design. The evidence was sufficient to identify a possible outcome for the second objective of the research that of establishing an effective and valid product for the RF sector. Also, the potential for effective engagement between a large college of FE and the RF sector of the logistics industry.

My conclusions were informed by both the positive and negative data that originated out of this research. A total of 93 interviews and 54 observations (Appendix 3, pp. 124 – 125) were conducted and the data transcribed, coded and analysed to identify patterns and trends in the responses. A significant number of documents from the three companies participating in the research were examined. I also referred to my research log and reflective journal together with those research papers submitted during my Doctoral programme (Appendices 6, 7 & 8, pp. 129 - 135). All of the data, originating from the research, was also triangulated with the pertinent, published research available within the public domain.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have given a voice to the research participants and explained how I used the research methods to gather the evidence to support my research objectives. All of the data, including the raw transcriptions and the coded summaries, have informed the findings and conclusions of this research. The evidence suggests that my objectives

were valid. It also suggests that effective engagement could be established if the right conditions were applied. The outcome of this research indicates that when the learning experience is valued and enhances practice, it can effect positive engagement. In the final chapter, I will use the data to test the research objectives and offer conclusion together with options for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSIONS.

> *"Action research hypothesis are not so much hypothesis as working hunches, and take the form, 'I wonder what would happen if" (McNiff, et al., 2003).*

In the previous chapter, I have used the voices of the research participants, together with relevant published reports, to establish the validity of concerns with regard to the value of NVQs being delivered to experienced LGV drivers. I also considered the effect of introducing a demand led element into the provision positive effect this had on the research participant's attitude towards professional development. This chapter describes the conclusions reached as a result of the data discussed in chapter four and will complete my thesis. My research objectives will be considered from a perspective informed by the research data and relevant literature. The conclusions will be qualified and any recommendations for continuing research identified.

Research Aims – Influencing and Limiting Factors

The primary objective of this research was to establish whether delivering NVQ programmes to experienced LGV drivers had any impact on their vocational practice. A secondary aim was to establish if the NVQs had any validity with the LGV drivers who were undertaking the NVQ programme and who were participating in this study. The second objective was to establish if the NVQ programme could be evolved and delivered so that the research participants could gain a tangible benefit. The collated and analysed evidence, together with the published research available supporting the research objectives was sufficient to reach some conclusions concerning both primary objectives and the secondary aims, although this is with some qualification.

The research proved to be very interesting from my subjective practitioner perspective. However, it raised more questions, concerning the credibility of work-based delivery and the qualifications offered, than were ever envisaged when developing the research

design (Bassey, 1999; Burns, 2002). The research has produced evidence into the perceived development that practitioners experience through reflective practice within the context of action research. However, the results should be interpreted cautiously due to a number of limitations. These include elements of the research methodology, although I am still of the opinion that AR was appropriate research design. In retrospect, I should have included the additional learning into the AR cycle at an earlier stage of the research, at the start of the second research cycle. The research design was also overly optimistic with regard to the introduction of reflective practice to the research participants. The development of reflective practice would probably not have occurred as a natural consequence of programme being delivered (NVQ, level two, DGV). The research design placed too much emphasis on the 'academic' expectations from the research participants. While reviewing the evidence, it was clear that the research participants did engage in reflective activity (*vide,* Research journal entry, cited on p. 79). A phenomenological approach to gathering and analysing this data would have elicited information, valuable to the research objectives, while not requiring the research participants to venture into the abstract language of academic research and practice.

When evaluating influence, I believe there was sufficient evidence to suggest that there was a positive result arising from the third cycle of research. The additional training was in context with the research participants practice. There was unsolicited and positive input from both the operatives and their managers. A positive reaction particularly from the management participants concerning the 'bottom line' potential of the new skills arising out of the training. Finally, the evidence from this study suggests that there was a positive influence on practice as a result of the changes to third AR cycle.

Can Effective Engagement be Established?

The primary consideration of this research was to investigate the possibility that experienced LGV practitioners derived little or no benefit from undertaking NVQs. The aim of the research was to establish if an effective engagement strategy between a College of FE and the RF sector, with regard to the LGV drivers, was possible to ensure that participants undertaking NVQs could benefit from the learning experience. The evidence from this research suggests that this is possible but with the condition that the provision being offered has a validity with those individuals who are participating in the learning (Duguid, 2005). Also, that the participants are allowed a degree of ownership of the learning experience. The first two cycles of this research suggested that this was not the case, the outcomes were passive at best and negative at worst. Further, the evidence indicated that the qualifications being offered had little or no value to the students, either in terms of reward (monetary or otherwise) or career progression. The most 'added value' that any of the LGV driver participants would agree to was the potential for a degree of 'self-esteem'. (Maslow, 1943). Their existing skills, knowledge and experience had been recognised and certificated. This is well illustrated by the vignette (Appendix 6) sourced from Wolf (2009).

Situating the Data

When a taught element was factored into the programme during AR cycle three, the evidence from the coded and analysed data indicated the LGV drivers participating in the research had valued the learning experience, they all welcomed the opportunity to acquire 'new knowledge'. During the first two AR cycles, the reflection had to be actively solicited from the participants. Following the practical training embedded within the third

cycle, the reflection was overwhelming and unsolicited, albeit in the language of the participant drivers praxis, rather than the academic.

All of the research participants were fully qualified, highly experienced and competent, practitioner. Informing the participants of something which they were already consciously aware of (certificating existing skills and knowledge), was considered by the LGV drivers to be patronising (Fuller & Unwin, 2010). Giving participants access to new skills and knowledge, delivered by highly credible experts, that enhanced their practice, ensured a highly effective engagement.

