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Research mobilities in primary literacy education : Interrogating how teachers encounter research in an age of evidence-based teaching

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Routledge Research in Literacy

RESEARCH MOBILITIES IN PRIMARY LITERACY EDUCATION

INTERROGATING HOW TEACHERS ENCOUNTER RESEARCH IN AN AGE OF EVIDENCE-BASED TEACHING

Cathy Burnett, Gill Adams, Julia Gillen, Terrie Lynn Thompson, Anna Cermakova, David Ben Shannon and Parinita Shetty

Research Mobilities in Primary Literacy Education

This book delves into the intriguing question of why certain types of literacy research gain more traction than others in educational settings.

It draws upon findings from Research Mobilities in Primary Literacy Education, an innovative and interdisciplinary study conducted in England and supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [ES/W000571/1]. The study investigated the types of literacy research that reach teachers, the ways in which human and non-human actors mobilise research and the transformation of research as it circulates. The book argues that, for teachers to foster genuinely inclusive literacy classrooms, they need to be equipped to draw on understandings associated with a variety of theoretical perspectives and research traditions. It further explores the dynamics of research dissemination and the factors that influence the uptake and application of research findings in educational contexts. This work is an original and groundbreaking contribution to debates about the scope and focus of literacy education, the role of evidence-based teaching and approaches to professional learning.

This book is of vital interest to scholars, researchers and students with interests in Literacy Education, Professional Development and the Ethics of Research. It challenges conventional wisdom, provokes thoughtful discussion and inspires readers to rethink the role and value of research in shaping literacy education that is inclusive, effective and meaningful.

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Preface

Research Mobilities in Primary Literacy Education was a research project conducted between January 2022 and March 2024 by Cathy Burnett, Gill Adams, Julia Gillen, Terrie Lynn Thompson, Anna Cermakova, David Ben Shannon, Parinita Shetty and Petra Vackova. It was a complex multi-stranded project which aimed to break new ground in the investigation of research mobilisation, drawing on sociomaterial theory and multistranded methodologies.

The idea for the project started with a hunch that the range of literacy research circulating in educational contexts in England did not reflect the vast range of research that we knew to be of potential interest and value to primary teachers. We suspected that a range of factors were at play linked to commercial pressures, the policy context and a dynamic communications landscape. Much of what we found through our project suggested this hunch was correct. But we also found much that complicated simplistic generalisations about teachers and the mobilisation of literacy research.

As a team, we brought together: a diversity of expertise and experience derived from working with methodologies associated with different disciplinary traditions; links to literacy research communities, professional and educational contexts in different jurisdictions within and beyond primary schools; and experience in creative design, public engagement and communications. In Chapter 2, we explore some of the ways in which research in the tradition of New Literacy Studies is relevant to literacy education. This work has been highly influential in our own thinking about literacies within and beyond formal education environments but we have welcomed opportunities to collaborate with those working in other traditions in our wider professional work in the field of literacy education. These experiences have provided rich opportunities to see the benefits of working expansively across research paradigms in ways that are truly interdisciplinary.

We anticipate that those who read this book will bring a diversity of expertise and experience, too. We hope our book will be of interest to scholars from different disciplines, including those interested in the transdisciplinary

fields of mobilities, literacy and education. We also hope our book will be read by policymakers, educational leaders, research mediators and research organisations and we have tried to make it readable to those with different interests, concerns and expertise. In doing so, we have covered a lot of ground to connect up experience, insight and ways of knowing that may be all too familiar to some readers but completely new to others. Inevitably there is not space to do full justice to the rich and expansive literatures associated with all the themes we address. We have tried to include enough signposts for readers to follow where they encounter something they are enticed or intrigued by.

As will quickly become clear, the *Research Mobilities* project was highly complex. In this book, we have drawn on findings from multiple methods to make an argument about relationships between literacy, research and teaching. While our project was a collaborative effort, we note that:

Chapters 6 and 7 feature the work of Gill, Parinita and Cathy as well as Anna who supported the analysis of teachers' 'mentions', Petra Vackova (who joined the Research Mobilities team from January to August 2023) and Gillian Bartle.

Chapter 8 features the work of Julia and Anna.

Chapter 9 features the work of Terrie Lynn, Anna, David, Petra and Gillian.

We hope that this book, our first book from the *Research Mobilities* project, will be of interest to anyone who is interested in how research reaches teachers or in relationships between research, teaching and literacy. It is important to say, however, that it represents just one pathway through our data. Other books and articles will expand on our theories and methodologies and provide more detailed explorations of our findings, drilling into the data on teachers' experiences, newspaper and Twitter, for example, and expanding on the full range of cases referred to in Chapter 5. There is also much more to be done in exploring the significance of our work on research mobilities to topics other than literacy and to fields beyond education.

We very much hope that the chapters of this book find their way to some of those we encountered through our project: into the offices of school leaders, consultancies, policymakers, Think Tanks and funding bodies as well as researchers and research organisations. Readers may be interested to hear that our findings – like many of those encountered by teachers who participated in our project – are summarised in other formats too. These include a resource for teachers, a methodological resource, an animation and briefing papers for teachers, school leaders, consultants, teacher educators, policymakers, researchers and research organisations. All can be accessed via https://research.shu.ac.uk/rmple. We hope these materials will be used as the starting point for discussion, reflection and debate.

We anticipate that readers will skip between chapters or perhaps just dip in to those most relevant to their interests. Readers in England, for example, may find little that is new in Chapter 3's exploration of policy while readers interested in methodology may see Chapter 5 as the heart of this book. Readers new to the vast field of literacy research may find Chapter 2 useful in contextualising what follows. Chapter 4 introduces our sociomaterial take on 'mobilities' which is developed throughout and which culminates in an exploration of some of the things that mobilities *do* (see Chapter 10). Chapters 6 to 9 offer different manifestations of mobilities generated through diverse methodological approaches.

A recurring theme of this book is that research can speak to education in different ways. It is valuable not just in illuminating pedagogical approaches but in providing insights and critique and in prompting us to interrogate the taken-for-granted and imagine how things might be otherwise. This book is offered as a contribution to debates about what literacy, research and teaching become in the current climate and about what literacy, research and teaching could be. Chapter 11 is aimed at all those concerned with what could usefully be *done* in response to the insights we generate. We imagine how relationships between teaching, research and literacy might be otherwise and explore some ways in which this might be achieved.

Cathy Burnett, Gill Adams, Julia Gillen, Terrie Lynn Thompson,
Anna Cermakova, David Ben Shannon, Parinita Shetty
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This book stems from the *Research Mobilities in Primary Literacy Education* project [ES/W000571/1]. The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), their reviewers and panel members is gratefully acknowledged. Our research study required us to reach into a wide range of contexts and to engage with individuals from across the educational landscape. We are indebted to all of those who gave so generously of their time and thoughts in helping us to understand the processes, practices and effects of research mobilities in primary literacy education. These include members of our teacher advisory panel and stakeholder group, project advisors and research participants as well as colleagues and other experts who have supported us with specific tasks or provided feedback on draft chapters for this book and other project outputs. All of them have played a role in inspiring, guiding and challenging us as we have grappled to make sense of research mobilities and their implications for teaching, research and literacy. In addition to anonymous participants, they include:

Chris Bailey, Gillian Bartle, Mark Barton, Mark Boylan, Chris Brown, Ian Chesters, Naomi Cooper, Teresa Cremin, Karen Daniels, Cara Doxey, Rob Drane, Fiona Evans, Helen Fairlie, Martin Galway, Layla Gharib, Navan Govender, Sinéad Harmey, Jon Harrison, Laura Heads, Marie Helks, Eleanor Hotham, Louise Johns-Shepherd, Robert Long, Fiona Maine, Roger McDonald, Sarah McGeown, Loic Menzies, Jemma Monkhouse, Gemma Moss, Lisa-Maria Muller, Debra Myhill, Kevin Palmer, Emily Perry, John Potter, David Reedy, Farrah Serroukh, Jonathan Sharples, Laurel Smith, Lo Tierney, Ross Young, Kate Wallace, Lynsey Wigfull.

We are particularly grateful to all the teachers who have participated in this project. Not only did they provide us with the insights that are at the heart of this book but did so during the years immediately following the worst phases of the COVID-19 pandemic at a time when schools and teachers were under considerable pressure to 'catch up' while struggling with illness and absence. We cannot name many of those teachers for ethical reasons but do give extra special thanks to Simon Collis, Emily Edwards,

Daisy Johnson, Vikki Varley and Ross Watson who worked with us to develop Research Conversations, resources to support teachers' discussions about research (see https://research.shu.ac.uk/researchconversations/).

We have been buoyed throughout our work by national and international interest. We have been fortunate to present at several national and international conferences and seminars and as invited speakers. Some of these included:

- Designing new approaches to investigating primary literacy education research mobilities in England, co-sponsored by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research in Curriculum as Social Practice, Western University, and the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada, May 2021.
- Institute of the Czech National Corpus, Charles University Prague, January 2022.
- Literacy Research Association Conference, Phoenix, AZ, November–December 2022.
- Sheffield Literacies and Language Conference: Forging Hopeful Literacies, University of Sheffield, June 2023.
- 23rd European Conference on Literacy/7th Panhellenic Literacy Conference. Crete, June 2024.

We have also benefited from comments from colleagues at internal events in our universities.

We are also grateful to Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Stirling and Lancaster University for providing support for our team residential meetings. Thanks too to Uta Papen and Julia Gillen as series editors, Alice Salt, Kirsty Hardwick, Stuti Das, Jayapriya Thillaikkarasu and the rest of the team at Routledge for their excellent support.

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Note that parts of Chapters 2 and 11 draw on:

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1 Why think about research mobilities in literacy education?

Introduction

This is a book about how literacy research moves to, among and around teachers, the kinds of literacy research that teachers encounter and the kinds that pass them by. It is a book that starts from the premise that literacy research can provide a powerful basis for far-reaching dialogue about what matters in literacy education and how this might be achieved and argues that it is worth engaging with a diverse range of research emanating from diverse perspectives and methodologies. This may include but is not restricted to research that produces the kinds of evidence that are often associated with 'evidence-based teaching'.

The field of literacy research is dynamic and expansive and draws on multiple disciplines, including language and literature, psychology, neuroscience, media studies, applied linguistics, semiotics, cultural and literacy studies. It reflects diverse educational concerns and interests and derives from differing assumptions about literacy, literacy learning and the purposes of literacy education. For example, it includes research which examines cognitive processes involved in reading as well as research exploring social and cultural dimensions of literacy. It is conducted in diverse places and spaces by a variety of individuals, organisations and partnerships. It is administered by universities, charities, schools and other bodies, by academics, teachers and consultants and many others, often working in combination. It includes research focused on the writing of words on paper and research examining the complex processes and practices associated with composing multimodal texts on screen. Literacy research also aligns with diverse educational aims. Some of these relate to proficiency in reading and writing but many aim beyond this, including critical orientations to texts and the worlds they sustain and a focus on creativity, the development of voice and participation in society. Literacy research is often underpinned by a commitment to social justice, whether this manifests in addressing the disadvantage baked into literacy provision within educational systems, ensuring learners are well equipped for future

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employment, acknowledging diversity in languages and literacies or indeed all of these. Literacy research therefore has a vast amount to offer educational practice in ensuring that literacy education is relevant, enabling, empowering and energising for all. Against this exciting world of possibilities, the research that has made an appearance in policy and practice in recent decades in England connects with relatively few topics, derives from relatively few perspectives and is limited in methodologies and methods.

There are several reasons why this may be the case. Teachers and schools have limited time to engage with research and some research findings are inaccessible, feel irrelevant to educators or are out of step with current policy mandates. But such reasons do not completely explain why such a limited range of research appears to gain influence. University research centres devoted to literacy can be found in many jurisdictions.[1] There are at least 25 peer-reviewed journals[2] publishing work on literacy and related fields such as reading, writing and language. Literacy is a priority for many schools and there are many national and international associations dedicated to promoting research-informed literacy education.[3] Of course, some researchers and universities are better than others at disseminating their work or promoting public engagement and research varies in quality and relevance. But to allow such a diversity of perspectives to slip from view is to neglect rich insights with the potential to enrich and radically transform literacy education for the benefit of children's present and future lives. It was a concern about this imbalance between research production and research use that led us to focus on the phenomenon we explore in this book, a phenomenon we refer to as *research mobilities*.

In doing so, we draw on research conducted through an interdisciplinary research project – *Research Mobilities in Primary Literacy Education*, which we refer to from this point on as 'the *Research Mobilities* project'. This was a collaboration between Sheffield Hallam University, Lancaster University and the University of Stirling. It was conducted between January 2022 and March 2024, supported by the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council [*ES/W000571/1*].

Through this work, we embarked on multiple strands of activity. We spoke to teachers and asked them to document and visualise their experiences of engaging with literacy research. We examined appearances of literacy research in newspapers and on Twitter. And we carried out detailed tracings of literacy research and research-related activity to help us understand how individuals, organisations, policies, texts and technologies combine to propel research to teachers or stall it in its tracks. Through all of this, we explored why and how it is that some kinds of literacy research gain traction while others do not. Along the way, we gained fascinating insights into how the take-up of literacy research is inflected by individual, commercial, political and ideological concerns and mediated by a complex, dynamic

communicative environment. All of this shaped the understanding of research mobilities that we share in the chapters that follow.

In this chapter, we set the scene for our exploration of the mobilisation of literacy research in primary education. We begin by arguing for a focus on research mobilities 'in the wild', taking account of how research mobilities course through the everyday lives and practices of teachers. We argue that there is a need to examine research mobilisation as enacted through social material practices. Next we outline recent debates around the role of 'evidence' in education and how these have contoured the educational landscape. In the light of these discussions, we introduce three inter-related areas of concern that are at the heart of this book and which, we argue, are pressing areas to address at a time when there is considerable focus on relationships between 'evidence' and teaching. These relate to: (1) engaging with diversity in literacy research; (2) working with expansive notions of research and the contribution of research to education; and (3) promoting connections between research and teaching that are professionally empowering for teachers.

Examining research mobilities 'in the wild'

As stated above, our interest in this book is in how literacy research moves to, among and around teachers *in the wild*. In explaining what we mean by this, we start by acknowledging the considerable body of work that has explored research mobilisation in schools and other areas of professional practice. This has generated valuable insights into teachers' perspectives on research, schools' applications of 'evidence-informed teaching' (Coldwell et al., 2017; Maxwell et al., 2022) and rubrics for research mobilisation (e.g. British Academy, 2018; Rickinson et al., 2024). Such work has much to offer researchers and research organisations in planning research dissemination with a view to impacting on educational policy and practice (see Chapter 4 for more on this). In our project, we too were interested in how research reaches teachers through planned dissemination by policymakers, research organisations and researchers. But we were *also* interested in other ways in which teachers encounter research. This might happen for example through engagements with social media, online newspapers, subject associations, consultants or Masters courses, school-led initiatives, internet searches or conversations with friends or colleagues. Such encounters are not always framed by national, local or school imperatives and can be driven by a wide variety of motivations. They may touch upon a vast array of sources of information representing very different standpoints. Much of this may be unplanned and serendipitous. Given all of this, if we were to understand which kinds of literacy research were gaining traction with teachers and schools, we needed to look beyond attempts to connect teachers with

research led by policymakers, research organisations or researchers. We needed to recognise that research findings move in many different ways. (Indeed, this is one reason for our use of the plural mobilit*ies* – more on this later.) We needed to take an interest not just in intentional research mobilisations but in what happens *in practice*. Recognising the complex and rather messy manifestations of research in practice, we refer to research mobilities 'in the wild'.

The *Research Mobilities* project focused on primary education in England where, as we explore in Chapter 3, successive policy developments over the last two decades have had implications for research mobilities in literacy education. In England, primary schooling applies to children aged 5–11. This is widely regarded as a key phase for literacy learning and, as we shall go on to explore, has been targeted by a great deal of work by government and other agencies in energetic attempts to shape literacy education. While policies and practices differ in other jurisdictions, England provides rich ground for examining how political, commercial, institutional and ideological factors play through research mobilities. As such, this project's insights are not only relevant to literacy educators, leaders, policymakers and researchers in England but likely to be of interest to those elsewhere and to those working in other disciplines, age phases and areas of education, too.

At this point, it is worth recognising that research mobilisation may well feel rather abstract, administrative and divorced from the everyday life of teachers and schools. However, one of the key ideas we want to advance in this book is that research mobilities are very far from abstract. They are rooted in interconnected social material practices linked to the dissemination, communication and mediation of research as well as to access and engagement. Such practices are inflected by social and material factors and have social and material effects. In illustrating this point, we reflect on the process of locating research pre-internet, drawing on Cathy's memories of searching for academic literature as a primary teacher enrolled in a part-time Masters in Education course in the early 1990s.

The everyday practice of locating research – research mobilities as social material practices

Before personal computing and the internet became commonplace in everyday life, the process of finding research typically involved travelling to university libraries. There you could search for your topic (literacy, writing or whatever) in hardbound alphabetically ordered indices such as the British Education Index. Against each topic was listed a series of references to pertinent journal articles which had to be copied down by hand – this was before the age of mobile devices.

Hard copies of journals could be found on shelves, sometimes in a completely different part of the library. These might be found as individual issues housed in boxes or lever arch files that had to be lifted down and rifled through. Or issues might be bound together in volumes. In any case, you had to flick through pages to find your article, sometimes waylaid by others that caught your eye. Some sources were stored on microfiche (thin photographic film) in miniscule form that was accessed using a microfiche reader, rapidly scrolling through multiple entries onscreen and then zooming in to read those of interest. Sometimes this took a while as the library did not have many microfiche readers and so you had to queue. Whatever the format, hard copies of journal articles had to be read in the library. If you wanted to take them away, you had to photocopy them, which meant queuing again (and paying) for the photocopier.

This lengthy process of locating and reading academic sources involved spending considerable time in university libraries and required insider knowledge about how this process worked and where to find the indices, volumes, devices, right bookshelves and so on. A session in the library had to be planned for. You needed notetaking equipment such as punched A4 paper that could be stored in ring binders and possibly a drink or snack to be consumed quietly and surreptitiously in contravention of 'no eating or drinking' notices. Given that so much reading had to happen in situ, libraries were policed as quiet places for individual study, different from today's learning centres with their pods and ovoid tables designed for discussion and collaboration.

There were advantages, however. There was a straightforward rigour to a literature search for example. You simply had to identify and read everything listed for your topic in the indices you consulted. And the location of research sources within a university library conferred credibility, an implicit (if not necessarily correct) assumption that the work had undergone a process of appraisal, most typically through anonymous peer review or at the very least approval by a publisher using well-established criteria (we assumed) for what constitutes quality. Of course through providing what felt like a definitive set of sources, the library, indices and so on limited the perspectives you could access. But if you were familiar with the routines this could feel reassuring. You were not plagued by the possibilities of the internet age, of the world at your fingertips, by the nagging thought that so much more is out there if only you could stumble on the correct search term, database or social media exchange. Nowadays search engines and digitised library catalogues and databases (the indices of old) guide interested parties to vast numbers of articles and other sources that can be read online anywhere anytime. Literature searches can be conducted from the comfort of your own home or started in the library and continued elsewhere. David, for example, recalls continuing a search started at a desk while standing in the

queue for a COVID-19 vaccine: the anxiety of being caught with a surreptitious snack replaced by the anxiety of missing some key publication.

These brief reflections illustrate the significance of more-than-human actors to research mobilities – technologies, objects, texts, routines, processes and regulations. They exemplify how social and material dimensions of research access are mutually entwined and how social material practices reflect and work to uphold certain assumptions about who accesses research and who decides which research counts. They also illustrate how mundane practices of research mobilisation are inextricable from assumptions about the legitimacy and credibility of sources of knowledge. The design and workings of libraries have always reflected societal developments and relationships between knowledge and power, sustaining westernised academic practices at the expense of other world views – see Gyure's (2008) history of US library architecture, for example. Libraries helped to position universities as key players not just in knowledge production but as mediators of research. Even now only those with a library card or special permission can gain access to library buildings and to their books, articles, newspapers, reports, archives and so on.

In recent years, however, the location and ownership of research has started to shift. Nowadays many articles are available online through search engines like Google Scholar and repositories held by universities and others or social networking sites like ResearchGate and Academia.edu. Many organisations now present research in ways designed to be accessible to a lay readership or publish research syntheses or summaries (e.g. Mesh guides https://www.new.meshguides.org/). And while at the time of writing (March 2024), much journal content still rests behind paywalls, the open-access movement has accelerated through the work of cOAlition S (https://www.coalition-s.org/) and increasing numbers of peer-reviewed research articles and monographs are freely available to all. This change has been demanded by funding bodies that require open-access publication as a condition of funding and require grant-holders to demonstrate impact from research (as was the case with the *Research Mobilities* project). Open access is enabled by rapid changes in digitisation meaning that research texts can be widely distributed and accessed from almost anywhere.

Digitisation has also made it much easier for those outside universities to share their work online without intermediary gatekeepers and a wide range of non-profit and commercial organisations publish and disseminate research online. The university library's status as a central hub for information has therefore diminished as search engines and social media provide more immediate and easily available access to information sources. For those with digital devices at their fingertips and unlimited internet connectivity, millions of articles can be accessed with a few clicks through what Suchman (2007, p. xii) refers to as '…the new agencies and accountabilities effected through reconfigured relations of human and machine.'

While the role of universities in producing and disseminating research may have been diluted, this does not mean that research mobilisation is more equitable. Rather, as we go on to explore, power imbalances in the circulation of knowledge play out in new ways. Inequities persist in relation to: which research is seen as legitimate and/or credible; whose research gets an airing; and who is entitled to decide which research counts. Digital technologies play a key role here – as online platforms frame research in certain ways, for instance, as algorithms push out some sources over others and as generative AI becomes increasingly sophisticated and ubiquitous in synthesising research findings from multiple sources (Stachokas, 2014; Marcum & Schonfeld, 2023). While research can be accessed through more channels than ever before, these processes remain inflected by mutually entangled social and material factors which have social and material effects. It is for this reason that we approached research mobilities with a *sociomaterial sensitivity*. We will expand on this stance in Chapter 4. For now, we simply want to assert that understanding research mobilities as entwined social and material practices is critical to understanding the possibilities and barriers to the mobilisation of research in education and hence for education as an inclusive, creative, empowering and humane process. This matters, we argue, at a time when so much emphasis is placed on advancing educational decision-making that is 'evidence-based'.

The age of evidence-based teaching

> I think there is a huge prize waiting to be claimed by teachers. By collecting better evidence about what works best, and establishing a culture where this evidence is used as a matter of routine, we can improve outcomes for children, and increase professional independence.
>
> (Goldacre, 2013, p. 4)

So begins an influential white paper published by the UK government in 2013 – *Building Evidence in Education*. The white paper was authored by Ben Goldacre, a medical doctor and academic perhaps best known previously for his exposes of 'Bad Science' which appeared in a regular column in *The Guardian* newspaper as well as a similarly titled website and book (Goldacre, 2008; https://www.badscience.net/). Drawing on his experience of evidence in the sphere of medicine, Goldacre makes a powerful argument for greater use of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) as the 'gold standard' of research in education in order to determine 'what works best' and to underpin teaching as an 'evidence based profession' (p. 15). The paper expanded on the benefits and limitations of RCTs and argued for supporting teachers to be critical consumers of research. Its lasting influence

in England was in galvanising a shift towards a certain brand of 'evidence-based teaching' which continues apace to this day and which parallels that in other jurisdictions.[4] This had been gathering momentum since the late 1990s through calls for educational research to be more directly applicable to educational policy and practice (Gorard, See, & Siddiqui, 2020; Hargreaves, 1996; Parkhurst, 2017). In 2013, a series of 'What Works Centres' were established to use 'evidence to improve the design and delivery of public services' (Evaluation Task Force, 2013). In Chapter 3, we expand on how evidence-based teaching has played out in England. For now, we untangle some ambiguities in how 'evidence' is understood.

First of all, debates concern the *kinds* of evidence that should legitimately be used within education. There has been considerable critique, for example, of the use of RCTs linked to a range of issues including: internal and external validity (Cartwright, 2019; Phillips, 2019); ethical concerns (Oakley, 2006); the limitations of quantification in investigating aspects of educational experience (Perry & Morris, 2023); and concerns about unintended effects (Burnett & Coldwell, 2021). Others have argued more generally that the evidence discourse is working to construct understandings about education in problematic ways restricting opportunities to think expansively, holistically or critically about practice and the aims and purposes of education (Biesta, 2010, 2016).

Debates are underpinned by differing beliefs about *how* evidence and education should interface – as captured in the distinction between 'evidence-based' and 'evidence-informed' approaches (Nelson & Campbell, 2017). Both 'evidence-based' and 'evidence-informed' are used to qualify 'education' broadly and more specifically, 'teaching', the 'profession', 'practice' and 'policy' (see e.g. Brown & Greany, 2018; Perry & Morris, 2023; Philpott & Poultney, 2018; Sharples, 2013). While sometimes used interchangeably, these distinctions are important as each implies a different role for evidence and – as such – a different set of factors in deciding which evidence to draw upon.

Of particular interest to us is how these debates position teachers. There has, for example, been considerable critique of of 'evidence-based' interventions which appear to position teachers as instrumental deliverers of others' recommendations and renders the underpinning research 'invisible' (Cain & Allan, 2017). As Priestley et al. (2016) explore, this has implications for teacher professional agency as following 'best evidence' may negate the value of professional knowledge. In addressing such concerns, many – including Goldacre (2013) – have argued for 'evidence-*informed*' approaches which are more dialogic in nature, with evidence weighed and interpreted in the light of teachers' professional experience and local context (Cain, 2017).

A further complication is that 'evidence' in education is commonly used not just to refer to research evidence but to evidence in the form of school,

pupil or system-wide data, such as attainment or performance data (LaPointe-McEwan, DeLuca, & Klinger, 2017). Putting research evidence into dialogue with attainment data has the potential to be productive as research may illuminate reasons for trends or guide pedagogical responses (Brown, Schildkamp, & Hubers, 2017). However, when introduced within high-stakes accountability systems, as in England, data-driven systems have led to a narrowing of educational vision. As sophisticated digitised systems for data aggregation and analysis have become embedded within educational systems, pupil data (primarily attainment data) have become key indicators of teacher and school performance. This has led to what has been termed the 'datafication' of education, whereby data become both the driver and the target of educational effort and innovation, distorting educational provision with negative effects for teachers and pupils (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). The use of 'evidence' to refer to both research and attainment data muddies the water.

While 'evidence' has become prominent in the everyday discourse of educational policymakers and practitioners in England, the meanings of evidence – and assumptions about how it is best used – differ considerably. These debates about the nature and use of evidence are pertinent to thinking about how research moves to and among teachers. The concern which is perhaps most relevant to this book however is that 'evidence' can be associated with a limited view of what research contributes to education and hence the range of research that might be deemed relevant.

In this book, and in the *Research Mobilities* project, it is no accident that we use the term 'research' rather than 'evidence'. We use 'research' to refer to a broad and diverse range of work, including but not exclusively research producing the kinds of findings that might be designated as 'evidence' by those committed to 'evidence-informed education'. In the remainder of this chapter, we expand on our argument for engaging expansively with *research* by introducing the three inter-related areas of concern that underpinned our project and which are at the heart of this book: (1) engaging with a diversity of literacy research; (2) working with expansive notions of research and its contribution to education; (3) promoting connections between research and teaching that are engaging and professionally empowering for teachers.

Engaging with a diversity of literacy research

While we hope readers will find our work on research mobilities relevant across the field of education and beyond, in this book, we focus specifically on relationships between research mobilities and *literacy*. In Chapter 2, we explore some ways of defining literacy, consider possible relationships between literacy, research and education and outline a range of literacy

research that is relevant to literacy education. For now, we simply make the point that defining literacy is not straightforward and neither are decisions about the range and scope of literacy education. It all depends on what we recognise as literacy; what we think literacy is; and the kinds of readers, writers and communicators we want children to become. To echo Biesta (2007), we cannot begin to think about 'what works' in literacy education until we have decided what we want literacy education to work *for*. Debates about the use of evidence in education often focus on outcomes specified within current curriculum documentation. Engaging with a diversity of literacy research can feed wider debates about the nature of literacy and the aims and purpose of literacy education. In the *Research Mobilities* project, we were therefore interested in the depth and breadth of literacy research and with research generated through diverse qualitive and quantitative methodologies. We were interested in different kinds of relationships between literacy research and education: with literacy education that was not just research-based or research-informed but research-engaged, research-inspired and research-provoked. As our project progressed, we saw how research and evidence were sometimes used synonymously but sometimes placed in opposition, gnawing away at one another. For now, it is worth explaining how we understood 'research' in our project.

Working with expansive notions of research

'Research', like 'evidence', is used and understood in a multiplicity of ways, not just by educationalists but by researchers too, and definitions of research are contested. During our project, we discussed definitions of research with a group of literacy researchers[5] who work in a wide range of paradigms. Notes from this meeting hint at just some ways of describing research:

- research can describe, characterise, explain, understand, discover or move;
- it may be described as systematic, robust or intentional;
- it is underpinned by principles that shape its intentions and ethics;
- it is positioned in different ways;
- it is inclusive of action research, participatory research and research conducted in different contexts by individuals with different experiences.

One of the difficulties associated with defining literacy research is that literacy education can connect with research from many different disciplinary areas, including sociology, psychology, cognitive science, media and literary studies, literacy studies and applied linguistics. In this project, we adopted an expansive view of research to accommodate research from varied disciplines that may be relevant to literacy education, reflecting diverse methodologies and perspectives.

It is worth noting that when we planned the *Research Mobilities* project, we were initially interested only in research that was conducted by academics working in universities. This was not because we believed universities *should* be the only originators of research, indeed we have previously argued in various forums for democratising sources of knowledge through increasing the status of teachers' enquiry (Burnett & Merchant, 2021), cultivating genuinely public engagements with research (Shetty, 2022), and challenging hegemonic westernised conceptualisations of knowledge (Shannon, 2022). However, given our awareness of the huge range of academic research available, we felt that academic research would provide us with a focus for exploring differential mobilities.

As the project progressed, however, our stance changed. It became clear that a very small proportion of the research that teachers encountered – or which featured in the news media or social media debates – came directly from universities. Perhaps this was to be expected given the shifts described earlier. 'Research' as it appeared to teachers and in wider public discourse was generated by a wide range of individuals and institutions – including charities, consultants, schools and teachers themselves, many of which were accessed through social media. And it rarely appeared as accounts of research. More often research findings were embedded in policy, integrated within research syntheses or threaded through training events, resources, interventions and curriculum frameworks.

This was interesting to us in many ways, not least because it raised questions about how judgements about research credibility and quality were made. We realised that, in investigating the different kinds of research that were moving to and among teachers, we needed not just to focus on different research topics and methodologies as originally planned, but different *sources* of research – teachers themselves as well as schools, government agencies, charities, companies and university-based researchers. We therefore quickly expanded our initial remit to consider research and enquiry conducted by organisations and professionals as well as academics. It is worth noting that, as we go on to explore, we came across many examples of guidance, inspiration and direction from individuals and organisations that did not seem to be rooted in research at all but which were referred to by individuals or organisations *as if* they were research, either explicitly or implicitly. We expand and exemplify this point later. For now, we simply make the point that research is a rather slippery term and that understanding what is seen as research (and by who) is all part of understanding research mobilities.

Connections between research and teaching

There is a growing literature around research use by teachers. Such work has repeatedly found that teachers say that they struggle to engage with research

and that relatively few teachers engage with research at all. Commonly cited reasons for this include: perceived irrelevance of academic research, inaccessibility, formatting that is not 'teacher friendly' and a straightforward lack of time (Coldwell et al., 2017; Nelson & Campbell, 2017; Walker et al., 2019). Indeed, in response to one of our invitations for teachers to participate in our study and tell us about their encounters with research, we received an emphatic response via Twitter – 'Teachers don't have time to engage with research!'

In response to such concerns, considerable efforts have been devoted to making research accessible to teachers and to promoting critical engagements with research. These range from platforms dedicated to synthesising and communicating research findings and their implications to teachers, such as Mesh Guides (https://www.new.meshguides.org/), to projects designed to cultivate research engagement in schools, such as Project Q in Australia (Rickinson et al., 2024). Regardless of whether teachers seek out research findings or engage in research themselves, their professional lives are likely to be inflected by research in one way or another. Research may be embedded within policies, training materials, resources, programmes, schemes of work or other designed interventions. More structured opportunities include:

1 **Research-engaged teaching**: opportunities to engage with others' research to inspire, inform or support reflection on teaching. The 'others' might include academics in universities, charitable bodies such as National Literacy Trust, independent organisations, commercial entities or consultants. Teachers may encounter research through individual enquiry (see below), through school-based learning sets or professional networks.
2 **Teacher participation in research**: teachers may participate in others' research, such as RCTs or collaborate with researchers in research/practice partnerships (McGeown et al., 2023) or close-to-practice research (Wyse et al., 2021).
3 **Teacher-led research**: research conducted by teachers themselves through practitioner enquiry or action research (e.g. Sachs, 2003; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This might be done by individuals (e.g. as part of Masters course), by groups within or between schools, e.g. professional learning communities (Brown & Flood, 2019), or may involve researcher/teacher collaborations initiated by teachers (Wright, Carvalho, & Fejzo, 2022).

At first reading, each of these reflects different assumptions about relationships between research and professional empowerment, with teacher-led research associated with a high degree of empowerment and embedded

research much less so. However, in practice, these distinctions are less clear as all may involve different levels of teacher agency and/or autonomy. While practitioner inquiry and professional learning communities may nurture teacher criticality, autonomy and activism (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Sachs, 2003), they can also be tagged to national priorities. Programmes or schemes are likely to involve a considerable amount of adaptation in practice. And teacher participation in research initiated by others may involve contributions that range from collecting data for analysis by external agencies to more democratic approaches to co-production (Farrell et al., 2021; McGeown et al., 2023). What feels like teacher-led to one teacher may feel imposed to another. Moreover, the categories interweave as teacher-led research involves reference to academic research, for example, or as an individual interest-led project leads to a school-based initiative. It is also worth noting that structured opportunities are not the only means by which teachers connect with research. In addition to opportunities to work with colleagues in school, many teachers connect with teachers across local and national boundaries through interest groups and communities mediated by professional associations and social media (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Guest, 2018; Macia & Garcia, 2016).

Opinion is divided as to which kinds of opportunities are more desirable, reflecting different ideas about teaching. There is however a considerable body of work which suggests that, while teacher engagements with research vary in nature, they are more likely to be valuable when teachers engage at a conceptual level than at an instrumental level (Cain et al., 2019; Weiss, 1979). While an 'instrumental' model of research assumes that 'teacher-proof' recommendations from research can be directly imported to practice, engaging with research at a conceptual level is valued for its effects on thinking, attitudes and perceptions (Cain & Allan, 2017). Conceptual use of research is more transformational in nature as it involves, 'redefining issues, sensitising and altering perceptions' (Nisbet & Broadfoot, 1980, p. 22). As Cain et al. (2019) explore,

> Research can provide a platform for teachers to engage in constructive and critical conversations, with a shared aim of thinking together about matters of educational importance (Earl & Timperley, 2009). It can enable a discourse to be established which allows teachers to explore and discuss key educational concepts in ways which articulate with professionalism rather than only policy (Schuck et al., 2018). Unlike public educational policy, which also aims to shape schools' actions in particular ways, educational research can be used to provide alternative perspectives and open up debate: it can be critiqued or even rejected.
>
> (Cain et al., 2019, p. 1082)

Conceptual uses of research, we suggest, pave the way for thinking about how a wide variety of literacy research may be inspiring, invitational and generative for teachers.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have introduced the *Research Mobilities* project. We have begun to explore why it is important to consider research mobilities and the promise of a sociomaterial sensibility. We have interrogated ideas about 'evidence', 'research' and 'literacy' and mapped some ways in which teachers may encounter research. In the chapters that follow we describe how we approached the *Research Mobilities* project and share its findings.

In Chapter 2, we expand on our argument for drawing on a diversity of research in literacy education. In Chapter 3, we outline some key features of the policy context in England, the focus of the *Research Mobilities* project. In Chapter 4, we locate our take on 'mobilities' within the broader body of work on research mobilisation and explain why we approached our project with a sociomaterial sensitivity. Chapter 5 provides details of our multi-stranded methodology which drew on a blend of qualitative approaches, corpus linguistics and sociomaterial tracings. Chapters 6–9 present findings from the various strands, exploring teachers' experiences of research encounters; the range of sources they mentioned when describing these encounters; appearances of literacy research in newspapers and Twitter; and in-depth considerations of how some research mobilises and what happens to it as it does so. In Chapter 10, we reflect on the implications of these findings for what literacy and research become in an age of evidence-based teaching and, in Chapter 11, we explore some possibilities for generating more equitable and empowering encounters with research.

The *Research Mobilities* project travelled rather uncharted territory in connecting a focus on research, literacy and teaching in the context of research mobilisation. In doing so, it drew on research and thinking associated with each of these topics and many others besides. Given the scale and scope of our project we have had to be selective in the perspectives we reference and the debates we discuss. While we attempt to be transparent about the decisions that informed these selections, we must emphasise that the *Research Mobilities* project was just one attempt to connect research, literacy and teaching and that, while this book seeks to summarise key findings from our project, other strands will be explored in future publications. We do however argue that connecting up the disparate themes of research, literacy and teaching is an important endeavour. In our experience, debates around research, literacy and teaching are usually addressed through different communities that convene in different networks, organisations, journals, conferences and conference strands. Resonances between strands are largely

unreported and undebated. While the process of tracing and strengthening connections between insights generated by these disparate communities is undoubtedly challenging, attempting to make such connections provides fruitful directions for potential future research and practice that could be of the utmost importance.

Notes

1 Examples from the United Kingdom include: Lancaster Literacy Research Centre, Centre of Literacy and Social Justice at the Open University, Centre for Research in Language and Literacy at Exeter, International Literacy Centre at University College London, Literacy Lab at University of Edinburgh and Bangor Literacy Lab.
2 *Journal of Research in Reading*, *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Literacy, Journal of Literacy Research*, *Reading and Writing*, *Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy*, *The Reading Teacher, Language Arts*, *Language and Literacy, Literacy Research and Instruction*, *Nordic Journal of Literacy Research, Reading, Writing and Literacy Instruction, Written Language and Literacy, International Journal of Literacies, English in Education*, *Literacy Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy*, *Perspectives on Language and Literacy, Reading Research and Instruction*, *Reading and Writing, Reading and Writing Quarterly*, *Journal of Reading Studies, Scientific Studies of Reading* and *Journal of Writing Research.*
3 For example, *Federation of European Literacy Associations, International Literacy Association, Literacy Association of South Africa, Australian Literacy Educators Association, United Kingdom Literacy Association* and *Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada*.
4 For example, see Institute of Education Sciences What Works Database from the United States – https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/.
5 These were all members of our advisory panel of stakeholders – see Chapter 5.

2 Towards an expansive view of literacy research

Introduction

Research that speaks to literacy education in primary schools can be found in many fields and disciplines including psychology, sociology, philosophy, applied linguistics, neuroscience and literary theory as well as childhood studies, media studies and others. Methodologies include a vast range of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. As explored in Chapter 1, the *Research Mobilities* project was underpinned by the idea that different kinds of literacy research can enliven, inform and inspire literacy education in different ways. In this chapter, we scope the dynamic and evolving field of literacy research and position our own work within that field. We begin by elaborating what we mean by literacy. We develop an expanded view and consider why such a view might be valuable to primary education. We explore how research from different perspectives can combine in useful ways, using reading as a case in point. Following this, we consider different ways in which literacy research can speak to literacy education, signalling eight *orientations* for literacy research. Each of these draws on diverse perspectives, understandings and methodologies and has the potential to speak to teachers and schools in ways that are inspiring, informative and thought-provoking.

Perspectives on the nature of literacy

One of the challenges of navigating the field of literacy is that 'literacy' is understood in different ways. In the National Curriculum for English for primary schools in England (DfE, 2014) at the time of writing – of which we say more in Chapter 3 – the focus is very much on developing *proficiency* in decoding, comprehending, transcribing and composing texts. There is a considerable amount of international research that speaks to proficiency, much of which addresses reading. Some of this derives from cognitive psychology and neuroscience and, as we shall go on to explore, there are contributions from other

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perspectives too. Notably there are also debates about the kinds of reading and writing that children should be proficient *in*. Contemporary life and work involve extensive and often rapid communication with diverse audiences across multiple media. This is just as much the case for young children as it is for adults (Chaudron, Di Gioia & Gemo, 2018; Kumpulainen & Gillen, 2017). Interactions are commonly mediated through text online and onscreen and involve collaborative rather than individual production of texts. This requires proficiency in many areas including information retrieval, critical evaluation, design, redesign, video-editing and coding as well as the ability to navigate multimodality and digital media. All of this is complicated further with the continual emergence of new communicative forms, as we see for instance in the rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in producing and synthesising texts. Reading and writing proficiency therefore includes a much wider range of skills than those associated with decoding and encoding words on a page (Coiro, 2021).

But, as many have argued, proficiency is not the only aspect of literacy that should concern educators (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Literacy is not just important in terms of future employment but for how we engage with others and the world around us (Mills, 2016). Through making, exchanging and using text, we connect with others, explore what we know and feel, make a stand and make things happen (Kress, 2003). This involves creativity, expression, collaboration and participation. Through literacy we are positioned in certain ways, opening out or closing down possibilities for who we can be and what we can do. As such, we may feel empowered or disempowered as our ways with words are validated (or not) in the world around us (Heath, 1983). In a world in which digital media are central to personal, social, civic, economic and political life, being able to create, interpret, innovate, evaluate and communicate through text has arguably never been more important (Burnett & Merchant, 2018). And in a world in which meaning making reflects diverse social, cultural and technological imperatives and practices, everyday life requires an expanding communicative repertoire (Gillen, 2014). Literacy therefore is about far more than proficiency. It is about how we live our lives, who we are, who we can be and how we make and remake the world around us. The *Research Mobilities* project was underpinned by an assumption that literacy education should be expansive enough to take account of all of this. This requires literacy research from multiple perspectives (Burnett, 2022a).

In illustrating how research from different perspectives can contribute to literacy education we turn to New Literacy Studies, a significant body of work with global reach which has emerged over the last four decades and one which has shaped our own research (see Hall et al., 2013; Rowsell & Pahl, 2015; Pandya et al., 2022). Drawing on ethnographic studies of literacy in everyday life (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), New Literacy Studies

challenged the idea of literacy as a set of standardised skills, as sustained by what Street (1984) called an 'autonomous' view of literacy. Instead work in this tradition has explored how literacy manifests in multiple ways, deeply embedded in context and always inflected by power and assumptions about the world – reflecting an 'ideological view' (Street, 1984). With this in mind, researchers have examined literac*ies* as diverse and ever-evolving social and cultural practices. Seminal studies such as Heath's (1983) study of literacy in families within three communities in the United States drew attention to the varied ways in which children were inducted into language and literacy practices in the home. Indeed ethnographic studies have repeatedly identified children whose literacies beyond school are richer and more sophisticated than those they evidence or encounter in school and that children who are seen as 'struggling' at school may engage competently and enthusiastically with a variety of texts in the home (e.g. Levy, 2011).

New Literacy Studies, also known as Literacy Studies (Barton, 2007; Gillen & Ho, 2019), has contributed some important ideas to literacy education. One of these is to challenge assumptions that the roots of low attainment always lie in ineffective teaching or the inadequacies of literacy in the home (Freebody, Chan & Barton, 2013). Instead underachievement in literacy at school can be explained in terms of educational systems that fail to recognise and value the diverse literacy experiences of learners (Kamler & Comber, 2005). Another relates to literacy learning. Examining literacies as social and cultural practices foregrounds how individuals are inducted into literacy practices through participation (Larson & Marsh, 2015). This has implications for how individuals are supported to extend and expand their communicative repertoires: working from and with the literacies with which they feel confident; and providing opportunities for meaningful communication in diverse environments. Through analysing literacies in practice, research in this tradition has also led to a more expansive understanding of literacy. It has explored, for example, the implications of multimodality, multilingualism and digital media in much research stimulated by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996) and foregrounded the significance of identity, space, place, embodiment, affect and materiality to communicative practices (Leander & Ehret, 2019; Lenters & McDermott, 2019). Work in literacy studies has not replaced work from cognitive psychology. Nor is it the only alternative view. It does however exemplify how research from different perspectives can provide alternative explanations for children's attainment in literacy in school and raise important questions about the focus and scope of literacy curricula and pedagogy.

In this book, we approach literacy research with an expansive view with a belief that teachers and schools can usefully draw on research findings that orientate to literacy in different ways. This includes research which approaches reading and writing on page *and* screen, that is interested in the

sub-skills of literacy *and* literacy as social, cultural, material practice and in what literacy *does* as well as what literacy *is*. This expansive view encompasses ideas about literacy that some of us have written about before which have been rooted in sociology and linguistics – drawing on sociocultural, socio-material and critical theories, for instance, and very much shaped by the sociocultural stance of (New) Literacy Studies (Burnett & Merchant, 2018; Gillen, 2014; Shannon & Hackett, 2024; Shetty, 2024). But it also includes other traditions of thought and enquiry derived from cognitive psychology, neuroscience and media studies, for example.

How can different perspectives combine to support literacy learning?

Faced with an expansive field of literacy research, one very understandable response might well be to try to identify which kind of research is the *most* useful or which offers the *best* insights or the *greatest* possibility of positive impact. Such judgements might be based not only on the quality and relevance of individual studies but on the relative value of different kinds of research. This happens for example when 'evidence' is narrowly defined or when researchers undermine others' methodologies in defence of their own. In this book, we argue that this urge to rank the contribution of different kinds of research is problematic. In making this point, we consider one of the most highly publicised debates in the field of literacy education: the so-called 'reading wars'.

