

**An exploration of teacher - pupil
communication, narrative thinking
and learning**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports some of the complex issues encountered, researched and addressed in the context of participatory, practitioner action research to support student learning in educational settings. Research methods were devised in response to genuine school-based situations working with colleagues within communities of practice. The focus is the interplay between teachers' communicative competence and teaching styles and students' communicative competence and learning abilities.

A series of four linked studies are reported which involved several hundred participants from pre-school to adult in a range of socio-economic and cultural settings, using mixed methods including interviews, observations and a comparative study. Improvements are reported in the cognitive-linguistic ability of students in relation to their narrative abilities following interventions conducted in classroom settings. The interventions involved support for narrative thinking and communication skills based around exploratory talk. The results suggest a positive relationship between students' communicative and narrative competences and the potential for effective academic learning. Nursery school observations and interviews in Japan revealed informed and effective educational and cultural support for young children's narrative competence and Japanese participants' comparatively advanced development in narrative thinking.

The results of the studies suggest that teachers' classroom interactions involving exploratory talk serve to support and help improve students' narrative competence and inner speech to support formal academic learning. The findings are discussed in terms of pedagogical knowledge, school culture and the UK educational climate.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The general aim of this thesis is to explore and extend an understanding of how the use of talk, and specifically narrative, enhances children's learning in educational settings. It investigates children's use of narrative at different ages and educators' support for classroom talk. The studies reported are situated within the broad field of learning, culture and social interaction. Key concepts are examined within sociocultural theory as the main explanatory conceptual framework.

The thesis seeks to explore how children and educators communicate in the classroom generally and in particular how this supports pupils' narrative thinking and competence. In so doing it seeks to examine and gain greater understanding of the relationship between communicative competence, the development of narrative thinking and learning. It is a practitioner enquiry using an action research model, systematically exploring componential and contextual models of classroom talk and pedagogy. In particular it examines the relationship with cognitive-linguistic development, incorporating developmental and international perspectives. The studies include a cross-cultural comparison of young children's narrative competences, teacher-pupil communication and pedagogy.

This chapter sets out the reasons for the study, including the author's background and position, its aims, research questions and model of action research. It also introduces a mixed methods approach to the action research, the comparative aspects and the approach to the overall analysis. Chapter Two examines research and literature related to the development of both communicative and narrative competence and its relationship with cognitive development and learning. It also examines studies of classroom communication and pedagogy and their role in supporting these processes; this includes international comparative perspectives. Chapter Three sets out the overall methodology of the action research cycle based on my ontological and epistemological perspectives.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven set out the research questions, methods and results of four enquiries in which educators and students in schools participate, as well as local authority and university staff from another culture. Analysis and reflection upon the findings of each study inform the design of the next. The final chapter provides an overview of the findings in relation to the research questions and the literature, with reflection upon ways forward for pedagogy and further research.

1.2 Aims

The overarching aims are for the findings and analyses to shed light on the development of children's narrative competence by examining how children and educators communicate in the classroom in order to identify teaching strategies which support pupils' narrative thinking and improve learning.

Specifically the aims of the enquiry are to contribute to:

1. Greater and broader knowledge and consideration of the nature of children's narrative thinking across age-groups.
2. Greater understanding of the relationship between interpersonal communication, the development of narrative thinking, learning and achievement.
3. Enhanced awareness of classroom pedagogies which enable pupils to develop and improve narrative thinking.
4. Cross-cultural research findings and discussions related to narrative development and pedagogy

I believe that the real-life issues, research outcomes and reflections across age-groups, social and cultural settings reported will provide informative insights. I consider that the qualitative findings and discussion are complemented, triangulated and further illuminated by the perspectives of data that are quantifiable and allow replication in different contexts in order to consider similarities and differences in participants' responses. I suggest that fresh perspectives will be provided by the data, some of which may have been gathered for the first time.

My intended outcome is to arrive at research conclusions which will facilitate successful engagement with the educational issues identified prior to and arising in the course of the research.

1.3 Author Positionality

In recent years there have been a stream of high profile, macro concerns and debates at national levels about learning and under-achievement (Siraj-Blatchford, Mayo, Melhuish, Taggart, Sammons and Sylva, 2011; Ofsted, 2012). Yet during my career in the school system, dealing with children's difficulties in learning and behaviour, it has not just been the impact of official reports that have stirred my deep interest and involvement (e.g. Bercow, 2008; Alexander, 2010; CBI, 2012). Rather, it has been my experience and concern at micro and meso levels as teacher, senior leader, school governor and teacher

educator that have spurred me to conduct school-based enquiries and act upon their outcomes. In professional collaboration with international colleagues over twenty years I have also explored education in schools and universities around Europe and the Pacific Rim, to 'reflect on ways of thinking and doing things' (Rogoff, 2003, p.362).

Working at the 'sharp end' of education I have observed and reflected upon the failures and frustrations of students in classrooms over many years, addressing the serious difficulties of a consistent number needing support in learning and behaviour. These failures are amplified in the on-going concerns and frustrations of many educators and parents regarding teaching, academic performance and attentiveness. However much educational attention in the UK currently remains centred on exam standards and improving specific 'skills' in areas such as reading and phonics. In contrast, my personal and professional experience has highlighted the knowledge domain of children's interrelated cognitive-linguistic development as the way to take learning forward. The issues examined in this thesis emanate directly from some of the complex issues that I have encountered, researched and addressed in the context of collaborative school-based problem-solving related to pupils' learning, behaviour and achievement.

1.4 Justification for the Study

I arrived at this research from a range of perspectives. The first is a key pragmatic principle that I have developed and worked within education. Secondly, there is a close relationship between oral communication and learning - and that the former is key to ensuring children's academic progress. In the course of everyday teaching I have observed that many children start school with insufficient language and communication competences to cope with structured learning experiences and have encountered little formal talk. In my experience supporting learners of all ages with difficulties in progress and behaviour I have found narrative thinking to be a major weakness. For example, when taking lessons or arranging classroom support for low-attaining students I have found many who struggled due to significant difficulties in processing their ideas. In all the settings where I have worked I have observed students in classes who could not articulate ideas or events in oral form, let alone transfer them into writing; this included many young offenders who still faced such challenges at ages 20 to 23. When managing the support of some students I have noted that such difficulties resulted in frustration and often led to anger management problems.

The barriers caused by under-achievement, poor attention and behaviour are highlighted by international research (Alexander, 2004; Kaczmarek, 2005; 2011; Minami, 2002;

Mercer, 2008). The longitudinal study Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) draws attention to the significant repercussions of early delays in language development. The literature shows that humans need to use narrative thinking to generate and process thoughts and ideas in a logical sequence. In order to report and explain events and experiences in speech (Vygotsky, 1978; Hymes, 1974; Locke and Ginsberg, 2003; Abiko, 2011). The use of narrative is also drawn upon to put across ideas in the complex process of writing with its abstract demands of describing times and places not in the here and now (Myhill, 2006; van Oers, 2012). The findings of Kutnick, Siraj-Blatchford, Clark, McKintyre and Baines (2005), MacBeath, Galton, Steward, McBeath and Page (2012) and Alexander (2010; 2012) also reflect this close relationship between oral communication, narrative thinking, learning and literacy.

The second principle is that when such delays are not addressed the problems inevitably become exacerbated. Frustrations associated with understanding, expression and writing are often more marked when pupils leave primary school and encounter the formal teaching style of the secondary curriculum (Bercow, 2008; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). However the problem does not stop there as I have encountered many students continuing to experience difficulties in communicative competence and narrative thinking after leaving school, as echoed in reports by industry (CBI, 2012) that 71% of employers wish for schools to teach better 'employability' skills including 'communication'. A related issue in my career has been support for teachers' own communicative competences when dealing with and supporting these types of difficulties and frustrations.

The third principle for this enquiry is related to international educational comparisons of comparative tests, existing data and literature of selective of education systems for policy purposes. However test results showing how UK students are represented are of great interest, such as the 'TIMSS' reviews conducted by the International Association for the Assessment of International Achievement (IAAIA) in which the UK regularly ranks around middle (Mullis, Martin, Foy and Arora, 2012). This position is consistent in the 'PISA' surveys by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013) in which the UK is in 25th place among 70 countries and regions.

Such interest in the education of higher ranking countries in Scandinavia and the Pacific Rim (OECD, 2013) must be countered with the dangers of misusing such comparisons to imply simplistic cause-and-effect relationships between curricula and pedagogies. As Alexander (2012, p.19) argues, it is not possible to reduce education to 'PISA performance' which 'tests what it tests, and no more' (p.6). In contrast some observation-based studies examine historical and cultural influences on values and school curricula,

while some qualitative studies examine the social, cultural and educational contexts of children's lives (Tobin, Yeh and Mayumi, 2009; Alexander, 2002; 2012).

The fourth aspect relevant to this research stems from experience and knowledge acquired in many roles throughout my education career, some of which are reflected in the settings in which the enquiries are conducted. The roles held include primary school teacher, secondary teacher, subject leader, head of special needs in several settings, further education, as a tutor of young offenders, senior management and school governance. The enquiries were undertaken for purposes including support for children's learning, social justice, increasing professional understanding and contribution to theory (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988b). The work of Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009) also draws upon several years of observation, research and participation in schools and universities in contrasting cultural and linguistic settings including England, Scotland, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and Japan, a country within the Pacific Rim. Prior to this research I had undertaken two lengthy study visits in Japan when I conducted in-depth observations in kindergartens, elementary and high schools, interviewed children, teachers and parents. I collaborated with university partners in discussions related to cultural values and practices including parenting and education. The outcomes and my personal reflections generated many questions related to teachers' beliefs and children's learning which led to the decision to include Japan in the final study in this thesis.

1.5 Research Questions

I have consistently found the matters relating to communication and narrative, discussed above, to be key issues in teaching and learning across all age-groups from nursery to adulthood. As a teacher-researcher I sought to explore them in depth in this thesis. Through its design and methodology the enquiry investigates the complex question of whether problems related to narrative and under-achievement underpin difficulties in school when children are required to read text or write a narrative. I reflect upon whether the problem becomes most visible when its content reaches a level beyond that of the child's narrative ability. These matters gave rise to the research questions addressed in this thesis, as set out below.

1. What is the nature of English children's narrative competence in the first years of secondary school?
2. What are the perceptions of English secondary school teachers and teaching assistants regarding their personal confidence and competence in the area of classroom communication, as related to supporting pupils' development?

3. What is the nature of English children's narrative competence immediately prior to school entry and how does this compare with children of the same age in a contrasting culture, in this Japan case as a country from within the Pacific Rim?

4. What is the nature of teaching strategies, styles of teacher-pupil communication, the development of children's narrative competence, and their inter-relationship, from UK and Japanese educational perspectives?

The enquiry examines the extent to which oral narrative process prompts the assembly of ideas and facilitates comprehension and expression in support of learning. It explores students' competence in narrative thinking and their ability to process and present their thoughts in words as the foundations on which school learning is built. It also examines the role of culture, pedagogy and adult scaffolding of young children's narrative development from a comparative, Japanese perspective.

1.6 Research Design

The research design embraces an ontological assumption based on the socio-cultural paradigm, in examining pupil and educator communicative competence (Bryman, 2008). I used practitioner action research on a four-part cyclical basis, each involving one study. The series of four linked studies were explored and I responded with reflexivity to the range of findings and issues which arose (Stenhouse, 1975), each contingent on the next. As social action involves a developing interaction with knowledgeable and reflexive others, interpreting and making sense of the actions of others may lead to partial explanations of the truth and remain indeterminate (Bohman, 2000).

The outcomes of each individual study informed the focus and design of the next. Secondly, the ages of the participants were to range from age four years to adult, therefore methods needed to be both sensitive and appropriate. Decisions on the overall methodology and individual research designs were therefore arrived at on a timely, considered and pragmatic basis. Choices of paradigms and methods were made in relation to each individual study to best address the issues and questions under scrutiny.

The mixed methods approach is situated principally in social ontology and constructivist social epistemology

On this basis I argue that the epistemological assumption, which examines knowledge about the development of language and narrative and how they are supported by adults, complements the ontological assumption. I used aspects of the epistemological assumption in the normative paradigm, initially scoping the nature of the phenomenon

using quantitative indicators of the range of participants' oral narrative competences. This provided the springboard for exploring deeper insights by privileging qualitative data in order to triangulate assumptions more holistically. The two approaches are inter-related or 'integrated' in this enquiry (Plowright, 2012).

Implementation of the action research projects took place amid the gravity and urgency of school matters and time-frames, taking 'account of theoretical underpinnings' (Myhill, Jones and Hopper, 2006, p.122) and my collaborative comparative experience of education. The studies draw upon the experiences, views and competencies of participants from a wide range of ages, socio-economic settings and educational contexts. Working collaboratively with colleagues in communities of practice I sought to examine the development of children's narrative competence as socially constructed, through sharing the views and experiences of participants in accordance with hermeneutics (Berger and Luckman, 1967). Experienced educators, teachers and parents from nursery, elementary, secondary and higher education settings, including university tutors, teachers and teaching assistants, participate in observations, questionnaires and interviews. English secondary school educators' perceived confidence and competence in the area of classroom communication and their views on classroom talk are examined. A study of pre-school children's narrative competences in the UK is replicated in Japan. The results are discussed and pedagogy, values and beliefs of Japanese early education are explored in relation to field study, observations and interviews conducted in Japanese kindergartens and schools.

Mixed methods combine with a pragmatic, integrated methodology in which the four cycles of action research examine the relationship between classroom communication, pedagogy and the development of children's communicative and narrative competences. In two studies of educators' views, the methods of unstructured and semi-structured interviews and questionnaires are used. In studies of children's narrative competence the method of asking developmentally appropriate oral questions in individual interviews is used with qualitative analysis and some numerical analysis. For the collection of data related to child-child and child-adult interactions in schools the method of naturalistic observation is used.

By privileging qualitative data, the quantitative data supported the early analysis. Scott and Usher (2011, p.29) argue that the complex nature of the 'life world of individuals' is inadequately informed by positivist methods. Gadamer (2004, p.175) also highlights the contextual complexity of educational research: '...what we encounter says something to us...'. Across the four studies my purpose was to access different types of information

that were 'complementary' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). I sought to draw upon different contexts, different participants and different paradigms of information gathering. The relative contributions of the qualitative and quantitative data were integrated with the analyses triangulated and considered within an 'holistic' integrated paradigmatic framework (Plowright, 2012). The American Educational Research Association (2002, p.106) considers using 'robust methodological pluralism' to be essential in complex educational inquiries.

1.7 Context for the Cycles of Action Research

In the school-based enquiries presented in Chapters 3 to 7, I sought to take a collaborative, pragmatic, analytical, reflective and reflexive approach. In the spirit of practitioner action research I drew upon personal experience and academic knowledge to address and reflect upon educational challenges. In implementation of the research and its analysis I was motivated by the aim for reliability in evaluating ways of interacting with learners, underpinned by theory, that effectively support pupils' learning, to respond with reflexivity and to validly inform further research.

Reliability, traditionally associated with quantitative methods, is redefined in the qualitative paradigm. Space is given to participants' voices interpreting the same phenomenon and events (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.300), emerging from 'dialectical' principles (Winter, 1987) of sharing meaning. The researcher reflects on asserting the truth through reflexivity, representing participants' voices. This is a collaborative relationship between the 'researcher and researched' (Ashworth, 2008, p.21). In the data collection and interpretation, I sought to involve another tutor to act as a critical friend, particularly with regard to assessing students' communicative competences in the intervention studies in Study 1.

The skill in representing others depends on the ability and continuous effort of the researcher to respect how collective knowledge accumulates in a spirit of care for participants' wellbeing. According to Gadamer (2004, p.146) dialectical reflexivity affords direct expression to the genuine voice of those whose 'life worlds are being absorbed' in rich textual meanings, resulting in the reliability of 'knowledge in life itself' (Gadamer, 2004, p.229). Validity in the qualitative approach is realised through the persuasiveness of the research phenomenon being ultimately conceptualised as trustworthy.

Reliability is thereby related to a range of perspectives in which subjectivity is viewed as a strength, forming the dialectical principle of 'voices in play' (2004, p.152). In these studies listening to the voices of participants in different educational settings across countries

sharpened my reflexivity, or consciousness, as a researcher as to the genuine nature of how knowledge is constructed by others. For example listening to the voice of Edna in Study 2, the staff member who echoed: 'it makes me unhappy, frustrated when I know I can/should communicate better. It can have some effect on the recipient too.' Also that of Carol, the pupil in Study 3, who said 'You get a Big Bunch of ideas' when working with others'.

The four studies herein which cover a wide range of ages and social spheres were conducted during the most recent periods of my career. An analysis during personal academic study uncovered that I had developed and applied a personal, intuitive pedagogy based upon an internalised academic model. It is a model of teaching, learning and assessment developed in the context of sharing my own and colleagues' professional successes, failures and dilemmas. Since its initial development this model was used and adapted in schools and classrooms prior to taking its present form, which underpins one of the studies in the thesis.

The research process took place amid the responsibilities and urgency of school-based implementation; as a result, school time-frames influenced some of the designs and methods of the individual studies. Some were related to school-based challenges that were acute and urgent. Each issue was identified, researched, analysed and critically reflected upon, most in collaboration with staff within 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1998). Working in the domain of practitioner research I sought to gain insights and an understanding of the social and educational issues emerging in the course of the enquiries. These aspects are situated in the field of social epistemology (Fuller, 2002) in which the researcher has an integral and active role focusing legitimately on everyday experiences as its subject matter. The continuing spiral of action research explores through narratives within everyday social interaction how meaning is continuously constructed and re-constructed.

I sought to take into account the different meanings and influences that are part of the social world and that the qualitative data acquired are subject to personal interpretation by both myself and the participants. In this regard I acknowledge my involvement in the data collection and analysis, and the role of interested researcher (McCormick and James, 1988). This is particularly relevant to the studies conducted in the (first) setting in which I worked. I therefore sought to monitor my involvement, personal reactions, interactions, selections and research assumptions by examining my personal views, motives and subjective interpretations. In the light of the data obtained I discussed with colleagues, reflected upon and addressed these with reflexivity. I regard reflexivity as connected to

intersubjectivity through interactions between participants in the course of the research. This interaction produces the shared knowledge, i.e. the 'conversations' between the researcher and the materials that are the heart of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1983; Colombo, 2003) and the 'hermeneutic cycle'. The latter is based on a circular relationship involving perspective taking and interpretations in which knowledge forms an interactive spiral. It involves an anticipation of meaning in which the whole envisaged becomes 'actual understanding of the parts' (Gadamer, 2004; p.291) and the interaction between them, emerging through the actions of participants. An effective example was recorded in Study 3 where staff commented on the responses of three groups working in a new study centre. Tutor 4 reflected that although the groups appeared to be engaged in their work, the 'quietest group' may not have been the most productive. Tutor 3 also felt that the independent groups appeared to have 'lost focus'. Tutor 2 felt that although the group was busy there was less 'swopping of ideas through dialogue'. Tutor 1 said she had seen the students in a 'different light'. This was triangulated by student Lena who gained confidence by interacting with and getting to know some of the students in her class for the first time, adding 'I learnt more about people who can't do certain things' (Study 3, section 6.5.2).

The approach developed by Gadamer (1983, p.361) is useful because it recognises that through dialogue the process of question and answer, give and take, including talking at cross purposes, serve to reveal others' viewpoints. The process communicate their meanings, which is the dynamic task of hermeneutics. He defines this knowledge as culturally located, which incorporates the concept of 'horizon, expressing a 'superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have' (Gadamer, 2004, p.304). Gadamer (2004, p.350) illuminates how further conversations result in an 'openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself'.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature related to the key areas of the thesis. That is, the nature of children's narrative competence as a 'universal, basic mode of thought' intricately related to later learning (Minami, 2002, p.36) and the nature of support for the process. The focus is on the internal, external and cultural factors found to impact on the path and rate of this aspect of language development during the pre-school and primary school years, i.e. the formative period leading up to secondary education. In addition the critique seeks to bring together relevant research findings, theories and pedagogical recommendations with which to inform the design of studies in this thesis.

The aims of this review and critique of the literature are to:

- Explore studies across disciplines within and beyond education which provide insights and data regarding the role of narrative competence in the learning process and how it is best supported by adults.
- Use research findings and comparative perspectives to inform evaluation of policies, education cultures and pedagogies in relation to talk, narrative competence and learning.
- Examine the methodologies of studies exploring children's narrative competencies and supportive pedagogies in order to use this information to contribute to the design of the enquiries conducted in this thesis.

The review includes aspects of research conducted several years ago but yet to be fully drawn upon in education for the scope, depth and insights they offer into the relationship between language, narrative and learning. This research, some of it drawn from beyond the field of education, also throws light on the support for children's narrative competence in the home and school. A second domain reviewed investigates the nature of pedagogy and teacher-pupil communication in the wider context of the 'culture' of education and classrooms. The review examines the type of classroom interactions that support learning or knowledge acquisition suited to children's later participation as adults in the global economy of the twenty-first century (McPhail, 2010). As the development of children's communication skills are found to be 'more embedded' within education in other cultures than in our own (Alexander, 2010, p.24), the review includes studies from comparative perspectives.

In summary, this chapter examines literature related to concepts and issues set out in the following sections:

- 2.2 Theories of language development, communicative and narrative competence.
- 2.3 Support for language by parents in the home.
- 2.4 Support for language by teachers: the nursery, primary and secondary school
- 2.5 Support for talk: educational policy and culture
- 2.6 The relationship between narrative competence, social context and attainment
- 2.7 Support for language: policy, culture and practice
- 2.8 Developing narrative competence: comparative educational perspectives.
- 2.9 Summary of findings and points for follow-up research
- 2.10 Concluding comments

Overall, the critique below seeks to provide a situated context for examining the fundamental but often invisible issue of talk in the classroom, from UK and comparative perspectives, with specific emphasis on the use of narrative.

2.2 Theories of Language Development, Communicative and Narrative Competence

The study of narrative falls within the domain of language development but draws upon a wide range of disciplines and paradigms. Theories of language acquisition and development, described by Minami (2002) as 'both a manifestation and product of a culture' (p.19), have flourished over the past century, with each leaving its mark on knowledge about both child-rearing and education and on the culture of schools. The knowledge, beliefs and 'cognitive actions' which influence what teachers do and the methods they use are also associated by many with their personal 'culture' (Lave & Wenger 1988) and that of the school (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob 1988). Educational culture is defined by Schein (1985, p.6) as 'the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared' by teachers which 'operate unconsciously... in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion.' It is found to particularly influence teachers' behaviour towards children 'at risk' (Lave et al., 1988) and demonstrates a close relationship between pupils' progress and attainment (Mortimore et al., 1988; 1992).

This section examines a range of theories related to the development of children's language and narrative thinking, including their relationship to teaching. Having examined each theory there follows a brief critique of how the theory has influenced educational

policy, the culture of schools and teachers and classroom practice as it relates to the support of children's language, learning and narrative development.

2.2.1 Behaviourist Theory

Behaviourist theory predominated in the early twentieth century and is often termed 'learning theory' and 'traditional'. It informed UK educational practice for many years, some would say 'dominated' it (Minami, 2002), regarding how children can be taught and trained in formal class settings and it continues to underpin some teaching methods today (Cook-Gumpertz, 1986). It predominantly applies the approach of B.F. Skinner, who views both learning and language as involving complex, linked associations which are learned through 'selective reinforcement'. Skinner's 'environmentalist' theory (Skinner, 1957; 1961, p.380) suggests that language is constructed through stimulus-response, trial and error; he refers to language as 'verbal behaviour' to be reinforced. An example is that babies' babbling speech sounds and toddlers' early words are reinforced by responses from care-givers or by experiencing pleasure at reproducing sounds and words s/he has heard; according to this theory sounds that are not part of her/his native language do not get reinforced and are finally forgotten or 'extinguished'. Skinner's methods are set out in influential papers published throughout and after this period (summarised in Skinner, 1957; 1961). Critics point out however that behaviourist theory does not account for the 'creative' nature of children's learning, as discussed below; the theory contrasts with the other findings in the field of psychology and research into early childhood and pedagogy based on observational and empirical data on young children's capacity to develop and use language of a broader nature.

Contemporary academic and experienced educators were highly critical of the behaviourist approach, including the wide gap between 'knowledge based on recall' and 'deeper forms of understanding' (Ewell, 1997a, p.4). Behaviourism influenced the culture of mass education to the immediate needs of a newly industrialised society (Evans and Jones, 2007). Methods of rapid 'transference' of basic literacy and skills were used and its 'hallmarks' are summarised by Galton, Simon and Croll (1980, p.33) as pupils in rows facing the front, conformity and accuracy in reading, knowledge of facts and grammar and 'arid drill'. Classroom relationships and communication were described by Dewey (1910) described as a 'one-way' interaction from teacher to class and its effects on children's learning as 'limiting'. MacMillan (1919) expressed her concern at 'terribly disciplined schools', the 'silent' children', 'the half frozen masses' and the pedagogy of 'talk and preaching' (MacMillan, 1919, p.287, 341).

2.2.2 Early Childhood Educators

As research in the domain of developmental psychology grew so did the range of perspectives regarding language development, notably related to different phases of a child's life and education. The research and publications of pioneers of education for children aged five to seven are based on their practical experience in such provision, funded in the early twentieth century by charities. Their pragmatic and informed approach was based on a holistic and developmental view which emphasised the differential psychological effects that social and physical environments exert on children's language and cognitive development (Froebel, 1900; MacMillan, 1904; 1919). In the UK, Isaacs (1930) published observational research data on the wide range of linguistic and intellectual capacities of children aged up to five years. This reflects interest and growth at that time in writings and research related to how young children learn and develop language in social interaction with parents, siblings and peers and exploring in concrete situations with their encouragement and linguistic support. This educational culture and theory are still applicable to nursery education today, remain relevant and debated and have provided the basis for further research which has flourished (e.g. Snow, Tabors & Dickinson, 2001). The observations and commentaries fit well with and are complemented by the theories that followed, as set out below.

Eventually educational changes were recommended in the 1921 Newbolt Report (1921) for children to learn 'the art of listening, communication skills and drama'. The subsequent Hadow Report (Hadow 1931; p.138) recommended 'activity and experience, rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored', which is 'closely related to the children's concrete knowledge and their own immediate experience'. It directly addresses language development in that children need to 'acquire a habit of lucid expression' (Hadow, 1928, p.112), should be treated as individuals and be 'encouraged to express themselves freely' (Hadow, 1931, p.156). However changes were very slow to be implemented in schools and educational culture was slow to change.

2.2.3 John Dewey

The identification of children's developmental schema in the 1930s (Bartlett, 1932), was significant as it had the potential to alert educators of the importance of early experiences in children's mental development. Bartlett suggested that those who are not exposed to rich, informal language opportunities early in life will fail to acquire the types of knowledge that are the strongest determinant of successful learning. In the first part of the twentieth century, the work of John Dewey in the USA also drew attention to how intellectual and conceptual understanding is developed in the growing child. His work draws upon the

interface between psychology and philosophy by examining the relationship between language activity and learning. Dewey (1933) pointed out that in the human mind 'meaning' is established through the creation of neural networks, stressing that learners need to interact to create their own learning. Dewey highlights the importance and benefits of the child engaging in problem solving through undertaking activities of a practical nature within a social environment.

Dewey's work therefore also focuses on the role of the educator and how existing knowledge in the culture is passed on to children as individuals. He provides practical guidance and 'principles' in relation to education. He states that leaders 'cannot start with knowledge already organised' and then proceed to 'ladle it out in doses' (Dewey, 1938, p.82). In contrast he suggests that a more effective approach is that activities should be based on 'child centred' interests and that the best learning occurs in the context of a compelling practical problem. Dewey perceives the teacher's role as 'sub-dominant' in the respect that the child should not be manipulated but be a free agent to question problems he chooses to study out of personal interest, as opposed to being under the control of the teacher. However Dewey (1910) was pragmatic in noting that, in contrast, the educational default culture and mode of classroom interaction prevailing at the time were in fact mainly one way, i.e. teacher to class.

However, by aligning experience with culture Dewey combines a functional psychological stance with a pragmatic, philosophical approach to learning. With a strong emphasis on the philosophy of education he suggests that culture plays a significant part in the learning experience of the child. He calls for engagement in common practical effort or collective responsibility - as in the idea of citizenship in which individuals become active participants empowered with the means to change society for the common good. Dewey's (1938) theory links strongly to what Freire (1972) terms moral inquiry. It explores the ideals of what is now termed social justice seeking to reduce what is known nowadays as an 'achievement gap'. Dewey therefore sees learning as part of a further developing continuum to the means towards a new end.

Dewey's focus on the representation of problem solving through group inquiry is seen by Finn (2012) as revolutionary and forward thinking. Finn summarises that Dewey's views on collaboration seek the power to move education forward, beyond policy, to ensuring practical, participatory activities in the classroom which can create democratic solutions to both educational and economic problems. Finn refers to the direct links made by Dewey between recognising the power of rhetoric and oral communication skills explicit to

dialogue and a 'condition' of cognitive growth. Dewey (1916. p.7) sees this as lying at the heart of both common understanding and the democratic process.

Dewey's practical emphasis on both pedagogy and social justice for individuals, spread from the USA across the UK, Western Europe and beyond. Dewey's writings are regarded as pioneering regarding development and language and regarding learning as forming the basis of further learning. Its philosophical impact in the UK was mainly on infant education, with many followers in junior education, and greatest until the late 60s.

2.2.4 Jean Piaget

A significant shift in psychological theory also occurred following the detailed seminal work of the Swiss biologist and psychologist, Jean Piaget. He set out his landmark 'constructivist' theory during and after the 1940s which, along with that of Dewey, challenged the prevailing passive behaviourist theory. Piaget's theory was enlightening as it was based on the belief that children are active participants in constructing their own learning and that they do so by interacting with their environment and by making connections between their existing learning and new experiences. The emphasis of Piaget's theory on developmental change is now seen to have represented a turning point that has challenged and influenced academic study, theory and practice.

Piaget conducted and recorded detailed studies of young children's learning and introduced the revolutionary view of an epistemology of learning. He also introduced the idea that children think differently to adults, moving through age-related stages of cognitive development until after the age of around twelve. Piaget's theoretical framework describes children using both physical and psychological structures to create 'higher-order' thinking systems (Ginsburg and Oppen, 1969, p.18). Piaget claims that 'adaptations' to the environment such as these occur through associated processes of 'assimilation' (Piaget, 1952).

The Piagetian theory of language development (Piaget, 1967) includes the view that children initially learn a new word-ending, e.g. adding 's' to provide a plural noun such as dog and dogs, hat and hats, then apply it to other words to create (incorrect) words such as 'sheeps' and 'mans'. Similarly they often attach 'ed' to the end of verbs to represent the past such as 'pick' and 'picked' but then use the system too widely to other verbs - resulting in words like singed, goed or slept. He suggests that new linguistic material is initially assimilated into its present stock of existing mental 'schemata' until developmental changes are made in response to what was at first found difficult. Eventually the ideas are 'accommodated' into what becomes a more mature system which is then able to be

applied to the new idea or concept (Baldwin, 1967, p.176).

However a controversial stance taken by Piaget is that as children acquire aspects of thinking and higher order intellectual skills these become incorporated into their talk, reflecting a view that children's language *accompanies* rather than *supports or generates* the cognitive process. Critics observe that his research methods principally involve accessing children's oral responses and a key criticism of his theory is that he appears to imply that children's language *represents* their state of understanding and cognition rather than helping to construct it. Ginsburg and Oppen (1969, p.17), for example, argue that children's language is considered by Piaget to be dependent upon and reflect the child's intellectual 'response' and the capacity to organise his thinking, intellectual processes and adapt to his environment.

Whilst Piaget's theories represented a turning point influencing academic study, theory and practice, analysts note a contradiction in a view of language as mostly reflecting the thoughts of the mind rather than serving as an active and constructive part in the thinking process. Similarly, the theory appears to pay less attention to the relationship between language and the processes of learning and understanding. Whilst Piaget sees language and learning as being constructed, his view of language development nevertheless can appear to be relatively passive on the part of the child and care-givers (Donaldson, 1978). Similarly, Piaget's theories do not overtly attribute a role to the child and care-giver in contributing to learning, language development and the development of understanding. He made little reference to the social context in children's development of language, a matter examined in the sections below.

During the period in which Piaget was publishing the education culture in the U.K. was generally one which regarded 'talk' as irrelevant and not 'real work'. Teachers were found to do most of the talking and 'imparting' of knowledge while children 'acquiesced' (Evans, 2007) and were 'passive' (Alexander, 2001). Galton, Simon and Croll, (1980, p.35) report that even in the late 1960s teachers' responses to children were of a 'behaviourist,' extrinsic kind and that they often punished children for talking in class (Cook-Gumpertz, 1986).

2.2.5 Noam Chomsky

Chomsky (1952) challenges Piaget's theory as a relatively passive interpretation, as Chomsky believes that young children participate more actively in their linguistic development. According to Chomsky's (1965) 'nativist' theory humans possess a lexico-grammatical structure or innate 'language acquisition device' (LAD), suggesting that as

young children hear prosodic clues in talk during their early linguistic experiences they acquire competence and structure in language. That is, young children are born with the means to pick up the framework of principles and elements common to human languages from what they repeatedly hear. This includes the rules of sentence formation from which children create hypotheses about language, begin to extract grammatical patterns and on this basis construct the rules or 'linguistic universals' for themselves.

A key part of Chomsky's (1985) theory is that he suggests that this is an innate process that occurs prior to gaining any knowledge of the non-linguistic world, i.e. even before children's spoken language becomes influenced by care-givers' gestures, vocalisation and contexts. He believes that only later does it get replaced by further, more complex linguistic processes and certain sentence formation rules. Minami (2002) considers that Chomsky exerted an 'enormous' influence on language development studies, particularly research into the acquisition of syntax. Chomsky's was also a revolutionary theory as it was further in opposition to behaviourist views on child development and combined with the theories of Piaget concerning development and the theories of Dewey to draw attention to the conceptual links between the role of language and cognition.

However Chomsky's belief that humans have some innate ability to learn language is criticised for being too componential and over simplified. His theory is much criticised as being limited and principally restricted to children's knowledge of grammar, notably by Hymes (1974a). He argues that Chomsky's theory is based on research data using idealised speakers and listeners in homogeneous communities where aspects of language are uniform across speakers and rules. He also suggests that it does not examine in detail the broader linguistic picture of what Chomsky sets aside as 'performance', emphasising that more serious attention should be paid to how children develop such competence within the family context and to culture-specific experiences and beliefs (Hymes and Gumpertz, 1972). Hymes (1972) proposes instead a model of knowledge which incorporates knowledge of grammar allied to other aspects of communication. Kies (1991) observations show that children develop their language by focusing not on accuracy, such as of grammar, but by aiming for effective communication socially and being understood. He points out that children learn real language that is live, in a continuous stream and not broken down into neat and easy components and sentences. Kies's (1991) analysis illustrates that children do not develop their language sequentially, such as firstly focusing on sounds, followed by vocabulary, grammar, etc., but that these are developed on all levels simultaneously.

Hymes also argues (Hymes, 1974b, p.92) that for children to have an innate capacity to listen to speech and to use grammar accurately that they are absorbing grammatical structures in the course of early socialisation processes within the family.

2.2.6 Lev Vygotsky

Aspects of Piaget's work came to be challenged as the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky from the 1920's and 30's became translated and published in the West during the early 1960s. Vygotsky's views oppose those of Piaget which, Donaldson (1978) argues, whilst recognising language and learning as being constructed by the child, suggests a relatively passive role, including that of the adult. Vygotsky (1962) suggests that children construct learning from both language and interaction with adults and other children; he argues that interacting with the physical environment empowers the child's mind, distinctly different from Piaget in respect of its active contribution to mental growth. Emerging socio-cultural perspectives of innate, cognitive and social interaction are explored by Vygotsky, (1978) and later by Bruner (1977; 1983; 1986; 1990).

Vygotsky's theory is based on a view that reaching understanding emerges from a process that begins with 'egocentric speech', progressing to 'self talk' aloud and moving towards 'inner speech', evolving from verbal thought to a higher plane and to thought itself (Vygotsky, 1978, p.27). Vygotsky highlights the role of private speech as inherent in cognitive development and focuses on how children assemble talk; for him speech occurs in an 'earlier affective stage' and later becomes conative and enters an intellectual phase' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.82). Vygotsky's approach draws attention to speaking as an interactive process involving cognitive processes which prompt a spiral of change for the learner. In fact he suggests that 'every function in the child's cultural development appears first, on the 'external' social plane, and later on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then on an 'internal' plane inside the child (intrapsychological)' followed by its internalisation to develop thought itself (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57).

Vygotsky draws attention to the essential role of adults and caregivers in children's language development. Initially this is by their use of speech with accentuated pitch and intonation which stimulates the young child, providing both structure and knowledge for speech and language. Vygotsky sees the different levels of interaction between adult and children as dependent on the quality of the 'intersubjectivity' achieved by the participants through their implicit intentions. He sees such cognitive functions placing great significance on the role of adults and caregivers, 'scaffolded' by the adult who can focus the child's attention giving information and insights. Where language is socially mediated, i.e. conversation, the child connects with others and assimilates experience encoded in

the semantic system of that culture's language (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky argues that it is not simply a question of a child 'acquiring' knowledge and language but of involving a complex holistic process of exchange and negotiation in a social context. He stated that children's 'cognitive functioning' first needs to be 'used' in a concrete and spontaneous way and that after this thinking moves to the level of 'intellectual control'. The actions of adults assist the child's knowledge of the world and the culture, even though the young child may not understand its significance for later learning and cognitive functions involving the mastery of higher order, symbolic structures as these are 'culturally embedded'.

Vygotsky's theory is powerful as it focuses on education, highlighting that learning processes are dependent on social interaction – an aspect hardly considered at the time of his writing in the West. He says learning demands 'intersubjectivity' and 'the attunement of the teacher', paying attention to 'the expressions and intents of members of a classroom' (Vygotsky, 1987, p.89). Having observed the child, the care-giver or teacher can anticipate the 'next steps' that the child is ready to take. He termed these as steps as within the child's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) and Vygotsky saw such support as essential in enabling the child to reach higher cognitive goals through gaining new perspectives in order to enquire further and progress independently. Vygotsky thereby sees the relationship between learning and development and the internalisation of knowledge in the culture as shaped by support for the learner's zone of proximal development. His model relates to both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels of communication in facilitating 'what a child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow' (Vygotsky, 1978). In this way, he shows how adults enable the internalisation of external, shared social processes, then to be used on the '*intra*-personal' level.

Though Dewey and Vygotsky may differ in the means by which they describe how learners may come to be educated, their work emphasises the importance of the role of problem solving through activity in the social environment and stimulation of the young child's critical and creative thinking. Previously, cognitive and linguistic competences had been taken for granted, classified more as syntactic or semantic components of language acquisition, in contrast to language as residing in a meaningful context. While it is sometimes said that Vygotsky does not provide a complete model or full empirical evidence to support his theory (Mercer, 2008), it prompted the development of socio-cultural theory which explores how higher psychological processes and thinking arises out of, and can be advanced through social interaction, including the school environment.

Throughout the 1970's, development work in language grew nationally and internationally as translations of Vygotsky's work filtered through from Russia into the West, with major contributions made by Barnes, Britton and Rosen (1969) in the UK and Bernstein (1971; 2000) in the US. Bakhkin (1981) too draws upon Vygotsky's theory, stating that with language comes identity in each cultural and historical context, drawing attention to more than the mechanics of oral communication and a linguistic perspective.

2.2.7 Jerome Bruner

Whilst interactional and socio-cultural factors were brought to the fore by the writings of Vygotsky, following his early death in the late 1930s the ideas are taken forward on a major scale by the American psychologist and educationalist Jerome Bruner. Both Bruner and Vygotsky challenge stage-type theories. In 1996 Bruner reflects 'It never occurred to me to believe in 'stages' of development in the Piagetian sense.' He argues that while Piaget devised methods examining how children 'construct' their view of the world, and pass through developmental stages from simple to complex operations, thereby explaining and justifying their thinking, he did not pay attention to the social context. Similarly, Bruner argues that Chomsky's theory does not take into account the way a child's language is dependent upon the social context and the quality of interactions (Bruner, 1983). He considers that Chomsky's LAD theory does not explain in detail how language is developed or the creative nature of language learning. Bruner (1983, p.19) argues for a Language Acquisition Support System, in which children's inborn tendency for social interaction and language learning combines with support or scaffolding by others of their endeavours to communicate. 'It is the interaction between LAD and LASS that makes it possible for the infant to enter the linguistic community.'

In his works of 1996 Bruner himself brings together his work of over thirty years, collating his theories, expanding on and exemplifying his ideas. The following section on Bruner's theory references two comprehensive volumes, '*In search of pedagogy*', in order to draw upon his personal overview and subsequent developments. For example, he later reflects that while there may be 'something innate' about the child's ability to crack the linguistic code, there is also something innate about the care-givers' ability to facilitate this 'as a transaction involving an active language learner and an equally active language teacher' (Bruner, 1996, p.56). Bruner particularly stresses the need for 'sensitivity nurturing the acquisition of language.' He describes how the development of a child's language is 'contingent' upon the quality of the relationship and interactions between the mother and child, each giving the other the benefit of the doubt. He illustrates the early dyad in which 'motherese' type of language is used by the parent to stimulate, structure and encourage

the young child's early talk, emphasising that this is a spiral process with later progress heavily dependent upon the quality of early and subsequent linguistic development (Bruner, 1996; p.111). The parent provides meaning and structure for the child as he enters the discourse and eventually allowing him to progress to a more sophisticated linguistic level involving the ability to 'infer and generate rules' (Bruner, 1996; p.19).

Bruner (1960) believes in learners' self-awareness and the extent to which they can consciously take a cognitively higher step, described as 'intention directed behaviour' or readiness. Bruner takes a strongly pedagogic approach, for example '*The Process of Education*' (1960) places great importance on the situation or 'context' of learning and states that this is 'never neutral', emphasising that children's learning is best undertaken in context as 'situated meaning making' (Bruner, 1996, p.227). In fact he states that in his experience of young children there is 'always some way in which anything could be made clear to them, given patience, willing dialogue and the power of metaphor' (Bruner, 1996, p.114). He refers here to the need for using a 'spiral curriculum' in which concepts are introduced to children early on in a simple but 'intellectually honest' way in order to build gradually upon the ideas. For the young this is initially in concrete or 'enactive' ways, learning to understand and order events through practical experience as knowledge and skills are not simply 'absorbed' in a passive way. Bruner termed the 'gift' of 'shaping' as 'what makes it possible for us to initiate, instruct and collaborate with each other, this sense that we know what the other is thinking or feeling' (Bruner, 1996, p. 231). On this principle is built Bruner's (1978) concept of 'scaffolding': a form of physical and/or linguistic support for learning by those more knowledgeable and experienced.

