Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The effect of beliefs about literacy on teacher and student expectations: a further education perspective

Kate Miller[a] and Candice Satchwell[b]*

[a]*University of Stirling, Stirling, UK;* [b]*Literacy Research Centre, Institute for Advanced Studies, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK*

With reference to the Literacies for Learning in Further Education TLRP project, this article suggests that teachers' and students' views of students' literacy capabilities are often influenced by a deficit model of literacy which does not take account of students' everyday literacy practices. The article revisits some of the literature on 'teacher expectancy', which has indicated that students' experience of education is affected by their teachers' expectations of them. We propose that these expectations are often shaped in turn by beliefs and attitudes about teaching, learning and literacy. We suggest that a recognition and respect of students' everyday literacy practices will enhance teachers' understanding of their students and increase potential for negotiating the borders between vernacular and curriculum literacies, thereby improving students' experience of Further Education.

Introduction

Further Education colleges provide diverse curricula for students of all ages. They provide vocational courses and training in a wide range of areas and provide a route into more academic courses and higher education. We have found that many students who study at FE colleges have had less than positive experiences at school and they have been classified as 'not very academic', a classification that follows the student into Further Education and may contribute to a negative expectancy effect. This does not reflect in any way on teachers' commitment to their students, or even on how they feel about them; it is more a case that low expectations can arise based on an incomplete picture of students' literacies. We are interested in the relationship between teaching and learning and in what impact teacher expectations may have on student experience, particularly in relation to teacher and student views on literacy.

*Corresponding author. Literacy Research Centre, Institute for Advanced Studies, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YD, UK. Email: c.satchwell@lancs.ac.uk

This article revisits some of the literature around 'teacher expectancy' which suggests that students' expectations (and realizations) of success or failure can be influenced by the expectations of their teachers. We suggest that teachers' views of their students are often conditioned by the teachers' views on literacy, which are in turn influenced by a prevalent, government-reinforced view of literacy, which sees it as a set of discrete skills to be taught and learned. This 'deficit model' of literacy can be particularly unhelpful for students who have not performed well in their academic careers at school. We will relate this idea to data collected on the Literacies for Learning in Further Education project.[1] The project is focusing on literacy practices required by curricula in Further Education—termed 'curriculum literacies' by Cumming *et al.* (1999), while also investigating the literacy practices engaged in by students in their everyday lives. Our argument is that if the deficit view of literacy is replaced in policy and practice by a social view of literacy, in which literacies of students can be acknowledged and even incorporated into the practices of college life, then teachers' views of their students' capabilities may be altered to such an extent that they are raised, hence enabling students to achieve more from their courses.

Expectancy and self-fulfilling prophecy

To date, most of the research into teacher expectancy has focused on schooling and the relationship between teachers and school students. Research has also been carried out on training and workplace learning (Livingston, 1969; Murphy & Campbell, 1999). However, there is no research into teacher expectancy in Further Education that we know of. Our focus here is on FE teachers' expectations of their students in relation to literacy, including the impact of teacher expectancy on the literacy demands of the curriculum.

Rosenthal and Jacobson in a book entitled *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968) explored the self-fulfilling nature of teacher expectations on pupil achievement. They concluded that 'the results indicated strongly that children from whom teachers expected greater intellectual gains showed such gains' (p. 184). Subsequently the concept has had broad and critical assessment within both the education and training literature, for example, Snow (1969), who concluded that *Pygmalion* had performed a disservice to teachers and schools, and perhaps worst of all to parents and children (p. 199). Subsequent research has shown that the creation of expectations in the classroom is much more complex and multidimensional than many of these studies suggest (Murphy & Campbell, 1999; Rist, 1970; Brophy & Good, 1970).

It is generally accepted that teacher expectations are made up of beliefs and actions based on those beliefs (Good & Brophy, 1997). Teachers' beliefs about students' potential academic achievement become their goals for the students and shape their daily classroom decisions and actions, including what they believe to be appropriate curricula and instructional practices, although these decisions are also frequently determined by prescribed curricula and targets set by funders. However, within these constraints, Good and Brophy (1997) argue that planning is guided by beliefs about what students need and how they will respond if treated in particular

ways, with decisions determined by how best to accomplish the expected goals for the students (p. 79). This is clearly sensible and appropriate when teachers' beliefs are well-founded, and research has examined how teachers can take advantage of the positive benefits believed to result from teacher high expectancy in terms of motivating their students; see for example, Green (2001). However, Delpit (1995) observes that when expectations are low, decisions concerning classroom activities are likely to include non-challenging and non-academic curricula and instructional methods. The result of this can be that, unwittingly, teachers teach less to the students instead of more.