The term 'reading wars' is commonly used to refer to what Jeanne Chall called 'the great debate' between phonics first and whole language approaches to teaching the early stages of reading (Semingson & Kerns, 2021). Phonics first approaches build up to the reading of whole texts through systematic synthetic phonics teaching to support children to decode words while, broadly speaking, whole language approaches focus on meaning from the earliest stages and approach the process of learning to read as part of the process of becoming a reader. Debates about the most effective approach to teach reading have resurfaced over many years, most recently in relation to cognitive psychological and neuroscientific research as captured under the umbrella term, The Science of Reading, which has become a commonly referenced touchpoint in debates about reading teaching in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. Indeed *Reading Research Quarterly*, a highly influential and prestigious journal associated with the International Literacy Association published a double special issue on this topic in 2021 (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020, 2021) and 'The Science of Reading' has been cited as justification for high-profile and controversial legislation and regulation around teaching phonics in anglophone contexts (e.g. Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2022). While scientific research on reading, and indeed references to The Science of Reading, covers a range of topics and can be

traced back to the 19th century (Semingson & Kerns, 2021; Shanahan, 2020), many of the most widely publicised voices have called for systematic synthetic phonics as the key instructional method for early reading. This hinges on Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading which theorises the process of learning to read as occurring through two parallel and mutually reinforcing strands: word reading and language comprehension.

References to 'reading wars' and related debates are problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, they suggest, and arguably sustain, a polarised opposition that underplays the diversity of scholarship that is relevant to learning to read (Yaden, Reinking & Smagorinsky, 2021). Debates are far more complex than the binary of reading wars, and indeed much popular debate, would suggest. The Science of Reading, for example, as a term has been appropriated, understood – and arguably misunderstood – in multiple ways (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020). Interpretations of 'whole language approaches' also vary (Boran & Comber, 2001) and the extent to which such polarised positions exist in practice is questionable. There is much research on early reading that sits outside the phonics/whole language binary and teachers often draw on a repertoire of approaches within reading provision (Hall, 2013). Perhaps the most concerning effect of the 'reading wars' discourse is that it oversimplifies what is at stake and distracts from other aspects of literacy. Teaching children to read the words on a page will always be an important priority for primary education but – as explored above – there are many other dimensions to learning to read and many other dimensions of literacy more broadly. In the light of this much may be gained from approaching the process of learning to read with reference to a broad range of research. In illustrating this, we turn to a book by Kathy Hall, *Listening to Stephen Read* (Hall, 2003).

In *Listening to Stephen Read*, Hall documented the responses of eight literacy academics who each analysed evidence of eight-year-old Stephen's reading. Stephen had been identified as 'underachieving' by his teacher. The evidence consisted of a running record[1] of Stephen reading a short passage accompanied by a pen portrait of Stephen and the teaching approach used by his teacher. The academics approached this task from four quite different standpoints, which Hall identified as: psycho-linguistic, cognitive psychological, sociocultural and sociopolitical. Perhaps unsurprisingly they arrived at rather different analyses and recommendations for what might be beneficial to Stephen as a reader. These included focusing on:

- reading as a problem-solving activity and on engagement with authentic texts;
- phonological awareness and phonic knowledge;
- exploring and building from Stephen's 'funds of knowledge' (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) of literacy outside school;

- critical analysis of how classroom reading provision may be positioning Stephen (and indeed reading) in unhelpful ways;
- critical literacy that examined the workings of power through text.

Hall's book provides a powerful example of how approaches to teaching reading rest not just on different perspectives on how children learn to read but on what literacy *is* and the *purpose* of literacy education. The different responses provide different routes into reading the words on the page but also address Stephen as a reader, not just a reader who was proficient but one who would love to read and could use text to engage with the world around him. Importantly Hall's analysis foregrounds how different perspectives overlap and are often tangled together in practice. As such, she demonstrates how different insights and standpoints can make important contributions to teachers' repertoires and how these can be complementary rather than contradictory. Indeed in other work, she found that literacy teachers who had been identified as effective in supporting literacy learning drew from a repertoire of approaches in teaching reading (Hall, 2013), something also found by Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, and Degener (2006) working in the United States. As others too have explored, different kinds of research speak to different dimensions of literacy learning (Moss, 2021; Ellis & Smith, 2017). We develop this idea in the next section which illustrates how different kinds of evidence can be illuminating to practice.

Expanding notions of evidence and what evidence is for

In this section, we argue that if we accept that literacy can be understood in different ways and that literacy education must address a range of purposes, it is also beneficial to draw on different kinds of evidence. We illustrate this with an example from a project which explored an email exchange between 9 and 10-year-old children in two primary schools, one in a city and one in a rural area (Burnett & Myers, 2006). It explored how children took up opportunities to use what was then a relatively new form of communication to share experiences and perspectives with those they had never met. Interested both in what children wrote and how they wrote it, Cathy observed a boy write his first email to his partner in the other school. He wrote:

> My dad was a footy player. What's your dad? I luv The Gunners.

Table 2.1 is extracted from a transcript Cathy made of this event, which attempted to capture what he did on screen (i.e. words he typed, edits he made) and anything he said as he wrote. He was not sitting next to another child. Cathy was sitting behind him.

Table 2.1 Writing the email

Time	*Onscreen*	*Speech*
11.12	Starts new sentence: 'm'	
11.13	Changes 'm' to 'M' Adds 'y'	
11.14	'dad was a football'	
11.15	Changes 'football' to 'footy'	Reads 'my dad was a footy'
11.16	'plaa'	Why did I put an 'a'?
11.17	Removes 'a' and completes 'player' Adds '!'	Laughs
11.18		
11.19	Adds 's' and 'your dad'.	
11.20	Presses space bar twice. Deletes one space. Writes, 'I luv the GUNNERS' Deletes 't' in 'the' and changes to 'T'	
11.22	Goes back and changes full stop after 'your dad' to question mark	Gasps – ooh

Source: From Burnett and Myers (2006).

As can be seen from Table 2.1, this email took 10 minutes to write. While some of this was undoubtedly due to rather poor keyboard skills, it was also because he made so many edits – at least seven in this short email. When Cathy asked him why he changed so much, he replied, 'I just want to do it right – cos I think the school's quite posh. Yes – I don't like people to think I'm a little town boy. I am one but I don't want them to think that.'

Several pieces of evidence feature in his example: the email, the observational notes and a transcript of what he said as he wrote. These are quite different forms of evidence to those usually associated with 'evidence-based teaching' as discussed in the previous chapter, which might typically manifest in the outcomes of a randomised controlled trial or analysis of assessment scores. This evidence does however provide food for thought. A teacher might, for instance, be interested: in the rather truncated format of the email (no greeting, no sign-off); in how this email compared with his writing with pen and paper; or in how difficulties with spelling and poor keyboard skills may have interrupted the flow of his writing which appeared laborious and time-consuming. Or they might be interested in issues of identity. Not just in what he chose to convey about himself ('my dad's a footy player') but in the care he took with spelling to avoid making a bad impression as 'just a little town boy' and in the tiny edits he made to curate a register appropriate to communicating with an unknown peer – changing 'football' to 'footy', for example. Alternatively they might be interested in the pedagogical possibilities of using digital communication to connect children with others across time and space, in

opportunities for collaboration and communication and for literacy learning as well as for learning across the curriculum. Or they might be concerned with issues of equity and power, the embodied nature of working on screen, the slipperiness of on/offline spaces or many other things.

This example illustrates how different kinds of evidence allow different insights: about what one child wrote, how he wrote it and how he felt about it. Each of these pieces of evidence might have proved useful to the child's teacher who would likely have weighed them together in deciding how to respond. Teaching involves working with different kinds of evidence all the time, whether produced through standardised tests, statistical analysis or ongoing observation as part of everyday teaching. Other kinds of 'evidence' would prompt other questions and areas of concern. A child's account of the joys and frustrations of reading at school, a spreadsheet of attainment data or patterns of common errors, a transcript of children writing collaboratively or a film made at home by a child on their iPhone might all prompt reflection about that child as a literacy learner and the kinds of activities that might be appropriate.

Similarly different kinds of evidence embedded within different kinds of research can be valuable to professional practice. Diverse research methodologies can generate insights that address literacy education in multiple ways, whether these be experimental research into reading processes, ethnographic studies of literacies in children's lives, critical discourse analysis of literacy assessment protocols or multimodal analysis of children's writing. Moreover, as we explore in the next section, research can orientate to literacy and to literacy education in a myriad of ways.

Orientating differently to literacy education through research

Over 20 years ago, Hannon (2000) described seven principles that could be used to drive priorities in literacy education: family choice, workforce requirements, social differentiation, equal opportunities, personal development, citizenship or social change. Each of these could represent a set of viable reasons to engage in literacy education and each has different implications for the emphasis of literacy provision. Others have explored how different assumptions about the nature of literacy, literacy learning and literacy teaching play out in research and practice. Ivanić (2004) for example identified six 'configurations of beliefs and practices' (p. 220) that have underpinned research, policy and pedagogy in the teaching of writing: a skills discourse, a creativity discourse, a process discourse, a genre discourse, a social practice discourse and a sociopolitical discourse. These principles and configurations still seem to us to have value in the digital age.

Drawing from a diversity of research involves acknowledging that these perspectives remain meaningful. This is clearly challenging, not least because

researchers tend to settle into distinct communities and in so doing entrench positions (Parsons et al., 2020). In this book, we take the view that such distinctions are unhelpful to teachers who are faced with the realities of literacy education. As our email vignette illustrates, for the child – and the teacher – there is never just one thing going on at any one time. When a teacher is teaching phonics, for example, they are not just teaching specific skills but conveying something about what reading is and about the children themselves as readers. It is misleading to argue that education does not involve elements of cognition and psychology. It is equally misleading to imply that education does not have social, cultural and material dimensions. Sociocultural practices and power relations are relevant whether or not teachers choose to contemplate them. We suggest therefore that it is helpful to see literacy research less in terms of competing models and more in terms of differences in emphasis.

As part of our preparatory work for the *Research Mobilities* project Cathy conducted a systematic 'scoping survey' of 142 articles published between January 2019 and December 2021 from 11 peer-reviewed journals, all of which featured research relevant to 5–11-year-olds (Burnett, 2022a). The scoping review aimed to summarise the *kinds* of topics being addressed, the *range* of methods being used and the ways in which different kinds of studies *might* speak to literacy education. As such, it was an exercise in demonstrating the *potential* for a range of research to speak to literacy education rather than one designed to make specific recommendations for evidence-informed practice. Cathy drew on this review to identify eight 'orientations' towards literacy which align with different areas of interest (see Burnett, 2022a for further details of the methodology, articles surveyed and examples of each orientation). We suggest that these orientations are useful in thinking about multiple ways that research might speak to literacy education and the range of different kinds of research that maybe relevant. The eight different orientations are as follows:

1 ***Literacy as a set of skills*** – research which focuses on the skills children use to create and access texts.

   Studies address, for example, skills associated with reading proficiency, grammar, spelling, handwriting and punctuation as well as skills linked to comprehension, information retrieval and the writing of texts in a range of genres. These kinds of skills have been a focus of literacy research for many years and standardised tests and other measures have been developed to assess these.[2] As explored earlier in this chapter, however, the range of skills needed has expanded considerably given new forms of communication. Reading and writing in everyday life also involve many other skills linked to searching online, succinct expression, using images,

making meanings across multiple texts, evaluating sources and so forth. Many of these skills are difficult to measure, not least because standardised tests have not been, and arguably, could not be, developed to assess them.

2 ***Literacies as socially situated practices*** – research approaching literacy as social and cultural activity.

Studies may foreground the cultural and linguistic resources that children bring to school, challenging deficit perspectives on children's literacy in the home. They include, for example, studies that explore the role of translanguaging practices, relationships between literacy and migration and the significance of digital media in children's lives.

3 ***Literacy as meaning making*** – research which explores the meanings children make and the ways in which meaning making is important to children.

This includes studies exploring creativity and/or the purposes and audiences for which children read and write – for purpose, pleasure, self-expression, personal fulfilment and so on. They might relate to children's reading and writing in or out of school and involve a range of texts, such as novels, comics, YouTube videos or gaming.

4 ***Literacy and power*** – research which examines inequitable power relations within literacy practices, literacy education and the wider world.

Examples include studies exploring how classroom practices, policies and classroom resources marginalise certain children. They also include projects investigating approaches designed to open up classroom spaces to more equitable and empowering literacy provision or promote children's active participation in challenging social injustice through critical literacy and civic action.

5 ***Literacy as social*** – research exploring interactions that happen through and as part of literacy practices.

These might, for example, relate to interactions between children, their families, their peers and their teachers.

6 ***Literacies as material and embodied practices*** – research approaching literacy as an activity which is always material and always embodied.

These include studies that foreground the role of feeling – or affect – in literacy provision and/or which approach meaning making as emergent rather than inevitably planned.

7 ***Literacy learning as multidimensional*** – since boundaries between these orientations are permeable, some researchers explicitly draw across orientations, for example, by combining a focus on skills with attention to social or material aspects of the learning situation.

8 ***Literacy and learning across the curriculum***

Some research explores the role of literacy in mediating understanding, exploration and communication in subjects across the curriculum.

This list of orientations tries to avoid grouping research according to research traditions, discourses or types of text (e.g. screen or paper-based). While some orientations are more closely associated with some traditions than others, most occur across a range. Drawing on multiple kinds of research shaped by diverse perspectives and interests and using different methodologies can feed different, and complementary, aspects of professional thought and action. In Chapter 11, we draw on examples of literacy research to reflect further on how research evidence can generate insight, provide critique or inform responses that might be valuable to teachers. We also consider how it can prompt imaginative leaps that help envision how literacy education could be otherwise.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented ways of thinking about diversity in literacy research. We have considered how literacy education and research can be inflected by varied understandings, perspectives and priorities that relate to: literacy learning (how literacy is learned); the purpose of literacy education (what literacy is for); and the nature of literacy or literac*ies* (what literacy is, and therefore what should be learned). We have argued that drawing across this diversity can be beneficial to teachers and in education more broadly.

We do not contend here that all research is of equal value or indeed that all research can speak usefully to literacy education. Recommendations from research that has been conducted carelessly or superficially or makes overly extravagant claims about its findings can be misleading or even damaging (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2020). Indeed we would support arguments for strengthening teachers and schools' capacity to weigh the value of research findings generated through different methodologies. However, as well as this, we argue for an approach to literacy research that accommodates diverse conceptual and methodological perspectives. Such an approach would address an expansive range of topics pertinent to literacy education. It would also involve encounters with research that orientates to literacy in different ways, contributing to teachers' repertoires of professional knowledge. As Biesta, Wainwright and Aldridge (2022, p. 3) write,

> any suggestion that there is only one 'ideal' way in which research and practice can and should relate is a problematic narrowing of the many ways in which educational research can be meaningful and helpful for educational practice.

We realise that calling for engagement with a diversity of literacy research is ambitious. Nevertheless, our argument for the range of literacy research

that *could* be considered provides a useful reference point for reflecting on what *is* considered. In the next chapter, we set the scene for our approach to 'research mobilities' by examining some key aspects of the educational landscape in England which, as we go on to explore, are relevant to research mobilisation.

Notes

1 A running record is a record of the errors – or miscues – a child makes when reading a passage. They are termed miscues as it is assumed that errors are not random. Analysis of the miscues can be used to understand the strategies a child is trying to use when reading, even if these do not always result in the 'correct' reading of a word (Clay, 1986).
2 Although it is worth noting here that many standardised tests have been the subject of critique.

3 Relationships between literacy, research and policy in England

Introduction

In this chapter, we consider some of the national frameworks and policy imperatives that had implications for relationships between research and literacy for teachers in England, the focus for the *Research Mobilities* project. For those unfamiliar with the United Kingdom, it is worth noting that there have long been differences between the education systems in different parts of the United Kingdom and that, since 1999, education policy has been completely devolved to the governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. At the time of writing, only education in England remains within the remit of the Westminster government. There is considerable diversification across the four nations not just in policy rhetoric but in many aspects of school life including underpinning philosophy, examination and testing, inspection, the status of languages, management of schools and curriculum – including literacy. While these differences may be less distinct in practice (Priestley, 2023), England is an interesting example of a country in which successive governments have attempted to advance a distinctive stance on literacy education and indeed one used as a template for policy interventions elsewhere – as in approaches to national assessment and the phonics screening test in Australia for example (Lingard, 2010; Wheldall, et al., 2019).

Major changes in the organisation and management of primary schools over the last 40 years have had significant effects on primary education. Until the late 20th century, schools in England were managed by local education authorities with oversight for budget, buildings and resource as well as quality of education. The Conservative Government's Education Reform Act 1988 shifted power away from local education authorities to school governing bodies that were given greater control over curriculum and resource. This was accompanied by significant measures designed to ensure consistency across schools. These included the introduction of a national curriculum with associated assessment framework which outlined expectations for three 'core' subjects (English, Mathematics and Science) and 'foundation'

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subjects such as Geography, History and Art and Design.[1] The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was established in 1992 to assume responsibility for school inspections. These developments in governance, standardisation and inspection laid the foundations for a 'high autonomy, high accountability system' (Malin et al., 2020, p. 4).

All of this has been the focus of extensive debate and detailed commentary which we cannot do justice to here (see e.g. Jones, 2016; Gunter, 2023). Moreover, relationships between policy and practice are, of course, neither linear nor consistent. Traces of old policy mingle with recent developments and policies have unanticipated implications that ricochet across educational sites as they combine with and interfere with one another. Moreover, many aspects of schooling are embroiled in transnational flows of ideas, policies and commercial activity facilitated in part by international bodies such as UNESCO and OECD, including large-scale assessment exercises such as PISA (see, e.g. Exley, Braun & Ball, 2011; Hamilton, 2017). Developments in digitisation and datafication, including surveillance technologies, commercial schemes and testing materials sold by multinational corporations, can all have standardising effects that work across national boundaries (Landri, 2018). While such initiatives may well have implications for research mobilities, there is no space to discuss them here, although we do note that England has been less driven by PISA data than other countries, drawing on PISA results primarily to justify existing commitments rather than identify areas for development (Moss, 2017).

In providing some contextualisation to those unfamiliar with the English context, we explore policy developments in three areas that were relevant to relationships between literacy research and literacy education at the time of the *Research Mobilities* project. These include policies implemented by the Labour government (1997–2010), Conservative/Liberal Coalition government (2010–2015) and Conservative government (2015 to time of writing). We focus specifically on:

1 The management of schools and high-stakes accountability measures.
2 The diminishing role of academics in education as sources of expertise and mediators of research.
3 Developments in literacy education in primary schools.

The management of schools and high-stakes accountability measures

This first area relates to the 'high autonomy, high accountability system' (Malin et al., 2020, p. 4) referred to above. Much of this is achieved through Ofsted inspections which are driven by regularly revised frameworks for inspection devised to reflect government priorities (e.g. see Ofsted, 2023). Ofsted inspections are high stakes as unsuccessful inspections lead to

considerable scrutiny and local authority-managed schools can be converted to academies (see below for more detail on academisation). While schools ostensibly have more power in deciding what to do, they are not able to decide the criteria on which they will be judged (Greany & Higham, 2018). As a result, aspects of school life prioritised by Ofsted usually become key priorities for schools. Here we consider two developments that intersect with this system in different ways: data-driven school improvement; and new structures for school organisation and management generated through a programme of academisation.

Data-driven school improvement

One of the most significant and long-lasting effects of the Education Reform Act was the implementation of systematic national expectations in relation to assessment. Previously assessment had involved measures developed by schools themselves or by academics, educational charities, associations or commercial organisations. With the National Curriculum came expectations for consistent approaches to formative and summative assessment. Requirements were introduced to judge children's progress according to a series of rather arbitrary 'levels of attainment', judged against brief descriptors of children's competency. These levels gained huge power as the focus for monitoring children's progress and for formal tests (commonly known as SATs) in Mathematics, Science and English (reading and writing) taken at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 (age 6–7 and 10–11). These tests and the test data they generated made it possible to conduct year-on-year national comparison of attainment and, as such, were the subject of granular analysis at the level of individual, class, school, local authority and nation. Test scores became used as a measure for the success of governments and local authorities and a key source of data for Ofsted inspections within a data-driven system for school improvement.

Over the last 30 years or so, this tightly drawn relationship between testing, inspection and accountability has become a major feature – and ultimately determiner – of education in England. The national curriculum, assessment procedures, expectations, Ofsted framework and regularity and format for inspections have all been revised and/or re-launched in different forms at various points since their inception. We do not have space here to detail the many revisions but key changes in the area of literacy have included: replacing a Key Stage 2 writing test with teacher assessment; introducing a test for grammar, punctuation and spelling for Key Stage 2 (age 10–11) pupils; and changing the status of a Key Stage 1 reading test (at age 6–7) from mandatory to optional. The 'levels' were later removed and replaced by a set of 'age-related expectations' against which children had to be assessed as 'working towards', 'meeting' or 'greater depth' and SATs were

placed within a broader programme of 'end of key stage assessment'. None of these changes appear to have done much to unsettle the culture of comparative measurement. Digitisation has enabled increasingly sophisticated analysis of attainment data, drilling down at the level of test question or curriculum statement in order to identify areas of relative strength and weakness with the stated intention of driving improvements at national, local and school levels.

This data-driven system has been the focus of considerable debate. Much of this has focused on its impact on the wellbeing of children and teachers and its narrowing effects on the curriculum (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018). The expectation for year-on-year increases has also been seen to underplay the complex factors that feed test scores and fails to question the reliability of the tests themselves as robust measures of progress in reading and writing (Moss, 2017). In particular, Ofsted's processes and practices have been critiqued over many years for relying too heavily on attainment data, not providing guidance for improvement, and paying insufficient attention to the effects of inspection on school staff (Gilroy & Wilcox, 1997; Perryman et al., 2023; Richards, 2012). Such criticism intensified in 2023 following the suicide of a primary head teacher whose school received a single word judgement of 'unsatisfactory' which was seen as disregarding many areas of strength within the school and made without due regard for the wellbeing of school staff (Waters & McKee, 2023). This led to an inquiry by the House of Commons Education Committee (2024).

Academisation

Parallel to these developments, the last 20 years have seen a programme of academisation which removed schools from local authority control, modelled on Charter Schools in the United States and Swedish free schools ('friscolor'). Academies were freed from the expectations of the national curriculum while still having to participate in national testing. First initiated by a Labour Government as a way of reconfiguring inner-city schools that had failed Ofsted inspections, the academisation programme was expanded by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government from 2010 to be eligible to all schools and then accelerated further by successive Conservative governments from 2015 (see Hilton, 2019, for a history). This programme also saw the introduction of 'free schools' (brand new schools constituted as academies and often with a distinctive character) and the emergence of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), chains of academies united by shared policies and practices and constituted as not-for-profit companies led by Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and a team of leaders that work across schools. The aims and principles underpinning academies vary considerably as does the scale of MATs. Free schools and trusts have

been supported by businesses, universities, faith and voluntary groups. Many of the larger MATs operate across regions and their CEOs have become powerful figures in the educational landscape.

The proponents of academies and free schools emphasise the freedoms these schools have to think imaginatively and innovatively about how to achieve the best education for their pupils. Critics however have argued that there is little evidence of the effectiveness of academisation and highlighted: the high degree of regulation and standardisation that is instilled within teachers and schools in some MATs; the large amount of state funding that academies pay to consultants; and the negative effects of competition between MATs on cooperation between schools (Hilton, 2019). Academisation has also had implications for teachers' working conditions and the central purpose of schools more broadly (Hilton, 2019; Innes, 2021). Moreover while local education authorities were once the locus for professional learning in schools, this often now happens 'in house' (i.e. within trusts) and/or in close collaboration with educational consultants.

At this point, it is worth noting that academisation has been much slower in primary schools than secondary schools in England. In January 2023, 40.4% of primary schools were registered as academies (gov.uk, 2023). In 2022, a government White Paper stated an ambition to extend academisation to all schools (Zahawi 2022). At the time of writing, this plan has been sidelined (Dickens, 2023) but the programme of academisation has had implications for all schools. The associated reduction in local authority support has had significant effects on the educational landscape in England with implications for research mobilisation, not least because it paved the way for an increase in the number of educational consultants working in schools and a marketisation of guidance and support.

Academies vary in their approach to facilitating connections between research and practice. Teachers in different MATs may well experience research – and literacy – in quite different ways. Nevertheless academisation has been associated with shifts in sources of knowledge and professional autonomy (Innes, 2022; Innes & Mills, 2022). Also relevant to our project is the role played by free schools and academies in mobilising and generating knowledge about education more widely, sometimes in partnership with universities and/or with consultancy firms or independent consultants. For example, School 21, a free school in London, developed and trialled a programme of oracy development in collaboration with academics from Cambridge University (https://voice21.org/) which is now widely promoted through the Voice 21 charity to schools across the United Kingdom. While the scale of ambition of such projects varies considerably, they further exemplify how the research landscape has shifted in recent years. This leads us to our next focus: the diminishing role of academics in England as sources of expertise in policymaking and practice in education.

The diminishing role of academics as sources of expertise and mediators of research in education

From the 1960s onwards, there have been moves away from involving academics in policymaking in favour of think tanks and special advisers (Kauko, 2022). This has led to policy/research relationships which have been described as 'uneasy' (Byrne & Ozga, 2008, p. 390). In this section, we focus on policy developments in two areas that are relevant specifically to teachers' engagements with research: teacher education and evidence-based teaching.

Changes in provision for teacher education

Our first point relates to a significant shift away from universities in the provision of teacher education. We do not have space to explore the history of the somewhat complex relationship between teacher education, universities and the field of education (see Furlong, 2013, for further detail). Suffice it to say that at the turn of the century, teacher education was administered, designed and provided by higher education institutions working in partnership with schools. Typically this involved three- or four-year undergraduate or one-year postgraduate programmes of preservice teacher education that incorporated a blend of university-based provision and extended periods of school placement guided by school-based mentors.

Since 2010, the central role of universities declined in a move towards a 'school centred system of initial teacher training' (Carter, 2015). A range of alternative models were developed including school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT), Teach First (aimed at 'high achieving graduates'), Assessment Only routes (12-week programmes for those already working as unqualified teachers) and School Direct (a school-led route involving partnership between a school, other schools and an accredited teacher training provider). Such changes generated considerable anxiety and upheaval within university education departments (Ellis & Spendlove, 2020). They also raised concerns about a weakening of the role of research in teacher education which seemed to position teaching as a craft rather than critical reflective practice, as implied by the shift in terminology from 'initial teacher education' to 'training' (McIntyre, Youens & Stevenson, 2019).

These concerns were exacerbated by a market review of initial teacher training conducted between 2021 and 2022 which had significant implications for the role of universities in cultivating relationships between research and professional knowledge (DfE, 2021a). This required all teacher training providers to re-apply for registration to award teacher education status and, as part of this process, demonstrate their compliance with a Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019) which outlined what must be taught. The Core

Content Framework included a requirement for, 'engaging critically with research and using evidence to critique practice' (DfE, 2019, p. 29) and provided a bibliography of research sources to be shared with teacher 'trainees' deemed to represent 'high-quality evidence' (DfE, 2019, p. 4). The DfE then combined the Initial Teacher Training Core Content and the Early Career Frameworks into the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework, which influences courses for trainee and early career teachers from September 2025, and is 'independently assessed and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation' (DfE, 2024a, p. 2). At the time of writing, the School Direct system is being phased out and new statutory guidance introduced for accredited initial teacher training providers (DfE, 2024b) but suffice it to say that considerable oversight remains in relation to the use of research evidence in teacher education. We turn next to the role played by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in research use in schools.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and evidence-based teaching

EEF was established by the charity, The Sutton Trust, in 2011 as one of the government's 'What Works Centres' (Evaluation Task Force, 2013). At the time of writing, it operates as the government's trusted broker for 'evidence' in education and has been supported by extensive government funding with plans for it to be 're-endowed' in 2026 (Zahawi, 2022). It was as part of this role that EEF was tasked with reviewing the Core Content Framework for initial teacher training, the Early Career Framework and other National Professional Qualifications to ensure that they were based on the 'best available' evidence. All of this contributed to what a government white paper described as a '"golden thread" of high-quality evidence underpinning the support, training and development available through the entirety of a teacher's career' (Zahawi 2022, p. 5).

EEF also engages in a wide range of other activities designed to strengthen connections between evidence and teaching. As well as funding randomised controlled trials (RCTs), EEF provides support for schools in implementing evidence-informed approaches. For example it publishes research syntheses and guidance documents for a range of topics, including literacy in primary schools, and maintains a *Teaching and Learning Toolkit* (EEF, n.d.) designed to support schools in selecting interventions which address a range of foci, including literacy. The toolkit draws on the results of EEF-funded RCTs as a key source of evidence. EEF is also active in developing approaches to research dissemination, communication and implementation. As part of this role, it established a network of Research Schools tasked with promoting connections between research and teaching, including EEF's recommendations and materials.

A number of universities contribute to the work of EEF, through developing interventions for trial, conducting RCTs commissioned by EEF and compiling research syntheses and other materials. Academics have been and continue to be employed by or seconded to EEF. The framework for 'quality evidence' and appropriate methodologies, however, is decided by EEF and this arguably implies a certainty that is rather at odds with the ontological and epistemological debates that are at the heart of academics' relationships with knowledge. In any case, EEF is an influential actor within educational policy and practice in England and plays a significant role in research mediation and endorsement.

Developments in literacy policy

Debates about effective approaches to teaching literacy – or more specifically reading, spelling and handwriting – have rumbled on for over a century in England (Gillen & Hall, 2012), surfacing every now and again in reports, initiatives and/or trends in pedagogy and practice. In this section, we describe major state-sponsored literacy interventions that have been – and remain – significant to the contemporary literacy landscape in England: the National Literacy Strategy (launched in 1998) and a sustained attempt to embed systematic synthetic phonics as the key to learning to read. These provide important insights into the development of literacy education in England associated with the 'high accountability, high autonomy' system described above. We end this section by outlining the National Curriculum requirements for English at the time of our project.

As explored earlier in this chapter, the Education Reform Act in 1988 ushered in the first National Curriculum for England which included English as a core subject with programmes of study for reading, writing and speaking and listening. Interpretations varied. In some schools, the National Curriculum's principles were expanded through practices in which children were celebrated and nurtured as readers and writers and skills teaching happened in the context of meaningful engagements with text. In others, English happened through a blend of comprehension exercises, spelling tests and handwriting practice in addition to well-established and routinised writing opportunities such as daily 'news' or story. In most schools, there was a place for one-on-one reading most often from graded reading scheme books, with teachers (and sometimes volunteer parents) squeezing in daily opportunities to hear children read short passages from their 'reading books' which they were also encouraged to read at home to their parents. In the 1990s, year-on-year comparisons suggested a stagnation in the number of children assessed as achieving 'level 4' in SATs at the end of primary school (the level desired for children aged 11). This analysis, combined with concerns about inconsistency across schools and the amount of

teacher time spent 'hearing readers' (rather than direct teaching), led to the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy by the then Labour government in 1998.

The National Literacy Strategy

The National Literacy Strategy has been described as the world's biggest ever school improvement programme involving 150 local authorities, 18,500 primary schools and 200,000 primary teachers (Stannard & Huxford, 2007). It was hugely ambitious in scope and timescale and involved significant financial and political investment. The then Minister of Education, David Blunkett MP, famously declared an intention to resign if SAT results in reading and writing at age 11 had not reached 80% at level 4 by 2000, just 2 years into the programme. Prior to the NLS, it was rare to hear anyone refer to 'literacy' in relation to primary education. More common were references to 'English' or 'language' or 'reading', 'writing' and 'speaking and listening' (the three strands of the National Curriculum for English).

The National Literacy Strategy was modelled on the National Literacy Project, an initiative introduced to London schools by the previous Conservative government in 1996/7. A key feature was *The National Literacy Strategy: Framework for Teaching* (DfEE, 1997) which translated the National Curriculum programmes of study for reading and writing, and later speaking and listening, into detailed sets of objectives at word, sentence and text level for each year group across the primary age range. These were mapped onto a range of text-types (fiction and non-fiction) to be used as the focus for teaching – designed to ensure that children encountered and learned to produce a range of texts across the primary phase. Each school received a box of distance learning materials (complete with videos, information and activities) commonly referred to as the 'lunchbox'. These focused on pedagogical strategies devised to support greater standardisation of delivery through a shift from individualised to whole class teaching, marshalled into a daily literacy hour structured around a series of whole class, group and individualised teaching. All of this was accompanied by a visualisation of a 'literacy hour clock' which portioned the hour into neat segments: 15 min for whole class reading or writing, 15 min for whole class word or sentence level teaching, 20 min for group or guided work and 10 min for a plenary. The implementation of the strategy was supported by literacy consultants who were stationed in local education authorities across England.

The National Literacy Strategy framework was not statutory. While all schools were required to dedicate an hour to literacy teaching each day, they were informed they could ignore it if they could justify an alternative to Ofsted – and the infamous literacy hour clock was intended for guidance only. But somehow the iconography of clock, the work of consultants, the

physical presence of the 'lunchbox' and tales of teachers using timers to enforce the discipline of the 15/15/20/10 min literacy hour tended to overpower discussion about interpretation and flexibility. Running the risk of an Ofsted judgement that found their approach to be lacking was just too much for many schools. As a consequence, the vast majority of schools in England adopted the framework and the hour, although interpretations of this varied considerably.

The National Literacy Strategy materials included very few explicit connections to research.[2] A summary of research was published after the launch which traced the roots of its underpinning ideas and approaches (Beard, 2000). However, the demands of implementing the Strategy left little time or space for critical review by teachers or for engaging in dialogue with research that might enhance, enrich or expand implementation. It was widely experienced as highly prescriptive and the drive to 'get it right' superseded professional reflection and debate. This was the first time a government in England had intervened not just in what was learned but how it was taught. In the light of this, there were considerable concerns about a generation of teachers inducted to the strategy that would be ill-equipped to think outside the strategy framework and associated pedagogies. Such concerns were exacerbated as the drive for incremental improvements in national test scores channelled – and arguably distorted – activity and energy. As the 2000 deadline approached, a raft of initiatives and interventions were introduced to maximise the likelihood of the 80% target being met. As things turned out, 80% was met in reading but not in writing. After 2000, results 'plateaued' and enthusiasm for the NLS waned, despite the introduction of new targets, materials and resources and the introduction of a new Primary National Strategy in 2003 (DCFS, 2003).

Siezing an opportunity, an opposition MP (Nick Gibb) nominated 'Teaching Children to Read' as the focus for a House of Commons Education and Skills Committee enquiry in 2004, following intensive lobbying from The Reading Reform Foundation (see Ellis & Moss, 2014 for a history). This led to the *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading* (Rose, 2006) which heralded a sharper focus on the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics as the key strategy for teaching early reading.

Systematic synthetic phonics

While the systematic teaching of phonics (phonemic awareness plus graphophonic knowledge) had formed a major plank of the National Literacy Strategy, it had been approached as one of several cueing strategies for early reading – in line with the Strategy's 'searchlights model' (DfEE, 1997). The Rose Review (2006) recommended that Gough and Tunmer's (1986) 'Simple View of Reading' should be used instead to underpin the

teaching of early reading.[3] This proposed a focus on two distinct dimensions in supporting beginner readers: 'word recognition skills and language comprehension processes' with phonics seen as central to word recognition. It was argued that this framework provided greater clarity about the needs of different children in learning to read as well as the kinds of knowledge that teachers require to teach these inter-related dimensions of reading.

The Rose Review stated that phonics should be taught through a programme of *systematic synthetic phonics* not the alternative of *analytic phonics*[4] (Goswami & Mead, 1992). The shift to systematic synthetic phonics was justified largely with reference to a trial in schools in Clackmannanshire which claimed a significant longitudinal effect (Johnston & Watson, 2004, 2005), findings which have been the subject of considerable critique (e.g. Ellis & Moss, 2014; Wyse & Styles, 2007). Indeed more recent research reviews concluded that while phonics remains an important dimension of early reading provision, it should not be the only approach used and that, while research syntheses have found that phonics teaching correlates positively with reading competence, the evidence that systematic synthetic phonics is more effective than other approaches to phonics is inconclusive (Torgerson et al., 2019). Nevertheless systematic synthetic phonics remained a central plank of government policy and was such at the time of writing. Its longevity and dominance were widely credited to the work of Nick Gibb MP. Gibb held key roles in the Department for Education for three periods between 2010 and 2023. His insistence on phonics was unwavering.

While the National Literacy Strategy was impressive for its breadth of vision and level of investment over a relatively short period, the strategic focus on systematic synthetic phonics far outstripped it in terms of longevity. The National Literacy Strategy had faded long before its documentation was moved to government archives in 2010 and yet the focus on phonics, boosted by the Rose Review, was bolstered further through successive policies and interventions that sedimented systematic synthetic phonics as the prime approach to the teaching word reading. One of the most influential moves was the introduction of a phonics screening check at age 6 designed to test children's ability to blend and segment phonemes, with failure to pass the test triggering further phonics work and a later re-sit. This test was highly controversial not least because it required children to attempt decoding of both real and pseudowords leading to concerns that it risked encouraging children to read without sensitivity to meaning with deleterious effects (Carter, 2020). Nevertheless phonics screening check results became a key indicator for Ofsted of a school's success in teaching reading and, as such, had the effect of keeping phonics high on the agenda for most schools.

Unlike the NLS, the phonics strategy was not accompanied by centralised guidance and support. Instead, funding was made available for the purchase of resources and professional development provision from government-approved

commercial providers. The drive for phonics was however galvanised by a series of mandates, initiatives and accountability processes. Some of these include:

- The production of a reading framework (DfE, 2021c) which intensified this focus and included a series of further clarifications/expansions.
- Government-approved lists of phonics schemes based on systematic synthetic phonics and deemed to be acceptable for use in school.
- The integration of requirements to teach systematic synthetic phonics within frameworks for teacher education, early career teachers and a National Professional Qualification in Leading Literacy (DfE, 2019, 2021a).
- An emphasis on phonics and the phonics screening check within Ofsted inspections for schools and for teacher education providers, including 'deep dives' into reading with phonics as a major focus. The Ofsted framework for inspecting initial teacher training mandated that 'trainees are not taught competing approaches to early reading' (Ofsted, 2020, p. 28).
- Ofsted's Review of Research on the Teaching of English (Ofsted, 2022) which restated the case for SSP.
- The establishment of English Hubs – schools with the remit to promote 'excellent teaching in phonics and early reading' (Shepherd & Fortescue, 2023, p. 5).

As this list suggests, attempts to place phonics at the heart of policy directives have been energetic, focused and committed, led largely by long-standing Schools Minister Nick Gibb. They have also been the focus for considerable debate, both in terms of teaching early reading and due to their narrowing effects on literacy provision.

The National Curriculum for English

While we refer above to policy changes in *literacy*, 'literacy' receded somewhat in the lexicon of primary teachers following the demise of the National Literacy Strategy. It became more common again to refer to 'English', the subject addressing reading and writing located within the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014),[5] with 'literacy' used to refer to a narrow range of skills associated with reading and writing. At the time of writing and during the *Research Mobilities project*, the National Curriculum for English for primary schools is split into two sections: Key Stage 1 (children aged 5–7) and Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11). It includes requirements for:

- Spoken language which is seen as underpinning reading and writing. Drama is included in this requirement.
- Reading incorporating word reading (including fluency), comprehension and reading a range of fiction and non-fiction. There is an expectation

that phonics is used to support word reading building on what has been learned in the preceding Foundation Stage.

- Writing including transcription (defined as spelling and handwriting) and composition (defined as 'articulating ideas and structuring them in speech and writing').

(DfE, 2014, p. 15).

Teachers are also expected to, 'develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject' (DfE, 2014, p. 19).

These requirements for English, like those for other subjects in the National Curriculum were shaped by the ideas of E.D. Hirsch (1988) and presented as 'knowledge based' (Gibb, 2015). 'Knowledge' manifests here in lengthy and prescriptive requirements for spelling and grammar. Word lists for spelling are provided for each year group (statutory in years 3–6) and lists of grammatical knowledge and terms to be learned are specified for each year. A specific requirement is made for children to be taught to use Standard English (DfE, 2014, pp. 14–15). This curriculum has been criticised for prioritising form over content with deleterious implications for children's writing (Barrs, 2019) and also for the political and civic implications of using the curriculum to assert some kinds of knowledge about language over others (Yandell, 2014).

The programmes of study are brief and narrow in focus and many of the topics discussed in the previous chapter do not appear at all. There is no reference for example to digital texts, creativity or criticality. This does not mean that schools cannot plan for these things. This version of the National Curriculum was presented as a spine for a more expanded curriculum suited to schools' needs and many schools and trusts do interpret it in imaginative ways. Nevertheless given the high-stakes accountability environment described above, it is unsurprising that many schools prioritise those aspects of the curriculum that are mandatory and subject to testing and scrutiny.

The emergence of new actors: Literacy education as a crowded field

Having described these three sets of developments, we end this chapter by expanding on another distinctive feature of the landscape for education in England – the range of individuals and organisations that provide guidance or support for literacy education. Historically teachers' professional learning was supported by local education services, by universities through Masters courses and by subject associations such as the United Kingdom Literacy Association (https://ukla.org/), The English Association (https://englishassociation.ac.uk/) and The National Association for Teaching of English (https://www.nate.org.uk/). With the dismantling of local education services, the move to

academisation and broader shifts to a more marketised system, sources of support have become increasingly decentralised. Long-established subject associations, charities and universities continue to facilitate teachers' engagement with research and some local education services still provide services for schools to buy in. However, as stated above, it is now common for MATs and free schools to develop – and often market – their own professional development courses and there is a growing influence from consultants, operating independently or as part of consultancy firms (Gough, 2013). The experience and expertise brought by consultants to literacy education vary widely. Some are ex-local authority advisers with extensive experience of supporting literacy over many years. Some bring recent and relevant experience as expert literacy teachers or leaders or insider knowledge of government expectations. Others offer advice on literacy in primary schools as just one of several areas and their professional experience may be with other age groups or subjects. Many have built their clientele through a strong social media presence, building from free online resources to paid consultancy (Gough, 2013). Any of these may or may not belong to networks through which they have access to a range of research.

The landscape has become even more crowded as relatively new bodies, independent of government, universities and local authorities, have emerged to support, regulate, lobby for and/or accredit professional practice, many of which promote the use of research in education. At the time of writing, these include the Chartered College for Teaching (https://chartered.college/), the Teacher Development Trust (https://tdtrust.org/), the National Institute for Teaching (https://niot.org.uk/) and the EEF's network of Research Schools (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/support-for-schools/research-schools-network) as well as various think-tanks. The possibilities enabled by social media have also allowed new kinds of networks to emerge, such as Research Ed, 'a grass-roots, teacher led organisation started in 2013' (ResearchEd, n.d.). While these individuals and organisations may share a commitment to strengthening relationships between research and practice and mediating research findings they may adopt quite different understandings about literacy and/or research.

Conclusion

As we have explored through this chapter, policy developments in England have had considerable implications for literacy, for research and for teachers' lives and work. Many of these have framed research and literacy in ways that are much narrower than the expansive ideas about literacy and research described in Chapter 2. To claim that policy is the only shaping factor in teachers' professional lives would be an over-simplification but it is certainly the case that these policies have worked, separately and in conjunction with one another, to define teaching, literacy and research in significant ways.

Given this proliferation of developments, England provides an interesting focus for exploring the movements of research in the wild. In the *Research Mobilities* project, we were interested in how these policy developments converged in the lives of teachers in relation to their encounters with research. We were also interested in how they were significant to the circulation of research more broadly, and in the effects produced as multiple policy developments combined with one another to amplify certain ideas or generate contradictions. As many analyses have illustrated, such effects – often unintended – may exceed and even undermine the intentions of their originators. In the next chapter, we explore how we orientated towards these shifts, slippages and escapes through a sociomaterial sensitivity and a focus on mobilities.

Notes

1 The names and number of foundation subjects have changed through different iterations of the curriculum.
2 Exceptions included Wray and Lewis's (1997) work on reading and writing non-fiction which informed that strand of the strategy.
3 As a matter of record Rose actually recommended that the searchlight model be *adapted* to acknowledge the two dimensions foregrounded by Gough and Tunmer, but the nuance of this recommendation was lost as the momentum grew for systematic synthetic phonics as the first approach to teaching decoding.
4 Systematic synthetic phonics involves blending and segmenting words from individual phonemes, for example 'n-igh-t'. In its early stages, the National Literacy Strategy drew on a mix of synthetic and analytic phonics approaches. Analytic approaches draw on analogies between words using onset and rime, for example 'n-ight', 'br-ight' (and have been seen as favourable by some as, by moving from 'whole to part, they retain a focus on meaning more easily).
5 We refer to the National Curriculum that was introduced in 2014 and was in place at the time of writing this book.

4 From research mobilisation to research mobilities

Introduction

As we explored in Chapter 1, the *Research Mobilities* project was designed to investigate research mobilities *in the wild*. We were interested not only in planned dissemination of research but in how research moves to teachers in unexpected or serendipitous ways. We adopted this broad perspective on what happens – rather than just what is intended – in order to generate in-depth insights into the movements of literacy research to, among and around teachers. Our focus on research mobilisation was born out of concern about the narrow framings of literacy and research that seemed to feature in educational policy (see Chapter 3). We were interested in how patterns in the take-up of research were connected in complex ways to a shifting communications landscape including digital mediation, government policy, changing approaches to school organisation and popular ideas about language and literacy. We wanted to know whether and how these things were significant to the mobilisation of research and whether certain kinds of research seemed to fare better than others, regardless of research quality or the efforts of researchers – and to consider the implications of these things for literacy, for research and for teachers.

In this chapter, we explain how the *Research Mobilities* project contributes to the wider work on research mobilisation. Our starting point was the interdisciplinary *mobilities* paradigm which has explored movement in multiple contexts – how movement happens and what movement does (Faulconbridge & Hui, 2016; Urry, 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006, 2016). We combined our interest in mobilities with a sociomaterial sensitivity to how individuals, organisations, technologies and so on combine to propel or stall the movements of research. We elaborate on these ideas in what follows. We begin however by locating our project within the broader field of research mobilisation.