Bruner (1996, p.111) suggests the human process of 'cognitive mapping' and the need for sensitivity in such interactions to achieve 'intersubjectivity' on which, he argues, mutual understanding depends. Bruner considers that this shared understanding between people lies at the heart of the processes of teaching and learning. Bruner (1996) argues that knowledge and skills are not simply 'absorbed' in a passive way but that humans need to reflect on what they are doing, going to do and how to do it. Bruner (1996) states that the 'conversation principle' rests on human activity and that what we actually mean is often more than we initially say. Bruner's strong pedagogic stance and his application of theory is reflected in his involvement in educational projects internationally and their published outcomes, for example school projects in Oxfordshire (Bruner, 1980) and in Italy at the Reggio Emilia centre. His educational stance from the 1970s is based on the role of the teacher as not conveying information but facilitating the learning process by helping children to discover relationships between information, influencing an integrated topic-

based curriculum related to children's interests in the U.K, the principles of which continue to be applied in many schools.

The theory of Vygotsky (1978) integrates that of individual development with its social, cultural and historical context from which, it is now recognised, it cannot be separated (Minami, 2002). His view that thinking draws upon symbolic and material 'cultural tools' is expanded upon by Bruner (1990) who examines language as a 'tool of the mind' which is inherited, built upon and transformed by each generation. Drawing upon the work of other theoretical traditions such as Dewey (1916) to complement that of Vygotsky and Bruner, socio-cultural theory is further developed by Rogoff (Rogoff and Chavajay, 1995; Rogoff, 2003).

2.2.8 Barbara Rogoff

In ethnographic research conducted across contrasting communities Rogoff examines how communication in everyday lives serves to award the growing child concepts for thinking about individual and cultural aspects of development (Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu and Mosier, 1993). She emphasises language systems as tools of thinking that both 'channel and result from community-wide ways of thinking and acting... in ways that mutually support each other' (p.268-9).

In turn Rogoff argues that the narrative structures valued in a community influence the ways that people express their ideas, both orally and in writing (Minami and McCabe, 1996). Her extensive research in culturally-contrasting communities (e.g. USA, Guatemala, Australia, Asia, and Africa) provides the basis for theory that 'guided participation' by adults and peers in the child's community provides access to cultural practices, skills and values. These include learning language and concepts through 'communication and coordination during participation in shared endeavours.' As part of these events Rogoff (2003, pp. 285-293), emphasises the range of narratives that children encounter, and that these include some which are instructional and others which entertain, stimulate flexibility of thought or creativity, but also noting that each narrative reflects the values of the their community. Through her anthropological, ethnographic and comparative work across different research domains Rogoff (2003, p.7) seeks to '...discern regularities in the diverse pattern of human development in different communities...'

2.2.9 Overview of Language Development Theories

Socio-cultural theory, inspired by Bruner (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) and developed by Rogoff (2003) and others, considers cultural learning as an empowering tool for the

development of a child's language involving a social, mutual construction of knowledge and understanding. While children are seen to initially model their actions on others' they rapidly begin to problem-solve through being supported in social interaction by more capable 'others', adults and peers. Socio-cultural theory sees language as socio-culturally mediated, and that the representational power of language does not derive solely from an individual but from social meanings which are present in a particular culture, in a particular context and time. With language comes more than the mechanics of oral communication and a linguistic perspective, it provides identity in each cultural and historical context. Bruner's model is built on a practical, problem-solving spiral curriculum, the use of narrative by children, intersubjectivity and shared understanding by their teachers. It is a model shown by extensive research to be not yet realised (Alexander, 2001).

While the above theories of language development are often considered as falling into two types, psychological and functional, they refer to different processes: psychological theories examine children's mental processes whereas functional theories examine the social and cultural processes involved in learning language. However psychological explanations, nativist and environmentalist (nature versus nurture) theories, may all be seen to complement each other, as research shows that the development of children's language potential depends upon their guided participation within a socially, culturally and linguistically endowed environment in order to become enriched and empowering. A significant associated matter is that each of these theories, bodies of knowledge and pedagogical models of linguistic-cognitive development have entered the educational culture and influenced both teaching and pupils' participation in schools in the UK, albeit to varying degrees.

2.2.10 Theories of Narrative Development

This section will review literature concerning children's communicative competence within which, it is argued, the use of narrative and development of narrative competence are situated. Communicative competence is the over-arching, umbrella concept which Hymes (1974) defines as the process by which an individual acquires the ability to communicate effectively through interaction. It develops during early social development and is acquired in interaction with care-givers, siblings and peers. It involves the ability to assemble meaning and the articulation of 'narrative voice' (Hymes, 1974) involving performance and tacit knowledge. Such processes accommodate speech and non-verbal communication.

Within the umbrella of communicative competence lies the concept of narrative competence which is defined by Bruner (1966) as involving the narrator's use of a breadth

of language which shows developing meaning, content and style. Bruner (1990) illustrates the early narrative competence abilities of telling a story, retelling a story, filling gaps in information and making inferences. He argues that its development is supported by the use of formal talk by experienced others which demonstrates a more refined organisation or 'order' in the way thoughts are articulated. Kaczmarek (1999) discusses this more advanced structure as including elaborated or 'extended' sentences which can convey more complex ideas including persuasive language.

Minami (2002) argues that narrative competence is a universal basic mode of thought that is intricately related to subsequent learning. He discusses how problems can arise when children have difficulty in verbally expressing themselves.

The aim of the section is to examine findings related to why and how children's narrative competence is important. The review will address the following related points: communicative competence; narrative competence including its relationship to literacy. Since we now have a global community of practice in research, the review includes comparative perspectives.

2.2.10.1 Communicative Competence

Bruner refers to young children's 'speech acts' as driven by 'communicative intention' in the context of everyday social activities (Bruner, 1970). In earlier theories of language development it can be argued that cognitive and linguistic competences are taken for granted, classified more as the syntactic or semantic components of the language acquisition process, in contrast to considering language in context. Vygotsky (1987; 1978) argues that thinking (intrapersonal) and communication (interpersonal) are related, occurring within social activity. He also argues that language development, as with other aspects of psychological or cognitive development, takes place through communication, and that this occurs within a cultural context.

Labov's (1972) proposal is that learning language involves not just a child knowing the components of language and stringing them together in grammatically precise sentences but of engaging in a 'communicative performance' context. He defines effective communication as consisting of specific forms of narrative and discusses 'thought-speech sequences'. He suggests that they have a 6-part structure, comprising of: an overview of events, orientation providing setting or context, actions, affective reflection of the narrative, resolutions and formal endings. With specific reference to narrative, Labov (1972) argues that to be 'effective' it must fulfil certain criteria. Firstly a referential function; this includes the temporal organisation of events, people and happenings to others; also it

includes an evaluation of the kind of attitudes that are brought into meaning. He suggests that this level of functioning requires the assimilation and encoding of incoming information into existing structures, and on this basis inference may be applied.

Hymes follows his principle that the study of language should be grounded in ethnographic observation rather than solely generating theory, using a taxonomic, descriptive fieldwork (Hymes, 1972). On the basis of this form of research Hymes (p.1) argues against the idea that the different linguistic channels of speaking, writing and signing are just different ways of encoding the same (p.12), and is attributed for the introduction of the concept of 'communicative competence' (Hymes, 1974b). He argues for the primacy of language function, and for a shift from considering its 'referential' function as primary one to seeing it as one of many functions. He proposes and defines a model of communicative competence which children acquire within a social matrix of language, is learned and can be more or less complete and flexible. He sees it as underpinned by performance and tacit knowledge, applied in the way that ideas are communicated through interaction. Hymes (1974b, p.92) argues that children have an innate capacity to absorb knowledge of different narrative structures in the course of early socialisation processes within the family; he suggests that as children talk with and to others they also learn to accommodate the non-vocal and non-verbal characteristics of communicative functions which enable them to assemble meaning. He suggests that in order to master matters of syntax and discourse the child must organise experiences and other factors which influence these processes. Hymes (1989) argues for two aspects of speaking that cannot be separated: i) what speakers are able to say and do say; ii) the communal context in which speech occurs. Analysing the meanings of the different styles he (1989, p.444) identifies dimensions which he argues contribute and govern their meanings: participant, setting and channel. Hymes therefore argues that speech cannot be considered separately from sociological and cultural factors as these not only create meaning but also shape linguistic form.

Hymes is fundamentally concerned with equality in communication matters and calls for concepts and methods that enable teachers to acknowledge and deal with diversity. His 'ethnography of communication' (Hymes, 1962; 1964) aims to use comparative, ethnographic taxonomies to examine and understand how communities differ in ways of speaking, patterns, switching, roles and meanings, against a background of the social 'privileging' of a single language or variety. His concern is for children who lack 'voice', whose communication cannot be heard because educators do not understand the contextual frameworks of their narratives. Hymes (1996, xi) argues for socio-economically disadvantaged children to develop their 'narrative voice', whilst acknowledging that its

effectiveness is also dependent on others and of the child learning that particular types of speech are valued in education.

Grice (1975) also draws attention to the roles of those involved in the communicative process. In his model he shows how the communicator requests information by informing and sharing an attitude or something of importance with the recipient. He emphasises a response is needed back from the recipient of the message, named 'joint intentionality' or 'communicative intent'. This emphasises the communicative act itself, the gesture and expression. In such a joint 'attentional frame' the message transforms from the private to the public arena, addressing both comprehension of the message and compliance with the message after it has been transmitted. Such intention requires key skill of interpreting different perspectives of other speakers. Both individual goals and social intention, from intrapersonal to interpersonal levels are therefore demanded.

For communication to be effective, Grice (1975) recognises that recognition of the relevance of the context cannot be assumed but must be seen by both the communicant and the referent. Grice's theory is based on the 'cooperative principle' which recognises the 'co-presence' in which effective communicators work towards a shared goal, and there is 'common cultural knowledge explicitly acknowledged in context' (Grice, 1975, p.89). Clark (1996) argues that Grice's model of communication draws attention to how human beings 'co-operate with one another... involving processes of shared intentionality, or common ground.' Scollon and Scollon (1995, p.94) apply the 'co-operative principle' developed by Grice (1975), arguing that classroom discourse should be 'conveyed as clearly, briefly, directly and sincerely as possible.' Both the speaker and the person being addressed need to understand the communication process which, as it is a social activity, follows certain social conventions to achieve these social ends, such as to attain and maintain joint attention (Van der Veen and Poland, 2012, p.107). Grice's co-operative principle requires teachers' heightened awareness of the child's frame of reference, of unwritten tacit rules that govern turn taking and of how children communicate their learning, within the complexities of classroom practice. Tomasello's (2010, p.343) definition of communicative competence is as 'a form of social action ... constituted by social conventions for achieving social ends, premised on at least some shared understandings and shared purposes among users.'

Bruner (1983, p.129) summarises: 'successful early communication requires a shared and familiar context to aid the partners in making their communicative intentions clear to each other.' Bruner argues that it is the 'conversation principle' that enables narrative thinking to bring what we mean 'into being' and the infant to enter the linguistic community

(Bruner, 1996, p.126). Alexander (2001, p.525) agrees, suggesting that the issue of communicative competence needs to be defined by how the child performs 'over the entire transaction'.

This review hereafter applies the comprehensive definition of communicative competence of Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.107) which takes into account forms of oral language and theoretical thinking as well as written language (e.g. reading). The following section will examine how in the context of communicative competence, the use of narrative in particular has a central and fundamental part to play in children's development, notably in relation to thinking.

2.2.10.2 Narrative Thinking

According to Bruner (1990), narrative thinking is the first form of thinking of human beings and its most direct form. Narrative is referred to here as an account or story, often about events that have taken place. Meister (2012) argues that as far as we know, every society in the world has narratives, used to communicate, convince, explain and entertain, which he suggests are rooted in our psychology. Labov (1972), amongst others, defines a narrative as being about a single event and consisting of at least two independent clauses in a sequence about a single past event. Bruner cites the use of narrative by young children to relate to the immediate situation in daily life. Its referent is concrete daily thinking and language use (van Oers, 2009). Slobin (2005) argues that it involves selecting those characteristics of objects and events that fit some conceptualisation of the event, and are readily encodeable in the language. Menary (2008) draws attention to the relationship between experience, emotion and narrative, and Kerby (1993) suggests that experience has a 'pre-narrative quality'. Slobin (1987, p.435) proposes that 'the expression of experience in linguistic terms constitutes 'thinking for speaking' as a form of thought that is mobilised for communication. Kerby (1993, p.42) also suggests that emotions prompt a 'demand for narrative'.

Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108) suggest that without narratives one is unable to construct an identity and Menary (2008) argues that the sense of self is constructed when consciousness and experiences surface in the process of narrating. Bruner (1996, p.42) argues that the quality of narratives constructed and associated thinking processes are central to finding one's place in culture and society. Vygotsky (1987) claims that thinking in concepts is not possible in the absence of verbal thinking. He considers that much narrative is involved in the process of reaching understanding through 'egocentric speech', 'self talk' aloud and eventually 'inner speech'.

Narrative is seen by many to be essential in human action, including the facility to make sense of events: 'clarifying meaning to oneself or others in the context of ... socio-cultural practice' (van Oers, 2007, p.304). Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108) describe narrative as a 'tool' giving coherent meaning to reality and substance to human experiences within socio-cultural practices. Ely (2003, p.404) for example, discusses how young children's narratives take place embedded in immediate and concrete contexts which often centres on their interests, needs and wants, and less often on objects, people or events not part of the immediate context. Others discuss how narratives enable children to build their personal consistent story with a certain motive, one's own perspective and one's own unique role, as socio-cultural practices, these narratives seen to relate closely to a person's emotions and language use (van Oers, 2009; Egan, 2006).

Engel (1999) also discusses how constructing and using narratives furthers our understanding by considering and reflecting upon our experiences and emotions in more abstract ways. Menary (2008) goes further, arguing that narratives themselves also have a range of important roles in one's psychological life. Narrativity is therefore also seen as an important part of interpreting and understanding the actions of others (Pléh 2003; van Oers 2003; Engel, 1999). This relates particularly to 'intersubjectivity' between speakers as defined by Bruner as the 'sense that we know what the other is thinking or feeling' and 'what makes it possible for us to initiate, instruct and collaborate with each other.' Cook-Gumpertz (1986, p.8) too argues that intersubjectivity takes place 'in a social environment' and that it occurs through exchanges and 'to some extent a joint construction' by speakers (1986, p.8).

Bruner (1986) differentiates between logic-paradigmatic and narrative forms of thinking. He argues that in logic-paradigmatic thinking, the basis of thinking processes are logical relations and theoretical concepts; this includes the generation, application, exploration and elaboration of scientific concepts. In contrast, narrative thinking processes are seen to include intuition, associative and aesthetical evaluations, with cohesion determining and guiding its progress, according to Van der Veen and Poland (2012). Menary (2008) argues for the importance of research into narrative, in particular for understanding the mind and the self across the cognitive sciences when using language or 'sign systems for personal and interpersonal purposes within specific cultural practices' (van Oers, 2007, p.303).

2.2.10.3 Definitions of Narrative Competence

Based on the above interpretations, van Oers (2007, p.304) defines 'narrative competence' as both an 'ability' and a 'disposition'. Wolfendale (1985) argues that

narrative experiences and opportunities are the components of children's cognitive structures or 'schemata' used for constructing and telling 'stories'. Becoming narratively competent, according to Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.109), is about the process of building up the ability to use language (sign) systems for communication and thinking. Bruner (1966) suggests that the narrative mode of thought centres narrative competence 'abilities' on 'human intentions', involving the use of a breadth of language reflecting the content plus the narrator's choice of style. Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108) argue that narrative competence also involves taking a point of view and setting down one's way of thinking coherently.

The literature shows that the context of any narrative is both its key characteristic and an orienting factor that the young speaker needs to learn to take into account. The context is necessary as it allows the speaker to make sense when communicating a narrative to others. The context is also required by the listener so s/he can take it into account when interpreting the narrative (Labov, 1974; Polanyi, 1982; Neisser, 1982; Richards and Light, 1987). Context conveys the point of view that a person takes in her/his narrative, which gives the listener or reader insight into the speaker's way of thinking, ideas, beliefs and values (Van der Veen and Poland, 2012, p.108). Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108) suggest that the context in which one tells a narrative is a means for thinking (intrapersonal) or communication (interpersonal), and thereby forms an essential part of the process of 'giving meaning'.

2.2.10.4 The Development of Narrative Competence

Wide-ranging research shows that children learn language by focusing on making sense and making meaning (de Villiers and de Villiers, 1972; Halliday, 1975), for example Bruner (1986) illustrates how children learn to construct meaning firstly as meaning by articulating the elements or components of a story. Narrative experiences and opportunities are defined by Wolfendale (1985) to be the components of children's cognitive structures or 'schemata' for constructing and telling 'stories'. Bruner (1990) illustrates 4 year olds' ability to make inferences in telling a story, to retell a story, account for, and fill information and opinion gaps: The findings show that by age 4 years there are already wide differences; some children are able to retell high level narratives, while others struggle to tell more than one event. Kaczmarek (1999) reports on the narrative abilities of 106, 3 to 6 year-olds and 143, 7 to 11 year-olds. Tasks adapted to the age-groups involve: reproducing a story, sequencing a story and talking about a topic. The findings show use of 'extended' compared to 'simple' sentences at a ratio of around 3.3 to 1 among pre-schoolers. By adolescence the ratio of 4.6 to 1 of extended versus simple

sentences is found, which facilitates older children's expression of more complex ideas. The oral narratives of 4 to 7 year-olds in pairs when constructing a text for a listener are shown by Rytel (2009). The analysis analysed 93 narratives during discussions and arguments, showing children's use of 'convincing' language in both conflict and non-conflict narrative discourse.

Reporting on a range of comparative linguistic studies, Minami (2002) reports on similarities between cultures in the components of narrative and that progression with age is generally similar. Narrative experiences and cognitive structures or 'schemata' for constructing and telling 'stories' however are found to be culturally-specific (Wolfendale, 1985; Minami, 2002) reflecting the structures used among their community. Bruner (1996) suggests that with experience and education the use of more formal talk provides the narratives with greater 'order'.

2.2.10.5 Extended Narratives

The literature shows that with greater narrative competence, older children use 'extended' forms of narrative to discuss experiences or knowledge that are not immediate. Snow, Dickinson and Tabors (2001) suggest that this extended form is needed for more complex personal narratives and explanations. Ely (2003) also argues that the depth and complexity of narrative abilities and dispositions impacts on not just the narrative constructed by the child but also the nature and quality of associated thinking processes. Kaczmarek (1999) draws attention to the role of narrative in planning including self-instruction at all ages, his findings revealing that there are many adults are 'not able to unfold a narrative'. Extended discourse is suggested by Bruner (1986) to include the 'paradigmatic' mode, described as scientific and logical, with language that is consistent and non-contradictory. Snow, Tabors and Dickinson (2001) suggest that such extended and complex forms are needed when the events and phenomena are not present and visible. Such extended narratives are increasingly combined with language that Donaldson (1978) terms 'disembedded' or 'decontextualised' (Peterson and McCabe, 1994) i.e. language referring to aspects and ideas which lie at a distance, in the past and/or are not visible. Their use underpins interpreting and creating narratives conveying differing points of view that are required in language and history studies. Other examples are seen in studies of geography and mathematics involving the use of terms such as 'degrees of latitude' and 'accession'. School science studies often demand thinking in paradigms.

Bruner (1986) illustrates how children progress to constructing meaning through 'consciousness', perceiving and understanding the thoughts of others. Tomasello (2008)

suggests that non-verbal communication is synthesised with words, placing mutual responsibility and narrative demands on both speakers in a dialogue. Such enhanced narrative competence is seen to facilitate the ability to go 'beyond the information given' (Bruner, 1986) in order to read 'between and beyond the lines' of what is actually said to uncover what is intended in communicative acts (Frid, 2000). Hargie (2005) argues that by using inference we also assess the attitudes, emotions and social status of others through observing non-verbal behaviour. Effective communication is also seen by Tomasello (2008) to involve interpreting of gestures as well as inferring a speaker's social intentions, similar to 'mindreading'. Interpreting spoken narrative is seen as a multi-faceted and essential part of the thinking process (Hymes, 1974b).

2.2.10.6 Narrative Competence and Literacy

On entering school young children are required to produce narratives orally and after a short time to create narratives in written form. Bruner (2006, p.231) regards literacy as based on the 'irresistible tendency to understand our social world by couching it in narrative' terms. Becoming 'literate' is defined by van Oers (2007, p.303) as 'using sign systems for personal and interpersonal purposes' within specific cultural practices.' Vygotsky (1978, p. 118) argues for a clear relationship between narrative and literacy, seeing children's writing as really a 'new and complex form of speech' and not writing as just a 'motor skill' and van Oers (2012) regards narrative competence as being at the core of becoming literate. Indeed Myhill (2009) argues that the degree to which the narratives children construct serve to inform, and underpin the texts they go on to construct is a matter of significance. This is particularly poignant for those who struggle with the generation of narratives and for those not successful in conveying the full extent of the meaning intended. Vygotsky (1978, p.82) argues that literacy is a complex cultural activity that should be 'meaningful' to children involving drawing and play in the preparatory stages. He sees it as involving a 'process', through which children come to know meaning embedded in conscious thought, how newly acquired knowledge becomes familiar, the new becomes the old and the epistemic becomes the ontic.

Van der Veen and Poland (2012p.107) associate communication with becoming 'literate'. They suggest that personal 'abilities and dispositions' are required, on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, for reconstructing and using 'text' to clarify meanings. They regard these as the 'sociocultural practices' involved in developing narrative competence (Van der Veen and Poland, 2012, pp.108-110). The actions of more experienced others in providing support for the child are important in interpreting the narratives that they hear (Frid, 2000; Sage, 2000), which in turn extends and enriches their own narrative

repertoire. Wallach (2005; 2008) argues that, in teaching, the relationship between connecting to an audience and communicating with learners is rarely addressed, i.e. giving and receiving of information in meaningful and coherent ways. Wallach (2008) emphasises that it is not enough to focus on children's use of the components of language. We need to observe their ability to read inferences and other contextual aspects of a situation, which enable them to become 'better equipped to manage the shift from informal to formal uses of language in school.' On this basis Wallach (2008) argues for pedagogical interventions which provide children and teachers with opportunities to develop both spoken and written communication in a 'deliberative' approach.

Writing is suggested by Myhill (2008) as 'mirroring oral language patterns' and demanding adjustment by some children from oracy to the written word. She argues that the meta-linguistic awareness required of the implied reader is a capacity to be developed and that it may also be that 'this linearity and temporality reflects writing that is close to the speech-writing interface.' As a result, where this is not well developed 'weaker writers are less assured in managing the specific rhetorical demands of writing partly because of the influence of their oracy experiences' (Myhill, 2008, p.284). Conversely, with regard to writing which influences speaking, Kress (1994) comments on the articulation of a sentence to convey information and meaning, 'as a textual unit, not a syntactical unit'. He comments on adults from the professional classes who communicate syntactically, arguing that the syntax of their speech is similar to the syntax of the written word, in contrast to the speech of many groups whose 'dialects are little if at all influenced by the structure of writing' (Kress, 1994, p.3). However an exploration of how learners might process 'talk to text', as part of a continuum, is suggested by Myhill (2009) who provides explicit opportunities for talk to enhance writing attempts. These involve three key aspects; talking to generate ideas, writing aloud, and talking for reflection. Successful communicative acts are seen to illuminate the need for context to give meaning which, combined with technical expression, support succinct expression. Myhill (2008, p.271) suggests the: 'management of cognitive writing processes of idea generation and text production' alongside an acknowledgement that writing is a social practice which requires understanding by 'implied readers' and 'the nature of genres as communicative discourses'.

Myhill (2009) points out that while narrative thinking and learning are 'often ordered by the sequence of events', older pupils move on to forms of writing that are 'non-narrative'. She argues (2009, p.272) that in subjects such as geography, mathematics and science the pupil has to decide on the order in which s/he arranges the facts in the writing, demanding an 'ability to operate a mental dialogue between content and rhetoric at a knowledge-

transforming phase.’ Myhill (2009, p.265), for example, suggests the ‘oral rehearsal’ by children of what they intend to communicate, when necessary, as a means of support when writing.

2.2.10.7 Overview of Communicative and Narrative Competence

The use of language as a communicative tool is seen by van Oers (2007, p.303) to ‘regulate’ human object-oriented activity, and by Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.107) to involve learning to use the language of a community in ‘creative ways’. It is now argued by some researchers (e.g. Hollich et al., 2000) that different aspects of theories become relevant at different points in a child’s language development. Ely (2005, p.404) suggests that children learn to use both modes of thought, but that the balance depends on the child’s culture, education and personal circumstances.

Narrative and narrative competences allow the child to enter ‘the culture to which the language gives access’ (Bruner, 1983, p.19), such as its meanings, values, traditions and actions. The above critique endorses Vygotsky’s and Bruner’s theories that language, communication and thinking are interrelated in the generation of ideas. Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.107) however highlight that while becoming literate is a process that encompasses knowledge, skills and dispositions, these elements are not separate and must remain incorporated in one complex cultural ‘performance’ that makes sense to learners. The demands made by schooling, including those of literacy and studying, highlight the importance of children consolidating skills and abilities of narrative competence through the use of spoken narrative and narrative thinking from an early age. It is the support for these processes that the following sections will address.

2.3 Support for Language: The Role of Parents.

The adult’s key role in the child’s development of language and cognition is central to Vygotsky’s (1978, p.87) theory that higher mental development originates in social interaction and interpersonal activity. Poehner and Lantolf (2010) argue that his theory is now better understood, particularly that children are dependent on the ‘mediation’ of a more capable social agent or other, at first the parent or care-giver, as instruction leads development. Bruner (1970) extends this theory with a valuable dimension based on his seminal studies of mother-child interactions as the basis of children’s development within the context of the wider culture. He argues that the mother encourages and supports the child as s/he begins to give varied responses, developing a dialogue sequence between them which involves new features such as turn taking. In this way Bruner sees the care-giver as naturally ‘orienting’ the child towards features of the world as they are

encountered which meet the child's cognitive needs. The features are 'referenced' by the care-giver with gestures such as pointing, demonstration and a commentary of oral naming and explanation of the context and how the world works.

Bruner sees this 'contingent' approach as essential to language and cognitive development, which he argues are inter-linked, to provide the child with experience and insights into the sensory world which would otherwise remain invisible and accessible. Bruner's (1983) theories are in accordance with Vygotsky's (1987) cultural-historical theory of human development and that speech enables further cognitive development, rather than it resulting from language development (van Beemen, 1995). Vygotsky provides the concept of support for next steps in learning and these steps fall within a 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). This support is defined by Lantolf (2009, p.359) as 'co-mediation between someone who has knowledge or capacity to attain a goal and someone who does not.' It is elaborated by Van der Veen and Poland (2012) as the process by which a 'more capable social other' supports the child in learning to perform new skills 'independently' that leads to progress in a certain activity. Parents use the ZPD in concrete language activities alongside narratives in their interactions. The parent is normally particularly sensitive to the child's current level of development in mediating activities towards learning, according to Vygotsky (1987) by using imitations of real life. Aware of their child's goal or intentions they will often supply the appropriate labels and vocabulary at the right moment for objects, actions and settings. In this approach the parent encourages the child to develop a narrative in order to communicate and think (Van der Veen and Poland, 2012, p.108).

Bruner describes the contingent support supplied within the ZPD (1978) by language as 'conversational scaffolding' when experiences are shared in discussion; this parental practice is argued by Bruner (1990) to underpin effective talk. Broader, contemporary theories of literacy development have built upon the theories of Vygotsky and Bruner in relation to ZPD and scaffolding in the cultural context, as outlined in the sections below. For example Bloom (2000) discusses how children who read with their parents develop an awareness and knowledge of new words, and how this advances their cognitive development, metalinguistic awareness and as a result enables them to extend their vocabulary.

2.4 Support for Language: The Role of the School

Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.110) argue that it is the task of the teacher also to be sensitive to the child's actual level of development so as to mediate the activity towards

learning. That is, the teacher both uses and contributes to the quality of the narratives used by the child to communicate and think about schematic representations. The ZPD they argue is for example, when a child and a teacher are involved in a joint activity in which they try to understand each other, co-constructing a narrative sequence which articulates different aspects of the representation. This echoes Bruner's (2009, p.132) call for 'the attunement of the teacher to the expressions and intents of members of a classroom.'

In applying Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD, Van der Veen and Poland (2012) argue, the mediation of the teacher between the child and the situation is key in her or him becoming narratively competent. Vygotsky promotes 'the attunement of the teacher to the expressions and intents of members of a classroom.' Vygotsky (1987) argues that using imitations of real life forms the basis of the ZPD, which van Oers (2011, p.86) suggests as 'Imitation, not in the sense of meaningless copying of actions, but in the sense of meaningful reconstructions of cultural activities.' Examples are pre-school play such as making a cup of tea or building a house with toy bricks. Bruner (2006) also warns of the dangers of teaching 'disembodied rules' in isolation and against teaching language and grammar in a componential strategy. Like Dewey he promotes a problem-solving context as children need to learn in a meaningful context as: 'to make our intentions known to others and articulate what we have in our minds is best contextualised in a problem solving enterprise' (Bruner, 2006, p.56). Promoting a pedagogy based on practical activities in the classroom involving children in cooperative activities Bruner (2006) argues for 'closer scrutiny' by teachers of 'the relationship between speaking, thinking and socialising.'

Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.109) see the teacher's other key role in this as assessment involving a 'two step process': firstly, in identifying the child's actual level of development, i.e. abilities that are already matured and in place; and secondly, based on the responsiveness of a pupil during mediation by a more knowledgeable agent, identifying the proximal level of development, uncovering abilities which are in the process of developing or maturing. However, Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the importance of noting what a child can achieve with support, rather than measuring only the actual level of development and Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108) also argue that it is the task of the teacher to be 'sensitive' by scaffolding the child's responses during the assessment process. They suggest that through the narratives children tell and write, a teacher can access both their actual and potential levels of development regarding their narrative competence, 'world view, identity, and meanings'. This can include insights into their experiences, beliefs and language development (Engel, 2003). In order to support

children's development and learning Poehner (2008, p.42) too suggests that 'we need to understand the full range of individuals' abilities.'

Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.110) suggest that language assessment should evaluate children's communicative competence and narrative competence, as well as syntax and vocabulary level. They note that there is, as yet, no model for the assessment of narrative. However they propose a model for assessing a 'well organised narrative'. It is designed to give both qualitative and quantitative information on narrative competence. The criteria are: 1) Suitable title, 2) Addressivity, 3) Quality of the story, 4) Vocabulary and sentences, 5) Empathy, and 6) Attitude. Each criterion has sub-criteria. In this approach, the ZPD can be seen as a diagnostic approach to development (Van der Veen and Poland, 2012, p.114). Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108) argue that on the basis that narratives are important for understanding human action, they 'merit a central place in educational practice' in order to gain insight into children's development and the nature of their cognitive achievements. Of particular interest is their assumption that 'assessment of narrative competence is something teachers should do throughout the whole year' (Van der Veen and Poland, 2012, p.116).

Applying Vygotsky's (1987) concept of 'imitation' in relation to the ZPD, Manstead and Hewstone (1995, p.191) argue that for a test of lexical knowledge to fairly and accurately reflect children's linguistic abilities it must as closely as possible 'approximate the normal situation in which children use language, in a natural setting.' They involve concrete language activities in which pupils use narratives to communicate or think as elaborated by Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108). As Elmes et al. (2003, p.145) argue, assessments must be 'ecologically valid', closely simulating real life situations and using recording methods which accurately reflect the behaviour of the participants. This is especially relevant when testing children from ethnic backgrounds which are different to that of the assessor; as Bernal, Bonilla and Bellido (1995) report, in the field of psychology 'most treatment research does not permit generalisation to ethnic minority populations.' Care is therefore essential in ZPD assessment to avoid cultural bias which can affect the responses, results and ultimately the mediation or teaching offered.

2.5 Support for Talk: Educational Culture and Policy

The support provided for children's talk emanates from a range of sources, language: central and local government policy, the culture of society and educators and, in turn, classroom practice.

2.5.1 School Culture

Support for children's language and talk, as for all aspects of their development, is seen to be inherently associated with the educational 'culture' of a school and its staff. Several qualitative research studies (Mortimore, 1988; Glover and Law, 2004) demonstrate a close relationship between pupils' attainment, teacher knowledge and the 'culture' of the school, defined by Smey-Richman (1991) as its 'common set of values, beliefs, and practices.' Argued by Schein (1985, p.6) as operating at a deep level, he sees culture as composed of the shared 'basic assumptions and beliefs' that are 'taken for granted' and operate unconsciously. Stoll (1998, p.5) examines how a school's culture is shaped by its history and staff but in turn influences teachers' views by acting as a 'lens' through which they view educational matters. She argues that it acts as a powerful 'mindset', which for teachers controls 'the way we do things around here' (Deal and Kennedy, 1983).

For example, in interviews by Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta and Howes (2002) teachers show their belief regarding the frequency with which educators engage pupils in cognitively challenging talk. Their personal narratives show that they closely associate this practice with strong pedagogical orientations towards literacy development. The results of Burchinal et al. (2002) show a significant interaction between children's family backgrounds and teacher-child relationships, providing evidence that social processes in classrooms are significant regarding the academic progress of children considered at risk of under-achievement. Glassman (2001,p.22) draws on the contributions made by the interactionists fifty years ago regarding the importance of the 'social context' of learning including social interaction.

Recent work by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) similarly shows that the highest scores for teacher quality are characterised by respect, social support and the concern they show their pupils. Bearing in mind the close relation identified between children's language development and educational attainment, it is of concern regarding the 'particular behaviour' of teachers towards children 'at risk' (Glover and Law, 2004). Longitudinal research by Sammons et al. (2011), reports that teaching quality is poorer for children in schools in socially disadvantaged areas.

Alexander (2001) examines the influence of educational initiatives on educational culture, pedagogy, policy and debate specifically in relation to developing language in the classroom. One example is Piaget's influence on the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967). His positive influence resulted in a move in primary schools away from passive lessons to active methods. In contrast is his age-related view of development in the Report which states that language 'develops through the stages' (Para.54) and that children 'need to

understand about 3000 words before they can begin reading (Para. 55). In contrast the Report emphasises their developing abilities, for example that 'most children can make sentences by the time they go to school.'

Wilkinson (1965) was the first to introduce the concept of 'oracy' in its own right and as the 'primordial' means of communication in classrooms. He argues how oracy can 'extend and develop thinking skills' yet it made little impact on culture and practice while the '*Language for Life*' (DES, 1975) has had greater influence on educational culture. The project '*Communication Skills in Early Childhood*' (Tough, 1977b, p.22) successfully promoted 'dialogue', providing five strategies for 'guided teacher talk': orienting, enabling, informing, sustaining and concluding (Tough, 1977b, p.241). On the other hand the National Oracy Project, which ran from 1987 (Norman, 1992), was closed within five years. According to Alexander (2012, p.8) it 'disappeared without trace' as oracy-based pedagogies are 'intensely political'.

The nature and delivery of 'oral' aspects of education are seen to be politically determined. Alexander (2000, p.564) argues that mainstream British state education is 'disempowering' due to being based on its 'imperialist past'. He argues that this is demonstrated by the little attention paid to the pedagogy of spoken language, as confirmed by the class observations of Galton et al. (1999) and others. Alexander (2000) suggests that this lack of emphasis on spoken language is due to the 'empowering effect' associated with 'democratic engagement' (Alexander, 2012, p.3) that it would otherwise have.

This situation is a result of the relationship between government and educational policy. For example, a major argument is that in a capitalist system the hegemony of the dominant class and culture is passed on through education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). According to this theory the structure of society is mirrored in schools and classrooms through curriculum content and pedagogy which continue patterns of advantage and disadvantage. An imbalance of power is seen to be the means by which 'social replication' takes place (Anfara, 1999), thereby furthering and re-confirming such practices – rather than changing them (McLaren, 1997; pp. 537-8).

Alexander contrasts the nature of the UK education system with the 'clarity, structure and logic' of education in Central Europe (Alexander, 2000, p. 564). He gives as examples the empowering elements of 'communication and self expression' which are given 'pride of place' in both French education (Ministere de l'Education Nationale, 1998) and Russia's oral examinations (Alexander, 2000; pp. 564-5). Abiko (2011, pp.359-360) also discusses Japan's political situation in relation to education, emphasising its modern national focus

on developing dialogue and informal, active approaches to ‘empowering’ children, enabling them to ‘... determine their future...’

The relationship between politics, educational policy and oral approaches is highlighted by debates concerning the programme for the teaching of English in the government’s revision of the National Curriculum for England for 2014. Of particular relevance is the relative weight to be afforded to, what had previously been headed as ‘Speaking and Listening’ (DCSF, 2000; Alexander, 2012) and that it appears to depart from. It refers to ‘the importance of spoken language in pupils’ development across the whole curriculum – cognitively, socially and linguistically, across both primary’ and secondary phases (DfE 2013-14). Such decisions can also be linked to the political practice of ‘policy borrowing’ which in 2013, for example, is described by the head of the ATL teachers’ union (Bousted, 2013) as cherry-picking parts of an education system to justify the reforms that it wishes to introduce.

Interestingly, compared to the situation at the outset of my research in the last decade, it seems more emphasis is now being placed on the components of language, including grammar, phonics and vocabulary. Less emphasis is to be paid to the performative aspects of language in context and the development of interpersonal and softer life-skills, as advocated by business (Confederation of British Industry, 2012).

2.5.2 Educational Policy

It was at this point that the UK political focus fell on educational ‘standards’ and by the end of the 1980’s the first National Curriculum was issued on an incremental, year-group basis, with pupils tested against ‘levels of attainment’. By 2000 the new Primary Literacy Strategy dissemination established a structured daily ‘Literacy Hour’. While these documents used the terms ‘interactive’ teaching and ‘oracy’ the approach contrasts with the definition by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) of oracy as the primary mode of language in which learners are encouraged *to talk at the level at which they think*. The Literacy Hour relates closely to the National Curriculum (2000) ‘Speaking and Listening’ programme which classifies as ‘Knowledge and Skills’ abilities such as organising ideas, taking into account; taking turns, relating, extending ideas, telling stories, describing and speaking to different people. There is however little reference in the programme to children learning to interact in different ‘social situations’ which, as the literature shows, influences the use of different styles of talk. Alexander (2001, p.565) suggests that overall the advent of the National Curriculum and Strategies served to move attention away from a focus on the quality of children’s everyday classroom experiences, replacing it with a culture that judges and exposes schools’ ‘performance’.

Data has accumulated on the developmental delay of many young children and its impact on later learning, resulting in curriculum documentation focusing on the pre-school period. To support and better prepare children for education, the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum was established for all children looked after or educated outside the home (DCSF, 2000) and 2008 was declared a 'Year of Communication', involving research and educational initiatives. The National Strategies' pre-school programme 'Every Child a Talker' pre-school initiative (ECaT) was also funded from 2008, across 97 authorities, on a three year rolling programme by the previous government. Its aim (DCSF, 2008, pp.3-4) was to encourage '... early language development ... from the outset, extending children's vocabulary...' so that '...before they start school, children are confident and skilled communicators...'

2.6 The Relationship between Narrative Competence, Social Context and Educational Attainment

The above review examines research and theory which highlight the critical role of early experience on human learning. Linked to this is the fundamental and enduring influence of children's language on their learning, progress and educational 'attainment'. This section focuses on the significance of the relationship between children's early language development and later educational attainment taking account of their social context.

Dickinson et al. (2001) cite extended discourse from age 3 as a key predictor of spoken language and emergent literacy skills later in nursery, and involvement in extended discourse and cognitively challenging talk at age 4 as predicting subsequent performance. Carr (2005) presents data showing that vocabulary knowledge is a reliable indicator of early and later literacy outcomes, based on the principle that vocabulary knowledge provides the basis for how children speak, listen, read and write.

Studies conducted by Locke, Ginsberg and Peers (2002) in Sheffield examine the attention, communication and language abilities of 240 three and four year olds during the first term in 4 nurseries in areas of social deprivation. The children were selected to exclude those with cognitive delay, language impairment or those who did not have English as their first language. Nationally norm-referenced, picture-based tests from Clinical Evaluation of Fundamentals Assessment: Pre-school (CELF-P^{uk}) materials, were used with the children to measure receptive and expressive language abilities. They participated orally by, naming, describing and providing answers, and by selecting illustrations which best matched their responses. These were entered against rating scales and 7 norm-referenced sub-tests. The findings (Locke et al., 2003, p.9) show the

majority of participants performing 'below' the level expected for their age, with boys receptive language scores significantly lower than that of the girls. Overall, almost a half of the nursery entrants experienced 'moderate, moderate-to-severe or severe delay.'

The longitudinal project 'Effective provision of pre-school education' (EPPE) by the Institute of Education London, conducted from 1996, is investigating pupils' intellectual and social/behavioural development including pre-school influences. Its 3-11 study from 2003 to 2008 measured and monitored the influences of primary school on their attainment, social/behavioural development, language and vocabulary, examining 3000 children in 141 pre-schools and 800 primary schools across the UK. The project consistently shows delays in children's attainment to be related to their home backgrounds, with major differences in vocabulary between 'low-income children and their middle-income peers' (Neuman, 2011, p. 358).

The Ofsted Chief Inspector's report of 2011 cites data showing that children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are at greatest risk of low educational achievement. These findings confirm those of Dickinson and Tabors (2001) and Hoff (2003) who report that children of low-income backgrounds have limited opportunities to learn new words. Hart and Risley (1995) suggest that by the age of 3 those in disadvantaged backgrounds hear around a quarter of the words encountered by the more advantaged. Locke and Ginsberg's (2003) Sheffield study shows the high percentage of three and four year olds with language delay who are from socially deprived areas. Similarly, data collected for the The Bercow Report (2008) show 1 in 6 young children experiencing delays in learning to talk and in some socio-economically disadvantaged areas 7% of 5 year-olds have significant deficits in language. This constitutes a total of over 40,000 children entering education. Overall, the Bercow report shows that over 50% of young children overall have language difficulties and that they go on to experience related problems in communication, including forming sounds, words and sentences and using language socially (Bercow, 2008).

Snowling (2005) is among many which provide data that children's difficulties in learning vocabulary and extracting meaning result in language difficulties that lead to reading and other problems. In the 2012 report the Ofsted Chief Inspector adds further data showing that by the time they leave primary school at age 11 one in five children are below the national average in English; three quarters of children do not reach expected average levels. The Chief Inspector reports that Ofsted figures suggest they are unable to 'access the curriculum in secondary school.' The Ofsted Chief Inspector's 2011 annual report data shows that this pattern of difficulties with learning continues into secondary education.

The EPPE project has extended the enquiry to include the pupils' secondary school years (up to post-compulsory education, post 16 education, training and employment choices. Its data show wide variance in children's attainment and 'striking differentials in vocabulary' (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2011, p.358). Topping (2011) too cites evidence that 40% struggle with learning generally at the end of their first year of secondary school and continue to experience dips throughout the first two years-. These are children from impoverished backgrounds and with lack of parental support and statistical analysis by Murphy (2012), shows that the progress of these children actually slows during the secondary years.