One of the interesting findings, upon the analysis of the research data, was concerning the credibility of the delivery staff (*vide,* pp. 82 – 83) and needs to be iterated. The NVQ Assessors had followed a highly structured, prescriptive format that was designed to get the LGV drivers through their NVQ programmes following a 'path of least resistance'. There was minimal opportunity for the delivery team to establish their vocational credibility with the LGV participants or to establish their status and membership of the 'community of practice'. Within their work environment, the research participants were highly competent practitioners and members of a 'community of skilled practice'. Membership of this community was wholly dependent on the ability and willingness to demonstrate a level of expertise to at least, the same level as that of the participants. The delivery team were either unable or unwilling to do this (Guile, 2003). The result was that credibility, and with it, access to the community of practice, was lost (Swann, *et al*., 2002). This inability to gain access to the community resulted in a 'failure to engage' by the Assessor delivery team with their students. While having some impact on the outcome of this research, I do not believe that it compromised the evidence to a

degree that invalidated the outcome. I do believe that this is a particularly interesting finding arising from the research project which is worthy of further investigation.

Participant Ownership and Voice

One emerging theme, throughout the research process, was that the participants considered the programme had been imposed on them. While they did not articulate this as oppression, it could be considered as such in that they had not had a 'voice' when the decision was made to engage the college to deliver the programme, As Wolf (2010) stated: "*Adult workers, when asked what they would like to study, chose completely different things from the low-level NVQs that are currently foisted on them"* (*ibid,* p. 8). Throughout the research, I was reminded of Freire (1970) who believed that a pedagogy which could help oppressed people regain their humanity: "…*must be forged with them, not for them" (ibid,* p. 33). The senior managers in the respective participating companies would have seen the professional development opportunities as a positive for their driver employees, but active participation was (or should have been) predicated on a dialogue with them. Learning must originate from a position of mutual agreement of benefit; effective engagement is reliant on informed consent (Foster, 2006).

Kelly (2007) suggests that many of the barriers to effective engagement are due to the "…*institutional cultures* prevalent within *FE*…*promoting work-based learning, the values and routines are something to be tolerated and managed rather than something that can enhance employer engagement"* (*ibid,* p. 5).

During earlier research (Pointon, 2010) I established that many senior FE practitioners considered their actions and work be influenced by external pressures like prescriptive funding requirements and 'pervasive' inspection:

> *Nowadays education seems to be about hitting targets. We have to hit 'benchmarks' all of the time, if we don't, we fall foul of the inspectors. So, as long as we are churning out NVQs in a timely fashion, we are seen as a successful college (ibid,* p. 53, Participant 4d, 11/08/2010).

The delivery team appeared to have adopted a strategy to make work-based learning fit the processes they had established for FE rather than evolve them to be 'fit for purpose' within the workplace. This was perfectly exemplified by a comment recorded during an interview with one of the delivery team, during the research:

> *"When I came to the College I didn't expect to find myself back in the industry having to prove myself". "I don't like being here, I don't know what I am expected to teach these students", they are all better at the job than I am". "This is not what Further Education should be about; we should be concentrating on the next generation of the workforce, not teaching people to suck eggs". D3, 10/072012)*

There is clearly here a failure to recognise that FE, and its funding streams, had been fundamentally changed by central (government) strategy (Wolf, 2011; Fuller & Unwin, 2011; Allais, 2011). The role of FE will continue to be an instrument of government policy makers as a mechanism for achieving educational and economic goals (Young & Allais, 2009).

In contrast, the instructors who were tasked with delivering the practical training to the cohort of learners participating in the third cycle of research were able to establish their credibility very quickly. At the start of each session, the instructors demonstrated those skills which the participants recognised and appreciated. This established them as 'fellow travellers', giving access to the community and with it, endorsement of the training. What can be taken from this is that professional development was valued by the research participants if it was relevant to them, their role and their vocational practice.

In summary of, and in answer to my primary research objective, NVQs, when delivered to experienced LGV drivers did not enhance their vocational practice and had no discernible validity. My second objective was concerning effective engagement; I believe the evidence suggests that this can be established if the provision is valid and the deliverer is credible, and there is informed consent from the potential participants.

In establishing a conclusion to the research objectives, I believe I have also established conclusions to those outcomes arising out of the primary research that supported the research and will contribute to the development of practice. In particular that it will inform my college's future planning and provision to the RF sector. It will also contribute to the professional development strategy for those staff who are tasked with addressing the requirements of the RF sector (and also with regard to the provision of workplace learning in all sectors). The findings will also be used to inform the work-based learning directorate's recruitment and selection strategy for new work-based Tutor/Assessors.

New Knowledge - I, 'The Practitioner.'

One further claim to 'new knowledge' resulting from this and earlier research (Pointon, 2010) is with regard to myself and my 'praxis'. Praxis, according to Carr & Kemmis (1986) is:

> *"…informed action which, by reflection on its character and consequences, reflexively changes the 'knowledge-base' which informs it remakes the conditions of informed action and constantly reviews action and the knowledge which informs it"* (*ibid,* p. 33).

I was drawn to this notion of praxis as an action that is taken as a result of reflection. My journey (explored more fully in Document 6) as a researcher has been one that as seen me evolve from a 'sceptic' to a position where conscious reflection has become a normal function of my professional activity, both as a researcher and an educationalist.

Wilson & Wilson (1998) suggest that: *"…effective learning depends primarily on the personal qualities of the educator"* (*ibid,* p. 355). One of my claims to new knowledge is that I have learnt about myself, and I am now in a better place to ensure I can benefit the students that access learning within my department. Also, that I am better placed to assist my staff through the difficult process of delivering learning to experienced practitioners. McNiff, *et al.* (2003) suggest that when establishing an AR design, the researcher has to be clear*: "…why they want to get involved in the area or subject of the research"* (*ibid,* p. 64). For me, there was a subjective interest in establishing effective engagement with the RF sector. Also, this research was participatory even though my participation assumed several identities including Manager (the delivery staff were all members of the department I manage) interviewer and observer. My claim to participation is founded on my 'membership' of the 'community of practice', I am acknowledged as being a specialist in the logistics sector. In defining my identity as a 'participator', I tend to agree with Kindon, *et al.* (2007) in that it should be seen as: *"…a political commitment, collaborative processes and participatory worldview" (ibid,* p. 11). The impact of stressing participation is that all those involved in AR projects are known as participants, not subjects or informants, who actively engage in research that is motivated by, and focused, on meeting their needs, therefore, establishing a participatory identity for the researcher.

