Investigating student teachers' presentations of literacy and literacy pedagogy in a complex context

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Investigating Student-teachers' presentations of literacy and literacy pedagogy in a complex context

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Abstract

The field of literacy and primary literacy education is patterned by multiple discourses and this raises challenges for those educating the next generation of primary literacy teachers. In England, the last 15 years have seen considerable levels of prescription in the primary literacy curriculum and compliance by the school and teacher education sectors has been enforced through demanding accountability regimes. In this paper, we draw on findings of a small-scale interview study to consider how understandings of literacies associated with different contexts may or may not inflect student-teachers' orientations towards literacy provision in school. We explore how five student-teachers presented their experiences of literacy within and beyond the classroom and how they seemed to position themselves in relation to literacy pedagogy. We focus particularly on continuities and discontinuities between literacies in their personal and professional lives, and on tensions they identified between the teachers they felt they wanted to, and were expected to, become. Reflecting on this work, we consider how we can best equip pre-service primary and early years teachers to develop as critical reflective literacy practitioners in the current context.

Key words

literacy, student-teacher, pre-service teacher, initial teacher education

Introduction

Preparing the next generation of literacy teachers has always been a contentious business. The field of literacy and literacy education can be seen as patterned by varied discourses reflecting different ways of conceptualising the range and scope of literacy (or literacies) (Hannon 2000). These different discourses are significant to how we view literacy learning and the kinds of pedagogies that we see as appropriate (Ivanic 2004). Conceptualising literacy in teacher education is also complicated by shifts in how people engage with texts in everyday life. Reading and writing in digital environments, for example, have become increasingly multimodal and there are increased opportunities to access, create, re-mix and share diverse and multiple texts (Jenkins, et al. 2006; Knobel, and Lankshear 2011). Many have argued that such developments prompt us to re-evaluate how we see literacy in education and, by implication, teacher education (Merchant, and Davies 2009; Honan 2009).

For those training to be teachers, this can be difficult terrain to navigate, not least because, as life history studies of teachers' developing professional identities have demonstrated, teachers' life experiences, values and beliefs have considerable significance for their professional practice (e.g. Clandinin, and Connelly, 1998; Goodson, and Ball 1984; Olson 1995). Pre-service teachers' own experiences as literacy users and literacy learners will also be significant to how they envisage and enact their professional role, and of course these may intersect with broader ideas about what it means to be a teacher and beliefs about pedagogy.

Of particular significance to pre-service teachers' professional development is the policy context in which their teacher education occurs. In England, the last 15 years have seen considerable levels of prescription in the primary (elementary) literacy curriculum. The National Literacy Strategy and then Primary National Strategy provided explicit guidance on

the content and delivery of the literacy curriculum (DfEE 1998; DES 2006), aiming to raise attainment as measured by standardised tests (SATs). Recommended approaches focused particularly on objective-led, whole class teaching. Schools were encouraged to structure their literacy plans around the teaching of different genres and their associated features and address specific skills linked to punctuation, spelling and reading strategies. In 2010, a new coalition government promised greater freedom for schools in relation to curriculum and pedagogy. At the same time, however, they placed significant pressure on schools to implement or strengthen use of systematic synthetic phonics in their early reading provision (DfE 2010). The draft version of the National Curriculum for English (DfE 2013) reinforces this emphasis and focuses attention on the development of specific skills linked to grammar and spelling. Initial teacher education (ITE) institutions' compliance with these policies is closely monitored through external measures of performance, and inspections conducted by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). These recent revisions to the literacy curriculum have been accompanied by significant changes in the nature of ITE in England, with shifts towards school-led rather than university-led provision (DfE 2011). Such movements have sharpened debates about how universities can and should contribute to teacher education.

As five members of a primary and early years English team working with postgraduate and undergraduate student-teachers, the challenges associated with the complex context for ITE literacy provision were particularly pertinent. We had a professional duty to equip students to teach literacy in line with current curriculum and policy. However, we were also committed to ensuring our students recognised the diverse and changing nature of literacy and were able to approach the teaching of literacy creatively and critically. We were interested in relationships between student-teachers' experiences of literacy and what they suggested was

valued within and beyond the education system. This small-scale interview study was therefore designed to investigate how student-teachers presented literacy in stories of their personal and professional lives in order to inform our teaching and contribute to debates about the role of universities in wider debates . In further contextualising the focus of this study, we begin by summarising previous research exploring the nature of student teachers' and teachers' experiences as they negotiate complex educational contexts.

Negotiating competing complex contexts in education

A significant body of work has explored how pre-service teachers grapple with different discourses and do (or do not) reconcile relationships between personal beliefs, experiences and curriculum requirements. The process of negotiating complex contexts and competing values and assumptions is powerfully described in narrative studies of teachers' lives. Clandinin and Connelly's notion of a 'professional knowledge landscape' provides us with a way of thinking about the breadth of resources and experiences that teachers draw on as they negotiate competing professional demands. They see teachers as drawing from a 'web of stories' (p.160) derived, for example, from their interactions with others, and their lives within and beyond school. This they argue,

> ...allows us to talk about space, place and time. Furthermore it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things and events in different relationships. Understanding professional knowledge as comprising of a landscape calls for a professional knowledge as comprised of a wide variety of people, places and things. (Clandinin, and Connelly 1995, 4-5)

From this perspective, the student-teacher does not simply assimilate practices s/he encounters during ITE but existing stories of school inter-weave with their own 'web of stories.'