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The challenge of research mobilisation

Research mobilisation has become a much-debated topic in recent years. Formal mechanisms, such as funding requirements and the UK's research assessment exercise,[1] have encouraged researchers to seek impact and of course most educational researchers would like their work to matter in some way within education policy and/or practice. In recent years the drive for evidence-based education has gathered pace through various national and international developments (see Chapter 3 and also, OECD, 2022, 2023). There has been a proliferation of organisations and networks established to examine and strengthen research-informed education[2] and numerous projects have explored strategies for enhancing relationships between research, researchers and teachers (see Chapter 1).

The potential for research to shape practice has sometimes been presented as tantalisingly simple. The UK government's What Works Network Ecosystems Model for example presents a cyclical process that moves from research production to synthesis, translation, dissemination, implementation and evaluation (Cabinet Office, 2018). Nevertheless, in the context of education, there has been much discussion about a 'research-practice gap' (Gorard, See and Siddiqui, 2020). Neal et al. (2015) explore some of the reasons for this: social and spatial distance between researchers and practitioners; echo chambers and closed loops that limit the circulation of fresh insights; and a lack of common ground between teachers and researchers, with teachers knowing little about 'evidence-based solutions' and researchers knowing little about local context. While explanations vary, it is clear that connecting research and practice involves much more than dissemination, strategy and investment and that the relationship between research and practice is complex and non-linear (e.g. see Boaz et al., 2019). Such concerns have led to increasing interest in the processes of research *mobilisation*.

Nuanced analyses of research mobilisation provide insights into the influences on research adoption (British Academy, 2018; Maxwell et al., 2022; Levin, 2011). Maxwell et al.'s (2022) 'systems approach', for example, presents engagements with research as tangled with diverse pressures and concerns and proposes that effective knowledge mobilisation needs to take account of multiple factors, such as researcher reputation, school leadership and culture as well as wider policy contexts. Studies have also found that successful mobilisation is not just eased by effective packaging and presentation but relationships and affective response (e.g. Creaby & Haslam, 2020). Maxwell et al. (2019) for instance concluded that attempts to embed the recommendations from the Education Endowment Foundation's work on deployment of teaching assistants were galvanised by motivation, passion and momentum as well as time to network, collaborate and reflect with colleagues.

As explored in the previous chapter, a wide variety of individuals and organisations are active in providing support for literacy education in schools in England. Many of these play a role in facilitating connections between research and practice at the level of policy engagement, organisational development or implementation (Cooper et al., 2020) and, as such, are often described as 'research brokers' (Shewchuk & Farley-Ripple, 2022). They include school/trust leaders, charities, subject associations, government institutions and local authority advisers as well as various commercial organisations and educational consultants. As we shall go on to explore in this chapter and in the rest of this book, our ideas about research mediation evolved through the course of this project. At this point, however, we note that many research brokers have multiple roles and that brokerage may be driven by a blend of commercial, professional, academic, political and/or ideological motivations. Examples of activities that might involve research brokerage include:

- creation of summaries, syntheses or synthesis of research;
- establishment or curation of research repositories;
- leading or contributing to events such as conferences, seminars or training;
- activity on social media or participation in staffroom discussions;
- development of resources and equipment;
- embedding research as a touchpoint or requirement, for example, in government policy or a course reading list.

These activities may or may not align with local or national policy. They may be planned or serendipitous and overt or – as is often the case with research-informed resources – less obvious. They may focus on a specific piece of research, draw broadly on a body of work or involve more open-ended invitations for research engagement. Importantly it is misleading to see brokers as always positioned *between* educators and researchers. Teachers and school leaders, for example, may well conduct their own research or inquiry or introduce research findings to their colleagues; and educational researchers are often active in professional networks and/or have dual lives as teacher educators as well as researchers. As such, many teachers and researchers play a role in brokering their own and others' research. Various rubrics have been produced to capture this complexity and to map and analyse the work of research brokers (e.g. Neal et al., 2019; Malin & Brown, 2020; Walker et al., 2019).

It will be clear from this brief overview that extant research on research mobilisation and brokerage has much to say to researchers and universities who are keen to disseminate their work effectively and to policymakers and educational leaders interested in ensuring that research is taken up in schools. In many ways, such work is aligned with the purposes, interests

and intentions of the *Research Mobilities* project and it has certainly informed and helped to shape our analysis and thinking. There were however aspects of our work which trod a slightly different path and which led us to understand research mediation rather differently (as we shall explore in later chapters).

One of these was our interest in the movements of research in the wild – in what *does* move rather than what is *anticipated, intended or desired*. During the *Research Mobilities* project, for example, we found that our developing ideas sometimes turned up in unexpected places. Early on, Cathy wrote a short article for *Teach Primary* magazine which argued for engaging with a wide range of research. This ended up on *Teachwire* (https://www.theteachco.com/teachwire), the online arm of *Teach Primary* which has well over 60,000 subscribers, many of whom are likely to be teachers (Burnett, 2022b). We only discovered this through a casual conversation with a colleague and of course have no idea who may have read the article there, if anyone at all, but it is quite possible that it was influential for someone somewhere. Such unexpected mobilisations were of great interest to us in the *Research Mobilities* project.

Our interest was in how research *does (or does not)* mobilise, which sometimes coincided with what researchers, policymakers and other organisations would *like* to happen but sometimes did not. This includes the movements of recently published research findings but also the research that is sedimented into practice, which resurfaces after many years packaged as an intervention or scheme or which moves between schools or networks of schools crossing local, administrative and international boundaries in parallel to, or at odds with, the policies of schools, trusts, regions or nations. We were interested not just in effective strategies for mobilising research but in why some research findings mobilise more effectively than others, regardless of strategy.

A second defining aspect of our work was our sociomaterial stance. In Chapter 1, we explored how the process of engaging with research has always been shaped by objects including digital technologies – whether these are booths, desks, buildings and library catalogues or referencing software, search engines or AI. These cannot be seen as deterministic. As described in Chapter 1, the physicality of the partitioned library desk may well enable solitude and the curve of the ovoid table invite collaboration. But they may also assemble with other things, routines and intentions with effects that are at odds with original design (as books are piled to create ad hoc dividers on oval desks, for example, or as notes are passed between booths). In our project, we were interested in the idea that research mediation involves combinations of actors operating in different spheres to include people and organisations but also digital actors such as hashtags, likes, PDFs, algorithms and hyperlinks. In our preliminary study, for example, we described how ideas moved on Twitter

between teachers, researchers, consultants and others in many complex ways that appeared radial and erratic rather than linear (Burnett et al., 2022a).

The third distinctive dimension of the *Research Mobilities* project, as explored in Chapter 2, was our interest in the relationship between research mobilisation and different *kinds* of literacy research. The vast majority of research mobilisation literature approaches research with a neutral stance towards content and does not attempt to draw connections between the nature of the research itself and its mobilisation. In contrast in this respect, our project was driven by a concern with a series of imbalances in the literacy research that was making its way into primary education (as discussed in Chapter 2). This concern may or may not be of substantive interest to those outside the literacy education field; nevertheless we do suggest that work in exploring relationships between mobilisation and *different kinds of research* is relevant to those interested in research mobilisation more widely. As we shall go on to consider in further detail, investigating research mobilisation is important for tracing the effectiveness of *intended* pathways to impact as well as those that are seemingly serendipitous. However, we would also argue that research mobilisation is inextricable from the politics of knowledge. Our project is underpinned by the idea that, in thinking about mobilisation, it is important to engage with the 'what' as well as the 'how' of research mobilisation. We expand on this point in the next section.

What does a specific focus on literacy research add to thinking about mobilisation?

As explored in Chapter 2, research associated with literacy has emerged from different disciplines and produced diverse insights into: the nature of literacy; how literacy is learned; and the purposes of literacy education. Attending to the relative mobilities of different kinds of research matters for a rather obvious reason. If we neglect to focus on the content of research and approach 'evidence' neutrally, then we sidestep complex debates about the purpose of education (Biesta, 2016). But it also matters in understanding how mobilisation happens and what it does. In thinking about this it is useful to reflect on examples of research that have circulated widely despite considerable critique. As discussed in Chapter 3, sometimes this has been because of alignment with government policy galvanised by commercial organisations and/or energetic work from literacy researchers but there may be other actors in play, too.

Hart and Risley's (1995) research into the language experience of children from lower and higher-income homes provides an illustrative example. Hart and Risley estimated that – by age 4 – children in the wealthiest homes will have heard over 30 million more words than children from those with the lowest incomes – and referred to this as 'the word gap'. Their conclusions

were extrapolated from the number of words that researchers heard spoken to children in 42 families in Kansas City, during hour-long monthly visits for about two and a half years. Their methodology and subsequent analysis have been widely questioned (e.g. Adair et al., 2017; Baugh, 2016) and yet 'the word gap' has repeatedly resurfaced in educational and public discourse as a matter of concern. It has appeared in the work of educational authors, charities and bodies dedicated to investigating the English language, been reworked through popular educational books and evoked in publications focused on the importance of oral language (Gillen & Burnett, 2020).

One possible reason for the resilience of the 'the word gap' idea is that it easily combines with moral panics about losses of vocabulary from the English language and with deficit discourses about the 'poor language' of young children (Snell & Cushing, 2022). Another may be that the concept acts as a rallying call for those committed to raising the status of talk in education whether or not they have much knowledge and understanding of Hart and Risley's (1995) research. And another may be that 'the word gap' is a tweetable phrase that can carry easily to time poor, policy hungry government advisers and educational leaders – 'the word gap', as one teacher told us in the run up to this project was 'big on social media'. We see similar effects with other catchy phrases used to refer to bodies of research and/or approaches to practice: 'The Science of Reading' for example (see Chapters 2 and 10), 'reading for pleasure' (Chapters 6–8) and 'funds of knowledge' (see Chapters 6, 7, 9). In any case, it would appear that the 'word gap' idea has moved in multiple directions across time and space, combining with a range of interests, intentions, affects and activities. In doing so, it has acquired considerable presence and persuasiveness and has been treated in some contexts as unassailable truth at the very same time that others argue that it is the epitome of a raciolinguistic ideology, deeply detrimental to England's education policies (Cushing, 2023).

Through this project, we wanted to better understand why some research gathers momentum and intensity. We were also interested in what mobilisation *does*, by which we mean that we were interested in what happens as research findings connect with people, organisations, ideas and activities. We were particularly interested in what happened to teachers, to literacy education and to research findings. In considering these iterative relationships between movement, teachers, literacy education and research, we were influenced by work in the mobilities paradigm and it is to this that we turn next.

Moving onto mobilities

Interest in 'mobilities' sharpened at the turn of the 21st century spearheaded by John Urry working in collaboration with colleagues from diverse disciplinary areas and parts of the world (Urry, 2007). Urry argued for

reorientating sociology from a focus on societies within nation states to 'a world on the move' (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 207), a shift necessitated by: global economic models that rely on the international exchange of labour and commodities; mass migration driven by political and economic insecurity and environmental collapse; a digitised, networked world which erodes spatial and boundaries; and a cosmopolitanisation of taste. These shifts manifest in movements of people, things and ideas that may be physical, digitised or (almost always) a combination of both. Studies of mobilities have been most prolific in addressing topics as tourism, transport and migration (Jensen et al., 2019) but there is a growing body of work that has explored *knowledge mobilities*, investigating how ideas cross international borders and highlighting the significance of geographic mobilities to the kinds of knowledge that gain traction (e.g. Jöns, et al., 2017). An example here is the role of colonialism and scholarly travel in explaining why ideas gain traction in some places and not others (Barnes & Abrahamsson, 2017).

Urry argued that it is imperative to interrogate and understand how people, things and ideas mobilise and to explore the enablers and blockages to such movements. This is important partly because mobilities are symptomatic of a changing world – and, as such, are important foci for analysis of power dynamics. But it is also important because of their varied, often momentous, effects (Faulconbridge & Hui, 2016). Mobilities research draws attention to the reflexive relationship between mobilities and social, cultural, political and material imperatives. Mobilities are not neutral but political. As Sheller and Urry argued,

> the new paradigm attempts to account for not only the quickening of liquidity within some realms but also the concomitant patterns of concentration that create zones of connectivity, centrality, and empowerment in some cases, and of disconnection, social exclusion, and inaudibility in other cases.
>
> (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 210)

Inspired by the mobilities paradigm, in our project, we were interested in how *processes and practices* of mobilisation were significant for which literacy research gains traction in literacy education and which does not. The effects of research mobilisation can be seen in rather straightforward terms: if research is mobilised through policy directives, it is likely to have effects on educational practice (even if not inevitably so). An example of this is the role of the Clackmannanshire study in bolstering the strategy on phonics in England (see Chapter 3). In such cases, mobilities may well be galvanised by beliefs and assumptions rather than lead them. But the process of mobilisation itself can also have effects, for example in stabilising ideas such as 'the word gap', however fragile or otherwise their base in research. Research

mobilities therefore may have complex relationships with – and arguably effects upon – what is done and which questions are asked of educational practice; they may not only be enacted by social, cultural, political and material imperatives but help shape them.

We were interested in iterative relationships between research mobilities and what literacy, research and teaching become, and in the effects of all this for those involved – for researchers, teachers, consultants, brokers and policymakers. As part of this, as we go on to explore, we became interested in relationships between research mobilities and ideas about expertise and credibility – in the effects of mobilities on who or what gets to be seen as expert and which kind of knowledge gets to be seen as truth. We were interested not just in how impressions of credibility, accessibility, relevance and value were feeding research mobilities but in how research mobilities themselves were significant in the accrual of credibility, accessibility, relevance and value.

Another central concern of mobilities research is the significance of borders, boundaries and border crossings. More commonly examined in the context of topics such as migration, communications, transport and trade (e.g. Endres, Manderscheid & Mincke, 2016), we were interested in the borders and boundaries we could trace in the field of literacy research and education. We anticipated that some of these would be connected to the highly regulated policy environment for literacy education in England (see Chapter 3), the diverse communities of literacy scholars (as described in Chapter 2) and mediation in different domains by policymakers, teachers, school leaders, charities and so on. Teachers – technically at least – have access to seemingly endless sources of information, inspiration and guidance via the internet and can network with teachers from across the globe. We were interested in how such opportunities might play out in alliances that destabilise boundaries, in the work being done to sustain boundaries and in how and when such boundaries appear. We were also interested in what happens to meanings as research moves and in how 'knowledge is both fixed and mutated as it is mobilised across boundaries' (Fenwick & Farrell, 2012, p. 3). With these ideas in mind we expand on the sociomaterial sensitivity with which we approached research mobilities, which we introduced in Chapter 1 as a way of engaging with the work of both human and more-than-human actors in research mobilities.

Approaching research mobilities with a sociomaterial sensibility

We use sociomateralism, as Fenwick, Edwards and Sawchuk (2011) did, as an umbrella term for relational ontologies, that see social and material dimensions of research practices as mutually constitutive. Key to our thinking was the notion of assemblage which, at its simplest, helps describe how

people and materials, texts, technologies, policies combine with social material effects. The notion of assemblage has been used extensively by educational researchers who have developed and adapted the idea from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) (e.g. Hamilton, 2017; Landri, 2018). It is an idea that we have found helpful in thinking about why it is that some kinds of literacy research appear to become influential while others are noticeably absent. It is helpful, for example, in thinking about the persistence of certain ideas, like 'the word gap', as a topic within educational discourse (see Chapter 3). Rather than seeing this as an achievement by a particular individual, policy or organisation we might see how this idea gains traction – and becomes reified – as policy and practice, popular discourse, commercial actors, tweets, likes, teachers, resources, parents and so on combine to sustain it as an idea that is significant – and true. This is achieved not just by aggregations of people – whether these be individuals, groups, organisations, communities and so on – but by more-than-human actors such as tweets, accountability mechanisms, curriculum directives, training sessions and performance management mechanisms.

Importantly the notion of assemblage does not imply inevitability or intractability. Relations are always provisional and require constant work to sustain. Assemblage is dynamic and fluid. As Law (2004) writes, assemblage can be seen as:

> …a process of bundling, of assembling, or better of recursive self-assembling in which the elements are not fixed in shape, do not belong to a larger pre-given list but are constructed at least in part as they are entangled together.
>
> (Law, 2004, p. 42)

With regard to mobilities, it has helped us think about how and why it is that different people, things, technologies, texts and so forth combine and entangle; what happens to them as they do so; and the effects of these entanglements in terms of who or what becomes powerful, which ideas are taken up, whose perspectives are privileged and so forth. It has helped us to articulate, for example, not just how ideas gain traction or credence but how they lose currency or fail to feature. It also provides us with a touchpoint to explain how meanings shift as things combine and become mutually entangled. And most importantly perhaps it undermines the argument that people, institutions, things, technologies, texts, etc. always conspire to hold things in place and that hegemonic discourses are ultimately inescapable – a move which is crucial to our recommendations in Chapter 11. This emphasis on the endlessly co-constitutive nature of phenomena and the production of differing, and possibly unpredictable, effects helps explain how some ideas do gain traction without official endorsement.

In Chapters 6–9, we explore some ways in which people, technologies, texts and organisations combine with effects that run parallel to, diverge from or even disrupt dominant perspectives in unexpected ways. While we do not underestimate the power of assemblages which have become 'stuck', the notion of assemblage allows us to see enactments of literacy and of research as ultimately unstable – it is always possible for things to assemble differently, and for actors to become other as they are mutually entangled (Burnett & Merchant, 2020). Specifically, in Chapter 9, we draw on Callon's notion of translation, which we expand on in Chapter 5.

Research as text(s)

At this point, it is worth making the point that many of the actors that contribute to research mobilities are texts of one kind or another. As Fenwick and Farrell write, research findings travel 'reified and mobilised as language' (2012, p.3) and, we would add, frequently as photographs, infographs, video and sound files, too. Research findings, for example, manifest as 6000 word articles, books such as this one, PDFs, guidance booklets, PowerPoint presentations, TikTok or YouTube videos, blogs, news articles or podcasts. These distillations are not straightforward or unproblematic and a sociomaterial sensitivity gives us some purchase on this. The notion of resemiotisation is highly relevant here as being concerned with 'textual production unfolding through time' and how such shifts have consequences in how people perceive them in the world (Newfield, 2015, p. 273). The process of producing different kinds of texts involves working with possibilities and constraints of different textual formats which in turn may be shaped by the economics of publishing, design conventions and modal affordances as well as personal taste and assumptions about what a particular audience will find accessible.

Earlier, for example, we mentioned an article that Cathy had written for *Teach Primary* which reappeared on the linked digital platform, *Teachwire* – 'Why evidence isn't enough' (Burnett, 2022b). The article was written through an iterative process in which Cathy was urged by the *Teach Primary* editor to be concise, to use plain English and to avoid 'academic terms'. Cathy went along with this, even though she was uncomfortable about how some of the details slipped out along the way. Interestingly, however, something else slipped in at the point of publication: a strapline she never had the chance to approve: 'We need an inclusive approach to research in primary literacy education to really see results – it's not just about large-scale studies….' This strapline may well have captured some of the argument but 'to really see results' ran counter to Cathy's argument about orientating to the broader aims and purposes of literacy education. The editors presumably (thought they) knew their readers and this slight tweak may well have been made to make the

article feel more 'relevant' to schools and teachers. But it also perhaps co-opted the article to the accountability discourse described in Chapter 3. As Iedema (2003, p. 48) argues: 'rematerialization requires new resource investments; restructuring derives from different expertises and literacies, and resemiotization opens up different modalities of human experience'.

Language, always manifest in material, multimodal forms, changes therefore in many fundamental ways as it is mobilised. Complex digital spaces, such as Twitter, for example, create (as explored in Chapter 8) ways in which people can participate in public dialogues and connect with one another, potentially build their own new audiences and connect with prominent professionals (Gillen, 2018). Furthermore, interactions on Twitter create 'new complex and layered combinations for the circulation of different (in) authenticities and, importantly, metapragmatic evaluations of such (in) authenticities' (Kytölä & Westinen, 2015, p. 7) through multimodal means of creating, reacting to and reposting tweets. It is often overlooked that Twitter changed rapidly in its affordances since its invention in 2006 and people's practices were both shaped by these and served to shape the platform itself. Initially, the platform was designed as a platform for group messaging (rather like WhatsApp became by about 2020). Taken up far more enthusiastically for public posting rather than among a restricted, small private group, people responded to the challenge of crafting a meaningful message in 140 characters (extended to 280 in 2017).

In earlier times, it was not possible to post an image on a tweet. If a poster wanted to include an image they would host that on another, linked platform and ensure that their tweet included the link and was worded so that a reader might be tempted to click again, to reach the linked site (Gillen & Merchant, 2013). Changes in management, policy and its reincarnation as X led to further changes and a mass exodus as many of its users saw it as no longer offering the possibilities it once did (Chang et al., 2023). Twitter, later as X, has continued to fluctuate according to many entwined factors including national/supranational policies, its own shifting regulatory regimes and cultural, professional and personal influences at play on users and the broader environment.

Such fluctuations are highly dynamic and are experienced by and shaped by individuals and their own communicative repertoires. Over time they shift among platforms, media and channels as they seek information, interact with others and perform their online identities and evaluations, creating the chains of communication that teachers speak of in Chapter 6.

Finally, we note that localised practices also shape and are shaped by what texts do. As platforms such as Twitter or texts such as PDFs, tweets, PowerPoints or reports appear on head teachers' desks, the screens of consultants and other researchers, the meeting rooms of local and national organisations and governments and the classrooms and homes of teachers,

they combine with imperatives, concerns, interests, feelings – and material realities – that shape what, if anything, they then become.

In all of these ways, the meanings of research may shift, aggregate, shed or dissipate as texts travel and get caught up in diverse and shifting sociomaterial entanglements (Burnett & Merchant, 2021). It is with these things in mind that we approached our analysis of research mobilities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that our focus on research mobilities contributes new ways of thinking about research mobilisation. We have outlined our interest in the iterative relationship between research mobilisation and the research being mobilised and introduced the idea that research mobilities are not just affected by what happens as personal, political, educational and economic concerns intersect with educational priorities and practices but that research mobilities themselves have effects and are embroiled with educational practices. We have gestured towards some of the more-than-human actors that participate in such moves. These ideas are relevant not just to thinking about literacy research but have implications for the wider work on research mobilisation, too. We have introduced these ideas because they were useful to us in exploring the role of research mobilities in stabilising and unsettling ideas about research and literacy and in understanding the role of human and more-than-human actors. It is with these ideas in mind that, in the next chapter, we explain the methodology we adopted for the *Research Mobilities* project.

Notes

1 Research Excellence Framework assessments are conducted at regular intervals, most recently in 2021 with next scheduled for 2029 (see https://www.ref.ac.uk/).
2 Examples include: National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships, Institute of Education Sciences (IES), National Center for Research in Policy and Practice (NCRPP), Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, the Researching and Understanding Research Use network (RuRu) at the University of St Andrews, the Durham University Evidence Centre for Education, The EPPI-Centre at University College London, Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research (KNAER).

5 Investigating research mobilities – A multistranded methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore how we approached the task of researching research mobilities. This involved dealing with some slippery ideas about 'research', 'evidence' and 'literacy' given that part of our interest in research mobilities was in how these ideas are understood, materialise and entangle with one another in educational practice. The borders we placed around our inquiry were constantly challenged. When we searched for 'research' in newspapers for example we found that these terms were rather unproductive in guiding us towards the exchanges we were interested in and we had to rethink our search parameters. When we asked teachers to talk about 'research', mostly they talked about things that were not research as we understood it. And when we invited them to focus on literacy, other things frequently slipped in, such as oracy, cognitive science, assessment and feedback. Rather than seeing such responses as irrelevant this prompted us to reflect that the boundaries we placed around our work as academics were rather at odds with the ways in which teachers and others engaged with relationships between research, literacy and education. We will explore more of this in what follows. From the outset however we emphasise that, in presenting our methodology, we are interested in thinking about how what we did both emerged from and interrupted our developing ideas about research mobilities.

As explored in previous chapters, we were interested in how actors combine to mobilise research in different ways and in the relational effects of such mobilisations for research, for literacy education and for teachers. It will have become clear that we started out with an idea of 'research mobilities' themselves as diffuse, complex, tangled, often unexpected – and difficult to grasp. In developing our methodology, we sought ways of engaging with this messiness. John Law and Annemarie Mol's ideas were helpful here (Mol, 2002; Mol & Law, 2002; Law, 2004). Law (2004) sums up the disconnect

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between the messiness of life and the ordering/organising functions of social science in the opening to *After method: Mess in social science research*:

> Parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and our statistics. But other parts are not or if they are then this is because they have been distorted into clarity. […] If much of the world is vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn't really have much of a pattern at all, then where does this leave social science? How might we catch some of the realities we are currently missing.
>
> (Law, 2004, p. 2)

When considering how methods entangle, interfere and interface with the things they seek to explore, Law suggests thinking in terms of 'method assemblage' whereby ways of knowing (methods) assemble with people, things, processes, policies and so on in ways that enact certain kinds of realities. Methods are active not passive in this process. They establish boundaries around what is seen as relevant and irrelevant through how they observe, log, record, order, organise and represent. It is an idea that Cathy has used previously to consider how different approaches to evaluating reading interventions enact those interventions – and indeed reading – in quite different ways (Burnett, 2017). Method assemblage involves 'enactments of relations that make some things present "in-here", whilst making others absent "out there"' (Law, 2004, p. 14).

Our approach was to use three sets of methods which could be seen as offering different 'modes of knowing' (Law & Ruppert, 2016) research mobilities and which, in effect, bounded research mobilities in different ways. Our methods included:

- corpus linguistics to explore public discourses about primary literacy education research in two domains: mainstream media, specifically newspapers and social media, specifically Twitter (now X);
- sociomaterial ethnographies of the movements and translations of specific pieces of research (such as articles, reviews and research-inflected ideas) drawing on a combination of network ethnography, controversy mapping and object interviews and manifested in nine 'cases';
- qualitative approaches to investigate teachers' encounters with literacy research. These included a blend of interviews, workshops, focus groups and lifelogging to capture *what* teachers encountered as well as their experiences and perspectives.

In working across our data, we were attentive to how our methods worked differently to bound literacy, research, teaching – and mobilities. Some

approaches were more scripted than others but all evolved during the course of the project. We used various digital tools to identify, collect, process, sort and represent data – including Google and Python – and more specialised tools and resources such as TweetCollector, Padlet (an online collaboration board), NVivo, Nexis and generative AI. These, like all tools, tend towards the enactment of certain kinds of realities, haunted by the previous uses folded into their design (Blackman, 2019).

In considering our three sets of methods, it may be helpful to hold in mind Law's idea of the kaleidoscope (as above) and see our methods as enacting different versions of mobilities just as new patterns are presented by the twist of a kaleidoscope. The teacher data provide insights into teachers' encounters with research. The sociomaterial ethnographies explore what happens to research as it moves and the work and labour of various assemblages in which research circulates. The newspaper corpus illuminates what was circulating in public discourse. But the kaleidoscope analogy has limitations. Despite considerable variety, the parts – and patterns – are ultimately finite and each pattern is distinct from the others. Our three approaches were more tangled than that. At times, the outcomes of our different explorations resonated strongly with one another. At others, they added nuance or suggested contradictions that generated questions to explore. Sometimes they troubled one another, helping us reflect not just on what our methods caught but what we missed and what these absences suggested about the mobilities of literacy research in primary education.

We found this ongoing process of confirmation and disruption useful in sketching dimensions of research mobilities and some of their effects for literacy, research and teachers in England. We describe some of these in Chapters 6–9. For now, we provide further detail on what we did, always holding in mind that this account of procedures cannot do justice to the enactment of these methods in practice (and indeed what was enacted by these methods). Readers interested in a more detailed account may wish to refer to *Investigating Research mobilities: A methods resource* (Cermakova et al., 2024).

Corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics is an approach to linguistic inquiry that examines extensive samples of real language that can be taken as representing a language in use at a particular period and/or place, by a particular group of people. For example, the British National Corpus 2014 (BNC, 2014) is a 100-million-word corpus of contemporary English that 'provides a snapshot of language, and a window into social history, at the time of its compilation' (Brezina et al., 2021, p. 595). It enables linguists and others who can make use of the wide range of corpus linguistic tools available to investigate words and phrases in

conditions of authentic use. Comparisons can be made, either within the corpus itself or by comparison with another corpus; for example, through using the British National Corpus compiled in 1990s (http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/) and BNC 2014 (http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014/) one can trace recent language change in British English. For the BNC corpora, the claim to representativeness of language as a whole lies not only in their size but also in their careful balances of included text types, between spoken and written English and across various genres. In these respects, BNC and BNC 2014 both strive for what McEnery and Hardie (2012, p. 10) term the 'ideals' of 'balance, representativeness and comparability' while noting that this would be extremely difficult if not impossible to achieve in practice. Nevertheless, the size of such corpora and the care taken in their construction make them powerful resources.

Another approach to corpus compilation, taken by this project, was to construct what are known as 'small specialist corpora' (Flowerdew, 2004). Note that *small* here relates to the contrast with the major corpora such as BNC and BNC 2014 or the enormous web-crawled corpora (e.g. TenTen corpora) rather than being an indicator of an absolute value, which can vary considerably, as indeed in our project. Drawing on pioneering work by Sinclair (e.g.: (e.g. 1991, 2004), Flowerdew (2004) makes three important points for our purposes about the construction of such corpora. First, that they enable a more targeted way of approaching a field, such as academic and professional language, than a general corpus could cater for. Second, that the analyst operates from prior knowledge of their field so that they have clear goals in mind and can construct their new corpora accordingly. Third, that comparison between corpora is an extremely useful technique: 'comparison uncovers difference almost regardless of size' (Sinclair, 2001 cited by Flowerdew, 2004, p. 17).

We now very briefly preview some of the main tools used in corpus linguistics. A first necessary step is connecting a corpus to a corpus linguistics platform or tool. There are several free tools available, including #LancsBox X (accessible from Lancaster University at https://lancsbox.lancs.ac.uk/) and AntConc (https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/). The use of other methods does not have to happen sequentially; and their selection and deployment depend on the goals of the analyst. Table 5.1 presents our simplified descriptions of the methods we refer to in this chapter. Linguists may wince at our use of terms such as *word* instead of useful distinctions such as *token*, *type* and *lemma* but our goal is to remain as accessible as possible here.

We again acknowledge that this description is very much simplified and that we have deliberately avoided some ambiguities and fine distinctions.

We created corpora from two different external sources and a third from the data generated through investigating teachers' encounters with research.

Table 5.1 A simplified summary of corpus linguistics terms used in this book

Term	*Description*
Frequency list	Words arranged in order of the number of times that they occur in the corpus; they may be presented as counts or as relative frequency (e.g. per thousand words).
Concordance line	A presentation of any word searched for or search term in the contexts in which it occurs; usually presented in a line as a 'window' that includes the words immediately before and after the word. The window can usually be clicked on to allow immediate access to the original text.
Keyword	A word that appears statistically more often in comparison to its occurrence in a chosen reference corpus, for example a word in a small specialist corpus compared to BNC.
Collocation	Two words that occur frequently either next to or very near one another in such a way that they are conceptually linked. This method in particular requires statistical testing.

The first corpus was designed to generate insights into the public discourse on relationships between literacy, research and primary education. For this, we focused on newspaper discourse as a proxy for public discourse. Of course, any public news media cannot genuinely and precisely reproduce the discussions we hear around us as we pass through life, whatever our professional, personal and community experiences. But, given newspapers' orientations to their audiences, they need to be in touch with what their diverse audiences want to read about and then further chime with their ideas. Newspapers are therefore the imperfect repositories of the ideologies of our time. Necessarily they are fuzzy reflections, not least because of legal constraints and journalistic conventions that shape these platforms, as any communications media. But if we want to know about what a society in general thinks about a particular topic, it can be extremely illuminating to study news media, and newspapers are a relatively accessible source. This approach has proved effective in studying a wide range of topics, from infant mortality in the Victorian age to Islamophobia in twenty-first-century Britain (Atkinson & Gregory, 2017; Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013).

Contemporary society exists in a 'hybrid media system' in which former distinctions between 'old' media such as newspapers and 'new' media such as social media platforms have been dissolving (Chadwick, 2017). Newspapers are increasingly encountered online and social media content often references, underpins or even drives journalism. In the light of this, the second platform in which we practised corpus linguistics was Twitter. Twitter was chosen because, at the time this project took place, it was perceived to be a social media platform that was particularly generative of debates in public, connecting institutions, individuals and not least significant for its connections across national boundaries. In 2012, Veletsianos

and Kimmons (2012) proposed that the rise of 'networked participatory publishing' could be discerned in academic research dissemination practices and its growth was likely to influence values and cultures across higher education. Twitter, mentioned by those researchers as significant in these techno-cultural shifts, was also a platform that had been well documented as used by teachers to share and exchange ideas, information and inspiration beyond their school contexts (Guest, 2018). Twitter, at this time before the involvement and eventual take over by Elon Musk, allowed us to look at multiple human and more-than-human actors involved in the mobilisation of research. Third, we created a corpus of data from our work with teachers. While being a particularly small dataset, we used it to investigate contrasts with the other corpora.

The corpora

Here we briefly introduce how we created our corpora, reflect on our decisions and preview some of the methods we used for analysis. As mentioned above, our first corpus was a newspaper corpus, technically relatively easy to construct, using Nexis, a large commercial database, although not without challenges (Ädel, 2010). Nexis provides a semiotically reduced version of newspaper articles, losing their illustrations formatting, links and many other features. This aligns with the general domain of corpus linguistics, which focusses on linguistic content rather than multimodality. Rheindorf (2019, p. 62) suggests that this 'semiotic impoverishment … may well be seen as an acceptable price to pay for studying representative amounts of linguistic data'.

A considerable amount of piloting and experimenting with different terms is needed to ascertain which can be operationalised to create a corpus that succeeds in including texts of interest, without too many exclusions, but at the same time does not contain too high a proportion of irrelevant articles that take enormous time to exclude. To express this more simply, if every article was headed 'primary literacy education research' our job would have been done for us but of course that does not happen in the real world. Different domains have their own lexicons and ways of referring to clusters of related phenomena. In newspapers, for example, *primary* and *research* brought out a huge number of results relating to other disciplines especially medicine. Therefore, after much piloting we settled on using the search terms *primary*, *literacy* and *education* in combination and collected articles published between 1st January 2017 and 9th May 2022. We thus created a specialist corpus to represent discourses around primary literacy in order to see whether and in what forms research was being discussed. This method meant that we collected a corpus which made sure that research would be included as it would be impossible to explicitly discuss research in primary literacy without mentioning primary and literacy but at the same time we

could, by analysing the data, see whether a particular topic was discussed in relation to research or not. Whether research is explicit, implicit or absent is informative.

The corpus was checked to remove duplicates and remaining irrelevant results. After this process, we had a total of 426 newspaper articles as shown in Table 5.2.

It can be seen at a glance that besides primary literacy education being a matter for concern for *tes*, as would be expected, it also appears in newspapers both with national and regional reach and that, as such, this is a corpus worthy of further investigation in giving insights into public discourses.

Our Twitter corpus was somewhat more complex to create and manipulate, requiring first access to the Twitter Application Interface (API) which enables communications between Twitter and other software, through requests and responses. Working in the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science at Lancaster University, we were fortunate to access a programme which worked with the Twitter API called TweetCollector (Joulain-Jay, 2021). A considerable amount of experimentation was required to settle on the most productive search terms: *primary, literacy* and *research* brought us a massive proportion of irrelevant materials while not giving us tweets that we knew were relevant. Different domains have their own appropriate discourses; for example, the search terms *primary* and *education* were less productive than in the newspaper discourse, on Twitter education was often implicit (although see below for its use as a hashtag). *Evidence* was another term we tried but brought too much noise. Combining insights gained from looking at relevant tweets we knew about and iterative searches, we settled on *primary, school* and *literacy*. As with the media corpus, this meant that the corpus was not definitively confined to a focus on research, but rather the best approximation to our goal we could achieve. We covered the time period from 1st January 2019 to December 2022. We collected over 31,600 Twitter interactions, which included tweets, retweets, quotes and replies together with related information such as account information (e.g. author, location and description) and various performance metrics (e.g. number of followers or number of likes and retweets).

Table 5.2 The *Research Mobilities* newspaper corpus

	Articles	*Words*	*Average length of an article in words*
National newspapers	157 (36%)	124,176 (31%)	791
Times Educational Supplement (*tes*)	86 (20%)	171,784 (42%)	1997
Regional newspapers	183 (43%)	109,643 (27%)	599
Total	426 (100%)	405,603 (100%)	952

Table 5.3 Division of the Research Mobilities subcorpus of original tweets into more or less influential tweets

Tweets	*Count*	*Words*
Tweets with 4+ retweets	1014	41,353
Tweets with <4 retweets	6172	230431
Total	7186	271,784

As retweets and quotes (replies are actually infrequent) are essentially repetitions that signal importance, influence, topic interest and so on, we also examined the Twitter corpus by focusing on original tweets only. We created a subcorpus of these which accounted for 18% of the total interactions. Since we were interested in how influential or not these tweets might be, signalled by the amount of their repetition within the Twitter discourse, we divided this subcorpus into batches based on the number of retweets. It is impossible to investigate how many people read a tweet; however, the act of retweeting probably means that a reader has read the tweet before retweeting. After experimenting with effect sizes, we decided that setting a level of four retweets or more worked to create a reasonably sized further subcorpus of influential tweets as shown in Table 5.3.

Finally, our third corpus was created by taking texts from our teacher data, from which all personal information and references to identifying entities such as school names and localities were redacted. The focus groups (14), interviews (12) and workshops (8) were transcribed. The transcription files were then cleaned and saved as txt files that amount to nearly 278,000 words. Given the nature of this corpus as elicited talk, dialogic markers of spoken language were particularly strong, with, for example, a lot of use of *I* and *you*. The third corpus was of limited use, mainly as a cross-check to references made in the other two and to follow up specific questions arising from the analysis of the teacher data outlined later in this chapter.

Sociomaterial ethnographies

In this section, we describe our approach for examining research moves and the assemblages implicated in these movements, an ambitious undertaking given that a piece of research is not neatly bounded. We assembled a sociomaterial ethnographic methodology influenced by network ethnography, controversy mapping and more-than-human approaches to 'interviewing objects'. We developed this methodology iteratively through our work on nine cases. Each case began with a public research text. These included not only published academic journal articles but also research project websites, research-oriented PDF documents, blogs and tweets, online evidence-based resources, literacy education-focused online sites, phrases used as shorthand

for bodies of research and digital spaces in which students and teachers materially embed specific research. From these starting points, we then followed actors going off in multiple directions backwards, forwards and other ways in time and space: actors doing something to move, block or respond to movements of the research text. We start with an overview of our multi-stranded methodology, informed by Actor Network Theory and other more-than-human perspectives.

Network ethnography

Network ethnography sets out to identify and analyse the creation of networks and the connections that make up these networks. It brings a strong focus on the work and labour that goes into how networks come to be and what they do. Methodologically it is useful for studying mobilities and flows: what is moving and how it stays the same or changes as it moves (see Ball, 2016; Ball, Juneman & Santorini, 2017). Network ethnography was developed by Howard (2002) and later adapted by Ball (2016) to study education policy mobilities. It is well-suited for examining literacy research, which also moves in and creates multi-sited networks through an intertwining of actors and in which research evolves, mutates or splinters off into new networks. Such networks are animated by social and material relations which enable certain activities, ideas, places, events, practices, policies, alliances, entities and money to circulate in varying ways and degrees. An exploratory investigative methodology, Rowe (2022) notes its concern with 'power and the struggle of power' (p. 4). Ball (2023, p. 1) described network ethnography as a 'responsive and adaptive assemblage of research tactics'. It offers a way for researchers to attend to both the situated and the dispersed through in-depth ethnographic work as well as some form of quantitative network-like analysis.

Controversy mapping

Controversy mapping enables researchers to take a closer look at some of the relations and sticky points within networks. Controversies are not merely disagreements. Venturini and Munk (2022) describe controversies as tensions which animate issues – which can include research – and negotiate *matters of concern* and *matters of fact*. Enabling observation of science in the making, controversy mapping (e.g. Munk & Ellern, 2015; Venturini, 2009; Venturini & Munk, 2022) brings strong sociomaterial framing and emphasis on digital methods well-suited to exploring the complexities of research mobilities that play out online or in hybrid on/offline configurations. It employs both data aggregation and more situated data analysis through innovative forms of mapping and data visualisations. Studying a controversy

often moves through five stages as the researcher examines moves from: knowledge claims to debates; debates to actors; actors to networks; networks to worldviews; and worldviews to change (Venturini & Munk, 2022).

Interviewing objects

We turned to the notion of 'interviewing objects' and heuristics outlined by Adams and Thompson (2016) to deepen how we attuned to and analysed human-thingly (and thing-thing) interactions. Drawing on more-than-human and new materialist feminist perspectives, the notion of object interviews signals the intent to include not only humans but also nonhuman things as relevant participants in social science research and to explore how both enact research moves together. In practice, this means trying to catch glimpses of objects (e.g. websites, infographics, blog postings and metrics) in their everyday interactions and involvements with humans and other nonhuman entities.

The cases

Choosing nine cases was a challenging task not least given the wide diversity of literacy research described in Chapter 3. Table 5.4 outlines the nine cases which were selected to maximise diversity in terms of:

- absence or presence within teacher data or news/social media corpora;
- reflecting a range of literacy research (e.g. topics, methodology and stance);
- examining the activity of a range of brokers that vary with respect to power, influence, credibility, depth and breadth of actions;
- presence of digital actors and extent of digital mediation and traces;
- degree of planned versus more serendipitous actions that facilitated specific research moves;
- temporality: we selected pieces of research with origins in published texts dating from the 1980s to 2023.

Data collection and analysis

We started by following the actors. As we did so, seemingly bounded pieces of research quickly dis-assembled and re-assembled into a myriad of fragments and new configurations. The uniqueness of each case meant that our digital fieldwork was fluid. It was not about 'connecting the dots' but rather letting the appearances and movements of the research (or lack of visibility and traction) guide how the tracings unfolded. Following the actors entails attuning to, tracing, searching for and noting appearances of all kinds of actors, taking cues from the actors and assemblings the researcher is following.

Table 5.4 Case matrix

	Name	*Literacy focus*	*Starting points for fieldwork*	*Foregrounded in this cases*
A	Phonics and the reading wars	Phonics	Published journal article Wyse, D., & Bradbury, A. (2022). Reading wars or reading reconciliation? A critical examination of robust research-evidence, curriculum policy and teachers' practices for teaching phonics and reading. *Review of Education*, 10(1), e3314. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3314	A recently published article; one of only 16 peer reviewed articles mentioned by teacher participants which also featured in media corpus that we continued to trace throughout the project; linked to a long-standing controversy; wide array of brokers
B	Reading for Pleasure at the Open University	Reading for pleasure	Reading for Pleasure at the Open University (OURfP) website and article: Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, F., Powell, S. & Safford, K. (2009) Teachers as readers: Building communities of readers. *Literacy*, 43(1), 11–19. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741--4369.2009.00515.x	A body of research led by Teresa Cremin at the Open University that has been widely mobilised for over a decade; a collection of academic publications, practitioner resources, community networks, ongoing professional developmentevents and university outputs centred around the OURfP website; mentioned by 15 teacher participants
C	Ofsted Review of English	English	*Research review series: English* (published May 2022)	An example of high-level government level interaction with, and packaging of, research in the form of a research review, authored by England's state education inspectorate; mentioned by nine teachers

(*Continued*)

Table 5.4 (Continued)

	Name	*Literacy focus*	*Starting points for fieldwork*	*Foregrounded in this cases*
D	Critical Connections	Multilingual digital writing and storytelling	The Critical Connections research project (2012–current)	An ongoing research project characterised by collaborative work with teachers in the United Kingdom and internationally, including a Film Festival to mobilise student-created digital films; large array of digital actors
E	Reflecting Realities	Inclusive and ethnically diverse reading materials	*CLPE Reflecting Realities – Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature* reports generated by CLPE (2018–2023)	Professional research reports generated by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), a long-standing UK-based children's literacy charity working with primary schools; successful and well-coordinated social media campaign around the report; a topic of interest to broader audiences; numerous and high-profile stakeholders; mentioned by four teachers
F	Reading Fluency Toolkit	Reading fluency	EEF Reading House Infographic online and link to the Fluency webpages	A research interest mentioned by eight teachers and emerging in recent publications by the Department for Education, Ofsted, and the Education Endowment Fund (EEF); extensive array of digital research-evidence outputs directed at teachers

G	Funds of Knowledge (FoK)	Counter narrative to deficit discourses across the primary literacy field by recognising the pedagogical resources of children and their communities	The term and concept	A long-standing educational concept; contradictions between FoK as enacted within broader educational literacy practices internationally and its relative obscurity in literacy education research and practice in England
H	OUP tweet on The Reading and Vocabulary Project	Reading and vocabulary growth	A tweet by @OUPSecondary posted in Feb 2022 from an account administered by the Oxford University Press	The starting point tweet emerged through our work on the Twitter corpora and is an example of how research might 'appear' on social media, in this case via the actions of a publisher; initial analysis and visualisations suggested a fairly clear division of labour among various brokers which warranted further examination
I	Join the DOTS (Dreams of Time and Space)	Digital literacies and playful pedagogies	DOTS.team and ARGLE.net websites	A small-scale research project linked to alternate reality gaming and digital literacies, both absent from National Curriculum; project which builds on researcher's trajectory of interest over several years; less extensive digital presence; highly focused activities and labour by selected brokers

Most data were collected and captured online and digitally. We also interviewed 18 people (a range of brokers) to provide context and detailed information not evident in digital traces. Data generation and analysis were done in constant conversation with each other and followed a three-stage process. In the ***Initial Explorations stage***, we scoped the possibilities in each case to gauge depth, breadth and viability. ***Stage 1 Analysis*** focused on following the actors in more in-depth strategic ways and conducting a relational analysis of actors, including attuning to the labour of particular research moves. We decided where to 'cut the network' to keep our work focused. Interviews began and data anecdotes (see below) were generated. In ***Stage 2 Analysis***, we applied our sociomaterial analytic framework to analyse specific mechanisms of research moves, mobilities and brokering to discern various translations of research (see Cermakova et al.[2024] for this framework and more detailed explanations of these stages). We sought out specific data as curiosities and puzzles came to the fore. Further data visualisations were created as a form of data analysis and, in some instances, as data representations.