This is corroborated by evidence showing that the 45% of eleven year-olds who just reach SATs level 4C at age fourteen go on to achieve only grade D and below in GCSE English at age sixteen (Ofsted, 2011). Ofsted reports that the majority of pupils' (75%) attain 5 GCSE passes only at grades D and below. The report *Moving English Forward* (2012) suggests that children's standards in English at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2012, show no overall improvement in primary pupils' learning since 2008. The analysis by Murphy (2012) confirms that over a third of pupils' results in GCSE English and Mathematics at age 16 are worse than in the comparable tests they took at age eleven. Data by Gross 2011 shows that 2011 witnessed the communication gap widening at secondary level, and that over the preceding five years there had been 58% overall growth in the total number of school age children with speech, language and communication difficulties (Gross, 2011, p.21). The ongoing EPPSE project (2011) shows the lasting effects into the late teen years and Ofsted's (2011) data show that many students from low-income families have 'multiple barriers to communication' and are at an educational disadvantage. This provides further and substantial evidence that for those with communication difficulties who are not helped to catch up, such serious difficulties can 'persist through their school career' (Communication Trust, 2011, p.10).

2.7 Classroom Talk and Socio-Cultural Theory

In historical terms, social interaction and communication have allowed collective human cultural knowledge to be passed on through joint practical activities in everyday life and educational processes (Daniels, 2008) and the use of language – termed by Bruner as (1990) the 'tool of the mind'. The beginnings of this work can be seen in the identification by Piaget (1932, p.409) that 'criticism is born of discussion' and that cognitive conflict stimulates enquiry. The work of Vygotsky (1962; 1978) is seminal in demonstrating that the use of language can transform children's thinking. The following sections of the literature review will critique how, based on the work of Bruner (1966) and Vygotsky

(1978), subsequent sociocultural approaches to classroom-based research explore social activity, talk and narrative and can support research into school learning.

2.7.1 The Relationship between Classroom Talk and Learning

As Bruner (1996) argues, learning about the world is intersubjective, i.e. learning is constructed in the course of social interaction. He suggests that making sense of a situation and constructing our meaning of it are both sensitive to the context in which it occurs. Murphy (2007) argues for classroom contexts using concrete, practical activities involving 'task-related' talk, and Dillenbourg (1999) suggests a topic of mutual interest possibly practical or visual. The benefits of collaborating in activities that are curriculum-related are further supported by Kutnick and Rogers (1994) and Mercer and Littleton (2007) and that this applies to children of all attainment levels (Slavin, 2009).

Bruner (1996) challenges educational ideas of the mind 'absorbing' and processing information, arguing that individuals construct 'reality' based on common cultural narratives. He cites a range of processes involved in making sense and meaning that are 'messy', ambiguous and involve social interaction – as learning about the world is intersubjective in nature and dependent on talk as the 'tool of the mind'. The work of Barnes (1976) and Cazden (1972) has promoted socio-cultural research into teacher–pupil collaboration, Barnes and Todd (1977) identifying 'exploratory' talk. Barnes (2008) later elaborates that it is a form of collaborative talk in which children generate 'half-formed' thoughts, exchange them with another, and in the process clarify their thinking.

2.7.2 The Place of Talk and Narrative in the Classroom

Reports show that since the early days of statutory education, children talking in classrooms have not been particularly popular, with a preference for teachers' 'talk and preaching' (Macmillan, 1919). The mismatch between theory, rhetoric and practice continued, notably when Wilkinson and colleagues (1965) battled to interpret the work of Vygotsky, Bruner and others and promote 'oracy' in primary schools. Since the 1960s (Barnes, 1969; Galton et al., 1980) studies show little change in whole-class interaction, notably the 'IRF' sequence: 'initiation' by the teacher, a 'response' by the pupil, and 'feedback' from the teacher (Edwards and Mercer, 1987, p.9). These show high use of 'closed' questions which prompt a short response such as yes or no and an answer which is either right or wrong. Yet recent studies among Mexican teachers by Rojas-Drummond and Mercer (2004) show that closed questions do not enhance learning and a review of international studies by Wolf, Crosson and Resnick (2006) finds that 'checking up' questions do not develop higher-level reading skills.

It is almost thirty years since Galton et al. (1980) and Cook-Gumpertz (1986) saw little emphasis on 'intellectual exchanges between teacher and student' (p.8), when Wilkinson (1987, p.115) summarised that teachers were 'unaware' of the appropriateness of talk in different situations, had no model of talk and that it was not thought 'children should talk to each other.' The Oracy Project (Wilkinson, 1987, p.1), provided strategies for 'oral and communication skills' to be taught based on the idea that talk is a rehearsal for writing. Despite subsequent work on the development of oracy many learners still struggle to transfer their thoughts into the abstract written form expected when entering secondary school due to difficulties in using talk to understand and to negotiate meaning.

Glassman (2001, p.22) reinforces the interactionists' emphasis on the 'importance of everyday activities' and their warnings that educators forget their 'power' in the learning process 'at their peril'. Galton, Steward, Page and Hargreaves (2007, p.63) provide evidence of the importance of children to express their ideas without embarrassment in an atmosphere of 'collectivity, reciprocity and support', in 'risk free' settings (Evans and Jones, 2007).

2.7.3 Classroom Observation Studies

Systematic observations of interactions and talk in classroom confirm little change from traditional whole-class teaching and practice. Barnes (1969) revealed secondary teachers doing most of the talking, reflecting unequal power relationships between teacher and learner. During the late 1970s the Observational Classroom Learning Evaluation Project (ORACLE), found a similar imbalance, with primary teachers 'transmitting' to their classes for two thirds of the time and few opportunities for children to take the lead, make contributions or enhance their language development (Galton et al., 1980). Observations by Cook-Gumpertz (1986, p.8) recorded few 'intellectual exchanges between teacher and student' and interactions incidental and casual, with little attention paid to 'intellectual exchanges between teacher and student', with simplistic responses to children, of a 'behaviourist,' extrinsic kind. Wilkinson (1987, p.115) argued at the time that 'although teachers believe they give prominence to discussion, observational research does not suggest this.' He suggested that the teachers did not think that 'it was not thought that children should talk to each other', to encourage dialogue or develop their abilities to empathise with each other. Cook-Gumpertz (1986, p.8) similarly argues there was little consideration of the social environment or of the range of language genres that different 'social situations' require. Wilkinson (1987) argues that teachers had no 'model' of talk at its best.

Despite the Literacy Strategy's early focus on 'interactive teaching', and substantial research findings, subsequent observation studies show neither has been widely applied. The findings of a replication of the ORACLE primary school observation study (Galton et al., 1980) conducted, nearly twenty years since the original are significant (Galton et al., 1999) as it identifies major increases during whole-class lessons in teachers talking *at* children rather than *with* them (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002) and for two thirds of the time during whole class teaching as the 'norm' (English, Hargreaves and Hislam, 2002). Galton et al. (1980) report that: a) the proportion of questioning in primary classes has since risen; b) the balance of 20% open-ended questions and 80% of closed questions has remained; c) teacher talk which concentrates on facts has doubled to 30% and accounts for 50% of all teacher instructional talk (Galton, Hargreaves & Pell, 2009). Similarly, the National Strategies Study (Hardman et al., 2003) finds some 70% of teachers' exchanges with individual pupils to be limited to an average of just 5 seconds and three words or less. Some 15% of teachers asked no open questions, only 10% did so; 43% took up pupils' ideas and ask questions, which constituted only 4% of all their exchanges. Only 11% of the teachers' exchanges promoted extended discourse, known to extend children's language and thinking processes.

This replicates the original Oracle findings (Galton et al., 1999; 2007) and Alexander (2001) relates similar evidence, or 'interactional asymmetry' that children are frequently spoken to in a manner he describes as 'supervisory'. Further parallels are found in the later review of Primary National Strategy teaching by Ofsted (2005) which concludes that schools do not plan effectively for speaking and listening (2005, p.2), that pupils are passive for too long in whole class lessons and lose concentration. Teachers are found to use too many closed questions, giving pupils too few opportunities to talk about their learning with insufficient challenge through engaging in independent activities. Smith et al. (2001) too argue that 'interactive' teaching strategies used with the whole class have not greatly changed the traditional pattern of interaction. Burns and Myhill (2004) also affirm that teacher-led questioning and explanations still dominate the classroom, with few opportunities for pupils to initiate ideas or give extended responses.

Classroom observations by Sammons et al. (2001) in Year 5 classes suggest that since the National Strategies teaching quality has remained 'uneven'. It is found particularly evident regarding 'richness of instruction' including thought provoking, children using hypotheses to experiment in problem-solving and reciprocal discussion with approximately 17% of classes rated as 'very low'. In fact, the teaching of 'higher order' and critical thinking skills of analysis, inference, application, interpretation, problem solving, and planning is not observed in 30% of classes. There are aspects of English

pedagogy in reading recorded to be 'noteworthy', for example 'some' children being encouraged to go beyond decoding text. These teachers develop higher order thinking skills for 'meaning making' by drawing on knowledge and reasoning to critically evaluate their comprehension.

2.7.4 Intervention Studies

Some intervention studies have trialled classroom strategies for talk and noted the outcomes. A science teaching intervention by Howe, Tolmie and Rodgers (1992) involved students working in groups of 2 to 4 to negotiate their predictions, test them out, and collaborate on interpreting the outcomes. The authors summarise that benefits from group interaction are gained by children comparing viewpoints and differing ideas generated by internal conflict, by reflecting upon concepts and facts that had previously appeared contradictory, and finally resolving them. Wolf, Crosson and Resnick (2006) report that using questions to support children in explaining a main idea in their own words, i.e. in a narrative, helps to develop reading comprehension.

Empirical intervention studies related to narrative by Veneziano and Hudelot (2009, p.17) report the danger of assuming that children already have narrative abilities, similarly calling for more evidence and potential in the domain of communication. Participants between 4 and 12 years were asked to consider key questions in relation to a told story involving perspective-taking. Cognitive interventions involved scaffolding to support participants' reasoning powers which Veneziano and Hudelot's (2009) report demonstrated gains made by all in the experimental group. The fundamental importance of 'cooperative learning' or learning in cooperation is stressed, with participants developing a 'repertoire of voices'. Veneziano and Hudelot (2009) conclude the need for teachers to scaffold children's thinking throughout the early and primary years, in particular powers of reasoning and the affective domain, the feelings or 'epistemic states' of others.

The Thinking Together Intervention (Mercer and Littleton, 2007) is based on a socio-cultural design to develop learners' understanding and use of dialogue as a tool for learning. This involved 700 UK children aged 6 to 13, whose thinking was assessed collectively and individually, using two sets of Raven's non-verbal reasoning matrices. The findings show that children in the target groups developed more exploratory talk, given words to use deliberately such as 'could, should and ought'. Secondly, questions on the 'Raven's matrix were solved more successfully, with gains in Maths and Science tests; the intervention groups overtaking control groups. A review by Mercer and Howe (2012, p.14) of a wide range of studies across subjects shows that discussing, reasoning

and arguing their points enhances children's learning. They also report the effectiveness of being actively involved in 'reflective discussions' advances children's understanding as do strategies which 'encourage students to put knowledge into their own words', i.e. provide a narrative (p.17). However Alexander (2005; 2008) reports that such 'dialogic' talk is not often seen in classrooms, i.e. as a true 'conversation' which involves all participants and considers all of their ideas (Mercer and Howe, 2012). This approach reflects the 'inter-subjectivity' between speakers that Bruner argues and what Mercer (2000) describes as involving 'interthinking'.

2.7.5 Teachers' Professional Knowledge

Lave and Wenger (1988) argues that the classroom support for children's language, learning and narrative development provided by teachers is attributable to their 'cognitive actions'. For example, Alexander claims that educators often assume that secondary age children have mastered the major structural features of language, particularly narrative, yet they may not have. He argues this is a particularly important issue for students in secondary schools as teaching takes place in a disjointed manner across separate subjects (Alexander, 2004). Such difficulties are worrying because, as Fischer (1998) and others argue, the ability to interpret narrative is vital to creative and critical thinking. Mercer and Littleton (2007) point out that exploratory talk relies on learners' mastery of narrative structure, is found to be weak among many pupils, yet many teachers do not pay attention to the exploratory process or narrative talk. Glassman draws on the contributions made by the interactionists fifty years ago regarding the importance of the 'social context' of learning including social interaction (2001, p.22), This is endorsed by Ahn and Filipenko (2007) who argue that attention must be paid to and focused on developing children's narrative in different contexts.

Barnes and Todd (1977, p.127) observe a wide 'repertoire of social relationships' that can be used in schools for classroom conversations, however Howe and Mercer (2012, p.18) suggest that many children need guidance on collaboration, discussion and problem-solving. In particular they suggest teachers need to 'model' the language of reasoning and argument. As Galton et al. (2009) observe, during classroom interactions teachers' hand-over to learners is critical and, as argued by Bruner, central to supporting, scaffolding and extending children's learning in a contingent manner. Yet Keefer, Zeitz and Resnick (2000, p.79) suggest it would be a 'challenge' to help teachers scaffold children's reasoning and discussions 'appropriate to the ... goals of the dialogue' and to make 'shifts in context when the ... course of argumentation might warrant it.' Tomasello (2008) concludes that understanding how effective communication and messages are conveyed

at a deep level is needed by both teachers and learners to reflect the sophisticated process. Alexander (2004) agrees that such support will only be realised when teachers understand that the development of language is a process and that it demands both 'pupil engagement and teacher intervention'.

New approaches to developing pupils' communication skills in proportion to other aspects of learning, despite increasing demands by school, society and employment, are not advanced according to Alexander because there remains both an 'historically rooted' tendency in the teaching of English to 'detach talk from reading and writing' and to 'indeed make it subservient' (Alexander, 2009, p.15). An earlier National Curriculum re-draft (DCSF, 2011) showed planning for communication, speaking and listening within personal skills alongside academic into secondary years in a creative, cross-curricular team-work approach to learning. This Curriculum has been replaced by the current government with another draft, currently under review (DfE, 2012), in which language and communication figure within English and some other subjects but is not embedded in its own right.

2.7.6 Overview of Classroom Talk

Despite long-standing research findings on children's language development, its impact on educational outcomes and the role of the environment, there have never been plans to assess pupils' progress in language. Rather, attainment has always been measured primarily through the medium of writing. It remains the principal means of national summative assessment, such as in National Curriculum SATs tests, GCSE and Advanced Level examinations. Although interpersonal communication is a constant and central feature of everyday life and work, it has never been the focus of any aspect of mainstream educational planning or, as of mid-2013, featured as a central subject in the UK school curriculum. This is of concern as research by Sammons et al. (2001) record that teaching quality is poorer for children in socially disadvantaged areas who most often experience difficulties in communication and learning that continue into adulthood.

2.8 Developing Narrative Competence: A Comparative Perspective

Raising educational standards and target setting have been the focus of recent governments. Wilshaw (2012), for example, suggesting England is being overtaken by other nations, referring to the positioning of UK students in international league tables of educational performance (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, 2001; 2003; 2007), particularly in the respect that Finland and Asian Pacific Rim countries continue to outscore the UK. English children aged 14 to 16 years represent 5% of the

higher bands, less than the world average of 6% in the higher band including sub-Saharan countries whose children receive 6 years less education and against an average of 13% of students from countries similar to the UK. The same dissatisfaction is expressed concerning the standards of older UK students and that the percentage achieving higher grades has fallen by around 13% (Sturman et al., 2007).

Looking beyond our own shores we are drawn 'inevitably towards comparison' (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2007) as a review of comparative studies of classroom communication offers the opportunity for a fresh look at UK pedagogy, particularly in relation to the development of narrative thinking to support learning. Alexander's (2001; 2006) review of primary education took into account both international comparisons and twenty-first century global influences and insights.

2.8.1 Introduction

This review reports repeated calls to expand the UK's pedagogical approach in the areas of communicative competence and narrative thinking. These requests coincide with the need to deepen its international research base. McPhail (2010) argues for both examining a 'broad range' of components regarding communication and taking 'an international or global approach'. In combining both calls the following section examines extracts from the literature directly related to the degrees and ways in which talk by children is encouraged, planned for and supported in classrooms. It is based on literature available in the English language and selected from Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, the USA and the Pacific Rim. The major focus is on Japanese education as an example of a country consistently scoring highly in educational and commercial comparisons.

Whilst in international educational tests results the UK is superseded by nations such as Japan and Finland, the cultural and educational contexts of their nations are not always fully considered (Rogoff, 2003, p.283). This also relates to the teaching methods used in nursery and primary schools in these countries (Alexander, 2002; Kunihiro, 2004), and to their children's school entry age at age 6 or 7 which is up to two years later than in the UK. For example, on the basis of her international and inter-cultural research, Rogoff (2003) demonstrates how language, as a tool of thinking, results from community-wide ways of thinking and acting including the home and the school. Minami and McCabe (1996) emphasise the influence that adult narrative structures have on the ways children go on to form and express their ideas orally. They show that children encounter wide ranging narratives for different purposes, for example some are instructional while others entertain or stimulate flexibility of thought and creativity.

Rogoff reports how cultures differ in the types of activities and materials in which adults involve children (2003, p.283) and how the nature of the narratives children encounter reflects the values of the community, family and school. International, inter-cultural and comparative studies such as these can thereby reveal the relative importance of oral narrative and literate narrative within a society, and compare degrees of support for children's narrative development across cultures, both outside and within the education system, and the relationship between the two.

2.8.2 Japanese Culture and Education

To place current Japanese education in a global context, its students are continuously rated near the top of international tables of student assessment even from age 9. The 2010 4th report on Pisa (Programme for International Student Assessment) identifies Japan as within the highest rank in core subjects compared with Britain at 23rd out of 65 economies (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010; Young, 2010). Whilst there is awareness of such success it is perhaps not widely appreciated that, as reported by Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella (2011), in the latter part of the twentieth century in parts of the Pacific Rim and Japan in particular, an earlier focus on testing and standards was considered to have been a mistake. Japan changed its approaches to teaching and learning and the national focus moved away from 'effectiveness' because of the view, as Abiko (2011, p.358) suggests, that 'these terms lack a humane, qualitative aspect.' Shimizu (2009) argues that Japanese teachers prefer instead to think of schools as being 'empowering for children'.

2.8.3 Japanese Educational Philosophy and Pedagogy

Japanese post-war education draws on American nursery (kindergarten) and elementary education for organisation but more importantly draws for its content and pedagogy from the democratic principles of Froebel and American educational philosopher John Dewey. Through several reforms it is both argued and observed that Dewey's influence endures as a 'pragmatic philosopher' (Youzhong Sun, 2007). According to Sugimine (2005, p.8) the character of Japanese education also reflects strong practical traditions from Zen Buddhist philosophy, such as 'wa' (harmony between man and nature) with a strong moral curriculum based on 'give and take' ('on and giri') and with these traditions the Japanese people have developed a unique 'group philosophy'. On this basis, kindergarten and elementary school pedagogies include informal methods involving group work in which cognitive processes are planned for and developed through 'social interaction' (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2011). Abiko (2011, p.361) confirms the value placed on children learning in groups based on increasing opportunities for 'interaction

and communication between pupils and teachers. He suggests that Japan responds positively to Vygotsky's theory of ZPD support and Bruner's concept of scaffolding and a theory of development which 'depends not on maturity but on education.'

A strong and noticeable feature in schools to age 12 in Japan is the emphasis on promoting practical effort and collective responsibility by children empowered with the means to change society 'for the common good' (Dewey, 1938). Finn (2012) sees this pedagogy as a revolutionary, forward thinking approach towards hands-on classroom activities. Kariya (2010, p.11) reports that seen in everyday practice is Dewey's philosophy (1902) based on the importance of the child engaging in practical problem solving activities in a 'social' school environment. This follows Dewey's four principles of learning based on 'child centred' interest. These are: children creating their own learning, acquiring meaning through mental networks, that the best learning is 'active' and occurs in the context of solving a compelling and 'personal' practical problem and teachers viewing learning as a means to an end and developing continuum (Dewey, 1938, p.82). Finn (2012) links to Freire's (1972) moral enquiry, problem-solving and ideals of social justice towards reducing an achievement gap and in addition also sees the relationship in the longer term with solving educational, economic and social problems.

Japan's Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (abbreviated as MEXT) provides the National Curriculum Standards for Kindergartens (NCSK, 1988) of which the aims are, (1) To experience the enjoyment of expressing feelings in one's own words; (2) To listen to other people's language and conversation, to verbalize what one has experienced and thought, and to experience the pleasure of communicating with others; (3) To understand the language necessary to everyday life, to be familiar with picture-books and stories, and to communicate one's feelings with teachers and friends.

The National Elementary School Curriculum (MEXT, 2000) has embedded within it the government's 'zest for life' philosophy (Izumi-Taylor, 2010), which links everyday activities to daily life. Examples include children's gardening working-parties and care for the environment, embedded in an integrated science curriculum which encourages children to grow up to take responsibility (Lewis, 2003). Japan is known to be collectivist, reflective and implicit; it is for reasons related to its cultural concept of 'amae' (open-mindedness and openness) that in the Japanese 'high context' culture they focus on group decision-making and feelings rather than individual achievement. For example, Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella (2011) suggest the Japanese are less inclined to make a decision on behalf of a group as they prefer taking into account the views of others towards a collective decision although it is a longer process.

Abiko (2011, pp.359-361), as an official at the Japanese Ministry of Education and a professor of teacher education, argues that; 'in Japan the most valuable purpose of education is the whole development of character in each person.' Referring to concrete activities he supports putting abstract knowledge 'to practical usein daily problems'; he argues that this develops children's capacity for 'learning how to learn... self education', life-long and 'autonomous' learning, for which he considers 'the ability of self evaluation' and 'self assessment' to be necessary . Lewis (2003) reports how these aspects are reflected in the freedom and power handed over to kindergarten and elementary school children. Of particular significance is the development of 'self-regulation' (Lewis, 2003; Abiko, 2011), a capacity that is linked to thinking aloud (Fisher, Jones, Larkin and Myhill, 2010) and Vygotsky's (1978, p.27) concept of inner speech.

The 'high context' of Japanese culture is also seen in kindergarten and elementary education. The emphasis on *amae*, or open-mindedness, and skilful communication is translated into Japan's education and the modes of talk and extended communication seen promoted in the classroom (Abiko, 2010). The main focus on 'amae' (open-mindedness) requires children to learn to 'read the minds' of others in conducive interpersonal relationships. In the Japanese curriculum for 6-12 year-olds, talk has for some time been viewed as the primary mode of communication and expression (MEXT, 2010), and in curriculum guidance its processes are made explicit. Kariya (2010, p.11) suggests that Japan's approach to dialogue, rhetoric and communication is seen in its elementary curriculum, as it cites as valuable 'communication skills' for 'applying to daily life and jobs'. These are seen consistently in schools, with topic or themed learning and practical activities, surrounded by groups of children talking together in a loud and animated way, as recorded by Lewis (2003). The Japanese Government's latest National Curriculum addresses the latest curriculum's main aim to improve, not pupils' language and writing, but firstly to improve their thinking, judging and presenting abilities at the core (MEXT, 2011). The strategy involves enriching and cross-curricular language activities to cultivate intellect, communication and moral reasoning, using 'hands on' talk with 'zest for life' (Abiko, 2010). A balance between subject knowledge and problem-solving abilities has since evolved, embedded in a 'talking to others' approach (Satomi Izumi Taylor, 2010). Importantly, as Lewis (2003) reports, children contribute orally to learning in the classroom; this includes their personal reflection on events (*hansei*) which is viewed as a 'disposition' mastered from early childhood. In general, Japanese elementary school children are also now very familiar with talking to the group or whole class, and with taking the lead in presentations, all of which are deemed to develop communication skills.

2.8.4 Japanese Educational Research

Shirakawa and Kitano (2009, p.258) report on the move in Japanese early childhood research away from quantitative methodology to 'interpretive and subjective research methods with sympathy, re-realisation and reconsideration', approaches which are widely accepted in the domain. For example, observations of classroom communication practices are set out and analysed by writers such as Lewis (1995; 2003) and Izumi-Taylor (2010). Developing pupils' narrative abilities in elementary schools within reasoning and thinking is also observed, with reports by many researchers that teacher-pupil interaction is planned, albeit with the teacher in a non-lead but guiding role. In many Japanese elementary school lessons the organisation and pace of teaching incorporates a length of time for pupils to talk and generate ideas and narrative, without the pressure of producing written outcomes or 'evidence' necessarily within the same lesson. Izumi-Taylor (2010) suggests that collaborative communication plays an instrumental role on a continuum from talk and narrative, on one end, to writing on the other. Writing is viewed as evolving out of experience; developing a sense of register and genre are considered intrinsic to a sense of audience and purpose. Cognition is seen in Japan as the most important outcome combined with feedback, initiated by the teacher but usually involves peers focusing on meta-cognitive engagement through collaboration (Izumi-Taylor, 2010). In relation to language Minami (2002, p.254) argues that teachers cannot assume that learners on entry to school will be proficient talkers, that they will have already grasped structural features of their native language, or that they can recognise constructs of events or schemata or 'structures in semantic memory that specify the general arrangement of a body of information.'

Maynard (1989; 2000) analyses how Japanese language strategies convey subjective emotion alongside sharing feelings with others in social settings. Rogers and Sage (2013) similarly report on major cultural differences between Japanese and UK parents and educators, the former primarily emphasising its moral curriculum through fostering friendship, social understanding, talk and empathy in both kindergarten and elementary schools alongside the academic. Contemporary Japanese educational philosopher Sugimine (2005, p.8) summarises, 'difficult though it may be to realise the purpose of true education, it is crucial to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding.' This view is further supported by research showing how Japanese kindergarten children are encouraged to talk and write to friends to show their emotions in written language (Shirakawa and Iwahama, 2009). In fact Abiko (2011, p.362) from the Japanese Ministry of Education, challenges the 'one-sided' interpretation of 'making meaning', suggesting

that it relates not only to the child's external reality but also to his 'internal, psychological processes'.

Shirakawa and Iwahama (2009, p.593) discuss how difficult it is for young children to 'keep in mind' words and narratives without speaking them aloud. They report on an activity with 3 to 5 year-old Japanese pre-schoolers which requires and promotes the development of both 'self talk and internalisation', a game involving guessing answers to riddles. Their participant observational studies report the participants moving away from the use of egocentric speech, at a level of 36% of their total utterances at age 3, reducing to 22% at age 4 and to 11% of their utterances by age 5. Shirakawa and Iwahama (2009, p.591) suggest that Japanese teachers are skilled in putting 'thinking time' between one hint and the next hint. They argue that it is deemed 'very important in fostering inner speech within a child's mind'; they consider that 'through playing riddles, children learn to think using language and then retain this language in their mind as a framework for thinking.' However Shirakawa and Iwahama (2009) argue that there are 'unresolved issues' around how and when a child's activity differentiates into individual inner activity (thinking), social activity (speaking and listening) and solitary activity (reading and writing). They conclude that, in their view, further empirical studies are needed.

Related research in Japan by Yoshitaka et al. (2002) explores how interactions in the social environment can affect children's emotional and cognitive responses to learning which may either hamper or facilitate their performance (Kaczmarek 2005). However interpersonal communication appears to be supported by Japanese philosophy and the concept of 'amae' in conjunction with 'kizuna', or the human tie, and the bond of friendship (Fuki, 2002) which underpin the interactions of kindergarten and elementary schools and staff. Shimizu (2011) suggests that kizuna bonds may have a more influential role in the academic achievement of children in school than might be expected (Abiko, 2011, p.362).

2.8.5 Japanese Education, Narrative Competence and Learning

In relation to views on classroom talk and narrative, educational philosopher John Dewey's writings philosophy and educational method have had a major impact in Japan, His work is a major influence on pre-school and elementary education and underpins their pedagogies and related teacher education. His writings (1933) on procedural and conceptual aspects of language, the role of culture and the creation of networks remain significant regarding learning as a continuum towards new ends. Dewey's focus on the power of dialogue in rhetoric and communication in the democratic process is based on 'social constructivist' theory, and continues to underpin pedagogy. Abiko (2011), from the Ministry of Education and professor of teacher education in Japan, argues that in Japan

'human resources are more important than academic resources' (p.362). This raises questions as to the reasons for the consistency and continuity of higher-level educational outcomes in countries such as Japan (Knipprath, 2010). Some explain the differing success of the two societies as attributable to Japan's participatory model in 'collaboration, not competition' (Bangs, 2010). This extends to observations of Japanese kindergarten and elementary school practice (e.g. Lewis, 1995; 2003) which consistently note the strength of feeling among educators that all children should have equality of opportunity, regardless of what the Japanese term social 'context'. (Westerners may loosely term this as 'social class' but this concept is not used by the Japanese.) Sando (2002) reports on the 'under-resourcing' of some Japanese families due to poverty which Sando argues can be 'devastating', but a strong moral stance by teachers seeks to support all children equally to succeed. Minami (2002) points to the interrelated and complex nature of the Japanese kindergarten and elementary curricula. He emphasises that the relationship between teaching and learning should not be under-estimated by professionals in Japan, with 'recognition of the need for explicit training for the stakeholders, including negotiating roles and responsibilities' (Baerg, Lake and Paslawski, 2012).

2.8.6 The Relationship between Japanese Culture and Styles of Communication

Minami (2002) points out that different cultural contexts have unique complex symbol systems that children experience and must learn about. The cultural contexts also underpin a country's education, pedagogical styles and teacher-pupil communication as well as culturally specific styles of communication. Hall (1987) argues that these differences in style are based on their people's relative ability to read and respond to 'context' and to other people. On this basis Hall provides a cultural model of 'low context' and 'high context' cultures related to the contrasting ways in which each communicates. In 'high context' communication, as embedded in Japan and other Asian cultures, very little information is 'coded' or explicitly transmitted, according to Hall (1976, p.79), which means that not everything is 'spelled out' by the speaker as in the West. The term 'high context' means that 'most of the information is located either within the immediate physical context or internalised within the speaker.'

As a result important related aspects such as parenting, interactions and expectations also differ in the East and the West. In particular, young children in Japan are shown that the nature of social 'contexts' such as situations and relationships is considered of central importance and merits careful consideration. In view of the implicit rather than explicit

forms of communication the Japanese high context, culture places more emphasis on listening and inference than speaking, with an emphasis on the child learning to listen carefully and developing empathy (Azuma, 1986). A focus on the fundamental role of interaction between cognitive and language development in Japan in accordance with socio-cultural theory is argued by Minami (2002) to link to *amae* (open-mindedness) as it requires a lengthy initial period of 'reading' and appraising the person, taking into account the situation or context. In Japan children must learn that *the sender* (or speaker) has responsibility for producing a coherent, clear, and intelligible message (Azuma, 1986, p.9). For this reason Japanese high context speakers award time to thinking about a message or communication, taking into account the person they are addressing and composing the message with subtlety and care. This 'mind reading' evokes the intersubjectivity that Vygotsky and Bruner argue underpin successful communication. In contrast, in the West the speaker may be more casual and take less care as it is considered to be 'the *receiver's* responsibility to make sense out of the message' (Azuma, 1986, p.9), not the speaker. In the West attention is paid mainly to the literal meaning of words and less to the context surrounding the words. Western cultures therefore tend to reside at the 'lower' end of the continuum of context.

2.8.7 Japanese Communication Styles and Adult-Child Interaction

Minami (2002, p.38) suggests that when an appropriate model of narrative structure becomes internalised and part of a learner's repertoire it facilitates communication. He argues that in his view different styles of narrative discourse reflect the language socialisation process, its fundamental structure and that these are both socio-culturally cultivated. He reports observations of contrasting parenting styles and parent-child interaction in Japan and America which reveal factors influencing how learners acquire language and holds valuable clues as to the differing ways in which narrative discourse develop and the roles that adults take. For example Minami argues that Japanese mothers believe that preschool children should be capable of 'reading the minds of others' and 'putting themselves in another person's position' in order to 'understand that person's feelings' (Minami, 2002, p.27). He reports how they scaffold young children's development of a form of 'mental telepathy' through subtle interaction called '*omoiyari*' (Minami, 2002, p.26).

This endorses the views of Vygotsky and Bruner on the centrality of inter-subjectivity in communication, a practice embedded in Japanese culture and part of the enculturation process. Japanese interactions focus on developing *interaction, communication and sharing* however it is also important to note that in Japanese child-rearing and

pedagogical practices talk is not the primary focus of the adults when seeking to enhance children's skills. In fact in Japan words are not totally relied upon, taking less account of what people say and placing greater trust in the quality of inter-personal relationships and personal judgement over a period of time. In actuality, when working with children to develop intersubjectivity the focus of adults is on 'tsutaeai-hoiku', a practice which seeks to develop mutual and collective ways of thinking (Hataya, 1968).

Minami (2002) provides further examples of language socialisation and structure being socio-culturally cultivated. He provides an analysis of the Japanese 'poetic' oral storytelling style and how Japanese young children imitate a 'canonical' style of storytelling, similar to Haiku poetry, with a pattern of 'orientation - act - outcome' (Minami, 2002, p.7) which is predominantly spoken by the mother. This is a 'canonical' pattern of conversational scaffolding, in which two to four experiences are presented in a discussion that is also noted by Bruner (1990) as underpinning effective talk. Minami (2002) describes how rich informal types of talk are used in the Japanese home with children, that these are 'in context', with 'extended' forms of dialogue and questions, as opposed to description. He explains that these constitute the means by which young Japanese children become inducted through and into a subtle interactive communicative style; how they learn that each communicative act contains its own implicit codes, hidden messages and inferences which need to be interpreted and explicitly responded to by the listener. Minami argues that language and non-verbal cues are necessary if children are to socialise aptly in cultural contexts.

2.8.8 Japanese Views on Narrative Competence and Cognitive Development

Minami (2002) presents an analysis of Japanese parenting and education which overtly address findings that children who are not able to read social situations respond inappropriately as they cannot de-centre (Donaldson, 1978). If children do not become aware of paralinguistic signs and cues, Minami (2002) argues, they may give ill managed and unrefined responses to others in a fragmented and componential way, providing only a part of a message or communicative act. When such difficulties are experienced by children there are often also 'emotional responses to misunderstanding' (Rogers, 2004a) which can become compounded and interfere further with effective communication. Hall (1987) shows how a country's forms of communication also reflect its culture, language, rules and norms. Minami (2002) shows how Japanese parenting and early education pre-empt and addresses these matters. He endorses Sugimine's argument that it is crucial for education to foster 'mutual understanding' (Sugimine, 2005, p.8). Whilst formal openings to lessons in Japanese schools are familiar, it is less known that the concepts of

amae and kizuna apply to Japanese adults' interactions with learners when teaching them. These are of an informal nature (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2011) as 'closeness' is seen to allow the 'internal voice' of the child or student to be heard externally (Fuki, 2002). This atmosphere is aimed at being emotionally safe (Yoshitaka et al., 2002), as required to support children's development of 'mental telepathy' or subjectivity.

Berducci (2010, p.25) emphasises that communication must be effective for language to be acquired in any culture and suggests that certain activities, such as turn-taking, develop children's social and communicative abilities. He argues that 'emergent cognition goes hand-in-hand with emergent interactional abilities' to lead to higher order communication, moving talk on from 'ordinary' to 'specialised'. The Japanese amae concept is overt and fundamental to its society and styles of interaction and communication, in which open-mindedness is based on an appreciation of mutual dependence (Doi, 1971). The 'incorporation of the concept by Japanese is extensive' alongside a prime focus on 'kizuna' or human ties (Fuki, 2002, p. 114) which are seen as essential in 'connections' between people and meaning making. Amae is a very public concept and much discussed, for example the importance of the bond of friendship was top of a recent poll in Japan and chosen as Japan's key word for 2011, written in Kanji script. Both concepts apply to the Japanese interactions with learners that are of an informal, rather than formal, nature; such 'closeness' is seen to allow the 'internal voice' of the child or student to be heard in the external context (Fuki, 2002).

In the English National Curriculum (2000) 'taking others' points of view' is a significant moment in children's developing narratives as they move from their own view into decentring and positioning. It consistently proves to be a major hurdle for many UK children when moving the focus of their writing from level 4 to 5. However Minami suggests that in the classroom the facilitation of effective communication has a similar, dual purpose as it also serves to develop cross-cultural understanding. Minami calls for communication to be acknowledged as the very means by which learners achieve it: 'we need to be aware that the basis for cultural difference originates in early stages of interaction at home and in education' (Minami, 2002, p.288) and that is the very basis that globalisation rests upon.

A country's education both draws upon and strengthens these aspects of its culture. This section has attempted to show some aspects of education in Japan, as an educationally high-achieving culture (as discussed above) with reference to some of the many complex factors underpinning its pedagogy and outcomes. As Minami (2002) emphasises styles of

communication are specific to, reflect and reinforce a country's culture, centring on the ability to read and respond to both the context and other people.

2.8.9 Comparing Japanese Approaches: An Overview

Overviewing the similarities and differences found in the educational and intervention approaches in Japan raises key points linking to educational and cognitive theories. For example, an important element of the studies of Brigman et al., (1999; 2008) with children aged 4 to 6, is that they involve children in story re-telling. Interventions are based on improving the transmitting and receiving of messages as narrative events that are heard as well as seen and felt. Story re-telling demands not just 'attention' and comprehension, that might at first appear to be the main focus, but also the processing and production of verbal and non verbal information. The story re-telling approach contrasts with teacher prescribed and content-led curricula that are found to be common.

As has been found elsewhere, this a skill that supports the development of children's narrative skills. The actions of more experienced others in providing support for the child are also important in interpreting the narratives that they hear (Frid, 2000; Sage, 2000), which in turn extends and enriches their own narrative repertoire. Yet, as Wallach (2008) argues, giving and receiving of information in meaningful, coherent ways and developing how to read inferences and other contextual aspects, enable children to become 'better equipped to manage the shift from informal to formal uses of language in school.' Wallach (2008) argues for interventions which provide children and teachers with opportunities to develop both spoken and written communication in a 'deliberative' pedagogical approach.

Similarly, the outcomes of Brigman's secondary school intervention study which, although measured by academic means, targets less directly pupils' academic skills. Instead the intervention focuses on: building an encouraging class community; cognitive strategies, including understanding story structures and meta-cognition; building healthy optimism and using (Japanese) 'kaizen' practice to acknowledge even small improvements towards continuous improvement.

As this review has shown, in educating its young the cultural values of the Japanese family are maintained and reinforced by the kindergarten and elementary school systems. Both caregivers and teachers focus on developing children's intersubjectivity through awareness of self, others' feelings and the surrounding social context. It is seen to be developed within the 'social environment' and intellectual exchanges and is 'to some extent a joint construction of teacher and student' (Cook-Gumpertz, 1986, p.8). Implementation of the Japanese curriculum rests upon adults' skillful and extended

narratives scaffolding open-mindedness, mental telepathy in subtle interactions. The processes of enculturation centre on the narratives of both the adults and the children.

Accessing both investigative fieldwork and research findings from Japan in this domain, especially those providing both qualitative and quantitative data in a community of practice, is somewhat limited due to language and geographical barriers. In addition, due to pedagogical beliefs (Shirakawa and Kitano, 2009, p.258) it is not easy to obtain complementary data that is of a quantitative nature if this were needed on which to base and substantiate any objective international comparisons between Japanese and English styles of classroom interaction and children's narrative competence

2.9 Summary of Findings and Points for Follow-Up Research

The individual key elements of inter-personal communication have been examined in research both theoretically and empirically. This critique has discussed how different communicative acts or codes are important to different groups, the types of meanings that different groups apply to different communicative events and how children fare in their unique educational communities. Van der Veen and Poland (2012) argue that the construction of narratives by children helps them understand human action based on theories that narratives and associated thinking processes are central to 'finding one's place in culture and society' (Bruner, 1996, p.42), and that the structure of the narratives reflects those of its closest community (Rogoff, 2003). Intersubjectivity is considered to be fundamental to this process, including the school setting, but depends upon what Bruner calls 'the attunement of the teacher to the expressions and intents of members of a classroom' (2009, p.132). The relationship between micro level activities and the macro scale of global communication is discussed, identifying education as a common, constant and key agency in this aspect of children's development and viewed from a comparative perspective.

2.9.1 Summary of Main Points from the Review

In reviewing and overviewing the literature related to theories and the findings of research I argue that there are several points that are consistently similar and significant.

1) There has for some time been international acknowledgement of language, not just in its own right, but as a multi-faceted, essential and central part of the thinking process (Hymes, 1974b). There is a call for the complexities of language and communication to be investigated using research studies comprising a range of approaches and methodologies (McPhail, 2010). This principle underpins the research design of the

studies by Locke et al. (2003), the EPPSE longitudinal enquiry (2011) and each of the linked intervention studies which explore and triangulate qualitative and quantitative measures (Brigman and Webb, 2003).

2) There is growing recognition that children need to develop their oral competencies to become 'fully participative citizens in a highly mobile global context' and that this 'cannot be left to chance' (Evans and Jones, 2007, p.559). There is much inter-cultural consensus in education that effective language and communication skills are now essential to the global society, (Finn, 2012) with greater focus by European Union educationalists (ESRC, 2010) and employers (Myers and Botting, 2008; CBI, 2010). To meet the complex requirements of interpersonal exchange across fields, global definitions of 'employability' now consider communication skills to be 'transversal' (CBI, 2010) and equally as important as academic skills (CBI, 2010; Comenius, 2010).

This already applies to Japan as a high achieving culture and Finn (2012) identifies how its curriculum has long been seen as the way to solve its economic problems. Its education system regards talk as the 'primary mode' of expression (MEXT, 2010), with its approach to dialogue, rhetoric and communication in its elementary curriculum seen as highly relevant 'to daily life and jobs' (Kariya, 2010, p.11). Its curriculum guidance makes these processes explicit in accordance with the Japanese culture of 'high-context' styles of communication, which is associated by research (Alexander, 2011) with the achievement of consistently high-level social, educational and commercial outcomes.

3) Strong cultural intersubjectivity is also closely associated with well-developed social and collaborative competence, as emphasised by Vygotsky (1962), Bruner (1996) and Rogoff (1993). It is found to be achieved by increasing both intellectual and emotional perspective taking (Donaldson, 1987; Berman and Slobin, 1994) and 'positioning' (Yoshitaka et al., 2002), all of which involve higher order thinking. Furthermore, abilities in perspective taking are associated with dealing with abstract, disembedded thinking (Donaldson, 1978), decontextualised language (Peterson and McCabe, 1994) and narrative view (Myhill, 2012), all of which underpin understanding and convey differing points of views as is required for thinking and problem-solving at advanced levels across the curriculum.

4) Similarity is seen in the focus on developing pupils' intersubjectivity in both the pedagogies of high performing countries such as Finland and Japan and successful intervention studies such as those of Brigman and colleagues (1999; 2008). It is of note that these interventions focus on developing children's social skills through interaction, communication and sharing which Vygotsky, Bruner and subsequent research studies

identify as the means to develop intersubjectivity; indeed Bruner (2006) argues for closer scrutiny of 'the relationship between speaking, thinking and socialising.' However it is also important to note that in Japanese pedagogical practice it is not talk itself which is the focus of adult scaffolding but 'tsutaeai-hoiku', developing like-minded ways of thinking (Hataya, 1968).