Narrative methodologies have been used to highlight how life experiences help shape pre-service teachers' values and beliefs (e.g. Johnson 2007) and their perspectives on themselves as beginning teachers (e.g. Rodriguez and Hallman 2013). They allow us to explore the significance of both past and present experiences to teachers' lives, illustrating how teachers' identities are shaped by experiences but are also multiple and open to change (Goodson, and Choi 2008). Such work often focuses on tensions between beliefs and practices. Furlong (2013), for example, drawing on an analysis of the personal histories and idealised teacher identities of 15 pre-service teachers, explores how her participants avowed both traditional and progressive constructions of teacher identity. She highlights the significance of 'lay theories' developed through personal and professional experience and describes how, for her participants, traditional constructions of teacher identity were largely produced through 'the apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975). Ottesen (2006) provides a further example of this in a study exploring reasons for the disconnect between policy and practice in school technology use. She shows how student-teachers re-worked technologies in classroom settings, using them in ways that seemed appropriate within those settings. Such studies show how induction into dominant discourses can limit, side-line or distort student-teachers' intentions.

At the same time, some pre-service teachers do manage to assert alternative teaching identities. Alsup (2005) for example invited student-teachers to interrogate their personal and professional lives through a series of activities including telling stories, reflective writing and art. She used Gee's concept of borderland discourses (Gee 2005) to describe how some of her study participants made sense of competing discourses through 'borderland narratives' and

generated new ways of 'being a teacher.' Handsfield, Crumpler and Dean (2010) described how one teacher positioned herself in relation to different discourses, improvising with different approaches to literacy teaching as she engaged with pupils. They argue that, at the micro-level of classroom practice, dominant discourses of literacy may be sometimes undermined and re-worked and new possibilities may emerge. This can lead to contradictions as teachers enact and re-work state policies. We may therefore see differences in what teachers present as appropriate when talking with others and what they do in practice: between how teachers enact teaching 'in-classroom' and present it 'out-of-classroom' (Clandinin, and Connelly 1996).

Research focusing particularly on teaching English and literacy has primarily foregrounded how dominant discourses inflect pedagogical practices. Hawarth (2006), for example, explored how secondary pre-service English teachers accommodated dominant discourses of literacy during ITE. Whilst responses varied, during their course, students increasingly justified their pedagogies in terms of national frameworks rather than pedagogical principles. Gomez, Johnson and Gisladottir (2007) describe how teachers may reinforce certain cultural models of literacy in their interactions with each other, and use these models to interpret classroom experiences. This illustrates how certain models sustain in spite of curriculum or policy change. In contrast, McDougall (2010) explored the perspectives of 26 teachers in Queensland, Australia. She sought their responses to a literacy curriculum designed to address multimodality and multimedia. She highlights how different teachers responded in different ways, some adhering to traditional principles and others becoming more 'futures-orientated.' Whilst teachers vary in their orientations towards literacy, these orientations can be hard to shift. Honan (2008) focused on barriers that primary teachers in Australia perceived to using digital texts in the literacy curriculum. She associated strong societal discourses around literacy and new technologies with teachers' difficulties in accommodating

such texts. Her work highlights the pervasiveness of 'autonomous' models of literacy (Street 1995) that equate literacy with the accurate acquisition and application of a fixed set of skills. Teachers may engage in a variety of literacy practices in their everyday life. However, for some, only certain kinds of literacies (and associated texts) may seem appropriate when enacting teacher identities (Burnett 2011).

The small-scale interview study reported below was influenced by life history studies and by these prior accounts of competing discourses in English/literacy teaching. We wanted to gain insights across student-teachers' lives in order to better understand their orientations towards curriculum and pedagogy; we were interested in continuities and discontinuities in their accounts of literacies in their personal and professional lives. Through such insights we sought to explore how student-teachers' broader experiences intersected with dominant discourses as they developed as literacy teachers in contemporary England. This we hoped would inform the development of approaches to help student-teachers navigate competing discourses as they reflect upon and review their literacy experiences within and beyond the classroom.

The study: aims, participants and methodology

In exploring continuities and discontinuities in student-teachers' personal and professional lives in terms of literacy, we had two aims. Firstly, we aimed to explore how student-teachers presented their use of literacy in relation to their everyday professional and personal lives. Influenced by socio-cultural perspectives that see literacies as diverse and situated in relation to different contexts (Barton, and Hamilton 1998), we were interested in how they presented the range and scope of their literacy practices, and the values, purposes and preferences they associated with these different uses. Secondly, we wanted to explore how they positioned

themselves in relation to enacted literacy pedagogy in schools. We were interested in how they described literacy teaching in school and the kinds of literacy teachers they wished to be.