Our approach included an innovative mix of 'meshed together' qualitative and quantitative work. We leaned towards more qualitative dimensions, not wanting to revert to familiar forms of social network analysis (SNA) or data representations that draw exclusively on big(ish) data. This is of course, an option for others employing this methodology.

As noted above, we drew on heuristics from Adams and Thompson (2016) for the object interviews: including data anecdotes which they describe as descriptive accounts. As human and thingly storylines weave together, anecdotes tell stories that are detailed and provocative. They are a way to gather data, they are data and anecdoting is a form of analysis. Attending to detail, more-than-human anecdotes describe interactions between people and things. And in so doing, they illustrate how specific practices are enacted and bring into view what is often less noticed (see Chapter 9 for examples).

Multiple shifts and movements were evident in the research we examined. Using the notion of *translation* as a heuristic enabled us to untangle research moves to understand the roles and actions of certain actors and how research *becomes* differently. We were able to catch glimpses of: how some positionings of research come to hold more power than others; which actors (and combinations of actors) become influential and how; the nature of the relations between actors; and the stability of particular research assemblages. In setting out the sociology of translation, Callon (1986) describes it as a series of displacements and transformations necessary to study the 'structuring of power relationships' (p. 197). It also enables researchers to examine the work and labour of research moves, important in network ethnography work.

Callon (1986) outlined four moments of translation. Although presented in a rather linear fashion, progression through these four moments (which are not neatly bounded or entirely distinct) is not a certainty and actors will jostle back and forth between moments as 'margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited' (p. 203). *Problematization* is an attempt to delineate an issue of interest which starts to link actors together. In our research, this may be how different actors gravitate to a particular manifestation of research. The devices of *interessement* are where the work really starts as actors become 'interposed' (p. 208) as a 'system of alliances' is constructed (p. 211). *Enrolment* is a further roping in of actors as they take on specific roles thus enabling an 'assemblage' to take shape and begin to work. *Mobilisation* is a form of stabilisation where the ongoing negotiations within the assemblage are smoothed over; the assemblage does what it needs to do and acts as 'unit of force' (p. 216).

We experimented with different forms of data aggregation such as Google Trends, Media Cloud, Issue Crawler, Gephi, Palladio, Voyant and networked Twitter analysis. This enabled us to see our data differently and work across larger swathes of data. We engaged with mapping and data visualisations – some generated through data aggregation and others more qualitatively, some generated digitally and others drawn by hand – to bring networks into view and, more importantly, the work (including invisible labour) that animates these networks. We tried not to 'flatten' networks, which is often the case when someone (or digital technology) tries to represent their complexities. Rather, we tried to explore the textures and dynamics of these networks. In agreement with de Freitas and Walshaw (2016), who think with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), this was 'not actually an attempt to represent the terrain, but an attempt to occupy the terrain and to engage with it' (p. 4). As each mapping effort is necessarily partial, multiple forms of visualisations can be generative and act as both analytical and representational devices. Chapter 9 illustrates some of our approaches to mapping.

Digital fieldwork

Our digital fieldwork unfolded across multiple websites, blog posts, tweets, online communities, documents, images and media articles. The digital traces we encountered were highly performative of particular digital infrastructures such as search engines, social media platforms, hyperlinking and recommender systems and therefore appeared and worked in ways shaped by those systems. We were acutely aware of algorithmic politics and proprietary platforms. We continually questioned what we were seeing and why and what we might not be seeing. We found that rich data were generated when approaching fieldwork with an openness to the unexpected, anomalies

and possibilities within the seemingly everyday and mundane. This included attuning to the antics of algorithms, as in the following anecdote written early in the work on one of the cases – Funds of Knowledge:

> Our starting point for Funds of Knowledge is of research that is surprising by its absence. It is a case marked by contradictions: highly specific to a place (Tucson, Arizona) but with a significant international presence; seemingly unknown in policy and practice contexts in England, and yet with evidence that it circulates here in partial, submerged ways. Unsure of where to start, I go to Google and search for 'funds of knowledge'. The search turns up 1.4 million results, straddling research, practitioner-facing blogs, and third space organisations. The first link is to an academic article by 'LC Moll'. Clicking the link opens a scan of an academic article in PDF form. I open a separate tab, go to Google Scholar, and type 'funds of knowledge' into the search box. The first result is 'funds of knowledge for teaching', by Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González. It has over 11,000 citations. I am familiar with Moll's name. I click the PDF button: it loads the same PDF as the first link in the Google search, a 1992 article in *Theory Into Practice*. I read it. It's only much later that I realise Google Scholar is enacting some behind-the-scenes trickery: the Google Scholar entry is for a reprint of this article in a 2005 edited collection, edited by three of the original article's authors (Gonzales, Moll and Amanti), and which has itself amassed over 7000 citations. Yet, on Google Scholar, the entry for the 1992 reprint has somehow merged with its 2005 reprint. Its 11,000 citations seem to be spread across both the original publication and its reprint, and any attempt to separate them results in all manner of digital hijinks. (The irony that the second Google Scholar result is 'an investigation of coherence' is not lost on me.)

Rich in opportunities, this approach brought challenges and was itself performative. By no means an exhaustive list, we highlight a few considerations. First, there was an overwhelming number of actors and 'traces' of the research to follow and deciding where to cut the network became essential and at times, was based on resources (such as time, technological expertise and access). Second, there was a strong reliance on digital traces which were highly performative of specific digital infrastructures and platforms. Venturini and Munk (2022) observe that 'relying on digital inscriptions' means 'adding all sorts of biases to the tangle of interferences' that digital ethnographers 'must patiently unfold' (p. 282). Third, following actors and traces was challenging given the way any piece of research is rapidly translated into a myriad of other forms. Our approach focused primarily on

digital traces, meaning that many other possible mobilisations – in staff rooms, Masters courses or wherever – were not as easily in view. Fourth, the quirkiness of digital technologies (which we saw as both co-researchers and research participants) extends the reach of the researcher but means the researcher is constantly 'negotiating' with, and becomes part of, their digital surround. Fifth, dealing with the public nature of many of the debates demanded sensitivity to ethics. Finally, our choice of cases led us to linger longer with some kinds of literacy research than others and this had implications for the kinds of mobilities we traced. Nevertheless, our tracings articulated with the news corpora and teacher data in some generative ways.

Primary teachers' encounters with literacy research

Our approach throughout the work with teachers was guided by our aim to work alongside teachers as far as possible, engaging them in shaping the methods used. We wanted to find ways for them to record their everyday encounters with literacy research within varying personal and school contexts, evoking materialities of encounters and their situatedness in professional practices.

Teachers were recruited to the project during the academic year 2021/2022. The previous two school years were described as 'the most disruptive period in children's education since at least the start of the Second World War' (Timmins, 2021, p. 4) and, at the time of our research, the priority for many schools was on trying to make up for time lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a challenging environment for teachers to engage with research and most teachers who participated in the project were those who were already interested and engaged with research, recruited via a range of national and local literacy and teacher research networks.

Teachers recruited to the first phase of the project participated in a sequence of activities including workshops, lifelogging, focus groups and interviews. In these extraordinarily difficult times, recruitment to the project was unsurprisingly slow. To encourage more teachers to participate, we later amended our approach to a single focus group. Thirty-two teachers participated in total (see Table 5.5).

Participants were class teachers, often with responsibility for literacy or an aspect of it across the school, and senior leaders, some of whom had responsibility for research. Our contacts with networks in or around Sheffield facilitated recruitment. About a third of participants were from schools in or around Sheffield with other participants from diverse locations across England. They represented a range of different school types including community schools, academies, voluntary and foundation schools, English hubs, teaching school hubs and research schools, with schools ranging in size from very small to large primaries.

Table 5.5 Teacher participants

Data generation	*Timing*	*No. of participants*
Workshop (W1–8)	March–November 2022	21
Focus group (FG1–6)		15
Lifelogging records		13
Interviews (Int1–12)		12
Single focus group/Interviews (SFG/Int1–8)	September–November 2022	11
Images		11

Working with teachers

Our initial approach invited teachers to work longitudinally, beginning with a workshop that introduced the project and elicited teachers' stories of encounters with literacy research in their everyday lives. In framing this activity, we invited teachers to log their encounters with research, introducing this activity through an initial workshop. We use the term 'encounter' to preserve some ambiguity about the agency (or not) of teachers in their relationships with research. As explored in Chapter 1, different assumptions about the relationship between research and educational practice hinge on different assumptions about teacher agency. In line with our sociomaterial sensitivity, we encouraged teachers to explore the spaces and objects around them as they reflected on encounters. We asked them about: how research was used, memories of research, classroom inquiry, moments when research was notably absent, research linked to resources or schemes and social media and about what encounters with literacy research might be like.

We introduced lifelogging to enable teachers to use technology 'to capture, store, and retrieve their lives' and as a means for both participants and researchers to 'better sense and understand the complex media-generated landscape' around them (Frigo, 2016, p. 136). We worked with teachers to adapt this approach to record encounters and interactions with research with minimum effort, building on Frigo's guidelines. This involved raising awareness of manifestations of research and the recording of encounters with these, using digital media that were readily available. Teachers adopted a range of tools and strategies in their lifelogging, many choosing to work with familiar tools and technologies, others taking the opportunity to try something new (see Cermakova et al., 2024, for more details). After several weeks of logging, teachers discussed extracts from their logs in focus groups. Finally, we invited teachers to participate in an interview or focus group to reflect on their encounters, on selected logs, on experiences of accessing, engaging with or conducting research and on the English/literacy topics that had cropped up. In preparation for these meetings, we asked teachers

to represent one or more of their research encounters visually and to think across their encounters, making a visualisation that explored how literacy/English research moved to and between primary teachers. All workshops, focus groups and interviews were held online to maximise opportunities for teachers from across England to participate.

In the single focus groups, we condensed the activities, encouraging participants to create and share visual representations (using online tools or paper sketches) of how they saw research moving to and from them as an alternative to lifelogging. We asked them to think across their encounters, prompting reflection on embodied and material dimensions.

Analysis

In our analysis of transcripts, logs and visualisations we developed an iterative, interpretive approach, weaving together insights from storying, thematic analysis and a detailed analysis of teachers' 'mentions' of research. These different approaches to analysis enacted different things. Our approach was often 'slow and uncertain' (Law, 2004, p. 10), punctuated by brief moments of clarity as our conversations, analytical work, reading, reflections and questions helped us re-consider a particular aspect of teachers' experiences or a tentative patterning of research mobilisations.

Storying involved working from the teachers' descriptions, informed by Burnett and Merchant's approach to 'stacking stories', whereby different stories provide 'a different take but each also perhaps troubling the last' (2020, p. 80). Starting from interview extracts we wrote short 'stories' drawing out movements and noting questions that surfaced as we engaged with teachers' encounters with research. We swapped stories, commenting on each other's, developing existing threads and exploring new ones. We expanded our gaze to complete transcripts, to the teachers' logs and to the workshops and focus groups that teachers had participated in. This iterative process enabled us to begin to map the complexities of movements of primary literacy research to, from and around teachers.

These mappings helped us explore patterns in how research moved, the actors involved and the relationships upon which these movements relied. Figure 5.1 explores movements from an extract of an interview with one teacher, the arrows showing what the teacher was doing to seek out research. The mappings helped us to probe further, to analyse the language teachers used to describe their encounters and to notice absences. In this way, these stories worked both with and against the stories we were writing, feeding the latter even as they seemed to deny the complexities that we wanted the stories to represent, a way for the 'text [to] make room within for whatever it also necessarily leaves out, for what is not there, not made explicit' (Mol & Law, 2002, p. 6).

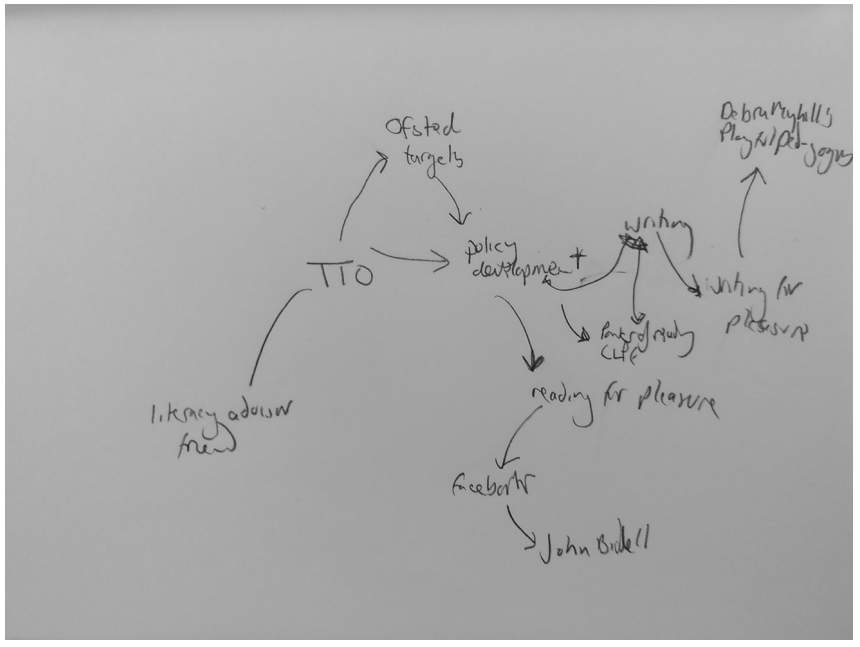

Figure 5.1 Researcher's sketch representing research movements. Photograph by author [Adams]

Our approach to thematic analysis was informed by our reflexive stance and sociomaterial sensitivity. Prior to embarking on coding, we increased our familiarisation with the data, reading and re-reading transcripts, checking them against recordings and making notes. Initially, each segment of the transcript raised questions about the wider circumstances surrounding the encounters with research that teachers were discussing, about possible connections and what was missing. 'Research' itself emerged as an ambiguous term (see Chapter 6). We developed an open exploratory approach to coding, using a more descriptive approach to code topics, actors and evidence types. This raised questions about what was generated by using these approaches in parallel and how we might bring them together, as well as how thematic analysis interacted with storying. We used NVivo to aid coding. This tool had various affordances, enabling us to code simultaneously, record observations and explore/revisit coded data. But it also fragmented the data, for example by divorcing extracts from the spaces in which they were generated and separating participants. Collaborative approaches helped to maintain our awareness of the issues, with team meetings and other interactions across the different strands of the project informing coding. This iterative, critical and reflexive approach enabled us to dig deeper

into the data, to add and revise codes, notice threads, commonalities and differences.

We developed initial themes from codes, exploring areas of similar meaning across codes, clustering potentially connected codes and exploring meaning patterns. Reviewing our list of codes and their descriptions alongside the research questions, we developed visual maps (see Cermakova et al., 2024 for examples). As we had found in other stages of analysis, what was most valuable was sharing our work in progress with each other, articulating the rationale for grouping codes together, posing and responding to questions before a further round of review and revision. We used Braun and Clarke's questions to support this review, considering whether we could identify theme boundaries, whether there was sufficient meaningful and rich data to support the theme and whether the theme was important in relation to the data and the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 99). We found that we both could and could not identify boundaries of themes as they slid in and out of focus. Our final 'themes' appeared more like views produced through a shifting kaleidoscope. Rather than there being firm boundaries, what was temporarily held together was at the same time in interaction/conversation with other 'themes' and shifted as we continued to engage in analysis, with theory and with each other.

Collaboration played an important role throughout our work with teachers, particularly during analysis. Our ongoing conversations with teachers and within the project team led us to pay attention to things we may not have focused on unaided which influenced the ideas we chose to write about. This was – and remains – an ever-evolving and fluid process. As we visited and revisited the transcripts, logs and images, we were not only in constant conversation with the data and each other but also with our past selves who understood the data in slightly different ways. The messiness and unfinishedness was a feature not a bug; allowing us to generate new perspectives, reflections and questions rather than provide definitive answers.

Logging teachers' 'mentions'

Our final approach to analysis involved logging *what* teachers mentioned in relation to their encounters with literacy research. This involved examining the transcripts, logs and visualisations described above from 32 teacher participants. We also included transcripts from the teacher panel meetings (see below) so that in total the mentions capture research encountered by 42 teachers. Mentions were logged on an Excel spreadsheet, noting topic, source, origin, source type and the name and type of any mediators. We referred to these items as 'mentions' as many were passing references made during free-flowing dialogue in interviews, focus groups and workshops. Sometimes logging was straightforward but more typically involved a degree

of interpretation and very few entries had entries in all columns of the spreadsheet. For instance, a participant might mention Twitter but provide no specific example or mention a piece of research but not how they encountered it. The logging of these incomplete references provided an extensive database of the topics, research and mediators to which these teachers referred.

As we explore in Chapter 7, teachers only occasionally made references to research per se, for example to research projects or publications. More often they encountered research via a mediator such as a consultant, colleague or blogger and research manifest in many different ways. Teachers referred to many sources (often in the form of guidance or materials) that had no discernible relationship to research but which appeared to act a little like research-based sources in claiming truths or making recommendations. We included such sources as they seemed important in understanding how (what we define as) research related in complex ways to a wider range of sources of information, guidance, inspiration and insight. For similar reasons, we also noted references that did not refer to literacy topics, research and/or materials, linked for example to other curriculum subjects or to cognitive science concepts, which were prominent in government-sponsored materials at the time. Teachers may have mentioned these because literacy was not sufficiently foregrounded in our framing of the activity or perhaps it signalled how subjects are inextricably tangled in primary teachers' lives or how topics other than literacy were surfacing at the time of our work with teachers.

Another reason for referring to 'mentions' – rather than the more formal 'references' – was to avoid implying that all sources mentioned were endorsed or indeed used by teachers. While sometimes teachers were enthusiastic, at others they were critical. They sometimes referred to resources or sources that they knew were used by colleagues or other schools which they did not use themselves. As such, we did not see the spreadsheet as a summary of the sources that shape teachers' practice but rather as a sample of the sources that featured in their professional lives. It included research which informed or was embedded within school practices and/or policy as well as research sources that teachers found or conducted themselves.

In categorising mentions, we drew on our own professional experience combined, where necessary, with internet searches to identify origins and/or the nature of organisations and individuals involved in producing or brokering research. This process was far from straightforward. For example, a category of 'charity' included those with charitable status but with very different purposes. Individuals often had multiple roles and organisational websites were not always transparent about aims or history. Topics and sources sometimes required internet searches to categorise and, where there was ambiguity, items were left uncategorised. Once finished, this systematic noting of mentions was subject to a process of consolidation to avoid

repetitions – that is where a participant had referred to the same item on multiple occasions.

Given the nature of this data, it is important to note that the spreadsheet was not regarded as definitive or representative, either of these teachers' encounters with research or of teachers more generally. It did however provide a snapshot of literacy sources, origins and mediators known by a group of teachers at a specific point in time, a group of teachers who, we might reasonably conclude given their involvement in the project at such a difficult time, were particularly engaged with research and/or literacy. It also acted as a portal to a vast range of research sources, sites and intermediaries that could be investigated further.

Ethics, reflexivity and relationality

Ethical approval for this project was given by Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee. This addressed protocols for recruitment, consent, confidentiality and data protection. Our approach to ethical issues was to consider them at all stages of the project, including publication, recognising that ethics reaches beyond alignment with institutionalised procedures into every moment of research (Kuntz, 2016). Given our multistranded methodology, this involved considering activity in a variety of domains and recognising certain issues and dilemmas that were specific in some ways to particular contexts (see Unger, 2020). We did not conceptualise ethics as necessarily different in online domains and were informed by other works on reflexivity in methodology and ethics such as by Guillemin and Gillam, (2004), McKee and Porter (2008) and Kuntz (2016).

Besides working with our institutional and professional ethical frameworks, discussions between ourselves were extremely useful. Questions regarding ethics were regularly reviewed and discussed at team meetings. Many issues discussed related to our duty of care to participants, whether these were the teachers and other interviewees who participated in our project or other actors participating in less direct ways via the data we generated. Our project involved a wide range of participants with academic and professional roles in various parts of the educational landscape. Their contributions were treated with considerable care given that they sometimes related to views or activities which could be seen as sensitive given the high-stakes accountability system, pressurised research environment and/or competitive markets in which they operated. This involved providing opportunities for participants to redact parts of interview transcripts and adhering to university protocols for data security and management. While our default position was to pseudonymise transcripts and extract details of places or institutions that would make individuals identifiable, we offered those interviewed as part of the cases the chance to be identified if they wanted. This

was in recognition that our findings rest on the participation and contributions of participants and was an attempt to avoid appropriating the ideas, thoughts or experiences of others. Notwithstanding this approach, we operated considerable caution in selecting extracts of material to share through publication or presentation to avoid, as far as possible, the chance that individuals would be identified unless they requested otherwise.

As the previous chapters have illustrated, research mobilities are tangled up in a multitude of personal, political, social, cultural and ideological imperatives as diverse actors combine. Inevitably our own personal, political, social, cultural and ideological histories and realities played a part in the insights that this project enacted, not least because we ourselves are actors in this field: as researchers, ex-teachers, teacher educators, literacy advocates and so on. It is likely that many of the effects of our positionalities were invisible to us or went unnoticed, traced by and re-enacted by Google's algorithm for example during sociomaterial ethnographies, shaping what was presented when searching online. Sometimes our allegiances and commitments played through this project in rather obvious ways. Our choice of cases, for example, is shaped partly by Cathy's knowledge of the field. We have reflected on the implications of this for the content and import of our findings.

In order to support critical review of our ongoing work in light of diverse perspectives and experiences, we consulted with various individuals involved in research mobilities. These included representatives from Wales and Scotland as well as England to hear from those working outside the English policy context. In addition to three project advisers, we convened two advisory groups: a teacher panel of 10 primary teachers and a stakeholder panel including:

- 12 individuals from UK-based universities involved in literacy research, some with research-focused positions and others with substantial roles in initial teacher education. Their research experience addressed diverse literacy topics, methodologies and theoretical perspectives and various 'orientations' to literacy, as summarised in Chapter 2.
- 15 individuals including representatives from schools, literacy charities, professional associations, government bodies, organisations close to policymakers and other research organisations.

We also worked with five teachers to develop a resource for teachers that built on project findings (see Chapter 11).

Given these various collaborations and line with our sociomaterial sensibility, we were aware of the project itself as actor and interested in the *effects* of our methods and research instruments. For example, as stated in Chapters 1 and 2, we were interested in connections between researchers and teachers

and between research generated through different paradigms. We were mindful therefore of what our project might enact within different sets of relations, whether this was for individual participants or institutions or more widely in the field of literacy education and research, for example as: stakeholders attended a stakeholder meeting and forged connections with those they met there; teachers in focus groups recommended resources to one another; or one teacher's reflection led another to question and reconsider previously taken-for-granted ideas. Just like many of the research objects we traced, our project translated in multiple ways and part of our ethical responsibility was to be alert to these translations and to explore ways of being and doing through the project which we believed to be in the best interests of teachers and the children they teach.

Conclusion

Our methodology was not designed to attempt a comprehensive overview of the mobilities of primary literacy research in England or indeed of the effects of research mobilities on literacy, research or teachers. Rather, consistent with our sociomaterial orientation, our methodology was designed to see beyond 'research' as a self-contained object transported like cargo on a ship and instead strive to glimpse the liveliness of research and its movements as 'material co-relations' (in the spirit of Ingold, 2007). Our approach was designed to catch various assemblages, to consider who or what was gathering and what they were doing. Our approaches derived from different theoretical starting points. Inevitably partial, they foregrounded a number of aspects of research mobilities which, we suggest, complement insights generated through previous explorations.

The data these methods produced were extensive, complex and multifaceted. As such, they provided glimpses of research mobilities which we feel are highly pertinent to the questions about teaching, literacy and research considered in this book. We explore some of these in the chapters that follow. In Chapter 6, we draw on interviews, focus groups, lifelogs and workshops to consider teachers' experiences and perspectives on their encounters with literacy research. In Chapter 7, we draw on the 'mentions' to consider aspects of *what* they encountered. In Chapter 8, we consider what we learned from the newspaper and Twitter corpora about appearances of literacy research in public discourses and, in Chapter 9, we draw on the sociomaterial ethnographies to explore relationships between mobilities and their effects in three of our cases.

6 Teachers' encounters with research

Introduction

In this chapter, we begin our exploration of research mobilities in the wild by focussing on teachers' encounters with literacy research. Drawing on workshops, focus groups, interviews and teachers' lifelogging and visualisations, we analyse how research moved to, from and around teachers as they discovered, produced, interpreted, engaged with and shared literacy research. We highlight the multiple and shifting realities of teachers' encounters with primary literacy research.

In many ways, our findings reflected those from other studies exploring teachers' engagement with research. Our approach however yielded other insights which we argue are particularly pertinent to our interest in research mobilities and their relationships with enactments of research, teaching and literacy. In common with the findings of a DfE-commissioned study (Coldwell et al., 2017), we found that while teachers valued research evidence and turned to research to help them solve practical problems, they tended to trust it more when it was supported by other evidence, for example hearing of positive outcomes from trusted colleagues. And while, like Brown et al. (2018), we found that some teachers' research use can be influenced both by colleagues' use of research evidence and encouragement from their school, we also found that individual interests, biographies and passions were important to sustained engagement with research. Lack of time and the pressure of multiple competing priorities were key factors that prevented further engagement with research for the teachers in our study, yet they found ways around this, facilitated by approaches to sharing information via multiple platforms in short 'soundbites'. Our analysis showed that the movement of research to, from and around teachers is complex, varied and multifaceted. In Chapter 7, we consider the specifics of *what* they engaged with in more depth. In this chapter, we draw on extracts from stories of teachers' encounters with literacy research and their visualisations of research movements to expand on the complexity and multiplicity of their experience of research mobilities. We focus on:

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- appearances of research;
- policy influences;
- managing the multiplicity of research mediators;
- research engagement;
- research mobilised;
- multiple mentions and hot topics;
- movements across time, space and relationships;
- credibility;
- multiple reinterpretations/manifestations.

Appearances of research

Teachers' encounters with research occurred in a variety of formal and informal contexts online and face-to-face. They described how research reached them through colleagues, managers, Twitter, professional development events, blogs, online searches, books, podcasts, advisers, organisations and emails, and how they shared research when leading continuing professional development activities (CPD), supporting individual teachers and talking with parents at coffee mornings. Some of the chaos they mentioned was attributed to research being shared verbally, the original source sometimes lost.

Reading across the dataset it appeared that mobilities were propelled or stalled as multiple actors combined in different ways, with effects for the relative stickiness or slipperiness of research and offering glimpses of barriers or blockages to movement. These actors included not only people such as teachers, colleagues, bloggers, consultants, friends and family but also organisations like for-profit companies, charities and research hubs, government or school policies, websites, hashtags, social media, phones, laptops, podcasts, notebooks, research journals and many more. New technologies and digital media featured prominently in teachers' encounters. Their accounts suggested how different actors assemble in brief moments before shifting and assembling differently and this, as we shall go on to explore, can have implications for the kinds of research ideas that gain prominence and those that are left on the sidelines.

It was also notable that when invited to talk about research, teachers discussed a diverse range of sources of inspiration and insight. Notably there were very few references to specific examples of literacy research. Teaching schemes, initiatives, approaches and training sometimes appeared to be conflated with research in the data. Underpinning research (if it existed) seemed forgotten or lost as it was disseminated and wrapped into interventions. The teachers may have mentioned schemes, initiatives and so on because they had been presented to or interpreted by them as 'research-informed' or 'evidence-based' or because they seemed relevant when our discussions turned to influences and inspirations for their teaching. Whatever the

reasons, it became clear that resources, events and publications played a significant role in their professional lives and that research, as we as academics might define it, made rare appearances. 'Doing research' involved a plethora of activities ranging from web searches, trialling an approach, conducting 'academic' research, reading, seeking perspectives from colleagues and from other schools. Moreover when we asked teachers to talk about *literacy* research they talked about other things too, such as whole school pedagogical approaches and assessment. These broader topics spilled into literacy, aided by actors who navigated boundaries between these.

How research moves to, from and around teachers: Seeking research out or being bombarded?

Our findings show that teachers must make an active effort to seek out literacy research beyond that directed by policy or experienced as 'done to' them through training schemes, teaching guides and CPD. We illustrate this drawing on the accounts of two teachers. The first, T2, an English lead in an academy trust, described how they experienced research encounters as a combination of prescribed research and research they sought out, following their own interests:

> Yes, so I've just put me in the middle, a little stick person. And then on this side, here, I've got the things of my own volition if you like, the things that I do for me, and so I look obviously online, but I might read blogs and posts by different people, so I do that research. Courses online. So I have done, for example, a UKLA course, a grammar conference, things like that, and I've got CPD and training. […]
>
> Yes, this bit on the other side is this is the 'done to me' for want of a better word, it's going into me. […] So yes if you go on a course or whatever, you have to do a bit of pre-reading, and so that obviously has been stipulated, so that is why the arrows are going into me, as in being told to do this.
>
> (SFG5, T21,[1] discussing their drawing)

Some research encounters were directed, first by what was prioritised or funded by their school and then by those facilitating continuing professional development (CPD) who stipulate pre-reading. The research that T21 described as of her own volition was funnelled via course organisers, those writing and compiling blogs and the algorithms behind their online searches. Like T21, other teachers we talked with found research through various mediators, including subject associations such as the United Kingdom Literacy Association, courses with the Chartered College of Teaching and universities, the Open University Reading for Pleasure resources, Facebook

groups, social media platforms, email newsletter subscriptions, webinars and projects (including ours), Google searches, other teachers, podcasts, online communities and conferences. For some teachers, the proliferation of sources felt overwhelming, although supportive networks of colleagues (in-person or online) helped them filter.

The second teacher, T17, talked about being 'bombarded so much by everything', describing a feeling of being surrounded by a continuous, overwhelming flow of research, 'it's all around us all the time, so many different ideas, so many different points of view, so many different platforms' (Int 4, T17). These flows of research (and what teachers prioritise) were influenced by policy with 'the Department for Education, Ofsted as well, always, always part of everything you do' (T17) and with senior leadership teams often reinforcing their messages. Other significant actors in the swirl of research were the 'big names' with authority on various literacy topics, as in this example focused on phonics:

> in the national circles, Ruth Miskin, anything that is connected to Ruth Miskin is seen as like she is the phonics goddess and it works, it works, and it does. Having worked in Early Years foundation stage before, phonics does work. Ruth Miskin does work, Read Write Inc. does work for the majority. It doesn't work for all, and I think that is where people do need to be very careful.
>
> (Int 4, T17)

Despite the seemingly relentless nature of research propelled to teachers and the strong underpinning messages, T17 did find ways to engage and speak back, even if only in private. For example, they followed the comment above about phonics 'working' by asserting that it did not work for all, identifying a need for research into how older children learn to read. They expressed discomfort in what they saw as a shift to consultants and organisations being 'very hot on trying to sell […] they have a product to sell and it makes a big difference' (Int 4, T17) and the ways that public figures were used to encourage buy-in of ideas, schemes and resources. Amidst all these movements, there was also stagnation as research was pushed aside in the deluge, resulting in 'a cupboard full of books with research in and so much of it I will probably never look at again' (Int 4, T17). Fear of change too 'sometimes stagnates the ideas that could be pushed forwards' (Int 4, T17).

Policy influences: What they want you to read

Increased centralisation of the curriculum, channelling of resources to government-approved schemes and high-stakes testing (see Chapter 3) all impacted on the research that reached teachers and how it did so. This was

evident in the research mediators mentioned as we shall go on to explore in Chapter 7. Policy effects were evident too, not only in the possibly unanticipated ways that policy acted to restrict the freedom and time that teachers had to engage with research but also through the increasing prevalence of research summaries produced by government departments or government-sponsored organisations for example the Ofsted review of research related to English (Ofsted, 2022), the DfE reading framework (DfE, 2021c) and EEF reports (see Chapter 7).

Ofsted was dominant in the data, mentioned by 20 teachers. In Chapter 3, we provided some insights into the role played by Ofsted over the last three decades and its effects on the lives and work of teachers, schools and children. Much of this has been linked to the high-stakes inspections which manifest partly in the form of a 'visit' to school. The nature and purpose of these has varied over the years but the salience of a 'visit' remains. In our analysis of the collocates of Ofsted in the teacher corpus, for example (see Chapter 5), not only are there references to the 'visit' but also other words that evoke the significance of the event and its anticipation ('impending', 'imminent', 'due', being Ofsted 'ready'). The anticipation of Ofsted's judgements linked to 'the visit' played a role in shaping teachers' encounters with research in two main ways. The first was the way that inspection directed schools' agendas, both in the need to be in a constant state of preparedness for a visit and, post-inspection, in actions to operationalise Ofsted-approved school plans. School and Ofsted agendas were closely related to curriculum policy and government priorities, with teachers noting that the government dictated what they taught and how they taught it. The scope for teachers to research, develop and use schemes themselves was limited because schemes had to have government approval:

> my English lead and I wrote a phonics scheme that we've been using for three years and we've got good results but it's not validated and the DfE and Ofsted, when they come and do their inspections, want to see a validated scheme and so now we've just had to abandon our scheme and buy a validated scheme.
>
> (Int 5, T2)

The inspection process directed research engagement:

> it's what Ofsted, it's what the government want you to read and want you to see and I think there are favoured researchers, depending on what their agenda is with a particular curriculum, or what the Ofsted agenda is with their particular outcomes that they're looking for, particularly with reading.
>
> (W3, T23)

This privileging of reading over other aspects of the English curriculum is evident in the number of times reading is mentioned in our data and is a topic we return to in Chapter 7. This diverted attention from other topics. One teacher remarked that they would like 'more official research on writing', highlighting the lack of attention given to writing in policy by saying that it 'wasn't even a subject on [Ofsted's] deep dive[2] list' (Int 1, T6).

For some teachers, Ofsted emerged as a reason to engage, with research often deployed in defence of school policy and practice. One teacher in a school graded 'requires improvement' by Ofsted engaged in research as a 'safety net', to justify why they adopted an approach to teaching reading comprehension (W3, T10). Another logged a discussion with their school improvement partner in which they had explained the school's approach to reading for pleasure in relation to the Open University's Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy guidance[3] (T2). Two English leads, T43 and T46, cited imminent Ofsted visits as one reason for their engagement with literacy research. When we interviewed T46 later in the project, the Ofsted inspection had taken place and they reflected on their conversation with the inspector, noting how they were able to justify pedagogical approaches with reference to research.

Broader policy changes also impacted on teachers' encounters with research. Some teachers expressed regrets about how policy changes to school governance, particularly academisation and competition between schools, restricted opportunities for collaboration and access to research. One teacher whose school wasn't part of an academy talked of an academy chain as

> very closeknit, very closed behind doors really […] they tend to do the research within their schools and then keep it in house as well […] nothing then being sent out anywhere else and other people can't gain from it. (W8, T43)

Other teachers who worked in academies shared examples of teacher inquiry and research sharing within their schools. Opportunities varied therefore across school types. Some teachers recollected the professional communities of the past, fostered by local education authorities (LEAs) with one contrasting this with today, when things are 'patchy', 'fractured' and their school was 'just kind of on its own, a little ship on its own really' (SFG3, T86), evoking a sense of isolation.

Managing the multiplicity of research mediators – 'a juggling act' or (digital) drowning in research

Teachers described their experiences of the multiplicity of research mediators and competing demands as overwhelming, omnipresent and disorientating. The limited time available to explore, reflect and engage affected

their responses to research. When we asked teachers to create visualisations showing how primary literacy research moved to and from them, T74 posted a photograph of a waterfall on the shared Padlet. Below it, they wrote 'Comes down to me. Can be very powerful. May sometimes fall into a bigger place and get diluted or misinterpreted'. Another teacher in the focus group, T75, added a photograph that conveyed balancing multiple activities, titling it 'Juggling act' and writing 'It can be a juggling act knowing which pieces of research to focus your attention on as we are living through a digital age where it can come at you from all angles'. The two teachers discussed their responses:

> T75: A big waterfall is what inspired me to be honest, because I was a bit like 'Where do I even begin' and that picture really helped, because that is what it feels like sometimes, it feels like all at once. […] I took it as you've put it, as nice, as a positive of it being powerful and it is, but I took it as almost sometimes you can drown and that is when I went to the juggling act, because it is so hard to filter through […]
> T74: […] I mean it as very powerful, but not necessarily in a nice way. It can be from above and pound down on you and you don't know how to use it properly. Not all the time, but sometimes it can feel like that.
>
> (T74 & T75, SFG1)

Another teacher described research gathering, coalescing in a mesh above their head, often ignored in the busy everyday activities of school life, attention on the children in their class, on planning lessons and finding resources, on meeting school priorities and external demands, supporting colleagues, leading curricula areas and meeting with parents:

> I think it lives up here, [#gestures to space above head] because if you want to, you can ignore it, you can just wait for the important bits to fall through, which they probably will at some point. And I know that my head subscribes to some newsletter […] so they get kind of …funnelled [#makes funnel gesture with both hands] down to you a different way, and so I do think there's plenty, the life of the classroom is, in itself, a sort of preoccupation and there are times when I don't look up at the mesh and I am just aware it's there [#gestures to space above head] because I haven't got time to deal with it.
>
> (Int 1, T6)

Engagement

In this section, we consider what it was that teachers felt did motivate and enable them to develop and sustain their interest in research. T12 described

how initially the profusion of research was difficult to navigate but that gradually, as they clarified their interests, they began to make their own pathways, following threads and signposts, accessing research on topics that resonated with their beliefs, passions and teaching:

> Yeah, I think that it's one of those things that kind of feeds itself. I guess because I mentioned going down that rabbit hole, clicking on links, finding different things. I think when you first have that, when you first engage with like the evidence base I guess it can be slightly overwhelming, but when you find a niche – so I guess for me it was probably the reading for pleasure kind of thing was where I probably started that engagement with research and I think that kind of built upon that, so I was really interested in that, then I started to think about how does the social reading environment influence that, then it led me on to oracy and kind of rabbit holed from there.[…] I think that as soon as you make that connection between the fact that engagement with research can have real life consequences on your own practices and then hopefully outcomes for children, then again that drives it as well, that curiosity and want to find out more.
>
> I think the social aspect of it is really important as well, having a strong network of people to draw upon who are also interested in it[…]I think it can be difficult if you don't have other people to talk to about these things, whether that's online or in school.
>
> (FG4, T12)

For engagement with research to be sustained, a complex web of factors come into play. One teacher noted how their reading habits, prior knowledge and responsibilities at school, combined with a recent research report, one where they had contributed as a participant. Their engagement with this work might have stopped there but additional funds brought a new member of staff into the school to support developments. Another told us of their enjoyment of reading about reading interventions and reading comprehension for a Masters module and the connections with their expertise in supporting children who were struggling with reading at school. For a third teacher, presenting their own research at a conference helped them realise how much research was going on in classrooms and make connections with other researchers. In these examples, teachers' engagement with research was influenced by their interests and backgrounds, by the situation in their school, facilitated by a range of human and more-than-human actors and by the availability of opportunities and resources to support reflection and collaboration. The presence or absence of any of these factors influenced engagement and teachers noted their capacity to engage had shifted as their role and responsibility had changed.

Research mobilised: Signposting or 'sowing seeds'

Teachers identified individuals, organisations and channels that were key in signposting them to research. These included friends, often also education professionals, colleagues, family members as well as teachers, consultants and researchers who were active on social media, training, websites, blogs, emails and podcasts. These individuals, organisations and channels varied considerably in how far they built on expertise in literacy, research and/or primary education and we discuss questions of credibility later (see also Chapter 7). One teacher noted that:

> some people work quite hard to be curators of useful information and act almost as gatekeepers to the educational research community […] if you follow what they say then they open a world of other people to follow and listen to and research, they will often signpost research that is useful to read as well.
>
> (FG6, T46)

Another told how a friend, a university teacher educator, had helped rekindle their enthusiasm in learning about education:

> she kind of encouraged me to doing things like joining some professional organisations, like the UKLA, and sort of engaging. So I am a UKLA member and through that, and getting on the Reading for Pleasure mailing list and that kind of thing, I feel like compared to my first years of teaching it sort of opened up just a set of encounters, as you put it, with different bodies of research.
>
> (W1, T6)

Often, engagement with research came via training tailored to specific interventions or encounters with consultants, charities and companies. One teacher gave an example of a phonics programme that led them to use the underpinning research to inform work with parents. Others described how they 'sowed seeds' for their colleagues, tailoring research to their audience. This propagation meant that the influence of mediators extended in unpredictable ways, reifying and possibly sedimenting topics and ideas.

About half of the teachers who participated in our study had designated responsibility for English, literacy or some aspect of it across the school. For some, this conferred an associated responsibility for research mediation. One English coordinator gave this example of literacy research that they had found and subsequently shared with teachers:

> …the Deborah Myhill at the University of Exeter on Grammar, embedding it, so making sure that it's not – it is quite a well-known thing now,

> but I still think that it's worth reminding people of – it's at the point at which you're teaching it for purpose rather than a separate entity, so you are really incorporating that into your planning. […] Research shows that it's better to embed grammar into the teaching and learning sequence and then I did a course at the UKLA conference on grammar and Deborah Myhill did a presentation amongst other people, but just in terms of the research that shows that it is a much better approach to do that, and they had concrete examples, etc.
>
> (SFG5, T21)

Here the mobilisation of Myhill's research, reaching T21 in a variety of ways, impacted their work supporting colleagues in school.

In a similar way, one English Hub lead described how they had drawn on the multiple opportunities for teachers to actively engage, participate and contribute around work on reading for pleasure, noting how this had spread into the work of the hub:

> The thing that springs to mind for me is probably Teresa Cremin's work on reading for pleasure. Probably because I'm thinking about how that has got like a massive operation to mobilise that knowledge base in terms of there's like a website and reading groups and podcasts. All different kinds of different ways to reach and it is probably because I'm thinking about in the context of this discussion, how that research team has kind of mobilised that in various different ways to reach as many teachers as possible. And then with the English hubs, that work is informed; we have like three aims and that work has informed one of our key focus areas and the training that we offer for teachers as well.
>
> (W5, T12)

In light of Chapter 3's discussion about the diminishing role of academics in mediating research for teachers and schools, it is worth noting that these two examples were some of the few in the data of research reaching teachers directly from universities.

Multiple mentions and hot topics

As we have discussed, research reaches teachers via a range of channels. Sometimes the volume of encounters and the possibilities these suggest are overwhelming, the impetus for subscribing to updates forgotten and emails ignored, until a combination of interest and multiple mentions prompts engagement. Where research was highlighted by several different mediators and in a variety of formats over time, these multiple mentions focused teachers'

attention and influenced what was taken up in school. Teachers described fleeting encounters with research, noticing and listing these, pursuing them when they cropped up again and again:

> I think if you've got the seed already there in your head and somebody again mentions it, 'oh yeah I know'. Then I think it's easier to sort of grow on rather than take something from scratch and develop it. […] Like the reading fluency, I seem to have had about four or five different things coming in and that's made me look out for that one aspect because I think well that's current at the moment, there's obviously people – it's quite an important thing.
>
> (Int 11, T38)

These multiple encounters formed a background clamour for attention and could lead to action – but they could also make it challenging for teachers to know where to start and what to choose to follow up.

Alliances appeared to form around topics, as in this example of research-like materials, again on fluency:

> Another thing for me was, for example, finding out about the Hertfordshire Grid for Learning have got quite a lot of work on fluency, and so then again, then you start seeing the names, or you start seeing fluency in other people's threads or in other people's materials even to the extent of say, for example, the resourcing website.
>
> (W6, T4)

One teacher suggested these 'hot topics' were linked to policy and accountability discourses, they were 'Ofsted related […] so it probably comes from a place of fear, doesn't it, and not wanting to be found wanting' (Int 9, T43). Some of the ways that research, policy, brokers and technologies combined to generate interest, to transform something into a 'hot topic' are traceable to policy changes.

Movements across time, space and relationships

In this section, we focus on temporal, spatial and relational dimensions of research movements, considering how interest in broad topics and particular research texts might flicker, flare or endure as they interact with teachers' interests, technology, communities and local and national priorities. We examine the enduring nature of the physical (the *Impact* magazine, a book) and the digital (the tabs left open) and the constant digital drip feed of research, promoted through emails, tweets and so on.

These teachers' research encounters occurred across a range of spaces that brought together different groups of people and a range of actors, criss-crossing physical and digital networks. Indeed, one of the teachers we spoke to depicted their experience of research as a 'web, a network web really of different links across', with links going 'back and forth and in-between each other' (SFG8, T76). They envisioned 'lots of different people connected to lots of different sort of platforms and then a whole heap of lines crossing over and running around the people […] It sounds a little chaotic' (T76). As they shared their drawing, they explained 'I sort of started with me in the middle, where I get it from, where I share it with and then how it's sort of all connected and then what kind of things I get'. For many of those we spoke to, the social networks and spaces – and the unexpected conversations and connections that occurred within them – were important navigational aids in the often-hostile structures they worked within. Despite the multiple (competing and sometimes contradictory) signposts referred to above, there is no map, guiding or charting how teachers encounter research. The blend of physical and digital places and spaces these teachers described included (but was not limited to):

- the bed where a teacher sat with too many tabs open on their iPad, a pile of books on the floor;
- the car that played a podcast highlighted by a consultant;
- the phone used to participate in EduTwitter's Sunday evening discussions;
- the school staff room that had a copy of a research journal for practitioners lying on the table;
- conferences where teachers encountered research.