It is important to locate the literature in its socio-cultural context. The so-called 'Pygmalion effect' was popular due to the fact that it was in keeping with contemporary sociological and political discourse in the US: Wineburg (1987) claims that the research findings were accepted and lauded at the time, primarily because they fulfilled what people expected or already believed. Wineburg states: 'The omnipotence of schooling is a compelling idea in a democracy, but sometimes popularity obscures falsehood' (1987, p. 44). In other words, there may well be other important factors outside of the school domain to consider in relation to student achievement, including the impact of material circumstances and social disadvantage.

Nevertheless, accumulated research over the past thirty years shows that high teacher expectations produce positive impact on individual students' perceptions and achievement, and low expectations produce negative impact (e.g. Babad, 1993; Brophy, 1983; Cooper & Tom, 1984; Harris, 1991; Jussim *et al.*, 1998; Rosenthal, 1994).

Most of the research in the area of teacher beliefs has been based on schools and training, with none being carried out in Further Education. Students in FE have very often come straight from a school environment, and their experiences there will have already had an impact on their self-beliefs. It is often the case that students who have not had positive learning experiences at school go on to colleges of further education. They are then given literacy and numeracy tests, which often confirm their own, and their teachers' negative views of their literacy capabilities. In these types of tests, literacy is viewed as a decontextualized skill that can be measured.

The more mature students who have had some work experience may have interacted with managers or trainers in the work place whose interactions with them will have impacted on their performance. Livingston (1969) found that the high expectations of superior managers were based primarily on what they think about themselves, about their own ability to select, train and motivate their subordinates. Murphy and Campbell (1999) argue that a trainer's positive expectations will make a trainee feel stronger mentally and more confident; consequently the learner demonstrates greater capability to manage a problem. Alternatively, where expectations are low trainees will deliver less, precisely because that is what is expected.

There are two points to be made therefore: one, that although the LfLFE project is clearly grounded in Further Education, research in other educational sectors is highly relevant; and two, that more work in the area of teacher expectancy needs to be carried out in Further Education settings.

Why and how teacher expectations shape classroom practice

If teacher expectations do have a significant influence then it is worth looking into where these expectations come from and how they can be challenged by teacher development, training, or collaborative participant research.

Bloomer and James (2001) have researched extensively in Further Education. Although their research for the Teaching and Learning Cultures (TLC) in Further Education TLRP project was not specifically looking at teacher expectations or issues related to differing conceptions of literacy, their analysis of teaching practices is helpful in considering why and how teacher expectations shape classroom practice. They state that practices are shaped by the values, beliefs and expectations that individuals bring to a situation. These are likely to include beliefs about knowledge and learning, political and moral values relating to the purposes and places of education, work and vocation, and expectations concerning the feasibility of certain educational aspirations (Bloomer & James, 2001).

The theoretical orientation of the socio-cultural school (including the TLC project) holds that we become who we are through participating in the communities around us. Learning and identity are therefore inseparable. Pryor and Crossouard (2005) argue that identities are multiple, performed and continually reconstructed through engagement with others. They see educational institutions as being especially powerful in sustaining the value and recognition accorded to particular forms of literacy and identity. They claim that summative assessment is one of the most powerful of these institutionalized discourses, because it creates texts that reify aspects of identity. These texts, because they are socially valued, work powerfully to shape an individual's sense of self in ways that can become self-confirming (Ecclestone & Pryor, 2003; Reay & Wiliam, 1999).

Timperly and Phillips (2003), in their research carried out in New Zealand, found that teacher expectations of student achievement changed over the period of six months of professional development in literacy. They found that the conditions required to achieve these changes involved a complex interplay of new knowledge in the form of redefining the reading task and of how to teach it, unanticipated changes in children's achievement, and teachers' feelings of self-efficacy in believing that they could make a difference.

Teachers' beliefs about students' potential academic achievement are, we suggest, shaped by their beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the nature of learning and, in relation to our specific interests, their beliefs about the nature of literacy. In the following section, we discuss competing views of literacy, which may underpin teachers' beliefs and consequent expectations.

Assumptions about literacy

The policy agendas of widening participation and social inclusion often position literacy as a key issue to be addressed. Literacy is identified as a significant factor affecting retention, progression and achievement in Further Education courses in the UK

(DfES, 2003). Much of that agenda focuses on basic skills and works with an individualised deficit model of literacy. Traditionally, literacy has been taken to mean reading and writing formal paper-based texts using predetermined rules surrounding the use of a national language. This view sees literacy as an autonomous value-free attribute lying within the individual—a set of singular and transferable technical skills which can be taught, measured and tested at a level of competence.