Identities

This research did encompass a number of my separate identities which all had an interest in the conduct and outcomes of the research. These included: I, the researcher, I, the logistician and I, the educationalist. From a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) perspective, I believe that learning should be viewed holistically where

an individual, firmly situated in a social and cultural environment, increasingly participates in communities of practice. To become a member of a community of practice is necessary to invest one's identity and practice in the core activities and values of that community (Henderson, 2006; Wenger, *et al.,* 2002). The possibility of subjectivity arising from one (or more) of my identities, was a potentially limiting factor on the validity of the research conclusions. Although the question of subjectivity needs to be addressed in all research, AR openly accepts the involvement of the researcher in the research process and rejects the idea that the researcher should assume an identity of the objective outsider. Reid *et al.* (2005) suggest that AR works within a paradigm: "…*in which subjectivity is acknowledged as unavoidable"* (*ibid,* p.123). The findings and conclusions are therefore presented to the reader who will be the judge of the validity of the submission.

The cyclic nature of AR has also enabled me to identify and emphasise the evolving developent processes within the four stages of each of the research cycles. At the same time, it has allowed me to reflect on my own identity within those cycles and in a way that I have contributed to the research process (Bassey, 1995). Within the cycles of this research design are the strategies initiated in order to establish effective engagement. Also, embedded within the narrative of this research is my own ongoing development, within each of my identities that have influenced my participation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When considering my practice and trying to understand it through the process of this research, I have felt the need to acknowledge 'I the researcher' as I migrate the outcomes of this AR into my practice. I also believe that I have shown through engaging as a collaborative participant, that I have developed an epistemology of practice that enables me to account for my evolving praxis (Dehler & Edmonds, 2006).

Qualification of the Research Outcomes

At the end of this thesis, I situate it at the time the research was undertaken and is predicated on the knowledge process, policy and protocols in place at the conclusion of the research (2012). Since its completion, there have been significant changes in FE and government policy and process that have to be acknowledged. The Wolf report (2011) paved the way for changes in FE and its provision to industry, and this was quickly followed by the Richard Review (2012). Perhaps more telling was Wolf's 2015 paper *'Heading for the precipice",* which described a bleak future for the FE sector. Since the completion of the work, there have been many developments in the fast moving and ever-changing landscape of FE. Never the less, this research contributes to knowledge and understanding of the role, purpose and value of vocational qualifications for experienced practitioners. There is additional value for policy and policymakers as they seek to design qualifications for the RF sector particularly experienced LGV drivers working within this sector.

During the writing of this thesis, I have considered the NVQ to have little value to the research participants involved in my study. While discounting the NVQ as a valid qualification for experienced LGV drivers, I must give credit to it as a function of an apprenticeship framework. The NVQ is a credible platform from which to assess the increasing levels of competence of Apprentices as they develop their vocational skills.

Finally, I consider that AR was an effective methodology for this research, it produced a range of evidence which allowed me to form a number of conclusions and recommend actions that will support the journey towards an effective engagement between my college and its provision to the RF sector of the logistics industry.

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Appendices

One - Participant letter

Tel

Mobile

Email@aol. com

Dear

As a part-time student at Nottingham Trent University, I have been working towards gaining a Doctorate in Education (Ed.D). My chosen field of study is the engagement between Further Education and the Road Freight sector of the UK Logistics industry. In particular, I will be investigating the provision of work-based learning as it affects operatives (LGV Drivers) within the sector. My plan is to study three cohorts of students operating within three road freight SME's based within North Staffordshire (including your own company) with the objective of establishing 'best practice' for the delivery of work-based teaching and learning.

As part of my research, I would like to interview and observe a number of Large Goods Vehicle drivers throughout the course of NVQ programme. To this end would you consider giving your consent to the following?

- A series of semi-structured interviews during the course of your NVQ. It is not envisaged that this will happen on more than three occasions and will usually take between twenty - thirty minutes.
- For myself, as the researcher to be present as an observer, during your activities in support of your NVQ. This will usually be during feedback sessions with your Assessor.

I enclose two copies of the Consent Form, which participants are requested to sign prior to commencing the research. If you are able to agree to take part in this research could I ask you sign and return one copy to me in the envelope provided, and retain the second for your own records? You will have the absolute right to withdraw from the research at any time should you so wish, and you can request that all or any part of your contribution be disaggregated from the

research at any time prior to formal submission to my university. All information will be treated confidentially with both yourself as the participant and your organisation being coded within all drafts and the final submission. No data will be available in ‘raw’ state. If you require any more details, I will be pleased to meet with you to discuss any concerns that you may have.

I thank you in anticipation of your help in this matter

Yours sincerely

Anthony Pointon

Assistant Director, Work- based Learning

Two - Research Participant Consent Form

In line with the requirements of Nottingham Trent University's Code of Practice and the requirements of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), all participants of educational research are required to give their informed consent prior to the commencement of any research exercise.

I (Print Name)……

Agree to be a contributing participant of an Action Research project on 'The engagement between Further Education and the Road Freight sector of the UK Logistics industry'. I understand that this will require me to participate in a semi-structured interview with the researcher and that this interview will be recorded and that recording transcribed and used in an academic submission to Nottingham Trent University. I also understand that I will be observed during the programme and records of the observations will be used to support the research. On agreeing to participate in this research, I expect that anything written about me will be shared with me, and my confidentiality will be protected by use of a research code for both myself and my organisation.