Five pre-service teachers participated in the study. Kate, Claire, Tom and Natalie (pseudonyms used) were training to be primary teachers and Rosie was training to be an early years teacher. All were enrolled on the final year of a three-year university-based undergraduate programme of ITE, which involved university-based teaching and school-based sustained or 'block' placements. The participants were those first to respond to an open invitation to all 154 final year student-teachers. Whilst no selection criteria were applied, it is possible that volunteers shared a particular interest in teaching literacy or a commitment to supporting the course and contributing to its development and this has implications for the study's findings, as explored below.

Influenced by the tradition of narrative research, we used interviews to gain insights into student-teachers' experiences. The scale of study did not allow for the kind of sustained engagement enabled though narrative studies but use of interviews enabled participants to talk broadly about their personal and professional lives, and enabled us to gain insights beyond those usually available to us as teacher educators. Two phases of individual semi-structured interviews were used. The first phase of interviews was conducted in the autumn term prior to a final block teaching placement. In preparation, participants were asked to create mind-maps (Buzan, and Buzan 1993) that represented their experiences of literacy, both as developing professionals and in their broader lives. The preparation of mind-maps enabled participants to reflect on their experiences prior to the interview. They were also used for ethical reasons. Given power relationships between student-participants and ourselves as tutor-interviewers, we wanted to give participants time to decide which aspects of their personal and professional lives they wanted to share. We began interviews by asking

participants to talk through their mind-maps and then used follow-up questions to support their reflection on what they had described. The second phase of interviews was held in the summer term after the final block teaching placement. In preparation, participants created representations of how they saw themselves as literacy teachers. Again participants were invited to take the lead in talking through their thoughts. In both phases, interview protocols were used to ensure consistency across all five interviewers. (See Appendix 1 for interview protocols.)

Each of the five members of the project team conducted both interviews for one participant. It is worth noting here that all tutors taught modules focused on primary and early years literacy and supported students with other aspects of their professional development. In order to minimise tensions that might arise for participants wishing to respond openly to interview questions but aware of professional expectations, no participant was interviewed by a member of staff who would act as their literacy tutor, assessor or referee during the remainder of the course. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were read by participants who were invited to remove any data or add to their comments prior to analysis.

The methods described above were designed to ensure that all 5 interviewers adopted a consistent approach, and to enable participants to talk as freely as possible. However, it would be misleading to suggest our methods generated objective insights into student-teachers' experiences. Participants knew interviewers as literacy tutors and this is likely to have mattered to how they presented their experiences, thoughts and values. As Goodson writes, 'life as lived and experienced' is not the same as 'life reported' (1992, 237). Acknowledging this, we see interviewees' responses as positioned 'accounts' rather than objective 'reports' (Baker 2002). Clandinin and Connelly (1996) argue that teachers often use 'cover stories', framing their practices in terms they feel are appropriate for fellow educators or evaluators. It is quite possible (or even likely) that these student-teachers were using cover

stories during their interviews with us. In turn our own interview prompts and subsequent analysis were framed by our beliefs and values about literacy and literacy pedagogy. Participants' accounts, adapted for and negotiated with us as researchers, were then filtered again through our own values and interests (Fielding 2004).

In line with our aims, we focused on two dimensions of the interviews during our analysis. Firstly we focused on the *content* of the interviews. We considered the range and scope of literacy practices and teaching episodes they chose to describe to us. Secondly we considered how participants *presented* these as they talked with us. We were interested in: what their positioned accounts suggested about their priorities, beliefs and assumptions about literacy and literacy teaching; and also in what this suggested about how they felt it was appropriate to present their experience to us as tutor/researchers. In analysing the interviews, we considered both *what* they were saying and *how* they presented this. The first stage of analysis involved open-coding. We began by each analysing the interviews we had conducted ourselves but also, in order to provide multiple perspectives, coded interviews conducted by another team member. This generated a series of categories of continuities and discontinuities linked to both the content and presentation. Having shared these categories, we returned to the data and used constant comparison analysis to repeatedly re-visit each set of interviews, exploring emerging themes across the data-set.

In the next two sections, we present findings from our study, drawing on exemplar data chosen a representative of recurrent themes. First we consider continuities and discontinuities which emerged from the students' accounts of their use of literacy in their personal and professional lives. We do this by identifying a series of binaries we identified within the accounts that represented contrasting takes on the nature of literacy. Second we consider how

the student teachers positioned themselves as teachers of literacy during interviews, through their accounts of their own teaching and teachers observed. In both cases we focus on both what they told us and how they did so. Following this we explore what we can learn by juxtaposing perspectives on literacies in their lives and literacy pedagogy, and then explore the implications of such insights for university-based teacher educators.

Continuities and discontinuities in students' presentations of literacies in their personal and professional lives

Through our analysis of continuities and discontinuities across their personal and professional lives, we identified three binaries representing different ways of conceiving literacy activity. These concerned literacy as:

- fixed & unitary/fluid & hybrid;

- individual/social;

- paper-based/digital.

The first two binaries relate to how literacy is conceptualised and the third to the kinds of texts participants reported using. We recognise here that other researchers may have identified different binaries; there are many ways in which we could explore similarities and differences across the practices described. These binaries however relate to dimensions of literacy that we see as central to the main challenges to literacy education, as outlined at the beginning of this article. In what follows we exemplify these binaries and, in doing so, explore why they are relevant when considering student-teachers' personal and professional literacies.