The New Literacy Studies (NLS), the theoretical basis for the LfLFE project, provides a social view of literacy that locates literacy practices (different forms of reading, writing and representation) in the context of those social relations within which they are developed and expressed (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Gee, 2003). This work has demonstrated the rich variety of literacy practices in which people engage as part of their daily lives, but has also shown that these are not always mobilised as resources within more formal education provision. Furthermore, NLS questions the view that literacy is a skill that can be transferred unproblematically from one domain to another. Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe a domain as a structured and patterned context in which literacy is learned; hence, literacy practices are always situated.

Kress (2003), Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and others argue that text-related practices increasingly involve an element of multi-modality and they have been influenced by digital and new technologies. They argue that the use of new technology has facilitated a shift in the semiotic landscape towards the iconic and visual as well as the written word. Significantly, they question whether educational provision has changed to accommodate these wider cultural shifts.

Ivanič (2004) explores the discourses around literacy (writing, in particular), and argues that teachers can benefit from an awareness of the different discourses in use and from recognizing which discourse(s) of literacy they are inhabiting themselves (p. 242). Ivanič identifies six discourses and we have found two to be particularly salient in respect of teachers' and students' expectations. In this article, we explore how different discourses of literacy might shape teachers' beliefs about literacy, and what effect they might have on their expectations of students.

The LfLFE project

The Literacies for Learning in Further Education (hereafter, LfLFE) research project involves collaboration between two universities—University of Stirling and Lancaster University—and four Further Education (FE) colleges in Scotland and England—Anniesland College in Glasgow, Lancaster and Morecambe College, Perth College and Preston College. A central concern for the project is to understand how the literacy practices required of college life and being a student relate to the wide range of students' literacy practices—the knowledge and capabilities they involve and the texts and modalities they address—which support learning across the curriculum. The project is taking a close look at the literacy requirements of four curriculum areas in each of four further education colleges. We are investigating the interface between the literacy requirements that students encounter on their courses and the literacy

resources that they bring with them to their studies. This interface can be described as potentially housing 'border literacies' which if they can be identified, could enable people to negotiate more successfully between vernacular and formal literacies within the FE context. These border literacies are potentially the literacy practices that students are already familiar with, adapted in order to become relevant in college contexts. Exploring the notion of border literacies has led us to investigate the perme-ability of the borders between literacy practices, and to consider how increasing their permeability can positively affect learning outcomes and ultimately serve as generic resources for learning throughout the life course.

One of the premises for the project is that the literacy practices of colleges are not always fashioned around the resources that students have developed in various domains and that students have more resources to draw upon than are presently being utilized in teaching of the curriculum. The intention is to achieve a critical under-standing of the movement and flows of literacy practices in people's lives: how literacy practices are ordered and re-ordered, networked or overlapped across domains (home-college, virtual-real, reading-writing), across social roles in students' lives and what objects might mediate such mobilisations. Ivanič *et al.* (2004, p. 10) warn that the processes of mobilizing these border literacies are 'not simple "border-crossings", but are complex reorientations which are likely to entail effort, awareness-raising, creativity and identity work on the part of the learner'. It is worth noting that we are not focusing on the literacy demands of the students' communication or key/core skills classes, but the reading and writing which are integral to and essential for success in their courses, what we have termed previously curriculum literacies, particularly in vocational areas.

The LfLFE project has used a collaborative ethnographic approach to capture the ways in which people make sense of the social context in which they find themselves. The data-gathering process has involved university-based researchers, FE practitio-ners and students to provide different perspectives on the literacy demands of college courses being researched, and the literacy resources of students taking those courses. In summary, methods used on the project have included the following:

1. a comprehensive collection of texts from two discrete units at different levels in each curriculum area;
2. individual or small-group interviews with students about their everyday literacy practices, using various methods of elicitation, including: a 'clock-face' activity in which students noted their literacy-related activities over a 24-hour period (see, Satchwell, 2005); photographs taken by students over the course of one week; an icon-mapping exercise (see, Smith, 2005);
3. interviews with students about their views on specific texts used in the delivery of their courses;
4. interviews with practitioners about their subject areas and about the delivery of the specific units in question; and
5. classroom observations and subsequent discussions between practitioners and observers.

Arising from this data, innovations have been formulated and are currently being trialled in the colleges by the FE practitioners themselves.

Practitioner researchers have produced unit case studies drawing on the data collected around each unit in collaboration with university-based researchers. Case studies have also been written for each student who participated in the research based on the data collected. This first level of analysis has contributed to the discussion in this paper in terms of illuminating the curriculum literacies involved in the delivery of particular units and how this relates to the lecturer expectations of their students. The views of the students on these curriculum literacies, in combination with the data around their everyday literacy practices, have provided the insights we have gained concerning the inter-relational dynamic of the interface between literacy practices in these two domains.