I understand that my rights as a participant are:

- To be informed of the purpose of the research
- To be able to terminate my involvement at any stage
- To anonymity (My identity protected by the use of a code in all documents)
- To ask for information to be changed or omitted as the research progresses
- To have my comments and information safeguarded
- To have my views objectively reflected
- To express my opinions on the research
- To discontinue tape recording at any stage during the interview
- To review the transcript of the interview prior to its incorporation into the research
- To contact the researcher at any time

Signature Date

Three – Research Participants

Research Participants Chronology of interventions

During the research, there were a total of thirty-three individual participants involved in the study. This number was broken down and coded:

- D codes were three members of the programme delivery team
- M codes were five Management representatives from each of the three participating companies (A, P and R)
- A, P and R codes without an M prefix were twenty-five participants undertaking the NVQ programme and included in either the pilot study or one of the three research cycles

Participant	**1st Interview/ observation**	**2nd Interview/ observation**	**3rd Interview/ observation**	**4th Interview/ observation**	**5th Interview/ observation**
D1	22/10/2010	20/11/2010	02/06/2011	24/10/2011	02/07/2012
D2	22/10/2010	20/11/2010	03/06/2011	26/10/2011	09/07/2012
D3	22/10/2010	20/11/2010	10/06/2011	26/10/2011	10/07/2012
MI (P)	13/10/2010	03/06/2011	14/11/2011	02/07/2012	N/A
M2 (P)	13/02/2010	03/06/2011	17/11/2011	04/07/2012	
M3 (R)	15/02/2010	07/06/2011	10/11/2011	05/07/2012	
M4 (R)	15/12/2010	06/06/2011	08/11/2011	09/07/2012	
M5 (A)	16/12/2010	02/06/2011	18/11/2011	06/07/2012	
Pilot study December 2010 - January 2011					
A1	03/11/2010	N/A			
P8	01/11/2010				
P21	01/11/2010				
P29	01/11/2010				
P52	01/11/2010				
R8	03/11/2010				
R12	03/11/2010				
First Action Research cycle January 2011 – June 2011					
P17	04/01/2011	01/03/2011	25/05/2011	N/A	
P1	04/01/2011	01/03/2011	01/06/2011		
P22	04/01/2011	03/03/2011	06/06/2011		
R18	06/01/2011	07/03/2011	07/06/2011		

R21	06/01/2011	07/03/2011	07/06/2011	
A2	07/01/2011	08/0/2011	14/06/2011	
Second Action Research cycle			**June 2011 – October 2011**	
P15	09/06/2011	15/08/2011	07/10/2011	N/A
P37	09/06/2011	15/08/2011	10/10/2011	
R4	10/06/2011	18/08/2011	13/10/2011	
R28	10/06/2011	18/08/2011	13/10/2011	
R30	10/06/2011	19/08/2011	13/10/2011	
A3	14/06/2011	23/08/2011	17/10/2011	
Third action research cycle			**November 2011 – June 2012**	
P24	29/11/2011	05/03/2012	18/06/2012	N/A
P30	05/12/2011	07/03/2012	20/06/2012	
R18	07/12/2011	12/03/2012	25/06/2012	
R22	07/12/2011	07/03/2012	20/06/2012	
A2	07/12/2011	08/03/2012	21/06/2012	
A5	09/12/2011	13/03/2012	23/06/2012	

In total ninety-six interviews were conducted. There were also a total of fifty-four observations of the participants undertaking the NVQ programme conducted during the three research cycles. Observations were undertaken just prior to or immediately following the scheduled interviews.

Four - Interview transcription

Subject: P37. Date of Interview: 15/11/2011. Venue: On-site P

Date of transcription: 18/11/2011 No of pages: 8

Comments: The interview was conducted following an observation by D1. I was also observing and noted that the relationship between P37 and D1 became quite heated and fractious. The issue appears to be with regard to the vocational competence of D1. This is my second observation and interview with P37; he is a very experienced LGV driver who has verbalised is discontent with having to undertake the NVQ programme, a number of times.

Question	Response	Comments
"Before we start P, how are you for time"?	. "I am OK; the boss says we have to be here so here I am". "I could do with getting off soon I have to get to Milton Keynes by six o'clock".	Negative
"No problem, let's get started". You have been on the NVQ programme for a couple of months now so can you tell me how are you finding it"?	"Look, I know you have got a job to do just like I have, but I really think we are wasting each other's time". "The boss says I have to do this, and I will do it, but so far your people haven't told me or shown me anything I don't already know". "The lad I have just been with was trying to tell me about my own truck and he got it completely arse about face". "If I drove like he was saying I'd have been sacked tomorrow". "How much do you think I am going to learn from someone who hasn't worked in the industry for donkeys' years"? "He may know it all in theory, but he can't put it into practice". "It's daft if you are going to try and teach us summit then at least send someone who knows what they are on about."	Waste of time Waste of time Negative attitude to programme I know better I know better
"Has the course not given you the opportunity to think about your role and the skills you need to be a good driver"?	.I have been driving trucks for nearly twenty why do I need a certificate to tell I know what I am doing"? "I do need to think about what makes me a good driver if I wasn't any good I would be 'up the road'. "I know what skills I need to get from here to Milton Keynes and get the load delivered, that's what I get paid for". "what I don't need is some jumped up; know It all telling me how to do my job". If you have to be here why can't you show us summit we don't' already know"? "Look I know I sound bolshie,	Negative attitude to programme I know better Potential for a positive relationship?

	but all of the lads are just a bit fed up with all of this". "All we want to do is drive and get paid".	

Five - Train to Gain - Vignette

A Train to Gain success?

In a recent Radio 4 File on 4 programme, the Learning and Skills Council was asked by the BBC to put them in touch with A ‘T2G’ success story: they were duly linked up with Crewe Football Club, where thirty stewards had received their NVQs; free to them and at a cost to the taxpayer of £1,200 a head. This was good news for the club because, armed with these certificates, they were legally able to dispense with paying local police £40,000 to cover each match. But new skills? As far as the highly experienced and middle-aged staff were concerned, they had learned nothing: they simply had a certificate to attest, legally, formally and as a contribution to national qualification targets, that they possessed the skills they had been practising for years.

Source: Wolf, 2009, p. 51

Six - Title and Abstract (Document Two)

Are Colleges of Further Education ideally placed yet insufficiently resourced to catalyse, shape and support the development of operatives within the Road Freight Logistics sector of the economy?

This paper will examine the potential for a research design to consider an effective engagement strategy for a large College of Further Education looking to deploy teaching to the Road Freight sector of the Logistics industry. The methodology is qualitative in nature focusing on the existing knowledge available and in the public domain. In attempting to situate two principles (Further Education and the Road Freight sector of the Logistics industry) this document has established a rationale for continuing with the research process. As anticipated, conducting an extensive literature review has raised a number of additional issues that are pertinent to the ongoing research. In considering the primary research objective: *"Can a large College of Further Education establish and effective engagement strategy with the Road Freight sector of the Logistics industry"?* There is sufficient evidence to suggest that further research will add to the existing knowledge.