They featured: personal recommendations (e.g. from a mother or friend); social media suggestions (perhaps from a Facebook group); emails received (from a charity, blogger or consultant whose newsletter they signed up for); and professional conversations with colleagues – both past and present. These conversations and interactions were necessary:

> you kind of need personal recommendations […], you need those interactions with other teachers who are passionate about research or passionate at a certain area and if you are just in a school on your own, not engaging with other people like that, you aren't going to get those recommendations […] – unless you're on Twitter constantly.
>
> (W4, T26)

One encounter with research led to another, and another. In some chains, the initial encounter was forgotten, lost in a myriad of connections and links,

covered by teachers' own searches prompted by the research, taking them 'down rabbit holes' and enabling access to ideas and avenues teachers may not have otherwise encountered, as in these extracts:

> I think one of the examples is the EEF alert that I then picked up. No, I know what it was. I went on a fluency training course, I think it was last week, and Tim Rasinski was mentioned and I went on his Twitter feed, and that then led me down a sort of rabbit hole of other bits and pieces that I thought were interesting as well.
>
> (FG6, T43)

> I actually can't remember [how I encountered Reading for Pleasure]. It's actually really weird. […] when I looked back on […] my first ever piece of work I wrote for my undergrad, which was like 10 years ago, 11 years ago, it actually referenced the Teachers as Readers UKLA […] and then [I] re-encountered it like I don't know how many years later […].
>
> (FG4, T12)

Sometimes research chains fizzled out, at least temporarily. Interest, perceived relevance and time were among the factors that determined whether or not research chains were propagated as teachers followed research threads, as in this example:

> if I am really interested and I've got a lot of time, which happens rarely, [I] follow kind of the threads of what have other people said about those things.
>
> (W6, T24)

These multiple connections across time and space allowed teachers to tap into a diverse array of ideas and insights. Some teachers preferred personal relationships and in-person encounters, viewing social media with a degree of scepticism and wariness; for others, social media became the only space to access research and fill in the gaps left by in-person conversations.

The mentions of encounters with literacy research at school featured staff meetings, training sessions, teachers doing their own research or sharing something they had found of interest with colleagues. Teachers told us it was often challenging to engage with research at school: 'I think we've tried to prioritise it, by using one staff meeting every half-term about research, but it's still not very long, sort of an hour at the end of one day, every half-term' (Int 11, T38). Informal conversations were important, often focused on solving practice issues.

As explored in Chapter 5, the teachers who participated in the research likely did so because they were interested in literacy and/or research, so we

might expect them to have been actively engaged in seeking out research, as in this example:

> …so there is me in the middle, and I feel a little bit maybe isolated […]
>
> So the way that I get my research is of my own reading. In the cloud I put the online stuff that I google, joining any webinars that are being sent to me, and so I am doing the active searching. And then the OU [Open University] networking is like a separate thing because it spirals from that, and then on the other side I've got one or two colleagues at other schools, so I have a friend at the first school that I taught in and she is very interested in research as well but funnily enough, she also feels that she is the one sort of maybe leading it or seeking it out.
>
> (SFG3, T86, describing Figure 6.1)

When research did crop up in schools, it was often redirected by email to teachers' homes, to be looked at after work. The lack of research or time for research in schools was frustrating for some teachers and when research did find its way into school, in this case via new teachers sharing what they had learned at university, it was enthusiastically received:

> In my school historically we haven't engaged much with research at all and it was one of the things that frustrated me a little bit […] And I was like why isn't anyone interested in what is being researched, discovered and suggested now? And fortunately me and the assistant head are both quite interested […] also we've got in some brand new ECTs [early career teachers] who are freshly trained, just been in university and I'm quite excited to hear what they've learned about as well on their course.
>
> (W8, T46)

Research-informed professional development was not restricted to the school day. One teacher had found free materials online that she used to support her ongoing engagement with research:

> The Open University have done a free module on reading for pleasure, which is full of the research rich pedagogies that Teresa Cremin has done, so I saw, I can't remember if it was on Twitter, probably, or I get emails from the Open University. They do a newsletter, so that was free CPD that I access, and it's all research based. It is actually quite good.
>
> (FG2, T2)

This comment prompted a discussion in the focus group about the importance of free professional learning and the quality and accessibility of Open

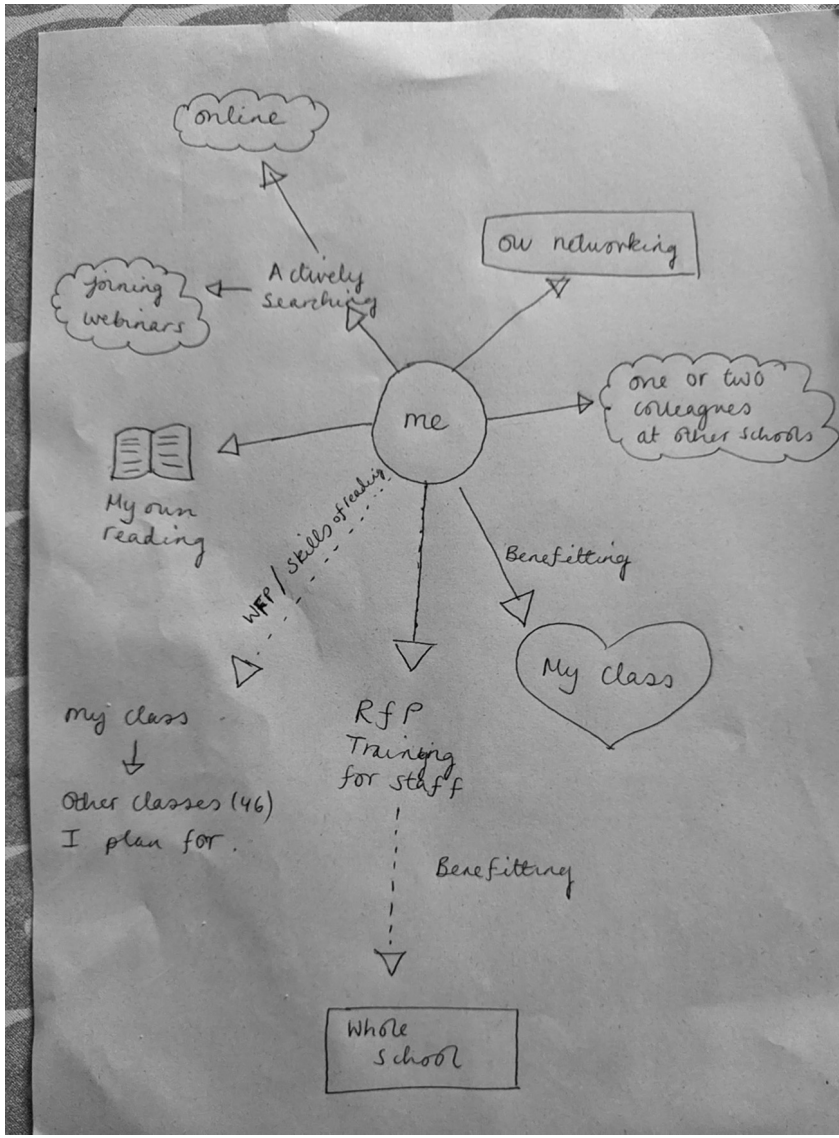

Figure 6.1 A teacher's sketch representing their research encounters. Screenshot by author [Adams].

Learn modules that enabled teachers to 'dip in and out' with their progress saved for when they returned.

Time emerged as a key factor in the kinds of research encounters teachers had, with social media facilitating short bursts of engagement between

other activities. Teachers talked of using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other platforms, skimming whenever they had a few minutes to spare, reading 'little snippets of research which then inspire you to do more or bounce on' (W4, T1), but aware that this often was not high quality or in-depth research. Another teacher, a literacy lead, illustrated how teachers had to be selective in managing competing demands on their time. They told how they shared research at a staff meeting, regretting how 'it gets watered down' (W7, T38). Despite the pressures on time, books featured frequently in the data. They recirculated and endured, perhaps promising expansive time to dwell with research:

> I have this book here on my desk, which is something that I bought as a result of one of the speakers at [the UKLA Special Interest Group] events, which is Harvey Daniels' Literature Circles which is obviously quite old […] it's 1994.
>
> (Int 1, T6)

Digital technologies also acted to direct and hold attention, for example links from tweets held as open tabs on a laptop and emails sent from a work account to home. This led to permeable boundaries between work and home, between professional responsibilities and personal interests, with teachers engaging with research in their 'down time', at evenings and weekends:

> I think that it's really blurred for me because I've got like Twitter on my phone and I'm just scrolling and sometimes not even realising that I'm doing it, so I think that it is really blurred between professional and home life. […] I've done that thing where you realise it's like 9.30, why am I thinking about this right now?
>
> (FG4, T12)

Digital technologies were also significant to how and when teachers interacted with research, with events accessed remotely and at weekends, providing opportunities for teachers to hear from someone 'much more experienced or knowledgeable' though they wished for 'some thinking time or some reading time that was actually scheduled into my week, but it isn't. It can't be' (W6, T4).

When teachers had managed to set aside time to engage with research, they saw this as valuable, but it required 'a mindset shift to make the time' (Int 8, T9). Often teachers sought out research themselves, in their own time and the tools used to access research were often personal ones: 'My phone, my iPad, my social media accounts…' (FG1, T17). Due to these time pressures, one teacher wanted access to shortcuts, to 'easy, accessible

stuff, to help you implement in the classroom quickly' (SFG6, T68). Another teacher agreed but emphasised the need for credibility, too.

Credibility

Credibility – of research itself or of its producers or mediators – was a key factor in what moved, how it moved and the relative 'stickiness' of research, that is the extent to which it was appropriated. At the same time, research mobilities played a role in the accrual of credibility. Actors gained more credibility as their uptake and visibility increased: 'They take on this kind of quite strong authority because everybody is using them' (Int 1, T6). Teachers described how the status of research was elevated when it was shared, for example at a special interest group meeting, by a trusted source on social media or by 'proper' printing, these acts conferring credibility. In this section, we explore *how* credibility was achieved, or not, and how sources came to be seen as more or less trustworthy.

Some of the signifiers of credibility included: official status, ratification through publication, resonance with popular discourse, professional and relational credibility and lineage, although these signifiers had different meanings for different teachers. For example, the official status of research, materialised in the 'government review of English at Key Stage 1' reassured T38 that they were 'on the right tracks' with their phonics scheme (FG5, T38), whereas the government's 'reading framework' raised questions for T12 who 'felt that some of the claims that were being made were fairly contentious based on the evidence that was available but being presented as truth or as fact' (FG4, T12). Credibility therefore was fluid and its achievement complex.

Evidence of ratification of research through publication was evident in how books, journal articles, websites, blogs and other research texts were mentioned. One teacher noted how recent research shared during their initial teacher education course was deemed credible partly because those sharing it were published researchers. The Open University's Reading for Pleasure website (https://ourfp.org/) was described as being:

> very well crafted in how it used research and how that has been applied into practice, and it sort of invites the development of the community in that if you've had this idea within school, you can then write something up and they can get it published on the website.
>
> (Int 2, T10)

Here, the credibility of the reading for pleasure research is enhanced through the project and website design and the various possibilities for teachers to exercise agency in the engagement with research it offers.

Professional credibility or a mediator's connection to teaching was also key. Being, or having been, a teacher was often significant, as in this exchange between teachers:

> T46: Hmm, have you read much of […] and his opinions on reading fluency?
> T43: Yes, he is another one of those sort of Twitter feed type pop-ups.
> T46: 100%, and I really love just the nature of his interactions as well. And the fact that he is very personable and makes a real effort to make his research accessible […]. He is like a real teacher with real experience as well, which makes a big difference I find.
>
> (FG6, T43 & 46)

This extract also demonstrates the importance of personal qualities – this individual was 'very personable'. Others were seen as reassuring, accessible or, 'a bit of a maverick' (Int 3, T20). Some mediators gained credibility by association with others. For example, T2 spoke of how much they respected one consultant, knowing that research she presented would be 'a good one to look at and something I'm going to be interested in'. This credibility was initially conferred by a recommendation from a respected and knowledgeable colleague and was cemented through subsequent encounters.

However, teaching experience did not in itself confer credibility nor did teachers necessarily see it as an indicator of quality. One teacher raised concerns about events where teachers presented research, pointing out that:

> Just because they're in the classroom currently doesn't mean that they've got best practice or their work is research driven.
>
> (SFG4, T67)

This professional and relational credibility is complex, requiring validation and verification. Research signposted by, or otherwise linked to, respected organisations was deemed more credible. One teacher talked of colleagues as trusted sources, mentioning one who opened their 'eyes to research' (Int 6, T29).

Teachers therefore relied on a range of factors when deciding what was credible, from gut instinct to researching sources and actors' lineage as T76 explains:

> Knowing who is the author of that blog potentially and what their experience is. Again, you've got to be careful because you might be the most highly esteemed professional but actually not any good. […]. Just because they've got a big following, it doesn't necessarily mean they're particularly

> credible. There's lots of people that shout very loudly aren't there, that doesn't mean they've got the most informed voices.
>
> (SFG7, T76)

Practical applications of research were important signifiers of research credibility and often teachers remained unconvinced until research-based interventions were shown 'to work' in their setting. They questioned where research was conducted and with 'what kind of children', wondering whether conclusions were transferrable to their context and whether some research might have been 'manipulated for a specific result' (Int 7, T11). This hesitancy extended to research recommended by other practitioners, with credibility of research and mediators pending trial in their own setting. Sometimes however credibility faded into the background, overridden by the need for accessibility:

> Blogs, I've actually found blogs the easiest to access. I know there's not always credible and you have to kind of be able to fish out in-between, but generally I think they can be really valuable.
>
> (SFG7, T76)

Research reinterpreted or redirected

As explored in Chapter 4, once research is out in the wild, it is adapted, represented and resemiotised in diverse texts. Computers, notebooks, a professional literacy organisation, groups that bring together fellow teachers and researchers, online meetings, a videoconferencing platform, a stray URL, a teacher from another country, an impassioned speech, a plan, a book, email lists the teacher signed up for, an article, a mother and a WhatsApp chat all featured in just one teacher's everyday encounters with research recorded in their project logs. In Chapter 7, we discuss how the affordances of these diverse texts vary and consider how meanings shift as they appear in different sites. In this section, we consider how multiple reinterpretations played through teachers' encounters.

These reinterpretations of research acted as shapeshifting objects that crossed boundaries within and between the various communities. These communities included teachers, researchers, charities, companies, consultants and courses with diverse goals and understandings of research, interpreting and re-presenting research for different audiences, variously facilitated and constrained by the technological tools deployed. Teachers carried these new research or 'research-like' objects into their communities, often changing them further as they shared with colleagues and the wider school community. As this happened, these research reinterpretations became different

things to different people – more or less accessible, a defence, a jumping off point, watered down, obscured or irrelevant. The original source of research was left behind as research was embodied in/as different objects. In the extract below, for example, two English leads discuss how they felt 'watering down' could change the focus and the message:

> **T23**: If I think day-to-day interaction with research, I think in primary schools a lot of it tends to be watered and filtered down through a different scheme […] or a different curriculum programme that somebody else has taken that research and watered down and filtered it. So it's not necessarily the core ideas and the core aspects of that research, it's somebody else's watered down version of it.
> **T10**: I think T23's point is a really good one, and about that sort of idea of there are certain gatekeepers and whether it's institutional gatekeepers but also it's also – what T23 was saying was about these almost secondary researchers, so they take other people's research and make it more palatable, which is good […] one that comes to mind […] takes other people's research and she kind of filters it down, sort of chunks it up which is good, but also it means are you getting the whole story? Are you getting that level of complexity that's implied in the original primary tier if that makes sense? I'd not thought about that until T23 had said it.
>
> (W3)

Some reinterpretations made statements about research findings or the implications of research that were unambiguous and lacked the nuance and contextualisation of source material. Others seemed to offer the promise of easy solutions to classroom issues. Research objects shared by some sources, such as the Department for Education or the Education Endowment Foundation, were unquestioningly accepted by some teachers whereas other objects were met with a more sceptical gaze.

Maintaining diverse networks and relationships required varying levels of labour. Consider this example from one of the teachers we spoke to. T46 had previously participated in the *Sounds Write* phonics training programme and consequently was on the company's mailing list. When it launched a new podcast, the company circulated an announcement. T46 read the email and their first thought was, 'gosh, who would ever listen to a podcast about phonics in their spare time'. Nevertheless, they clicked on the link to subscribe. They did not get around to listening to an episode until they participated in our project. They did so after we had invited them to log encounters and think more deeply about their engagement with literacy research. Once they had listened to one episode, they found the podcast helpful for developing their practice and went on to listen to more.

Different actors and circumstances combined to enact in T46's engagement with the podcast. In addition to the teacher, this involved the person conducting the training, the podcast creators, host, guest and promoter – and the *Research Mobilities* project researchers whose focus and methods inspired T46 to engage with the podcast. Some of the more-than-human actors at play included the email and the podcast (and their design), the objectives of the *Research Mobilities* project, the podcast app used and its navigational features and the school/personal priorities and capacities that enabled T46's engagement.

Other teachers described subscribing to a range of different newsletters from consultants' websites, research schools, English hubs etc., but not reading them, using Google searches to research topics and turning to discussion posts in Facebook groups or Twitter threads for conversations, ideas or recommendations which led them to books, websites, blogs or podcasts. They were aware that mediators with varying motivations shaped ideas in particular ways and acknowledged the role that algorithms on online platforms played in reifying topics and actors and closing down other avenues of exploration. At the same time, many of the teachers we spoke to found such reinterpretations valuable as they provided access to new ideas and insights to draw on in their classrooms. In such instances, agency is collective, relational, mediated and distributed. The complex relationships and apparatuses enabled by varied reinterpretations tapped into the collective intelligence of the different social actors involved. Recommendations and reinterpretations acted as navigational guides in the face of overwhelming amounts of information.

In some instances, teachers found reinterpretations restrictive. Some schools subscribed to services that provided curriculum resources for teachers, offering 'a big saving [of time] but also it is like mind-numbing stuff and they deliver everything in exactly the same way' (T6). Such complete handover to other actors left little room for teachers to make informed or active choices:

> [the school] had a scheme for everything and if any teacher deviated from what was on the school [plan] that was not on. And I'm just absolutely gobsmacked that academies have come to that, or schools. It makes me feel extremely sad and emotional about it, because you might as well stick anybody in front of a classroom to teach off of a scripted piece of paper that you're not allowed to deviate from or use your professional judgement.
>
> (T63)

A wide range of human and more-than-human mediators exist that, in theory at least, are available to support teachers in drawing upon research

to respond to varied circumstances, interests and priorities. However, a limited range of reinterpreted resources combined with the structural pressures teachers face means that they may not be able to engage with research that does not fit the motives of policymakers – be they in schools, trusts or government.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored teachers' encounters with literacy research through the reflections they shared with us in workshops, focus groups and interviews and through their visualisations. In many ways, our findings about teachers' encounters with research echo those of other studies that have explored teachers' experience of engaging with research: lack of time, lack of access to research findings, research that feels out of step with local context, a sense of being 'done to' by research and of research that feels irrelevant to teachers'professional interests or concerns. However our work also adds nuance to these debates through its focus on research mobilities.

These teachers' reflections foreground the multitude of actors, human and more-than-human, that play a role in research mobilities and the complex ways in which these actors interact, overlap, rise to prominence or fade away. They provide glimpses of the work involved in generating and sustaining these interactions – the work of organisations, researchers, teachers, networks, social media and so on – and of how research mobilises not just through official channels but through informal, serendipitous processes and practices. We have charted a diversity of movements of research, the multiple chains of remediation that branch off in sometimes unpredictable ways, gathering momentum, slowing, fizzling out temporarily before perhaps being nudged into the spotlight again. We have also considered some ways by which topics and mediators come to prominence. All of these factors suggest that critical engagement is difficult given that research and research-like material appear in such a variety of formats and places and this is a topic we return to in Chapter 11.

Teachers noted how demanding school life is, how little time there is to engage with research and how frequently it is accessible, short summaries of research with implications and strategies for practice that demand their attention. Their descriptions of encounters revealed the dominance of mandated or official encounters with research, directed by government policy, by Ofsted or promoted by the Education Endowment Foundation but also showed how some teachers do find and make spaces to engage critically with literacy research. Other literacy research did find a way through this mesh of mandated and promoted research, fuelled by teachers' passions and encounters with researchers and interested colleagues. In the next chapter we take a closer look at the kinds of materials they engaged with.

Notes

1 Extracts from teacher data are coded to note the event the data was generated in – interview (Int), workshop (W), focus group (FG) or single focus group (SFG). Teachers are referred to by Tx (e.g. T14) with the code number assigned on their expression of interest to participate in the project. Not all those who expressed interest followed through to participate.
2 Evidence gathering on particular areas of the curriculum, see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspections-statistical-commentaries-2022-to-2023/schools-commentary-deep-dives-in-school-inspections.
3 See https://ourfp.org/reading-for-pleasure-pedagogy/.

7 Appearances and disappearances of literacy and research for teachers

Introduction

In Chapter 6, we explored aspects of teachers' encounters with research. This highlighted some ways that research encounters opened out or closed down possibilities for them as literacy educators, with implications for relationships between research mobilities and teaching. In this chapter, we explore *what* they encountered: some of the literacy topics they referred to, the origins of research encountered and the individuals and organisations and technologies that mediated that research. In doing so, we start to explore connections between the process of research mobilisation and what literacy and research became for these teachers in England.

As outlined in Chapter 5, we used an Excel spreadsheet to log the topics, sources and mediators that the 32 teachers mentioned when describing their research encounters during interviews, workshops, lifelogs and focus groups. We supplemented these with mentions made by the 10 teachers who joined our teacher panel. This chapter draws on the database of 820 'mentions' generated through this process. It is worth reiterating that references to encounters were fleeting and 'mentions' rarely included information about topic, research source *and* mediation. They also included references to subjects other than literacy and generalised references to literacy topics or research. Nevertheless, for 391 of the 820 literacy-related mentions, we identified the topic, the source of the research or other resources and/or one or more actors involved in mediation.

We reiterate that the database reflects what just 42 teachers chose – or perhaps happened – to share with us during our workshops, interviews, meetings, lifelogs and focus groups. Had other teachers been involved, or had we involved these teachers on other occasions or framed our interactions differently, they may have mentioned other sources or topics. We also reiterate that a 'mention' does not imply endorsement or even interest, and that – as explored in Chapter 6 – these encounters were associated with different contexts and motivations. It would therefore be misleading to

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suggest that mentions give straightforward insights into *all* primary teachers' experiences of literacy research or even that they are comprehensive in capturing *these* primary teachers' encounters. We therefore approach quantifications with caution and resist the temptation to correlate relationships between teachers, topics, types of brokers and so on (even though such work would be extremely interesting with a much larger sample of teachers over time).

Despite these caveats, the spreadsheet generated an extensive list of actors that played through these teachers' encounters with literacy research including research findings, research producers and research mediators as well as texts, events, resources, guidelines, policies and social media sites. It gave us insights into sources of information and insight available to teachers, as well as formats, forms, places and events in which they might encounter these. It also provided a list of literacy topics that they had pursued or that featured in the research that had been presented to them.

It is particularly interesting, we suggest, that this snapshot of sources, topics and mediators derived from *this* group of teachers. As explained in Chapter 5, these teachers were in many ways exceptional in that they committed to talk to us during a period when schools and teachers were under considerable pressure. While the sample included teachers with wide-ranging roles and experience from diverse school types and locations, it likely included a disproportionately high number of teachers with a particular interest in literacy and/or research. One worked in one of EEF's network of Research Schools (see Chapter 5 for information about EEF) and others were subject leaders for English and/or literacy in their trust or school. Several referred to events and resources provided by professional associations such as the Chartered College of Teaching and the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) – the latter unsurprisingly as UKLA circulated our recruitment materials and Cathy was a former president (see Chapter 5). We might expect therefore that, while subject to state-mandated guidelines from Ofsted and DfE, these teachers were more likely than many to engage with perspectives and insights from diverse sources of literacy research and with an expansive understanding of literacy and literacy education.

While there is no space for in-depth analysis of the 820 mentions, in this chapter we make a series of observations that connect to the issues and questions considered in this book. These relate to:

- range and diversity of individuals and organisations involved in the mediation of research;
- range and diversity of materials to which teachers referred;
- research and resemiotisation;
- appearances of literacy – the topics that featured in encounters and some absences.

Range and diversity of individuals and organisations involved in mediating research

In Chapter 3, we explored the diminishing role of universities and local authorities in brokering research in England over the last two decades and in Chapter 6 commented on the vast range and diversity of individuals and organisations involved in the mediation of research encountered by these teachers. As well as universities (and to a much lesser extent) local authorities, these included: government agencies and government-funded organisations like Ofsted, EEF and the National Institute of Teaching; think tanks and charities; colleagues and school/trust leaders; friends and families; consultants, consultancies, publishers and other commercial organisations; teachers elsewhere in England or the rest of the world; and professional associations, some of which were longstanding like The National Association for Teaching English and others which were relatively new like the Chartered College of Teaching. The relationship between these individuals and organisations and primary literacy education are many and varied. Individuals, for example, included those:

- with a well-established professional relationship with a group of teachers, for example a consultant working with a particular school;
- with prominent online personas;
- who had been proactive in promoting their own or others' research in policy and/or practice.

Many of these had multiple roles, for example: a teacher who also wrote books; an independent consultant who was also a blogger and wrote for *tes*; an ex-head teacher who had a consultancy business; a consultant who worked for a think tank; an ex-academic who was now an independent consultant; and a practising academic with established links to schools and a leading role in a subject association.

Organisations involved in mediating sources varied in their structures, funding and stakeholders. For example, they included those funded through membership subscriptions or donations, commercial activity, grants from governments, charities and/or research councils and by a combination of sources. Of these, organisations with similar constitutions played different roles. Think tanks, professional associations and lobby groups, for instance, may all have had charitable status but engaged in quite different activities and interfaced or collaborated with those in different parts of the educational landscape. As such, their alliances and commitments varied along with their commercial, ideological, personal and/or interpersonal concerns.

In Chapter 6, we noted some ways in which teachers made judgements about credibility. As we pursued the sources they mentioned, we noted

that the level and nature of experience and expertise offered by individuals and organisations were often very difficult to evaluate. Many of the websites we examined were exuberant in asserting expertise and legitimacy but it was not always possible to assess stance or their experience if not made explicit. It would also appear that levels of expertise and experience in literacy, research and primary education varied considerably. Not all referred to professional experience of education and, of those that did, not all claimed experience of primary education and/or English/literacy. The level and nature of their research experience also varied. They included academic researchers, doctoral students and organisations that conduct research (including charities and universities) but also those with no discernible record of research involvement. Those with research experience varied in their expertise, interests and standpoints and as such were likely to be more familiar with, interested in and/or convinced by the value of some literacy topics and research methodologies than others. Commentators also included those associated with a specific approach or resource which they promoted through a policy, product or professional network. Of these, some commentators cited underpinning research and some did not.

We also found that those advocating connections between research and teaching included many who were not academic researchers. In one teacher's lifelog, for example, we came across a series of 'master classes' which addressed research-informed teaching. Chaired by a prominent educational consultant with a strong social media following, the series featured 13 speakers. As far as it was possible to tell, none were employed at universities at the time (although some may well have been in previous roles). While the events aimed to explore practical approaches to engaging with research, it did not appear to engage with the *research* on engaging with research or involve academic researchers in the debate. The showcased speakers had a range of relevant expertise, experience and insights to share but it is noteworthy that universities were absent, not least because many researcher-led projects have explored practical approaches to enhancing relationships between research and practice over the last decade (see Chapter 1). There is certainly no shortage of interest or expertise in this area within universities.

We do not suggest that great research communicators must be researchers themselves nor that the only worthwhile insights in education are gained through research. There is a long history of educational publication and advice that draws on professional experience and expertise. However, we were interested in whether this diversification of research mediators – and experts on research–practice connections – was associated with a diversification in the *kinds* of literacy research teachers encountered (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of what different kinds of research might involve). The wide range of mediators might, we thought, provide multiple access points to

literacy research and, through doing so, enrich debates about the nature of literacy and the aims and purposes of literacy education. What we found however was rather different to this, as we go on to explore in the final part of this chapter where we discuss appearances of literacy.

Range of materials to which teachers referred

Our second set of observations relates to the vast range of materials mentioned by the teachers, building on points made in Chapter 6. In some cases, teachers referred to identifiable research articles, reports or bodies of work, notably not limited to research conducted in universities. They included research (often surveys) conducted by charities, teachers and schools as well as other research organisations such as EEF. In many cases, however, relationships with research were far less straightforward. Our analysis led us to distinguish between:

- *Direct research sources*: identifiable research sources in the form of peer-reviewed articles, monographs, reports, dissertations or bodies of work which provide detailed information about methodology and findings. These might be produced by university-based researchers, other organisations, teachers and/or schools. We include evaluation studies and research summaries in this category, while recognising some complexities which we return to later in this chapter.
- *Research-adjacent* materials or artefacts summarising the findings of a specific research project, for example a podcast summarising a piece of research, an infograph or diagram extracted from its original source material such as Scarborough's Reading Rope (see Kambach & Mesmer, 2024), a teacher's PowerPoint slide used to present findings from their Masters inquiry. In the forms in which teachers encountered them, they lacked detailed explication of methods, findings or insights but could be traced to sources providing this information.
- *Research-infused* presentations, guidance or publications which made references to a range of research, for example government publications, books aimed at the teaching profession or wider public. These do not always include specific citations and it is not always clear how research has informed statements or recommendations.
- *Research-shaped* resources such as schemes, interventions or training modules that build on principles generated through research. These may or may not reference underpinning research.
- *Not research*: items such as online resources, guidance or schemes which, as far as we could identify, have no traceable basis in research. Ideas or insights from research may well infuse these items but no references or claims are made.

We resist the urge to quantify occurrences in each of these categories in the teachers' mentions as distinctions between these categories were not always straightforward. We do note, however, that the traceability of research underpinning resources, materials and guidance was considerably variable and references to direct research sources linked to literacy were relatively scarce. The vast majority of references were to research-adjacent, research-infused or research-shaped materials as well as those that were apparently not research.

While direct references to research were unrepresentative of the wider dataset, we dwell briefly on those that did occur as they provide insights into how research did materialise directly for some of these teachers. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine the content of these research sources in any depth but we can offer a categorisation as shown in Table 7.1.

Sixteen peer-reviewed articles were mentioned by six teachers. Of these, eight were mentioned by one teacher participant (T20) who was enrolled on a doctorate (although none of the eight linked to the theme of their doctorate). These included articles that stretched beyond the narrow framings associated with the National Curriculum for English. As well as five articles on reading information texts, three foregrounded topics associated with a more expansive view of literacy and literacy education: Dernikos's exploration of sound in a primary classroom (2020), Marsh's work on literacy and popular culture (2006) and Rogers et al.'s (2006) on preparing literacy teachers for diverse settings.

Beyond T20s rather exceptional list, one other teacher mentioned a peer-reviewed article that seemed to sit outside topics in the National Curriculum – Da Silva and Tehrani's (2016) article on Indo-European folk tales. Other peer-reviewed articles addressed topics that were high stakes in primary schools as the focus of National Curriculum and/or statutory assessment: grammar, comprehension, phonics, fluency and volitional reading (Myhill

Table 7.1 References to direct research sources

Type	*No. of items (only including those which were identifiable and literacy-related)*	*Participants who mentioned one or more of these*
Peer-reviewed research articles	16	T2, T9, T10, T11, T20, T46
Research reports	15	T2, T9, T10, T11, T12, T17, T20
Bodies of research	5	T10, T11, T24, T18
Research summaries	7	T2, T4, T6, T9, T10, T11, T12, T20, T29, T38, T42, T43, T46
Teacher-led research	9	T1, T2, T6, T9, T10, T12, T20 TP1, TP5

et al., 2013; Wyse & Bradbury, 2022a; Yuill & Oakhill, 1988; Nation & Snowling, 1998; Swanson & O'Connor, 2009). These articles however did not necessarily map neatly to government recommendations: some foreground notions of children as active meaning makers that are rather at odds with the emphasis of government guidelines (see Myhill et al., 2013; Barrs, 2000) and the Wyse and Bradbury (2022a) article explicitly challenges government policy (and indeed was a focus for one of our cases – see Chapter 9). Another five referred generally to bodies of work which we knew to be rooted in research, such as Teresa Cremin's work on reading for pleasure, but it was unclear which sources they had engaged with.

Fifteen reports were mentioned by seven teachers. These included reports on surveys by leading literacy charities such as the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education and the National Literacy Trust as well as evaluation reports of literacy interventions published by EEF. This is unsurprising as all those reports mentioned were freely available, produced by organisations active on social media and written to be accessible by a professional audience. They do however vary considerably in the scale, rigour and methodology of the research reported and may or may not have been subject to peer review and/or subsequent editorial input by the commissioning organisation.

Thirteen teachers mentioned publications that summarised the findings of multiple studies linked to a single literacy-related topic. Of those mentioned, seven were identifiable. These varied considerably in form and approach, from summaries aimed at practitioners to narrative literature reviews and systematic reviews and meta-analyses which may or may not have been peer-reviewed. Of these, eight were reviews published by EEF, of which five were identifiable. Other reviews included those conducted by universities (University of Liverpool, Open University), literacy associations and charities (Primary Literacy Research Collaborative) and consultancies (Writing for Pleasure Centre, Department for Education and Ofsted). We return to Ofsted's review later in this chapter. Within some of the reviews we examined, it was clear that the synthesised findings fully supported the claims and recommendations made in the review although this was not always the case.

Nine teachers referred to literacy-related research/inquiry they had conducted themselves through a school/trust-based initiative or as part of an accredited course (such as a Masters course or the Chartered College of Teaching's CTeach programme). Of those who referred to their own literacy-related research and/or inquiry, all investigated aspects of the National Curriculum which were subject to high-stakes assessment and/or scrutiny by Ofsted: vocabulary, writing, grammar, spelling, reading difficulties and reading for pleasure. It is noteworthy that nearly all of those who had conducted their own research/inquiry also mentioned other direct research sources (e.g. T10 mentioned at least one of each of reports, articles

or bodies of work). Those that did access research often referred to more than one source type.

For many of these examples of directly accessed research, we do not know why teachers accessed them or whether they saw them as relevant to teaching. The list does however demonstrate that, despite the many concerns explored in Chapter 6, some teachers did pursue lines of investigation that led them to sources representing orientations to literacy that exceeded the requirements of government policy. Sometimes these articulated with government requirements, perhaps opening out alternative approaches. At others, they may have reflected priorities and interests that were specific to their own contexts, interests and/or their perceptions of the needs of the children they worked with.

Research and resemiotisation

Our next observation relates to the format in which research appears to teachers. While the previous section summarised examples of directly accessed research, the vast majority of references to research were to research-infused or research-shaped sources that appeared in varied forms and formats. In illustrating the implications of this point, we examine two appearances of one topic that made a series of flickering yet not unsubstantial appearances in our data – reading fluency.

Reading fluency is addressed in the detailed description of reading in the National Curriculum for English (DfE, 2014) and was indeed the subject of one of our cases (see Chapter 5). At the time of our project, reading fluency was the focus for some work by EEF in collaboration with HFL Education (https://www.hfleducation.org/), a non-profit consultancy firm which had developed and were promoting an intervention on fluency (which we focused on for one of our cases – see Chapter 5). One teacher's lifelogging data included a screenshot of a tweet by Sarah Green (assistant head teacher and EEF literacy content specialist) on behalf of EEF referring to her work with Herts for Learning (an organisation which transformed into HFL Education) 'to help colleagues understand the language of fluency'. Her tweet has high design values, includes a beautifully realised image that needs to be seen in colour to be fully appreciated. Its final line, slightly emboldened, is 'Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 EEF'. Since it links to an EEF blog post, it is clear that it is highly connected in a process of resemiotisation. As may be recalled from Chapter 4, the concept of resemiotisation entails interest in the processes and practices involved in mobilities (Newfield, 2015).

Before examining what happens with the move from blog to tweet, we consider the original blog post (Green, 2021). An approach to analysis is offered by van Leeuwen's (2007) framework for examining claims to legitimation in public communications by organisations aiming at high levels of social

acceptance. He proposes four categories against which the EEF blog can be considered: authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation and mythopoesis.

First, 'authorisation' is immediately constructed in two striking ways. Throughout the EEF content, there is a use of logos, pop-ups offering sign-ups and a prominent link at the top of the page to an 'About us' section. If any reader is not already familiar with the EEF, they are offered a choice of a welter of information, in easily digestible formats such as a mission statement 'our promise' and highly detailed annual reports. For this particular blog post, authority is cemented too through the prominent description of its author: 'Assistant Headteacher and EEF Literacy Content Specialist'.

Second, 'moral evaluation' refers to cultural values that can be presumed to be shared. van Leeuwen (2007, p. 91) observes that often these can be oblique, but for EEF they are often of central importance, here rendered through a prominent early link in the post to 'our updated *Improving Literacy in KS2* guidance report'. Nobody, it can reasonably be assumed, can be against this goal of societal benefit.

Third, it attempts 'rationalisation' through claims that appear scientifically based. In the post, reading fluency is defined not only through linguistic content but also through professionally drawn figures. These features, including careful hierarchisation of prominence, bullet points, arrows and circles, do more than provide a visual equivalence of linguistic meanings but rather a new materialisation of relationships particularly found in technologised discourses (Iedema, 2003).

Fourth, 'mythopoesis' calls upon our human predilection for narrative (Bruner, 1986). Readers require not just to be told what to do, what works, but to at least briefly encounter a dramatic tension inherent in the wrong action. They might find this in: '… any instruction that focuses primarily on speed with minimal regard for meaning is wrong'.

Even without delving into this rich text in greater detail, we note the careful choice of sources, formatted as academic references and thus in themselves part of the multifaceted claim to authority. It is interesting that the cited texts are articles that, in themselves, are crafted to be useful to teachers, rather than primary accounts of research. If a reader wanted to read and evaluate the underpinning research they would need to follow up the sources cited in those texts. The decision to reference practice-orientated publications is quite understandable in this blog post. It is designed to appeal to desires for accessible texts (see Chapter 6) while at the same time hinting that another layer of investigation could lead to the sources of the knowledge claims presented. However, it does illustrate how, as research findings are communicated to teachers (e.g. as findings are summarised in a tweet, bullet points or infographic or training session), detail on underpinning research becomes disconnected – or blackboxed – along with information about methodologies, limitations and caveats.

To return to the tweet by Sarah Green (linking to the blog post) that appeared in our lifelogging data, it too could be considered in terms of claims to legitimation. To state the most obvious first, the affordances of a tweet are not the same as a blog; the latter allows more space. A tweet requires the insertion of written text, with a very constrained set of multimodal features possible (Gillen, 2018). Moreover, the poster, if directly typing text, cannot control font or colour except in certain automatised aspects, such as accounts mentioned preceded by @ and links turning blue. New resources can be brought to bear with for example the incorporation of images. In Sarah Green's tweet, the image has high production values. As Iedema (2003) observes, this careful resemiotisation entails investment of resources. Professionalism is required to understand the characteristics and opportunities offered by each platform and to leverage this effectively. As Iedema (2003, p. 48) suggests, such 'restructuring derives from different expertises and literacies, and resemiotization opens up different modalities of human experience'. Every encounter with the notion of reading fluency is unique. 'Tracking the semiotic chain' (Newfield, 2015, p. 273) then demonstrates how resemiotisation operates in practice, never a transparent transferral of meaning but always involving sociomaterial changes.

This matters because, as explored in Chapter 6, teachers may encounter the same findings or recommendations not simply through a chain or resemiotisation (as when moving from blog post to tweet) but through bursts of contemporaneous encounters with a similar topic in different online and offline sites packaged in different forms. Moreover, teachers may themselves rework ideas encountered in a report or blog post as guidance for colleagues or as a PowerPoint slide and summarised at a staff meeting. As this happens, and as research is encountered in different ways, it is possible that sets of research findings or implications assume different meanings. We explore this further in Chapter 9. Iterative appearances of everyday texts can work to close down or open out possibilities for meaning (Kell, 2011) and in a similar vein there may well be multiple shifts and sedimentations of meaning as a single research text (a tweet, an infograph or whatever) assembles with diverse actors.

Appearances of literacy

Our final set of observations relate to the literacy topics that appeared in our database and some of those which did not. We begin by noting the prevalence of reading as a topic, a trend which recurs in our analysis of media discourses in Chapter 8. We follow this by examining two items that featured repeatedly in our dataset and end by noting some topics that were noticeably absent from teachers' mentions.

The prevalence of reading

For reasons outlined in the introduction, we were wary of drawing conclusions based on quantifications. However, it is worth noting that 'reading' featured far more frequently than 'writing' and that 'writing' was mentioned by far fewer participants than 'reading'. Of those mentions that referred to an identifiable literacy topic, we recorded 191 references to reading made by 31 participants and 68 to writing by 23 participants. This imbalance between reading and writing reflects a longstanding difference in emphasis on reading and writing in the field of literacy education and research (Brandt, 2019) and it is one we noted in our analysis of public discourse as discussed in Chapter 8. It also reflects the focus of government policy over the last 15 years or so. Following the demise of the National Literacy Strategy, policy announcements have largely concerned the teaching of reading with relatively few pronouncements on writing. Reasons for this are explored in Chapter 3 but it is perhaps surprising given the powerful role played by assessment in England's high-stakes accountability system. According to end-of-key-stage assessments, attainment in writing has long trailed attainment in reading[1] and so writing might logically be expected to have been a focus for government intervention for some time. The references to writing that do occur fall into three groups: those that map onto transcriptional aspects of writing within the National Curriculum for English (linked to punctuation and spelling – see Chapter 3); those addressing linguistic aspects of reading and writing (e.g. grammar and phonics); and those associated with a cluster of activities around writing led by independent consultants The Writing for Pleasure Centre (https://writing4pleasure.com/), which adopt a more expansive notion of writing as social, cultural practice and foreground authorship.

In addition to generalised and non-specific references to 'reading', mentions that referenced specific reading-related topics mostly articulated with the requirements for reading within the National Curriculum and wider government policy (see Chapter 3). They included mentions of reading for pleasure (41 mentions), reading fluency (25 mentions), early reading (14 mentions) and comprehension (10 mentions) while phonics was mentioned 34 times. Of these, sources on the early stages of learning to read were primarily publications produced by the Department for Education that present the early stages of learning to read in relation to Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading. These include *The Reading Framework* (DfE, 2021c) and the Rose review of early reading (Rose, 2006) (see Chapter 3). In other reading-related topics – for which government guidance had been less forthcoming – sources ranged more widely. One example is reading comprehension. One teacher for example included a PowerPoint from a training session on inference in their lifelog that referenced Yuill and

Oakhill's (1988) research on comprehension which derives from a psychological paradigm. Another referred to Harvey Daniels' (2001) work on literature circles which focuses on meaning as socially constructed. Teachers also mentioned resources and structured pedagogical approaches designed to enhance comprehension such as 'reciprocal reading' (EEF, n.d.). These sources vary in their approach to reading comprehension, not just in recommended pedagogies but in how they orientate to reading comprehension itself.

It is not our purpose here to engage in critique about the relative value of these or any other sources. Indeed, it may well be that insights from studies underpinned by different orientations are complementary rather than contradictory (as argued in Chapter 2). However, the appearance of research reflecting differing assumptions is worth noting in relation to our discussion about research mobilities. First, it demonstrates how a wider range of sources may be accessed for topics where government guidance is less prescriptive. Second, it takes some knowledge of the wider literacy research landscape to spot the differences. These subtleties may well be missed by teachers, not least because – as stated above – pedagogical guidelines for comprehension were often encountered through training sessions, guidelines and materials. When underpinning research is blackboxed, it is hard to tease out different emphases. Finally, we note that the examples cited in this section are over 20 years old (published between 1988 and 2001). This longevity is something that is also evident in examples discussed below, demonstrating how research can remain influential for many years as it becomes embedded within professional repertoires and is re-energised as repackaged as part of training materials, publications and events.

Successful mobilisations

In this section, we consider two examples of what appeared to us to be highly successful mobilisations of research related to literacy in primary schools. Both featured repeatedly in our discussions with teachers, surfaced in our analysis of media discourses (as explored in Chapter 8). Both became the focus for cases outlined in Chapter 5. The first is a body of work focused on reading for pleasure. The second is Ofsted's Research Review for English (Ofsted, 2022).

Reading for pleasure

In Chapter 6, we noted that there were regular references to research on reading for pleasure, which appeared relatively evenly across the sample, in all months of data collection from May 2021 onwards. It was mentioned by 15 of the participating teachers as well as 2 members of the teacher panel

and was one of the most commonly cited references to research across our dataset. Reading for pleasure is a theme that has been prominent in debates about literacy education for many years (Cremin & Moss, 2018). Not all mentions of reading for pleasure could be traced to a specific source but of those that did the vast majority referred specifically to the work conducted by Teresa Cremin and colleagues at the Open University, UK. (Other mentions of reading for pleasure included references to the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, Jane Considine, a literacy consultant, Jon Biddle, a teacher with a strong social media following and the 1921 Newbolt report [see Doecke, 2017]). The prominence of the Open University work was impressive not just in terms of reach but in its significance for the teachers who mentioned it and, as such, it became a focus of one of our cases. Notwithstanding that reading for pleasure is a topic with broad appeal (see further discussion in Chapter 8), the successful mobilisation of the Open University's work is an example of what can be achieved by highly committed, energetic academics who are sensitive to the interests of both policymakers and practitioners.

Three features stand out in this example. First, there is the considerable labour by Teresa Cremin herself (evident in the many direct references to her by name). Second, reading for pleasure is mentioned in connection with a variety of types of activity including Teachers as Readers groups (who meet to share books and discuss practice), an Open University module on Reading for Pleasure as well as events, both face-to-face and online. Third, research is mediated in different forms and formats which teachers encounter in different spaces and places including various events and meetings as well as a well-constructed website which acts as a hub for diverse activities. As explored in Chapter 6, research and research-related ideas tend to gain authority and credence through multiple mentions. In this example, multiple entry points invited different forms of engagement (some of which were mentioned by our teachers; some of which we explored during our tracing).