Fixed & unitary /Fluid & hybrid

The first binary distinguishes between literacy as fixed and unitary, and as fluid and hybrid. We can understand this distinction in terms of that between psychological-cognitive models of literacy which see literacy as a set of skills, and sociocultural models of litera*cies* as social practices that are situated and multiple (Barton, and Hamilton 1998).

Unsurprisingly, in their personal lives, all participants presented literacy as fluid and hybrid. Literacy was purpose-driven and deeply embedded in everyday life. Rosie, for example, commented:

> Well, when I started jotting things down I realised how much I do use literacy in my everyday life. I think books are an important part of how I use literacy, but then when I started brainstorming there's so many other ways that I use it. I think like technology's had a lot to do with how I use things differently. Like I've got an iPhone now and I've got i-books on my iPhone even though I still don't get quite used to reading it. It's not like reading an ordinary book, but I think when you start thinking about it you do realise how much you do use literacy in different areas of your life just every day really.....emails, text messages, the internet… things like that have become like an everyday part of life.

Participants' uses of texts linked to everyday activities, as well as longstanding interests or particular needs associated with formal and non-formal contexts. They presented reading and writing as varied; they used texts for different purposes and in different domains of their lives, as family members, friends, employers, students, and so on. Participants also noted how literacy preferences had shifted during their lives. For example, Natalie described how she had moved from using MSN to Facebook whilst Claire noted how she had mastered, then later rejected, text-speak.

At times, this sense of fluidity and hybridity seemed to play out in their presentations of literacy pedagogy. All participants described looking at texts with children- often linking this to genre-led approaches to teaching reading and writing. At times this reflected their descriptions of purposeful engagement with texts in everyday life; when asked to talk about what was important to him in literacy teaching, for example, Tom commented: 'I think maybe literacy for a purpose, so when I'm teaching and the children are learning, like learn for a purpose'.

Such stories however were juxtaposed with others which presented literacy in classrooms as fixed and a set of skills to be amassed. We can see this in Claire's response when asked to describe a time when she was being the literacy teacher she wanted to be:

> Definitely when I was levelling up the work on the whiteboard ………….. The work was packed with everything I was looking for. Okay, it didn't look great, but it was packed with everything I was looking for.

On being asked what 'levelling up' involved, Claire explained this as:

> Improving a text and making that text the best it can be – adding or taking away or rearranging it so that it reads better and shows more skills than it did before.
> It got the message across that you're going to put openers, connectives, wow words and you're going to think about the ordering of sentences and they all got it and they all produced a high level piece of work and some of my lowers produced work that didn't reflect everything else that was in their literacy books. So again that was moving them on a little bit, sort of pushing them.

Natalie highlighted similar preoccupations when summarising her priorities for literacy teaching on placement:

> Because now in Year 6 obviously they're writing for their SATS and they've got to, you know, do different styles of writing and I've got to sort of make sure that I'm prepared.

Natalie here presented success in teaching as related to progress and national expectations, in contrast to the purposeful acts described in everyday life. Whilst the changing nature and use of literacy in participants' own lives related to need and purpose, in their stories of school life 'change' was often measured by 'progress' linked to fixed notions of literacy. Children then became defined in terms of their relative ability to demonstrate these skills: they were 'lowers' or 'highers.'

Individual/Social

The second binary relates to a distinction between literacy as individual or social endeavour. All participants presented literacy in their lives as social (even when working on individual tasks). Whilst they described no examples of the kind of networking with unknown others that has been associated with digital texts (Jenkins et al. 2006), participants seemed to engage in the 'networked individualism' described by Wellman (2002). They spoke of using social networking to communicate with friends and family and support personal relationships. They talked of communicating and 'working' simultaneously on line: they wrote assignments and planned lessons whilst 'chatting' to friends, family and other students. For example, Claire described how she used Facebook to organise and maintain social relationships whilst simultaneously researching information and writing assignments:

It is my main method of communication, especially between me and the people who don't live in Sheffield – so like all my old school friends and people like that. I put every single photograph I take up on it pretty much [chuckling] and I just love the fact that… Like I was sat doing my planning now and I've just sat and talked briefly to my friend ….

Participants also spoke of using social networking to support academic reading and writing. For example, Natalie talked about contacting a female relative who would proof-read her academic work for her. Sometimes this social dimension was presented as valued, at others as frustrating. Claire for example talked about her preference for using technologies that provide choice about *when* to respond, for example, text messaging, and complained about being interrupted by social networking or MSN.

Despite this interweaving of the academic and the social, participants suggested that academic university assignments, assessed by pre-determined criteria and 'uncomfortable' were very much associated with individual responsibility. Some stories were tinged with feelings of anxiety and isolation. Natalie for example commented on how she felt after failing a university assignment:

I think I've been more worried about everything. I panic about everything now when I do it because I don't want to… I never want to feel that way again because it was really upsetting and it was very sad, you know, when you try hard and you've just not quite made it. So I think erm... I mean I was doing alright before that, but it just wasn't… I don't know, I think that just sort of shocked me and I think now when I do it it makes me… you know, you get really stressed and then you get upset because

I'm just panicking that it's not right and I just go over the criteria, over and over and over it to make sure I understand what it's asking.