5) The aims of Brigman's two intervention projects (1999; 2008) include academic improvements but not 'basic skills' as in the U.K. Instead, alongside enhancing classroom skills such as paying attention listening and metacognition, the main focus falls on social skills. It uses strategies which increase the number of opportunities to interact with peers and adults by encouraging communication, the use of 'story structure' in thinking and working with others (Brigman, Switzer and Lane, 2008). Examining the strategies more closely suggests it may be that the interventions are effective as they develop participants' communicative competence and, as an integral part, enhance their narrative competence. A closer examination of the data would be needed to identify the relationship between social, communication and language skills alongside the correlation academic achievement.

6) The findings of Galton et al (2007) confirm the importance of children expressing ideas in an atmosphere of collectivity and support. Current pedagogical practices based on those which value the 'acquiescence of children to quiet working practices' (Evans, 2007, p. 55), as Hymes (1974) and Myhill (2008) suggest, result in pupils not becoming adequately equipped with an appropriate conceptual framework to develop the narrative style of thinking considered necessary for school learning. Such practices require a change to innovative methods which stimulate children's communicative and narrative competences and metacognitive abilities.

The research designs of intervention studies and the pedagogies of classroom curricula found successful in improving performance are seen to be similar in the relatively informal nature of the relationships among pupils and teacher. There appears to be an equality in the balance of power (Barnes, 1969; Galton et al., 1980) which enables children to respond in what they find 'risk free' interactions (Jones, 2007). This exemplifies Kaczmarek's (2005, p.18) findings that the mind requires feelings of safety to attain high developmental *levels* relating to social interactions. The findings of teacher and parent interviews by Burchinal et al. (2002) are reflected by those of Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) that the highest scores for teacher quality are characterised by respect, social support and concern shown to their pupils. All of their conclusions appear to relate to the combined Japanese concepts of 'friendship support acknowledging progress' which

underpin the sensitivity and informality of teaching interactions by Japanese kindergarten and elementary staff (Fuki, 2002). On this basis it appears worthy to award classroom atmosphere, the quality of relationships and sensitivity in communication serious consideration in research regarding matters of academic achievement. This endorses the conclusions of Abiko (2011) and Shimizu (2011) that these matters have a more influential role than might be commonly appreciated.

7) A further point of similarity is the inclusion of the practice of reflection. In Brigman's (2008) second intervention study the specific form 'kaizen' is part of the intervention, looking for even small improvements in the spirit of acknowledging and praising continuous improvement. As has been seen, reflection in various forms is central to the Japanese curriculum, including 'hansei' which prompts evaluation and analysis from the early years onward. In the ways that reflection is applied in both the Japanese curricula and the School Success Skills study it appears to be a linguistically based practice which prompts higher order thinking of the analytical and evaluative kind.

8) Yoshitaka et al. (2002) points out how interactions in the social environment can affect children's emotional and cognitive responses to learning and may either hamper or facilitate their performance. As has been seen, reflection is central to both the Japanese curriculum and Brigman's second study (2008) in prompting evaluation and analysis from the early years onward. Reflection involves risks for children in exposing their thoughts, feelings, self-criticism and receiving the reciprocal comments criticism of their peers, albeit constructive. However it is a further practice that is also highly dependent on an informal, emotionally 'safe' and secure atmosphere, another point of similarity and consistency in findings related to classroom communication and interventions which support academic achievement and which is related to the arguments of researchers from across Europe, the U.S.A and Japan (Abiko, 2011; Kaczmarek, 2005; Shimizu, 2011).

An uncritical 'transfer' of educational policy between cultures is inadvisable. It may ignore cultural and economic conditions or political factors (Steiner-Khans, 2004). The flourishing of comparative studies has seen much exporting and importing of educational approaches (Cowen, 2000). Policy 'borrowing' is viewed by McAdam, Tarrow and Till (2001, p.12) as a mechanism by which the standards or reforms of one nation judged to be 'desirable' by another country are cited in order to validate and import them to meet political purposes. This practice may be seen as relatively superficial, uncritical and short-term in its suitability and effectiveness. It contrasts with policy 'learning' which has the potential to provide more informed insights between cultures. Policy learning perceived by Chakraborty (2010) as supporting the development of a country's national policies, draws

upon international experience as a comparison to clarify its own context. Through action research, participants may proactively anticipate issues, trends, effects and pressures, empathising with each others' strengths and needs (Chakroun, 2010) more meaningfully.

2.9.2 Summary of Issues for Wider Research Attention

The extensive agreements and parallels found in research findings across continents, cultures and countries is an inspiring and encouraging situation on which to reflect. Having discussed and identified the key issues it brings into sharper perspective the matters that stand out for attention. These I also identify in sections, as follows.

- a) Research data on the nature and content of narrative competence, observational, qualitative and quantitative are needed. This is particularly pertinent for planning for the area of language in the education of those children and young people who struggle with the generation of narratives, and for its assessment. It is particularly relevant for those not successful in conveying the full extent of the meaning intended.
- b) As the literature shows, the context of any narrative is its key feature. It is also an orienting factor that the young child needs to learn to take into account to understand and make narratives comprehensible to a listener (Richards and Light, 1987; Labov, 1974; Polyani, 1982; Neisser, 1982). Context is overtly recognised a key feature of both interpersonal communication and pedagogy in some cultures, including Eastern cultures such as Japan, and that the two applications are closely related (Rogoff, 2003), yet it has not been examined extensively in relation to classroom practice and teachers' interactions.
- c) While it is argued that most children master the ability to tell narratives, there is relatively little information on the extent, pace and nature of children's progress in this area and its interaction with the learning process. For example, the degree to which the narratives children construct serve to inform and underpin the texts they go on to construct, which is also recognised by Myhill (2009) to be a matter of significance.
- d) Models and frameworks which offer tangible, pragmatic insights and guidance for observing and assessing the overall narrative competence of children are hard to find. There appears a shortage of materials identifying paths of development which enable progress to be acknowledged.
- e) In addition to recognising even small steps in achievement, the assessment of narrative competence is known to be closely associated with the development of social competence. Clearly defined assessment information on narrative competence would

allow the teacher to increase opportunities for experience in both domains and promote their mutual development.

- f) With regard to narrative competence per se, a model or framework for supporting and acknowledging individual pupils' narrative development would be a further constructive and valuable addition to both teachers' academic and professional development.
- g) Closely related is the matter of the classroom skills of teachers and teaching assistants in the domain of classroom communication, and their relationship with levels of personal confidence. As Alexander (2001) argues, much rests upon their values, beliefs and academic knowledge, however there are few findings related to the basis of their 'cognitive actions' (Lave, 1998). Research is therefore needed on the competences and personal levels of confidence of staff in the area of classroom communication.
- h) It is also argued that narrativity mutually supports intersubjectivity, as emphasised by Vygotsky (1962, p.89), Bruner (1996, p.111) and Rogoff (1993), and underpins both perspective taking (Donaldson, 1987; Berman and Slobin, 1994) and 'positioning' (Bamberg, 1997c; Myhill, 2009). The latter is a type of higher order thinking related to socialisation on the one hand (Minami, 2002) and understanding and writing disembedded forms of text at the 'knowledge transformation' stage (Myhill, 2009) as are demanded by the school curriculum. In view of its centrality, greater research should focus on the nature and form of subjectivity, and on its promotion in the classroom, albeit an unfamiliar concept to many teachers.

At the time of writing, observational studies and intervention trials which specifically investigate narrative thinking and communication appear relatively minimal or at least difficult to locate. Interventions designed specifically for practical classroom settings and in English schools could have valuable, practical outcomes and applications. It is necessary to heed the dangers of uncritically 'transferring' educational policy between the two cultures and not taking into account major contextual differences in socio-economics and culture, such as history, language and child-rearing practices. Nevertheless my research seeks to investigate how we can equip our learners to survive the consequences of global recession and reduced job opportunities for younger people. Abiko (2011) discusses the impact of the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in the mid 90's. This resulted in the current emphasis, in kindergarten and elementary schools, on educating the whole person. This approach is considered on both individual and group levels to lead to greater personal, social and academic success. An informal approach in the early

years to focusing on communication, talk and collaboration through problem solving has been used.

Regardless of differences in cultures, underlying moral values are associated with upbringing in both societies. In Japan young children are seen to need informal education; Abiko (2011, p. 363) regards this approach as ‘essential and crucial’ similar to the ‘base and protection’ initially provided by children’s parents. He describes it ‘... as an expression of affection’ without which children would feel ‘lost and lonely’. The school may have to supplement or compensate for lack of nurturing in the home. That it needs to be the arena for developing friendships and cooperation through exploratory talk and problem solving is captured by the Japanese Elementary School Deputy head teacher as a universal entitlement. Genki, known as ‘zest for life’ is seen as both a vision in the Japanese National Curriculum and an active learning process. It is a philosophy which places group dynamics and cooperation at the heart of the learning process. Those in the child’s immediate circle known as ‘kin’ friends (similar to relatives) are regarded as having an important role in helping a child to resolve conflicts using talk, turn taking and reflection (see section 7.9.1).

Findings also reported in Study 4 show that educational researchers in Japan choose not to use the terms ‘effective’ or ‘effectiveness’ in relation to pedagogy because these terms lack a humane, qualitative aspect. Similarly, they do not like the terms ‘effective’ related to schools or teaching as they believe it can imply that results are only measured quantitatively and superficially. Instead, Japanese educationalists prefer more positive and active terms such as ‘powerful’ or ‘empowering’ when referring to education (Abiko 2011, p.358).

2.9.3 Points Arising from the Review that the Studies will Address

On the basis of the above points regarding the current situation in research in this domain I make the following arguments for the proposal of studies.

- I. Myhill (2008) argues that the meta-linguistic awareness required of the implied reader is a capacity to be developed and that ‘this linearity and temporality reflects writing that is close to the speech-writing interface.’ Such writing is suggested by Myhill (2008) as ‘mirroring oral language patterns’. As a result, where this is not well developed it demands adjustment from oracy to the written word by some children: ‘weaker writers are less assured in managing the specific rhetorical demands of writing partly because of the influence of their oracy experiences’ (Myhill, 2008, p.284). As the above review

shows the range and quality of children's experiences are extremely wide and hard to anticipate.

- II. When support is needed by children for producing writing that is 'ordered by a sequence of events', Myhill (2009, p. 265) suggests the 'oral rehearsal' by children of what they intend to communicate. Myhill also points out that when pupils move on to forms of writing that are 'non-narrative', in subjects such as geography, mathematics and science, it is the pupil who has to decide on the order in which s/he arranges the facts on the page. She argues that this process calls upon the ability to 'operate a mental dialogue between content and rhetoric at a knowledge-transforming phase' (Myhill, 2009, p.272). The levels and details of such skills in the oral narrative stages appear to need closer investigation.
- III. Whilst the review shows that there are many young children who have inadequate language abilities to cope well in school (Locke et al., 2002; EPPSE, 2011) there are no detailed or in-depth data available on the narrative abilities of children as they start school. Neither is there data on the same abilities as they leave primary and enter secondary school. In other words, this 'fundamental' and 'primary' narrative ability is often neither marked, monitored nor addressed throughout a child's education, despite the fact that any weakness is likely to prompt a wide range of personal, affective and academic problems, as outlined above.
- IV. On this basis I argue that children need to be supported in developing the narrative competence which underpins the translation of speech into writing when starting school. Well-developed narrative skills are needed before they embark on the writing process, to avoid the negative attitudinal and emotional barriers associated with early delays and failure. Narrative skills are also essential to the oral rehearsal that provides support to many beginning writers. However on the basis of both research evidence and my professional experience related to their levels of personal confidence experience I suggest that their narrative skills cannot be assumed, even at the secondary school stage (Wilkinson, 1987; Alexander, 2004; EPPSE, 2011; Topping, 2011). I suggest that this is a journey that is far longer and more needy than appears to be generally recognised, planned for or resourced. I argue for research into children's narrative development and the support they need throughout the long journey of developing their narrative (and non-narrative) writing, and that this is highly relevant in the secondary school years.
- V. Van der Veen and Poland (2012) suggest that an assessment of communicative competence and children's oral narratives by teachers can provide insights into their development, progress and cognitive achievements. In addition assessment of narrative competence is recognised for its effectiveness in developing intersubjectivity

for interpreting and understanding the actions of others (Pi'eh, 2003; van Oers, 2003; Engel, 1999). On this basis Van der Veen and Poland (2012, p.108) argue that narratives should have a 'central place' in educational teaching and assessment practices.

- VI. Findings in the literature report suggest that levels of language and communication of very young children may be high in those countries in which older students achieve highly in international tests, i.e. by the ages of 9 and 14. This is in spite of often starting school around 2 years later in the U.K. However to what extent this gap applies to levels of narrative competence is not clear. Research at the pre-school level around children's narrative skills at school entry could be highly informative, particularly in relation to the later academic success of students in such countries.

Accessing both investigative fieldwork and research findings from a Pacific Rim country such as Japan is often limited due to language, financial and geographical barriers. This applies particularly to accessing both qualitative data, quantitative data and researching within a community of practice, such as in the domain of narrative competence. Furthermore, Japanese child development and pedagogical beliefs often result in barriers to testing in order to collect complementary data which is of a quantitative nature (Shirakawa and Iwahama, 2009). However this data-base may be required in order for any objective comparisons, such as between levels of Japanese and English children's narrative competence, to be substantiated.

- VII. Despite what is now known about the limitations of what children can convey in writing, 'achievement' in the UK continues to be measured principally by academic educational performance at a formal level and considered to be effective. The requirements of the current Education Secretary are for teachers to place pedagogical emphasis on testing, control and discipline and to avoid the danger of idle chatter (Alexander, 2013). However this low-context approach has been found to be ineffective and counterproductive in education (Hall, 1976; Minami, 2004), as research across 20 countries confirms (Alexander, 2012), and draws attention to the contrast with 'high context' communication, pedagogy and practice espoused by schools in high achieving cultures. More detailed comparative enquiry could provide valuable professional knowledge and insight into approaches and strategies which demonstrate how pupils' narrative competences can be supported and enhanced by teachers in order to further their all-round development.

2.10 Concluding Comments

This literature review has sought to demonstrate that all cultures have stories and accounts which are socio-culturally situated and involve complex abilities. The whole activity that is language involves complex interpersonal exchanges whether they be face-to-face or electronic. At the heart of social activity, narrative is seen to be the vehicle responsible for acculturation and cultural representation, creating meaning within oneself for cognitive and social purposes and sharing meaning with others, much of this now nationally and globally.

The review has demonstrated how historical and political as well as academic factors in school and classroom management underpin the cultures, views and practices of teachers on how children develop language and narrative, learn and make progress. Extensive international investigations and reviews, including those reviewed for over a decade by Alexander (2003; 2008; 2012), confirm my own experiences and argument that talk and narrative are not perceived by many UK teachers as supporting cognition. His findings also suggest that teachers' communicative competences may not be adequate to support these processes. The current situation contrasts with the consistent conclusions of researchers and employers that effective communication involves a sophisticated process which has to be learned. Alexander finds in schools '... an historically rooted tendency to detach talk from reading and writing and ... make it subservient...' (Alexander, 2009, p.15) and compares this with the 'integrated' approaches '...prominent in the curricula of many other countries...' (Alexander, 2010, p.24). Yet, narrative thinking, in particular, is acknowledged as the first, most direct, concrete form of thinking and in daily use (Bruner, 1993; van Oers, 2009). Myhill (2008) argues that meta-linguistic awareness is required for reading and the speech-writing interface and for engagement in the type of higher order thinking demanded by advanced learning, as summarised above.

I argue that classroom studies suggest that research findings on the fundamental role of narrative and narrative thinking per se in children's learning, and teachers' communicative competences in supporting these processes, are yet to be taken fully into account, planned for or explored in sufficient depth in UK education.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

One of the key points emerging from the review of literature is that the relationship between oral communication and learning is a major issue. Many children start school with inexperience of formal talk, insufficient language and communicative competences to cope with social situations and formal school learning. Such difficulties often deepen and become exacerbated in secondary school and can permanently affect future life chances. Several other issues arise from the review of the literature. One was that those involved in research into under-achievement rarely enquire into the relationship between narrative competence, thinking, oral expression, literacy and learning. Secondly that, as learners need such competences to shift expressive language into formal literacy, educators must ensure they can operate at basic oral levels in order to adapt to the complex and abstract demands of writing.

The literature highlights the close relationship between children's under-achievement, poor attention and behaviour and leads us to question the cognitive-linguistic levels required of children entering primary school. The third issue that emerges was the importance of educators' communicative competence and knowledge of strategies to help children improve their cognitive linguistic abilities. Such strategies include providing experience of formal situations which require clear spoken narratives, self-regulation, and an awareness and an intersubjective understanding of audience and purpose.

3.2 An Overview of the Research Questions and Research Design

As I had consistently found the above to be key issues in teaching and learning for all ages I sought to explore them in some depth. They resulted over time in the research questions posed in chapter 1 which are reiterated below.

1. What is the nature of English children's narrative competence in the first years of secondary school?
2. How can English secondary school educators improve classroom communication to support pupils' development?

3. What is the nature of English children's narrative competence immediately prior to school entry and how does this compare with children of the same age in a contrasting culture, in this Japan case as a country from within the Pacific Rim?

4. What is the nature of teaching strategies, styles of teacher-pupil communication, the development of children's narrative competence, and their inter-relationship, from UK and Japanese educational perspectives?

The enquiry examines children's use of the oral narrative process to generate and assemble ideas, facilitate comprehension and expression to support the learning process. It explores the developing competences of children of different ages in narrative thinking, processing thoughts and presenting their ideas to others in words. It also examines the role of culture, pedagogy and adult scaffolding in young children's narrative development from a comparative, Japanese perspective.

3.3 The Action Research Design

The studies took place in the context of a practitioner research enquiry. It is a style of research that I was very familiar with having worked closely with staff in many settings in challenging circumstances, as well as in high performing settings, collaboratively addressing deep and critical educational issues. The studies which follow were conducted to respond to genuine questions and were addressed through the methodology of action research which helps develop living educational theories (Whitehead, 1993). The goal of such research is to enable the practitioner to bring about an improvement in their own practice (Birley and Moreland, 1998, p.34), through reiterations of incremental change, either individually or institutionally. It takes a 'bottom-up', cyclical approach (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) as seen below:

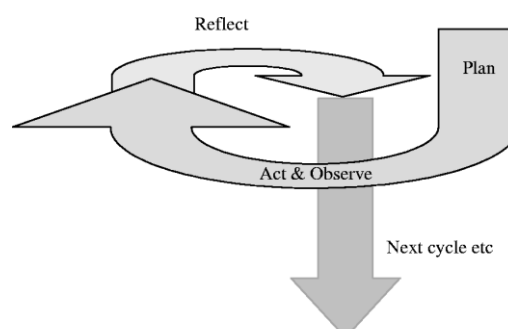


Figure 3.1 - Action research model

Source: Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p.11

The action research process is frequently described as inclusive, collaborative, observed and accountable as a method of social change. A further characteristic is that it promotes ever-greater awareness of one's own practice. The cyclical model is modified to a spiral model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) to reflect being in a different position having completed a cycle than before one started. In the second cycle, what is termed the 'planning' stage within the first cycle becomes the 'modified planning' stage in subsequent cycles. The adapted model below depicts more clearly the continuous nature of the spiral:

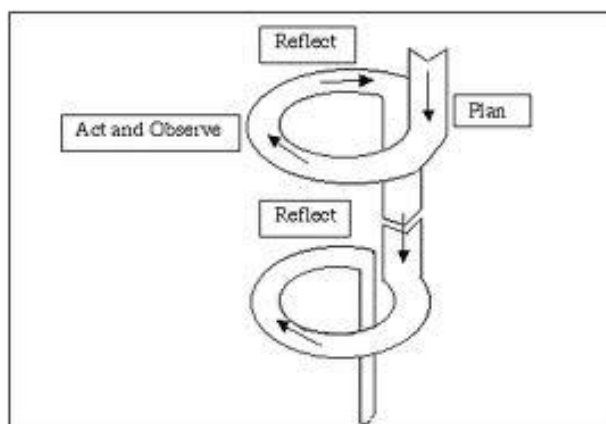


Figure 3.2 - Adapted action research model

Source: Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005

3.4 The Four Cycles of Action Research

The four studies are linked and implemented over an extended period. The common thread is communication, narrative thinking and learning, and the methods are also related. The studies constituted four cycles of action research, the findings from each study generating reflection, reflexivity and further questions. The first three studies emerged from a problem-solving response to genuine educational matters in the schools involved (Stenhouse, 1975) and the fourth study involved two projects of a more exploratory nature. In relation to children's narrative development and exploring reasons for some of the difficulties experienced by some learners and educators in this area, the studies were centred on seeking greater 'understanding' (Maxwell, 1992). In summary, Maxwell argues for five kinds of qualitative validity: factual accuracy in the accounts, accessing meanings and interpretations, the theories and constructs of the participants, the generalisability of theories generated to similar situations, and the application of a valid evaluative framework (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p.107). Denzin (1997) suggests triangulation of the data sources and methodologies in such research, to which Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the concept of 'trustworthiness' is often more relevant in qualitative research than the conventional views of reliability and validity.

Both of these terms are related within qualitative research to concepts of value and trustworthiness or 'authenticity', as discussed in relation to action research by Carr and Kemmis (1986, pp.189-90). In this respect Winter (2006, p.146) also suggests that authenticity, based on epistemological validity and cultural authority, results from the 'genuine voice and expression of those participants whose life worlds are described.' Winter (2006, pp.151-2) argues for the two traditions of action research: i) to be collaborative, reflecting the plurality of perspectives of those involved, and ii) to be self-questioning and reflexive.

Authenticity in the context of this study permeates at a deeper level of understanding on the researcher's part; that of developing integrity and competence, strengthening of collaboration, embedded in democratic and inclusive values. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue, that the concept of 'trustworthiness may often be more relevant in qualitative research than the conventional views of reliability and validity'.

This is encountered in Study 4 where Japanese educators explain the moral stance towards children's learning, developing what Abiko (2011) describes as 'totality of character'. It matches with my classroom observations of the children's friendship, respect for self and others, reflection, persistence and energy. The concept is triangulated in the Japanese educators' focus group meeting and the professor's summing up that 'conversation involves more than the understanding of the other as an object of knowledge or framing the other in one's own perspective.' Japanese problem-solving at the heart of the Moral Curriculum enhances learners' empathy and reciprocation in the learning process. Reflexivity or consciousness of children's own learning and its impact on others is readily articulated in an emotionally intelligent and open way. As seven year-old pupil Haruki commented 'At first I was worried if it worked or not but it worked' (p.219), an approach which aligns with Dewey's philosophy.

In qualitative research an understanding of social reality is sought by increasing the 'truthfulness' of ideas about a particular social phenomenon (Denzin, 1978). Davies and Dodd (2003, p.281) suggests that to do so, the qualitative researcher evaluates 'subjectivity, reflexivity and social interaction'. According to Gadamer (2004), by using the dialectical processes of inter-personal discussion with participants, researchers seek truth and trustworthiness. Representing the many voices of participants as authentically as possible allows them to recognise their own thinking. Such dialectical processes serve to establish the ontological background of the hermeneutical experience of the world.

Seale (1999) argues that 'trustworthiness' lies at the heart of both quantitative and qualitative research. Trustworthiness is linked by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to reliability

and validity which they regard as dependent upon the quality and rigour of research. Creswell and Miller (2000, p. 126) explore validity through the use of triangulation in which researchers 'search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories. Reliability, validity and triangulation are key concepts as they reflect the multiple ways of establishing truth and trustworthiness.

The studies involve participants of a wide range of ages, socio-economic settings and educational contexts. School pupils, experienced educators and parents were involved in interventions and interviews. Child participants were drawn from pre-school, elementary, secondary school and university settings in England and Japan. Educator participants were drawn from schools in England and Japan, and from local educational authority and university sectors in Japan. These factors influenced the design and methods of the next, as did the requirements of participants of different ages and the different cultural settings. The following section provides an account of the action research process, then moves from one cycle to the next, representing a total of four cycles. Within each cycle and study the following will be set out:

- the original research question
- the focus of the action research which followed with its position in the cycle
- the title given and used in this thesis

I use the above models of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) but their component headings are adapted, paying attention in each cycle to: i) Identification/Planning/Modification; ii) Implementation; and iii) Analysis and reflection.

3.4.1 First Cycle of Action Research – Study 1

Study 1 took place in 'City Secondary', a new large, inner-city secondary school in 'challenging circumstances' in the Midlands. Of a roll of 1800 students, 700 were on the special needs register and of 200 arriving in Year 7, 70 had a reading age below 8. Low GCSE grades of D to Ungraded were consistent for 80% of the cohort. As an integral part of my annual practice, I administered assessment (or 'screening') tests to all 200 new students entering Year 7 to provide base-line information on their cognitive, linguistic and narrative competence and writing production abilities by: i) giving answers to a general knowledge test; ii) providing an account of a familiar process; iii) re-telling a short story. Following testing, interviews with participants were conducted to gain in-depth evaluative data. In the three years since the school opened the results had caused concern due to a high rate of low level narrative ability.

i) Identification

The 55 committed support staff and I had shared our perceptions of such difficulties. They generally agreed that it was not expected that narrative competence was either monitored or addressed. Their belief was that the time students spent talking, with educators and peers was minimal, reiterating views by Galton et al. (1999) and Mercer (2012) that the time spent working 'independently' in formal school contexts was growing.

ii) Planning

Conclusions were mutual, we needed more knowledge of students' competences – and support for them that would not demand staff time or money. A collegial move led to the first research question, formulated 'in situ' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992): 'What is the nature of English children's narrative competence in the first years of secondary school?' It resulted in the first cycle of action research involving Study 1: 'An assessment of students' communicative competence on entry to an inner-city secondary school and a comparison of interventions to improve it.

iii) Implementation

The study involved Year 7 participants, male and female, with a mean age of 136.7 months. The outcomes of the assessment of communicative competences test in Year 7 formed Part (a) of the study. Part (b) was designed to examine whether the amount and quality of students' interactions with peers was as beneficial as that spent with their educators in improving communicative competence, comparing small-group interventions. As part of the broad agenda of 'Widening Participation', the Year 7 classes were being offered a range of activities to stimulate creative thinking during lunch-times. Two of these activities were selected as 'interventions', on a rotational basis using three groups of 15, the third group being the comparison group. The rotation meant that both these activities would be available to the third group at a later stage in the widening participation programme.

A section of the assessment results in Part 1 were used as the 'pre-test', and the same materials used for the post-test (see below). The assessment process aimed to provide qualitative and quantitative information against which to measure any subsequent progress following the intervention. The 'interventions' were: i) a teaching scheme that accompanied the assessment materials, and ii) a game. Both are briefly described below. A third group was used for comparison. Follow-up retrospective interviews with participants were also planned.

Intervention 1: The Communication Opportunity Group Strategy

These materials were designed to improve spoken language. The Communication Opportunity Group Scheme (COGS) was devised by Sage (2000) consisting of a set of published materials, setting out a structured course of sessions and assessment materials. It was trialled with pilot groups and norms were obtained for assessment outcomes with different ages (see Sage, 2000). It was designed to be used with small groups (or individuals) in an intensive session which includes one-to-one attention. More details are provided in Chapter 4 but my extrapolation from the scheme is that it enhances narrative competence according to the principle that literate language develops formal talk. It provides structure for students in organising ideas in narrative form and assesses according to 7 levels. In this intervention I taught the 'Cogs' group for 10 hours, across a course of five 2-hour sessions.

Intervention 2: The Go Game

The second intervention was the game of 'Go'. It is an interactive oriental game of strategy (levels from 1st to 8th Dan), played by 2 opponents on a chequered board using black and white stones. The 'one-to-one' play in pairs serves to increase the opportunities and time available to participants for talking and reasoning bearing in mind that the literature shows time in lessons for students to talk with peers and teachers is minimal and of short duration.

The game was introduced at the university as part of a Widening Participation scheme, led and modelled by an expert on a giant board. Audience participation in demonstrations was followed by discussions of moves and alternatives. Pairs of participants received a set of Go materials, told to spend the second session playing openly, talking about moves, and discussing the effects their partners' moves have on their situations. Other presentations emphasised planning, strategy and that regular recap, analysis and evaluation of games between partners were important for learning and improving. After initial tuition the 'intervention' involved participants playing in pairs independently during lunch-time 'Go Clubs', run by the participants twice a week, which I monitored for attendance and duration.

The game of Go was chosen as an intervention that could be conducted by participants themselves and: i) to increase the number of one-to-one verbal exchanges that participants have with each other; ii) to use moves, strategies and reasoning to provide content, focus and structure to support the opening, maintaining and direction of

conversations; iii) to increase the duration of participants' talk through discussing and reasoning about moves in the game, prompting 'extended' talk of increasing linguistic complexity; iv) to introduce or familiarise students with the concept of formal procedures and conventions; v) to demonstrate strategic board moves that increase in complexity, demanding the internalisation of planned and subsequent moves and intersubjectivity.

The cognitive underpinnings of the game of the 'Go' is that it is an oriental board game like chess which demands complex thinking; the intervention was part of a lunchtime 'club' requiring no lesson time or additional staffing. In the longer term, participants could continue playing time beyond the intervention project.

Pre-test and Post-test:

The same test was given to participants of both groups before and after the interventions. A box containing small objects of novelty and interest was provided. Each participant selected an object and was asked to examine it for a while and prepare to talk about it for around three minutes. The assessed criteria were cumulative and a 'Narrative Level' from Cogs awarded according to the student's ability to:

- Describe the attributes of the object (level 1)
- Do so in an ordered way (level 2)
- Provide a comparison by bringing out similarities and differences (level 3)
- Indicate the time sequence (level 4)
- Explain how the object functions (level 5)
- Reflect upon the object with personal views (level 6)
- Put the object into a wider context, within/beyond personal experience (level 7)

Selected students were also interviewed in relation to the current school context. A small number were interviewed some years later to ascertain whether the interventions had been remembered.

iv) Analysis and reflection

On completion of the intervention study I decided to review the assessment materials from Cogs that I had used. Two assistants in the school and external colleagues had found some of the terminology difficult to interpret. As I was familiar with the materials, I examined them as objectively as possible for their clarity and ease of use.

I noted that terms such as 'principles, levels, tasks and structures' are condensed, often overlap or are interchanged. For example, 'components' are also described as 'principles',

'aspects of communication related to tasks' (p.11) and 'principles of narrative development' (p.12) are? *related to* the 'components'. The principles or components are listed as 'clarity, content, convention and conduct' yet 'content' does not appear to refer to the substance or ideas contained in a student's talk, as most educators would expect. Instead 'content' is classified with the 3 other components as the 'how' of communication. The 'Sage Assessment of Language and Thinking' and other tests use different scoring from ½ mark to a possible maximum of 16; 4 'principles' with sub-components award different marks of 11 to 20, with a possible maximum of 67. Within levels or 'goals' there were 'Core' and 'Specific' Skills, marked 0-10 with a maximum of 20. Other sections contain descriptors and/or examples so there is no consistency across tests, making assessment daunting and confusing. My initial reaction was that marking could become haphazard and/or subjective, a problem when sharing or comparing results.

Reflecting with colleagues upon the Cogs materials and the academic and practical issues raised above, I decided that I would at some point build upon its strengths and design my own assessment material. This was later carried out, taking place during the planning of a follow-up assessment and intervention study. (This went on to constitute the third cycle in the action research.)

The interview data was extrapolated and analysed for trends and qualitative data obtained.

3.4.2 Second Cycle of Action Research – Study 2

The research question addressed in Study 2 was 'How can secondary school educators improve classroom communication to support pupils' development? It arose as, based on the literature reviewed, it was observed that there is a strong academic and research basis showing the need for educators and students to develop their classroom communication skills.

i) Identification

Study 2 follows on from the action research findings of Study 1 in City School when questions arose among the Support Staff in the Curriculum Support Faculty of which I was Director. Sharing the findings of the screening tests (Study 1) they had discussed the needs of the students with difficulties and reflected that they need to communicate with them more effectively and to know more about group communication. They sought to analyse the relationship between their 'developing professional vision and their teaching activity' (Van Es and Sherin, 2009). They had observed in classes and concluded that the whole-class teaching style of 'one size fits all' was not working and questioned whether

communication difficulties were hindering their learning across subjects. Some staff trained before 1980 were also conscious of their long-standing professional development needs.

Thus a group of 35 among 55 support staff, both teachers and assistants from the Curriculum Support Faculty, came together voluntarily to begin an enquiry at both staff and student levels which remained on-going from one school year and across the next. The enquiry had elements of participatory action research in that there was a sense of 'ownership', acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning, with an orientation towards action in the educators' school 'community' for social change (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2007, pp.276-7). The staff group collaborating in the enquiry had some of the characteristics of a 'learning community' (Morrissey, 2000) as they were seeking 'collective' knowledge in a spirit of care for the students' well-being.

ii) Planning

The design of the action research evolved but from a retrospect analysis I can report that three main methods were involved, i) participant questionnaires; ii) the provision of new knowledge for staff and iii) reflection upon practice and action. To explore with the educators their concerns about their communicative competences, they were given the opportunity to convey these through a questionnaire, which also asked about what they wanted to focus on in the research and what they hoped to gain on a professional level. As the action research progressed over time two further questionnaires were administered to measure the extent to which it had met the staff's expectations.

iii) Implementation

Focus: Communication in the Classroom

The project involved 35 teachers and support staff focusing on what is required to improve learning and understanding. Five sessions of workshops totalling 10 hours across 2 terms were eventually provided to explore how secondary school educators might improve their communicative competencies. Interactive teaching (Alexander, 2001; 2009) was central to participants' collaborative learning and reflecting upon their personal communication styles, and classroom learning opportunities, mostly in pairs and small groups. The strategies explored how to help students improve their thinking and hence express their ideas using narrative structures. Both participants and tutors demonstrated how students' learning could be structured and scaffolded by improving educators' talk with them in ways which help them to listen, engage and learn.

The Cogs materials discussed in Study 1 were used with staff participants as a method to support their understanding of communication processes and their personal skills. The nature of the activities was similar in format to those for school-age participants but set at more challenging levels. In view of the personal views and feelings of the educators, which are powerful factors influencing such personal and sensitive issues, sufficient time was allowed for mutual discussion, support and personal reflection during the intervention/training sessions.

There were eventually 3 questionnaires. The first was administered before the start of the project, the second in the second term and the third eight weeks later. The research was conducted across the autumn and spring terms and eventually included five two-hour workshops for participants. The second questionnaire was used to elicit participants' views on their progress and confidence in the action research, the third questionnaire was given eight weeks later asking similar questions but in more detail to explore longer-term effects.

iv) Analysis and reflection

For the purpose of data collation participants' responses to the questionnaires were divided into those of the teachers (16 participants) and 'non-teachers' (19 participants). Analyses were conducted of responses received across time to the two main issues which were the development of participants' communication knowledge, skills and confidence, after the most intensive action research period and again two months later. Questionnaire responses were classified, collated, providing additional quantitative and qualitative data. Constant reflection was aimed at a critical review of assumptions.

Ongoing support of colleagues offered options to address personal and individual needs; both of which is termed by Eraut (1993) as 'skilled behaviours', and the deeper matters that he classifies as 'deliberative processes'. Qualitative responses showed moves in beliefs and attitudes, especially those related to staff reports on changes in the classroom on their own part, and those which led to different responses from children. For example one participant reported: 'his attitude changed once he recognised I valued his contributions and allowed him to discuss his views.'

Feeding forward the action research raised four main issues about researching and providing for educators' continuing professional development in the area of communication: a) How communication can be furthered within the time constraints of School Development Planning ; b) Meeting the needs of staff from different backgrounds

as learners; c) Providing a balanced approach in addressing staff's individual and group needs; d) Offering a mechanism to facilitate staff listening to the responses of others.

3.4.3 Third Cycle of Action Research – Study 3

Study 3 in the research originated from the findings of the Studies 1 and 2, and subsequent work with colleagues in a secondary school in the North-West where I worked with trainee teachers on placements from the university and with their teacher-mentors. Discussions deepened in a community of practice with mentors, trainees and school students to developing insights, new knowledge and reflective practices.

This study follows on from the action research and findings in Study 1 carried out with Year 7 students in City School. Study 2 emerged to address questions that the mentors raised related to the findings which I had shared with them. They showed great interest as to their own students' narrative development in the subsequent (second) academic year of secondary education, i.e. in Year 8. The staff had already shared with me the school's move to increase students' self-directed study time, related to a newly built Study Centre. They had enquired how effective and supportive this would be for students.

'Bridge School' has a degree of selection, being a girls-only and Roman Catholic school, with a high proportion of middle management and professional families living in privately owned properties. It provides a contrast to City School with regard to academic performance and is rated by Ofsted as 'good' with many students achieving highly in post-16 examinations.

Study 3 was designed:

- i) To discover the levels of narrative ability of students at the point at which they move from the first year to the *second* year of their secondary education (Year 8);
- ii) To identify the relationship between their levels with those of students from City School in a contrasting socio-economic setting and with lower academic outcomes (Study 1);
- iii) To use this information to gain a two-year overview of the range of Year 7-8 students' levels of narrative competence, i.e. the capacity to bring together events from a range of contexts to construct meaning, as the underpinning of formal learning;
- iv) To investigate whether variation in teaching and learning strategies can make a difference to students' narrative thinking and their ability to assemble ideas, improve expression and enhance understanding, in the short term.

i) Identification

The staff I worked with in the school had questioned the meaning and relative effectiveness of increasing students' self-directed study time in response to the use of a new Study Centre. They reflected that students are already regularly taught by teaching assistants and learning mentors and the amount of time students spend working 'independently' can be considerable. Their interpretation was that it sat interestingly alongside findings that the amount of time students talk with educators and peers is minimal (Galton et al., 1999; Mercer, 2012). I also reflected upon findings that the assessment and skilful scaffolding of students' thinking and problem-solving by teachers is central to the learning process, considering my colleagues' question as to the value of increasing independent study time whilst decreasing, albeit it by a little, time with teachers. I had previously shared with them the study I had undertaken in the Midlands and they returned to this, asking whether a similar project could be undertaken in their setting. I discussed with them the ethical issues regarding children, the views of the head, staff and parents, however they pointed out that there was to be a rota of activities in the new Study Centre and any 'interventions' could be part of that.

The teachers knew of the new materials I had developed for students to assess and develop their narrative competence and had been keen to have them trialled in the school. One suggested that both interests could be combined and we eventually concluded that an intervention trial similar to my first project (Study 1) could be implemented in the context of the new Study Centre. Further analysis revealed their concern that alongside an intervention using my narrative materials the methods should include: i) 'supported' study; ii) 'totally independent' study. This request was based on the school's plan for students to work in both ways, i) with support from a teacher or skilled 'higher level' teaching assistant; ii) with supervision but no skilled support available. These moves led to the focus: 'An assessment of students' communicative competence in the second year of a suburban secondary school and a comparison of interventions to improve it' (Study 3).

ii) Planning

The study was planned and agreed to involve one Year 8 mixed ability class of 30 participants with a mean age of 148 months. It was designed to: a) assess their levels of narrative competence using NCP materials; b) examine whether the amount and quality of students' interactions with peers was as beneficial as that spent with educators in improving communicative competence. To make use of the new Study Centre, the Year 8

classes were being offered blocks of time there for different types of independent study. Two of these were selected as 'interventions', on a rotational basis using three groups of 10, the third group being the comparison group. The rotation meant that both types of study would be available to all three groups at a later stage in the programme.

iii) Implementation

Participants were allocated to three groups of 10 participants. For the purposes of equivalent treatment, there was an approximate match in the balance of participant characteristics, ages and abilities, confidence between groups. All participants were individually pre-tested and post-tested to provide qualitative and quantitative information against which to measure any subsequent progress following the intervention.

Five intervention sessions were timetabled across an uninterrupted period of 5 weeks, each session of 2 hours continuously. There was as much consistency in timetabling as possible; the interval between sessions was to be as close to 7 days as possible, with all sessions to take place in the afternoon.

Intervention 1: The Narrative Communication Processes model (NCP)

As raised above, I built upon the strengths of Cogs, applied my own knowledge and created my own materials to assess students' communicative competence, focussing on narrative ability. It emerged from an analysis made during academic studying, that I had been applying to my teaching an intuitive pedagogy based upon an internalised academic model. It was a model of teaching, learning and assessment developed in the context of sharing my own and colleagues' professional successes, challenges and dilemmas. Since its initial development the model was used and adapted in schools prior to taking the form presented below.

The new materials, involving a format for teaching and assessment in mainstream classrooms, were devised and used in a second intervention study. The 'NCP' model structure was built upon the principle that the structure of oral narrative was similar to the structure of formal written language, demanding abstract reasoning, creative problem solving and a coherent interlinking of events. The processes of NCP strive to raise learners' achievement by developing an understanding of this narrative experience in a 'deliberative' way to develop knowledge and awareness, as well as skills in cognition and communication.

The model consists of a series of inter-related components of communication:

- i) 'Elements of narrative thinking'. These are cognitive-linguistic components which progress with enhanced complexity in line with students' experience and cognitive development. The elements are: Description; Order; Comparison; Sequence; Purpose and function; Personal reflection; Contextual consideration.
- ii) Narrative competencies are qualitative and consist of: Clarity; Convention; Conduct. (Acknowledgement to Sage, 2000.)

During the 10-hour intervention all participants allocated to the NCP group/s received tuition appropriate to developing NCP abilities. As an experienced teacher I led the NCP intervention. I was fully aware of my 'interested researcher' status. Surrounding circumstances meant that I was the only professional available who knew the materials and was available to implement the intervention. As I did not know the student participants I did not teach them at any other time so could not enhance their performance in any other form or on any other occasions. Although I was to become more familiar with the NCP group, after pre and post testing all 30 several weeks apart I would be unlikely to be able to recall the individual scores of any individual participant; this would only be relevant should I wish to falsify any results, but this was not feasible since it would invalidate the very data I was seeking.

Intervention 1: Self-Directed Activities

These participants were to work in their small group of 10 in the style of 'independent self study'. This was a method already used in the school and which was to be increased with the opening of the Study Centre. In this intervention participants were required to: i) select a theme of interest to investigate and report on independently; ii) to identify points and questions to explore and carry out research using the Internet and other library facilities in a self-directed way; iii) to organise and present their information in visual or written form, using either paper or IT. Participants could choose to collaborate and discuss their ideas with each other.

Intervention 2

The role of the Intervention 2 Tutor was active in providing guidance and responding promptly and constructively to students' questions and requests. This method was similar to that used in many secondary classrooms, when students 'self direct' their work but approach the teacher for support, information and advice at relevant points. An experienced secondary teacher (Tutor 2) took this group. The graphical presentation was received and responded to by the Tutor; however, it did not constitute an assessment as part of this Study and is not reported.

Comparison Group: Intervention 3: Task-based:

In this intervention participants were required to: i) read a story provided by the tutor relating events about a child in difficulty in order to investigate points of interest and report on them independently; ii) to identify questions to explore and carry out research using the Internet and other library facilities in a self-directed way; iii) to organise and present their information in visual or written form, using either paper or IT.