Expectations and further education: implications from the LfLFE project

There are a number of factors emerging from the data, each of which will be discussed below:

1. Some lecturers in FE are inclined to have low expectations of their students' literacy capabilities.
2. Some students in FE have low expectations of their own literacy capabilities.
3. Lecturers in FE respond to the climate of low expectations about literacy in the ways in which they devise teaching materials and methods.
4. Students' responses to teaching materials and methods are not always positive.
5. The LfLFE project challenges the root of these difficulties by looking at teachers' discourses around literacy, and recognizing what students actually do with literacy, both inside and outside of college.

Lecturers' low expectations of students' literacy capabilities

Through the data, we have found that some lecturers have low expectations of their students based on their rating of the students' literacy abilities from a skills perspective on literacy, reinforced by testing at entry to college.

In interviews, there have emerged elements of a negative discourse in relation to students' literacy expressed by both teachers and students themselves. This is a skills-based discourse of literacy where literacy is viewed as decontextualized ability to read and write. In interviews, teachers have made remarks such as:

> Some of them (students) even find difficulty if you give them material to read … to actually be able to concentrate on it and I do feel we have problems … I don't know where it comes from but they certainly don't seem to be so willing to work at that kind of thing nowadays.

There is anticipation that students will not read texts produced for them; and often the assumption that arises from this is that students are not able to navigate large amounts of text. However, this may relate to what Duchein and Mealey (1993), discussed in Alvermann (2003, p. 153), refer to as 'aliteracy'—'the capacity to read

but electing not to do so'. Students in interviews have to some extent reinforced this view themselves by saying that they tend not to read handouts 'until they have to'; that unbroken stretches of text are seen to be unattractive and 'boring'; and that they are more likely to pay attention to texts which are brightly coloured with pictures and a variety of fonts. Through extensive interviews and activities with students designed to elicit information about their literacy-related activities in their everyday lives, the project is working towards an understanding of students' literacies outside of college which might account for their preferences regarding texts, and hence for teachers' observations such as that quoted above.

Students' low expectations of themselves

The LfLFE project has revealed also a number of instances of students having low expectations of themselves in terms of literacy. Typical comments include, 'I'm no good at writing'; 'Don't look at my spelling—I can't spell!'. Both of these comments came from Childcare students who were deemed by their tutor to have been placed at a level below their capabilities, both achieving highly on their course, apparently in spite of their beliefs about themselves.

Teachers with low expectancy have been found to undervalue students' own views on what or how they learn (Brophy & Good, 1974). This in turn would contribute to students lacking confidence in their ability and their own decision-making capacity. For example, a student in the LfLFE project was observed writing things down only when they had appeared on the board, written by the teacher. Although she was asked to put down her own ideas first, she chose to omit this stage. This suggests an over-reliance on teacher input, determined by a lack of confidence in her own ability and entrenched over the period of her schooling.

Clearly, students' beliefs about themselves will have been informed by their previous teachers' attitudes and beliefs, as well as by numerous other factors which will have contributed to their sense of self. For those FE students who have been treated as 'low achievers' at school, their expectations of teacher behaviour may be that tasks are highly prescriptive. This in itself can lead to students carrying forward their attitude in school and believing that the task is more important than the aim; for example, that completing a sheet of exercises is more important than what the exercise is designed to teach (e.g. Anderson, 1981). Blumenfeld and Meece (1985) suggest a reason for this is if pupils do not understand the relationship between discrete activities and overall learning. Despite teachers' best efforts, in Further Education this lack of understanding is apparent when there is no direct purpose or explicit audience in evidence for students' written work. An example of this is the logbook that students taking NVQs are often required to complete. While their course may involve many different kinds of literacies with which the students engage with enthusiasm, the completion of the logbook is regarded as 'a chore' by both students and teachers. This seems to be related to the lack of a clear audience, although the purpose (of demonstrating competence, but not furthering learning) is reasonably clear. Alternatively, students on a course designed for training children's travel representatives tend to see

a clear purpose and potential audience for their literacy activities, which are all directly related to their future work. (These issues will be explored further in papers from the LfLFE project.)