In this excerpt, Natalie presented herself as distraught by unexpected failure and framed her anxiety in terms of her failure to meet expectations she did not understand but which she must address through her individual determination.

There was a similar focus on individuality when participants described literacy in school. Stories focused on episodes where children were engaged in literacy as individuals, and children's reading and writing were measured by individual progress towards pre-determined levels. Several participants emphasised the importance of talk in classrooms but associated this more with creating a relaxed atmosphere than with collaboration around reading or writing.

Paper-based/digital

The third binary relates to the kinds of texts participants described. In distinguishing between paper-based and digital texts, we recognise that digital texts are often used in conjunction with paper-based texts in everyday life (Robinson, and Turnball 2004). We use this binary however to highlight some differences in the kinds of texts participants talked about when referring to literacies in school and in other domains.

In describing literacies in their lives, all participants presented themselves as 'readers' of paper-based texts, such as newspapers and books: Claire talked about her collection of reference books for her course and using books to follow her interest in space and children's literature. They also referred to using digital sources, valuing ease of access to information on topics of interest. Tom, for example, talked of pursuing his interest in health and fitness

through the Internet. Again, many spoke of being reliant on social networking. Tom, for example, commented:

> Facebook - I live on it: So I've got Facebook [referring to mindmap] because that's where I use a lot of literacy, reading news, reading comments, writing comments, like events I know where I've got to be.

The order in which participants chose to refer to these different kinds of texts seemed significant. Paper-based texts were described first. Natalie, for example, discussed her use of a wide range of texts, both paper and screen-based. However, it was only after she had described her use of books, and then online books, that she went on to discuss other kinds of texts. Perhaps this was because she felt books were more appropriate to discuss with her tutor/interviewer. She also emphasised that she was not 'ruled by' social networking like some of her friends. In doing so, she differentiated between what she seemed to suggest were literacy practices with different levels of legitimacy.

Print-based texts also dominated accounts of classroom literacies. Participants described an enthusiasm for children's literature and told stories of their attempts to motivate children to read books. There were, however, few if any stories of using digital texts and certainly none that addressed the creative or participatory dimensions of textual production and consumption often associated with digital environments in everyday life (Davies, and Merchant 2009).

How did participants position themselves as literacy teachers?

Having explored continuities and discontinuities in the range and scope of literacies described, in this section, we consider how they positioned themselves as literacy teachers. In doing so, we focus on three ways that they presented what was important to them, through:

- success stories of confident literacy teaching;

- opposition stories in which they contrasted their approaches with teachers they observed;

- acknowledging tensions between literacy in school and everyday life.

We have organised these findings in terms of these three different kinds of presentations as they represent different ways that participants seemed to be grappling with competing discourses. The first, students' success stories, related to their lived experience of 'being' a teacher. The second, students' opposition stories, were stories through which they positioned themselves against pedagogical practices they had observed. The third relates to a recognition of competing discourses related specifically to literacy teaching.

Success stories of confident literacy teaching

In the first interviews, no participants deemed themselves to be competent literacy teachers: indeed two commented that they had tried to avoid teaching literacy on previous placements. Unsurprisingly, aside from one student whose experiences were less favourable, all students presented themselves as more confident in the post-placement interviews. What was interesting, however, were the different ways that they framed their growing confidence as literacy teachers.

In the first set of interviews, they related their confidence as literacy teachers to their subject knowledge in terms of their understanding about language and texts. As Tom noted:

> I think at the heart of it there is subject knowledge because you've got to have good subject knowledge. It doesn't matter how good you are as a teacher or your personality or anything else; if you haven't got the subject knowledge, then the children aren't going to get the subject knowledge because you don't know it.

This emphasis on 'getting it right' caused anxiety for some. Claire commented:

Well I've got to write a script. I've got to have every word that I'm going to say. I have to make sure I write down every single thing about the text type.

In the second set of interviews, following final block placements, participants told stories that were less focused on their own knowledge and more on their actions and intentions. These stories seemed to represent a confidence born of 'being' a teacher, but 'being a teacher' seemed to mean different things to different individuals. We can see this in two stories that focused on generating motivation for reading. In describing how she had successfully engaged children with reading, Rosie emphasised how she wanted children to be comfortable and secure in what they were doing, and was reluctant to 'pressurise' children to be 'correct':

I just really would want children to feel comfortable even though they struggle and just for them to feel as though erm... they can do and they can have a go and there's no right, there's no wrong and it's all about just having a go and just feeling confident really.

As Nias (1989) explored in her seminal study of primary teachers, an ethic of care often plays out in how teachers present their work. In this excerpt, Rosie associated her care for children's personal development with her teaching of literacy. She suggested that literacy pedagogy is not just about delivering a set of skills, but bound up with feeling and emotion. As the only participant enrolled on a course of early years ITE, this may reflect a particular emphasis within her experience in school and at university.

Claire also focused on emotional dimensions, but her comments related to enjoyment and enthusiasm for reading:

> The important thing for me is getting children to enjoy reading. Not just teaching them
> to read, but getting them enthusiastic about reading and getting them reading different
> texts as well. It has to be exciting. Excitement, fun, enjoyable.