The difference between this and Intervention 2 was that participants were asked to 'work quietly', minimising collaboration and discussion with their peers. This was another method commonly used in the school, particularly in homework clubs and the library where students are supervised by an assistant. The role of the Intervention 3 Tutor was 'supervisory' and focused principally on the provision of materials and procedural requirements. Participants were required to be self-reliant, independent, to make their own decisions and use study skills. An experienced teacher, Intervention 3 Tutor, supervised this group. The graphical presentation was received, responded to by the Tutor and seen by the students' teachers; however it is not reported on here.

It is important to note that the 3 interventions were on a rota basis, so that all groups would experience each intervention in turn beyond the duration of Study 3.

Pre and Post Tests: An oral method of assessment was used, taken from the NCP framework, as both the Pre-Test and Post-Test for all 3 groups. The activity in which it is situated is the same as that used in Cogs assessment in Study 1: participants' narrative and communicative abilities were assessed on an individual basis within a whole-group activity with group members as audience, seated in a circle.

- A large hand-held box was prepared containing a large number of small objects selected to be appropriate and of interest to the group's participants.
- The tutor presents the box to the group and gives the following instructions:
 - The box was to be passed in turn between participants. Upon receiving the box the participant was to select an object of interest that s/he can discuss.
 - The participant was to talk about the object in detail for approximately three minutes continuously. There were no constraints on the style used and each participant was free to use descriptive, factual, interrogative and/or open-ended approaches.
 - One student volunteer was needed to act as time-checker to ensure that each participant has approximately the same length of opportunity by adhering to the same format, for reasons of consistency and reliability of test results.

Grading of oral assessments: The discursive talk of each participant was assessed by the tutor during the three minute presentation, acknowledging components according to two sets of NCP criteria. Levels awarded for both (a) and (b) were noted immediately on the Oral Assessment Recording Sheets for each participant individually, with additional qualifying qualitative comments entered based on observations of non-verbal and contextual features. A university colleague accompanied me during a proportion of the Intervention 1 sessions and again when final marks were calculated and finalised, for moderation, consistency and reliability checks.

Feedback Questionnaire: All 30 participants completed questionnaires regarding their time in the groups to provide qualitative data.

iv) Analysis and reflection

As Halasz and Michel (2011) summarise, communication skills are ‘generic transferable and functional’ in relation to learning and thinking. When sharing the results of Study 3 with the staff whose interest had in part prompted it, there was a mutual response, i.e. that educators need appropriate teaching methods to help students develop these skills. If not, the evidence suggested that they may fail to perform well in school tasks because they are beyond their ability to think, understand and express ideas. Students’ ability to organise thoughts into formal speech in giving information or instructions and retelling events are, once mastered, *transferable* (Hind, 1994; 2007; 2011), meaning they can be applied to any situation and as such are seen as key competencies in educational success.

My conversations with the staff made an emotional impact on me due to their surprise and concern regarding the levels of students in a ‘good’ school. The results for me were also somewhat unexpected bearing in mind the contrast in background to the students in Study 1. I then recalled the voices of the educators in Study 2, their values, concerns and commitment in seeking to find ‘better ways’ to communicate in the classroom which support children’s narrative thinking and confidence.

It was clear that if students are not helped to think and speak their thoughts well before Years 7 and 8, as in these two studies, many are likely to continue experience barriers to learning and social interaction. Secondary schools are also likely to continue to see difficulties and ‘dips’ in attainment (Doddington et al., 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008).

Clearly the small numbers and relatively short time-scale of Study 3 meant that no conclusive or causal statements could be made. However the outcomes drew attention to, and raised questions about, the development of children’s narrative and communication

processes in the early and primary years. I reflected that whilst 'language' difficulties are reported in research implemented upon school entry, and their relationship to learning delay, there is little information on children's narrative competence per se. Nor is there much data on the degree of teachers' awareness and skill in encouraging and supporting children in earlier stages of development. A reflexive response to this in my research was to pursue these questions further.

3.4.4 Fourth Cycle of Action Research – Study 4

The issues that made an impact on all of us in the community of practice in the preceding study combined with my reflections upon all of the three preceding studies, with the insights gained from teaching across the age-groups, and with my comparative studies in different parts of the world. The interaction between these reflections led me to the final cycle of action research, Study 4, in collaboration with Japanese colleagues. Our research questions were:

- i) What is the nature of English children's narrative competence immediately prior to school entry and how does this compare with children of the same age in a contrasting culture, in this Japan case as a country from within the Pacific Rim?
- ii) What is the nature of teaching strategies, styles of teacher-pupil communication, the development of children's narrative competence, and their inter-relationship, from UK and Japanese educational perspectives?

i) Identification

We reflected that whilst 'language' difficulties are reported in research upon school entry, and their relationship to learning delay, there is little information on children's narrative competence per se. Nor is there much data on the degree of teachers' awareness and skill in encouraging and supporting children in earlier stages of narrative development. A reflexive response to this in the research was to pursue these questions further in a fourth cycle of action research. The two questions posed were interrelated and led to a comparative study of two parts, involving projects we conducted in England and Japan:

- a) A focus on 'Young children's narrative competence and the views of teachers and parents on early learning';
- b) A focus on 'Pedagogy and practice in Japan related to developing young children's communicative and narrative competences.'

As discussed earlier moving away from the informal relationships and language used in the home to the formal relationships and speech used in school demands new skills and language from young children. Any problems at this age can have a marked effect on their academic performance, as found across countries and cultures. As global competition has resulted in international comparisons of performance, it draws attention to their relationship with curriculum, pedagogies and deeper socio-cultural factors. Study 4 was designed to address these issues by examining young children's early narrative development as well as the views of parents and early educators in an international context.

ii) Planning

A two-part comparative study was planned to address whether, at the point of school entry, around age five, English young children possess the skills necessary for dealing with standard classroom discourse. Do they have the cognitive capacity to understand and interpret adults' instructions and questions in school, and do they have the cognitive and verbal competence to orally communicate simple facts and construct a simple narrative, such as story or account? Japan was chosen as a partner because, as reviewed in Chapter 2, its education and students are consistently in the top eight among 70 countries in international educational comparisons (OECD, 2013; TIMSS, 2011) and its commercial and social achievements are notable. Because I had already conducted studies with colleagues in Japan I had some knowledge of its culture and education and I had many follow-up questions.

The data sought to address these by: a) examining the relative cognitive-linguistic starting points of representative groups of young children as they enter compulsory education; b) seeking to investigate the cultural and pedagogical context of early education in Japan, including the voices of parents and educators on developing children's communication skills.

iii) Implementation

In the UK I carried out the research myself. In Japan it was administered by a lead Japanese research assistant whom I was working with at a Mid-Japan University within a team of four with expertise in working with young children. They had higher degrees and an advanced level of English language in the field of education. All four assistants demonstrated high degrees of consistency and reliability when carrying out the research with young children.

Study 4 used four research methods: a) Interviews with nursery school participants; b) Observations in nursery-school and elementary classrooms; c) Questionnaires with parents; d) Informal conversations with parents and nursery staff; e) Focus group discussions with educators. An overview of the methods is presented below.

In view of the difficulties encountered by secondary school participants, reported in Studies 1 and 3, I sought to compare the narrative development of much younger children across similar socio-economic areas. The English study was carried out in nursery schools in the south-east Midlands and in Japan in kindergartens within the south central region. Participating were 55 English and 55 Japanese children aged around 5 years, with 56 boys and 54 girls and no significant difference between ages.

A) Interviews with nursery age children

Participants were asked questions which required them to give an oral narrative. This was designed to assess their competence in generating, assembling and organising a small number of propositions in:

- i) Questions about the purposes of everyday items that are known to be familiar to nursery children aged five.
- ii) Listening to and immediately retelling a short story, known as a reliable indicator of learning potential, with information reproduced reflecting cognitive-linguistic levels (Beilin, 1975).

The cultural features that provided 'meaning' in the tasks (Anastasi, 1988, p.298) were protected as meaning-making was a key component of the cognitive assessment criteria. In view of the immaturity and concentration levels of the participants the interview questions did not require complex oral responses due to the risk of not accurately assessing their levels of understanding. Several Japanese researchers and the research assistants who were experienced in working with the age-group confirmed that the content was familiar to Japanese children and valid for research purposes, and 'back translation' ensured reliability.

- i) Answers to the Everyday Items questions related to personal understandings essential for comprehending received language: animate/inanimate function, space, time and comparatives. During both the interviews it was taken into account that the responses might need to be carefully considered bearing in mind the young age of the participants and that they might need to be probed minimally for clarification, whilst not providing undue

structure since this is what the questions were examining. Responses were then coded according to their capacity to convey relevant and in-tact information in narrative form.

ii) To ensure meaning and sense the story involved 9 propositions whilst the average expectations for the age-group are an accurate recall of around 4 propositions. The purpose of the re-telling was to assess: a) accuracy of the position of the propositions recalled in the sequence of events; b) accuracy of syntax; c) coherence or 'intactness' of the total information.

A pilot was firstly carried out by the researchers immediately prior to the testing periods in the UK and Japan to allow for feedback and minor modifications. No children with special educational needs, including language or learning difficulties, were included. The same procedures were followed in both countries. The Japanese children's oral responses were also examined by me for reliability and validity through reverse translation carried out by the researchers on a daily basis throughout the period. This also allowed attention to be paid to the nuances of language due to the sensitivities of interpretation. As an ethical precaution during the testing process the interviewers and interviewees were visible at all times to the staff of the nurseries.

B) Qualitative data: classroom observations

During each day in all six participating nurseries there was free and open access. No timetable was given for my days in the nurseries in relation to particular places or times, apart from notifying me of any special events going on that I would not be aware of. My observations of 'typical' everyday events were recorded in ethnographic style field notes: arrivals and departures, provision for indoor and outdoor play, structured learning, music, dance, origami etc. interactions and actions of children, parents and teachers. In some instances daily plans were provided by staff as well as children's activity sheets, school booklets, letters to parents (written in Japanese).

My other observations were conducted in elementary schools. In order not to walk into lessons mid-way it was necessary to plan ahead. In most cases however I was asked which subjects, activities or age-groups I wanted to see on arrival in the morning and this was arranged. During breaks and lunchtimes I was free to visit any part of the school. Children mostly stayed indoors due to the weather and moved around the two-storey buildings to visit friends and activities as they wished without overt adult supervision. My observations were unstructured and exploratory in nature, incorporating an ethnographic approach.

I followed interactions of interest by exploring and discussing them with the staff involved to access their interpretations. The analyses consisted of making sense of the school day and week, the timetable and structure, unwritten 'rules' and expectations for the ways in which children interacted. My aim was to try to identify the relationship with the interpretations and meanings of educators, academics, staff, nursery parents and children's responses to the interviews and story-re-telling task.

C) Parents' questionnaire

A single, open ended survey in the form of a questionnaire was offered to parents with an explanatory letter explaining that the project was to access the views of parents on early learning. Parents were asked to rank the values of everyday activities in the home for children's learning. Some examples are as follows. The value that they attach to: talking with the child at mealtimes; reading books with their child; the value of their child attending extra classes or clubs; learning or studying alone; using the computer for play or study; watching television; spending time with grand-parents; playing games in groups. In interpreting the results and their possible meanings reference was made to informal conversations with parents occurring at other times. I combined this with further information gathered during my other field visits, discussions with educators, academics and the literature contributed to the qualitative analysis and interpretation of parents' responses.

D) Informal conversations with parents and nursery staff

Qualitative data was obtained during informal conversations with staff, teachers, assistants, clerical, kitchen and maintenance staff in all 6 nursery schools. The reasons for this are that in Japan all categories of staff are acknowledged as of equal value within institutions and businesses. In the nurseries staff made themselves available and were ready to participate in a conversation or discussion. These were informal, and some were transitory meetings so that notes were not always made immediately, however their views all contributed to the bigger picture.

E) Focus group discussions with educators

This took place at Mid-Japan University and involved my staff colleagues from kindergarten to university level. They shared my interests and questions related to education and culture and as a focus group responded, each person sharing the main beliefs and values.

iv) Analysis and reflection

My observations and records showed that, while the 'everyday' nature of both enquiries with children prompted a good response rate, the English children and the Japanese children responded at different levels. I considered whether, according to the socio-cultural interpretive paradigm, this reflects a culturally-developed awareness of how to communicate in response to the 'everyday' content of the material and to the demands of two different narrative genres. It may also suggest that children are less able to communicate their interpretations of facts and re-tell a story if they do not possess the mental schema, including applying narrative structures, or emerging language with which to make sense of the situations and express meaning. Whether this is 'weak point' for UK children would need to be investigated further i.e. when dealing with information gaps and 'missing pieces' in conversation and when communicating using narratives (Bruner, 1986).

The views of parents regarding their children's learning greatly informed and enhanced my understanding of how children enter school in the Japanese cultural context and the early beginnings of education are of great interest. The views of the parents clearly reflected those of educators in their own country. The study has, uniquely, accessed the values and pedagogical beliefs of nursery staff which have contributed to a clear picture. The relative values placed on individuality, collaboration, communication and cooperation emerged alongside styles of school talk, cultural values and goals. Classroom observations revealed a high level of knowledge and skill among nursery and elementary school staff in the domain of interaction, intersubjectivity, communication and support learners' for narrative structures. Triangulation of the findings, including the background of children's responses in the language interviews, focuses attention on the very nature of theory, values and professional practice embedded in the initial education of teachers in both countries.

3.5 Overview of Methodology in the Action Research

The cycles of action research include collaborative school-based problem-solving and comparative research replicated in a cross-cultural setting, both of which were responded to with reflexivity on a wide range of issues (Stenhouse, 1975). To deal with 'multi-faceted' enquiries (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Plowright, 2012) a relativist ontology was used to explore possible underlying social reality and values, through listening to and interpreting the voices of individuals. The methods needed to be fine-grained, appropriate

and 'dependable' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) in order to investigate the practices and concepts of communication and narrative through sensitive collaboration with colleagues.

The quantitative elements explored and compared the frequency of responses, the combination of approaches seeking overall to gain insight into the inter-relationship between the two sets of data (Brannen, 2005; Alexander, 2001).

The mixed methods approach resulted in a pragmatic, integrated action research methodology examining children's narrative competences, classroom communication, pedagogy with educators and parents. Collaboration within 'communities of practice' embraced participatory action research with colleagues in mutual enquiry, according to their circumstances. Data emanating from sharing knowledge, personal constructs, cultural values and practices contribute to an understanding of social and educational issues (Fuller, 2002).

The tests of secondary school children's narrative competences were similar, as each had emerged from the previous one and used similar levels, the main change being greater clarity and simplicity in their use. Those tests with nursery children in England had a narrower but similar focus. In that sense there was a degree of internal validity, mainly because of consistency as I was the only person conducting the tests; in both enquiries I genuinely sought to ascertain students' competences and to find effective ways to support and improve them.

The overall purpose was to bring together the most valuable aspects of the qualitative and quantitative findings to provide rich 'complementary' data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) within a 'holistic' integrated paradigmatic framework (Plowright, 2012). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that constructivism's relativist stance '... holds that realities are apprehensible in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions that are socially and experientially based...'. I suggest that classroom communication is a 'complex' educational matter for which 'robust methodological pluralism' in this research is essential (American Educational Research Association, 2002, p.106). Once the results were considered and reflected upon, including their shortcomings and weaknesses, the intention was to put forward proposals for future practices and measures.

Each study was conducted in collaboration with staff within 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1998) in all settings across both countries. This enabled me to examine my motives and interpretations as I collected and reflected on the data in collaboration with colleagues. I acknowledge that there was an inevitable subjective stance as in any action research but I sought to take a reflexive stance in the conduct of

the research, including my interaction with colleagues and when making sense of the results. I understand reflexivity as a heightened consciousness of my developing biography, its possible contribution to knowledge and its impact through shared practice. I was very conscious that my pre-understandings (Gadamer, 2004) had initiated and influenced the research to varying degrees and levels, however I felt supported by the idea that a conscious fusion of pre-understandings can shape beliefs especially when bringing my subjectivities into account.

Becoming critically aware of my developing identity also guided me to balance procedural ethical moments with ethics in practice. An example of reflexivity in both a professional practitioner sense as well as that of a researcher can be seen in Studies 1 and 2 in which staff shared a problem in teaching students unable to communicate their ideas effectively. It was also raised at management and inspection levels. The initiation of the research was in part due to their concerns but also due to my developing understanding of this pedagogical problem. This demanded sensitivity at both strategic and operational levels. During senior team meetings I negotiated to develop the research within the school improvement agenda. I experienced tensions in that when staff had approached me they said they had not had the confidence to discuss their problems more widely as they anticipated being judged as failing or to be not doing their job appropriately. Some felt intimidated by management's coercive approach to 'getting the job done' and improving 'results' within pressurised timescales.

In this respect I had to reflect upon timescales of when and how the research could be executed in an effort to represent colleagues' professional vision with dignity and respect. There were also associated issues of social justice related to helping to improve the children's learning and progress. I endeavoured to assimilate meaning from situated contexts involving listening to and representing participants' voices.

The team and I openly sought to enlighten our understanding of the students' learning processes within a shared pedagogy, moving along the lines of a 'co-generative enquiry' (Greenwood and Lewin, 2000). I felt there was strength in such an approach and at the same time a realism that an action research approach would take time and need to be embedded in practice for sustainable improvement. However, I was mindful of the desire of participants to improve learning at whole school level in a commendable bid to assert their autonomy and that morally I had been chosen to represent their articulation. Ashworth (2008, p.21) stresses that addressing the interests and concerns of the participants is paramount in high quality research. Though my own research role was not a value-free position, the need to construct new knowledge became a greater motivation.

It demanded honesty and an ethical attunement to addressing the practical and managerial challenges of everyday school life. This had involved taking me out of my comfort zone in response to both colleagues' needs and my own cognitive and emotional misunderstandings. The research was to be a large undertaking in which I had to balance my daily teaching duties and management accountabilities within the bigger picture of the school environment with its increasing unpredictabilities.

Early in my school-based research as a teacher-researcher I had felt that detaching myself from specific research purposes would limit my relationship with participants. It was common practice for teachers to share good practice in team efforts and Study 1 became a natural and accepted progression of professional development. Becoming a reflexive partner in classroom research processes (Winter, 2002) meant a collaboration between the 'researcher and researched' (Ashworth, 2008, p.21) and a balancing of the power relations within the establishment for what I sincerely believed was the greater moral good of the learning community. In saying this I also acknowledge that this claim is from a personally held professional perspective.

Protecting collective understandings, subtly respecting individual autonomy and operating at micro-ethical levels demanded mental acrobatics. At the same time, I attempted to address and respond to ethical concerns as they arose as a way of pre-empting actual potential ethical threats to validity. In this way, I made the research transparent at governing body level and used my teacher-governor stance proactively to represent the staff at strategic levels. Dealing with such ethical tensions illuminated the complexity of the research process. I developed a growing confidence and took ownership of a strengthening and facilitative research role. This was conceived through adopting a nurturing process with ethics in practice at the heart, as opposed to following a prescriptive procedural set of conventions.

As the research developed, I became more sensitised to my privileged position and regularly scrutinised how my role may have influenced my interests, the data collection and its interpretation (Yardley, 2008, p.250). Reflexivity provided a safety-net, encouraging me to examine and re-examine the terms and language I employed as these underpinned the means by which I thought about the research including 'taken for granted assumptions' (Ashworth, 2008 p.13). This applied to both an awareness of my own language and body language, for example, when using questionnaires and interviews with participants. By avoiding ambiguous and leading questions I sought to eliminate, as much as possible, suggesting to participants any preferred responses on my part. Technically, when devising tests for students I repeatedly examined the concepts and terms used; I

considered their suitability according to currency, relevance and transparency of meaning in relation to my developing knowledge of the culture, age-range and levels of understanding of the young participants. I listened attentively to staff at meetings and informally on a one to one basis.

Examining terms and language also applied to the recording of qualitative data during individual interviews with participants. Mostly, I was able to capture responses verbatim; when necessary I asked participants for a recap or probed for further information to ensure clarity. It required listening closely in order to fairly and fully represent their views balanced with my own time out for reflection, a necessary assurance. When reading participants' written responses, it required attentiveness and an awareness of avoiding attributing personal interpretation or meanings. Seeking intersubjectivity I accessed individual and cultural insights, an understanding of the social and educational issues emerging (Fuller, 2002) and the shared knowledge that lies at the heart of the 'hermeneutic cycle' (Gadamer, 1983; Colombo, 2003).

Table 3.1 presents a summary of the research questions, the action research studies which address them and the range of methods used. The following, final section contains a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in the selecting research methods, my positionality as researcher, my reflection and reflexivity.

Table 3.1 – Summary of the research questions, action research studies and range of methods employed

Research question	Cycle/Study and Focus of Action Research	Methods <i>in brief</i>
What is the nature of English children's narrative competence in the first years of secondary school?	Study 1: An assessment of students' communicative competence on entry to an inner-city secondary school in Year 7 and a comparison of interventions to improve it.	Reflection Pre and post-tests Intervention study
	Study 3: An assessment of students' communicative competence in the second year (Year 8) of a suburban secondary school and a comparison of interventions to improve it.	Pre- and post-tests. Intervention study
What is the nature of English secondary school teachers' and teaching assistants' perceived confidence in classroom communication, and how can it be developed?	Study 2: How can secondary school educators improve classroom communication to support students' development?	Support and tutor-led sessions. Pre- and post-questionnaires.
i) What is the nature of English children's narrative competence immediately prior to school entry and how does this compare with children of the same age in a contrasting culture, in this Japan case as a country from within the Pacific Rim.	Study 4: A comparative study of two parts, conducted in England and Japan. a) Young children's narrative competence and the views of teachers and parents on early learning.	i) Semi-structured interviews. Oral narrative task.
(ii) What is the nature of teaching strategies, styles of teacher-pupil communication, the development of children's narrative competence, and their inter-relationship, from UK and Japanese educational perspectives?	Pedagogy and practice in Japan related to developing young children's communicative and narrative competences.	ii) Naturalistic / ethnographic observations. Inspection of documentation. Semi structured interviews. Focus group.

3.6 Discussion of Ethical Considerations

3.6.1 Practitioner Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is ultimately moral in purpose. As Basit (2010, p.56) suggests, sharing of knowledge can present ethical dilemmas regarding 'the dignity and privacy of research participants', on the one hand, and the 'pursuit of truth' and knowledge on the other. Ethical considerations underpin the whole research process in order that it may be morally justified. In this research design, acute awareness of audience and sense of moral purpose on my part as the researcher attempted to reconcile procedural aspects of ethical appropriateness with my commitment to analysing the implicit nature of problems in situ.

In this study the dynamic of participatory action research was a complex challenge; an interweaving and balancing of participants' rights with researcher responsibility underpinned by diversely chosen methods (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). Demands were complex and unique, with attention to access, informed consent, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and trust in a participative yet safeguarded relationship for all based on an 'attempt to formulate codes and principles of moral behaviour' (May, 2001, p.59).

The locus of my research role was a closely intertwined methodology deployed in cycles of action research. This emerging ontology focused on narrative competence as a vehicle for communication and self-expression. It questioned how educators may improve their own communication skills and student learning experiences. Such knowledge contributed to my epistemology, committed to the concept identified by Dewey of developmental nurturing of justice, care and respect at the heart of learning. It is also that of moral reasoning, as embedded in Kolberg's 'Socratic Model' (Reed, 1997), beliefs that I developed throughout my teaching career.

My research is a biographical account, justifying how and why I chose certain courses of action, using 'spaces for ethical reflexivity' (Powell et al., 2012, p.40), in an attempt to close the gap between assumptions and perceived reality. For this purpose, I adopted Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988, p.5) action research model as 'self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social and educational practices' and how such practices are conducted. Five premises relate to the role of participants. The first gives them ownership to shape the research; the second emphasises that their rights and ideas need accounting for. The third supports participants in challenging the accounts of the research for bias avoidance, irrelevance and inaccuracy. The latter would include verifying the

factual accuracy of 'what you are reporting' (Kosy, 2005, p.84). This might include checking such facts as a participant's age, role or length of service. In the case of very young participants it may be relevant to compare what they say, such as giving their age, against school records, following this up with a consideration of the reasons why a particular response was given. The fourth requires their explicit permission prior to making written notes, for example during interviews, tests and observations. The final premise ensures participants' rights are binding and transparent, (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982), placing responsibility back on to me.

In relation to ethics and the interface with reflexivity the phenomenological approach disputes the idea that research can be perspective free. It refutes the possibility of conducting research without having any views or pre-conceptions but instead seeks to acknowledge and address them. Gadamer (2004) argues that this puts the researcher transparently into the frame as a subjective and interested party. . Associated with this are the 'pre-understandings' (Gadamer, 2004) and reflections that had led to this research. Examining, for example, my view that the poor behaviour of many students is often due to a loss of attention, a misunderstanding of lesson material or subsequent tasks, with the two being closely related. I had observed in large numbers of students with such problems that they wrote very little, had little idea of what to write about and had difficulty in putting content together orally. I therefore set up this study in the context of such awareness and foregrounding, as Gadamer (2004, p. 272) suggests, to allow the research to '...present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings...'

Gadamer (2004; pp. 271-272) argues that there can be '... neither 'neutrality' with respect to the content nor the extinction of one's self, but suggests the foregrounding and appropriation of the researcher's own fore-meanings and prejudices...' He highlights the importance of the researcher examining how the interpretations and meanings placed in the findings had been arrived at. In this process Gadamer (2004) argues for the application of reflexivity. McGraw, Zvonkovic and Walker (2000, p.68) highlight that reflexivity is required to address the inevitable everyday ethical dilemmas which arise through the generation of new knowledge. Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p.261) argue that whilst procedural ethics address research integrity, safe-guarding and autonomy they cannot anticipate all potential problems. For this reason a sensitivity to ethical practice is demanded plus a prompt response to ethically difficult events when they arise. Safe-guarding is paramount with both adult and child participants and research preparation must address such issues.

In Studies 1, 3 and 4 involving pupils, all research assistants had been selected as they were known individually to be both experienced and to work well with children. They had safe-guarding certification and were highly aware of the sensitivity required in individual and group situations to ensure participants felt emotionally safe. These field studies required researcher and assistants to observe children's responses, to be aware of an awareness of discomfort in undertaking the tasks and to consider the reasons. In each of these studies there was detailed ethical preparation; relationships and trust had been established before commencing each study. During the four studies no participant refused.

A related example occurred when my original research counterpart in Japan for Study 4 became unable to participate in the project just as the lengthy preparation period was due to begin. Because I had developed long term trusted relationships with the educational charity that was funding the research I was immediately supported. UK-Japan discussions began again, a new partner eventually came on board and the problem was resolved.

As my research responsibilities emerged, ownership of the process became clearer. Key elements included participants' rights and accountability, tempered with bias avoidance, irrelevance or inaccuracy. This included verifying, for example, the factual accuracy of a child participant's age and checking the translation into English of a role cited by a Japanese practitioner. In the case of very young participants it may be relevant to compare teachers' information with what the children say; also to compare a child's response, such as their date of birth, against school records if it appears that the year, for example, may not be correct. This calls for monitoring to a fine degree and attention to finer details in a preventative approach, linked to reliability. Also, explicit permission prior to gathering data for interviews, activities and observations were vital, with participants' rights as binding and transparent. The principles defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) were applied to the 4 studies as follows:

- The researcher's role as transparent and open;
- Skilled interactions with participants;
- Permission and access is sought in dialogue with personnel and strategic bodies;
- Permission is sought to observe participants (Study 4);
- Anonymity and confidentiality regarding participation and data gathering;
- Agreement to share research outcomes with others.

3.6.2 Insider-Outsider Considerations

Attention to the researcher's role from an insider-outsider stance developed along the insider-outsider continuum with a deepening reflexivity.

Gadamer comments that 'reflexivity is inherent in life' (2004, p.241). It is a process which allows participants to interpret together phenomena related to the meaning of their actions. Reflexivity is connected to inter-subjectivity in interactions between points where knowledge is developed by degrees along a continuum. The insider researcher may be accepted into the group, acquiring privileged access to knowledge and giving greater confidence, or may create dissonance. Within the 'hermeneutic circle ... understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which meaning occurs' (Gadamer, 2004, p.157). Testing ideas in action and being aware of our own subjectivities may lead us into deeper insights 'when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon; his ideas become intelligible without necessarily having to agree with him' (Gadamer, 2004, p.302). The reflexive researcher may perceive the strengths and weaknesses of an approach along an insider/outside continuum where participants make sense of their actions depending on the purposes of the research.

The process creates tensions and new ways to accommodate meaning. Such insider-outsider perspectives are described by Mercer (2007) as a 'double-edged sword' as the researcher strives to balance their personal beliefs with assimilating and faithfully representing the voices of others. Gadamer (2004, p.547) discusses the 'infinite dialogue with ourselves ... which differentiates us from that ideal of an infinite spirit for which all exists and all truth lies open in a single moment's vision.' He continues that it is in the 'experience of language - in our growing up in the midst of this interior conversation with ourselves and the introduction of others into the conversation with ourselves - that the world begins to open up and achieve order in all domains of experience.'

This relates to all four studies presented here in which my researcher role as insider or outsider shifted, dependent on my own 'professional and occupational moves' (Hellawell, 2006, p.8). From Studies 1 to 4, I experienced several career changes. They ranged from teaching and researching at a strategic level in a large challenging city secondary school, qualifying for headship and embarking on a PhD. Consequently, I was offered a one year contract at a Midlands university liaising with the local education authority on the newly qualified primary and secondary teachers' programme. Subsequently I took up a permanent university position in the North. I took advantage of the different roles, settings and geographical areas to follow up my studies in contrasting contexts.

Considering whether insider or outsider positions are advantageous depends upon the context. Within this inquiry, my research 'biography' was by governing ethical aspects 'imbued with values, motives, age and employment' (Hughes, 2013, p.1). However, I slide 'along more than one insider – outsider continuum, and in both directions, during the research process' (Hellowell, 2006, pp.483-494). It was also possible to be an insider yet feel an outsider to differing degrees at the same time. The concept of reflexivity in action research heightens the researcher's attunement to her own personal experiences in interaction with others. I became conscious of my own professional stance as an insider to a degree in the emerging research narrative as a researcher rather than a teacher taking ownership of my research and development (Stenhouse, 1975). My 'pre-understanding', related to my own 'situatedness' (Gadamer, 2004), oriented my ontological assumptions concerning reality. It also prompted in me the process of epistemological analysis, i.e. coming to know the world psychologically and socially through collaboration and communication with others (Angen, 2000, p.385). Reflexive practice involves intersubjectivity and the generation of ideas for change. This inevitably raises the epistemological dilemma of interpretation to an ethical level at which truth as an experience extends beyond oneself and beyond method (Gadamer 2004).

Because the action research stemmed from the practical interests and concerns of the learning community, I sought to represent the voices of different people as authentically as possible, in that they could both hear their own thinking and that they could be heard. As a reflexive partner in the process (Winter, 2002), a dialogue in which researcher and participants communicated within a shared framework of cultural meanings highlighted how interpretations may come into being. The research in the UK and Japan, and their comparative 'low' and 'high' context cultures, as defined by Hall (1987), shaped my thinking. The Japanese context provided space for ethical reflexivity. The collectivist and egalitarian values and practices of its society served to support my reflexivity; my Japanese colleagues responded that what I felt was of equal value to what I knew. This endorses the view that the most significant learning experiences are always '...both cognitive and affective in nature...' (Heikkinen, Huttunen, Syrjälä and Personnen, 2012, p.10).

My changing research role across all studies, with different age and cultural participants and using a mix of methods in contrasting contexts, served to enrich my research identity. My reflexivity and the 'subject' of my research interacted with 'partial, historical, local knowledge' (Richardson, 2000, p.929) as a heuristic device. From an emotional and intellectual perspective, I paused to reflect on what influenced the research at the time of conducting it and the following years, still questioning how learners articulate their thoughts with each other.

My research role was continuously open to scrutiny and transparency, as I skilfully navigated what seemed initially an 'ethical maze' (Cocks, 2006). Hughes (2013) suggests that it is researcher reflexivity, combined with a self-critical perspective that regulates one's actions in this domain.

3.6.3 Procedural and Governing Aspects of Ethical Considerations

The four cycles of action research presented in this thesis focus on the development of narrative expression as a vehicle for communication and learning. The four studies were investigated in secondary school contexts (Studies 1, 2 and 3) and comparative early years' settings (Study 4). The balancing of procedural and governing ethics was a key issue, since primary responsibility for undertaking research that is ethical rests with the researcher, and I illuminate here the ethical tensions experienced.

The two dynamics of procedural and governing aspects of ethics needed clarifying, how I chose the research design and research methods in agreement with my personal and professional values. Pring (2003, pp.142-145) distinguishes between 'principles of action', underpinned by moral considerations, and the researcher's character. He also questions the 'principles' that govern or justify 'the researcher's actions and specific 'rules' which need to be adhered to. Tensions are faced when juggling 'respect for the dignity and privacy of research participants on the one hand and the right of society to know on the other', demanding integrity.

Studies 1 and 2 (Cycles 1 and 2)

Two of the studies were conducted in the same school, ('City School'), focusing on the development of narrative expression as a vehicle for learning. Study 1 examined children's use of narrative on entry to secondary school and Study 2 supported secondary school educators' inquiry as to how they communicated in the classroom and how talk and learning are enhanced.

I stressed the importance of explaining both projects at the next whole staff meeting cascading the same formal information. Study 1 involved just the children and Study 2 emerged to support the needs of support staff. Tutor-led sessions were provided which were also open to staff across faculties with each faculty offering a volunteer member of staff alongside a teaching assistant who was allocated to each faculty. The Principal had agreed to this. However, regarding study 2 volunteers we agreed that 35 was a feasible number of staff in total since the Principal supported my idea of the school allocating one hour of school CPD time provided that participants would add one hour of their time after school, where possible.

Great care was taken ensuring volunteers did not feel pressurised into participation and that they may withdraw at any time, affording them anonymity and confidentiality including rejecting the data-gathering devices once the projects were underway. Care was taken to ensure more vulnerable participants were scaffolded and one member of staff commented on the right for all children to participate with assistants acting as scribes where appropriate so all had opportunities to access information fairly. Following the staff meeting I met with my own team consisting of 55 support workers who reflected on their perceptions of the staff meeting and clarified points.

City School was familiar with models of the reflective cycle and 'double loop learning' (Argyris and Schön, 1974). This culture of inquiry does not view participants 'as vessels emptying themselves into research indiscriminately' (Domosh, 2003, pp.107-111). From the outset we emphasised 'values of accountability in relation to participants, their experiences and my decisions regarding participant well-being' (Plowright, 2012). My strategic role as an inside researcher gave access to a range of participants at all levels within the school. A sense of ownership and joint enterprise of two cycles of school improvement (Studies 1 and 2) resided in the intrinsic worth of research projects where 'notions of fairness and morality' were tied to 'cultural conceptions of how individuals' related to each other (Rogoff, 2003, p.221) in a proactive partnership.

In Studies 1 and 2 (see methodology) being an insider was advantageous in that my 'biography' resulted in 'familiarity with researched groups' (Carter, 2004). Being a trusted member of staff and teacher governor was instrumental in giving me a strategic and operational vision of teaching and learning and how to best support staff in genuine collaboration. Trust gained in both contexts enabled us to co-construct meaning, encouraging participants to perhaps begin to think and 'act differently' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010, p.73). The claim to transform knowledge and understanding would be self-regulatory in nature, based on evolving interpersonal relationships and negotiation, a process of developing reflexivity.

As the researcher I needed to be vigilant to my position within the research location, particularly with regard to the subjective nature of my insider stance. For example, in the school setting other staff could have questioned whose research agenda it really was. Furthermore, acting as a bridge between participants' differing views regarding school practices and policy decision-making, was not without its tensions, especially when the senior management team were focused on a diverse range of issues. As the researcher, getting research onto the school agenda also involved me in addressing pragmatic matters of space, time and power relations as well as philosophical issues.

On one hand, I was aware that being a member of the culture working at diverse levels within the organisation offered me a deeper understanding of the 'setting and context of the research arena' with which to represent staff and students. The staff had voted for me to represent them as teacher governor suggesting that they trusted my credibility, relationships and awareness (Robson, 2002, p.540). In fact it was the relationships, trust and empathy that, I believe, facilitated both access and authenticity in the data I obtained; an outsider would have been less likely to have had such open access and, as such, would not have experienced the insights that emanated from my role, everyday experiences and the collegial collaboration of those who participated generously throughout the action research.

At the same time I did not take for granted the risks inherent in my position as lead researcher. I considered it paramount to be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of participants by co-constructing ideas about the research and was committed to support the team, given the faith and responsibility they had placed in me. I also took on board different prejudices in a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 2004). This gave participants the freedom to openly challenge the interpretations and reinterpretations in the research process, as both a 'problem of application', to be found in all understanding, and a potential strength. The data from Study 1 led to Study 2 then on to Study 3 in which Study 1 was replicated and extended in a contrasting school environment. Yet similar issues emerged, secondary school students' difficulties in the area of narrative competence and the need for its development. These findings led to a study with young children and the results led in turn to its replication in a contrasting country known for the academic 'standards' of its pupils at ages nine and fourteen.

The research problem was believed by all staff to be worthwhile; motivation is a key factor: 'if the community driving the research believes it has value for them' (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p.102) which was critical. My 'widening participation' role supported an empathetic understanding of all participants in view of the challenging context within which all staff were working. In Study 2, in particular, staff may have revealed 'more intimate details of their lives to me as someone considered empathetic, as juxtaposed with the problems that proponents of insider research nevertheless acknowledge' (Hockey, 1993, p.199). Collective agreement and sharing of responsibilities amongst participants worked towards the common goal of high quality research that would 'make a difference to people's lives' (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p.106). This was happening being part of the team with fair and due respect given for their contributions.

Regarding informed consent, in my line management with the Principal I initiated Study 1 then Study 2 as it emerged as integral to the whole school development plan. I composed a sheet of information supplemented by briefings. The proposal was placed on the Senior team agenda to be ratified the following week at the governor's meeting. This body was composed of the wider community, ranging from a Somalian parent liaison worker and local parent from the estate to representatives of the local council and education authority to a university lecturer. All were in favour.

Aspiring to social justice issues, I took the Year 7 cohort in Study 1 to the university for the Go project. Parents gave informed consent for all children to be involved, which both enhanced all participants' self-esteem and raised the school's profile in the wider community. As one parent commented 'anything what gives them education and something different to what we've had.' Halina in Year 11 quotes, 'None of our family has been to Uni', adding, 'It just shows you what you can do if you try and what you could do in the future.'

Where parents give written or verbal consent for their child to participate, the researcher must ensure that the child wishes to participate when the research actively begins. Should the child refuse to participate by saying no, showing no, not responding, pulling away, ignoring or showing unwillingness (Skanfors, 2009) the researcher needs to be sensitive to possible underlying reasons even if not fully articulated. For example, the child may not have the words, or wish to explain why. However, this may be a temporary reason and there may be the option of the child being included later. If there is a deeper disclosure issue, an immediate follow-up as to the true nature of the problem is needed. Alternative tasks may be prepared for any child not wishing to participate. This allows thinking time to reconsider their choice should they change their mind.

Pupils as voluntary participants have every ethical right to withdraw from the research at any time (Bosit, 2010). It is the responsibility of the researcher to explain the research in a palatable manner. Preparation and time taken to explain what the research is about and how the participants may be able to help the researcher improve the learning for everyone ensured in all cases that there were no withdrawals.

Study 3

During Study 3 I was employed by North West University. Previous Studies 1 and 2 complemented this context. I perceived that participants felt comfortable and confident in my presence. They commented upon my empathetic understanding and success with previous teacher trainees with whom I had worked in their school. They were interested in

my previous research in School 1, acting as a springboard for development. Study 3 was also built on strong working relationships and confidence of a partnership tried and tested in the past, developed from trusting, equitable foundations. Clear boundaries were established, however, in this study, roles and responsibilities concerned two institutions; the school and the university, the latter my place of employment.

In this study, I have reflected on my university lecturer's role. Entering the school as a researcher I could be considered as a 'temporary insider' (Mercer, 2007, p.2) or 'free agent' (Campbell et al., 2004, p.170). At the same time, I was able to share ownership of the inside research process, working smartly and developing skills with participants. There were genuine values of care regarding improving student learning, using their 'contextually embedded narratives' (Anderson and Jones, 2000, p.44) to advantage in the process. I felt welcomed into this school setting and not a stranger.

Reflexivity supported my sense of agency of being both an insider and outsider in Study 3. I was developing my research, yet reflecting upon my previous role in Studies 1 and 2 researching within a contrasting organisation in which I felt a true insider due to my teaching position. My understanding was that 'insiderism' and 'outsiderism' emerges by degree, within the relationship. Researchers must recognise their own situatedness and at times question their subjectivities. They need to provide themselves with spaces for ethical reflection to explore the nature of the role more deeply and possible alternative choices through which to navigate.

In general, I chose to adopt Mercer's (2007) 'temporary insider' stance, balanced with 'a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement' (Hammersley, 1993, p.219). Within the hermeneutic circle, however, reasons underpinning an enquiry may be embedded in the researcher's pre-understandings which may ultimately transcend any 'temporary insider' stance (Gadamer, 2004). Whilst scrutinising what appears to be common knowledge, the researcher in pursuing truth must assure dignity and privacy of participants and reconcile her own stance and commitment to the research and the implicit nature of problems in situ. A reflexive approach relies on an intuition where the researcher may have to discretely judge by degree, how to move forward after re-evaluating experiences and possible changes in behaviours. The position may be compared to being fully involved with participants to allowing oneself to be temporarily mentally distanced from it in order to further illuminate the matter with finer precision in one's own head. Gadamer (2004) refers to this strategy as 'bracketing'. It allows for deeper reflection and is inherent in the researcher's inner voice.

In the latter case I focused on the research when back at my full time university work and obligations. I reflected with a sense of perspective that the scope and degree to which I conceptualised my insider-outsider stance became part of a continuum illuminating my own reflexivity within a bigger research journey. However, I still believed the 'social insider' was better positioned from a research perspective in this case because of my understanding of 'relevant patterns of social interaction required for gaining access and making meaning', (Shah, 2004, p.556). In the school I was collegially welcomed as a 'social insider'.

Rapport developing with staff in Study 3 was empathetic. The research focused on children's developing narrative competence but was also supportive to the school with reference to the school's need to develop a new study skills programmes. The outsider perspective added a degree of detachment for me since I could remove myself from the operational in-house school politics and pending Ofsted inspection. A focus on how the new build was progressing and whether student facilities would be enhanced by the new Study Centre were added tensions for the whole school and I questioned whether my research was timely. However, the staff wished to pursue the research and it was agreed at whole school level that this would be a golden nugget to enhance school improvement plans. This challenge argued for 'high quality connections between researchers and their practice partners to allow for mutual learning' (Dutton and Dukerich, 2006), as 'appreciative inquiry' underpinning good research projects.