Lecturers' responses to their low expectations

There are examples drawn from the research where teachers have expressed how their own perception of students' limited ability in literacy activities shapes the classroom practice in relation to literacy practices. One lecturer interviewed for the LfLFE project said that he did not expect students to read books because he knew they would not. Instead, he would give students abbreviated notes extracted from a relevant text using simple language that he thought the students would be able to understand. Another lecturer would do a revision session immediately before doing the assessment to ensure that the students had the 'correct' answers fresh in their minds. These examples illustrate that when expectations are low, decisions concerning classroom activities are likely to include non-challenging and non-academic curricula and instructional methods, with teachers teaching less to the students instead of more. Similarly, lecturers sometimes feel compelled to teach to assessment rather than exploiting the full scope of the course descriptors. It is not always clear whether lecturers do this because they are bowing to pressure over retention and achievement statistics, or whether it is due to the low expectations they have concerning their students' abilities to engage with a broader curriculum. In these cases, the staff often position themselves as helping students, but their low expectancy might actually mitigate against this.

To help students, staff in some areas indicated that they simplify teaching and assessment artefacts, a practice which they themselves identify as unsatisfactory 'spoon-feeding' (Edwards & Smith, 2005). For instance, a Computing lecturer commented about handouts to students:

> I think I really did just redo it and make it just easier for them to read and not so much …
> not so challenging I don't think.

This simplification often tends towards a reductionism, presenting students with a bulleted text, which decontextualizes the material presented. A problem arises when this decontextualization takes place to such an extent that the content of the artefact loses substantive meaning.

The climate of technical rationalism in Further Education colleges identified by Bloomer and James (2001) contributes to a reluctance to move outside the 'comfort zone' (Ecclestone, 2001). Ecclestone (2001, p. 11) explains how teachers' low risk approach to getting students through was reinforced by regulation from the Qualification and Curriculum Authority and awarding bodies to ensure close compliance with the assessment regime. She describes how teachers worked within a comfort zone of acceptable engagement, breaking complex assignments into separate tasks and coaching students through the requirements. It would seem that teaching practices are a result of a complex interplay between various factors relating to the learning

culture of the institution; but that teacher perceptions of student literacy abilities combined with the pressures of getting students through often result in unchallenging classroom practice.

Students' perceptions of literacy in Further Education

According to Eccles and Wigfield (1985), children ask themselves two general questions: (1) 'Can I succeed on this task?' and (2) 'Do I want to succeed on this task?'. These questions are also crucial in relation to students' perceptions of literacy activities in FE. Their answer to the first question will be influenced by their own self-beliefs, which will have been moulded by previous (and/or present) teacher expectations. Research by, for example, Parsons and Ruble (1977) suggests that as children get older, there is more likely to be an actual (rather than simply perceived) correlation between their expectations of success and their actual performance. The current climate of summative assessment contributes to this perception of students being defined by their previous performance in standardised tests (Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Assessment Reform Group, 2005). Therefore, if students get used to 'not succeeding', they expect not to succeed, and in fact do not succeed. Their answer to the second question, 'Do I want to succeed on this task?', will be crucially related to the first, 'Can I succeed on this task?'. However, it will also be influenced by their perceptions of how important the task appears to be; how much they like doing it; and how useful it might be to them either in the present or in the future. Other factors such as peer pressure may also have an influence. From initial analyses on the LfLFE project of students' views of the texts with which they are expected to interact on their courses, students' perceptions both of their own literacy and of the value and purpose of the texts emerge as factors in their engagement with those texts.

As described above, some staff identified strategies to help students interpret texts. However, the students interviewed suggested that their lack of interaction with materials produced for them is because they are unclear of their use and relevance and because they are not engaged by the tone, language and visual design of that with which they are presented. While we are cautious as to the extent to which this is the case for all students, there would appear to be an interesting issue that written information does not necessarily inform students pedagogically in the ways in which staff would like.

The overall tendency emerging from the data suggests limited engagement with extended texts in most subject areas based upon certain expectations of students by staff. However, when discussing this with students, we found that a significant proportion talked of the teaching artefacts as 'unchallenging'. This suggests that at least some of the strategies adopted by staff to assist students with their learning, based on their perceptions of the inadequacy of student literacy practices, are not effective for a lot of those students. Alternatively, some students interviewed about texts appeared to have 'skim-read' them and decided to filter out the information they considered to be irrelevant. For example, a group of Travel and Tourism students said they had focused only on the first page of a nine-page assignment handout. The

tutor had gone to some lengths to create a varied and interesting text, using a variety of font sizes and styles and including a scenario that was designed to contextualize the tasks for the students. However, the first page contained the assessment criteria provided by the awarding body, which the students clearly considered to be the most relevant and significant information required. The indication from both of these apparently conflicting sets of data, is that these students engaged in critically evaluating the texts supplied, both in terms of recognizing their limitations, and in identifying what they considered to be their redundancies.