For her, this was about embodying enthusiasm, for example by doing:

> …silly dances and waving my arms around and getting all enthusiastic about it and
> the kids were sort of… I just remember everybody's face looking at me thinking
> "She's weird! What's she doing?" but I was really enjoying it.

Both stories represent a commitment to developing a love of reading, but they play out in different ways. For Claire, this was about modelling enthusiasm herself, embodying it - through waving her arms around. As in Probyn's account of teaching higher education students (Probyn 2004), she described her teaching in terms of gesture and the proximity of bodies in a shared space. Claire's enthusiasm seemed very much located in the 'lesson': it was her presentation to pupils within this lesson that counted. For Rosie, it was about an enthusiasm for reading born from a more intimate relationship between pupil and teacher. Her story was not bounded within the lesson, but seemed to concern the work she did to establish reading within her classroom community and encourage her children to feel like readers.

Both Rosie and Claire seemed to present a confidence in what they were trying to do here; their stories were presented as 'success stories,' that seemed to represent what they felt was important about literacy pedagogy. 'Being' a literacy teacher was not just about prior work on developing the skills they would pass on to others, in terms of their subject knowledge, but about sharing a set of values or relationships with children. However their very different takes on promoting reading suggest different ways in which their notions of effective literacy

pedagogy were intersecting with other dimensions of their teaching role. For Rosie, this seemed to be about the significance of teacher/pupil relationships whereas for Claire it was about teaching as performance. For both, it is worth noting the importance of affect, which is something we return to later.

Opposition stories

In addition to these success stories, participants frequently contrasted their own approaches with those of teachers they observed. Natalie for example described a teacher's lesson and commented, 'it wasn't what I would do'. Kate specifically contrasted her style of teaching with that of the regular class teacher. She emphasised the teacher's insistence on children writing daily and in silence. As she contrasted her personal views on her role with those of the teacher, she illustrated her own concern for flexibility, variety and interaction and how:

> I felt that …….. my ability to be creative was very much blocked in literacy because I was told "The children must write every day. They have to be writing every single day in literacy."

No participants appeared wary of asserting ideas that ran counter to what they observed in school, although of course this may have been because they felt these ideas were more in line with what we, as interviewers, believed.

What was interesting about these opposition stories was that the principles and values they described were often linked generically to primary pedagogy and being a primary teacher, rather than specifically to literacy teaching. In telling them, these student-teachers could be seen as voicing back to us concepts they had encountered at university. However these were concepts developed across the course rather than specifically within literacy modules. Students spoke for example about using 'active learning' (Tom) 'pupil voice' (Rebecca),

'learning through interaction' (Tom), 'creativity' (Kate) and 'experiential learning' (Rosie). These opposition stories seemed to work more generally to position the participants as innovative, progressive teachers, rather than suggesting anything specific about their beliefs about literacy teaching.

It was not surprising that their understandings about literacy pedagogy intersected with more general understandings about primary teaching. (Indeed a teacher educator would hope this to be the case.) It was however noticeable that their opposition stories rarely linked to specific values and beliefs associated with literacy teaching. This brings us to the final section in which we consider how participants explored (or did not explore) tensions between literacies in everyday life and literacy at school.

Acknowledging tensions between literacy in school and everyday life

All participants located their experience of tensions between discourses in their descriptions of individual practices or practitioners. They rarely abstracted from this or problematised tensions between literacies at school and in everyday life. In different ways they argued for acknowledging the affective – for prioritising relationships and promoting enthusiasm, for example - but did not challenge the centrality of teaching literacy skills as fixed and unitary. They presented themselves as 'doing literacy differently,' as interpreting literacy requirements in ways that would motivate and engage children, but not as re-thinking what literacy in schools could or should be. Perhaps this was because of their perceptions of our views as interviewers, or because they lacked the tools for thinking about their experience in these ways. Or perhaps because the interviews did not lend themselves to this kind of reflection. In many ways this is unsurprising. As new teachers they were likely to focus on themselves rather than broader policy. However it is worth noting how one participant, Tom, *did* frame tensions between his own beliefs and expectations faced. We include this single

story as it seemed to work differently from the opposition stories described above. In this example, Tom seemed to acknowledge tensions not between different pedagogical positions (as in opposition stories) but in terms of the relationship between the literacy curriculum and literacy in everyday life.

Tom began by describing an incident which seemed to have caused him to question established approaches to literacy teaching:

> I was asked to teach like different genres and it sounds very simple, but then it was written down "Just refresh all the genres" and I was kind of like "What are all the genres? There's hundreds."

Here Tom seemed to be making links between literacy in school and literacy in life, critiquing the notion that there are set text-types for children to learn. As he reflected on this, he appeared to be arriving at alternative ways of understanding literacy and considering the implications of this for literacy provision:

> We're social beings, aren't we, and like as far as I'm concerned we're going to learn […] Children, they're going to learn […] and us like in the greater society and in the real world so to speak, there's a lot of social kind of interaction and if the children aren't aware of the social interaction and aren't very socially kind of fluent, then they're not really going to be successful. I think there's more to life and there's more to learning than how to link a sentence. Not in a bad way, I'm not undermining literacy but literacy's part of a bigger picture.