Study 4

A contrasting point in exploring the insider outsider dichotomy continuum continued within Study 4. The study evolved to become a comparative study which involved British and Japanese nurseries. I acknowledged that responsibility for this project may have veered more towards the outsider part of the continuum. I initially had access to 3 contrasting British nurseries with ease since I worked at their nearest university and had taught in a range of schools near to them. I had been familiar with taking formal and informal steps to access school settings at a geographical and cultural distance in comparative study-visits over the previous twenty years, but in the context of this study involving Japan as the researcher I was party to extensive 'movement' (Wood, 1998, p.43). I was pushed beyond insider research boundaries in working with Japanese colleagues in our replication of some of the studies when I needed support at institutional level when learning that my long-standing partner in Japan was faced with having to 'withdraw from the research context' (Hopkins, 2002, pp.202-203). Fortunately, I secured a new partner, through contacts at Japanese government level.

However, my Japanese colleague was a graduate of a prestigious British university, had visited British schools, was an experienced English-Japanese speaker and was studying for a doctorate. We felt our relationship was a 'parallel discourse' (Dale and Robertson, 2007), with a deep appreciation of each other's conceptual understandings and communication. Collaboration with the Japanese university's staff focused on ownership, reciprocity and group harmony, compared to the British notion of 'a critical community' (Campbell et al., 2004, p.118) which '... can often consist of those who are 'stakeholders' and 'experts' in the research area, and those who have an interest that may be 'academic' in nature...'

In view of this, I took care not to impose any pre-conceived values. Assumptions required to develop knowledge link to our traditions in the sense that they are shaped by our 'pre-understandings' (Gadamer, 2004). They are embedded in our professional backgrounds, beliefs and practices. Understanding must precede methodological knowing. Our cultural and historical identities are open to new understandings requiring an awareness developing through the continuous, reflexive process of being and becoming through interaction with others. As Gadamer (2004) argues, pre-understandings allow us to question our prejudices, raise our consciousness and make us open-minded. Scott and Usher (2011) argue that rather than by-passing our prejudices we should use them as a key starting point when constructing new knowledge. Being aware of my own pre-understandings provided particular meanings and perspectives in a challenging context. By remaining open-minded to the interactive nature of the research process itself in a give and take relationship, pre-understandings were proactively challenged leading to further self-reflection and greater capacities to fulfil the research.

Being an 'interested researcher' can prompt an acute awareness of cultural-historical biases and prejudices. The essence of hermeneutics overrides bias in a 'democratic process of dialectical reflection to reach a compromise of intentionalities' (Lisle, 2000, p.118). This is based on a shared framework of reflexive cultural understanding; the core of human essence. As teaching children had been a lifelong vocation for me, originally in the teacher- researcher tradition of Stenhouse (1975), I had been particularly interested in how children learn and communicate effectively through language. Being a researcher meant moving to a more refined stance.

Throughout my career I had experienced effective and non-effective teaching and leadership and had held management positions which involved observing staff and pupils. This role, whilst aiming to be pro-active, had its tensions particularly where teachers were under-performing. Leading participatory action research as a researcher enabled me to

raise the profile of struggling staff to a different level where they were able to grow in esteem and expertise in a shared enterprise through the research. In this way, given appropriate scaffolding and a voice, my own previous prejudices were alleviated. As Edna states in Study 1, she felt she had gained understanding particularly from 'practical' and 'motivating' elements of the sessions on reflection. In answer to Question 6 (What needs do you have to support your further learning?) she exclaimed 'learning how to become assertive as opposed to just giving the impression of being bossy'

With Edna individually, she also commented on the need to impart '...tact, enthusiasm and instructions' This followed on from her previous answer in which she also commented on the fact that it was good to see a representative of the school's management attending the sessions (a male Deputy-Principal who elected to join the group). In researching I could identify with Edna's honesty since, in becoming a better teacher myself, I could empathise with the perceived inadequacies that teachers experience in schools when time and talk for students as part of learning are at a premium. It was in confronting my own prejudices or pre-understandings that I became committed to representing others through the research role, working towards freedom of speech and other democratic principles which underpin the ideals of social justice.

I was an outsider in the respect that' outsiders are newcomers to the meaning system, with limited understandings of how practices fit together and how they have developed from prior events' (Rogoff, 2003, p.26). Yet my relationship with my new Japanese colleagues grew rapidly and I felt the community trusted me as an insider and I did not feel an outsider. In a communicative approach I reflected on the heuristic which would conceptualise my relationship with these research partners. I had to '... search for rules of conduct that enable us to operate defensibly in the political contexts in which we have to conduct educational research...' (Simons, 1995, p.436). We shared ideas about assessing the narrative competence of children as they start school and, although this approach differs markedly from Japanese philosophy and practice, there was great interest in collaborating on a comparative study. Working at a distance from my new Japanese research counterpart placed sensitive demands on time and effort with respect to assent, access and consent which needed continuous re-examination.

Research ethics as a formal process is a relatively new concept in Japan but academics have long discussed philosophical and moral issues deeply prevalent within their curriculum (Dewey, 1909; Abiko, 2011). As a researcher I shared understandings of research ethics evolving within the relationship, focusing on core values of intellectual honesty, based on mutual respect at all levels of the process. Effective communication

and relationships were deemed highly moral, perceived as social responsibility, 'to some extent in relationship to society and that is to some extent a non-Western way of thinking' (Macfarlane and Saitoh, 2008, p.190).

Ethical principles in the literature '... often emphasise the collectivist nature of Japanese society where, in contrast to Western cultural norms, the needs of the group are elevated above those of the individual...' (MacFarlane and Saitoh, 2008, p.183). Based on a group discussion emphasis, my research consisted of daily after school meetings with the teachers, followed by meetings with the research team where the conversation involved lengthy reflections of talking around the subject. Often this appeared informal with refreshments and ending in group consensus. The researcher's role needed to be reflexive and empathetic: '... at every phase of research, including the consent process, sensitivity and attention should be given to the cultural ethos and eidos of the community...' (Matsumoto and Jones, 2008, p.326).

Informal practice to support more formal research mediated along a continuum emphasising collective responsibility in a problem solving approach for the benefit of the group rather than the individual. Whilst dealing with a culture's uniqueness, ways of working together dealt with consensus, questioning and choices are made through a developing culture and ownership emerging from the team itself. A critical review of concepts and emerging narratives of those researched in context, was engaging in complex areas. For example, in pre- prepared research design, choosing was 'opt in' or 'opt out' consent was appropriate (Boddy, 2012, p.89). The paradox of 'opt out' consent where participants were contacted to take part, assumed their participation unless we heard to the contrary. Ironically this worked towards a fully inclusive approach used by the Japanese researchers.

With reference to the Japanese context, the researcher needs to be sensitive towards stereotyping 'of cultural differences which may not be true' (Matsumoto and Leong, 2008, p.326). In order to guard against this, the researcher must start from a specific perspective, for example the 'etic' as 'a particular cultural perspective' (Fossheim, 2012). Challenging one's assumptions by gathering 'emic' information and data, for example, through observations and focus groups, often leads to the creation of a new 'etic' when knowledge is co-constructed amongst participants and provides an innovative framework.

Heightened awareness of the Japanese context required an understanding of a high context culture (Hall, 1987). Ethical complexity was 'generated by the fact that the various agents involved have differing understandings of how, say, respect is expressed, and live in different contexts where the possibilities of expressing respect-as well as disrespect-

depend on a variety of traditions and institutions' (Fosshelm, 2012, p.11). Degrees of respect, humility and politeness are prevalent when addressing Japanese people.

Another dilemma of cross cultural research is that of translation and communication across countries without interaction in person. It was one issue to have accurate Japanese translators but the need for a deeper understanding of values within the cultural context meant that 'purely translating between languages 'word for word will guarantee misrepresentation of information as well as skew research findings' (Fosshelm, 2012). My new Japanese counterpart was not only fluent in both languages but also a knowledgeable and skilful interpreter with in the field of education. Meanings, nuances and values can be subtle or hidden, but our in-depth discussions worked well to uncover these to ensure integrity in the representation of Japanese responses. The process of 'back-translation', back and forth between the languages, also ensured accuracy in written materials including interview questions.

3.6.4 Research Involving Children

Basit (2010) argues that consideration and communication in all relationships, with an understanding of diverse contexts, needs to be without discrimination. This applied in particular to all participants lacking in confidence who needed to focus on communication skills. Both myself and the research assistants needed to interact with child participants sensitively 'within an ethic of respect for any persons involved directly or indirectly in the research they are undertaking regardless of age, sex, race, religion.... or any other significant difference between such persons and the researchers themselves or other participants in the research' (BERA, 2004, p.6).

Cocks (2006, pp.257-258) argues that informed consent is based on morals of trust, honesty and integrity lying at the heart of the process, combined with clarity of purpose. In Studies 1, 2 and 3 the participants include children, therefore 'seeking assent requires the researcher to remain constantly vigilant to the responses of the child at all times: it is not something gained at the beginning of the research then put aside. It requires time and constant efforts on the part of the researchers, who need to attune themselves to the child's unique communication in order to know when to remove themselves. Parental or guardian approval was necessary. It applied consistently to the very young children in Study 4, the four year-olds in England and Japan.

With regard to explaining research to preschool children, Löfdahl (2007) examines what it means to participate in a broader perspective. He emphasises avoiding complication for participants including children. It is questionable whether or not young children

understand what it means to have their learning analysed. It is more pragmatic to explain to children in another country that, as visitors in the school, we are interested in what they say and do as we are from a different country, in order to access the immediate context. Children have the right to participate in research and parents need to give them that right. However, the researcher needs to obtain informed consent particularly when under-age children are involved together with the children as far as possible (Backe-Hansen, 2002).

Acceptance of the research by children and those working with them needs to ensure they feel comfortable and able to make free choices. A preliminary, informal day was organised so participants could familiarise themselves and talk with me; I remained in the play area so they could involve me in their unstructured play if they wished. Lindsey (2010, p.119) argues that an explanation of 'who the researcher is' is essential as: 'young children will normally require an oral explanation expressed in a manner that communicates effectively.' By informing parents I had anticipated that they would communicate details of the project and its activities to their children, however this was also undertaken by staff in the relevant classes in the school. Remaining complex issues focused on anonymity and consent. In terms of what the research might 'give back to the children' I hoped that they would enjoy and benefit from the one-to-one activities involving narrative development. Feedback could also help support and further their competences.

My research schedule involved a one-to-one interview with children lasting around ten minutes seated in a quiet corner of an open play area of their nursery. The Japanese assistant asked them firstly about questions about every day matters and then to respond to a short story. Questions were asked in the style familiar to young children; examples are when in the home they might be asked about items in a picture or story book such as 'Who goes Quack-Quack..?' or 'What do you with your tooth-brush..?' The purpose of the questions was to discover how the four year-olds used narrative, how much they could express about particular everyday items and events, and if they could re-construct a very short story about a lady with a cat. An important strategy was 'ethical radar' (Skanfors, 2009, p.15), being highly attuned to small children based on intuition, experience and skill on the researcher's part. Awareness of reading both verbal and non-verbal signals which children may communicate can help. Knowing when to withdraw if children feel uncomfortable is critical. The children were interested to participate and during the interviews seemed to enjoy pondering on the answers. As Kjoholt (2012, p.12) suggests, 'children like adults are strategic, narrative-making beings.'

3.6.5 Reflexivity

It was important as an action researcher to be closely involved with the research subject, the context in which it took place, and other stakeholders 'to be self aware as the instrument' of research (Borg et al., 2012, p.52). A fundamental awareness of acting in an ethical manner as both a personal commitment to myself and others was at the forefront of my mind. Becoming sensitised to the scope and limitations of explaining phenomena, assumed from an epistemological stance, that interpretations were 'at best, partial and incomplete' (Morgan, 1983, p.369) within situated, social, communicative practice. Whilst I reflected on ways of thinking and acting, it raised the following questions: How did I do what I did? How did I respond to processes? Were any pre-conceptions reasonable? How was my view applied to practical contexts?

My presence adopted 'degrees of reflexivity' (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) in interpreting knowledge and understanding through the medium of language as hermeneutic discourse. This conversational dialogue strongly communicated as the way we are 'in-the-world' (Gallagher, 1992; Diekelmann, 2005; Holroyd, 2007) involved the dialectic process of questions and answers. This revealed possibilities for understanding the world, others, and ourselves, from a new dimension (Gadamer, 1989; Gallagher, 1992). Gadamer's hermeneutic intent centres on conversational dialogue as participative with ethical focus on openness and respectful listening and hearing of participants' voices and this was my stance. Firstly, I reflected on how I communicated with participants. Secondly, how was I accountable to others in this developing relationship? The creation of knowing communities 'can aid us in our attempts to maintain our varied research relationship' (Mauthner and Doucet, 2002, p.14).

The research illustrated here moved rapidly from a temporary crisis, after the loss of a research partner, which required focused mental navigation and reflexivity. One needed a moral compass as to whether it was taking a risk too far, being up against time constraints and distance, plus initially being an outsider with the new partner. Whilst the importance of avoiding the 'potential ethno-centrism of ethical guidelines' cannot be overestimated (Fossheim, 2012, p.40), I believe that my passion to continue following up my research questions, whilst taking a rare glimpse inside relatively undiscovered territory, outweighed any doubts and obstacles.

CHAPTER 4 - STUDY 1: AN ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCIES ON ENTRY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL AND INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE IT

4.1 Introduction

As the review of the literature has established, a complexity of cognitive processes, styles and nuances come together to enable learners to extract meaning and help to make sense of situations, conversations, reading matter etc. The manner in which we speak and the subtleties of our exchanges reflect our roles, relationships with others, our knowledge, values, attitudes and personal characteristics. Body language and talk also reflect our understanding of the nature of the occasion or situation and, crucially, whether it is a formal or informal setting.

Studies such as the ongoing longitudinal EPPSE (2011) project show that if children enter primary school with difficulties in communication, their thinking ability often proves inadequate for dealing with the social and learning demands of the classroom. Furthermore if these difficulties persist into secondary education they are likely to seriously hamper their development of thinking and problem-solving abilities. In fact in the case of children moving from a less formal, community-centred primary school many problems arise when they face the more rigidly timetabled and subject-centred environment of the secondary school. For a combination of complex reasons what may be interpreted by staff as 'misbehaviour' may actually represent the need for students to develop deeper levels of conceptual knowledge in order to understand what they are taught and so feel more comfortable in the secondary environment. Shared 'cultural knowledge' is also seen as important to literacy, defined by Williams and Snipper (1990) as referring to knowledge of the culture, such as traditions both distant and recent, and including matters such as TV, shows, songs and a country's history (Minami, 2011, p.72).

As examined earlier, students entering secondary school often encounter a very 'low context' style of language and teaching across many subjects. A large proportion of the words used in teaching are out of context, both in speech and in print. This demands of all new students a high level of general and cultural knowledge, rapid mental processing

capacity and the ability to use narrative language to clarify their current knowledge as well as new information and ideas. Being well prepared for secondary education is therefore a key issue for students' later progress.

4.2 Rationale for Study 1

The longer term outlook for students with difficulties in thinking and communication appears worrying. Their problems are likely to seriously limit their capacity as adults to operate confidently and effectively and to succeed. In the mid-twenty-first century society, citizens will be heavily reliant on good communication skills for dealing swiftly with people, problems and events across cultures, interacting in multi-ethnic populations both locally and globally (Orozco, 2009, p.71). Against this background the impetus for this Study 1 arose, and for the following 4 reasons.

1) Personal experience in schools and analyses of National Curriculum SATs tests and GCSE exam results highlight the difficulties encountered by some English fourteen and sixteen year-olds. Their problems are found to be not related to matters of subject knowledge but to: a) not understanding test or examination questions; b) not knowing how to respond to questions and answer appropriately.

As examined earlier, both understanding and responding to questions are dependent on two cognitive capacities. These are the capacity to bring together a collection of information and ideas and the ability to process and set out ideas in a narrative form. In the field of research both have been recognised for some time as abilities that underpin all academic learning; expressed simply, the capacity to take in information and the ability to apply and express it.

2) Such difficulties usually underpin what is often interpreted by secondary school staff as 'misbehaviour', when in fact students need to develop deeper levels of conceptual knowledge in order to understand what they are taught, feel comfortable and be able to respond during lessons.

3) Despite the fact that capacities to bring together a collection of ideas and to set out ideas in a narrative form is central to learning, it is not expected that they should be monitored by the school during a child's education. Even beyond primary education, when students approach the academic demands of KS3 SATs, GCSEs and A Levels in KS4 and 5, students' capacities in these areas are still not specifically addressed in either teaching or assessment.

4) The amount of time students have to interact with their educators is minimal (Galton et al., 1999). Bearing in mind that staffing levels will not improve for financial reasons this situation will remain at least unchanged; indeed in many schools students are already regularly taught by teaching assistants and learning mentors. The amount of time that students spend working 'independently' can also be considerable.

4.3 Research Questions

Research has shown that the assessment and skilful scaffolding of students' thinking and problem-solving by teachers is central to the learning process. The four reasons underpinning this study combine to raise and address questions about the time that students spend in communication with educators, in communication with peers, in 'independent study', and about their relative effectiveness.

Study 1 relates to action research which addresses the question of whether children are developing thinking and communication abilities at the end of their primary education. It aims to assess the cognitive and linguistic performance of students aged eleven to twelve years as they enter secondary school. This assessment includes discovering whether, rather than learning solely about language *per se*, students are also:

- learning how to shift from using informal to formal styles of communication;
- able to draw upon their cultural knowledge;
- able to use narrative structure to improve their thinking and communication;
- able to improve the non-verbal aspects of their communications.

4.4 Research Design: Two Cycles of Action Research

The two cycles of action research reported (A and B) here took place within the new large, inner-city Midlands challenging secondary school named 'City Secondary', with 700 of 1800 students on the special needs register. Only 20% of the cohort achieved C to A grades at GCSE. All lived within the school's inner city catchment area. I had built up a team of 55 committed support staff over three years in my role as Head of the Learning Support Faculty. Whole school assessment analysis in tests and exams had often resulted from students misunderstanding questions or being limited in their responses and inappropriate answers.

At this level, I had shared with staff students' inability to assemble and arrange ideas in narrative form. Regular meetings among support staff within the Learning Support Faculty enabled the team to view the 'whole picture' of student progress including patterns of

success, slow progress and 'failure.' Within this community of practice I led the team. We decided it was important to investigate the communicative ability of our Year 7 intake, 70 of whom had a reading age of below 8. We decided to monitor whether their needs remained the same or improved over time. Together with the team it was decided in particular to look at the relationship between levels of competence and confidence in cognitive-linguistic ability. The study was to follow samples of participants through the school, a small number for up to four years to obtain longitudinal attitudinal data on teacher-pupil communication. Another issue was the question of possibly increasing the amount of time and quality of students' exploratory talk with peers in class facilitated by staff, or whether additional time spent with their peers would be equally beneficial to help them improve communication and thinking abilities.

4.4.1 Part A of the Study

As Head of the Learning Support Faculty I conducted an analysis of student performance and noted that underachievement in tests and exams often resulted from misunderstanding the questions or answering inappropriately. I had shared with staff that this was dependent on students' fundamental capacity to assemble information, process and organise ideas in narrative form.

i) Identification

The support staff observed that classroom practice showed that subject staff often misinterpreted difficulties as 'misbehaviour' although such students did not appear to understand concepts and respond in lessons. We agreed that we needed more knowledge of students' competences in order to scaffold their learning.

ii) Planning

Narrative competence was being neither monitored nor addressed in the school and the support staff had observed that the time students spent talking, with educators and peers was minimal. The staff had shared their need for assessment materials, asking what I had previously used and recommended to develop students' communicative competence.

As an integral part of my annual practice, assessment or 'screening' tests were given to all 200 new students entering Year 7 to provide base-line information on their cognitive, linguistic and narrative competence and writing production abilities. Together the staff and I questioned the level of the children's narrative competence in Year 7, thus beginning the first cycle of action research reported in this study as Part A: 'An assessment of the

students' communicative competence on entry to secondary school'. [This later led to Part B: 'A comparison of interventions to improve it'.

iii) Implementation

The outcomes of the assessment of communicative competences test in Year 7 formed Part 1 of the action research cycle encompassing research into students' levels of ability on entering secondary school.

Participants: The assessments involved the 200 Year 7 students, male and female, with an average age of 11 years 4 months.

Materials: They were assessed by: i) giving answers to a quiz of everyday 'cultural' knowledge; ii) providing an account of a familiar process; iii) re-telling a short story. Following testing, interviews with participants were conducted to gain qualitative data. Details are presented below.

Cultural knowledge test

This consisted of 10 quiz questions of cultural knowledge, at an age and social appropriate level, delivered orally by each form tutor to the class. One of the questions was designed to prompt a response to 'what happened' in a (then) recent global event that also required a short narrative typically composed of the subject, object and actions in a sequence, (see Appendix 1). A teaching assistant supported students requiring spelling support where needed when students recorded their answers, although this analysis focused on conceptual understanding.

Scoring: Each response was coded as either:

- Fully correct;
- Partially correct - where sufficient information is given to indicate some degree of knowledge;
- Incorrect - where insufficient or no information is given.

Providing an account of a familiar process

Participants were asked, on a one-to-one basis, to explain a familiar process by providing step by step instructions. In this case the process was 'how to make a cup of tea' since this was known to be something that girls and boys in local families did regularly. This research method relates to 'elicited narrative' (Berman and Slobin, 1994) and does not rely upon listening and recalling information but draws upon secure personal knowledge. The aim is to prompt participants to construct an appropriately sequenced, extended

narrative, i.e. one that contains several propositions. The assessment is not time-bound and participants are allowed to re-consider and correct their accounts. Responses were noted on the recording sheet.

Re-telling of a short story

Participants were required to listen to a short unknown story composed to contain 9 propositions of the type used in instructions, presentations and explanations. A summary of its content is that it is about a boy's birthday and how his sister is preparing for it. The story re-telling process is not reliant on participants' general knowledge, understanding or longer-term memory abilities. Instead it measures the research participants' capacities to make sense of, re-structure and re-tell the story they have just heard in narrative form.

The test draws upon capacities that are relied upon in schools. For example, when a teacher requires students to take in, make sense of and act upon a sequence of information, such as carrying out a series of tasks in science or design. A further example is in a history lesson when required to listen to an account of a series of past events, recall and research them. The story re-telling test draws upon both cognitive-linguistic processing and the construction of a narrative. Research indicates that a story re-telling allows participants freedom to respond and provide information at their own levels of thinking, language and narrative. Narrative story re-telling is also known to be a reliable indicator of students' potential ability in reading (Bishop and Donlan, 2005).

Scoring: A rating of 'partially correct' was given for naming of propositions (items and 'ideas') in the procedure but without a full or correct sequence; it was also awarded for the order of those propositions given but where the list was incomplete. A rating of 'fully correct' was given for providing intact information (i.e. a full account). A rating of 'incorrect' was given for responses where both the propositions were incomplete and the sequence was incomplete or inaccurate.

Ethical Considerations

The tests and interventions in Part A and B of Study 1 took place within the parameters of the school's curriculum, practice and action research. The participants were with existing members of staff, therefore no special safeguards were sought at that stage. At the point at which it was decided that the results of the Year 7 testing and results of the studies would be written up for out of school purposes the school staff, students, governors and parents were consulted and their permission obtained regarding publication beyond the school, whilst ensuring that the school and students were anonymous.

I emphasised the importance of explaining how information about both projects was to be analysed and used at the next whole staff meeting. Sensitivity was taken ensuring children who were volunteers in interviews did not feel pressurised into participating and that they were aware that they could withdraw at any time. Parents were informed of this also in the respect of giving consent. Care was taken to ensure more vulnerable participants were scaffolded. One staff member commented on the right for all children to have assistants acting as scribes where appropriate so all had equal opportunities, but this was part of school practice. Following the staff meeting I met with my own team who reflected on their perceptions of the staff meeting and clarified points. A sense of ownership and joint enterprise of two cycles of school improvement (Studies 1 and 2) resided in the intrinsic worth of the research projects and the fact that all activities were offered on a rotation basis.

Regarding informed consent, in my line management with the Principal I initiated Study 1 then Study 2 as integral to the whole school development plan. The proposal was placed on the Senior team agenda and ratified the following week at the governors' meeting. The Year 7 cohort was taken to the university for the 'Go' project a part of the following Intervention Study (Cycle B). Parents gave informed consent for all children to be involved, which both enhanced all participants' self-esteem and raised the school's profile in the wider community.

For reasons of ethics and anonymity the school is referred to in this thesis as 'City School'. No details or names are given. All were aware that the research project was designed to gather data on what students encountering difficulties would find supportive in order to improve interaction and learning through exploratory talk.

4.4.1.1 Analysis

The results are shown here. It was in response to these assessment findings that the second cycle of action research was planned.

4.4.1.1.1 Analysis of cultural knowledge quiz

The percentages of participants achieving 'Fully correct' answers to the 10 questions of test [a] Cultural Knowledge in *the pre-test* are ranked in the table below. They are shown in descending order, from the questions answered most successfully to those answered least successfully.

Table 4.1 - Percentage of correct answers by the Y7 school cohort to the Cultural Knowledge pre-test questions, presented in rank order (N=200)

Question	Fully correct responses
1. Where does milk come from?	83%
2. How many colours are there in the rainbow?	66%
3. Write a number less than 9083	66%
4. What is the capital of England?	61%
5. What do you call your Mum's dad?	41%
6. How many countries are in the British Isles?	32%
7. Who is the Prime Minister of Britain?	29%
8. Which continent is India in?	27%
9. What are the points of the compass?	13%
10. What happened on September 11 th , 2001?	1.5%

As the above scores show, the complexity of the questions is reflected in the results. It might be expected that the simplest questions, listed as 2 to 5, could be answered by all children eleven years at the end of Year 6, however the findings show that these questions were answered successfully by between no more than three quarters of students. 17 per cent did not answer 'where milk comes from', even allowing for ambiguity in the question and accepting some responses as in a 'carton' or the 'supermarket'. Bearing in mind that this figure was obtained across a full cohort of 200 students it can be seen that the general knowledge level of the entire Year 7 cohort was very low.

The content of questions 6, 8 and 9 (the British Isles, major continents, points of the compass) might be considered as a fundamental base for students learning more about geography in their secondary school, indeed this material features in the primary National Curriculum. Success rates for these questions from 32 to just 13 per cent are very low in this context, as in 13% not knowing the compass points.

To put these scores for the school cohort into context, the table below compares the mean of the overall total scores of the cohort to those in the original group piloting the test devised by Sage (2000). Scores represent the total number of questions answered correctly out of 10.

Table 4.2 - Cultural Knowledge pre-test total scores of the Year 7 students compared with pilot group participants

Group	Number in sample	Mean score of 10	SD
Year 7 research group	200	5.4	12.7
Original pilot group	100	8.2	7.7

While the mean total score obtained with the original pilot group was 8.2 answers correct out of 10, as shown above, the mean total for the research group in the school for the General Knowledge test was just 5.4 answers correct out of 10. Furthermore, a wide standard deviation of 12.7 for the research group suggests a large cluster of very low scores which suppressed their overall mean. The standard deviation within the pilot group was far lower at 7.7. As might be expected there is a highly significant difference statistically between the scores of the research group and the pilot norm ($p = < 0.003$).

4.4.1.1.2 Analysis of account of a familiar process: How do you make a cup of tea?

In this test the number of relevant components provided by participants in their oral narrative account of the familiar account is totalled (propositions, correct sequence, full narrative). To put the scores for this age-group into context, the original pilot group was a total score of 7.4 compared to 3.4 in the research group. The table below compares the mean of the overall total scores of the school cohort of 200 compared below with this norm.

Table 4.3 Research participants' pre-test scores when providing a short account of a familiar process compared with pilot norms

Group	Size of group	Mean Score	SD
Year 7 research group	200	3.4	2.9
Original pilot group	100	7.4	5.2

As the above results show there was also a highly significant difference in this test between the means of the two groups ($p = 0.002$), with the research group scoring less than half that of the pilot group. The research group revealed substantial difficulties in providing a full narrative for a sequence of events that they experience regularly in their daily lives. The research group showed a small standard deviation of 2.9 compared to a deviation of 5.2 among the pilot.

It is unlikely that the poor scores from the research group were due to participants not understanding or not recalling how to make a cup of tea. Bearing in mind the narrative difficulties demonstrated in the results shown above it may instead have been due to the participants' lack of experience in structuring and expressing their thoughts in narrative form. Qualitative interpretations explain examples later. This is a competence further explored in the following test.

4.4.1.1.3 Analysis of story re-telling task

In calculating the test results the total number of relevant components provided by participants in their re-telling is totalled (propositions, correct order and syntax. To put the

scores for this age-group in context, in the original pilot (N=100) gave an average score in each section of 4.3; this contrasts with an average for the research group of 2.4, almost half. This measure of narrative ability is captured by the scores presented in the table below. The results show comparisons of the mean scores of the research group of 200 with the mean scores of the pilot group.

Table 4.4 Research participants' pre-test scores when re-telling the story compared with pilot norms

Group	Total mean no. of propositions expressed (SD)	Mean of no. of propositions in correct order	Mean of no. of propositions with correct syntax	Mean of no. of propositions plus intact (full) information
Year 7 research group (N=200)	2.5 (7.6)	2.4	2.4	2.3
Original pilot group (N=100)	4.5 (12.47)	4.2	4.2	4.1

As the results show, the overall ability of the Year 7 research group to listen and retell the short story was significantly lower than the pilot on this specific test. Scores of almost fifty per cent lower show that they had serious problems in taking in information and assembling the narrative coherently. Out of a total of 9 propositions the research group's mean score was 2.5, with a standard deviation of 7.6. This compares with score of 4.5 and a greater standard deviation of 12.47.

The overall results show a highly significant statistical difference between the research group and the norm at a level of $p = 0.0001$. This suggests that very little information from the story was able to be retained and retrieved by participants in the group.

4.4.1.1.4 Qualitative analysis and overview of responses across tasks

Regarding the 3 initial tasks of eliciting narratives through (i) cultural understanding, (ii) description of an everyday event and (iii) story retelling, I have selected (i) cultural understanding, to consider the responses of 3 students' in depth. The 3 students are Hitan, Tamsin and Carla. (see Appendix 3). Of particular interest are the responses to Question 10: 'What happened on 11th September 2001?' All 3 students give similar responses to this question in a single phrase. Hitam stated 'the twin towers came down', Tamsin responded 'The towers got knocked down' and Carla replied 'The twin towers came down.' All 3 answers are partially correct but do not provide a contextual or extended narrative.

Compared to the pilot test, over 98% of students gave partial answers, for example, 'the twins got burnt' or 'Paris tower fell down'. Such answers may indicate a lack of knowledge

of cultural events regarding location, the what, who, how, where and when of events, for example the association of the Eiffel tower in Paris may have indicated that the student was searching for an association with a tower, (see Appendix 4). The reply 'it's not my birthday' indicates perhaps a certain lack of awareness that school tests do not usually relate to individual, personal information but to more cultural matters.

To fully access their cultural knowledge the question could perhaps have been reframed to ask a series of answers in order to support the assembly of events in a coherent narrative. Similarly, perhaps the students could have been prompted. Some of the support assistants prompted the students after they had handed in their scripts and one student replied 'Oh yeah.. I meant the towers that got knocked down - on the news. I just put osamabin' The fact that one student responded about their birthday may have indicated this was more meaningful so it was relevant in a sense, however the disembedded nature of school learning implies that the question referred to shared, cultural knowledge. Just three students, totalling 1.5% of the cohort, managed to give a complete answer, (Appendix 1). One responded 'Bin Laden bombed the twin towers in a terrorist attack and also threatened the Pentagon.' However the test here was of the ability to construct a narrative and the results of this show that for many of the students this may have been a struggle.

A second observation relates to providing an account of a familiar process, designed to prompt a narrative that was less likely to depend upon either 'external' knowledge or even short term memory. Hitam, Tamsin and Carla all explained how to make a cup of tea (Appendix 3). Hitam explained his tea making but did not state the step of removing the tea bag, Carla did the same, unless they did not forget the step and it correctly indicates the way they both make tea. Tamsin gave an extended and elaborated account consisting of 12 components. Her vocabulary is graphic as she was able to provide visual details of how the spoon is used: 'scoop a spoon of sugar in the cup' and gave visual and technical information of ensuring 'the spoon hits the bottom so the sugar at the bottom floats around.' This suggests Tamsin has much concrete experience of making tea and is able to articulate her real life experiences meticulously. A major contrast in her performance is seen in the story retelling however. She gives just one phrase of the girl: 'in the dining room writing an essay.' This is accurate but consists of only one sentence and idea, missing out 90% of information; the remaining nine propositions.

In the story retelling task, Hitam's story reflected 72% accuracy, in contrast to his short account of tea making, however it is noteworthy that he omitted key references to the story context, as in the time of year 'May'. The main characters' identities were also

omitted, 'Luke and Helen', as were the location and time of the main event, the 'party disco at 7.45'. However, he conveyed the meaning of the story by substituting 'loud' for 'deafening' and 'back garden' for 'back yard' and 'tops' for 'shirts', but substantially altering the overall narrative. Carla similarly omitted the key characters, the time and location as the key focus of the birthday. Yet she read between the lines that the story was about a 'brother' and sister, substituting 'brother' for Luke, which is feasible. 'Test' was substituted for 'essay' and the 'kitchen' was noted as the location where the story was enacted.

Students bring and express their own meanings mediated through culture. For example, for Tamsin, the daily tea-making activity may have had greater meaning for her as she was practically and regularly involved with the process in the social context. She may not have perceived the story retelling requiring her to be actively involved in the process but was concise in summing up what it may have meant to her.

The detailed qualitative analysis of participants' narratives suggests a strong cognitive-linguistic association with their ability to produce a more extended form of narrative. This is shown most clearly by Tamsin's explanation of making a cup of tea. She provides a structure of 4 coherently sequenced sentences. There is attention to detail suggesting a visualised mental rehearsal, referring to the kettle's 'button', to stir it 'around' and that the sugar 'floats' around.' It is clearly a process that Tamsin is very acquainted with and she has confidence in relaying the process. If, in contrast, she were to be assessed against the narrative she provided in retelling the story the conclusion might be that her memory or narrative are limited. In this task she provided one short sentence containing just context and one action: 'She was in the dining room writing an essay.' It might be assumed that she saw no point in the task, as the teacher already knew the story but the same could apply to how to make tea. Whereas Tamsin appears not to address disembeddedness in the story-retelling, it is difficult to ascertain if that is the reason for such a short narrative. A more comprehensive assessment across a range of narratives would provide a broader view. This indicates that while assessment of narrative competence is important, it is a process requiring knowledge and longer term planning.

Note: For more details of these participants' responses please see Appendix 3.

4.4.2 Part B of the Study

On the basis of the results of the 3 screening tests there was continued concern about students' fundamental abilities, at both student support level within the Learning Support faculty, but also at senior management level. Whilst further teaching and additional

staffing would have been welcome this was not feasible and ways to provide additional support for the students within the parameters of the usual school routine and budget was much discussed.

i) Identification

A key issue arose from the test results, support for students' oral narrative ability, particularly ways to prompt and increase their opportunities for exploratory talk and to construct extended narrative. The ideas suggested resulted in the second cycle of action research (Part B) which became an intervention study. This cycle investigated whether the amount and quality of students' interactions with peers was as beneficial as that spent in a class designed to improve communicative competence, comparing small-group interventions: 'A comparison of interventions to improve communicative competence'.

ii) Planning

As part of the 'Widening Participation' provision to raise students' aspirations, Year 7 classes were being offered a range of lunch-time activities to stimulate creative thinking. Two of these activities were selected as 'interventions', on a rotational basis using three groups of 15, the third group being the comparison group. The rotation meant that both these activities would be available to all groups at a later stage in the Widening Participation programme of events. Assessment results in Part 1 were formatively taken into account as well as the administration of a 'pre-test' and 'post-test', using the same materials (see below). This process provided qualitative and quantitative information against which to measure any subsequent progress post intervention.

iii) Implementation

The 'interventions' were: i) a teaching scheme that accompanied the assessment materials, and ii) a game. Both are briefly described below. A third group was used for comparison. Follow-up retrospective interviews with participants were planned.

Intervention 1: The Communication Opportunity Group Strategy

The materials used were drawn from the Communication Opportunity Group Scheme (Sage, 2000) known as 'Cogs', consisting of a structured course of sessions and assessments. The sessions provided systematic teaching followed by review, demonstration, guided practice and supportive feedback. The intervention aimed to develop two dimensions of students' communication to improve communication 'performance' overall:

- i) The quality of presentation (the '*how*')
 - ii) Types of narrative thinking (the '*what*')

The Quality of Presentation dimension of the framework sets out a progression in oral expression. As learners' speech demonstrates an increasing sense of audience and purpose it reflects developments in paralinguistic and meta-cognitive awareness, as shown below:

Table 4.5 Cogs: Quality of presentation – showing progression

Progression in the quality of presentation		Criteria
1. Oral content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Presenting a contentious issue – Setting context and explaining topic – Outlining different views held – Suggesting action – Summarising, stating own view – Supporting with charts, pictures, evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Structure is balanced, with evaluation</i> ○ <i>Issues are clearly presented</i> ○ <i>Uses evidence</i> ○ <i>Answers are competent</i>
2. Oral clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introducing the theme – Reading 2 extracts from 2 separate sources – Illustrating different views about the topic – Explaining differences in approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Introduction is clear</i> ○ <i>Reading is audible and clear</i> ○ <i>Makes appropriate contrasting selection</i> ○ <i>Makes relevant comparisons</i>
3. Oral conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Presenting a format for seeking information – Selecting areas for questioning and seeking information – Cueing into interviewees' responses – Clarifying aspects to be explored further if more time was available – Responding to others' questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Listens well</i> ○ <i>Gives appropriate responses</i> ○ <i>Answers give full information</i> ○ <i>Manner is confident and relaxed</i>
4. Oral conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Making a personal response to a newspaper heading – Commenting in logical, relevant, interesting ways, using general knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Able to make relevant, concise comments</i> ○ <i>Makes imaginative response</i> ○ <i>Shows sound general knowledge</i>

Extract from Sage (2000a)

It provides structure for students in organising ideas in narrative form on 7 levels. It draws upon elements in the students' speech as listed the left-hand column, i.e. content, clarity, convention and conduct. These are further defined in the central and right-hand columns.

The 'Narrative Thinking' dimension aims to enable students to develop the ability to assemble information. They are shown how to progress by using narrative structures which demonstrate increasing complexity, personal viewpoints and judgements. The chart below sets out these 'narrative levels', which begin at level 1 and progress to level 7.

Table 4.6 Types of narrative thinking - showing progression

Progression in types of Narrative Thinking		Criteria
Level 1	Record	<i>Producing a range of ideas</i>
Level 2	Recite	<i>Arranging simple ideas</i>
Level 3	Refer	<i>Comparing ideas</i>
Level 4	Replay	<i>Sequencing ideas in time</i>
Level 5	Recount	<i>Explaining ideas – why? how?</i>
Level 6	Report	<i>Introducing, discussing, describing, evaluating ideas</i>
Level 7	Relate	<i>Relating events, settings, actions, results and reactions</i>

The narrative progression is cumulative as ideas are expressed in a more extended and coherent form (Alexander 2010). The materials, subject content and vocabulary used in the session were chosen to be appropriate to the age and background of the students.

Using this intervention I taught the 'Cogs' group for 10 hours, across a course of five 2-hour sessions which required participants to communicate in small groups and to the larger group.

Intervention 2: The Go Game

The second intervention was the game of 'Go' involving one-to-one play in pairs to increase opportunities for collaboration and talk bearing in mind that the time for student discussion is often limited in quality and quantity. After initial tuition the 'intervention' involved participants running a lunch-time 'Go Club' twice a week, which I monitored for participation and duration.

4.4.2.1 Methods of analysis

Pre-tests were conducted before both the Cog intervention and the Go Game intervention. The same test was conducted with both groups following the respective interventions in an endeavour to monitor progress. A range of participants were interviewed after the interventions to gain broader qualitative data related to the school context.

4.4.2.1.1 Pre-test and post-test

A box containing small objects of novelty and interest was provided. Each participant selected an object and was asked to examine it for a while and prepare to talk about it for around three minutes. The assessed criteria were cumulative and a Narrative Level from Cogs awarded according to the student's ability to:

- Describe the attributes of the object (level 1)
- Do so in an ordered way (level 2)
- Provide a comparison by bringing out similarities and differences (level 3)
- Indicate the time sequence (level 4)
- Explain how the object functions (level 5)
- Reflect upon the object with personal views (level 6)
- Put the object into a wider context, within/beyond personal experience (level 7)

The assessment sheets use the same structures as in the charts above, using the following scoring for allocation of marks to each component: 5: Highly competent. 4: Competent. 3: Generally competent. 2: Adequately competent. 1: Little/no evidence of skill.

This is a structure that I was familiar with having been part of a Cogs course, having been ratified as an assessor and having since used it numerous times in collaboration with others so that I believe I am consistent in applying the criteria reliably.

A higher level support assistant experienced with the Cogs scheme assessed work alongside me to ensure reliability and parity in accrediting performance.

4.4.2.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

A range of participants were interviewed after this project using a semi-structured format to gain qualitative and contextual data in relation to their experience of school in the context of the Widening Participation activities. This venture was a whole-school enterprise, aimed at all 1800 students that centred on raising attitudes and expectations. Colleagues and I had discussed students' responses to the new rotation of activities and these seemed positive, so a small-scale questionnaire inquiry, involving a random selection of students, was used to provide insights and comparisons in attitudes to school at that time.

4.4.2.2 Results and analysis of Part B of the Study

This section shows the results of students participating in the Intervention Study.

The results comparing pre and post-test results of participants according to the two interventions (Cogs and the Go game) and the comparison group are set out separately in the following tables. The Pre-Test and Post-Test results below show the mean scores for the element of Content.