In particular, a case for further consideration of the role of Further Education and its practitioners deploying an effective offer to the Road Freight sector has been made and a number of further research questions established. Further research will be conducted into thesis questions in order to support the primary research objective. To this end, a small-scale research design will be deployed with an aim of establishing the nature of leadership and the management of change within Further Education from the perspective of its delivery staff. The research will be at a local level and will utilise the

participation of a small (10 – 15) number of active practitioners who are members of the Senior Management Teams (SMT) of a number of Further Education colleges.

Conducting the research for this document has also raised a number of questions with regard to the education and training provision available, in particular to the Road Freight sector of the Logistics industry. It would appear that the 'fitness' of many of the qualifications available is based more on governmental consideration and less on identified sector or individual needs. The notion of 'credentialism' and under-employment has emerged from this investigation and warrants further examination. Therefore, a second small-scale research design will be established to consider the validity, or otherwise of the qualifications available including those mandated on the sector. Research for this design will be located within three local companies who have agreed to participate in this exercise. It is anticipated that the research design will be primarily qualitative in nature and sited within an interpretive paradigm.

Seven - Title and Abstract (Document Three)

The value/benefit of vocational qualifications to operatives working within the Road Freight sector of the Logistics industry. To what extent has the 'paper-chase' replaced 'real' vocational skills and experience within skilled / semi-skilled operative roles?

This study, using primarily qualitative methods analyses views and experiences of Large Goods Vehicle drivers with regard to Education, lifelong learning and professional development. In particular, the perception of reliance on 'paper' qualifications over tacit skills and experience. This research is one element of an on-going 'Action Research' project being conducted in part fulfilment of a Professional Doctorate of Education (Ed.D).

The evidence for this document was derived from data gleaned from participants employed by three Road Freight logistics companies operating in North Staffordshire. A total of 132 questionnaires were remitted (12 pilot and 120 main) with 100 being returned (9 pilot and 91 main). These returns informed a series of three semi-structured interview forums, two of which were attended by operatives (LGV Drivers) and the third which was attended by individuals in management positions from the three participating operations. The specific aims are to explore the views of semi-skilled, operative level employees and their employers/managers on the perceived value of formal qualifications and mandated training, as opposed to tacitly acquired vocational skills and experience and to situate those opinions within the individual experience of both compulsory and post-compulsory education and respective attitudes towards accessing and engaging with Further Education.

The research indicated that although the participant's experience of compulsory education had been poor and had left them inadequately prepared for employment they were open to developmental opportunities available through Further Education. This conclusion does, however, need qualification. There was a deep suspicion of mandated training (with specific reference to the Compulsory Training Directive, 2003/59/EC) and a belief that their expertise was being called into question. There was an expectation that any professional development should have a relevance to their vocation. There was an almost unanimous agreement that too much emphasis is being placed on 'paper' qualifications and not nearly enough recognition of the experiential learning and tacitly acquired skills.

The conclusions of this exercise have proved interesting and will certainly inform the on-going action research project adding to the data that will hopefully provide an answer to the overarching research question: *'The evolving role of a College of Further Education – To what extent can a large College of Further Education establish and effective engagement strategy with the Road Freight sector of the Logistics industry?*

Eight - Title and Abstract (Document Four)

How are issues of educational leadership and the management of change impacting on a large College of Further Education's ability to deliver effective work-based teaching and learning to the Road Freight sector of the logistics industry?

This dissertation using primarily qualitative methods, analyses the influence of the process of leadership and the management of change within Further Education on the deployment of work-based learning to the Road Freight sector of the logistics industry. This research is one element of an on-going 'Action Research' project being conducted in part fulfilment of a Professional Doctorate of Education (Ed.D). The research was situated within an interpretive paradigm and utilised semi-structured interviews as the primary research mechanism. The evidence was derived from data gleaned from a small number (10) of senior Further Education managers employed by five large colleges in England and was referenced to the available pertinent literature.

The research found that the provision of work-based learning to the Road Freight sector was not unique either in deployment or process. For this reason, the conclusions arrived at are in relation to Further Education's provision of work-based learning to the industry in general. Unanimously all the research participants reported a sector situated in low morale, disillusionment and ineffectiveness. The situational causality was attributed to an overly bureaucratic, government agenda driven by target setting and autocratic inspection. The conclusions need to be qualified by the timing of the research. Further Education, particularly the work-based sector was undergoing significant change during the research time-frame, and the returns were inevitably influenced by the situational experience of the participants. Taken in isolation the research would have to conclude

that the process of leadership and management of change within Further Education was having a detrimental effect on the provision of work-based learning.

The conclusions of this exercise have proved interesting but will need to be tempered by the external factors that influenced the findings. The findings will inform the on-going action research project adding to the data that will hopefully provide answers to the overarching research question: *The evolving role of a College of Further Education - To what extent can a large College of Further Education establish an engagement strategy with the Road Freight sector of the Logistics industry that ensures the effective delivery of work-based learning.*

Nine – Document Six, Reflection

Reflections on: 'The process of becoming a Doctor of Education', 2008 - 2012

By

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor of Education at Nottingham Trent University

School of Education

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> *The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (Schön, 1983, p. 68)*

Introduction

Jarvis (2000) interprets the rise of the professional doctorate as part of a broad movement of some research from the university to the workplace, reflecting the need for workers in the knowledge society to continually develop professionally. While accepting this premise, I have always considered my continuing development as a practitioner to also be emancipatory (Habermas, 1971; Inglis, 1997) freeing me from the constraints of ignorance and allowing me to practice from a position of increasingly informed competence (Lipman, 1991; Bolton, 2005). However, soon after commencing the programme, it became apparent that part-time professionally-oriented research at doctoral level was incredibly challenging (Butcher & Sieminski, 2006; 2009). Research had to be accommodated alongside a busy and demanding professional life while at the same time ensuring the process had the minimum impact possible on my personal life.