When considering the prominence of reading for pleasure in our dataset, it is worth reiterating that the teacher participants were not a representative sample and that one of the more successful strands of our recruitment campaign for this project had been the circulation of invitations to participate via the United Kingdom Literacy Association. Not only does Cathy have a longstanding relationship with UKLA (as a former member of executive committee and president) but Teresa Cremin is a trustee and former president and UKLA has partnered the Open University on various activities associated with reading for pleasure, including the Teachers as Readers project. Nevertheless, UKLA has many other prominent literacy researchers among its members and research interests in a wide variety of topics. Even within the UKLA community, reading for pleasure has achieved impressive reach.

Ofsted's Research Review for English

Ofsted's Research Review for English (Ofsted, 2022) is a synthesis of research associated with the topics included in the National Curriculum for English. This was mentioned by nine of the teachers, some of them multiple times. As explored in Chapter 6, Ofsted played a powerful role in galvanising and stalling teachers' research encounters as part of the high-stakes accountability framework described in Chapter 3. Indeed, references to Ofsted occurred repeatedly across the dataset, mentioned in every month of our data collection period. In addition to its role in defining school priorities, Ofsted plays an occasional role in directly connecting research and teaching through publishing reports on specific topics. The most frequently mentioned of these was Ofsted's Research Review for English (Ofsted, 2022).

Like the Open University reading for pleasure research, the report was mediated by multiple actors: emailed by head teachers, featured in the educational press (*tes*), on Twitter (Marc Hayes), through training by a consultancy firm (Herts for Learning/HFL Education) and from independent consultants (Writing for Pleasure Centre). Teachers' comments suggested that individuals and organisations framed the report in different ways: school leaders directed teachers to the report; some provided interpretations of key messages for schools (Marc Hayes identified '10 key things' (https://www.marcrhayes.com/post/a-summary-of-ofsted-s-english-research-review-for-teachers-and-leaders); while others provided searing critiques (McCallum & Bleiman 2022; Writing for Pleasure Centre, 2022). Whereas reading for pleasure was strategically communicated via multiple channels, Ofsted's report was mediated in multiple sites in different parts of the educational landscape: within school, the educational press, by consultants and professional associations. This mobilisation therefore was associated with a range of perspectives and responses. We might see the relationship between the Ofsted report and these diverse standpoints as mutually beneficial – with each helping to mobilise the other. This is a phenomenon we discuss in more depth in Chapter 9. We might also note the considerable motivation to engage with this report given the role played by Ofsted in the education system in England and the pressure this placed on teachers to ensure they were attuned to Ofsted's expectations (see Chapters 3 and 6).

Absences

Having considered some mediators, topics and texts that featured in the teacher data, we now consider some which did not. Our initial intention was to map absences systematically against the range of topics, methods, theories and implications generated through the scoping survey described in Chapter 2 (Burnett, 2022a). However, as the database of mentions suggested so very many absences, this would have been rather convoluted and

taken far more space than we have here. Instead, we draw on our experience of literacy research and education to identify some topics that are conspicuously absent (or only apparent in one or two mentions). While other literacy researchers might be more concerned with other absences than those we identify, we suggest that these relative absences are noteworthy and we intend them to be read in two ways: (1) in and of themselves – to consider what the absence of these particular topics might suggest about this particular context; and (2) as indicative of the implications more generally of engaging with a relatively narrow range of research.

First of all, there were no explicit references to the phrase 'The Science of Reading' by any of the teacher participants or in the news or social media corpora. As explored in Chapter 2, 'The Science of Reading' has been used to refer to reading research on a range of topics emanating from cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Most typically it has been evoked in arguments for the use of systematic synthetic phonics as the foremost approach to teaching decoding. We do not suggest for a moment that the recommendations of such research are not felt in schools in England – many of them certainly are – but the absence of this phrase from our dataset is interesting given its prominence in international debates about the teaching of reading at the time of the study (see Chapter 2). Its absence is certainly not because there are no active researchers in England who work in this paradigm – there are. But it may well be that, because phonics has been so systematically embedded in England and held in place by such high-stakes accountability systems, schools have little choice but to teach it. There was no reason to evoke 'The Science of Reading' in justification for a greater emphasis on phonics as this greater emphasis was already in place. When you read this, 'The Science of Reading' may or may not have made it into mainstream educational discourses in England. At the time of our project, however, it was noticeably absent from our dataset.

Other absences included topics that were missing from policy. We mention three of these here but there are many others. The first is digital media. The digital media research field is one we know well as two of us have published in this area. There is a vast range of international research literature from the last 25 years which has informed calls for literacy provision to reflect more accurately the changing nature of literacy. There were however no references to digital media in our dataset at all apart from two mentions of a seminar on literacy and film and one to an OECD report on 21st-century readers (OECD, 2021).

The second is 'funds of knowledge'. 'Funds of knowledge', as we explore in Chapter 9, is a concept that has application across the curriculum but which is particularly powerful in challenging deficit discourses in language and literacy. It chimes with a broader body of work that draws on ethnographic approaches to uncover literacies in the lives of children and families.

It is a concept that most literacy researchers working within a sociocultural paradigm would be aware of as it often features in postgraduate courses and is a touchstone for many researchers in England and internationally (e.g. Compton-Lilly, Rogers & Lewis, 2012; Tapia, Reyes & Kalman, 2023; Nash et al., 2023; Reyes et al., 2016). In some ways, its absence from our teacher data is unsurprising given that it is rather at odds with the 'knowledge rich' stance underpinning the National Curriculum described in Chapter 3 – and our sample was small. However, given the slant of our sample to UKLA, we might have expected someone to mention 'funds of knowledge' – but no-one did. This may be because none had encountered it or perhaps it was just not prominent for them just then or perhaps they did not see it as relevant to our questions about literacy. Indeed later, when we set out specifically to look for 'funds of knowledge' as the focus for one of our cases, we did find some examples of its use in England (see Chapter 9) but we still regard its complete absence from the teacher data as a point of interest.

The third and final topic we highlight here is critical literacy. Exceptions are references to critical literacy via the National Literacy Trust and The Guardian Foundation. Also the OECD (2021) report mentioned above includes references to reading online with discernment and safety. There are however virtually no references to sources which address inequalities generated through literacy education or link literacy and power in response to the extensive international literature on this theme (e.g. Janks, 2010; Pandya et al., 2022). We did see several references to CLPE's *Reflecting Realities* report which uncovered discrepancies in representation of diversity in children's literature, reflecting societal imbalances of power but there is a much wider body of work that unravels and challenges inequalities in literacy education that was not referenced at all.

We could refer to many other topics which have received considerable attention from literacy researchers: linked for example to literacy and affect, multilingualism and multimodality which all have implications for the creation and implementation of empowering, enabling and inclusive literacy provision. And of course, there is a vast range of published research which does not feature at all.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered some aspects of what teachers mentioned when asked to describe their research encounters and identified some topics that were absent. This range may well have been different for other teachers or for these teachers on other occasions. Nevertheless, it does foreground some possible connections between research mobilisation and enactments of literacy, research and teaching.

Regarding relationships between research mobilities and teaching, we noted that research materialises in many different ways, relatively rarely as directly accessed research and that much of what is encountered is difficult to trace to underpinning research. This has considerable implications for critical engagement with research as it means that credibility, expertise, legitimacy of mediators, researchers and research findings are hard – sometimes virtually impossible – to evaluate.

Regarding relationships between research mobilities and literacy, a diversity of sources appears to be associated with a relatively narrow range of literacy research, with certain items, sources and mediators gaining significant influence. This is perhaps unsurprising as individuals and organisations compete to garner attention, reputation and income in a highly complex and overcrowded research landscape. The topics and approaches promoted and noticed are likely to be those that reflect high-stakes government requirements and address areas that schools and teachers know they will have to defend through the inspection process. It is no surprise that this brief overview suggests a high degree of convergence between the types of research teachers encounter and government priorities. At the same time, as we noted in our exploration of directly accessed research, teachers' lines of enquiry do not always align with government or school policy. As such, other research sometimes seeps in.

Note

1 See Chapter 2 for commentary on this.

8 Applying a corpus linguistic lens to explore appearances of literacy research in news media and Twitter

Introduction

In Chapter 5, discussing Law's notion of method assemblage, we quoted his discussion of a kaleidoscope as simultaneously a characterisation of the world and how we perceive it. This chapter takes the lens of corpus linguistics to consider some findings from the specialist corpora we created for this project, concerning the appearances of literacy, including appearances and absences of research.

In Chapter 5, we introduced corpus linguistics as a methodology and explained how we created our specialist corpora for the *Research Mobilities* project. The first is a collection of texts from newspapers, considered as a proxy for public discourse, from January 2017 to May 2022. Construction of any corpus entails meeting challenges which may require imperfect decisions. One created for us by the functionality of the Nexis database was that we could not separate out newspapers from Wales from England and therefore had to take them together. We included the Times Educational Supplement (TES), a national newspaper popular with teachers and educationalists, until it went online only in 2022. By drawing on this corpus, we highlight topics in primary literacy education research that resonate with newspapers and their audiences and identify institutions and people that regularly figured as sources of expertise or that appeared to be viewed negatively.

Our second corpus is drawn from Twitter during the period January 2019 to December 2022. Twitter (now X) has been a significant social media platform for many teachers and others interested in primary education and provides a unique window on discourses around literacy in a space where major providers, brokers and users of research can interact.

Our final corpus is a small dataset of the views of teachers as collected within the project which has been used to inform our findings in various ways but is not focused upon as such in this chapter. These corpora could each be considered as spaces, in Massey's sense of space as produced by multiplicities coming together in ways that may or may not be perceived by any of the

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complex entities involved; and thus as 'imbued with temporality' (Massey, 2005, p. 55). While a corpus linguistics investigation appears, as one works with it, as a flattened collection of texts, it is important to hold onto the sense of diverse sociomaterialities that are, as it were, paused, to allow a purview from a particular research methodology that is corpus linguistics.

Here we present some key findings about the topics, approaches, methodologies and social actors of particular significance in the primary literacy education landscape in England today. Necessarily, in a single chapter, we cannot present all our findings but instead pursue some interesting aspects of these, working as we shall show, at different levels of granularity.

Major findings from the newspaper corpus

Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 demonstrated that literacy education is part of public discourse, as represented by newspaper media. Of obvious interest to us is the range of topics and stances towards those topics that are represented and the extent to which these align as manifest in literacy education policy in England which, as explored in Chapter 3, we characterise as narrowly framed.

We looked for keywords, that is, words that occur statistically significantly more often in our data – the research mobilities media corpus – than in a reference corpus – the newspaper subcorpus of BNC 2014 (Brezina, Hawtin & McEnery, 2021) that is about 20 million words of newspaper texts published in British English between 2007 and 2020. (For anyone interested in corpus linguistics we mention that we used the log-likelihood statistical method.)

The very first point we need to make is that the most prominent keyword in this corpus in comparison to newspaper reports in general is *children* and that the second is *reading*. It is unsurprising and expected that *children* appears in first position but it is noticeable that literacy seems to be reduced overwhelmingly to *reading*. Before discussing this major theme, we consider other key findings about actors and topics associated with primary literacy education.

First, in order of keyness, children are also known as *pupils* or *students*. Other actors found prominently included *teachers, parents*, *schools* and *teacher assistants*. In terms of spaces, *schools, classrooms*, *trusts* and *libraries* occur as the places where primary literacy education appears. When *parents* are mentioned (which they often are), it is in terms of their relationships with schools, for example,

> The commission also called for parents and teachers to sign annual 'homework contracts', whereby teachers pledge to set pupils 'high-quality homework' and parents agree to support their children's efforts to complete it.
> (*The Guardian*, 13.7.2017)

They are most often characterised as an adjunct to the activity of literacy instruction located in homes, rather than as providing opportunities for informal literacy education. However, there are also some interesting examples where families and communities are involved, in ways that are explicitly related to findings from literacy research. The following article from a regional newspaper makes connections between people in varying roles, including children, unusually positioned as agentive, with other people and varied organisations in a place-based project:

> A SHOPPING centre in Hereford has launched a quest to find a young reading hero who has used reading to positively benefit others. Old Market Hereford is asking parents, guardians, teachers, families and friends in Hereford to nominate a child under the age of 12 who they think has gone above and beyond to inspire or help others through books. The initiative is part of the Young Readers Programme, a partnership between its owner, British Land, and the National Literacy Trust. The programme is designed to encourage children aged 11 and under to read for enjoyment in their spare time.
>
> Jonathan Douglas, director of the National Literacy Trust, said: 'We know that reading for pleasure is one of the most effective ways to help children reach their full potential. Our research shows that children who enjoy reading every day outside school are five times more likely to read above the expected level for their age than those who don't. With the support of British Land and its shopping centres and retailers across the UK, our Young Readers Programme has helped more than 19,000 children choose books to enjoy and keep. For many, these were the first books they had ever owned.'
>
> The winner will be chosen by a judging panel made up of representatives from British Land, Old Market, the National Literacy Trust.
>
> (*Hereford Times*, 24.6.2017)

Second, assessment is a strong theme across the corpus. Within this theme, there are many topics expressed in negative terms as deficiencies or difficulties encountered, such as *disadvantaged, need*, *dyslexia* and *interventions. Attainment*, a word which in itself could reference positive or negative outcomes, frequently appears in a negative context; its most frequent collocate is *gap*. It is striking that the 'attainment gap' is overwhelmingly located as being associated with children being disadvantaged before they start school, because of home-located deficiencies.

> …if ministers are serious about closing the attainment gap, they need to get parents onboard at home.
>
> (*The Guardian*, 26.2.2022)

An example of this is found in an article about the North Yorkshire County Council's response to the pandemic. Its chief executive, Richard Flinton, is described very positively in relation to his attempts to revive the economy through greater digital connectivity, arts and culture revivals and reimagining Scarborough High Street. His attempts however are framed in relation to deficits within the local community:

> But it's the pockets of chronic educational underachievement that concern him most and he believes that only a focus on the pre-school readiness of disadvantaged infants can bridge attainment gaps and enable all parts of the community to become full economic participants.
>
> (*The Independent*, 27.2.2021)

Given the timing of our study, the COVID-19 pandemic often featured in terms of differential effects on reading attainment. An example is an article from the *Guardian* newspaper previewing 2021 World Book Day, which centred on an interview with its CEO, Cassie Chadderton, with scrupulous attention to the acknowledgement of underpinning research:

> Research carried out by the World Book Day charity – which brings together the UK's leading reading and educational charities including BookTrust, CLPE, National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency – has found that the number of children reading has fallen since the start of the pandemic.
>
> 'Many children and parents embraced reading at the beginning of the pandemic, with huge benefits for their wellbeing and development but numbers have since decreased, meaning some children are not experiencing the life-chance improving benefits of reading for pleasure,' said Chadderton.
>
> (*The Guardian*, 4.3.2021)

To return to attainment, it is, of course, often measured at school and results are often the foci of news reports, so keywords include *SATs, tests* and *age*. The coverage of SATs is mostly concerned with three main topics, *failure*, *success* and *resistance* which despite being contradictory stances can occasionally appear within the same article. A *Daily Mail* article began an article on SAT results with a negative stance on the results:

> ALMOST four in ten children in England are still not meeting expected standards in the three Rs by the end of primary school. Official data shows that just 61 per cent of 11-year-olds made the grade in reading, writing and maths national curriculum tests this year. This means that 39 per cent failed to meet the threshold across all three subjects and could now struggle when they move to secondary school in September.
>
> (*Daily Mail*, 5.7.2017)

The article quickly moved to presenting a more positive stance on the results, explaining that they showed a 'marked improvement' since 2016 with an elaborated explanation from the School Standards Minister and, at the end of the article, further support for SATs from the Centre for Education and Employment Research at Buckingham University and other sources. Nonetheless, the middle of the article displayed another commonly found reason for discussing SATs in newspaper articles: resistance from teachers, trade unions and other associations. This piece contained a succinct summary of this view: 'We currently have a system in which the SATs hang over schools like the sword of Damocles' (*Daily Mail* is a tabloid paper with shorter articles and content centred on more sensational news, see also Cermakova et al., 2024 for discussion on media corpus composition).

Although literacy attainment, as explored in Chapter 3, relates to reading and writing, the major keyword of this corpus is *reading*, illustrating that overwhelmingly in England, through the lens of the major media outlets, the understanding of children's literacy is dominated by reading. This prevalence of reading over writing reflects what we found in the teacher data (as discussed in Chapter 7). In the next section, we tease out what we learned about public discourses through examining some collocates of the keyword *reading*. (By collocates we mean words that frequently occur together.)

Collocates of reading

One of the statistically strongest collocates of *reading* is *love*. This is quite a fascinating finding in that it is, at first sight at least, in quite a different register from words associated with the accountability discourses described in Chapter 3. *Love* is almost always connected either directly to reading as in *love of reading*, or of *books* or *stories* and is usually presented unproblematically, as a readily accessible benefit or disposition. For example, we found the following in The Plymouth Herald:

> Charlotte Sandercock from The Cathedral School of St Mary said: 'The Young Readers Programme is a fantastic initiative and has really helped motivate the children to read more.
>
> 'A love of reading is something that can last a lifetime. It's a great way for children to learn new things and fire their imagination, so anything that inspires them to open a book more often is amazing'.
>
> (*Plymouth Herald*, 19.7.2022)

We found precisely the same quotation, word for word, in the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* and the *Hereford Times*. Each time the quotation was attributed to a local teacher, likely because this was included in a Young Readers Programme press release. While we are in no way suggesting that

these views are less than sincere, such strategies are an accepted part of prefabrication in professional communications targeted at news and other media (Bell, 1991). One of us, attending an All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting in 2020, was a little surprised that the preparatory briefing included 'suggested tweets' – the combination of a text and relevant digital actor making it easier for busy participants to contribute to news stories. In the examples discussed above, selection implies alignment with the proposed viewpoint. Although of course books may be accessed through digital platforms, there is no reference to this possibility and print books seem most often to be understood. *Love* is rarely associated with *writing*.

Phonics is another significant collocate of *reading* and also a keyword in the corpus. *Phonics* often occurs with terms that will be unsurprising to readers of Chapter 3, including *synthetic, check, systematic, screening* and *instruction*. *Phonics* is a relatively technical term compared to say *love* (of reading), yet it has passed into relatively common use in media discourse in England. Discourses around phonics are presented in the vast majority of cases as taken for granted, a feature of the primary literacy education environment, for example:

> 'There is an expectation that at the end of primary school, pupils will be able to read well and an assumption that teaching pupils to read is the job of primary teachers', she explains. 'Primary teachers are clearly doing a fantastic job – look at performance on the phonics screening check, for example …'
>
> (TES, 3.11.2017)

> The use of phonics to teach reading is a great example of how scientific evidence has fed through to everyday classroom practice.
>
> (TES, 2.11.2018)

The topic of phonics is occasionally presented in more nuanced ways, as in the Guardian (17.9.2020) article on teaching dyslexic children. We found two occurrences, where an outright challenge appears, both of these within quotations from academic researchers. In *tes* (17.11.2017) quoting 'Cambridge-based psychology researcher David Whitebread':

> There is, therefore, no empirical evidence to indicate that, in schools minister Nick Gibb's words, emphasis upon phonics puts young children 'on track to become fluent readers' (bit.ly/GIBBPhonics). The practice certainly trains in skills relating to the conversion of visual stimuli into sounds, but there is as yet no evidence to indicate whether or not this places the meaning-making process associated with literacy into the 'back seat', as the neuronal pathways associated with reading are formed.

and in *The Guardian* (discussed further in Chapter 9):

> 'Policy changes have led to changes in teaching, including more time being spent on phonics, the **separation** of phonics from other literacy activities, and a reliance on a small number of phonics schemes,' said Bradbury. 'This is an important shift in how children are taught to read, a shift which is not underpinned by the research evidence'.
>
> (*The Guardian*, 19.1.2022)

Several other words associated with reading proficiency that significantly correlate with *reading* include *comprehension* and *fluency* (both of which also featured in the teacher data – see Chapter 7).

Reading comprehension and fluency, as relatively technical concepts, feature particularly in *tes*, often with reference to specific research studies. However such terms also spill over to more general media, even local newspapers, in connection with initiatives of various kinds that are reported as enhancing literacy competencies. *The Oxford Mail* (18.4.2020), for example, reported on a local charity's work with specialist tutors and disadvantaged children who 'typically make more than a year's progress in reading accuracy and comprehension in just six weeks'. This implies not just success in 'narrow[ing] the attainment gap' presented as the aim of the activity but also implies expertise in the exercise of assessment measures. The *Grimsby Telegraph* (7.2.2022) reported on an academy's purchase of 'Reading Plus software for selected students to increase reading levels and fluency'. Without wishing to appear churlish when reading about the academy's enthusiasm for literacy, a reader might wonder whether these 'selected students' are the same as, or different from, the 'top students' who receive 'a token which they can choose to use on a number of rewards, including a free book'.

Key findings from the Twitter corpus

As explained in Chapter 5, the nature of the Twitter dataset is quite different and initial pilot explorations showed that perhaps its strongest characteristic in comparison to the newspaper media corpus is relative dynamism. The newspaper corpus displays, comparatively, a relative homogeneity across topics and across time. The pandemic intervened, but even that period of crisis was characterised in newspapers featuring primary literacy education in effects judged by already understood themes, such as love of reading, attainment and skills.

Twitter, on the other hand, while having some consistent themes, presents a relatively fast-moving platform, with a great variety of actors and topics. Therefore, an initial task was to divide the corpus into subcorpora by year, to make comparative examinations of appearances and disappearances

more visible. We first investigate this through an examination of hashtags. Our second set of findings relate to influence.

Popular hashtags

When considering Twitter data, it is important to remember that Twitter as a platform has constantly evolved. Its affordances evolved from its inception (Gillen & Merchant, 2013). One interesting affordance is the hashtag, placing the sign # immediately adjacent to a word (i.e. without a space) to emphasise it as a theme for the post. The IT journalist Kalev Leetaru analysed the hashtag in 2019 as having increased in popularity from becoming mainstream in 2013 to being included in nearly half of all tweets by mid-2016 but then levelling off to appearing in around 40% of tweets by Spring 2019 (Leetaru, 2019). We have been unable to find external data to corroborate our intuition that something approximating this level continued during our period of data collection, while subsequently falling out of favour to a substantial degree (we again note that all our discussion of Twitter predates 2022). However, investigating hashtags in our corpus certainly proved fruitful.

The hashtags have been retrieved from the whole corpus, that is, both tweets and other interactions (i.e. retweets, replies and quotes). After the retrieval, they were all converted to lower case and grouped together, for example, #ReadingForPleasure and #readingforpleasure would count as the same hashtag. Having divided the corpus in subcorpora by year, we present the most common hashtags (other than #literacy, always the most prevalent), see Table 8.1.

It can readily be seen that there is a mixture here between terms that have enduring salience such as #education and #school and many of the other readily comprehensible terms such as #primary are indeed found if we extend the list beyond the ten most frequent. But there are terms which even three years later appear somewhat baffling whether or not we understood them at the time. For example, looking into tweets mentioning #Pakistan, there are a range of topics including literacy rates, comparisons between girls and boys and others but it would take further investigation to try to work out why this attracted particular attention. A further possibility would be to investigate each hashtag in detail to investigate to what extent research underpins discussions, explicitly, implicitly or is absent.

Influential accounts

The first and most superficially appealing way of defining influential accounts is to look at the number of followers, so this is what we did first. We found that the essential quality of dynamism persisted in that there were strong differences when comparing year by year. However, three accounts appeared

Table 8.1 The ten most frequent hashtags other than #literacy

	2019		*2020*		*2021*		*2022*	
	Hashtag	*Freq.*	*Hashtag*	*Freq*	*Hashtag*	*Freq*	*Hashtag*	*Freq*
1	#education	380	#nep2020	558	#worldbookday	347	#teachers	557
2	#primary	332	#stayhome	391	#education	147	#internationalliteracyday	441
3	#educationday	324	#neptransformingindia	270	#sdg4	135	#indianarmy	431
4	#school	257	#primary	237	#plprimarystars	99	#education	331
5	#reading	233	#neweducationpolicy2020	233	#edutwitter	88	#primary	273
6	#teaching	224	#earlymomentsmatter	196	#edchatie	87	#school	230
7	#ks2	213	#education	188	#(non-latin alphabet)	69	#jhula	219
8	#ks1	203	#school	165	#changingthestory	60	#student	219
9	#pakistan	166	#worldbookday	156	#readingforpleasure	60	#iphone14pro	218
10	#sdg4	104	#covid19	142	#primaryschoollibrary	56	#kashmir	218

in the top 20 in our corpus in at least 3 years: each now appears with one representative tweet:

> @NelsonMandela [The Nelson Mandela Foundation contributes to a just society by promoting the values, vision and work of our Founder. Follows/RTs/Likes ≠ Endorsements] tweets on 22.1.2022:
>
> Learners at Mbongo Primary school in Mpumalanga and Tiyiselani Primary school in Limpopo commenced their 2020 school years with brand new libraries.
>
> Mbongo – https://t.co/0b03MOMQB2
>
> Tiyiselani – https://t.co/xPjideuH3F #MandelaDay #Literacy #Education https://t.co/6nJV0FEyPf

@ PenguinUKBooks [Publishing the best books and authors for over 80 years. Discover your next great read at https://t.co/yMCVgWziH6.] tweets on 2.11.2021:

> An alliance between the @Literacy_Trust and Penguin Books UK has been set up to transform and equip 1,000 libraries in primary schools by 2025. Find out more 👇 https://t.co/mSY0ILeX1B

and

@ClarenceHouse [The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall] tweets on 5.3.2020:

> Earlier today, The Duchess of Cornwall celebrated #WorldBookDay and the magic of reading with children from Bousfield Primary School in London. 📖
>
> HRH visited literacy classes at the school, which is the former site of author Beatrix Potter's home. https://t.co/jFB1hF2uz8

A range of accounts from different continents appear at least twice, geographically as diverse as NBS Television, *The Australian* and Ministry of Education (India). Investigating explicitly UK-based accounts does however yield a list of accounts we recognised as popular in the domain of primary literacy as they appeared consistently across our datasets with the highest count of followers (note, these accounts have explicitly specified as their location 'UK' or 'England'; the number of followers as at the time of the data retrieval):

Alex Quigley – Username: AlexJQuigley, Followers: 75,464, Location: York, England

BookTrust – Username: Booktrust, Followers: 114,678, Location: UK

Department for Education – Username: educationgovuk, Followers: 460,645, Location: UK
EEF – Username: EducEndowFoundn, Followers: 108,387, Location: London, UK
Literacy Trust – Username: Literacy_Trust, Followers: 96,525, Location: London, UK
Michael Rosen – Username: MichaelRosenYes, Followers: 288,808, Location: London, UK
The Bookseller – Username: thebookseller, Followers: 236,977, Location: London, UK
The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall – Username: ClarenceHouse,
Followers: 1,097,681, Location: UK
The Reading Agency – Username: readingagency, Followers: 72,664, Location: UK
UKEdChat – Username: ukedchat, Followers: 81,351, Location: UK

As explained in Chapter 5, our approach to data collection using Twitter could not guarantee that only results appertaining to primary literacy research would appear nor that some potentially relevant results would not be excluded. The Twitter dataset is also different in that it covers discourses outside England, reflecting that posts and related reactions often crossed international boundaries even though our study is focused on England. Plainly it would take a considerable amount of intensive further investigation to ascertain the extent and manner in which the UK-based accounts listed above orientate to research or not. Nonetheless it is notable that all these accounts appeared as influential in our corpus. Several of these appeared also in the teacher corpus and/or in our background literature research. This resonance suggests that we can claim some robustness in our methodology, although we must emphasise that the different lenses and approaches taken do not imply a claim to triangulation. It is interesting that taking a broader lens to Twitter has identified Nelson Mandela, Penguin Books UK and Clarence House as significant in the primary literacy world, including through their alliances and promotions.

An approach to influence

Stewart (2022) used ethnographic methods with an appropriately small number of participants to investigate how her scholarly users deployed complex practices to 'build public, credible identities, status position, and influence in scholarly networks and on Twitter in particular' (Stewart, 2022, p. 202). Many users of Twitter, now X, will recognise that equating the popularity of an account to the number of followers would be a simplistic

and ineffective way of measuring influence, although one of us at a conference of computer scientists in Dublin in 2014 was a little startled when a plenary speaker suggested that the modern definition of 'a loser' is someone with fewer followers than the number they follow on Twitter!

During the period of our data collection, Twitter was a social media platform where actions counted, although adopting simple platform metrics to any investigation of influence may be misleading, especially when our interest is in how research moves 'in the wild'. Investigating influence however is undoubtedly a complex matter (Zhang et al., 2023). One may be a follower of an account without ever seeing more than one tweet. On the other hand, actually being influenced by an account can be indicated through likes, as one is unlikely to do this without reading the tweet. It should however immediately be acknowledged that liking might not indicate approbation as it can be used as a bookmarking system in order to return to a tweet later; nevertheless, that too indicates a measure of interest. Retweeting does imply reading and, most probably at least, a measure of approbation in that one is passing on to one's followers. Quoting a tweet is as certain an indication as can be found that the original tweet has been read, since here the poster retweets but also adds a comment. Thus it is the strongest type of interaction and for this reason we deem retweeting and quoting as the strongest sign of being influenced.

Therefore, we returned to the whole corpus of tweets again and created a Python programme to detail how each tweet was retweeted or quoted and then divided tweets into batches. After some experimentation, the most fruitful method of division was as shown in Table 8.2.

We then moved to isolate the influential accounts, that is, those that appeared in batches 3, 4 and 5 and put them together. This method allows some confidence in the assertion that these were the most influential accounts in our corpus over the four years. Table 8.3 presents the accounts located in the United Kingdom.

Several of these appeared in our project teacher corpus. Many of these are organisations in the field seeking to be influential and adopting professional communicative practices. They may identify themselves as such, for example,

Table 8.2 Tweets divided into batches according to influence in retweeting as quoting is generally not very frequent

Batch number	*No. of retweets*	*Number of tweets*	*Percentage (%)*
1	0	3870	54
2	1–3	2302	32
3	4–10	717	10
4	11–50	252	3
5	50+	45	1

Table 8.3 Influential UK accounts in primary literacy education research 2019–2022

User name	*Description*	*No. of tweets with 4+ RTs*
Literacy_Trust	The National Literacy Trust is dedicated to transforming lives through literacy.	12
imaginecentre	Education consultancy and school book supply company.	12
clpe1	Improving literacy standards in primary schools through their teaching programmes, CPD and research.	6
EducEndowFoundn	Education Endowment Foundation (EEF): raising attainment of children facing disadvantage.	4
MightyWriter_UK	The multi award-winning literacy resource that transforms children's literacy almost overnight.	4
tes	Follow us for exclusive news, views on schools, education policy and teaching.	4
IpswichTown	Ready for 22/23. Get the new kits using the link.	3
whatSFSaid	Author of Varjak Paw, The Outlaw Varjak Paw & Phoenix.	4
ColU_FITC	Official charity of @ColU_Official Providing Sports, Education & Health activities for all ages & abilities.	3
JDLiteracyTrust	CBE, Hon FRSL, CEO of the National Literacy Trust.	3
NickPoole1	CEO of CILIP, UK Library and Information Association. Advocating for libraries and information professionals.	3
thebookseller	The UK's definitive book industry magazine and website.	3
timesscotland	The best of our journalism. Subscribe here: [URL].	3
7Stories	National Centre for Children's Books. FREE ENTRY.	3

the National Literacy Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation may seek to put forward their content through a named person such as Nick Poole, CEO of CILIP. Sometimes strongly linking a specific person to an organisation can be an effective method in Public Relations generally although obviously it has its dangers. It is interesting to see that some beyond England are particularly influential including @timesscotland, *The Times and Sunday Times Scotland*. @Ipswich Town football club might at first sight seem surprising, but in England there have been several initiatives connecting football clubs with primary literacy during the last 30 years. In 2019 Ipswich Town football club had a drive supporting local literacy.

> Year 2 pupils from Rose Hill Primary School visited Portman Road yesterday for a literacy event, which was supported by the @EFLTrust and Kinder +Sport, as part of the #JoyofMoving project. #itfc
>
> Town 'keeper @WilllNorris surprised year 2 pupils at St Matthew's Primary School today as part of a literacy event, which was supported by the @EFLTrust and Kinder +Sport. #itfc
>
> Holbrook Primary School visited Portman Road yesterday for a literacy event, which was supported by the @EFLTrust and Kinder +Sport. #itfc

Given that a key concern for this book is links between academic researchers and research mobilities, we undertook a further investigation of effective UK-based academic Twitter accounts. We operationalise here the academic accounts as accounts that contain the word 'university' in the 'Author' description. In this way, we identified 353 unique accounts, where approximately 70% were accounts of individuals and the rest were institutional accounts. The individual accounts belong mostly to academics working at universities and students but also alumni. The proportion of alumni is particularly high for countries like Pakistan or Uganda. It is also considerably more frequent in the United States than in the United Kingdom. In Table 8.4, we include a sample tweet for the most influential academic accounts, which is not necessarily representative of their production, but may give a flavour.

These tweets demonstrate a great diversity and variety in content and style, displaying diverse ways of creating engaging content and involving other accounts.

Conclusion

Our investigation of newspapers gave us a good sense of public understandings of primary literacy education, including how research featured. This is the hinterland against which new initiatives, new policies and new pieces of research emerge and are taken up or not by teachers. Notions such as 'attainment gap' and 'reading for pleasure' acquire status and power through repetition. As with the teacher mentions explored in the previous chapter, literacy is primarily understood as related to reading. Although for some, including some researchers located in universities, issues of reading methodologies may be as live as ever, it is noteworthy that 'phonics' was treated uncritically in the main, reflecting how it is sedimented in our education system.

The age of Twitter as it was in 2019–2022 has already long passed. It must not be assumed by readers of this book that the platform, renamed and evolved as it has, demonstrates the qualities of its past as indicated here.

Table 8.4 Influential academic accounts (with 24,000+ followers)

Author name	*Account*	*Followers*	*Description*
Andrew MacGregor Marshall	@zenjournalist	291,207	Journalist. Recovering war correspondent. Author @ ZedBooks. University lecturer. Publisher https://t.co/ Idx6U9jGwq
The vast majority of online lessons for primary school children are just royalist propaganda. Very few online lessons teach crucial literacy and numeracy skills. 2/4 https://t.co/TIUDCi7tTp. [14.6.2019]			
University of Plymouth	@PlymUni	64,510	Latest University news, events, research and information on our courses. Apply to Plymouth: @PlymUniApply Residence Life: @PlymUniResLife Alumni: @PlymUniAlum
Medical students have been delivering reading sessions to local primary school pupils as part of a project to boost literacy in the city. https://t.co/uDA5rt7VMM #GettingResults #NHSDay https://t.co/qexdycjXPE. [5.7.2021]			
Leeds Beckett	@leedsbeckett	61,713	The official account of Leeds Beckett University (formerly Leeds Metropolitan). A thriving student community in the [heart] of Yorkshire.
@EducationLBU has honoured Leeds' first black headteacher with a new studentship. The Gertrude Paul Doctoral Studentship will focus on improving maths and literacy with primary school children from mainly African and Caribbean backgrounds. #ShapingLeeds https://t.co/u7FCeyPPIY https://t.co/nQaEJ14jvI [21.5.2020]			
Vanderbilt Health	@VUMChealth	43,530	Sharing the latest health news & medical research from Vanderbilt University Medical Center. https://t.co/ yaTJpICEEV Join us: https://t.co/yWWgYMzuE0
RT @VUMCHearSpeech: Congratulations to PhD student Sylvia Liang. Her project, 'Literacy-Language Intervention Delivered via Telepractice to Primary-school Children.' [14.6.2019]			
Sheffield SU	@SheffieldSU	35,780	Welcome to the number one students' union in the country. Our purpose is to represent, support and enhance the lives of University of Sheffield students.

Interested in becoming a Number Hero or Literacy Champion? We've got a great volunteer opportunity for you! Learn new skills & work with other students to make a difference for children in Sheffield and gain primary school experience. Find out more https://t.co/8QajDiHqnw https://t.co/yomqC84FpY. [20.10.2021]

mesut uyar	@mesutuyar10	35,315	Professor.Ottoman-Turkish Military Historian. Graduate of Turkish Military Academy&University of Istanbul Political Sciences; working at Antalya Bilim University.

@PhdTravlos Cafer Tayyar asked help from villagers when he had lost contact with his companions. One peasant decided to get benefit by informing the Greeks. Later in his life, Cafer constructed a primary school in that very village not only teaching basic literacy and math but also nationalism.
[19.12.2020]

Oxford University Press	@OxUniPress	26,667	At Oxford University Press, we advance knowledge and learning. We employ over 5,000 people and enable learners to achieve their potential in over 200 countries.

Our #RaiseAReader survey found that 28% of older primary school pupils want their parents to read to them more often. 📖
Explore how to engage your child with #reading here 👇 https://t.co/tlXsBCodVK. [4.10.2022]

Accountancy@UJ	@UJAccountancy	26,466	#WSAAB – Who said accountants are boring? Department of Accountancy@ University of Johannesburg. E-mail: accountancy@uj.ac.za Facebook page: UJ Accountancy.

We are so happy to share our latest reading room renovation at Zonkizizwe Primary School.
[8.9.2022]

Reading for Pleasure	@OpenUni_RfP	24,803	Isn't every child entitled to [url] Transformative research from The Open University. #OURfP

RT @Literacy_Trust: We're looking for 80 primary schools to join Puffin World of Stories in 2019! Would your school like access to free books? [29.4.2019]

Timothy Shanahan	@ ReadingShanahan	24,180	Timothy Shanahan is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

RT @LorraineConnaug: Research paper "Disciplinary Literacy in the Primary School" by Professor Timothy Shanahan @ ReadingShanahan available. [21.10.2019]

The two main corpora provided different shakes of the kaleidoscope in approaching mobilities in primary literacy education research, indicating how some assemblages come together in various moments. The teacher corpus gave us some confidence in our emergent findings, but this data was examined rather more directly, as in Chapter 7.

Investigations of research mobilities around primary literacy education were fascinating to us in a number of ways:

- some professional actors are effective in mediating ideas and practices in the field of primary literacy education;
- some of the influential commentators on primary literacy education come from outside the field;
- while some topics sustain interest over time, especially when considered broadly, others flicker briefly, being of momentary attraction;
- social media can offer a space for diverse, rich and multifaceted interactions, in which teachers and indeed anyone interested in the topic can find value.

Finally, we suggest that corpus linguistics offers a rich means of text mining, with systematic methods for creating specialised textual datasets and/or investigating the now considerable range, increasing all the time, of corpora already available. If, however, part of the goal of the investigation is to glimpse these texts 'in the wild', it is vital to take into consideration the sociomaterialities of these spaces. It is also necessary to include in this critical engagement reflections upon decisions made in the crafting of corpora, another shift of the kaleidoscope.

9 Tracing literacy research

Networks, controversies and movements

Introduction

In this chapter we draw on sociomaterial ethnographies to explore the many ways actors combine to mobilise literacy research: the work and labour that goes into how research moves, who-what is doing this work, and how the research may shape-shift and do different things as it moves. As explored in Chapter 5, we started with nine public research outputs of interest: primarily published research articles in peer-reviewed journals but also research project websites, research-oriented PDF documents, blogs and tweets, online evidence-based resources, literacy education focused online sites, phrases used as shorthand for bodies of research and digital spaces in which students and teachers materially embed specific research.

The previous chapters have explored how research accounts re-assemble into a myriad of different configurations and fragments: summaries, bullet points, visualisations, podcasts or a carefully curated collection of 'facts' that circulate in and through social media postings, PDF documents, on literacy-related websites, in the popular media or as hashtags, URL links, videos and PowerPoint slides. In this chapter we expand on how these circulations are generated by, and generate, *translations* of the research (see Chapter 5). Translation of research is a complex process that meshes together an abundance of actors (human and otherwise), processes of brokerage and different manifestations of research across multiple terrains, some highly governed and others less so. Figure 9.1 offers a messy representation of some of the actors implicated in research mobilities.

Our data suggest that actors are not equally powerful or persuasive. Not all are willing agents. They are diverse: people and also digital elements and physical things that do different things in different time-spaces. And they do not work alone. They combine and work in assemblages that move or stall literacy research in one way or another: deliberately and sometimes inadvertently. Some of these actors seem to become indispensable. Others lock into specific

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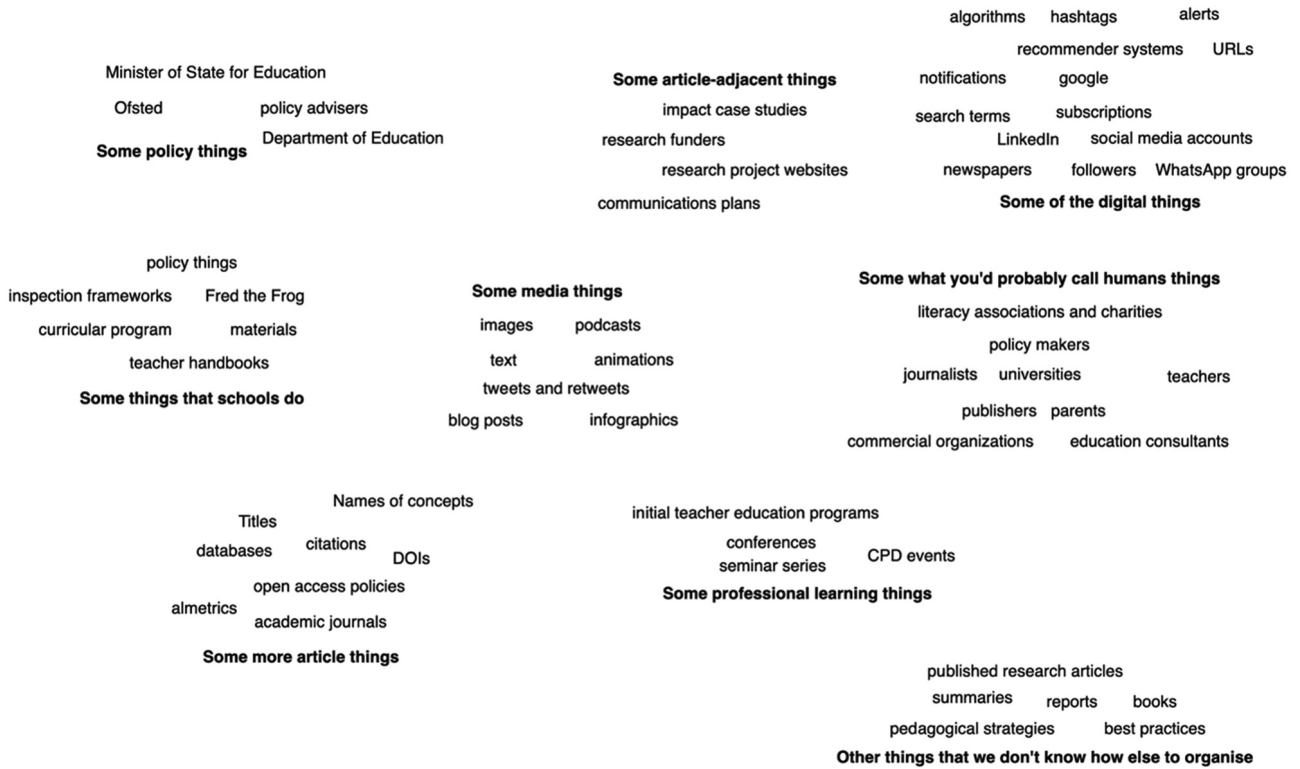

Figure 9.1 The messy ephemera of research.

roles. A handful manage to become powerful spokespeople-things for complex assemblages that both enact and are enacted as 'research mobilities'.

In this chapter we share three cases: Phonics and the Reading Wars, Critical Connections and Funds of Knowledge (see Chapter 5 for an overview of the cases). The starting point for the first was an article by Wyse and Bradbury which had surfaced in the teacher data (see Chapter 7). The other two were explored in deliberate attempts to trace research relating to topics that were more or less absent from the teacher data and which articulated with an expansive view of literacy. We were interested in whether and how research mobilises which does not link closely to policy. In discussing these, we introduce data from other cases to tease out nuances of specific research moves. The cases highlight how different assemblages 'broker' research. Planned and serendipitous, literacy research is made visible in varying degrees as different assemblages labour together in attempts and failures to 'move' not only research findings, theorisations and methodologies but also critical questions, ideas and ideologies; critiques and contradictions; enthusiasms and resonances; and controversies.

Each case follows actors who were actively, or more passively, doing something to move, or respond to, movements of research. We adapt Callon's (1986) concept of *translation* to examine how it is that a particular manifestation of research gathers other actors around it and how these manifestations of research become part of other research, policy, practice or corporate assemblages: in other words, the politics of these assemblings. And through such mediations, transformations and displacements (Callon, 1986), how research *becomes* differently.

As we explored in Chapter 5, attempting to generate and analyse such data was a complex undertaking that was inevitably partial and fragmented. Moreover, attempting to trace the movements of research was far from a linear process: it was not a matter of connecting the dots from start to end. Indeed, the assumption of a concrete singular start and end point is problematic. In Chapter 5 we explained how we selected our entry points in each case. Having gained a sense of some of the movements of specific research, we purposefully selected various starting points for conducting different analyses. These were analytic starting points: our points of insertion into already existing swirls of research moves. The fluidity of our starting points is consistent with how various stakeholders encounter research. Because there are countless entry points, any research or research 'move' already contains moves and ideas from other times and spaces.

The phonics and the reading wars case

On January 18, 2022, an article was published online by Review of Education: *Reading wars or reading reconciliation? A critical examination*

of robust research evidence, curriculum policy and teachers' practices for teaching phonics and reading by Dominic Wyse and Alice Bradbury (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022a). The title's evocation of the 'reading wars' references debates, often misrepresented and overplayed, about the teaching of reading over many years (see Chapter 2). The article draws on 'a systematic qualitative meta-synthesis of 55 experimental trials' and 'a survey of 2205 teachers' to challenge educational policy on reading on the teaching of reading in England.