Table 4.7 Pre and post - test results for Content

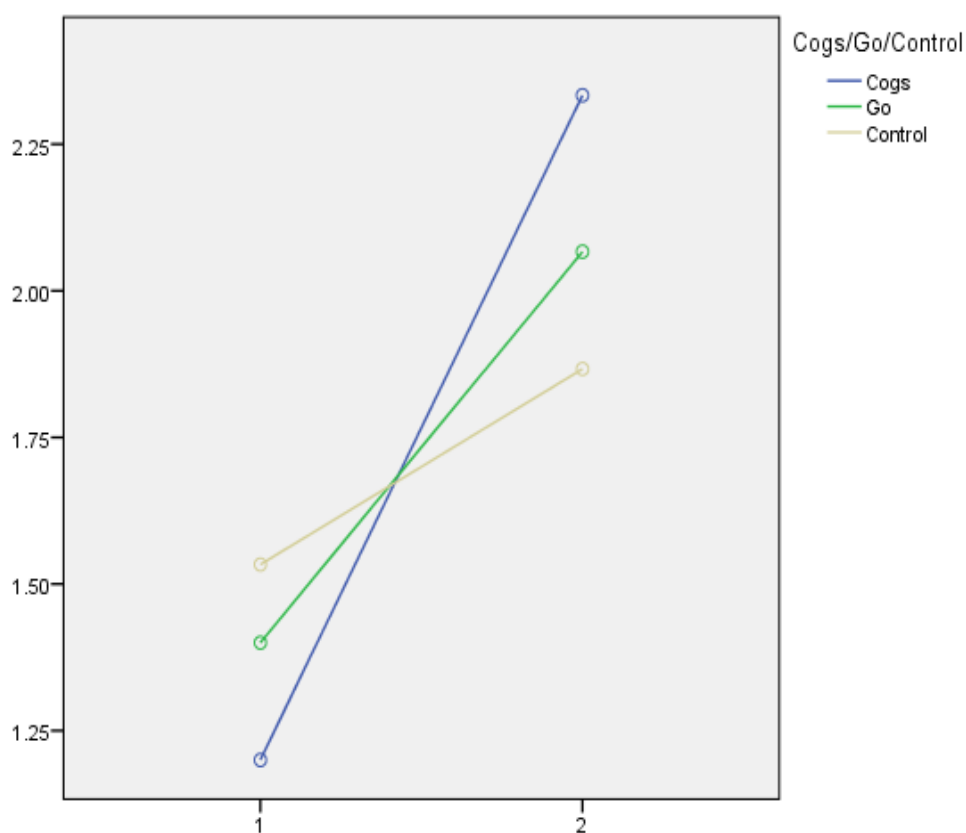
	Cogs/Go/Control	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre-test	Cogs	1.20	0.561	15
	Go	1.40	0.507	15
	Control	1.53	0.516	15
	Total	1.38	0.535	45
Post-test	Cogs	2.33	0.617	15
	Go	2.07	0.799	15
	Control	1.87	0.352	15
	Total	2.09	0.633	45

As the above table shows, greatest gains were made by both the Cogs and Go intervention groups however, Cogs participants almost doubled their score whilst Go participants increased by over a half.

According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 77.075, $df = 1$ and a level of significance of $p = 0.000$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed.

The following line graph 4.1 shows clearly how despite the lower mean starting scores of the Cogs and Go groups they made greater progress in Content than by the control group.

Figure 4.1 Line graph comparing the 3 groups' responses to Content in Pre and Post-Tests according to intervention



In Table 4.8 below can be seen an almost identical pattern in relation to Clarity, where gains for Cogs were double and over half for Go.

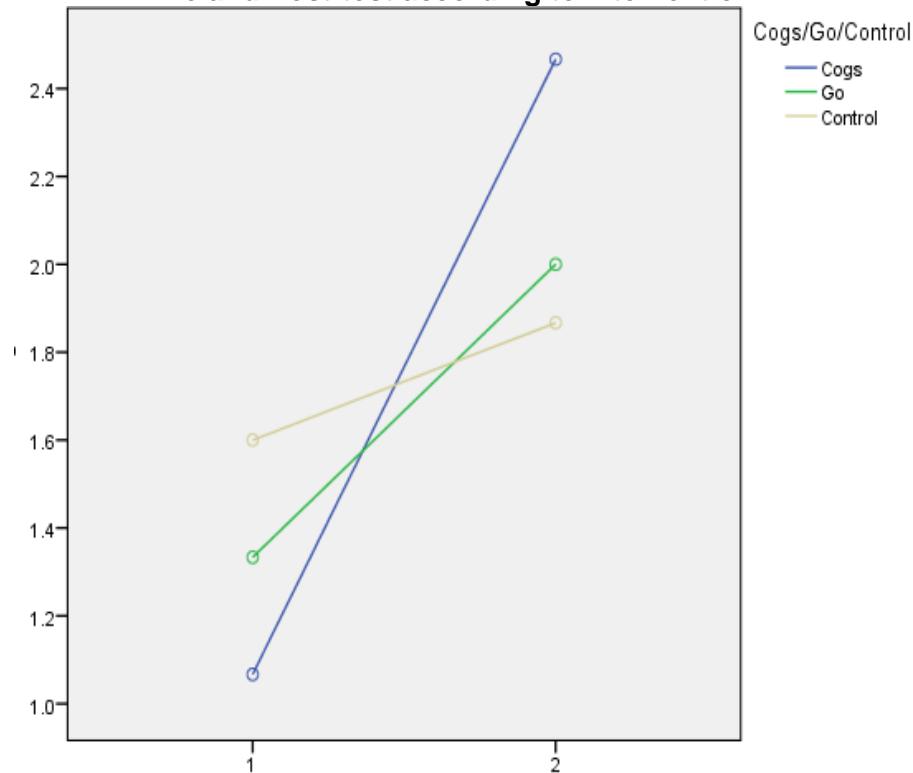
Table 4.8 Pre and post-test mean scores for Clarity

	Cogs/Go/Control	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
clarity pre-test	Cogs	1.07	0.258	15
	Go	1.33	0.488	15
	Control	1.60	0.632	15
	Total	1.33	0.522	45
Clarity post-test	Cogs	2.47	0.640	15
	Go	2.00	0.845	15
	Control	1.87	0.743	15
	Total	2.11	0.775	45

According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 82.452, $df = 1$ and a level of significance of $p = 0.000$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed.

The line graph below (Fig.4.2) illustrates the same pattern of progress by Cogs and Go groups; the clarity gains confirm greatest progress by Cogs followed by Go.

Figure 4.2 Line graph comparing responses to Clarity in Pre and Post-test according to intervention



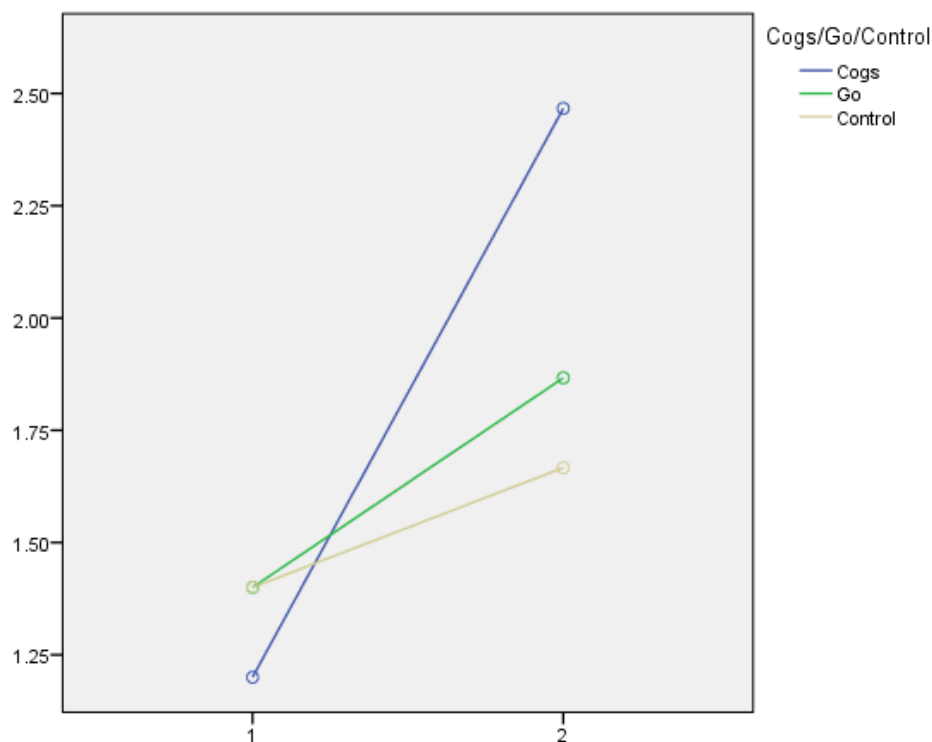
Once again the scores for Convention are shown in table 4.9 below, to be greatest for Cogs, followed by Go.

Table 4.9 The pre and post-test mean scores for use of Convention in Pre and Post-tests according to intervention

	Cogs/Go/Control	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Convention Pre-test	Cogs	1.20	0.561	15
	Go	1.40	0.507	15
	Control	1.40	0.507	15
	Total	1.33	0.522	45
Convention post-test	Cogs	2.47	0.743	15
	Go	1.87	0.915	15
	Control	1.67	0.724	15
	Total	2.00	0.853	45

According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 53.846, $df = 1$ and a level of significance of $p = 0.000$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed. These results are clarified by reference to the line graph below when Cogs gains are greatest followed by Go.

Figure 4.3 Line graph comparing responses to Convention in Pre and Post-tests according to intervention



In relation to Conduct, table 4.10 below shows that Cogs mean scores doubled post intervention improving by a third for Go. Little gain was made by the comparison group.

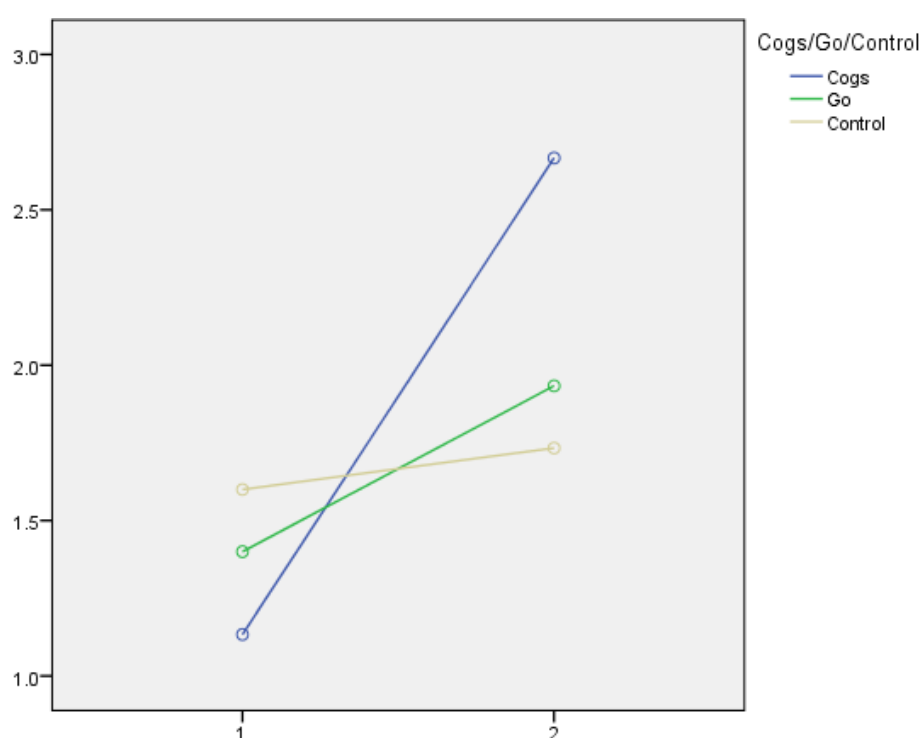
Table 4.10 Mean scores pre-test and post-test Scores for Conduct

	Cogs/Go/Control	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
conduct 1	Cogs	1.13	0.352	15
	Go	1.40	0.507	15
	Control	1.60	0.507	15
	Total	1.38	0.490	45
Conduct 2	Cogs	2.67	0.488	15
	Go	1.93	0.799	15
	Control	1.73	0.594	15
	Total	2.11	0.745	45

According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 90.750 df = 1 and a level of significance of $p = 0.000$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed.

The line graph shown in Fig. 4.4 below shows almost no gains by the comparison group in Conduct. Cogs shows this doubling of progress, followed by Go. Conduct is a complex element as it combines many factors in communicating meaning to an audience. It depends much on gaining experience and confidence in talking in formal situations. Both of these conditions were met in the Cogs and to some degree in Go situations.

Figure 4.4 Line graph comparing responses to Conduct in Pre and Post-tests according to intervention



4.4.2.2.1 Analysis of the attitudinal interviews

A total of 20 students randomly selected from the cohort were interviewed about their attitudes to school after the intervention study. The random selection meant that it was likely that some students had been in all 3 of the intervention study groups however they were not asked this question since that was not the purpose of the interview but was linked to the Widening Participation agenda. The interview used a semi-structured format allowing both focused answers and open-ended elements to allow further detail to be added and richer data (Basit, 2010). They were asked what they liked, disliked and found difficult generally about their experiences in secondary education. As Basit argues (2010, p.104), 'the beauty of a semi-structured interview is that, unlike a questionnaire or a

structured interview, there is no need for equivalence or asking the same questions of all participants.’ In this situation, however, given the very short interview time allotted, it was important to ensure that all questions asked related to and sought to address the research questions.

Following a close examination of the interview scripts, the most common and recurring themes were identified. The information below represents the majority of opinions expressed overall about what they liked were above 85 per cent. As far as possible the way the views were expressed has been captured in table 4.11 below.

Table 4.11 Students’ responses to what students liked about secondary school on entry, expressed as a percentage (N=20)

Likes about school	Percentage of responses
Meeting friends	95%
Break times and holidays	94%
Lessons when you are doing things rather than listening	92%
Teachers who are cool, and treat you like a proper person	91%
Times when you have choices	90%
Visits outside school	89%
Adults who make things interesting	87%
Adults who listen to you and help you understand things	85%

The above table 4.9 suggests that students value the social aspects of school, good communication and a choice of ‘hands-on’, interesting activities. Particularly significant is the 85% agreement that they appreciate adults who help them to ‘understand things’.

Table 4.10 below shows the aspects of school life that the participants particularly disliked.

Table 4.12 Aspects of secondary school life disliked by students (N=20)

Dislikes about school	Percentage of responses
Teachers who talk roughly	96%
Teachers who talk too much and too fast with boring voices	93%
Work that does not interest them	92%
Rules all over the place	91%
Too much work and not enough play	89%
Too big and impersonal a place	86%
Buildings that are old, cold and dreary	85%
Too many changes	82%

The comments appear to mostly capture the reverse of the 'likes', perhaps inadvertently. A dislike of the pressures of 'too much' work and 'uninteresting work are combined with dislikes of a 'cold, impersonal environment' and too many rules. Especially interesting for this study of 'school' are the 93% to 96% comments about teachers' communication; students do not like teachers who 'talk too much' or talk 'roughly' and with 'boring voices'.

The final selection relates to responses relating to factors beyond likes and dislikes, specifically those that actually cause difficulties and problems for students, as shown in the table below.

Table 4.13 Aspects of school students found difficult in order of concern (N=20)

Difficulties about school	Weight of opinion
Understanding what teachers are saying	91%
Work that is boring and difficult	89%
Homework you don't understand properly	85%
Not enough time to do what you want	84%
People not interested in you but only what you have to do	82%
Too much pressure	81%
Too many changes of teachers and comings and goings	80%
School is large/spread-out so you can't get used to layout	80%

Here again students are concerned about gaining 'understanding' and doing things that are pressurised, boring or too difficult for them. They refer once more to communication, to teachers who are hard to understand, not interested in them and who change too frequently. These three points are probably linked, so that students appear to be saying is that where there is not consistency of staffing it creates difficulties.

Overview of responses

While the data represents the views of a limited random sample of students the responses do appear to relate to the quantitative data obtained with all participants from the Year 7 research cohort. Overall, these students, new to secondary education, stated that they found communication difficult and the school confusing. It was intended to follow up with intervention and non-intervention participants on a longer time-scale but this was not feasible in the light of workloads.

4.4.2.2.2 Retrospective interviews with eight students (longitudinal)

As I had retained my relationship with 'City School' I conducted retrospective interviews after 4 years for which I received permission from the Principal. 4 boys and 4 girls who had participated in the two strategies were interviewed for 15 minutes. The interviews

contained 5 open-ended questions about school, including one which asked their memories of taking part in the Go/Cogs intervention. Semi-structured interviews were chosen so as not to restrict participants' responses on any topic. The time available for the interviewing, after a brief introduction, was short and on a one to one basis. The arrival of some of the participants was delayed due to difficulties in finding the office. Time was at a premium; however I aimed to help students to feel comfortable.

Conduct of the interviews

As the students entered each recognised me as previously their teacher and greeted me cheerfully. I explained again that I was very interested to find out about how they were getting on since I'd last seen them. I reassured them that for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality their responses in the interviews would be numbered and not named. I believe the participants were aware their views were valued, with the joint intention of improving teaching and learning.

Analysis of longitudinal interview responses

Participants' responses were transcribed verbatim and analysed for any recurring themes, as presented below. In the following resume I allocate the participants fictitious, gender-appropriate, names for anonymity. Using a semi-structured and fairly informal approach, information was spontaneously added by some participants as 'their view of the social world' (Basit 2010, p.117). Some of the students extended their answers. Bob for example, who elaborated candidly on question 4 almost as an extension of question 3 (see Appendix 4), said that he liked to talk. After the final question, number 5, Jan also continued, talking seriously about teachers, emphasising: 'teachers need to build trust and respect.'

In response to an opening, warm-up question, 6 students indicated that they felt positive about school, with one student wavering between ok and unsure but Bob stating 'I've had enough of school.' All students seemed motivated as that they had work interests to follow, ranging from practical building work, nursery nursing, hairdressing and accountancy, (see Appendix 4). Two girls' interests were a Martial Arts black belt and another with a part time job in the chemist's. The Day Conference which some students attended at the university to learn Go was recalled by 4 participants. Halina said 'I remember going to the Uni for the day where we learned how to play Go. It just shows you what you can do if you try and what you could do in the future.' She was referring to being on the university campus for the first time. She added, 'None of our family has been to Uni.'

Regarding the research interventions (Study 1), 4 students mentioned learning the 'Go' strategy game positively. Sally remarked 'It was fun to work in small groups with friends. We had arguments over the territories in the game and were able to put ourselves into each other's shoes.' Bob suggested 'it was real life problem solving, like Colombo'. Dave added 'You got to know others really well and felt safe, even people you may not have got on with before. I learned to listen better.' It gave Faith confidence: 'I learned not to keep myself closed in and not worry about what people thought.'

The Cogs intervention was remembered by 4 participants who commented that they enjoyed it. They placed emphasis on how they liked the group work and liked communicating about their chosen projects to a small though critical audience. Jan said 'When you're talking, it's like speaking out aloud to yourself. It's great when an audience smiles at you. It's important to work with those you don't know as you get to understand their feelings.' Jan also mentioned it felt non-judgemental. She commented on aiming for GCSE English Grade A, was enthusiastic but needed self-belief. John stated 'I used to be very shy. Shy people don't like speaking up.' He continued that he felt like he was part of a team and it taught him to be honest however he still felt he lacked confidence and needed to make longer contributions. Jasper also agreed; 'it helped me present myself more professionally.'

All participants favoured an interactive context involving problem-solving, learning from failure, the importance of making friends and showing empathy to others when presenting their projects to each other. This retained oral evidence shows that students remembered after 4 years both interventions with affection and purpose. In some cases, it may have enhanced their confidence, attention and awareness of a sense of audience and purpose, as in Jan's comment, cited earlier, that she felt in tune with those listening to her presentation.

When I asked about how the students learn best, participants' responses focused predominantly on what was, in effect, how the teacher could improve their communication skills. They referred to the difficulties they encountered by 'being given instructions from the front' with 'too much of what the right answer should be' and students being 'put on the spot'. Relationships and communication appeared to be at the heart as it was felt that 'not liking a teacher may mean you won't ask for help'. Perhaps the following two replies summarise the overall response quite concisely: 'teachers need to be quiet sometimes', 'some teachers don't understand you need to talk with them sometimes. It's important - I need to feel liked.'

Conclusion

On reflection, it is interesting to relate the interviewees' perceptive and reflective comments to the reference by Mercer and Howe (2012, p.18) to students' developing 'perspectival understanding,' in addition to what Myhill (2012) terms developing a 'narrative view', i.e. taking another's view in an empathetic manner, attributed to communities of practice. The students had experienced 'social interaction, mediated by dialogue' (Mercer and Howe, 2012, p.19). The participants confirmed that talk was 'important to get ideas around in your head' (Bob), commenting positively on genuine collaboration: 'we were able to speak with different people that we'd never spoken to before (Faith) in contrast to 'being given instructions from the front' (Sally).

One student commented on behalf of others, in a self-regulatory and poignant manner, that 'shy people don't like speaking up... the teacher doesn't notice the majority of the class and it's still the same in some classes.' Furthermore, that 'It's only when you fail, you know what you've done wrong' (John). This is endorsed by Mercer and Howe (2012, p.18) who suggest that such 'extended narrative accounts and detailed explanations may never be heard' by the teacher. Mercer and Howe (2012, p.17) argue that only if the teacher gives the student time and voice can a pupil 'extend turns to express their thoughts and reveal their misunderstandings.'

Even after a lapse of four years, the participants' retrospective replies showed interest, focus and a high degree of relevance, as indicated by their extended responses. In understanding the specific educational functions of developing students' narrative expression and response in the classroom, it appears that students may value and understand more about how it facilitates the learning process than has been formally recognised by their educators.

4.4.2.3 Reflection

Cycle 1 of the action research appeared to confirm, in some detail, the generally low abilities of the Year 7 students generally in the tests of cultural knowledge and narrative competence. This pattern is important given the nature of the content of the secondary school curriculum, syllabus and tests. Furthermore, time-scale and results pressure affect the planning of lessons and teaching styles, the literature would suggest, may not be supportive of such difficulties. Nevertheless the results do provide an indication how the Year 7 students in City School respond to tests such as these, and the questions which probe their knowledge and narrative abilities – shown to underpin oral literacy and academic progress in both the short and longer term. However, the qualitative analyses showed how context-dependent many of the results may have been, as closer

examination of responses show variation according to the question, e.g. Tamsin's very short, single phrase, response to the story-retelling compared to her extended response of nine sentences when describing the making of tea. Similarly the brief and unclear response given about September 11th on paper compared to that given orally afterwards to the teaching assistant who indicated some knowledge of the event. Nevertheless the combination of lack of either competence or confidence in the tests shows in close-up detail that these students are at a disadvantage. In comparison with the primary curriculum the secondary curriculum places an ever-increasing emphasis on writing and on responding to diverse genres of print. Studies in subjects such as Literature and History demand what Myhill (2012) terms the 'narrative turn' when learners have to express views from an empathetic stance, often demonstrating a sense of audience and purpose. It is expected that they are able to talk themselves into thinking through their inner voice. Mercer and Howe (2012) refer to this as 'perspective taking' and question how this may be explored prior to formal writing, such as by discussing in groups to generate ideas. Yet in the UK, the government appear to be placing less emphasis on oracy and examination course-work with expectations for pupils to achieve higher academic results. Many assumptions seem to be made about learning when, as revealed in this research, many teenagers have difficulty in structuring narratives to express meaning orally. The Confederation of British Industry (2012) confirms that a third of employers are dissatisfied with school leavers' academic attainment. This includes those who have not developed the 'self-management' skills needed when leaving school and the CBI assert that action must be taken to avert longer term problems.

This brings into question what exams may lead to and whether we need to address the balance in what we are educating for and how we are going about it. Lave and Wenger (1991) supports the view that learning occurs most productively when constructed in a 'meaningful' way, through social interaction and collaboration within the culture in which it is situated. They argue that this recommendation contrasts with most classroom activities which often involve 'knowledge which is abstract and out of context' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.19).

Reflecting upon the results of the Cogs and Go interventions when compared to the control group would suggest that over the period both groups made progress in their communicative and narrative abilities. Whilst this is very positive given the short time of the intervention and given the generally low levels of abilities in the tests screening tests of narrative ability it is surprising. Immediate reservations might be expressed about reliability since I was aware of which participants were in each group and also carried out the post-tests. However, having separate criteria, each of which was assessed, would

make it difficult to recall the results of all four sections for all 30 participants, all of whom were at different levels in the pre-tests. It would have been extremely difficult to have recalled a total of 120 marks for 30 individual participants across a period of over six weeks, between carrying out the pre-tests and when conducting the post tests. The results of the statistical analyses show slight variations between the four criteria in the pre and post-tests, content, clarity, convention and conduct, and some improvement was made by the control group, indicating that progress was made by all students across a half term period, nevertheless the Go group made greater progress and the Cogs group most of all. This perhaps should not be surprising given the intensive nature of the teaching in the Cogs group focused on developing communication and narrative. There is a point about a possible Hawthorne effect but this could apply equally to both intervention groups, whereas their results were distinctly different. Furthermore the comparison group were also involved in lunchtime activities involving staff and their results showed little progress.

The reflections of the action research group on this point have been that the results of the Go group are particularly interesting and positive. This group was not given teaching time, purely supervision or at least the presence of an adult and the time was spent interacting with peers, most intensively with one partner. The structure of the Go oral exchanges after each game, which were part of the formal process, gave a structure to the conversation, a focus and requiring reasoning and possibly argument, each of which are known to enrich and improve higher level cognitive processes and narrative. This form of exploratory talk appears to have led to the gains made by the Go group which, against the control group, are substantial at around fifty per cent. This is important bearing in mind that no teaching (beyond the training day), adult support or resources were used.

4.5 Discussion

Upon entering the secondary school classroom children are often expected to grasp what is said and to read at great speed. To do this they need to have already in place the mental and linguistic structures necessary to rapidly order and make sense of what they read and hear. These structures underpin the cognitive strategies needed to assemble word and number events in appropriate ways in English and Mathematics tasks examined in national tests. Many students in City Secondary School on entry had achieved limited prior learning. The study sought to illuminate the thinking and communicative abilities of two cohorts of children in order to support their learning experiences more judiciously. Half its population was registered as having special educational needs yet the data analysis suggests that lack of *knowledge* alone was not the greatest problem for students.

In contrast, of actual significance were the serious limitations in the fundamental oral ability to structure and narrate events. Yet what is not examined in either curriculum or assessment reports is the cognitive-linguistic skill of narrative thinking. The findings of this study highlight the difficulties students experienced were closely associated with both the extraction of meaning when listening and in the construction of meaning when talking, particularly in narrative form.

The results of the tests and interviews suggest there is a close inter-relationship. The very high proportion of students experiencing difficulties in school learning also showed difficulties in narrative expression, in which they constantly struggled to communicate and negotiate meanings. It is argued that when required to construct a narrative students may draw upon existing knowledge for ordering place, subject, object and events. It may also call into question the ambiguity of questions set in assessment contexts and formal exams. The question arises therefore of how to triangulate these test results. Would probing have facilitated a more comprehensive narrative account as the example given above? Or is articulation of ideas the issue, i.e. in cases where students have the knowledge? How can we achieve extended responses which give a whole picture in words? When considering the formal demands of absorbing and interpreting information transmitted in the classroom, there is a need to clarify the fact that certain individuals may not respond adequately is dependent on several variables.

Tests and assessments may appear disembedded or decontextualised and perceived by learners as having no meaning. Although the form period for the cultural knowledge quiz was half an hour, giving adequate time, the quiz format may have led to an expectation from the students that the answers had to be given rapidly and they felt under pressure. These factors may represent barriers to students accessing and expressing ideas in narrative form that reflect narrow modes of instruction and assessment. The eighty per cent of participants in this study who displayed serious deficits in narrative thinking, structure and expression on school entry may also have social as well as academic disadvantages. However, students' responses to the approaches of the Cogs and Go interventions were positive; there were good levels of participation and enjoyment. Participants recalled the interventions with value even after five years and the results of the Cogs intervention suggest a positive effect, at least in the short term.

The research literature shows that difficulties with taking in and assembling information underlie many problems of not only learning but also of associated attention problems widely categorised as 'poor behaviour'. These are aspects examined further in the following studies which focus systematically on the developing communication and

thinking skills of older students and younger children, and the classroom communication competence of educators.

CHAPTER 5 - STUDY 2: SECONDARY SCHOOL

EDUCATORS' COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN THE

CLASSROOM

5.1 Introduction and Rationale

As has been discussed, the period of primary-secondary transfer at ages eleven to twelve has consistently been associated with issues of concern arising from the transition process (Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons and Siraj-Blatchford, 2008), followed by a dip in performance by many students and a downturn in motivation (Doddington, Flutter and Ruddock, 2000). Children moving from more informal, community-centred primary schools can experience problems when they encounter the more subject-centred environment of the secondary school. What may be interpreted by staff as 'misbehaviour' by students may actually indicate that they need greater understanding and conceptual knowledge to help them cope with lesson content. Such knowledge might help them feel more comfortable in the classroom and as a result respond with greater confidence and competence during lessons.

The participating school in Study 2 is City Secondary in which Study 1 was conducted, with this second cycle of action research ensuing from it. Study 1's assessment results and students' individual, specific needs were examined by the Learning Support team against the academic requirements of subject lessons, homework and exams. The majority of the students with special needs had developmental delay and the team acknowledged that many were expected to produce lengthy pieces of writing. A linguistic analysis, based on the principles of narrative and narrative thinking, showed a significant gap between the demands of these tasks and students' abilities due principally to the demands of curriculum and exam syllabus. The staff regularly commented that many of the students they supported often seemed 'set up to fail' in most lessons when completing tasks and beforehand when listening to explanations and instructions.

Rationale: The rationale underpinning Study 1 is extended to this study. Staff across all faculties had long been concerned about improving relationships with learners to teach them more effectively. The staff had perceived a gap between how much they knew

about student learning in their subjects and were concerned about managing students' learning experiences and the lack of response by many.

Contemporary approaches to learning focus on the role of the teacher as a 'facilitator' of learning, with students playing an active part, making meaningful choices as part of a 'process' of learning, rather than one-off 'events'. This contrasts with 'traditional' views of the teacher as 'transmitting' or 'delivering' learning to a passive audience, relying on note-taking and memorisation, often without understanding. This study pays attention to teaching processes, classroom 'culture' and the critical relationship between how educators 'think and act', 'how pupils learn' and 'what pupils learn' (Alexander, 2010, p.103). It does so by addressing what Rotgans (2010p.2) points out, that effective communication rests upon 'teachers' interpersonal and cognitive characteristics', the dynamic nature of teacher-pupil interaction embedded in mutual understanding.

Research into teacher-pupil communication in secondary education is surprisingly sparse given the long-standing and consistent dip in attainment following the primary-secondary transition. Kutnick and Siraj-Blatchford (2005, 2011) find that secondary teachers are mostly unaware of the children's abilities on transfer. They suggest that many assume that students have already acquired pre-requisite knowledge and understanding for new learning and are immediately capable of critical and moral debate at levels way beyond functional levels of literacy.

Support for the action research was provided by the Senior Management Team when focusing on the need to improve the 'effectiveness' of teaching and 'raise academic standards'. The study sought to support the 'pragmatic competence' of educators and the 'co-operative principles of communication' (Grice, 1989) through accessing their personal views and feelings. Hargie (2004) comments that 'all communication is context-bound, shaped by the personal characteristics of the participants' (p.41). It directly endorsed Alexander's call (2010, p.103) to examine the 'culture' of the classroom, in particular the relationship between 'how teachers think and act', teaching processes and 'how and what pupils learn' which he describes as 'critical'.

5.2 Research Questions

The research questions relate partly to the work Wiebe-Berry and Namsook (2008) who argue that pupils need styles of teaching that develop their 'thinking and communication skills' with a form of communication between teachers and students which deepens their understanding. Van Es and Sherin (2008) too suggest that teachers should focus on 'aspects of pedagogy' and Idrus (2010) that learners need to develop the capacity to

communicate what they know and how they achieved it. The study raised the question: How can secondary school educators improve classroom communication to support students' development?

5.3 Design of the Study

From the staff's perspective the project was to address the problems they had in communicating with students with diverse and complex learning needs, across subjects. In the longer term it was hoped to also improve the structure and content of students' writing, which was also a constant pressure for staff. The study set out to share with support staff their professional development processes, their views on their effectiveness and the origins of my role as an insider researcher. In brief, as Van Es and Sherin (2008) capture, for improvements to be possible, educators need to analyse the relationship between their own 'developing professional vision and their teaching activity.'

5.4 Research Methods

The group of support staff, both teachers and assistants from the Learning Support Faculty, came together voluntarily to begin an enquiry at both staff and student levels which emerged in the previous school year but became substantial across the next school year, and this is reported here. There was 'ownership', acting, observing, reflecting among the educators, seeking 'collective' knowledge to increase their students' well-being.

5.4.1 The Participating School

City Secondary was the large, inner-city co-educational school in 'challenging circumstances' in the Midlands, with a roll of predominantly white children from families of low socio-economic status with high rates of unemployment and single parents. Developmental delay was the greatest cause of students' difficulties leading to 80% of GCSE grades at D to Ungraded. Language and communication problems were major barriers to learning; many of the children had existing language and communication delays that had hampered their development of relationships and learning since the Foundation Stage. The local authority English Advisor commented that many eleven year olds in the school used their first language of English as if it was an additional language.

5.4.2 Staff Participants

Of the 55 staff in the Learning Support Faculty a total of 35 support staff participated, 16 teachers and 19 assistants, 11 males and 24 females. As the school had recently opened

some of the participants were newly appointed. Assistants and generic support staff had from one year's experience in similar roles and teachers had from two years' experience. Many had between 9 and 37 years' experience, some in one of the recently merged schools. Their ages are shown in table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1 Age-groups of participants (N=35)

Age-group	Teachers	Assistants	Total
20-29	1	4	5
30-39	4	9	13
40-49	5	4	9
50-59	5	2	7
60-69	1	0	1
Totals	16	17	35

Being familiar with the challenges of local inner-city education and the work of curriculum support all staff had an interest and commitment to supporting students encountering difficulties.

5.4.3 My Context as the Researcher

I was appointed to the school when it first opened two years before this study. As Director of the Learning Support Faculty I led and managed the support team of over 50 staff in meeting the cross-curricular needs of the 700 children on the Special Needs Register. I later became a member of the senior management team and governing body and was latterly appointed as the Director of Widening Participation. Following an inspection, Ofsted (2004) reported that the Learning Support Faculty Director (the researcher) was leading a 'large and effective team of learning support assistants and specialist teachers' whose work the inspectors considered as having 'far reaching consequences'.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

For reasons of ethics and anonymity the school is referred to as City Secondary School. No details or names are given which would enable the institution to be identified. All participants were given information about the study in both written form and oral briefings. Staff were advised at the outset that the activities and participants' responses to the research would be anonymous and identified by a number. The collective responses were to be examined and participants would be told the results of the study which would be written up for research purposes. All participants consented to this. A paper headed 'City School: Participant Information' can be seen in Appendix 5, based on the information

provided, although as the work was conducted within the school's ethical regulations at that time it was not subject to the university's ethical requirements and forms.

5.6 Stages in the Cycle of Action Research

The three parts of the cycle are set out below in accordance with the methodology outlined in Chapter 3, i.e. Planning – Implementation – Analysis – Reflection.

i) Planning

Taking 'action' regarding new knowledge for staff began with an interactive workshop in communication at the educators' request. To address concerns about their communicative competences, it provided the opportunity to convey these privately through a questionnaire, their reasons for focusing on the research and what they hoped to gain professionally. As the action research progressed two further questionnaires were administered in retrospect to ascertain their progress and confidence.

The support staff responded keenly to an opportunity to benefit from university accreditation. Tutors from the university joined the group, explaining and demonstrating through video the reasons for the communication barriers of many students with learning and/or behaviour difficulties.

ii) Implementation

The action research evolved, using three main methods: i) participant questionnaires; ii) the provision of new knowledge for staff and iii) the staff's reflection upon practice. An initial questionnaire gained information about participants' current knowledge and skills concerning their personal communication skills. Five sessions of workshops totalling 10 hours across 2 terms explored how the educators sought to improve their competencies. A quest for interactive teaching had prompted them to reflect on classroom learning opportunities, mostly in pairs and small groups, to help students enhance their thinking and expression by improving narrative competence.

The support staff were still in the process of developing their roles, working strategically *alongside* subject teachers in planning for learning in line with inclusion. The majority lived within the immediate community, sharing or understanding many of the values, beliefs and frustrations of the community regarding schooling and learning processes. As such their insider perspectives on students' communication needs were valuable within the sessions.

The three questionnaires used were as follows:

- Questionnaire 1 sought to gain information about participants' current knowledge and skills concerning communication prior to action taken to provide knowledge about communication and support personal communication skills
- Questionnaire 2 sought to gain information about participants' responses to the experiences provided in the tutor-led sessions, including the use of Cogs materials, what they felt they had gained and the tutors' teaching strategies that they preferred
- Questionnaire 3, administered two months later, aimed to gain more detailed information on whether the experience was continuing to influence participants' educational practice in the longer term.

For further details see Appendix 6.

While completing the questionnaires the atmosphere was calm and quiet to ensure participants were free to consider and reflect on an individual basis during this time.

5.6.1 Materials: Communication Opportunity Group Strategy (Cogs)

Five sessions of workshops totalling 10 hours across 2 terms were provided for participants. Tutor-led sessions demonstrated how secondary school students' learning could be scaffolded by improving educators' talk with them in ways which help them to listen, engage and learn. The strategies demonstrated showed participants how to help students improve their thinking and hence express their ideas using narrative structures.

The Cogs sessions and activities for the educators were similar to those for school-age participants but at more challenging levels suited to adults and to demonstrate how secondary school educators could work towards improving students' oral and cognitive levels. As the literature shows, in the longer term this is known to contribute towards greater engagement, motivation and improved behaviour.

The approach to supporting the educators include developing two dimensions of their communication skills that are known to be effective in raising levels of performance overall:

- The level and quality of communicative content (the '*what*'), as seen in Cogs Part A.
- The level and quality of communicative processes (the '*how*'), seen in Part B.

The methods for tutor-led sessions were interactive and mostly small-group based, with the emphasis on participants using and developing their communication skills intensively with peers in the group. The content was as listed in the following summary:

- *What is the link between thinking and communication?*
- *What is thinking? What kinds of interaction and questions support reasoning?*
- *Acquiring baseline assessment information about talk and communication.*
- *Contact games to develop aspects of communication, adapted for adults and children.*
- *Preparing for using the Cogs approach with whole classes.*
Differentiating tasks around a chosen topic.
- *Presentations are made by each of the small groups.*
- *The group members discuss how they had worked with members of the group.*

The pre- and post-session questionnaires were also used to evaluate participants' experiences.

5.7 Staff Action and the Application of New Knowledge

The context of staff's collaborative enquiry is provided here, although this report is not focused on the wider view of changes within the school.

The physical proximity of staff in the large Learning Support Base, when arriving, departing and working as well as my role in working with them, enabled everyone to easily share on-going conversations and reflections in the cycle of action and improvement. My role as an insider, whilst leading from within and coordinating the action research, allowed me to provide support for subsequent developments as well as participate. This process resulted in many additional meetings, both formal and often impromptu, to which staff brought issues and matters on classroom communication as they identified them.

These were then considered, analysed and discussed amongst the staff, decisions were subsequently made, training or further enquiry carried out and new approaches implemented. It was a process of developing and applying praxis as the participants engaged with other staff within and beyond the Learning Support Faculty. This was a lengthy and complex process and the following sets out the outcomes, decisions and achievements that resulted from the collective project:

- A challenge to arranging support by 'lessons' and 'subjects' as the timetabling rationale. A fundamental change was made at whole-school level to timetabling staff

to provide continuity of support by assistants being linked to individual students across the curriculum. This was successful in improving relationships, trust and communication between students, support staff and subject teachers.

- An understanding by the participants that they needed more flexibility in the way they communicated with students when providing support in subjects lessons, explaining the new ideas presented in lessons. This led to meetings at whole-school level about the way support staff worked with both the teachers and the staff. It led to a change in more flexibility for support staff in ways of listening to and supporting students in classes, and by providing more practical resources and modelling.
- There evolved regular informal meetings with teaching and support staff across subjects to communicate more openly and share feedback and support for each other
- Towards the latter part of the year a joint Literacy Initiative was launched by the combined Learning Support and English Faculties; this provided literacy support for staff and students across the school including teaching methods such interactive starter activities and students having subject-specific word banks to extend their vocabulary and support their thinking; there was also a school magazine for students, parents and staff, began to be published setting out in a visual way, on these Literacy resources and developments.

Across the course of the rest of the year these enquiries and developments by staff went beyond their work within the faculty as they engaged with staff across all subjects and many levels, some of which is indicated in the above projects.

5.8 Methods of Analysis

For the purpose of data collation participants' responses to the questionnaires were divided into those of the teachers (16 participants) and 'non-teachers' (19 participants). Analyses were conducted of responses received across time to the two main issues which were the development of participants' communication knowledge, skills and confidence, after the most intensive action research period and again two months later. Particularly important were the staff's qualitative responses, how to improve pupil engagement at a deeper level and raise the quality of classroom interaction in the school. The combination of analyses was designed to allow for triangulation of evidence to allow more thorough consideration and reflection on how and why participants responded to an understanding of processes and outcomes. In this follow-up to Study 1 it was vital to

ensure new ideas would be tried in the classroom and to identify both staff and student priorities for improving communication in Year 7. Immediately following the research and support across two terms Questionnaire 2 also asked participants about their preferences for different styles of delivery during tutor-led sessions.

5.9 Results and Analysis

Before the research meetings had started there was an interest among staff in students' difficulties with 'concentration' and the staff were discussing if the enquiry would show the reasons for this and how they could be supported. At the start of the first support session for staff they completed Questionnaire 1 in which they explained their reasons for joining the group. The following term, at the end of all of the meetings they reflected on their learning and completed Questionnaire 2. Two months later they completed a third questionnaire in retrospect in which they shared what they had gained and how they were applying it. According to the methods of analysis the results of the questionnaire surveys are presented according to both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses undertaken. This section overviews the participants' experiences throughout the two terms. It presents the results in relation to participants' responses in the questionnaires regarding their knowledge and skills concerning classroom communication and their subsequent development throughout the action research period. These are followed by a closer examination of qualitative data extracted from the questionnaire responses.

5.9.1 Questionnaire 1: Qualitative Analysis

The analysis of the first questionnaire showed a mix of participants' motives. Some participants focused on the need for skill and confidence with dealing with both children and adults. For example, comments included 'when talking to parents and staff, individually or in a group' (commented on by a teaching assistant), 'in classes and school corridors' (teacher) and 'with colleagues, students and friends' (generic support person). In relation to pupils, participants hoped they would 'improve communication to enable students to learn in a more individualised way', 'help pupils to become more confident' and 'to communicate more to their peers and members of staff' (assistants). Responses by teachers in the first questionnaire showed a balance. Firstly, improving pupils' 'thinking skills', 'making learning easier', 'and more easily retained'. Also included were to improve students' 'self-esteem', the 'will to succeed' and 'communicate more fully with adults and peer groups'.

5.9.2 Questionnaire 1: Quantitative Analysis

Data was extracted from Questionnaire 1 completed by the 35 participants. Responses as to how they had rated their communication knowledge and skills are shown in the following table.

Table 5.2 Responses to Questionnaire 1: Teacher and non-teacher perceptions of their existing knowledge and skill in classroom communication pre-support (N=35)

Response	Teachers N=16	Assistants N=19
I have a high level of knowledge and skill	8	5
I have a low level of knowledge and skill	8	14

As the table shows, the results reveal a marked difference between the teacher and non-teachers' initial responses concerning their existing knowledge about communication. Half of the teacher graduates claimed an awareness of their knowledge and skills, whereas only a quarter of the non-teachers (assistants) were aware of such knowledge. In summary, the first questionnaire confirmed the educators' wish to address their communication competences as staff as well as those of the students they taught.