I, the reflective practitioner

As my research progressed, it became apparent that my participation in and reflection of the Ed.D had initiated a change in my practice. This started with the recognition that my academic research was being converted from first-hand learning into explicit knowledge, that I used to inform my day to day work (Bourner, *et al.*, 2001). Evans*, et al.* (2005) iterated the importance of reflection and argued that: '…*the emergence of the knowledge economy places increasing emphasis on the requirement for individuals to develop sophisticated new literacy's and advanced thinking skills if they are to survive*

and prosper in an increasingly complex world' (*ibid,* p.120). Dewey (1933) defined the process of reflective thought as *'…active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends'* (*ibid,* p. 118). While agreeing with this over-arching descriptor, I am also inclined to accept Moon's (1999) definition of reflection. Primarily that reflection should be seen as a '…*personal characteristic rather than simply a mental activity*' (*ibid,* p.5).

It is only over the last few years that my reflection has consciously been more than a simplistic learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) and I have come to realise that reflection should not be holistic but accurate and situated in '…*common sense'* (Moon, 2004, p.82). I have also recognised that any reflection can also only be situated at a particular point in time, as experience expands then introspection will, inevitably, change. My perception and beliefs concerning my professional values and my practice had been shaped by reflexive actions, informed by my gained experience and effectiveness in role (Sambrook & Stewart, 2008; Thompson, *et al.,* 2012)**.** Becoming a reflective practitioner is not so much about the acquisition or development of the skills and areas of knowledge required for successful practice. Rather, it concerns the particular skills needed to 'reflect constructively' upon ongoing experience as a way of developing those skills and knowledge and improving the effectiveness of one's work (Moore, 2000. p.128).

Denzin & Lincoln (1998) state that *"…every text that is created is a self-statement, a bit of autobiography, a statement that carries an individual signature"* (*ibid,* p. 184) this reflection is then is my 'self-statement', the story of an experienced vocational practitioner's engagement with doctoral study and development into an informed professional within a 'community of practice' (McQuire, 1987; Passfield 1997; Hanrahan,

1998; Napoli, 2006), to a point where it has almost become a cliché (Johnson, 2003). Further, to consider those episodes of 'puzzlement, amazement and at times sheer disbelief' (*vide*: Schön (1983) cited on page seven) that I had experienced over the four years I was studying for my Doctorate.

Reflection - education progression as a metaphor

While the use of metaphor in qualitative research is often unconscious (Schmitt, 2005) there is appropriateness in reporting from a position of 'the first person': '…*typically their users do not seem to regard them as 'mere' metaphors but as expressing some kind of literal truth'.* (Danziger, 2000. p. 331) The process of doctoral study uses 'journey' as a constant simile or metaphor (McClintock *et al.*, 2003; Batchelor & Di Napoli, 2006) it is almost inevitable that metaphor is established as a narrative mechanism in the production of this submission**.** It was particularly relevant when considering those moments of self-doubt and the possibility of failure that I experienced during the programme.

> *I really don't know how I will be able to continue dealing with all of the things I am being asked to do. My writing is important to me but my staff are real and at the moment need me more, and there is no end in sight. (Journal entry, June 2010)*

At the time of writing the above I was having to deal with some major personnel issues within my work environment and I was forced to re-prioritise my research and writing.

As retrospective reflection is situated at a distance from the actual, it is only possible to consider what lessons can be learnt. Fitzgerald (1994) suggests:

> *The retrospective contemplation of practice undertaken in order to uncover the knowledge used in practical situations, by analysing and interpreting the information recalled.* (*ibid*, p. 67)

In trying to gain a deeper understanding of this 'journey' and the obstacles encountered (real or otherwise) and my concept of professional development, I will continue to draw on the entries I had made in my reflective log since starting the programme[3] together with my recollection of events (albeit recalled in the present) and the papers I have submitted as a requirement of the programme. Where possible I will support my narrative with data available within the published literature.

In providing a narrative of my 'journey of educational discovery,' it soon became apparent that change is constant and overt. As Batchelor & Di Napoli (2006), who use the metaphor of a voyage, state:

> *Fundamental changes happen during the voyage. When you reach your destination are different. The changes that occur are ontological as well as epistemological. They are changes in who you are as well as what you know. They contribute to shaping your voice for being and becoming, as a person, as well as your voice for knowing* (*ibid*, pp.13 -14)

Maintaining the journey analogy, it is necessary to iterate that it is most defiantly not a linear process. At the very beginning of my doctorate I and my 'fellow travellers' were asked to 'metaphorically' illustrate our perceptions of doctoral study. There were several imaginative descriptions, but two that resonated with me were those of a rocket journeying from the known into the unknown depths of outer space. The second was a journey across a mountain range, and it is this latter example that I most closely identified with. Continuing the metaphor, I saw myself as ill-equipped, lacking the knowledge and skills of a mountain climber and without the maps to chart the best route. I knew where I wanted to go but how to get there? On reading back through my research journal I came

[3] Which stretched to some 30.000 words by the time I started to summarise its contents for this document

across the following entry which illustrates my situation at that point in time. Written in January 2009 (a few months after I commenced the programme) I say:

> *There seems so much to do and so little time. The rest of the group, most of who are already in the university 'club', seem to be streets ahead of me and already have a good grounding in the process. The more I think about it, the less I seem to know. I have to keep asking myself do I really want this and if I do where do I get the 'tools' from?*

After a while, and as the programme progressed, I came to realise that my concerns were shared by my peers, and we had all had that 'self-doubt' at some point. It was within the developing relationship with my peers that a confidence began to emerge that I was up to the challenge. Somerville & Keeling (2004) suggest that integral to effective reflection is peer review, particularly where the individual giving feedback has *'participated in the same experiences'* (*ibid,* p. 44). Hopefully, this submission will give some insight into how I acquired the requisite skills, knowledge and experience that allowed me the possibility of arrival after navigating the 'peaks and troughs' encountered along the way.