Tom's experiences seemed to be leading him to question what he perceived as over-emphasis on certain literacy practices. In doing so he also seemed to question his earlier conception of the literacy teacher he wished to be, which centred on his acquisition of detailed subject

knowledge. It is difficult to know exactly what Tom meant but we could see his reference to 'social learning' as challenging a skills-based discourse of literacy which he had been experiencing in school. Indeed he went on to begin to formulate alternative ideas about literacy pedagogy more aligned to socio-cultural ideas about literacy and literacy learning:

> I think it's important to have a wide range of like information texts and just a language rich environment where children can learn and maybe just where they can kind of experience things in different ways and, if possible, within a real life context to help them to understand things in the way that they might practice.

Tom seemed to be verbalising tensions here and we could perhaps see him as engaging in the kind of borderland narrative that Alsup (2006) described. Indeed it is possible that he developed these ideas through his participation in the two interviews and our invitation to reflect on literacy in school alongside literacy in everyday life. However, Tom also seemed to struggle to articulate an alternative model of literacy or literacy provision. For Alsup, a narrative becomes a borderland narrative when it mediates the navigation of competing discourses in ways that are professionally fulfilling and possibly empowering. Tom was the only participant to express a dissonance between literacy in everyday life and in the curriculum, but even he seemed unable or unwilling to explain the nature of the tensions he was experiencing.

Discussion: student-teachers' presentations of literacy and literacy pedagogy in a complex context

By juxtaposing accounts of literacy in everyday life with accounts of literacy pedagogy, this small-scale study has begun to unpick the complexity of these student-teachers' experiences.

Different interviews on other days managed by different interviewers may have generated quite different stories from those represented here and, as considered earlier, other researchers may have highlighted different elements. Moreover, these five participants – enthusiastic volunteers – cannot be seen as representative of their cohort, let alone student-teachers from other institutions or on other routes. Despite these limitations, we suggest that it is helpful to attend to what and how these student-teachers presented as they spoke of their literacy practices. These interviews illustrate the multiple ways that different strands of experience may intersect as individuals go about the task of becoming literacy teachers.

Participants described a richness and diversity across the range of literacy practices in which they engaged. These practices varied for individuals in line with their different interests, preferences and personal circumstances. However, for all there were differences in how they presented literacy within and outside school. In presenting literacy in their lives, they seemed to shift backwards and forwards between a series of binaries, presenting literacies sometimes as a set of skills and sometimes as diverse and changing; sometimes individual, sometimes social; sometimes digital, sometimes paper-based. When referring to classroom literacies, however, they tended to emphasise the fixed, the paper-based, and the individual.

In a study of this kind, we might expect participants interviewed to present perspectives reflecting the ideas, values and approaches explored during university-based literacy provision. There was evidence of this. It was perhaps unsurprising, for example, that Rosie talked most about emotional dimensions of literacy, which will have been addressed more fully during her early years course. Or that there was lots of enthusiasm for children's literature, which formed a strong spine of their university-based literacy provision. However, participants did not simply present back to us what we had presented to them during

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workshops and seminars. They drew on university and school-based experiences in individualised ways: relationships with children were significant within all participants' descriptions of their practice, for example, but their significance varied within and between individuals' accounts.

It is worth noting that participants' accounts of literacy teaching were emotionally charged. Over recent years there has been a growing interest in the significance of emotions to developing teacher identities (van Veen, and Lasky 2005). Research has highlighted how teaching is intimately connected to the ability to sustain relationships with pupils, colleagues and mentors and the significance of teachers' personal beliefs about the centrality of caring to their professional role (O'Connor 2008). In our study, participants' stories suggested that their literacy teaching was closely bound up with feelings about themselves and the teachers and children with whom they worked. There is a need to recognise how affective dimensions are experienced by student-teachers and how this is significant specifically to literacy. In doing so, it is also worth emphasising that the affective is also discursive (Wetherall 2012). As we see in Claire's and Rosie's stories, the subjective is highly significant to teaching but subjectivities are framed by different sets of values, beliefs and structures.

Practices encountered in school often won out over practices we had explored at university; success stories were frequently patterned by school discourses, for example in the emphasis on levels and targets. Participants did not, however, seem to be simply assimilating the discourses of literacy teaching encountered in school. They told opposition stories which suggested they were developing a personal and professional stance on literacy teaching which sometimes countered what they were expected to do in school, and which they were prepared to defend - to us at least. There was however very little reflection specifically in relation to literacy: either the scope and range of the literacy to be taught, or the appropriateness of

literacy pedagogy. Where they experienced tensions between personal pedagogical beliefs and school practices, these were usually about generic pedagogy. And where tensions did relate specifically to literacy- as in Tom's example- there was an uncertainty about articulating alternatives. All this highlights the messiness of student-teachers' experiences, illustrating how different discourses intersect with and inflect their experiences in different ways. Pedagogies initially designed to address socio-cultural dimensions may be re-framed within a skills discourse. Discourses that frame the purposes of primary teaching in different ways- as about care or empowerment or accountability for example –may pattern how students position themselves specifically in relation to literacy provision.