LfLFE project: a challenge to the prevalent view

Interviews indicated that students engage in a wide range of screen- and page-based literacy practices in their everyday lives, in particular in relation to reading. These activities include reading a whole variety of paper-based texts ranging from CD inserts and instructions for computer games, to newspapers, magazines, journals, menus, recipes, novels and factual books, and screen-based texts such as web pages, computer games, mobile-phone text messages and Teletext. Their activities also include writing notes, stories, songs, text messages, e-mails, their own web pages or web-logs ('blogs'). Many of these media are multimodal in that they contain a mixture of sound, print and images, which can be still and/or moving. Our argument is that when students' literacy ability is defined *without* reference to these activities (and the surprise exhibited by lecturers about the range of activities which came to light indicated that they were not being taken into account), teacher expectancy is conditioned by what students do *not* do, rather than what they *do* do. Hence, the deficit-model of literacy is in play.

One of the possible beliefs of teachers which is challenged by the LfLFE project and by the social practices view of literacy, is that a student's uses of literacy in the classroom is an indicator of a student's potential. This belief derives largely from a skills-based view of literacy where students are seen as 'good' or 'bad' at reading and writing. By focusing attention on the reading and writing that students *do* engage in, the project is revealing the extent and diversity of people's everyday literacy practices and shifting attention towards a more positive and inclusive view of students.

There are also instances of students feeling—despite the messages they have previously received about their literacy levels—that they will succeed on their vocational or even academic courses. For example, a student doing 'A' level Media Studies described his handwriting as 'childish' and his spelling as 'diabolical'. He also admitted that he had often skipped school and had been drifting towards a life 'hanging around street corners, and getting into petty crime'. Yet, having decided on a life course and come to college to achieve it, he said, 'I know if I put my mind to it I can do whatever, within reason, whatever I want really.' A catering student who described disliking school, and particularly essay writing, was determined to become a chef and to do whatever was required of him to achieve the qualification. These are examples of students who have overcome their former teachers' expectations: they have survived 'against the odds', through a particular dedication to their subject, in these

cases coupled with a secure sense of identity and purpose. As Ivanič (2004) points out in a discussion of a social practices discourse of writing: 'people are likely to begin to participate in particular practices to the extent that they identify themselves with the values, beliefs, goals and activities of those who engage in those practices' (p. 234). An understanding of the vernacular literacy practices of students and the literacy practices of their present and future workplaces, therefore, could really help motivate participation in classroom activities.

The process of carrying out the research in collaboration with practitioners and students has already brought about certain changes to teaching practice and insights into the literacy practices of students and teachers, a procedure that could be seen as an important intervention in itself. The processes whereby reading and writing are learnt in formal educational settings are what construct the meaning of literacy for particular practitioners (Street, 1984, p. 8). The indications from the research are that FE teachers and their students have encountered literacy within a skills-based model in formal educational institutions and hence they often do not easily recognise the sort of practices that students engage in outside of their courses as literacy practices which may be drawn on in the learning of course objectives. The practitioners and students who have been actively involved in the research have to varying extents changed their perception of their own literacy practices and are being engaged in a dialogue on how these practices could be better drawn upon in the teaching and learning of their curriculum areas.

How a social practices view of literacy can alleviate the Pygmalion effect

If teachers'/lecturers' low expectancy of student achievement is based on a skills-based approach to literacy where they consider that the student has not learned enough literacy skills in former educational settings to be able to achieve well on their particular course, then maybe a change to a social practice view of literacy can go some way to counteract the impact on the students of that low expectancy. Staff awareness of the complexity of the curriculum literacies involved in studying and of the target workplace literacies that students are being prepared to engage in can go a long way in helping students to enter new discourse communities. The same literacy practices cannot be simply transferred from school to college to work. If teachers/lecturers are able to identify the different literacy demands among institutions and among different subject areas they can help their students navigate the various discourse communities. The project is currently trialling changes in participant tutors' practice emerging from a consideration of the wide range of literacy practices in which students engage in their everyday lives. These innovations are indicating that the raising of teachers' awareness of their students' literacy practices can impact on their teaching practice and expectations of student achievement.

Any theorization that represents teaching as presenting 'items' of knowledge to be internalised raises the same difficulty. With a diverse student body, no fixed start or end can be assumed and, consequently, no selection of items can be appropriate to the needs of all (Northedge, 2003, p. 19). In most classes, there is a diverse range of

experience in terms of literacy practices that students bring to the classroom. It is important that teachers recognise the potential of these as resources that can be drawn upon. The hope is that teachers can be more positive about their students' literacy practices by viewing them from a social practice perspective rather than as discrete skills that students either have or have not.