Guthrie (2007) illustrates this transition from conscious incompetence to conscious competence[4] (Hershey & Blanchard, 1977) by using the notion of the researcher as an apprentice, then journeymen and finally acceptance into the guild (*ibid,* p. 1*).* If I accept this analogy, then I consider myself to be, at best, a journeyman in that I now have a familiarity with the 'language' while at the same time don't yet feel ready to enter through those portals where its usage is common parlance (Sowell, 2009). An entry in my reflective log for July 2010 stated:

> *I understand the words; I know what epistemology, ontology, methodology and method mean concerning research. I am even developing both an*

[4] I am suggesting that the pinnacle of unconscious competence is still not quite within my reach and perhaps it is not a place I need to get to.

> *understanding and interest in philosophical paradigms but, it still feels like I am speaking a foreign language.*

Perhaps it is a testament to my progression that I could at least acknowledge that I now felt comfortable with the 'language'.

Accepting the unexpected

As an FE practitioner, I had to believe that my work and that of my colleagues had a value. During the research (Pointon, 2010) it became apparent that there was a growing belief by senior managers within the sector that this may not be the case, a view shared by many commentators of Further Education (Coffield, 2007, 2008; Wolf, 2009, 2011):

> *On reflection, I do find it difficult to align my perception of myself as an educator and the role I now see myself in, as an 'administrator' of a qualification factory that does nothing to develop either our students or their employers* (Pointon, 2010, p. 58).

The above quote is typical of many I recorded during my research and surprise, puzzlement and even dismay are apt descriptors of my emotions as the investigation unfolded. As the research progressed, it became apparent that my convictions concerning the benefits of workplace learning were going to be tested possibly changed. Considering my identity as a practitioner, I was aware of those changes (hopefully for the better) that have been effected by my exposure to the doctoral process. While this is still an objective, I am aware that my perception of change was influenced by the continuous acquisition of experiential knowledge, the more knowledge I acquired, the better I was able to understand my situational experience. As Boyd & Fales (1983) stated:

> *The process of creating and clarifying the meanings of experiences in terms of self in relating to both self and world. The outcomes of this process is changed conceptual perspectives (ibid,* p. 101).

However, the data arising out of my research was challenging some of my fundamental beliefs concerning continuing professional development. In particular, the impact of a performativity culture that has become the norm within Further Education:

> *It requires individual practitioners to organise themselves in response to targets, indicators, and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation. (*Ball, 2003, p. 215)

Having long held the view that education should have a 'civic' quality (Pfeiffer & Coote, 1991) I was inextricably linked to my research and research subjects by the shared experience of a community of practice. Also, having come into Further Education from the industrial sector I was examining, I was at times been challenged by the 'struggles' occurring in FE and its engagement with industry. Changes to funding, overt bureaucracy and contradictory policy making at both regional and national levels (Coffield, 2007; Wolf, 2009) affected both the research process and my practice. Foucault (cited in Collins, 1980) commenting on the validity of situated participation suggested:

> *If one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question (ibid,* p.64)

While I would agree that my research benefited from being conducted by a practitioner/researcher who was comfortable within the 'community of practice' being examined, it did engender a subjective emotion. I had an empathy with both the people and the organisations being examined (Johnson, 2009). For this reason, it was necessary to ensure a balance of validity was maintained so that the research did not move to introspection (Hammack, 1997), rather a rigour and validity was maintained. In retrospect, it is clear that documenting my research was, at times difficult, and reflection

'in action' was an important process required to ensure a validity of the research process (Greenwood, 1993; Guba & Lincoln 2005). I had invested time, emotion and a belief in the value of work-based learning and I was in effect using research methods to test this belief to destruction.

Analysing the data for part of my research I was at first astonished, and then disappointed with the outcomes. However, it did at least illustrate that my research was not so rigid as to discount the possibility of the unexpected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The realisation that much of which I believed to be fundamental was, in fact, open to question allowed me to start to explore issues which, to that point, I believed to be infallible (Elbow, 1973). As Wienstein (1999) stated, I allowed myself to: *"explore, uncover, unpeel (as the skin of an onion), to get at the core issue, and to get insights and begin to understand" (ibid,* p. 37). In retrospect, it is apparent that the conscious need to consider why I wanted to conduct the research was an overt reflexive action, as a direct result of the process of reflection in action I had adopted (Merriam, 1998; Russell & Kelly, 2002)

Having consciously allowed myself the freedom to question my perceptions, it appears that my subconscious was not quite ready to give up the fight. During the process of documentation it became apparent that I was establishing a fractious relationship with my research and writing, it was developing a character with needs and wants. A journal entry in July 2009 stated:

> *I haven't written anything for some time and have started to feel quite guilty, almost as if I have abandoned a relative (albeit one I am not particularly fond of).*

This view of my research and writing having an identity and character was maintained throughout the research process, almost as if I had acquired a demanding and critical fellow traveller (Anderson, 2002). On re-reading my reflective log, I was surprised at how often I allowed the research both character and voice. Following a taught session I wrote: *'We really need to get this finished'.* We! I was doing the reading, making the notes and typing. So, why would I want to share this with anything or anyone? Roche (2000) states:

> *It is critical that the researcher owns his or her doctorate totally, that is the research question, articulation of the research problem, the thesis structure and contributions (ibid,* p. 180)

Yet from my notes, it would appear that I had allowed the process a degree of ownership over me.

Situating reflection in experience

Jarvis (1992) suggests that how we learn and reflect is predicated on a combination of both present and past experience. If this is the case, then my reflections (and development as a practitioner) need to be situated in my experience of working on the doctoral programme and that prior experience that has brought me to the position I now found myself in. After many years in the logistics industry, I was recruited by a large Further Education College and was tasked with establishing a new department to address the requirement of the local Logistics and Transport sectors. Academically, the qualification 'paper-chase' which I had begun in the industry continued.

It was following my move to FE and while I was undertaking my PGCE[5] that I began to reflect on the developmental programmes I had undertaken. It was this reflection which brought me to the conclusion that the whole journey had been a pursuit of self-actualisation (there were also issues around meritocracy and credentialism which I had explored in some depth during the course of this programme[6]). It may also have been an unconscious desire to justify (to myself) my change of status (operative to quite senior management in industry and then straight into a middle/senior management role in FE).