Implications: acknowledging richness and messiness

Designed to inform debates about the role of universities in supporting pre-service primary teachers' development as teachers of literacy, this small-scale study highlights dimensions that deserve further investigation. Personal literacy preferences, learning histories, experiences at university and 'being' or observing teachers may inter-weave in different ways to inform developing conceptualisations of literacy and literacy pedagogy. We suggest that paying attention to this is important if we are to effectively equip student-teachers to plan meaningful and relevant literacy experiences for their pupils. This is particularly the case given that the dis-connect between every-day and schooled literacies may be highly problematic for children's current learning and future lives (Levy 2009; Bearne 2003), and that social relationships have been seen as central to effective literacy pedagogy (Cremin 2009).

We argue that we need to see literacy as part of the professional knowledge landscape and that, by literacy, we should include not just student-teachers' experiences of literacy

education but, literacy in everyday life. Student-teachers' everyday literacy practices are a potentially rich starting point for critically examining and interrogating literacy in school (Graham 2008). We also suggest however that we need to see the significance of the broader professional knowledge landscape for how student-teachers position themselves as literacy teachers. Values, beliefs and experiences of primary teaching, and of learning more generally, will be significant to how students interpret and enact literacy teaching. If we are to encourage students to become critical, reflective practitioners who understand the diverse and changing nature of literacy and the implications of this for literacy learning, then we need to support them to review how they are drawing from their varied experiences to conceptualise literacy and position themselves as literacy teachers.

Like others (Alsup 2006; Miller Marsh 2002), we argue that we need to equip student-teachers to identify and review the discourses that shape their teacher identities. We need to enable them to review how dominant discourses shape what they do and also enable them to critique such discourses by examining, and encouraging them to inhabit, alternative positions. As work in the field of critical literacy has explored, however, naming discourses does not mean you can necessarily distance yourself from or relate differently to them (Janks 2002). We also need to acknowledge the role of the affective, of embodied and relational dimensions.

All this, we suggest, has implications for the role of the university. It is beyond the scope of this paper to make detailed recommendations for future practice and indeed this would be inappropriate for this small scale study. However we do suggest that these findings highlight the need to continue to support reflection and critique within initial teacher education. In a policy context where literacy is presented as unitary and fixed, we need to ensure that students are able to recognise the richness and diversity of literacy in everyday life. We also

need to ensure students recognise the messiness that results as competing discourses of literacy, literacy pedagogy, and primary education intersect in schools. We would argue that universities have an important contribution to make in supporting students to navigate these complex contexts. This might involve, for example:

- Sharing success and opposition stories and considering the understandings of literacy, literacy teaching and literacy teachers that underpin them;
- Recognising, valuing and exploring students' diverse literacies;
- Encouraging students to consider the how these play out in what they believe and what they do;
- Facilitating the sharing of narratives of tension and borderland narratives and encouraging reflection on these;
- Providing opportunities for literacy tutors to articulate their own positions in relation to literacy and teaching, and to see these as positioned;
- Acknowledging the affective dimension of literacy teaching and exploring the implications of this for how literacy is presented, experienced and performed.

Such approaches may better equip student teachers to navigate the complex context they face in the classroom, make informed decisions about approaches to teaching and learning literacy, and reflect on their implications. They may also increase their confidence to recognise the relevance and value of their personal use of literacy and ability to understand and actively position themselves in relation to the social, cultural and political context for literacy teaching in which they work.

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Appendix 1

Interview 1 Protocol

1. Talk through what you've prepared relating to the way you use literacies in your life.…

Prompts:

What has influenced the ways in which you use literacy now?

Can you identify any key incidents?

Or any key individuals …or significant relationships?

What kinds of texts have been important to you in your life? Why?

What has influenced how you feel about using literacy in these different contexts?

Which kinds of literacy do you feel are valued by others (who?why?)…and which are most important to you? (And why)

How have your uses of literacy changed? And why?

2. What's important to you as a literacy teacher?

What's led you to this?

e.g.

- key individuals/relationships

-has your teaching of literacy changed? If so, how?

3. Can you see any links between how you use literacy in your life and how you use it as a teacher?

Are there any tensions? If so, what…

4. You're about to go on placement…

How do you feel about teaching literacy?

What would you like to be like as a literacy teacher?

Interview 2 Protocol

1.Review of transcript from Interview 1.

Do you want to make any comments on what you talked about before?

Are there any experiences you want to add?

Is there anything you'd like deleted from the transcript?

2.Reviewing literacy on placement

Talk through your representation of the literacy teacher you want to be.

Last time you said you wanted to be this kind of literacy teacher [summarise what was suggested last time]

Tell me about a time when you were this kind of literacy teacher.
What enabled this to happen?

Tell me about a time when you felt you weren't this kind of literacy teacher.

What got in the way?

What kind of literacy teacher do you want to be in the future?

Do you think you'll be able to be this kind of teacher? Why?

Extension questions for any questions:

Can you tell me a bit more about…?

You mentioned 'xxxx' - can you tell me what you mean?

Can you give me an example of…?