> *Appearing as an article in a peer-reviewed journal, it is replete with the typical markers of academic work: publication date, a DOI reference, journal name (Review of Education) and a reference to BERA (the British Educational Research Association, which publishes the journal). Its route to publication from receipt to revision to acceptance is carefully documented with dates. At the top of the page the article is labelled as a 'RESEARCH REPORT' and next to it a green unlocked padlock and 'Free to Read' text indicates that open access. There is a link to a YouTube video abstract featuring the two authors. Key words are carefully selected to tag the article in ways which will facilitate online searches but also to signal the main aims of the article and align with specific debates: assessment, phonics, policy and reading. The section on Funding Information informs that the Helen Hamlyn Trust funded the authors' research centre. The research article is already more than its 53 pages. Whatever this text is yet to become, it clearly does not work or travel alone: each of the actors just noted are implicated in how the article moves. There are others. Metrics such as full text views (19, 546), an Altmetric score (460) (Oct 11/2023) and other digital actors, such as Google Scholar, help to count its reach. The research article now rendered into a form that enables it to be datafied and tracked. Google Scholar tracks citations in 2022 and thus far in 2023 while Altmetrics indicates the number of news outlets, policy sources, Wikipedia pages and readers on Mendeley that have some how interacted with this research article. Algorithms keep an eye on where it appears and influence how it might appear in searches on screens. Based on this data, there is clearly some movement as it is picked up, blogged or posted about and referenced in policy sources or Wikipedia pages. And yet, despite all this information what exactly is being mobilised?*

The case starts with the publication of this article, which acquires an academic citation. The title, the text of the article and various other devices accompanying its publication mark out an area of interest which starts to link actors together. This is Callon's (1986) first moment of translation: *problematization*. It seems to be a typical academic article in a peer-reviewed journal. It is being read, written about and cited. But how does it move and

where does it go? It has attracted attention both among academics and wider publics and, as discussed in Chapter 7, was one of few articles mentioned by the teachers who participated in our study. Various devices of *interessement* and *enrolment* as per Callon's (1986) model of translation (see Chapter 5) help to make the labour of research moves more visible.

Devices that create an alliance of actors around this article include the long history of the phonics-reading debate. There is also the track record of the authors (academic researchers in this field) as evidenced by other publications, research projects and citations and references to their work outside academic spheres. Interwoven into this debate are significant policy moves. When this article was published in 2022, systematic synthetic phonics was (and still is) deeply embedded into curricular policy, as explored in Chapter 3. The presence of commercial entities offering synthetic phonics-oriented products and resources, as well as consulting and training services, means that they too pay some attention to this article. Devices of *interessement* vis-a-vis this article are further enacted through the considerable level of rhetoric and debate playing out publicly in the media, social media and other online spaces involving academics and government as well as teachers, literacy-related organisations, educational consultants and parents. The ongoing nature of the polarised debate suggests that the mobilities of this research article and its desire to press for substantive policy shifts may be somewhat predictable (and perhaps limited) given the seemingly entrenched positions on phonics in well-rehearsed and established assemblages that *are* phonics theorising, policy and practice. However, Mol's (1999) notion of *ontological politics* suggests that assemblings can be imagined differently. Such work starts by understanding the social and matter relations animating current iterations.

We focus on two translations: (1) research as event; and (2) research as controversy.

Translation: Research as event

The 2022 article does not just *appear* in this sprawling complex melee of research, policy, experience and opinion about reading and phonics. It has a carefully orchestrated series of appearances that attempt to order particular networks and moves. Mechanisms employed to announce the publication of this article translate this research into an event. Through different processes of enrolment, the research becomes *something that can be reported* and so becomes *something to read about* (as well as possibly, but not necessarily, read).

One mechanism is the strategy for how publication of this research is announced and planned. Although academics are the primary audience, Wyse noted in our interview that it was hoped the article would make its

way to policymakers and at some point to teachers. A university communications expert was added to the mix and a communication plan was developed to bring the article to wider public attention, including key figures of influence worth tagging or contacting directly. This plan became an important actor, translating the research article into something that could be more visible in strategic spaces and amplify its mobilities: it ordered movements.

Months before publication, this article started to assume a more tangible presence when Wyse circulated an invitation on December 17th 2021 for signatories on an open letter to Nadhim Zahawi, Secretary of State for Education, 'strongly calling on the UK Government to change their policy on reading'. The open letter, an enrolment device, was merely one of the opening research moves. The article was published on January 18th 2022, cuing a flurry of activity as various actors went to work. Almost immediately, there were responses in media, social media and among academics. Some of these were planned texts, directed by the communications plan: a legion of hyperlinks between the article and these media articles employed to distribute this work. But a host of more emergent texts and moves were also at work. Table 9.1 provides a selective view of some of these initial moves.

As we have seen with examples in Chapters 6 and 7, the published research article, albeit a powerful actor, was not always the most visible. It was displaced (Callon, 1986). The most prolific manifestations of the research article seemed to be excerpts and hyperlinks to the full article or other related articles and research. Through these often inter-connected URLs, the article shape-shifted into different forms: different headlines and extracts from the article pulling at different aspects of the research. The academic article worked by fading into the background in some assemblages in ways that maintain the sense of 'research as event'.

For example, we noted more frequent (re)tweeting of *The Guardian* article rather than the research article, even by universities. Very rarely was the full citation seen in these public spaces. The article was fragmented and redistributed (displaced) as it became something pointed to: a 'landmark study' in one Guardian article or 'an attack on phonics' in the *Telegraph*. The online comments on Bradbury's article in *The Guardian* bent the research into a springboard that enabled larger publics (including teachers) to share a myriad of opinions and experiences related to phonics and reading. This too, created a sense of 'eventedness' as the 695 comments accumulated over less than 48 hours (Jan 19/2022 at 15.42 until Jan 21/2022 at 10.28).

In most of these moves, the research maintained its 'prickliness' and strong advocacy for change: the sharp edges of its stance and criticism of current policy evident even in the fragments that circulated. References to the article, particularly in the media, as presenting 'the latest' and 'new'

Table 9.1 Time/space movements of Wyse & Bradbury (2022a)

Set up in advance and highly choreographed	*Immediate political and academic responses*	*Social media activity*
1 The Conversation article by Wyse & Bradbury, *Phonics teaching in England needs to change – our new research points to a better approach* (Jan 19, 2022)	6 Nick Gibbs (then a Member of Parliament, but previously [and later] Minister of State for Schools) responded in the Telegraph, *Resist the 'progressive' attack on phonics* (Jan 26/2022)	Responses also began appearing on social media, including:
2 The Guardian article, by Weale, *Focus on phonics to teach reading is 'failing children', says landmark study* (Jan 19/2022)	7 a quick short academic response posted on ResearchGate by Johnston and Chew (Jan/2022 no date), *Response to Wyse, D. and Bradbury, A. (in press) Reading wars or reading reconciliation? A critical examination of robust research evidence, curriculum policy and teachers' practices for teaching phonics and reading.* This article appears to be unpublished as of Nov 18/2023; according to ResearchGate, it has 2757 reads to date	8 Greg Ashman's tweet of The Guardian article, calling the research *BONKERS CONKERS* (Jan 19/2022)
3 institutional (UCL) blog post by Wyse & Bradbury (Jan 20/2022)		9 Ashman followed up with a blog post, *Has synthetic phonics been demolished*? (Jan 20/2022) on his Filling the Pail blog
4 another article in The Guardian by Bradbury, *Why are ministers obsessed with teaching children to read using phonics?* (Jan 20/2022) which generated 695 comments		10 Tom Bennett (ResearchEd) tweeted the Bradbury Guardian article (Jan 20/2022), claiming Wyse & Bradbury's study will mislead educators and hold children back; directs readers to Ashman's blog post
5 article in *tes* by Amass, *Why early reading lessons need to go beyond phonics* (Jan 19/2022)		11 broader Twitter activity followed the initial Guardian articles with tweets and retweets evoking criticism of the government, puns, relief and personal experiences of their own children finding phonics difficult

research strove towards urgency: an invitation for action and change. Even if the intact article hovered somewhere in the background, its presence was what galvanised and legitimated a host of other actors and actions. Wyse comments, 'a research project is not just the empirical side and the analyses, it's also the engagement, the impact. … We were thinking let's get a solid peer reviewed research publication …. because it's so important' (interview). The significance of an academic article and the necessary work it needs to do, and support, was noted in other cases.

Other actors shape shifted as well. The academic was translated into a communication strategist, monitoring where and how the article appeared, jumping into the fray of various discussions across several digital spaces, as well taking and deflecting public criticism. Faithful (and ostensibly stable) intermediaries such as Twitter (now X), WordPress, research project websites and university press releases were employed; the work of interessement and enrolment perhaps easier because these were familiar 'channels'. Search terms, hashtags, online platforms, likes and followers and read metrics alongside recommender systems and notifications were jostled into place to invite other human and digital things to 'read about' the research. And yet, how this research article moved, where, and with what meaning was not always predictable. These digital actors were also mediators: changing that which they helped to make visible.

Translation: Research as controversy

In this (and other cases) strong evidence of the tussle between matters of fact and concern drew us to Venturini and Munk's (2022) work on controversy mapping. Although research often starts with *matters of concern*, sometimes it will re-animate somewhat stabilised *matters of fact*, translating them into matters of concern (e.g. Latour, 2004) to keep issues from closing down, to re-energise certain actors and/or to engage more peripheral or absent/silent actors. By challenging the Department of Education's emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics, the Wyse & Bradbury (2022a) article reinvigorated debates about phonics as matters of concern. At the heart of the controversy into which this article sailed were questions about: the power struggles between different intellectual and ideological positions that give life to the phonics debate; slippage between and conflation of different orientations to literacy, expertise and evidence, legitimacy and credibility; and informed debate versus distraction.

The long history of debates about phonics served to keep existing assemblages and tensions in motion. As an actor, this article was implicated in moves to galvanise actors already enroled and perhaps attract new ones; and importantly, to change policy, practice and public narratives. In so doing, this research article not only entered an ongoing debate but was translated into a controversy. Here we sketch an initial inventory of this high-stakes controversy to describe and consider: (1) how knowledge claims (i.e. this research article) moved through and with other actors into networks of debate and proposals for action; and (2) the sites in which the controversy played out.

Conducting an *actors/Issues analysis* (Venturini & Munk, 2022) was a generative way of working with data which enabled us to examine how different actors related to different aspects of the phonics debate and therefore,

how they were connected to, or implicated in, how the Wyse & Bradbury (2022a) article moved. The performativity of controversy leads the researcher beyond singular actors into actors 'tangled in complex alliances of actors with and against each other' (Venturini & Munk, 2022, p. 12). The work of translation became more nuanced and visible when we examined how different actors *assemble* to generate and mediate tensions. It was through this work that research seemed to move and to take on different meanings.

Controversy, according to Venturini and Munk (2022), is characterised by arguments set out as proposals for action, in which, inevitably, 'knowledge is always enmeshed with politics' (p. 10). The knotting together of knowledge and politics is evident within the article itself. For example, Wyse & Bradbury (2022a) state that,

> the effectiveness of the teaching of reading is of paramount importance for education systems, and effectiveness should be determined through rigorous research. However … political ideology can be an influence on the development of national curricula and teaching methods, sometimes contrary to the research evidence (p. 4).

Knowledge, politics, research and ideology are also knotted together elsewhere. Nick Gibb leveraged official online platforms and influential national newspapers available to him as an MP and Minister of School Reform. On his website, Gibb (Sept 2021) stressed that phonics was a prime example of a political-ideological agenda in action, stating that phonics 'exemplifies the battles we [the Conservative government] have waged since 2010 [when the Conservatives took over from 10 years of Labour government] against the ideologically-driven bad practice that has bedevilled the education system since the 1950s' (paras 7 & 8).

Knotted together in this way, research and policy networks were attempting to remake educational ecosystems in part by 'redefining what matters in educational research' (Rowe, 2022, p. 4). Translation into a controversy heightens the visibility of this research which seems to facilitate particular mobilities but may also limit others. As in most controversies, this research article (and the larger body of research attached to it) was translated into a position: no longer just research evidence and theory but a stance and a different imagining of valued outcomes in this high-stakes issue about reading in primary schools. Consider this description from Lepawsky et al. (2019) and imagine the 'we' refers to teachers:

> we are thrown into the middle of the action where various actors are articulating positions, staking out their alliances and oppositions, and making a case for this or that version of things. In such situations, those thrown

> into the middle of the action are confronted with the question of how to know who to trust and how to recognize actor partisanship (p. 438).

As this article moved, it became a form of politics attempting to present compelling arguments and persuade, implicated in various forms of actor partisanship. It is not surprising that it took considerable labour and complex negotiations with an array of actors for such research to move into these terrains.

This case illustrates how academic researchers keep the theoretical and philosophical work of literacy present and some of the labour involved in doing so. This includes collectively helping to build material infrastructures to translate research in ways that spark critical dialogue to address these controversies. Many actors continue to engage with, comment on, critique, support and refute aspects of the Wyse & Bradbury (2022a) article, including teachers and head teachers. Digital spaces such as social media, comments on The Guardian page, and blogs ostensibly bring this range of actors together around the insights foregrounded in the research. That said, a deeper debate *between* key stakeholders about the literacy issues raised through this research is not as evident. Although there are places of intersections, the debate is both more diffuse (with many voices) and highly clustered (with more circumscribed circles of debate), which presents a challenge for generative debate between stakeholders.

The Critical Connections (multilingual digital storytelling) case

> *Critical Connections (https://www.gold.ac.uk/clcl/multilingualism/criticalconnections/) is indexed by Google as 'belonging' to Goldsmiths – an elegant, clean and simple webpage. After a bit of scrolling on a small laptop screen I find the link to the 'real' Critical Connections webpage hosted at WordPress. The contrast between the two is striking. Not only the colour scheme changes but the real page is busy. Really busy. Thirteen tabs to explore. Most of them have further subpages and more after that. The main feature on the home page is a sliding photo gallery with 64 photos of mostly children and young people 'in action' but pictures of places (schools?) are also included. The text tells us about the project and two short videos tell us more. The third tab is 'Professional Development' with online workshops and a page with 'Handbook for Teachers': a downloadable, 109-page resource. The next tab is 'Research': one of the subpages says simply '3 project posters'. They are lovely, the posters. 'Film Awards', the next tab. Eight subpages. Another tab says 'Deptford Storytelling' and another 'Poetry – Artwork'. Each of these represents a mini-world of its own. A colourful collage… of Critical Connections.*

Critical Connections, based at Goldsmiths University, London, was developed by Vicky Macleroy and Jim Anderson. The research project received its first funding from Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2012 and has gradually found its way into over 50 UK schools and partnership schools in 15 countries outside the UK. The research arising from the project examines multilingual digital storytelling. Noted in our interviews was how 'dialogue between languages teachers and English mother tongue teachers has been problematic, to put it politely, in spite of the government recommendations since the Bullock report'. Viewing literacy as multilingual and multimodal, the research develops and advocates for transformative pedagogy. It crosses boundaries that are currently imposed by the official curriculum but also boundaries between learning environments: school, home and community contexts.

In line with findings explored in Chapters 6 and 7, our data across several cases highlighted that literacy research faced extra hurdles if it did not relate directly to the curriculum requirements outlined in Chapter 3 (e.g. Funds of Knowledge and Join the DOTS cases). Trying to link into current policy imperatives in England or work alongside them creates additional challenges and constraints for how research may move and its capacity to mobilise actors, including teachers. Macleroy mentioned how the Critical Connections work had been 'pushing margins because it's about teachers finding time to do this, despite an impressive uptake across England and globally across the UK borders' (interview). We did however identify a series of 'piecemeal' arrangements that assemble elements of this research in particular places, held together by things and people in ways that materially and structurally 'embed' the research while also facilitating flows and constant evolution (Ball et al., 2017).

One tangible manifestation of this research and the starting point for our analysis was the Critical Connections website. As described in the anecdote above, it is a busy site. Not only visually and digitally: the research itself is lively and there is evidence of different ways it moves to and from the website through the work and flow of various intermediaries. Like the Reading for Pleasure at the Open University and Join the DOTS cases, what began as a research project website has been translated over time into an active site that helps to assemble and enact ongoing collaborations between researchers, practitioners, partners and interested publics. But the Critical Connections website is not necessarily a 'central hub' or the most powerful actor in this case. Rather, our data highlight how research mobilities are distributed and diffuse.

Drawing on Callon's (1986) model of translation, we focus on the many devices of *interessement* and *enrolment*: the real work as actors start to create or link into different assemblages and take on various roles. The complexity of the aptly named 'Critical Connections' research intrigued us and so our

fieldwork attuned to the many sites in which this research was being enacted, the connections that constitute the global networks which have formed and the sorts of materiality implicated in the work and labour of research mobilities in this case. We provide an abridged version here.

The Critical Connections 'research as project' and 'project as research' evokes a series of presences and absences that work to bring together different actors and galvanise an array of flows and circulations. With a 14-year history, Critical Connections has been supported by several funding sources (replete with the ongoing challenge of securing project funding). Academic articles and blog posts work to move the research by keeping its academic outputs visible and circulating. The open access *Handbook for Teachers* (Anderson, Macleroy, & Chung, 2014) is not only a handbook created *for* teachers, it also enacts a range of research-based experiences of working *with* teachers and students. There is the Film Festival. Zoom and Eventbrite provide spaces and coordination of the now hybrid format. There is the activity in schools: mainstream and complementary schools in the UK and internationally. There is a sense of being able to address and work locally while also being part of something global.

There are multiple entry points for actors gathering around, in and through the Critical Connections project and website. People, organisations and an abundant ever-changing digital entourage seem to move in both coordinated and more organic ways. Social and material connections develop at events such as Critical Connections conferences, annual film festivals and partner networking and community engagement gatherings. Courses at Goldsmiths, professional development sessions, PhD studentships and teacher and student digital storytelling projects garner more connections between actors and evidence specific research moves. Resources are rich and abundant. The legacy of schools and participants over an extended length of time who have engaged with this research also become 'resources' for the project. As do the digital stories created by the students and faithfully archived by Vimeo, YouTube and the website, amplifying reach through time and space and creating a visible history of effort and performativity of the research. Digital and physical spaces bring together digital and human actors; digital mediation facilitates the global reach of the project.

The continued work in schools informed by and informing this research, along with the annual student entries in the international film festival and awards won by teachers, give the successes of this research a presence. The relevance and popularity of (digital) storytelling, the interweaving of film making (based on the work of Joe Lambert in the USA), language learning and project-based learning, along with the creative process of drawing on lived experience continue to be important mechanisms of what Ball (2017) describes as articulation, persuasion and legitimation that 'animate the assemblage' and give it shape and focus (p. 39). Flows that are aided and

abetted by the project blog, Facebook (235 followers Nov 6/2023) and X presence.

None of these actors operate alone. And there are multiple overlapping networks. Callon (1986) refers to the negotiation of *margins of manoeuvre*, which in this case plays out across a sprawling mesh of resources, events and pedagogical experiments. International connections (for example, schools in Taiwan, Italy, Japan, Germany, Cyprus, Australia, Egypt and India) and interactions between different stakeholder groups enter the mix. Notable are high-profile partners: the British Film Institute, The British Museum and the Museum of London and the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education. The Critical Connections project is visible on some of these partner websites with the tangle of weblinks between elements of the research growing even more layered. An ethos of collaborative work and permeability of research and practice infuse the project. Funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Qatar Foundation and Goldsmiths provide financial resources and expectations of certain kinds of 'deliverables' and outputs. The project team has grown and is now supported by project advisers, a support team and a social media manager. There is no one central mastermind (human or otherwise) directing actors and activities although there are several powerful and influential actors. In this case, one translation we examined was how such research assemblages mix, mutate and mobilise as they materialise as the annual film festival.

Translation: Research moves as it materialises into the 'Our Planet Festival'

As well as materialising in articles, teacher handbook, online resources and a project website, the theoretical and methodological aspirations of Critical Connections have been translated into numerous multilingual digital films created by students and their teachers in schools in the UK and across the world in 15 countries, many of which have featured in annual film festivals. Above, we identified some of the devices of interessement and enrolment significant in this case. Now, we look more closely at the work of the annual film festival. The first of these took place in 2013 at Goldsmiths, awash with VIP guests. In 2021, the theme changed to 'Our Planet' and, due to COVID restrictions, the Film Festival moved online. Initially considered unfortunate, this opened the festival to young creators from outside the UK. We focus on the *Our Planet Festival* in 2023 which showed stories in 27 languages from young creators (6–18 years old) from 21 educational institutions in eight countries.

Callon (1986) describes a 'successful' translation as one that reaches *mobilisation*: a form of stabilisation where the ongoing negotiations within the assemblage are 'smoothed over'. The assemblage does what it needs to

do and can therefore act as 'unit of force' (p. 216). The film festival seems to achieve this. Teacher-facing resources are interwoven with the transformative activist pedagogy. The over-arching research questions, concepts and theoretical models – and complexity of the research – are never far from the surface (and ever present on the Critical Connections website). Teachers and students are not distant 'audiences' to whom research may travel but rather positioned as co-researchers and co-creators. Scrolling down the Our Planet Festival 2023 page, for example, we see an evocative and inviting image of a digitally-rendered heart shaped tree with leaves, details about the physical location of the festival, the programme of events, overview of the Festival and its link to the Critical Connections project. On the right side of the page is a live feed from the MDST (Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project) Facebook page. Aims for 2022–23 are listed and there is alignment with evolving research questions, underpinning theoretical perspectives and a conceptual framework available elsewhere on the site.

Continuing down the page there is a link to the *Handbook for Teachers* (2014) along with a visualisation of 'Key Stages in the Filmmaking Process'. This is followed by timelines, factors to consider and mention of project resources. In addition to directing teachers to the archive of films from previous years, there are links to five digital films illustrating what makes a good digital story. Teachers are encouraged to share these films with students to prompt discussion.

It is through the Film Festival, and the digital stories which animate it, that the research is made material – or as Law (1992) asserts, relations made durable. The translation of the research into an event – the Film Festival – is a form of ordering. The role of teachers, students, researchers, partners, the research itself, publics, digital spaces and thingly actors clear. Although there may be tensions and ongoing jostling between actors, they act as a unit for a period of time. Through such ordering (i.e. translations) an assemblage comes together and can do something. Hagberg (2016) writes about 'agencing', an extension of Callon's work on translation: *how* arrangements continually shape themselves and therefore have the 'capacity to act' (p. 112). The short 3–5 min digital films are also influential actors: through their liveliness as a *collection* of Film Festival entries which can be seen and heard in-person and online and through populating and enacting digital archives extending across time and space. They become spokesthings-people for the research. And are what Knorr Cetina (1999) refers to as *epistemic objects*: 'processes and projections rather than definitive things … with the capacity to unfold indefinitely' (p. 181). The Film Festival works as a powerful actor to bring together actors: shaping social and material relations in ways that enable it to be a film festival, a manifestation and structural embedding of the Critical Connections research.

The Funds of Knowledge case

In Chapter 7 we noted how the concept of 'funds of knowledge' was conspicuously absent from teachers' mentions of research. We chose to trace it because we were interested in seeking out where and how it *did* appear in England given its prominence in the international literacy research communities we were familiar with. As explored in Chapter 7, 'funds of knowledge' (often referred to as FoK) first emerged as a concept, key term, and series of research studies in Arizona in the 1980s and 90s intended to counter racist deficit perspectives of the Mexican-American community (Hogg, 2011; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1983). Here the issue of interest or *problematization* – Callon's (1986) first moment of translation – is established.

Originating in Arizona, the 'funds of knowledge' term-concept has significant international reach including diverse locales such as Spain, Poland, China and Uganda (FundsofKnowledge.org, no date). It is well known internationally amongst many teacher and teacher educator communities. Forty years after Vélez-Ibáñez's (1983) seminal research, 'funds of knowledge' is not a neatly bounded area of research or indeed, a neatly bounded concept. Instead, its movements in England could be characterised as diffuse and sometimes flickering appearances. Unlike other cases (e.g. Reading for Pleasure at the Open University, Reflecting Realities, Ofsted Review of English and Join the DOTS) there is no strong central presence (academic researcher, organisation, or policy) implicated in attempting to drive or 'watch over' its uptake, use and boundaries. It does not look to have a wide circulation in public online spaces, especially vis-a-vis primary literacy. Our analysis of the Twitter and media corpora did not find any mentions of 'funds of knowledge'. It was not mentioned in our teacher data but does make appearances in other cases, such as the Critical Connections and Reading for Pleasure at the Open University cases.

Our digital fieldwork and tracings suggest 'funds of knowledge' has moved in ways that are both unpredictable and partially obfuscated as it straddles practitioner, scholarly and public spaces. Our analysis suggests that one device of *interessement* and *enrolment* (e.g. how heterogenous actors start to be interposed and take on specific roles as various assemblages form) is the mutability and immutability of the term-concept itself. Below we examine its fluidity and multiplicity unpicking shifts and slippages as this research has moved and become tethered to different educational and societal agendas. We suggest that the term is a significant manifestation of the research and works in idiosyncratic ways to mobilise associated research. The translation we explore here relates to research as a fluid phrase with multiple agendas.

Translation: Research as a fluid phrase with multiple agendas

We begin where it started. González, Moll and Amanti (2005) attribute the origins of the concept (but not the term itself) to the research of anthropologist Vélez-Ibáñez (1983). Vélez-Ibáñez's work describes networks of exchange and 'mutual trust' in the Mexican-American community of Arizona. Almost a decade later, Moll (an educational researcher) and González (an anthropologist), along with Amanti and Neff built on trajectories in their own research and concurrent or subsequent work with and by Vélez-Ibáñez at the intersection of anthropology and education (e.g. Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll, Vélez-Ibáñez & Rivera, 1990; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), publishing the now seminal *Funds of Knowledge for Teaching* (Moll et al., 1992). This paper reported on how first generation Mexican-American children with Mexican parents were embedded in complex networks of care, labour, interdependence and learning at home, including economic activity. In this way, 'funds of knowledge' began life at the intersection of educat*ors'* and anthropolo*gists'* practices.

From this tightly-knotted gathering of researchers, research, practices and publications, the term 'funds of knowledge' and its acronym, FoK, have become more elastic, eclectic and less tightly bounded, its movements more improvisational. We explored where the term-concept has appeared more recently and share four examples which illustrate ways in which this research – and specifically the term itself – is being translated: in policy, research based in England, influential organisations and the media (see Figure 9.2). We demonstrate slippage in how the term is used with new conceptual forms emerging.

Policy

The 'funds of knowledge' term-concept has not appeared explicitly in education policy in England. Our interview with DfE policy adviser, Wesley, suggested that it was not a concept that is well-known in government. However, it did become embroiled with Ofsted's (2019b, 2023) revision to the Education Inspection Framework that required schools to demonstrate how they were developing children's 'cultural capital' which they define as 'essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens' (2019a, p. 10). Somewhat buried in a sea of other text, it seems to crop up in sections such as 'Social Justice'. For example, Point 26 states that 'many disadvantaged students may not have access to cultural capital, both in the home and then in their school' (2019a). Although 'funds of knowledge' is not mentioned specifically, cultural capital has become a more widely used phrase. This has in turn enabled the concept of 'funds of knowledge' (which may be unfamiliar

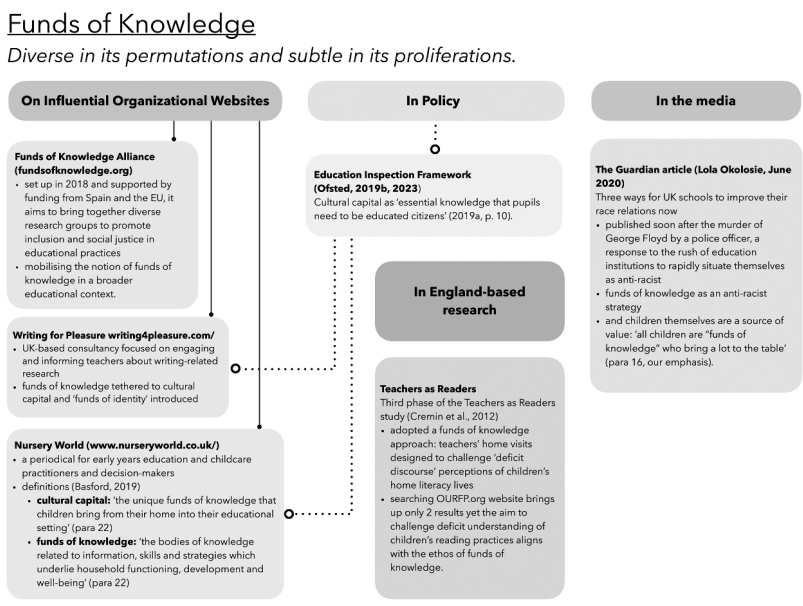

Figure 9.2 Appearances of funds of knowledge.

to some) to move in ways it might not have otherwise and so tethered the concept to the inspection framework in surprising ways. Although such moves can mobilise research, the translations of this research can be quite startling.

In a column for *Nursery World*, Jo Basford (2019) contrasts Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital with Ofsted's use of the term and positions 'funds of knowledge' as an 'alternative perspective'. She goes on to define 'funds of knowledge' as 'the bodies of knowledge related to information, skills and strategies which underlie household functioning, development and well-being' (para 22), referencing González et al. (2005).

Writing for Pleasure, a consultancy, make frequent use (34 distinct uses) of the phrase 'funds of knowledge' on their website. In their critical commentary of Ofsted's Research Review for English (see Chapter 7), they refer to 'funds of knowledge' and cultural capital as well as 'funds of identity'. Although not framed as a response to Ofsted's use of cultural capital, the publication is still quasi-causally linked to Ofsted's turn to capital. In both examples, 'funds of knowledge' became tethered to cultural capital as a kind of counter-discourse to the deficit perspective adopted by Ofsted (wherein children are framed as lacking in cultural capital). Neither publication makes the case for the kind of anthropological 'noticing' advocated by the Tucson

academics. Yet their use of the terms and the Tucson conceptualisation seem broadly aligned with the term itself and can still be seen to circulate in ways that provoke counter-discourse.

In England-based research

One project that employed 'funds of knowledge' was the third phase of the Teachers as Readers study (Cremin et al., 2012). In this way, this research project was aligning (and enroled by) the spirit of both the 1992/2005 and the 1983 'funds of knowledge' articles. Searching for the term 'funds of knowledge' on the OURFP.org website brings up only two results: a Teachers' Reading Group paper and a presentation resource by a teacher. Yet, the aim to challenge deficit understanding of children's reading practices aligns with the ethos of 'funds of knowledge.'

In organisational websites

The term also appears in the form of a fairly recent international entity: the *Funds of Knowledge Alliance*. Active since 2018, and supported by funding from Spain and the European Union, this alliance brings together diverse research groups to promote inclusion and social justice in educational practices. Despite limited references to (primary) literacy on their website they are nevertheless mobilising the notion of 'funds of knowledge' in a broader educational context.

While the 'funds of knowledge' concept has become tethered to cultural capital through the work of policy making, in other spaces it comes to associate with children's interests, which takes it in a different trajectory from both Vélez-Ibáñez (1983) and Moll et al. (2005). This was evident on the Writing for Pleasure Centre's website. The term seems to be used as though it is self-evident, often with reference to Moll et al. (1992) or to one of their own publications, usually understood as being about children's interests or concrete experiences.

In the media

In 2020, Sonia Thompson, a headteacher, was interviewed in The Guardian for an article which situates itself in response to the rush of education institutions to rapidly situate themselves as anti-racist. Thompson makes explicit reference to 'funds of knowledge' as an anti-racist strategy, both capturing how the original Tucson research aimed to counter racist deficit discourses and pushing the concept further to argue that the children themselves are a source of value.

From appearances to mobilities

What do these appearances tell us about how and what 'funds of knowledge' as a term-concept – and related research – is mobilising? Circulations of the term seem at times removed from its deeper conceptualisation, the original research and the careful ethnographic approach that characterises the application of González et al.'s (2005) work in educational contexts. There is a blackboxing, backgrounding or even distancing from the original research. Mol (2002) writes that '*to be is to be related*' to remind us that 'nothing ever "is" alone' (p. 54 italics in original). In other words, an object becomes and does in relation to other things. And when those things and relations change so too might the object. This relational and multiple ontology helps to explain how research outputs such as the term-concept 'funds of knowledge' can be and do more than one thing.

It is not unusual that a research idea will change over time as it starts to move into new terrains amidst changing research, practice and policy shifts; as practitioners play, explore and experiment with it; or as various mediators (such as the government and policymakers, media and commercial and third sector bodies) become interested and re-assemble it in different teacher-facing ways. Such malleability and adaptability may even be considered a marker of 'good' research. Within and through this fluidity, there are absences. Taking up Blackman's (2019) urge for researchers to become ghost-hunters we can see how the *concept* 'funds of knowledge' still haunts the *term* itself, even with slippage. Perhaps the term itself has become a legitimate spokes-thing for the research (for the studies, researchers, publications, social justice aims). And when this happens, blackboxing is an inevitable part of the processes of translation. In this way, matters of concern are translated, to some degree, into more stable matters of fact.

This analysis shines a light on how 'funds of knowledge' research can be displaced even as the term itself stabilises into something that can travel. The term has a particular resonance and seems to be bent (and bend-able), at times, to serve different political, social, economic and normative purposes. Not only does this notion enrol other actors, it is also enrol-able. It is this very enrol-ability that enables it to take on new associations and do different work, its understandability often belying the complexity and significant epistemological shifts involved in valuing different knowledges and the highly critical social justice aims. In this way, 'funds of knowledge' research (in some form) moves. It also moves through its tethering to other ideas, as with these moves to associate (or conflate) 'funds of knowledge' with cultural capital, as well as to a leakier, broader sense of 'funds of knowledge' as standing in for counter-deficit ideals. Although the *term* 'funds of knowledge' moves intact, its conceptualisation sometimes transforms (from anthropological-educational praxis, to self-explanatory term, to reflecting a

new concept). Its broad relationship to counter-discourses remains, even where (or even *because)* the precise meaning of the concept has changed.

This example pushes back on the notion of the 'lethal mutation' in research mobilisation. The notion of 'lethal mutation' in educational research is commonly attributed to Brown and Campione (1996). In a 'Tes Explains' article for the Times Educational Supplement produced in collaboration with the EEF, lethal mutations are defined as occurring 'when evidence-informed practice is modified beyond recognition from the original practice' (Times Educational Supplement, n.d., para 1). This notion was also mentioned by several of those we interviewed. While the term 'lethal mutation' implies an ending or, in the EEF's words, something unwittingly 'counterproductive' (para 1), our research indicates that mutation may sometimes actually *support* mobilisation, albeit in messier, leakier, altogether riskier ways. We are drawn here to consider the Deleuze and Guattari (1987) concept of a *ligne de fuite*: a line of flight, escape, or of 'leaking, and disappearing into the distance' (as Massumi offers in the notes on his translation of *A Thousand Plateaus*). Not inherently negative, Deleuze and Guattari understand lines of leakage (or flight as they are more commonly known) as transformative: leakages that 'deterritorialise' social spaces and create new connections. Similar lines of flight were evident in other cases.

In this case, studying translations enabled us to glimpse what sorts of actors and mediational work are complicit in how 'funds of knowledge' moves – or not – as it finds itself in multiple assemblings of loosely connected actors. There is a sense that the term-concept is *caught* between policy, practice and research. Perhaps it could be a mechanism of further translations: a lever for opening spaces for different discussions. The term and its various 'meanings' serving as bridges through justice, inclusion and social cohesion as broad and educational pedagogies, to practices and also to policy more specifically.

About moves & movements

In this chapter we have explored data from three cases, supplemented by data from other cases. This analysis foregrounded several forms of translation: (1) research as event and as controversy; (2) research materialised in film festivals and digital films created by school children and teachers; and (3) research as compressed into a sinuous concept with multiple agendas. Drawing on Callon's (1986) sociology of translation, our analysis enabled us to 'reconstruct networks of translation, analyse their architectures' and follow lines of movement and 'evolution of relationships' posed by various pieces of research (Mallard & Callon, 2022, p. 156). These translations are complex and often overlapping: each illustrates how actors assemble in ways that move research and how research is constantly becoming.

Our tracings led us to many organisations, people and things (especially digital things) brokering movements of research in ways that mean they too become part of the research. We interacted with and interviewed several people serving as mediators, including: charities, educational consultants, media reporters, social media bloggers, ITE (Initial Teacher Education) staff and government policy advisers. None of these are stand-alone entities but actor-networks. Koon (2022) writes that brokers often 'believe themselves to be translators, realists, and bridge-builders' (p. 7) and many will present themselves as 'neutral' (Viseu, 2022, p. 8). But in our findings, many devices of interessement and enrolment are evident that complicate such assumptions.

Digital spaces often invite quick, short responses that 'make a point' and this is a mechanism by which, Venturini and Munk (2022) explain, more pressing 'worldview' questions find themselves translated into technical strategies, especially when aligned with the time pressures of professional workers. This is amplified, in part, by the active presence of commercial, political and entrepreneurial actors in the literacy education space. The presence or absence of spaces for debate seem to contribute to how research moves, including how it may become further fragmented. Venturini and Munk (2022) suggest that 'discussions that do not last long enough are rarely productive because they only traverse the public debate and do not stay long enough to produce actual deliberation' (p. 288). However, online digital traces offer only partial glimpses into how, and to what degree, such issues are debated and discussed; in each case, much will have happened offline and/or in online spaces that was not accessible to us. It is also possible that some of the 'small-sized' statements observed online serve as catalysts for larger debates, especially when aggregating with other statements. In this way, they may contribute to generative discussion or move into different spaces in which less compressed and perhaps less public responses emerge, creating opportunities for deliberation.

10 Relationships between research mobilities, research, literacy and teachers

Introduction

Our aim for the *Research Mobilities* project was not just to better understand how research mobilises but to better understand what research mobilities do. The previous four chapters provide different takes on relationships between research mobilities, literacy, research and teaching. Each chapter, sketching the boundaries of our interest differently, allows us to know these relationships in different ways through diverse forms of data and analysis. Our sociomaterial sensitivity has illuminated not just the strategic work of researchers in disseminating research but the relational effects of complex interactions between human and more-than-human, often digital, actors. We have explored how research can move to, among and around teachers in multiple forms. And we have considered how research findings and implications can be amplified as they move and how they can shift as details drop away and new meanings or associations are accrued in a dynamic communicative environment.

We re-emphasise at this point that our project was not designed to achieve a comprehensive overview of the mobilities of literacy research in England or the effects of research mobilities on literacy, research or teachers. The accounts we shared in Chapters 6–9 are inevitably partial and positioned. Not only is there a vast amount of data unaccounted for here which we may explore in future publications but in common with Law (2004), as discussed in Chapter 5, we are convinced that a complete account would be impossible.

In this chapter, we consider how the phenomena we have described are significant to the central concerns of this book: why and how some kinds of literacy research gain traction whilst others do not; what happens to research accounts as they materialise in different forms and within different sites; and some implications for teachers of differential mobilisations of literacy and research in education. We argue that, in many cases, research mobilities reflect and sustain narrow enactments of literacy and research and that this

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limits opportunities for primary teachers to facilitate literacy education that is empowering, inclusive and relevant to the contemporary communicative landscape. We also describe how co-existent mobilisations of literacy and research open out other ways of knowing and doing literacy education. We begin by summarising what we have learned about the actors involved in mobilising literacy research in England.

Research mobilities

In all parts of our project, we encountered a multitude of human and more-than-human actors involved in research mobilities. Just some of those included: school leaders, consultants, policymakers; articles, reports, books, tweets, podcasts, emails, websites, search engines; projects, teaching schemes, interventions, resources, guidelines; PowerPoint presentations, online modules, festivals, conference schedules and, of course, teachers themselves. And there are many more that will have played a role that we have not mentioned, such as screens, Wi-Fi connections, pricing structures, journal editors, publishers, library catalogues and diverse forms of new media. There are also aspects of mobilities we have not had space to address in this book. There is, for example, much more to say about: the role of AI in the kinds of research that teachers encounter; the role of infographs, animations and other kinds of text in resemiotising research-related ideas, findings and recommendations; and the implications for research mobilities in England of international flows of policy and ideas including the work of global organisations such as OECD and Pearsons.

Nevertheless, our work does rather complicate the ideas about brokerage introduced in Chapter 4 demonstrating how research mobilities are generated through complex, heterogeneous shifting entanglements of human and more-than-human actors. Digital mediation evidently plays a key role. As we have seen in Chapters 6, 8 and 9, it can not only extend the reach of research to new audiences but also maintain tightly bounded echo chambers. And while it promises instant accessibility through a bounty of options, an excess of possible sources of insight, information and expertise makes it more difficult to know where to start or how to keep up. All of this can obscure the individual, commercial, political, societal and ideological concerns that infect research mobilities so that research mobilisation can feel like a rather neutral endeavour. It is, however, very far from such.

As we have seen, the ongoing work to mobilise research can evoke shifts in the research itself. Mediation by multiple actors can galvanise circulation by enabling a multiplicity of appearances but also invite fragmentation, distillation and re-constitution. Often, too, it is not merely 'research' that moves in some shape or form. What also ends up circulating and animating research are: speculation; generative debate; attempts to grab attention as well as

self-promotion; advocacy, support and confirmation for ways of thinking and enactment of particular research ideas; efforts to reach out to practitioners and engage in practice-oriented discussion; disagreement; questioning and thinking differently; politics and political moves; and entrenchment of familiar stances. In other words, movements include what research comes to mean and how it matters. It is also through such moves and circulations that varying degrees of credibility, legitimacy, relevance and expertise are enacted.

While our findings demonstrate the key role played by government policy in shaping the research that gains sway in primary schools, they also show how research mobilities in the wild can be hard to predict. Given the wide diversity and multiplicity of pathways through which research travels to, among and around teachers, it might be expected that literacy research addressing a wide range of topics and issues would filter through. Our explorations however suggested an unevenness in the extent to which different types of research do or do not materialise in the lives of teachers. Mobilities are not neutral. Research mobilisation is inextricable from the politics of knowledge and power relationships are disrupted or upheld by the kinds of research that gain sway.

As explored in Chapters 7 and 8, some pressing literacy topics were more-or-less absent from our teacher data and from our analysis of media appearances of primary literacy education. When we set out deliberately to trace movements of research linked to some of these in Chapter 9, we did find evidence of them within specific communities of researchers and/or practitioners (as in the Critical Connections case) or hybridised with other ideas (as with Funds of Knowledge). For the most part, however – through our analysis of media discourses and our conversations with teachers – what we observed was a *narrowing* of what research and literacy became and of the role of teachers as enquirers and in making sense of research. Reading was much more prevalent than writing and limited in scope. Much of what appeared mapped onto key themes in the National Curriculum for English. This will not be surprising to those familiar with the English context – not least because of the narrowly-framed curriculum and high-stakes accountability mechanisms outlined in Chapter 3 – but our analyses of research mobilisations do suggest a relative 'stuckness' in the field of literacy education that confirms the concerns we explored in Chapter 1 about how 'literacy', 'research' and teachers are positioned in this age of evidence-based teaching.

Reading across these chapters, we can see how research mobilities (and all they entail) are inflected by a range of commercial, political and ideological imperatives which are difficult to disentangle, hard to identify and which tend to be obscured as research moves. Moreover the devices and approaches applied to make research movable also make it difficult to interrogate as research summaries and recommendations are disconnected from their

sources along with methodologies, caveats and statements of limitations and positionality. There is a sense of displacement and de-formation: as explored in Chapter 9, Callon's (1986) notion of translation is relevant here to describe what happens when some assemblages (or powerful actors within them) become spokes-things while other actors are relegated to the background. As such, research mobilities and narrow framings of literacy, research and professional learning are mutually constitutive. This has concerning implications for teacher professionalism as well as for the role of research in education and the possibilities and potential of literacy education.

In what follows we draw on these understandings to consider how mobilities can work to obfuscate attempts to engage with expansive notions of research and literacy in ways that are professionally empowering for teachers. We consider relationships between research mobilities in primary literacy education and:

- the sedimentation of research as 'truth';
- the narrowing effects of the accrual of credibility;
- mutability and multiplicity;
- relevance and resonance.

In exploring these themes, we must be clear that while these are phenomena that we have observed and presented in various parts of this book, we do not suggest they provide a complete account. Rather they indicate possible points of concern, starting points for critical reflection on *which* research moves and what this means.

The sedimentation of 'research' as 'truth' in an age of evidence-based teaching

In this section, we draw from Chapters 6–9 and our wider work on the project to explore some of the ways in which provisional, contingent research findings can be reconstituted as 'truths' through the processes and practices of mobilisation. Central to the argument of this book is the idea that mobilities matter partly because they help shape the ideas, commitments and beliefs that get taken up in education and that, through doing so, they help sustain certain truths over others and enact educational realities in particular ways. As we have explored, sources of guidance, support and direction for literacy education are extensive and diverse but actors may combine in ways that limit the topics, methodologies and underpinning theories that gain influence. While exceptions exist (see Chapters 7 and 9), our data suggest that the literacy research that gains traction is dominated by work on a limited range of topics. This is concerning given that, as argued in Chapter 2, literacy involves a wide range of practices that are constantly

in flux and literacy education can benefit from perspectives and insights from research from multiple paradigms. A narrowing in the range of research which mobilises may therefore help to sustain the idea that the literacy research that does gain traction is uncontested as unassailable truth.

Of course, this contradicts fundamental understandings about the nature of research and what it can contribute to educational practice. Researchers across traditions and working in different contexts vary in the extent to which they unpack the provisionality, positionality and relative surety of their findings – and they may well do this to a differing extent in different contexts. Some are more strident than others. Even so, researchers rarely make absolutist statements about their own work when communicating to other researchers in peer-reviewed articles or monographs, preferring a multi-faceted approach to persuasion (Hyland, 2004). Even where abstracts, conclusions or summaries make ambitious claims about contributions to knowledge, surrounding narratives situate arguments in relation to extant thought and almost aways include caveats suggesting that claims are tentative and/or provisional. This kind of reserved and careful approach to making claims is important in minimising inappropriate and misguided leaps from the provisional findings of research to definitive implications for practice.