I began to develop an idea of learning being a distinct emotion, with a rationalised subjectivity that allowed me to construct a valid reasoning for my developmental journey (Erut, 1994; Mulligan, 2000) The literature suggests that significant learning only takes place if a person sees it will maintain or enhance the structure of the self (Greenhalgh, 1994). For me learning was emotional, and I could identify with Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, believing myself to be firmly situated within the realm of self-actualisation. It has been suggested that reflection and feeling act in an interdependent relationship with emotion (Taylor, 1997; McAlpine & Weston, 2002).

Being an advocate of the civic quality (Pfeifer & Coote, 1991) of education, the emotional element during the course of my research was surprising! The evidence seemed to indicate a growing disillusionment and dissatisfaction with both the delivery and validity of work-based learning to the sector being examined. Also puzzlement, that this perception was reiterated by senior management within FE (Pointon, 2007).

[5] PGCE – Post Graduate Certificate in Education

[6] Issues of credentialism and meritocracy are found embedded in several of the papers submitted during this programme.

Reflection on research

I had always intended that my research would be participatory. My direct engagement with my research subjects required critical consideration of the relational situations and issues of identity and power that arose from the research. Defining and developing the concept of agency and identity, influenced my decision-making concerning research design and deployment.

Academically, it was necessary to develop a much deeper appreciation of epistemology. Many hours were spent discussing the concept of knowledge, from both a philosophical and pragmatic perspective. For me this concept was synthesised into one telling phrase, 'the justified true belief' of knowledge. Now I know that this position has both proponents and detractors (Gettier, 1963), and there is a philosophical discourse that continues about the nature of knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994; Greco & Sosa, 1999; BonJour, 2002l; Morton, 2002). However, from the point of view of this relative novice researcher, 'a justified true belief' gave me a principle to work with. If I have a justified true belief in the epistemology of my research, I was able to submit my findings satisfied that the knowledge is true as I found it (Copeland, *et al.,* 1993; Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Surely, my very involvement in the research process would have affected my justified true belief of the knowledge produced? After all, if I was to follow the academic process correctly, in a way that motivates critical questioning and making connections between the research and the outcome, the product will either be validated or discounted (Boud, *et al*., 1994; Hyland, 2008). From my (as objective as possible) perspective, I considered the outcome of the research would be a reflective integration of epistemology and the research design that I had deployed (Jenkins, 1995).

It was my intention to identify a methodological paradigm and a research method that would support my research aims and objectives. I also wanted to identify and situate my intended participant cohort relating them to both the research and the reasons for my undertaking the research. There was an ever-present and overt recognition of my 'identity'. I had worked for many years in the RF industry; I was a senior manager in FE, and I had a vested interest in both sectors. Most published text on research (Blaxter, *et al*., 2003; Coleman & Briggs, 2005; Cohen, *et al.,* 2007) advises the researcher to make explicit their role, position and situational identities within the investigation. I concur with this recommendation, not least because I recognised the limiting effect my personal beliefs and bias might have had on the outcome of the research. But doesn't this very prior experience and knowledge, that may influence the research, situate my credibility to undertake the research (Reason & Heron, 1986; Lee, *et al.,* 2000, cited by, Garrick & Rhodes, 2000). As Stake (1995) stated: *'One of the principle qualifications of qualitative research is experience' (ibid,* p. 49), and I identified myself as a qualitative researcher. I needed to be part of the process of research, not isolated in a laboratory where 'human' data becomes mere statistics.

I do understand the discipline of quantitative research and also recognise that for some, quantitative research will have a validity that qualitative methodologies do not. However, there is I believe, a 'coldness' and impersonality to quantitative studies in a social science setting where people are reduced to empirical data, becoming just numbers. I believed researching 'people' requires a passion and the ability of the researcher to empathise with their research participants. During one of my tutorials, my supervisor described me as a 'prophet' spreading the message, and I can relate to this, it is this subjectivity of the human experience that made my research valid (for me at least). As

Morrison (cited by Coleman & Briggs, 2005) suggests: *'The starting point for interpretive researchers within education should be a distinct set of principles regarding what it means to conduct educational research with people (ibid*, p.18*).* As I stated in an earlier submission (Pointon, 2010, p. 50), this perspective would seem to situate interpretative researchers as part of the research topic rather than separate from it. As a qualitative researcher, I needed to stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shaped my inquiry (Salzberger-Wittenberg, *et al.,* 1983).

Conclusions

The terms reflection and reflective thought have been variously associated with experiences that involve discrepancies, dissatisfactions, exercising discernment and making judgements, problem-solving, questioning, logical reasoning and uncertainties (Dewey, 1933; Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1990) in relation to practitioners who *'construct their own meanings within a community of professional discourse'* (Boud, 1999, p.123). Boud, *et al.* (1994) capture how reflection and learning might be linked through defining reflection as:

> *'an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning. The capacity to reflect is developed to different stages in different people, and it may be this ability, which characterises those who learn effectively from experience (ibid,* p.19)

This implies that to become an informed, purposeful and thoughtful practitioner; it is important to question your actions, background experiences consistently and reconsider personal attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, theories, understandings and

values in the light of experience (Malfroy & Yates, 2003). As suggested by Carr & Kemmiss (1983), this allows for a new epistemology of practice, a way of thinking about the creation and dissemination of knowledge.

My doctoral journey had allowed me an opportunity to engage in contextually focused research activity ensuring that I became progressively more effective in accurately assessing a situation, selecting an appropriate course of action, implementing the plan of action and evaluating the outcome to inform future planning. This was, I suggest, an experience which should lay the ground for professional growth and enquiry. It also allowed a gradual change of epistemological perception concerning the position of contextual knowing (Baxter-Magolda, 1999), reflective reasoning (King & Kitchener, 2002) and critical thinking (Moon, 2004). In short, reflection gave me a mechanism that allowed me to continue with my research even when long-held beliefs and perceptions were called into question by the progress, product and outcomes of my research.