Socio-cultural theories of learning view teaching as enabling participation in knowing (Engestrom, 1987; Beach, 1985). Knowledge is seen as constituted in the flow of meaning produced between knowledgeable people when they communicate together. From this perspective, knowledge is not pinned down on the pages of a book. Rather, it is something that develops because of meaningful interactions and participation in communities of practice. Similarly, literacy practices cannot be chopped up and taught as discrete skills. They develop out of a process of discoursing, situated within communities. So, if teachers can mobilise elements of vernacular literacy practices that students are familiar with as a way in to more specialised literacy practices which they will need to develop a familiarity with in their chosen vocational area, then this may ease the transition from non-specialist discourse into the specialist discourse of the target knowledge community. The role of education, then, is to support participation in the discourses and literacy practices of unfamiliar knowledge communities.

In addition, because the specialist discourse of the vocational area is taught within a formal educational setting, it becomes a crucial factor that some literacy practices are implicitly privileged over others within this setting. Indeed, the language of the educational setting can be seen as a specialist discourse in itself, which means there may be two specialist discourses to be 'learnt'. Teachers' views of students' literacy are partly based on the disuse or misuse of literacy practices specifically associated with the educational system, rather than those of the vocational area. It is this recognition of the value-judgements surrounding literacy practices that leads to the marginalization of some literacy practices with which many students identify and their tutors frequently do not. By recognizing and respecting the unfamiliar practices, there is more of a chance of the borders being crossed in both directions (see Gee, 2003). The elements of border literacies that allow mobilization may include a recognition of students' own literacy practices having validity for both themselves and their tutors. If the concept of the Pygmalion effect is pursued, the consequent confidence in an educational context can lead to engagement with the relevant literacy practices therein (see Ivanič & Satchwell, forthcoming).

One of the primary functions of education is to construct intermediate levels of discourse, which model key aspects of target discourses, but allow relatively unskilled participation. Border literacy practices if they can be identified and incorporated into curriculum teaching and learning may help this process. At the very least the process of researching literacy practices has made teachers and students more aware of the diverse and different literacy resources that are available to them, so they can focus on what they can do rather than what they cannot do. This in itself has impacted on the expectations of teachers participating in the research, in so far as changes in their classroom practice for the project were based on students not being judged on what they may or may not have learnt at school but instead being

encouraged to draw actively on a diverse range of literacy experiences in different domains of their lives.

In conclusion, the LfLFE project has indicated that teachers' low expectations of students often derive from a skills discourse of literacy. A discourse of literacy as a social practice can lead to a very different view of students' capabilities. If policy and practice acknowledge, respect and work towards harnessing those literacies which students privately value highly, the Pygmalion effect can become a positive rather than a negative phenomenon for students in Further Education.

Note

References

Anderson, J. R. (1981) *Cognitive skills and their acquisition* (Hillsdale, NJ, Erlbaum).

Assessment Reform Group (2005) *The role of teachers in the assessment of learning* (pamphlet). Available online at: www.assessment-reform-group.org (accessed 16 June 2006).

Babad, E. (1993) Pygmalion—25 years after interpersonal expectations in the classroom, in: P. Blanck (Ed.) *Interpersonal expectations: theory and research applications* (New York, Cambridge University Press).

Barton, D. & Hamilton, M. (1998) *Local literacies: reading and writing in one community* (London, Routledge).

Barton, D., Hamilton, M. & Ivanic, R. (Eds) (2000) *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context* (London, Routledge).

Beach, K. (1995) Activity as a mediator of sociocultural change and individual development: the case of school-work transition in Nepal, *Mind, Culture and Activity,* 2(4), 285–302.

Bloomer, M. & James, D. (2001) Educational research in educational practice, paper presented at the *Regional Conference of the South West of England Learning and Skills Research Network*.

Blumenfeld, P. C. & Meece, J. L. (1985) Life in classrooms revisited, *Theory into Practice,* XXIV(l), 50–56.

Brophy, J. (1983) Research on the self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher expectations, *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 75(5), 631–661.

Brophy, J. & Good, T. (1970) Teacher communication of differential expectations of children's classroom performance: some behavioural data, *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 61, 365–374.

Brophy, J. & Good, T. (1974) *Teacher-student relationships: causes and consequences* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston).

Cooper, H. & Tom, D. (1984) Teacher expectation research: a review with implications for classroom instruction, *The Elementary School Journal,* 85(1), 76–89.

Cumming, J., Wyatt-Smith, C., Ryan, J. & Doig, S. (1999) The literacy-curriculum interface: literacy demands of the curriculum in post-compulsory schooling, *Queensland Journal of Educational Research,* 15(1), 133–139.