Nevertheless, success within the knowledge economy often involves asserting uniqueness of expertise. This applies to academics who are measured on their ability to generate new knowledge with demonstrable impact, 'to build public, credible identities, status positions and influence in scholarly networks and on Twitter in particular' as Stewart (2022, p. 202) asserted. It applies at least as much to consultants and associations whose financial security relies on their ability to claim expertise that resonates with or is relevant to teachers and schools. This combines with a political environment in England that coherently but also, as we argue, somewhat reductively shapes uses of literacy and research in primary education, exerting considerable pressure on those involved in the production, mediation and use of research. Whether they be academics, politicians, consultants or whoever, they may feel compelled to trade in certainties. Unsurprisingly therefore it is commonplace, as we found in our analysis of research-adjacent, research-infused and research-shaped texts and resources (see Chapter 7) to encounter statements about what 'evidence shows' that are at odds with careful and contingent presentations and readings of research. We found frequent references to 'evidence-informed' and 'research-based' in descriptions of approaches, organisations, policies and interventions but underpinning research was often treated rather lightly: as homogeneous, in fleeting mentions (not always supported by citation) and/or as bite-sized pieces with no reference to methodology. In such ways, nuance, complexity, contingency and alternative perspectives are marginalised.

While conscientious researchers may be loath to claim certainty, provisional research findings can morph into truths once they are taken up in policy and practice or resemiotised in different formats. And even when materials themselves include appropriate qualifications, their authority may be bolstered as they combine with other materials and/or appear with frequency across different sites. As we have seen, one of the ways in which teachers assess credibility is through 'multiple mentions'. Ideas or recommendations, such as those with government endorsement, may be recirculated by individuals and organisations to maintain a presence in a marketised education system and start to *feel* more certain when they appear in multiple forms and in multiple spaces. This matters because of the reflexive relationship between credibility and research mobilities: as items or individuals appeared repeatedly across sites they – for some at least – accrued credibility, and accrual of credibility helped to mobilise research.

None of this may be hugely problematic if research is used to *open up* practice – to suggest, to guide, to inspire, to invite or to exemplify what is possible and what might be valuable. It may, however, be extremely problematic if it is used to *close down* practice – to define what should or should not be done, particularly when this involves arriving at implications that far exceed the parameters of the research in question. We came across many examples of how this happened as research assembled with the mechanisms of the high-stakes accountability system in England (see Chapter 6). As a member of our advisory teacher panel stated:

> You sometimes feel that when research is presented, or met by professionals, it almost feels like the ideas or findings or thoughts are done to the person receiving the information. Rather than it being a sort of true engagement and reflection. It's kind of 'This is what I've heard/seen and this is what you're going to do', and it's almost like it's 'Oh, where do I fit in this kind of picture?' […] A lot of research I see when it appears within an educational setting tends to be about this is what we're going to do or this is what we will do. I'm not entirely convinced that all or most research actually sets out to do that at all.
>
> (Teacher panel member 1)

As explored in Chapter 1, evidence-informed practice can encompass a range of relationships between research and teaching, from the use of research to arrive at firm conclusions about 'what works' to teacher-led inquiries and critical, reflective engagements with research evidence. When we examined the materials teachers mentioned in their conversations with us, we found that many did not refer to research at all. However those that did often referred to research being used to justify models for what teachers will *do* (as in the extract above) rather than what they might think, imagine

or believe is important. This suggests not just a certainty about research findings but about the parameters in which professional practice takes place. If research is mobilised to assert what works (and therefore what teachers will do) then, as Biesta (2016) explores, it may erode opportunities to engage more broadly with aims and purposes.

The narrowing effects of the educational marketplace

As the previous chapters explore, the key messages within national policy frameworks appear in the lives of teachers in different ways: through consultants, literacy leaders and Ofsted inspectors; as white papers, phonics schemes and frameworks; in staffrooms, universities, meeting rooms, the educational press or via social media; and within teachers' roles as classroom teachers, subject leaders, teacher trainers or research leaders. We are certainly not uncritical of the idea of the university as the sole source of knowledge. Universities have a long history of excluding certain ways of knowing, not least through the prevalence of English language publishing. But it is noteworthy that, in England, an increased emphasis on strengthening evidence-based teaching has coincided with a diminishing role for academics as mediators of research (see Chapter 3). As explored in Chapters 7 and 9, we found that relationships between teaching and research were often mediated by consultants and various other organisations – some associated with government, some not – rather than researchers. We repeat that we do not suggest that only researchers should speak about research but we do suggest that the relative absence of researchers from debates (albeit with exceptions) can have implications for how research is understood and may, in certain cases, bolster certainty where this is inappropriate.

Innes and Mills (2022), drawing on the work of Bernstein, argue that academisation and the growth of consultancy have led to a new 'corporate field' in which the logics of the marketplace thread through relationships between knowledge, policy, practice and education. They describe how: 'This led to new kinds of marketisation, a tenfold increase in private companies and consultants offering their services and a significant factor in the emergence of a corporate field of knowledge' (Gunter & Mills, 2017, p. 278.) This, they suggest, has had various effects which include implications for how teachers and school leaders are positioned, not least because knowledge about literacy is filtered through expectations linked to accountability. Guidance, in this context, can all too easily become guidance on compliance with government expectations. Mills argues:

> There are shifts from the provision of public education located in professional expertise towards marketised and contractual knowledge exchange processes and flows. New knowledge actors are emerging, variously

> termed in this set of articles as, for example, 'corporatized actors', consultants, brokers and experts, non-state actors. Hybrid roles and new relocations of power are emerging. Neoliberalism's reach into education and schooling is well mapped and analysed in the literatures within policy scholarship, and further afield. Studies of markets and marketing in education (e.g. Ball, 2007); the connections between education and trade (e.g. Burch, 2009; Saltman, 2010) have given detailed and well-grounded accounts of the commercial activities within schools as well as schooling itself as a commercial activity. Moreover, critical scholarship has revealed how the nature of knowledge itself and its production has been changed (Ward, 2012). Knowledge is now bought and sold by governments; individual schools and Universities. Knowledge that was produced and provided by 'the public' is now privatised and 'outsourced'.
>
> (Mills, 2015, p. 209)

These developments in the communicative/sociopolitical landscape have considerable implications for the accrual of credibility. While defining and attributing credibility has always been fraught with complexity (Dheskali & Schmied, 2019), the loosening of ties between universities and knowledge means that knowledge can become uncoupled from the checks and balances associated with academic research such as peer review and alternative perspectives and understandings may be marginalised. In our project, we saw how, in addition to more formal markers like publications record, credibility is accrued through things like familiarity, relationships, resonance with popular discourse or presence in online spaces. Different teachers relied on different markers of credibility – for instance some found the credibility of research was enhanced when it was mediated by state-sponsored organisations. Such endorsement made others suspicious.

Given these developments, it is unsurprising that most teachers' mentions coalesced around a relatively narrow range of research topics. Resources, recommendations and training are far more likely to be taken up if it is clear that they are relevant to the concerns and priorities of schools and teachers. Within a competitive attention economy, there are therefore huge pressures for individuals and organisations to appear relevant (and credible) by connecting to what they assume will be schools' priorities. A marketised education system may well offer possibilities for innovation and creativity – and we observed some examples of this in our detailed tracings of research (see Chapter 9). But it may also, as explored in Chapters 6, 7 and through the media corpora discussed in Chapter 8, be associated with narrowing and compliance.

Mobilising research that addresses a more expansive range of topics or with alternative viewpoints is challenging. Wyse and Bradbury's (2022a) article was an example of a highly successful mobilisation – on the radar of

academics and policymakers and featuring in news media as well as our discussions with teachers. Teachers however still had to follow government requirements and, for the general public, phonics still tends to be taken for granted (see Chapter 8). As Mol (2002) notes, controversies can be amplified in certain circles but may be incompatible with and hence largely irrelevant to those in highly regulated sites – such as primary teachers who must adhere to the current curriculum. Debates about how best to teach reading may well be of interest – and may perhaps play out in future policies by other governments – but it is just not possible for teachers to act on them in the highly regulated system in which they work. One of our teacher advisory panel members, for example, noted:

> I was sat in on an interview with the HMI Ofsted inspector and her conversation was about early reading and phonics and it was heavily gauged around that early reading framework. There was no real option for discussion outside of that framework and everything was [@sighs] there was an unspoken assumption that this research, this evidence, is the research that everyone follows and that somehow this is the received attitude and approach towards reading, early reading and phonics within school.
>
> (Teacher panel member 2)

Having made this point, we emphasise – that despite this apparent coherence and consistency – not *all* appearances of research and/or literacy we encountered were aligned with a narrow range of topics or standpoints. We have shared a number of examples where this was not the case and glimpsed many more through Twitter hashtags. For those of us that are committed to promoting encounters with research that are professionally empowering to teachers, it is concerning however that it was frequently so.

Mobilities and mutability

A predominant concern for policymakers interested in research mobilisation is with consistency of message – how to ensure that the messages that travel to schools and to teachers are true to the original research findings. Many accounts exist of how research-informed pedagogies have been instantiated in ways that run counter to their original intentions (e.g. Snell & Lefstein, 2018) and a key thrust of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)'s work has been to promote 'fidelity' to interventions (see the discussion of 'lethal mutations' in Chapter 9). Our analysis highlights relationships between mutability and mobilities as meanings fall away from or accrue to research findings as they get made in different forms. It is often suggested that research summaries need to be simple if they are to mobilise and a recent study of research brokering including teachers and teacher educators in

mathematics found that effective graphic design was the single most important feature (Rycroft-Smith & Stylianides, 2022). Packaging research up for teachers – as discussed in Chapter 7 – often involves stripping away complexity and nuance to generate straightforward summaries, clear infographs and achievable and transferable direction for practice. And in Chapter 9, we explored how research findings are reframed as they combine with policy, practices and so on.

Research findings can become something other than intended by researchers as they are remade in different texts and as these texts reassemble with other texts and technologies and with people, policy, practices and sites. Meanings shift across different materialisations and as materialisations move across sites. This is not simply a matter of lack of fidelity, misinterpretation or misappropriation but is inevitable with resemiotisation as ideas and practices move. A slippage from provisionality to certainty is just one of the slippages that may occur. Research findings can, as we have explored, lose or accrue new meanings or be bundled up with other assumptions, findings and interests. This does not mean that all slippages of meaning lead to deleterious effects – some of the reworkings we found of 'funds of knowledge', for example (see Chapter 9), could well be valuable for teachers and the children they teach.

Importantly it is not just research findings that are mutable but what is understood *as research*. As explored in Chapter 1, as the project progressed, we became less interested in research as something that could be defined as meeting certain criteria and more interested in how research was discursively constructed. We noticed that 'research' became and felt like something quite different in relation to different practices in which teachers engaged and quite different to how we conceived research as academics. One challenge we felt keenly was in holding together ideas about research as enacted in academic communities and research as enacted in professional communities. We suggest this may well be part of what teachers have to do whenever they engage with research. Except that for them things are even more complex, as they must also bring into play their feelings about the range of possibilities that are open to them in being a teacher and how these things interface with what is happening in their class, what they notice is going on and what, in the light of that, might be needed.

Relevance and resonance

If research is to mobilise it clearly needs to matter in some way. It needs to speak to teachers' current concerns that arise in the constant dynamic interplay of influences on the classroom and experiences felt in the moment. To this end, some have called for more work to ensure research is *relevant* to teachers: for example by involving teachers in deciding the design and focus

of research (McGeown et al., 2023). Our conversations with teachers and others we interviewed also highlighted the importance of *resonance*. Even when framed within the logic of the 'what works' discourse, interest in research may be driven by a *feeling* or *sense* of what might work or might be right. From our cases and from teachers' accounts, we noted how research communicators worked to cultivate resonance and relevance by adopting an accessible style, drawing on examples and personal stories to generate connections with readers and connecting to common professional priorities and concerns. Of course what resonates with one may not with another but such feelings do seem to be important to whether or not research mobilises.

We do not have space here to fully explore the manifestation or implications of resonance and relevance. We do however make the rather obvious point that neither 'relevance' nor 'resonance' are neutral. Types of research, topics for research and sources of research may be deemed more-or-less relevant depending on a whole host of factors. These may be linked to personal experiences and/or assumptions as well as those circulating in policy, at school and in wider society – just as we have seen in teachers' statements about how they judge the credibility of those offering guidance and support. One difficulty is that perceptions of resonance and relevance are framed by existing concerns and priorities and can also sustain practices or beliefs that may well be disadvantageous. In Chapter 4, for example, we referred to Hart and Risley's (1995) 'word gap' research, work which has been widely critiqued. The longevity and regular recurrence of this work in educational debate may well be due partly to resonance – to how these findings chime with what some teachers (and policymakers) assume to be the case. If so, it may well be an example of how resonance has helped sustain deficit perspectives on young children's language at odds with work that has provided other explanations of a limited demonstration of language and literacy in school (Kamler & Comber, 2005). Feelings about resonance, relevance and truth manifest differently and intersect in different ways. But attending to resonance does remind us that affect can be just as significant to research mobilities as logic – even if we rarely acknowledge this to be the case.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter, we summarised some of the findings of the *Research Mobilities* project. We highlighted:

- the rather limited range of literacy research that appears in professional and public discourse;
- how research mobilities (and all they entail) can be inflected by a range of commercial, political and ideological imperatives;

- how the devices and approaches applied to make research movable also make it difficult to interrogate (because research summaries/recommendations get disconnected from their sources along with methodologies, caveats, limitations, positionality and so on).

While noting exceptions, we signalled that our findings highlight relationships between research mobilities and narrow enactments of literacy and research, relationships that are entangled in a complex educational marketplace and which are textured by mutability, relevance and resonance. We do not have space here to explore the various ways in which hegemonic knowledge practices marginalise other ways of knowing the world along with their values and understandings. Suffice it to refer to Chapter 1 and our brief consideration of how social and material practices associated with accessing research hold certain orientations to knowledge in place. As we hope we have demonstrated in this book, however, research mobilities are very far from abstract. They are rooted in everyday practices that are inflected by social and material factors and have social and material effects on what research, literacy and teaching become.

As academics we have plenty of experience of how 'research' becomes differently as enacted within different academic practices: whether encountered as mentors, supervisors, examiners, reviewers, research leaders or activists or as journal articles, book proposals, monographs or whatever. Research can be enacted in different ways in professional practice in schools too. Our participating teachers talked about their experience of research in very different ways – as imposition, as ballast, as invitation, for example. Within 'evidence-based teaching', research is positioned as something to provide clear direction to practice and its worth weighed in its potential to do just that. But if we think about the purpose of research differently – as check point or invitation or critical friend, then the criteria needed to judge it differ too. If we reframe what research is for, then its value might be associated with other qualities – such as ethical commitments or a conviction that research is done in ways that recognise the richness and messiness of human experience. With this in mind, in the next chapter, we explore some practical approaches to positioning research differently, approaches that might enable a generous engagement with different kinds of research.

11 Moving literacy research around

Possibilities for expansive and empowering encounters with literacy research

Introduction

We began this book with concerns about how 'research' and 'literacy' were enacted in the educational landscape and with the implications of this for teachers and for literacy education in an age of evidence-based teaching. We have approached these issues from a novel starting point, considering relationships between research mobilities and the kinds of knowledge about literacy that circulate. As well as exploring what gets in the way of empowering encounters with a range of research, we have actively sought to explore how the diet of research teachers receive through official channels is supplemented, reconstituted or questioned. Through our work, we have arrived at a better understanding of how research moves to, between and around teachers. In generating critical purchase on why it is that some research-informed ideas about literacy gain more influence in educational practice than others, our project raises fundamental concerns about relationships between literacy education, research, policy and practice – relationships which we argue are central to the ability to foster critical reflective engagements with research. These have practical implications for researchers, teachers, schools, teacher educators and policymakers as well those involved in research mediation.

In many ways, the findings of the *Research Mobilities* project contribute to existing critique of neoliberal education systems, providing another example of the effects of a marketised education system trapped in a standards discourse. We hope therefore that our findings add ballast to calls for major changes in educational policy in England. They certainly chime with work in other jurisdictions which has sought to make connections between research and practice in order to foreground teacher agency and open out professional dialogue and reflection. Examples include: the Welsh government's National Strategy for Educational Research and Inquiry (Welsh Government, 2021); the Monash Q project in Australia which has developed rubrics to foster research engagement through a combination of

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individual, organisational and system level influences (Rickinson et al., 2024); and Critical Literacies and Awareness in Education (https://clae.no/) a project that brought teachers together with researchers – while focussing on teaching critical literacies in primary schools across various subject areas and libraries, teachers also gained inspiration from each other on broader issues such as space and security. We also note the role of practitioner research in driving professional thinking and looking beyond established routines, practices and priorities (Malone and Hogan, 2020) and Korsgaard (2020)'s argument for *exemplarity* in education in which examples of practice generated through interpretivist research are used to prompt professional reflection and debate. As Korsgaard argues, 'By offering examples instead of evidence, we open an interpretive space in which teachers can explore different perspectives – they can go visiting' (2020, p. 1368).

In this section, we add to such models and insights by making some recommendations that are informed by what we have learned about research mobilities in the wild. These are designed to support teachers in thinking fluidly and expansively about relationships between research and practice. We begin by developing an argument for adopting a 'generous' approach to research that recognises that research can know and address literacy education in different ways. Afterwards we offer some recommendations which are designed to: inform critical encounters with research; advocate for expansive and inclusive approaches to literacy and research; and support teachers to work with and through research to develop, understand, critique and imagine primary literacy education that is fit for children's current and future lives. These recommendations are shaped partly not only by our own reflections on what we learned about research mobilities but also by suggestions from our research participants (including teachers and brokers) as well as by our advisory teacher and stakeholder groups. We conclude by identifying areas for future research to extend understanding of research mobilities and their effects. We consider how such work may be beneficial across education and in other fields, too.

Developing expansive and inclusive approaches to literacy and research

This project was partly driven by the belief that if teachers are to develop empowering and radically inclusive literacy classrooms, they need to be allowed to use their professional judgement to draw on understandings associated with varied theoretical perspectives and research traditions, including those building on social and cultural theories (Ellis & Smith, 2017; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Stouffer, 2016). As explored in Chapter 2, there are many important ways that research can feed literacy education and, through doing so, enrich, extend and sustain teachers' professional

repertoires (Burnett, 2022a). Literacy research has generated a diversity and breadth of insights and implications that have relevance to literacy education relating, for example, to critical literacy, digital media, embodiment, affect and materiality, multilingualism and multimodality (Cazden et al., 1996; Baker-Bell, 2020; Comber, 2016; Leander & Ehret, 2019).

Like others (see Chapter 1), we argue that understandings generated through research must always be considered in the context of professional experience, in relationship to teachers' knowledge of the needs, interests, desires and motivations of the pupils they teach. And that as part of these, there is a need to advocate for teacher-led enquiry (Sachs, 2003) and to develop models of collaborative and participatory research in which researchers and professionals coproduce insights and understandings that are relevant to classroom practice (McGeown et al., 2023). One of our teacher panel members, for example, foregrounded the teacher's role in evaluating and making sense of their practice, commenting:

> I mean we're working with kids. They're like, they're lovely, but they are sort of – you know I love the word messy, really messy, and there's never going to be a one-size-fits-all solution and I suppose that is a problem with things like EEF. It's like one size fits all, verbal feedback for everybody. But actually the intricacies of how we solve these problems are much more complex.
>
> (Teacher panel member 1)

Expansive ideas about the role of research have much to contribute here. As well as sometimes providing guidance on effective practice, research can challenge assumptions about children or what happens in literacy classrooms, providing insight or inspiration for thinking, being or doing differently to what is routine or expected. As well as practices that are 'evidence-informed', there is a role for practices that are 'research provoked' or 'research inspired'. In the next section, we expand on how this might be achieved through what Law calls 'generosity' in research.

Towards a generous approach to research

In calling for *'generosity'* in research (Law, 2004), Law advocates an openness to knowing in diverse ways and to understanding how different kinds of knowledge are not only enacted by but act on the world they seek to explore. We find this notion useful in tempering assertions about 'what works' by considering 'what if': *what if* there are other things at play? *What if* something else matters more? *What if* we approached this differently? *What if* things were otherwise? Such 'what if' questions can retain an openness to multiple ways of knowing and provide a route to working creatively

with the findings of research. They assume a dialogic relationship with research that considers research findings and implications always in conversation with other insights, whether these derive from other kinds of research or from professional experience or expertise, from knowledge of local context or a combination of all of these things.

There are of course tensions here. Not only might teachers and academics have different ideas about research (as discussed in the previous chapter) but ideas about 'knowledge', 'evidence' and 'data' vary considerably between research paradigms and these intersect with diverse understandings about what literacy is and what literacy education is for. At one of our *Research Mobilities* stakeholder group meetings, for example, a group of literacy researchers discussed the challenges of working across paradigms and the tensions this could produce. This highlighted some fundamental differences in how research and its relationship to practice is conceived. While some of those present were comfortable with the idea that research can provide 'direction' to teachers, others were uncomfortable with this notion and preferred to talk about how research might provide 'guidance', 'inspiration' or 'insight' (Stakeholder meeting 3, October 2023). Navigating these different discourses is not straightforward.

In many ways, university structures encourage and enforce division. Academics working in different traditions contribute to different research centres, attend different conferences and submit their work to different journals (Parsons et al., 2020). To operate effectively within a knowledge economy that rewards originality and measurable impact, researchers must advance *their* insights and demonstrate *their* unique contribution and this is often achieved through signalling the inadequacies or incompleteness of others' work. While expressing a commitment to collaboration and interdisciplinarity, research assessment exercises, such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework (UKRI, 2024), may unintentionally bolster such siloing by rewarding the achievements of individual researchers and research centres that can trace distinctive contributions to new knowledge and impact (Watermeyer & Hedgecoe, 2016). Negotiation, compromise, shared ownership and common ground sit rather uneasily in this landscape. Academic practices may help to sustain distinct and separate positions rather than facilitating the alternative ways of knowing that might be valuable to teachers working in complex environments.

Problems also arise when different orientations to literacy and research are pitted against one another. This has happened with the so-called 'Reading Wars' and in related debates on the 'Science of Reading' in Canada, the United States, Australia and elsewhere (see Chapter 2). Controversies can, as explored in Chapter 9, play a key role in mobilising research on either side of a debate. They can however also draw on imperfect or misleading readings to position alternative insights as polar opposites. Also problematic is

the way that noisy debates on specific questions can shunt out discussion of other topics and questions, leaving little space or time for the many questions which could – and we argue should – be asked about the nature of literacy and aims and purpose of literacy education (see Chapters 2 and 7). Some of us have experienced this in our professional roles, whereby government consultations on specific topics have drained energy from other pressing issues that have significance for literacy education. The dominance of reading within public and professional discourse on literacy raises similar questions, not least because this does not seem to stretch to include digital reading, critical literacy, multilingualism or multimodality (see Chapters 7 and 8).

It is worth reiterating here that, in illuminating how some research gains considerable levels of traction, we do not suggest it has no worth. Rather we are concerned with the perspectives and insights that are sidelined as this happens. We also reiterate that decisions about the kinds of research to draw upon are never neutral and, as such, research engagement always has an ethical dimension, driven by what is seen as in the best interests of children and/or wider society. As one of our teacher advisory panel members commented:

> if research is going to get people to think, to analyse, to question for themselves, then it will bring that kind of dialogue. I'm not saying it will completely revolutionise primary education or secondary education within Great Britain, but it's about ensuring that there is a purpose behind questioning and there is a purpose behind dialogue, professional dialogue. It's not just there to fill time or to you know show that we've read this piece of research or we've referred to this. It's actually about what's important. Getting down to what's important really and that comes from, I think, asking questions and being able to analyse and reflect.
>
> (Teacher panel member 2)

Shifting the focus away from 'what works' leads to questions that can be addressed from multiple perspectives and this is where researchers from different paradigms can usefully contribute. This does not mean there will be no points of difference or departure but it does lay the ground for thinking expansively, creatively, critically and productively about what literacy education could be and should involve. In the next section, we explore ways of expanding possibilities for research in primary literacy education.

Expanding possibilities for research in primary literacy education: From 'what works' to 'what if'

Some of the diverse ways in which research can connect to educational practice include: offering guidance; generating insights; providing critique; prompting imaginative leaps. We use examples here to illustrate the distinctions.[1]

Research which offers guidance

Here we refer to research that contributes to the *how* of literacy education: to anything that teachers (or schools, trusts, regions or nations) do or provide in support of children's literacy education. This includes the kinds of guidance on strategies and interventions often associated with 'what works' and evaluated using randomised controlled trails and other experimental designs. Examples here include the use of 'sound stories' to teach vocabulary (Lawson-Adams & Dickinson, 2020) or analyses of the effectiveness of a handwriting intervention (Ray et al., 2021). But we also include research exploring more loosely bounded or holistic pedagogical strategies that do not lend themselves to evaluation through such methods. Such approaches may be researched through richly described case studies or detailed analysis of participation by very small numbers of children. Examples include studies of culturally responsive teaching (Bryan-Silva & Sanders-Smith, 2024; Kelly et al., 2021), digital storytelling (Sanchez & Ensor, 2021; Schmier, 2021) and writers' workshops (Machado & Hartman, 2021).

Research which generates insights

Other research generates *insights* into experiences, processes or other educational phenomena relevant to literacy education. Such studies provide insights from which teachers, schools and trusts may develop their own responses, make choices about resources to choose or raise questions about priorities and breadth of provision. This research is less about 'How to…?' and more about 'How does…?'. Studies, for example, provide insights into relationships between letter naming and letter writing (Reutzel et al., 2019) or the role of the nonverbal, such as gesture, in supporting lexical knowledge (Lawson-Adams & Dickinson, 2020). Or they may analyse trends or relationships that could be of interest to teachers when considering the children they teach, such as qualities of children's writing at different ages (Llaurado & Dockrell, 2019; Stavans et al., 2019; Tolchinsky, 2019), relationships between comprehension and volitional reading (van Bergen et al., 2021) or studies of boys' attitudes to reading that challenge assumptions about gendered differences (Scholes et al., 2021). Another compelling way in which research can speak to practice is through providing insights into children's experiences of literacy both within and outside school. Examples include studies exploring the role of translanguaging, multilingualism, transnationalism and digital media in young children's literacies (Rowsell & Pahl, 2015).

Research which provides critique

Research which provides *critique* interrogates ideas, values, purposes and inequalities in education. It includes analyses of educational approaches,

policies, resources or processes that prompt critical reflection on teachers', schools' and policymakers' priorities and practices. Such research generates pressing questions for teachers, policymakers and educational leaders and can also be powerful in envisioning alternative possibilities – a central question here is 'Why this'? Examples include Worthy et al.'s (2021) critique of 'brain-based' interventions for dyslexia and Carter's (2020) analysis of the effects of the phonics screening check in England on children and the curriculum. They include studies which highlight inequity of classroom opportunity or analyse the (in)appropriateness of schooling/resources in meeting children's needs (Henning, 2020; Omogun & Skerrett, 2021; Shepard-Carey, 2021). They may demonstrate how institutional or societal inequalities play out in classroom provision, such as Cushing's (2023) work on racialised language practices in schools.

Research which prompts imaginative leaps

Like most categorisations distinctions between response, insight and critique can easily blur. Many research studies fall into more than one category. Researchers may arrive at critique through insights, for example, or responses may well be prompted by critique. And teachers' reflections on research may well draw on a blend of response, insight and critique. Any of these however might be the starting point for imaginative leaps – for thinking differently about what literacy education *could* be. Research which provides insights into new communicative practices, for example, has radical implications for how we understand reading and writing. And research which explores the social and cultural situatedness of learning challenges the deficit discourses that underpin many calls for improvements to skills teaching. A central question here is 'What if?'. What might literacy education look like if we assumed an expansive definition of literacy that allowed for digital media, multimodality and multilingualism? What if we designed an assessment system which truly reflected what matters about literacy in everyday life? How might lessons and educational spaces and activities be organised in order to be genuinely equitable?

Distinguishing between responses, insights, critique and imaginative leaps signals different ways in which teachers (and policymakers, educational leaders, consultants, teacher educators and so on) may take up literacy research and different ways in which literacy research can address professional practice. It demonstrates a way of moving beyond debates about 'what works' and 'best evidence' to think expansively about how research might speak to teachers: to think about 'How does?', 'Why this', 'What else?' and 'What if?'

Opening things out – What might generous and generative research encounters involve?

Having outlined a range of ways in which literacy research might contribute to literacy education and provided some examples, in this section we consider

first some challenges involved and then some possibilities that build on what we have learned about research mobilities.

Challenges for critical, reflective encounters with literacy research

As explored in Chapter 4, much recent guidance on teachers' engagement with research has focused on the role of research brokers who have the time and specialist skills to interpret research and make connections with professional practice. While recognising that brokers can play an important role and that, of course, no teacher can engage directly with all the research associated with everything they do, we do take the view that direct encounters with research are valuable. The teachers who sought out research often did so through topics and questions that went beyond what was expected by school or national policy, driven by their perceptions of the needs of the children they taught. Generalised guidance or research summaries pegged to national policy directives sometimes helped them achieve what was expected of them but did not always help with their professional interests and concerns.

At this point, it is worth emphasising that we did not evaluate teachers' ability to critically evaluate and critically appraise research through the *Research Mobilities* project. Our conversations with teachers suggest that criticality may well be something that teachers are better equipped to demonstrate in relation to some topics and types of evidence than others. Teachers, for example, may be all too aware of the limitations of the data used to make judgements at school, class or pupil level (Burnett, Merchant, & Guest, 2021) but less confident when evaluating research which draws on diverse methodologies. Criticality may also be, as some of our teacher participants suggested, something that is felt but not voiced or nurtured in some contexts but silenced in others. This is a topic that deserves further research but it may well be helpful to think of criticality as *situated* as it materialises in different sites in different ways. We certainly saw plenty of evidence of teachers' critical reflection in our data.

Nevertheless we do think there are things to be learned from the *Research Mobilities* project about supporting teachers' critical engagements with research. In our experience, critical research engagement has typically involved reviewing research as presented in an article (usually from a peer-reviewed journal), evaluating the claims and relevance to practice. We see considerable value in engaging directly with research as presented in articles or reports, not least because they make it possible to trace methodology and engage with nuance and provisionality (which, as we have seen, is so often not the case for teachers). However, as explored in Chapter 6, teachers are likely to encounter research in a much wider range of forms in their professional lives. We suggest therefore that support for teachers' critical engagement with research also needs to acknowledge the complexities and messiness of teachers' encounters

with research 'in the wild' and recognise the multiple formats in which research is encountered. This is likely to involve challenges in some or all of the following areas:

1 *Engaging with a diversity of kinds of research*

As described in Chapter 6, teachers may feel overwhelmed by seemingly endless sources of information, guidance and insight. One response to this would be to increase efforts to direct teachers to research findings which others see as robust and relevant. In England, the Education Endowment Foundation attempts to do just this. However, as we have explored, generalised recommendations do not always address teachers' professional concerns and interests and summaries foreground some kinds of research over others. Research engagement therefore needs to address a diversity of research, for example, through considering the different orientations to literacy outlined in Chapter 2. Support is therefore needed for evaluating research that uses range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

It may also involve reflecting on why some kinds of research gain such traction in policy and practice while others do not. This last point involves considering the aims and purposes of literacy education.

2 *Engaging critically with research in different formats*

Research findings can shift in meaning as they materialise in different forms, sometimes shedding meaning, sometimes accruing new meanings as they hybridise with other ideas or understandings, or sometimes combining with other ideas or insights in powerful ways (see Chapters 7 and 9). Moreover, when teachers come into contact with research it is likely to appear as referenced in a tweet or email or embedded within an intervention, resource or training session, with 'the research' (as it might appear in a journal article) blackboxed. Losses of meaning or nuance and selective use of research can be strategic. However, sometimes content drops away, develops or shifts as research findings are mediated in different forms. Research findings therefore may be disassociated from their origins long before they reach teachers. When this happens, critical evaluation is highly problematic if not impossible.

3 *Engaging critically with research presented through multiple modes*

As explored in Chapter 7, research appears to teachers in many different formats using various combinations of words, images, moving images, soundfiles and so forth. Critical evaluation of research in the format of a blog post or video may well involve quite different sensitivities to critical evaluation of a journal article. One example here is the use of visualisations of insights or information generated through research. Traditional approaches to information design have tended to focus on the clarity

needed to enable rapid interpretation (e.g. Clarke, 2022). Graphs and pie charts, for example, offer straightforward correlations between innovations and their effects or patterns of responses – relative attainment in test scores, for example. Other kinds of diagrammatic depictions also aim for clarity, such as the diagrammatic representation of A Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), and are designed to convey explanations to be used as the basis for action. In these examples, the visual mode offers much in signalling relationships between variables and dimensions and/or mapping events over time in powerful ways. However such visualisations differ in the extent to which they invite professionally engaged dialogue and the extent to which they close things down. Critical evaluation of research therefore also requires critical engagement with representations in a range of styles and modes.

4 *Engaging critically with research reviews*

Research reviews and syntheses surfaced frequently in our discussions with teachers and in our analysis of media appearances of literacy. Such reviews vary considerably according to intentions, timescale and methodology – with different inclusion criteria and different levels of systematicity. As a result, they may orientate differently to research on a given topic and indeed to the topic itself. Despite these complexities, conclusions are often presented as 'truths' even if the evidence underpinning them may be more provisional than summaries suggest. Moreover the review methodology may be omitted when review findings are translated into digestible form as briefings, sets of guidelines, infographs or toolkits. Thinking critically with research involves an awareness that different review methodologies can generate different results and a willingness to question whether assertions made in summaries, headlines and bullet points are really substantiated by the research that informed them. It may also involve juxtaposing the findings of reviews conducted for different purposes and in different ways.

5 *Evaluating credibility*

The research mobilisation landscape is very crowded and it can be difficult to evaluate the credence or expertise of individuals and organisations presenting themselves as research-informed. The checks and balances associated with academic publication are often missing and credibility can be implied or asserted in a variety of ways. Given these challenges, teachers may draw on a blend of approaches to gauge the credibility and relative expertise of organisations or individuals. These include traditional markers such as track record and publications as well as others such as approachability and online presence. Critical engagement with research therefore involves a critical orientation to the strategies utilised to assert credibility and expertise.

6 *Critically evaluating the advocates of research (including the work of digital actors)*

In the light of the previous point, critical engagement with research involves thinking not just about claims made but about the assumptions and interests of its advocates. This might involve questions about: the basis on which individuals or organisations promote a particular piece of research (whether these are researchers themselves, brokers or digital technologies); their commitments and interests; and whether (and if so how) research findings have attached to other insights, understandings or beliefs. As with previous points, this critical evaluation involves an awareness of a range of possible orientations to literacy. Knowing about a range of orientations makes it easier to identify how one individual or organisation is positioned in the field.

These points signal factors relevant to critical research engagement in the contemporary communications landscape. Addressing these includes considering: how research is located in relation to other kinds of research; how research was encountered; the means through which it travelled; and who or what endorsed it or smoothed its path. They suggest a notion of teacher criticality that is, at once, local and expansive. Local in that teachers weigh research in relation to what is happening in their own classroom with the children they teach. Expansive in orientation to literacy and to research, engaging with who and where research comes from.

In considering these six challenges, it would be relatively straightforward to elaborate a new list of 'critical literacy skills' that account for mobilities and this is certainly one possibility to explore. However, while this might support teachers in evaluating what they encounter it may do little to challenge some of the narrowing effects of the evidence-based teaching discourse described in Chapter 1. As Woods explains, research does not just provide justification for pedagogies but

> Positioning 'agentive' teachers to both determine their own place in the world and prepare their students for living in such a world requires teachers who: are research literate in that they continue with their own learning; know how to identify problems related to their practice, their students' learning and education more generally; and can think beyond the 'accepted wisdom' to pose new questions about these problems and to harness a set of skills and capabilities that enables them to implement change.
>
> (Woods, 2021, p. 348)

In the next section, therefore, we consider some possibilities for nurturing critical, reflective encounters with research in which research is used to, as

Woods suggests, 'think beyond the "accepted wisdom" to pose new questions'; to move, in effect, from 'what works' to 'what if'.

Possibilities for facilitating critical, reflective encounters with research

Our suggestions for facilitating teachers' encounters with research draw on what we have learned about how research mobilises while holding on to a commitment to generosity (as explored above). Rather than starting with 'how best can we get research to teachers', we start with 'what *are* teachers encounters with research like' and attempt to draw on these insights to reflect on what could be done to ensure that such encounters are professionally empowering. We discuss three directions which may be fruitful: meeting places; compelling research communications; and empowering and enabling spaces.

Meeting places

Our first point concerns collaboration and reciprocity. Some models of evidence-based teaching imply that research mobilisation involves a process of transfer between researchers and teachers/ schools/educational leaders, possibly mediated by one or more third parties. In education, however, boundaries between researchers and teachers are often rather blurred. While some academics are career researchers, many have worked previously as teachers or continue to work in education in a professional capacity and many teachers are also involved in research or professional inquiry. Binary distinctions between teachers and researchers also underplay the nature of teaching as a 'research-like' profession. Many of the activities associated with research – data collection, analysis, observation and so on – are very much part of the day-to-day life of teachers. One of the effects of the knowledge economy however is to bolster divisions between different groups. University academics are expected to have an impact on practice and, moreover, are effectively in competition with one another to do so. Some – due to determination, social media savviness, hard work, excellent networking and/or good fortune, find themselves in position of influence, with space to share their insights and work to support implications. But most do not.

Developing a generous approach to research that recognises the contributions of different ways of knowing requires an imaginative approach to facilitating collaboration. Funders for example might encourage alliances that interrogate an aspect of practice in ways that acknowledge and engage with complexity rather than distilling commonalities. Research assessment exercises might reward impact strategies that nurtured alliances between researchers working on similar topics from different disciplines. And more could be done to build models of research/teacher partnerships that create

spaces for researchers and teachers to connect in which both research and professional expertise are valued.

We have been involved in several projects that seem to exemplify these principles including two projects supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. One of these involved partnering ten academics with ten teachers to explore how ideas about affect and embodiment might play through literacy education and what this might offer to thinking about professional practice (Lenters and McDermott, 2019). The other convened a group of teachers to re-imagine literacy assessment through conversations with six international researchers whose work offered distinct and contrasting perspectives (https://reimagininglitassessment.ca/). Both projects were characterised by an imaginative attempt to reconfigure teacher/academic relationships on the assumption that these new configurations might lead to new ways of doing things that could have material effects for young readers and writers. Both were finite and culminated in outputs – a book and a manifesto – artefacts that may or may not mobilise in the wild. But regardless of whether these initiatives were long-lasting, the experience of being involved in such projects can be energising. While the complexity of managing a large project and pressure to deliver on key outputs can sap creativity and embed a performativity mindset, small, invitational gatherings can provide space to interrogate ideas and practices without risk of judgement.

Compelling research communications that invite dialogue

Our next suggestion involves the format in which research appears. In Chapters 6 and 10, we described some ways in which research can sediment into certain truths and how some teachers felt that research was 'done to' them. Our concern here however is with how to engage in research communication in ways that reflect a generous approach – that open out discussion and debate rather than close it down.

Through our work on the *Research Mobilities* project, we have observed some highly successful communicative strategies. These include effective social media use across multiple channels; enticing use of multiple modes and media; use of websites as touchpoints for multiple publications and activities; and the framing of research findings in relation to professional concerns. In many cases, however, these have focused on clarity of information and guidance. As explored earlier in this book, visualisations like the Literacy Hour Clock and Simple View of Reading have played a powerful role in informing and upholding certain ways of 'doing literacy education'.

Our suggestion is to use visualisations to engage with uncertainty and multiplicity. In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of creativity and innovation in the field of information design that could offer

possibilities here. Lupi's (2016) work on 'humanising' data provides one example. Lupi explores the use of data visualisations to uncover and engage with the intimate details of individual lives, emphasising context, personalised responses and ephemerality in contrast to the generalisations that are traditionally the stuff of data visualisations. Imaginative visualisations such as these have the potential to stimulate the kinds of open-ended and engaged, critical and reflective professional dialogue we envisage.

We drew on these principles when commissioning visualisations to support the *Research Mobilities* project. We were interested in images that might generate discussion, that might invite teachers to engage with our findings, which remained open to interpretation rather than closing things down and which, we hoped, would hint at possibilities for professional dialogue and deliberation. We do not have space here to discuss the various visualisations or indeed other forms we explored that were designed to invite discussion of our process, findings and emerging questions (which included a blog, an animation and podcast discussions between teachers and researchers). These can be found on the project website (https://research.shu.ac.uk/rmple/). At the time of writing, we have more to do in exploring the potential for images and other modes to inspire, prompt or deepen professional reflection but our experience so far of sharing visualisations with teacher colleagues has convinced us that the creative mediation of research is an area ripe for further exploration.

Empowering and enabling spaces

Our third suggestion connects with a key theme that emerged from the teacher interviews and focus groups: the professional confidence to take risks and the need for space to think more slowly and more deeply about research. After inviting their reflections on research encounters, we asked participants what could improve such experiences. In addition to points about accessing and navigating research, the value of networking emerged as a key theme. Much of this happened online but also through connections with friends, family and colleagues. Indeed some mentioned how they found our workshops and focus groups useful as a chance to exchange ideas and sources of research with others:

> I was just going to say this is kind of what I hoped like, listening to [T2] talking about the reading pleasure and then her recommending something for [T11], this is kind of beneficial to me because I think that I've found I'm quite tunnel visioned on what I can find, and [now] I might go and look at that reading for pleasure course now that [T2] suggested, so I really hope that is what we can get out of it. And like [T11] said, actually bouncing ideas off of each other with similar minded people.
>
> (FG2, T26)

Such opportunities enabled them to tap into different kinds of expertise and experiences, making up for individual gaps in knowledge. However they were not available to all. One teacher, for instance, longed for more open and honest communities, where people discussed research gaps and talked about what had not worked. They spoke of the importance of social media in helping to stay connected and finding fora that both reinforced and challenged their views:

> … questioning my own ideas and finding those little pockets of 'Oh yeah, they've got the same mentality as me' or actually they don't and I wonder why? That is a very powerful platform to have too, yeah, definitely, social media.
>
> (Int 4, T17)

Other suggestions in a similar vein included 'people in a room having a discussion about research [and] almost modelled how to look at research critically, and not just jump on board straight away and implement something that you've read is amazing' (T11) and research partnerships between teachers and universities (T10). One teacher hoped that 'somehow schools go back to that LEA [local education authority] centralised model where those key ideas are coming through then that is only going to benefit our children' (T86) while another looked forward to joining an academy trust as, 'there will be a kind of a whole group of people thinking about stuff like that, that I can maybe share with – because at the moment I can't digest it and so I don't' (T4). Such opportunities might well nurture imaginative leaps, for example:

> In my inner dreamworld what I would like to happen is for someone to set up a sort of steering group about children's writing, which then caused them to re-write the teacher assessment frameworks [@laughs] for the end of Key Stage 2 to make them more realistic, and to acknowledge that to be working above the age of KS2 you don't actually need to write like an adult, which is basically the final category, the greater depth category. But I don't know how that would happen. But I think writing research is what I am interested in, and I do find through the links I have, I guess I do find action research and examples of practice about writing and people saying, 'I tried this approach and it worked'.
>
> (Int 1, T6)

Towards the end of the Research Mobilities project, a group of teachers collaborated to develop resources to support teachers' engagement with research, responding to the experiences that teachers had shared in the project. The outcome of this work was a new resource, Research Conversations

(https://research.shu.ac.uk/researchconversations/), which is designed to provide starting points for developing the meeting places, compelling research communications and empowering and enabling spaces discussed above.

Where next for researching research mobilities?

In this chapter, we have explored a series of aspirations which we see as consistent with a generous approach to connecting research, literacy and teaching. We have focused our discussion on teachers' relationships with research but these recommendations have implications for others, too. Literacy researchers may draw on our insights into research mobilities in refining their approaches to communication and engagement. Policymakers, consultants, school leaders and teacher educators may find comfort in our calls to engage with a wide range of research or be drawn to seek out other perspectives and insights. These aspirations will, we hope, resonate with research funders, professional associations and research organisations committed to facilitating dialogue and collaboration between researchers with different interests and methodological and theoretical standpoints. And all may play a role in developing, facilitating and encouraging open-ended engagements with research to invite professional dialogue that is empowering to teachers.

There is much more to be written from the *Research Mobilities* project. Further detailed analysis and exemplification will be addressed in future publications. There is also much more to be done in investigating research mobilities in the wild not least given a shifting political landscape and dynamic communicative environment. At the time of writing, generative AI is starting to seep into everyday academic and professional practices. As this becomes increasingly mainstream, there will be major implications for the kinds of research teachers encounter and the forms and formats in which it manifests. There is also much more to be done to investigate what happens to literacy and to research within local sites. Our analysis was in many ways 'at a distance'. There is more to be learned by participating more directly in teachers' encounters with research and understanding the practices and experiences of other actors. There is also great potential for investigating research mobilities in other jurisdictions, in other subjects or aspects of education and in other disciplines. We hope that the various methods we have tried out in this project will be of use to others considering such investigations. Our project website includes a *Research Mobilities* methods resource, designed to offer some inspiration from this project to social scientists and others (Cermakova et al., 2024).

In this book, we have focused on three inter-related areas of concern which, we have argued, are pressing areas to address in this age of evidence-based teaching: (1) engaging with diversity in literacy research; (2) working with

expansive notions of research and the contribution of research to education; and (3) promoting connections between research and teaching that are professionally empowering for teachers. We hope that our exploration of research mobilities in the wild will fuel further debates on each of these topics and illustrate how they are deeply interconnected and therefore cannot be addressed in isolation. The *Research Mobilities* project raises important questions about what literacy education might be and what teaching might involve if research mobilised and manifested differently. As such, our findings matter in considering the role research might play in moving literacy education on.

What if?

Note

1 These examples are drawn from Burnett (2022a).

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