DfES (2003) *21st century skills: realising our potential* (London, Crown Copyright).

Delpit, L. (1997) *Other people's children; cultural conflict in the classroom* (New York, The New Press).

Duchein, M. A. & Mealey, D. C. (1993) Remembrance of books past … long past: glimpses into aliteracy, *Reading Research and Instruction,* 31(1), 84–97.

Eccles, J. & Wigfield, A. (1985) Teacher expectancies and student motivation, in: J. B. Dusek (Ed.) *Teacher expectancies* (Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.).

Ecclestone, K. (2001) Learning in a comfort zone: cultural and social capital in outcome-based assessment regimes, paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Conference,* University of Leeds, 13–15 September 2001.

Ecclestone, K. & Pryor, J. (2003) 'Learning careers' or 'assessment careers'? The impact of assessment systems on learning, *British Educational Research Journal,* 29(4), 471–487.

Edwards, R. & Smith, J. (2005) Swamping and spoon-feeding: literacies for learning in further education, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training,* 57(1), 47–60.

Engestrom, Y. (1987) *Learning by expanding: an activity theoretical approach to developmental research* (Helsinki, Orienta-Konsultit).

Gee, G. P. (2003) *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy* (New York, Palgrave McMillan).

Good, T. & Brophy, J. (1997) *Looking in classrooms* (New York, Longman).

Green, J. (2001) *High school graduation rates in the United States* (New York, Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute).

Harris, M. (1991) Controversy and cumulation: meta-analysis and research on interpersonal expectancy effects, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 17(3), 316–322.

Ivanič, R. (2004) Discourses of writing and learning to write, *Language and Education,* 18(3), 220–245.

Ivanič, R., Edwards, R., Fowler, Z. & Smith, J. (2004) Literacy practices as resources for learning: issues of identity, multi-modality and fluidity, TLRP Annual conference.

Ivanič, R. & Satchwell, C. (forthcoming) Networking across boundaries: connecting and transforming the literacies of research, practice and theory, *JAL Special Issue, New Directions in Academic Literacies Research.*

Jussim, L., Smith, A., Madon, S. & Palumbo, P. (1998) Teacher expectations, in: J. Brophy (Ed.) *Advances in research on teaching,* Vol. 7 (Greenwich, CT, JAI Press, Inc.), 1–47.

Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the new media age* (London, Routledge).

Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2001) *Multimodal discourse: the modes and media of contemporary communication* (London, Hodder Arnold).

Livingston, J. (1969) Pygmalion in management, *Harvard Business Review,* 8, 193–210.

Murphy, D. & Campbell, C. (1999) The Pygmalion effect reconsidered: its implications for education, training and workplace learning, *Journal of European Industrial Training,* 23(4–5), 238–251.

Northedge, A. (2003) Rethinking teaching in the context of diversity, *Teaching in Higher Education,* 8(1), 17–32.

Parsons, J. E. & Ruble, D. N. (1977) The development of achievement-related expectancies, *Child Development,* 48, 1075–1079.

Pryor, J. & Croussouard, B. (2005) A sociocultural theorization of formative assessment, paper prepared for the *Sociocultural Theory in Educational Research and Practice Conference,* University of Manchester, September 2005.

Reay, D. & Wiliam, D. (1999) 'I'll be a nothing': structure, agency and the construction of identity through assessment, *British Educational Research Journal,* 25(3), 343–354.

Rist, R. (1970) Student social class and teacher expectations: the self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education, *Harvard Educational Review,* 40(3), 411–451.

Rosenthal, R. (1994) Interpersonal expectancy effects: a 30-year perspective, *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* 3, 176–179.

Rosenthal, R. & Jacobson, L. (1968) *Pygmalion in the classroom* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston).

Satchwell, C. (2005) Literacy around the clock: an examination of the 'clock activity' as a method for identifying everyday literacy practices with further education students, *Proceedings of 3rd*

International Conference—What a Difference a Pedagogy Makes: Researching Lifelong Learning and Teaching (2005) (University of Stirling, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning).

Smith, J. (2005) How students' everyday literacy passions (practices) are mobilized within the further education curricula, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training,* 57(3), 319–334.

Snow, R. (1969) Unfinished Pygmalion: review of Pygmalion in the classroom, *Contemporary Psychology,* 14, 197–200.

Street, B. (1984) *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, CUP).

Timperley, S. & Phillips, G. (2003) Changing and sustaining teachers' expectations through professional development in literacy, *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 19(6), 627–641.

Wineburg, S. (1987) The self-fulfilment of the self-fulfilling prophecy: a critical appraisal, *The Educational Researcher,* 16(9), 28–37.