5.9.3 Qualitative Analysis of Responses to Questionnaires 2 and 3

Responses to the third questionnaire, completed in retrospect two months after the end of the organised project, showed the value attached by action research participants' to their experiences. The third questionnaire showed a triangulation with the second questionnaire and re-confirmation. For example, in response to questions asking what participants had gained there was a balance between 'understanding' and what I classify as learning about the 'practical' application of communication skills. A majority said they had valued practical aspects, but this was mentioned more by the assistants: discussions, videos, ideas, lectures, demonstrations and how these had helped them to 'understand different ways of communicating with other people.' The teachers cited: awareness, analysis and 'techniques'. Both types of participants reported the value of working and talking together to understand and solve problems. The theory and praxis they had developed together was behind their drive, with a much longer-term vision. The Ofsted inspection that followed reported on the 'far reaching consequences' of the work (Ofsted, 2004).

5.9.4 Overview of Responses by Three Staff Members to Questionnaires 1 - 3

I then selected a random sample of staff questionnaires by role to read more closely in order to gain insights into their individual experiences across the two terms, (see

Appendix 6) The following provides extracts from responses to questionnaires 1, 2 and 3 of Edna, a support worker (SW), Bill, a teaching assistant (TA) and Jessie, a teacher (T).

The responses of all three staff indicated they had valued the concept of communication in the classroom from the start and had identified the need to enhance their knowledge and skills, showing commitment to the issues. For example, in response to question 4 (Where are you going to use your learning?), Edna (SW) intended to share the ideas with 'colleagues, students and friends' and Bill (TA) added 'within the classroom' and Jessie (T) 'in my daily work-in groups too.' Edna responded to Question 6 regarding why the above matters were important to her; 'it makes me unhappy, frustrated when I know I can/should communicate better-it can have the same effect on the recipient too' , suggesting an awareness of the process as reciprocal, she was conscious of her audience and that her message was understood. She reiterated the point in response to Question 10 (How will your learning impact on other staff?), giving an holistic answer she pieced together previous answers, arriving at her aspiration of needing to 'increase confidence, increase knowledge' as she disseminates her ideas with the impact of becoming a 'happier person... more concise, dynamic.' She set expectations of improving her awareness of the communication and its application from the outset.

Bill said he wished 'to be able to motivate students' (Q6). Prior to this he stated that 'to improve communication with students' and 'on-going support from teaching staff, were why doing this was important to him (Q6). From a different perspective, as a teaching assistant, he illuminated a need for teachers to build a rapport with him to scaffold the work he was carrying out in the classes and not just to view communication as a linear, isolated process with a learner. Bill did not answer Question 10 regarding 'How will your learning impact on pupils?' I did not raise it in the group but later raised the matter of impact on pupils informally over break. He then explained he thought it depended on how well he got on with the class teacher as to whether he could influence pupils' learning. He felt some teachers did not always effectively communicate with him and that was why he wanted to gain knowledge and skills from this project. Jessie, the teacher, expressed the view 'I like learning. Communication is the key' (Q6), a clear-cut answer which seemed to link to Question 10 regarding impact: 'more thinking skills, increased communication skills'. The latter comment may have been abstract to a degree.

Questionnaire 2 focused on participants' responses post research on their own communication. Edna felt she had gained understanding particularly from 'practical' and 'motivating' elements of the sessions on reflection. In answer to Question 6 (What needs do you have to support your further learning?) she exclaimed 'learning how to become

assertive as opposed to just giving the impression of being bossy! 'When discussing this further with her individually, she also commented on the need to impart 'tact, enthusiasm and instructions!' This followed on from her previous question and she also commented on the fact that it was good to see a representative of the school's management attending the sessions (a male Deputy-Principal who elected to join the group).

Bill, in response to the second questionnaire, had found 'all of it' useful and he especially liked 'discussion with others', feeling his 'motivation' was high. In this sense, he may have resolved his earlier issues of his communication with other staff at the start of the course. Following this theme through, I located him over coffee. He explained that the sessions had given him confidence particularly in relation to a specific staff member. He felt he had resolved the issue by asking the teacher to include him in more of the planning aspects of a lesson for a particular group of challenging students. It was effective that the particular staff member was also part of this research group and had become much more conversant.

Jessie agreed that 'discussion with others' (Q5) had been beneficial, vocalising that staff did not often get the opportunity to meet each other across faculties in this way. She recorded that her 'motivation' was very high. She also added that she felt for the pupils who also found some staff members incommunicative sometimes and that the findings of this research needed to be disseminated to staff beyond the 35 volunteers.

Overall, responses showed that all three participants had felt the best aspects of the research were 'observing practical sessions' (Edna), 'the interactive component' (Bill) and 'discussion with others in the group', as reiterated by Jessie.

5.9.5 Qualitative analysis by Staff Focus Group

I decided to invite the three staff to join me as a focus group, to listen to and hear their personal interpretations of their own and staff's collective experiences one week later. I used their individual questionnaire responses (on which they had been allocated an identifying number) to prepare for the session and follow up points of interest in the discussion. I had on-hand their completed responses to questionnaire 3 for reference and they were also invited to include their personal responses to questions if they wished. I explained that an examination of responses to the pre and post questionnaires had showed particular patterns, with a strong response to the question of how to better facilitate children's learning, valuing attention to communication in the classroom and the need to enhance their knowledge and skills in the future. The following provides a

summary of the follow-up discussion with Edna, Bill and Jessie, a teacher as they shared and interpreted their reflections over the collaborative action research at City School.

Jessie began by sharing with all of us that she didn't volunteer to join the course but now she felt she had benefitted from it. Jessie was employed in the school as a teacher by the local education authority and had been 'required' to attend any in-service developments and research projects. The most valuable aspect for her was meeting a cross-section of staff in 'this vast school' where someone coming from the outside 'could feel totally isolated.' She said she had been 'inspired' through discussion with others. She felt that on returning to the LA, at the end of term, she would promote the ideas from the course. She thought that a 'preventative' course in teacher pupil communication would be valued particularly within the feeder primary schools, an area to which she was shortly returning.

Bill stated that he'd volunteered for the course. He referred back to a problem he'd experienced when he felt he wasn't getting on with a particular staff member. However, since both he and the teacher had been on the course, their rapport had been strengthened. It was now working interactively with children within small groups, developing Maths resources which contributed to real life problem solving. In the mid to longer term, he was hoping to raise his aspirations and, with the support of the Math's Subject Coordinator, to go on a Higher Level teaching assistants' course at the local university.

Edna reflected on her final comments, stating the course had definitely raised her awareness and interest in how to communicate with others and that she was considering training to teach in the future. She felt that time and money was an issue. She was now looking at the Graduate Teacher Programme. The course had given her confidence. I can report in retrospect that she is in her second teaching post.

Participants' responses to Questionnaire 2, which was completed after the two terms of intensive action research, were collated and compared to responses to Questionnaire 1. A quantitative comparison showed that participants of both groups recorded a major difference in their personal knowledge about communication. They had been asked to rate their knowledge on 4 measures of: excellent/very good, good, adequate or none. Table 5.3 below identifies the results.

Table 5.3 Responses to Questionnaire 2: Teacher and non-teacher ratings of the degrees of knowledge and skills they has gained post-support (N=35)

	Ratings :	Excellent or Very Good	Good	Adequate	None
Teachers N=16	Knowledge	14	2	0	0
	Skills	13	3	0	0
Non-teachers N=19	Knowledge	17	2	0	0
	Skills	15	4	0	0

As shown above, ratings were high among both groups of participants with regard to the knowledge and skill gained. Although numbers of participants overall were small, statistical analyses were conducted whilst bearing in mind the sample size. Two statistical tests of validity were used on the data. Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks non-parametric tests were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the tutor-led sessions on both teachers' and non-teachers' knowledge, and to evaluate course satisfaction. Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Rank Sum W Tests were then used to compare the two groups on each of these measures.

The statistical analyses revealed that the Z value for the teachers' positive responses to the knowledge and skill gained from the course was - 3.5162 at a highly significant level ($p = 0.0004$). For the non-teachers the response rate was similarly positive, with a Z value of - 3.8230 which was also highly significant ($p = 0.0001$). It was interesting that both groups felt they had benefited professionally from the experience as educators who have contrasting levels of training and experience often have different requirements and expectations.

5.9.6 Questionnaires 1 and 2: Participants' Ratings of Knowledge and Skill

Whereas there was a significant difference between the levels of teacher and non-teacher knowledge before the tutor-led communication sessions, this was not demonstrated afterwards. Each group of educators responded to the sessions with similarly positive views as the statistical analysis confirms. Before the sessions the Z value for the difference in views between groups about their current levels of knowledge was - 2.1669 at a level of significance of $p = 0.0302$. After the course the Z value for the difference between the two groups of educators was - 0.7618, at a non-significant level of $p = 0.4462$. This indicated that there was no difference between them as both groups felt similarly positive about the degree of new knowledge they had gained on the course.

5.9.7 Learning Style Preferences

It should be noted that in their responses to Questionnaire 1, a majority of over 60 % of participants had expressed a need for support for communicating in the classroom. They had requested this specifically to help them develop the confidence to implement new ideas which would improve students' thinking in lessons. This had included increased use of talk and maintaining students' motivation.

Acting upon the responses and requests of educators in Questionnaire 1 all sessions had been designed to be interactive. This approach was used to ensure that participants had the opportunity to learn about and experience new teaching approaches through personally undertaking pair and group tasks of a participatory (interactive) nature. Therefore Questionnaire 2 asked participants what their preferences were for different styles of delivery. The responses were classified and the table below shows the overall results.

Table 5.4 Questionnaire 2: Participants' preferred learning styles

Lecture	Interactive	Self-Study	Experience
5	21	4	5

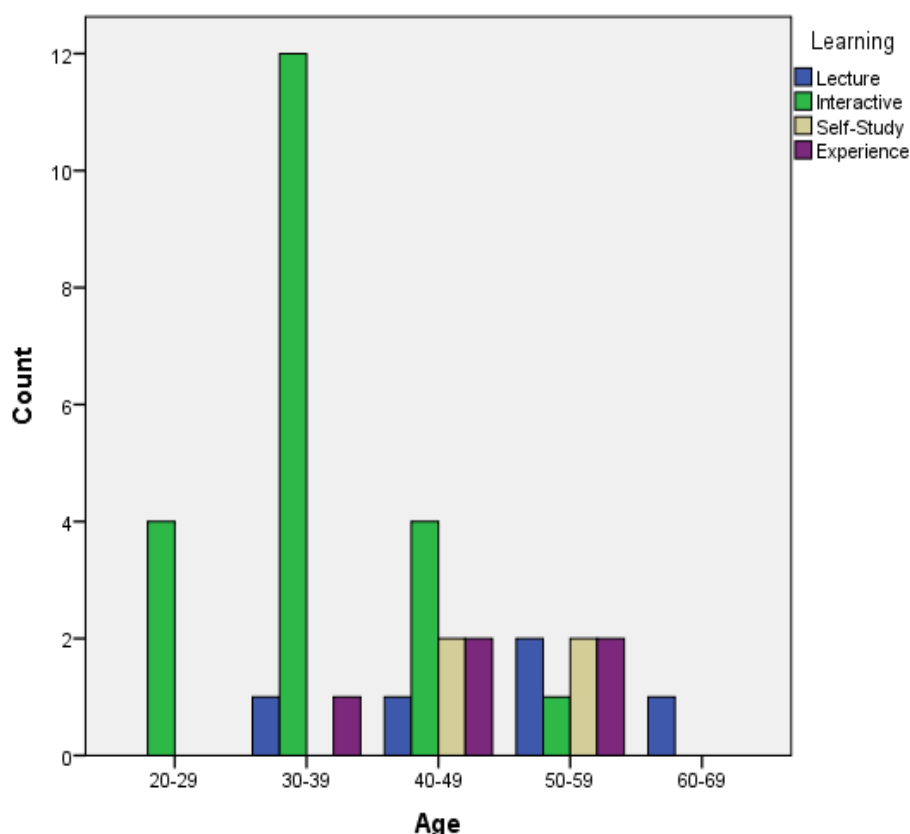
A closer examination shows that there were differences for participants' choices according to age, as shown below.

Table 5.5 Questionnaire 2: Participants' preferred learning styles according to age

Age	Learning style				Total
	Lecture	Interactive	Self-Study	Experience	
20-29	0	4	0	0	4
30-39	1	12	0	1	14
40-49	1	4	2	2	9
50-59	2	1	2	2	7
60-69	1	0	0	0	1
Total	5	21	4	5	35

The following graph shows the association between the choice of learning style and the age-group, with, on balance, a greater preference for more interactive methods by the two younger age-groups.

Figure 5.1 Bar chart showing age-groups of participants and their preferred learning styles



These findings could be of interest if there is any relationship between the participants' preference for styles of presentation and learning and the ways in which they communicate with and support learners in classrooms.

Please note a grid showing an overview of the narrative responses to the interviews of staff is located in Appendix 6.

5.10 Reflection

The combination of quantitative data and qualitative responses allowed the triangulation of evidence to allow more thorough consideration and reflection on how and why participants responded to an understanding of processes and outcomes. Constant reflection was aimed at a critical review of assumptions.

This project provided an explicit set of criteria to guide future school policy, creating a natural dialogue between staff as mutual critical friends, which has been found to be the key to self-monitoring. This theme is further deliberated upon in the belief that 'until we understand how professionals actually learn as they go about their everyday work, we

cannot fully comprehend what we need to do to help students for the professional environments they will work in' (Eraut, 2011).

The complexity of the teaching and the variability of the work context confirmed that educators were reflective problem-solvers acting appropriately, justifying support which enables them to develop ways of thinking and communicating rather than 'training' in particular practices. For example there may be possible barriers where educators have images of teaching as 'telling', and learning as 'memorising'; these serve to shape how they see the way they operate which usually leads to inflexible ideas (Eraut, 2011). The outcomes demonstrated that the opportunities provided by the tutor-led sessions had enabled staff to develop considerable social skills of 'advocacy, inter-group relationships, team building and inspiration' (Eraut, 2011) for 'developing the person'. The nature of this relied on teamwork, trust and a developing culture of continuous improvement where teachers 'who are sensitive to take account of pupils ideas' in dialogic practice for increasing pupil engagement at a deep level and raising the quality of classroom interaction' (Lyle, 2008, p.222).

5.11 Final Stage of Action Research in City School

At the end of the study participants' discussions focused on the part played by communication skills awareness sessions, if any, in the initial training of teachers and assistants. This included the type of training needed by those with differing perceptions of how they learn, of how children and students learn, of males and females, teaching and non-teaching staff.

By the end of the school year momentum and motivation among the Learning Support staff were high. Around this time, a few weeks before the end of the school year, the Local Authority made a decision to select 1000 children, move them to other schools and exclude 80 boys on the Special Educational Needs Register, to reduce school size. The Learning Support Faculty was disbanded including the role of Director of Widening Participation that I had previously held and that of Director of Widening Participation. It was no longer possible to continue the cycle of Action Research as I was diverted to other management related matters.

Responding with reflexivity to working with both teachers and assistants in the study I decided that further research would be valuable with discrete groups in different social-economic settings and within professional education. In the longer term monitoring narrative competence from an early age and examining educational practices in other countries regarding any emphases on narrative development in their curricula.

5.12 Conclusions

In addressing the research questions the following points emerged. The educators had asked, in effect, to be encouraged and supported in their efforts to experience, understand and use similar approaches themselves in classrooms. Joint research and support involving both teachers and assistants were reported to be a valuable experience in individual feedback on professional development. Informal discussions following up the study revealed that staff felt they seldom had the opportunity to evaluate the learning experiences of others and themselves in any detail. A key point is that a relatively small amount of support across two terms was able to produce gains in these areas when supported by colleagues and staff skilled in developing these abilities.

Study 1's data analysis suggested serious limitations in City School's students' fundamental oral ability to structure and narrate events and that lack of knowledge alone was not the greatest problem, as is commonly assumed in the literature. The cognitive-linguistic skill of narrative thinking, as the findings highlight, are closely associated with both the extraction of meaning, as in listening and reading, in the construction of meaning. Similar patterns of difficulty were to be found in Study 2 conducted in another school where students are from higher socio-economic bands and achieve well. It appears important to bear in mind the critical nature of the Year 7-8 period in children's cognitive and personal development the challenges faced by students entering secondary school and the long-standing Key Stage 2-3 dip, all of which were examined earlier. The findings of Studies 1 and 2 appear to substantiate the concerns raised by the educators of 11-12 year-olds in this study and are to be noted.

The findings of this study appear to raise four main issues about researching, and providing for, educators' continuing professional development in the area of communication:

- How communication can be furthered within the time constraints of School Development Planning.
- Meeting the needs of disparate groups of staff as learners.
- Providing a balanced approach in addressing staff's individual and group needs.
- Offering a mechanism to facilitate staff listening to the responses of others.

Future research could examine more closely educators' experiences, views, choices and needs in relation to communicating with both students and other educators in classroom settings. My experience of hearing the voices and interpretations of teachers and non-teachers in this study suggests that such research would be valuable with discrete

groups, in different social-economic settings and within professional education, both initial and post-experience. The research design would do well to prioritise participants working with students at the beginning of their secondary education.

CHAPTER 6 - STUDY 3: AN ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN THE SECOND YEAR OF SECONDARY SCHOOL AND INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE IT

6.1 Introduction

As discussed above, younger children are more used to learning in the context of their immediate environment, at home, at play and with friends, engaging in turn-taking and talking about everyday matters related to the here and now. It has also been examined how, upon arrival in secondary school, they are suddenly confronted by a very formal style of communication. This requires them to take in a great deal of information on a wide range of subjects, each presented by different teachers in different ways, and to readily accommodate and apply many new concepts. These hurdles are particularly poignant given that the period following the point of school transfer, i.e. from Year 7 to Year 9, is well known as being often accompanied by a 'dip' in attainment and the development of many educational problems, with some improvements in recent years (Doddington and Flutter, 2000). The ongoing EPPSE project, the first large-scale longitudinal British study to monitor the trajectories of cohorts of students from pre-school to secondary education and beyond, emphasises the long-term negative effects of this transition on some students, particularly those who are already vulnerable or low achieving (Evangelou et al., 2008; 2010).

6.2 Rationale

In view of the heavy demands of secondary education on students' cognitive and communication abilities it is unfortunate that the development of narrative competence is not measured upon entry to secondary school. For, as the findings of Study 1 show, there are clearly students experiencing long-term difficulties in communication whose problems were not identified at an early stage. This highlights the issue of monitoring students' formal narrative development before secondary school and if not as they move through Years 7 to 9, the period associated with a potential dip in performance which exacerbates any existing difficulties.

Assessing and monitoring narrative competence draws attention to the matter of teaching strategies, teaching content and how appropriate they are for enhancing students' communication and narrative abilities. The findings of research such as the ongoing EPPSE project and the findings of Study 1 show that the systematic development of students' communication and narrative abilities is highly relevant during Year 6-7 transition and during the critical Year 7 to 9 period, both of which are known to underpin the relative success of students' formal education.

6.3 Research Questions

Building upon the findings of Study 1, conducted in the first year of secondary education (Year 7), action research was carried out to address questions related to students' cognitive-linguistic development in the subsequent academic year of secondary education, Year 8. The research objectives focused on:

- i) Whether students from a school in a different socio-economic setting and with higher academic performance than the school in Study 1 make greater progress in narrative ability;
- ii) Assessing narrative abilities at the point at which students move from the first year to the second year of their secondary education (Year 8) to gain a two-year overview of the specific cognitive capacity to bring together events, as is central to constructing meaning and forms the underpinning of formal learning, drawn from different contexts;
- iii) Investigating whether variation in direct teaching strategies can make a difference to students' narrative thinking and their ability to assemble ideas, improve expression and enhance understanding, in the short term.

6.4 Design of the Study

Study 3 follows on from the Year 7 action research findings from Study 1 in chapter 4, conducted in City Secondary School. The cycle of action research reported here addresses questions that teacher-mentors raised when I shared the Year 7 findings with them. Study 3 reports on the 'action' comparing interventions with students in Year 8 at Bridge Secondary, a school in a contrasting area to that of City School featured in Study 1

6.5 Research Methods

Three interventions were compared, preceded and followed by pre-tests and post-tests using a test based on the Cogs material. In accordance with the action research cycle set

out in the Methodology (chapter 3) the study is reported using the following on-going structure: Planning – Implementation – Analysis – Reflection.

Participants

The participating school was Bridge Secondary in a suburban area of the North of England. Its profile is in major contrast with that of City Secondary School in Study 1 which was socially disadvantaged with academic results consistently low. Bridge Secondary was a girls only school in the Roman Catholic diocese with mainly privately owned properties, higher academic achievement and rated by Ofsted as 'good'. Its ethos was fostering students' personal abilities and social mobility.

i) Planning

I had previously shared with a group of teacher-mentors the study I had undertaken in the Midlands. They were interested in the materials I had developed for students and were keen to trial them in the school. It was interesting for all of us to research whether students from this school showed higher levels of communicative and narrative ability. I was to assess these at the point at which students move to the *second* year of their secondary education (Year 8), providing a two-year overview of their capacity to bring together events and construct meaning.

The staff at Bridge R.C. Secondary questioned the effectiveness of increasing students' self-directed study time in a new Study Centre as they already spent much time with teaching assistants and mentors and the time students spent working 'independently' could be considerable. It reinforced findings that time for exploratory talk with peers is minimal (Galton et al., 1999; 2004; Mercer, 2012) and the skilful scaffolding of students' thinking and problem-solving is central to the learning process. I had previously shared with staff the study undertaken in the Midlands and they asked whether a similar project could be undertaken in their setting. They pointed out that there was to be a rota of activities in the new Study Centre and any interventions could be incorporated. They considered that alongside an intervention using narrative development materials based on Cogs, other methods (interventions) should include 'supported' study and 'totally independent' study. Their request was based on the school's plan for students to work in both ways, i) with support from a teacher or skilled 'higher level' teaching assistant; ii) independently, with supervision but no skilled support. The decisions led to Study 3: 'An assessment of students' communicative competence in the second year of a suburban secondary school and a comparison of interventions to improve it'.

In response to these interests I collaborated with the staff on an assessment study, smaller in scale than at City School, to sample their students' narrative abilities. It was to be conducted with the younger cohort (Key Stage 3) but with participants one year older, Year 8. The second part of the study was also to examine the relationship between educators' communication/teaching strategies and students' learning outcomes.

ii) Implementation

The study involved one Year 8 mixed ability class of 30 participants allocated to three groups of 10 participants. All were individually pre-tested and post-tested to provide qualitative and quantitative information against which to measure any subsequent progress following the intervention.

Five intervention sessions ran over 5 weeks, each of 2 hours in the afternoon. Two of the study conditions were selected as 'interventions', on a rotational basis, the third group being the comparison group. The Study Centre's rotation system meant that both types of study conditions (interventions) would be available to all three groups at a later stage in the programme in the same type of 'carousel' organisation as at City School.

I was fully aware of my 'interested researcher' status in the study. Surrounding circumstances meant that I was the only professional available who knew the materials and was available to implement the intervention. Unlike City School I did not know the student participants at Bridge School and did not teach them so could not enhance their performance in any other form or on any other occasions. Although I was to become more familiar with the Cogs group, after pre and post testing all 30 several weeks apart I would be unlikely to be able to recall the individual scores of any individual participant; this would only be relevant should I wish to falsify any results, but this was not feasible since I would invalidate the very data the group was seeking.

Intervention 1: The Community Opportunity Group Strategy (Cogs)

The same materials were used as in Chapter 4, those designed to improve spoken language by Sage (2000). To recap the information provided in Chapter 4, the sessions provide systematic teaching followed by review, demonstration, guided practice and supportive feedback to develop two dimensions of students' communication to improve communication 'performance' overall:

- i) The quality of presentation (the '*how*');
- ii) Types of narrative thinking (the '*what*').

The Quality of Presentation dimension of the framework sets out a progression in oral expression. As learners' speech demonstrates an increasing sense of audience and purpose it reflects developments in paralinguistic and meta-cognitive awareness, as shown below:

Table 6.1 Cogs: Quality of presentation – showing progression

Progression in the quality of presentation		Criteria
1. Oral content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Presenting a contentious issue to a group – Setting context and explaining topic – Outlining different views held – Suggesting action – Summarising, stating own view – Supporting with charts, pictures, evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Structure is balanced, with evaluation</i> ○ <i>Issues are clearly presented</i> ○ <i>Uses evidence</i> ○ <i>Answers are competent</i>
2. Oral clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introducing the theme – Reading 2 extracts from 2 separate sources – Illustrating different views about the topic – Exploring differences in approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Introduction is clear</i> ○ <i>Reading is audible and clear</i> ○ <i>Makes appropriate contrasting selection</i> ○ <i>Makes relevant comparisons</i>
3. Oral conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Presenting a format for seeking information – Selecting areas for questioning and seeking information – Cueing into interviewees' responses – Clarifying aspects to be explored further if more time was available – Responding to others' questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Listens well</i> ○ <i>Gives appropriate responses</i> ○ <i>Answers give full information</i> ○ <i>Manner is confident and relaxed</i>
4. Oral conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Making a personal response to a newspaper heading – Commenting in logical, relevant, interesting ways, using general knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Able to make relevant, concise comments</i> ○ <i>Makes imaginative response</i> ○ <i>Shows sound general knowledge</i>

Extract from Sage (2000)

The assessment focuses on elements in the students' speech, i.e. content, clarity, conventions and conduct, as defined in the adjacent columns. The 'Narrative Thinking' dimension aims to enable students to develop the ability to assemble information. They are shown how to progress by using narrative structures which demonstrate increasing complexity, personal viewpoints and judgements as shown in table 6.2 below which sets out these 'narrative levels', which begin at level 1 and progress to level 7, (see p.3).

Table 6.2 Types of narrative thinking - showing progression

Progression in types of Narrative Thinking		Criteria
Level 1	Record	<i>Producing a range of ideas</i>
Level 2	Recite	<i>Arranging simple ideas</i>
Level 3	Refer	<i>Comparing ideas</i>
Level 4	Replay	<i>Sequencing ideas in time</i>
Level 5	Recount	<i>Explaining ideas – why? how?</i>
Level 6	Report	<i>Introducing, discussing, describing, evaluating ideas</i>
Level 7	Relate	<i>Relating events, settings, actions, results and reactions</i>

The narrative progression is cumulative as ideas are expressed in a more extended and coherent form Alexander (2010). The materials, subject content and vocabulary used in the session are chosen by the tutor as appropriate to the age and background of the students. Using this intervention I taught the ‘Cogs’ group for 10 hours, across a course of five 2-hour sessions which required participants to communicate in small groups and to the larger group.

Intervention Group 2: Self-directed

Participants worked in their group of 10 in the style of ‘independent self study’, a method already used in school and to be extended when using the Study Centre. They were to: i) select a theme of interest to investigate and report on independently; ii) identify points to research using the internet and library in a self-directed way; iii) organise and present information in visual or written form. Participants could collaborate and discuss their ideas with each other. The role of the Intervention 2 Tutor was to actively provide constructive guidance to students’ questions. An experienced secondary teacher (Tutor 2) took this group and received the work but it did not constitute an assessment as part of this study and is not reported.

Comparison Group 3: Task-based

In this group participants were required to: i) read a story provided by the tutor relating events about a child in difficulty in order to investigate points of interest and report on them independently; ii) identify questions to explore and to carry out research using the internet and other library facilities in an independent way; iii) organise and present their information using either paper or IT in written form with images if required.

The difference between this and Intervention 2, the Self-directed Group, was that participants were asked to ‘work quietly and independently’ in their area of the Study Centre, to be self-reliant, make their own decisions and use study skills. This was a

method used in the school, particularly in homework clubs where students are supervised by an assistant. The Comparison Group 3 tutor provided task instructions and materials and supervised the group ensuring that participants worked independently as required in the Study Centre. The students' work was collected in and responded to by the tutor at the end of the session. It was then passed on to the students' form teachers. The work was not retained for use in this study.

Pre and Post Tests

The same method of oral assessment was used for both the pre-test and post-test with all 3 groups. The activity was the same as that used in the Cogs assessment in Study 1. To recap, participants' narrative and abilities were assessed on an individual basis within a whole-group activity with group members as audience, seated in a circle. A large box containing a large number of small objects of interest to participants was presented by the tutor. They each selected an object of interest to talk in detail for approximately three minutes and were free to use descriptive, factual, interrogative and/or open-ended approaches. One student ensured that each participant had the same length of opportunity and adhered to the same format, for reasons of consistency and reliability.

6.5.1 Method of Analysis

In response to my evaluation of the Cogs assessment materials during the research at City School (chapter 4) I had revised these for ease of use, however the criteria are consistent with Study 1 applying the narrative competencies of: Content; Clarity; Convention; Conduct (Sage, 2000). Assessments used the same structures, using the following scoring for allocation of marks to each component: 5: Highly competent; 4: Competent; 3: Generally competent; 2: Adequately competent; and 1: Little/no evidence of skill.

Grading of oral assessments:

The discussion of each participant was assessed by me during the three minute presentation. Levels awarded for both (A) and (B) were noted immediately on an oral assessment recording sheet, with qualifying qualitative comments based on observations of non-verbal and contextual features.

Feedback Questionnaires

All 30 student participants were asked if they would complete a questionnaire regarding their time in the groups to give perspectives and feedback on their experiences, perceptions and responses. This was an important part of the action research process

since the voices of children and students are often unheard, yet provide rich and insightful qualitative data.

Administration

The sessions ran at the same time each week during normal school afternoon periods. Students were informed that they were valued as participants in the project and that this was not available to other classes in the school. This acclaim served to achieve full attendance and participation and appeared to engender feelings of equal 'worth' between participants regardless of the group and intervention. The three groups remained fully engaged and involved in the workshops which contributed to maximum consistency as possible between groups. This was a challenge bearing in mind the less interactive and interesting teaching in my view, used with the comparison group (3), and to some extent with Experimental Group 2, and bearing in mind that that between sessions students were likely to discuss their group's experiences and compare reactions.

6.5.2 Ethical Considerations

At the planning stage the head teacher of Bridge School had full details of the aims and methods of the staff's action research. An information letter had been sent to parents about the new Study Centre and their children's participation in the carousel of activities. The difference was the period of Cogs teaching of 10 hours and the two other methods in the 'interventions' were the same as those used regularly in the school. The difference was that their organisation was to be used by staff for purposes of comparison and the results were likely to be published beyond the school, with anonymity protected.

A major benefit was that form tutors and English tutors were later provided with detailed feedback on individual students' progress which they could use constructively for the purposes of formative assessment. A further benefit was that all participants had the 'accolade' of being chosen for the study from among others. Participants were provided with the opportunity to be part of a group of ten students, a group almost one third of the usual size, with associated benefits of greater access to resources and reduced group pressure.

6.6 Results and Analysis

Quantitative data was available from the intervention study and the interview data. Qualitative data was extracted from a range of sources and was key to interpreting and understanding the quantitative data, the patterns that they show and a triangulation of any of the findings.

6.6.1 Quantitative Analysis

The results of pre-tests and post- tests were tabulated which allowed a comparison of frequencies and means with statistical analyses carried out to gauge the significance of any differences between groups. In presenting these results it was borne in mind that any quantitative and statistical analysis could not be considered as totally reliable in a study which, for resource reasons, involved only 30 participants and a period of intervention of 5 weeks. Bearing in mind the above constraints and considerations, the quantitative results of the pre-tests and post-tests were collated and compared in statistical analyses principally to identify any trends or points of interest that might arise. Whilst it was not the assumption or intention that causal effects related to the intervention results could be deduced on the basis of this small-scale study, it was hoped that any points of interest could inform a follow-up project and the intervention be explored on a more statistically viable scale.

The pre-test and post-test results for the Cogs and Self-directed intervention groups and the Task Based comparison group are set out separately below. Each table compares the mean test scores for each group for the elements tested: Content, Clarity, Convention and Conduct. Each of these tables is followed by a chart showing the results of a two-way repeated measures ANOVA test and level of significance; subsequent reference to a line graph in each case graphically illustrates the path of improvement shown by each of the 3 groups between the post-test and pre-test.

Table 6.3 Pre-test and post-test results for Content

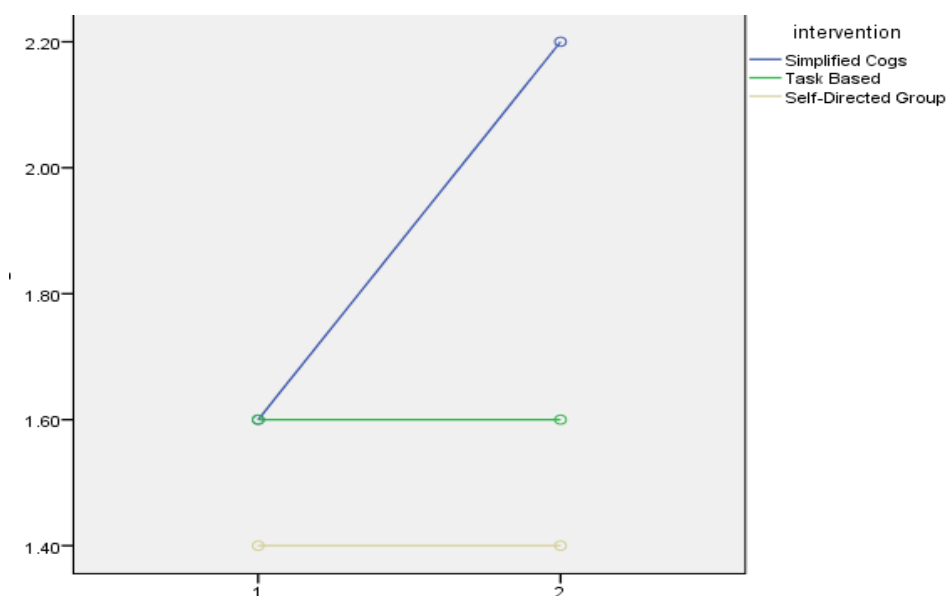
	Intervention	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
content pre test	Cogs	1.6000	0.51640	10
	Task Based	1.6000	0.69921	10
	Self-directed Group	1.4000	0.51640	10
	Total	1.5333	0.57135	30
content post test	Cogs	2.2000	0.63246	10
	Task Based	1.6000	0.69921	10
	Self-directed Group	1.4000	0.51640	10
	Total	1.7333	0.69149	30

The above table shows that on the test of Content the Cogs intervention group progressed from a mean of 1.6 to a mean of 2.2 between pre and post test, an improvement of 0.6, compared to no improvement by either the Self-directed group or

Task Based comparison group. According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 13.5, $df = 1$ and a level of significance of $p = 0.001$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed.

The line graph below illustrates the rate of improvement in relation to Content by the Cogs groups and no improvement by either the other intervention group or comparison group.

Figure 6.1 - Line graph of the groups responses to Content



The results for the Cogs (Communication), Task Based (Comparative) and Self-directed Groups are set out separately below, showing the mean scores using results for the element of Clarity.

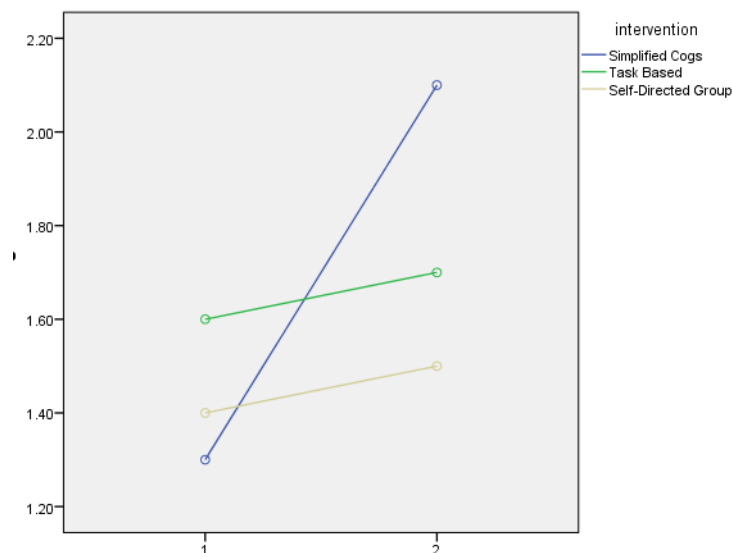
Table 6.4 Pre-test and post-test results for Clarity

	Intervention	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Clarity pre test	Cogs	1.3000	0.48305	10
	Task Based	1.6000	0.69921	10
	Self-directed Group	1.4000	0.51640	10
	Total	1.4333	0.56832	30
Clarity post test	Cogs	2.1000	0.31623	10
	Task Based	1.7000	0.82327	10
	Self-directed Group	1.5000	0.52705	10
	Total	1.7667	0.62606	30

As the table above shows, on the test of Clarity the Cogs intervention group progressed from a mean of 1.3 to a mean of 2.10. Between pre and post-test, an improvement of 1.7 was achieved, compared to an improvement by the Self-directed Group of 0.1 and the Task Based comparison group by 0.1. According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 16.667, $df = 1$ and a level of significance of $p = 0.000$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed.

The line graph below illustrates the relative rates of improvement by the three groups in relation to the element of Clarity.

Figure 6.2 Line graph of the 3 groups responses to Clarity



The table below shows the mean scores post intervention for the Cogs, Task Based (comparative) and Self-directed groups, for the element of Convention.

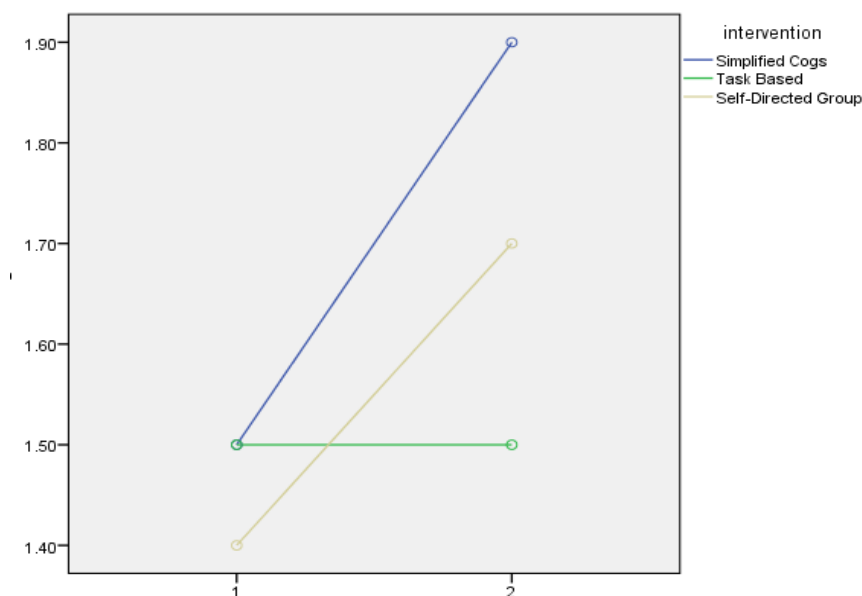
Table 6.5 Pre test and post test results for Convention

	Intervention	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Convention pre test-	Cogs	1.5000	0.52705	10
	Task Based	1.5000	0.52705	10
	Self-directed Group	1.4000	0.51640	10
	Total	1.4667	0.50742	30
Convention post test	Cogs	1.9000	0.56765	10
	Task Based	1.5000	0.52705	10
	Self-directed Group	1.7000	0.82327	10
	Total	1.7000	0.65126	30

As the table above shows, on the test for Convention the Cogs intervention group progressed from a mean of 1.5 to a mean of 1.9 between pre and post-test, an improvement of 0.4 compared to an improvement of 0.3 by the Self-directed Group and no improvement by the Task Based comparison group. According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 9.8, $df = 1$ and a level of significance of $p = 0.001$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed.

The different rates of progress between the pre-test and post-test for the element of Convention is illustrated below in the line graph.

Figure 6.3 Line graph showing the 3 groups responses to Convention



The mean pre-test and post-test scores for the Cogs group, the Task Based (comparative) and Self-directed groups are set out separately below, showing using results for the element of Conduct.

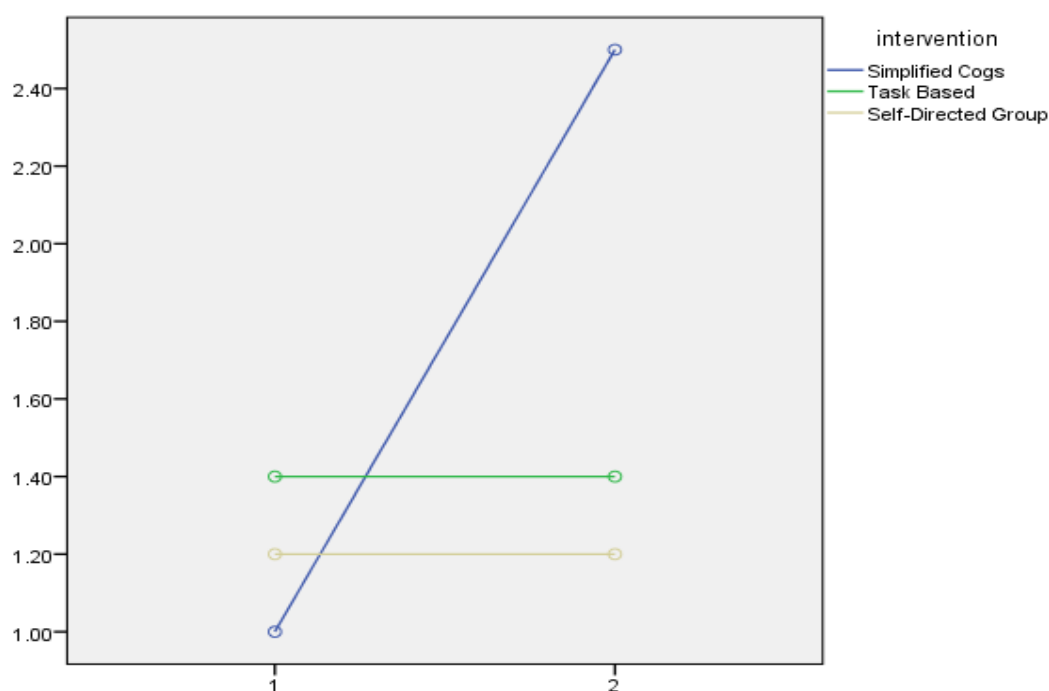
Table 6.6 Pre-test and post-test results for Conduct

	Intervention	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Conduct Pre-test	Cogs	1.0000	0.00000	10
	Task Based	1.4000	0.51640	10
	Self-directed Group	1.2000	0.42164	10
	Total	1.2000	0.40684	30
Conduct post-test	Cogs	2.5000	0.52705	10
	Task Based	1.4000	0.51640	10
	Self-directed Group	1.2000	0.42164	10
	Total	1.7000	0.74971	30

As the table above shows, on the test of Conduct the Cogs intervention group progressed from a mean of 1.0 to a mean of 2.5 between pre and post-test, an improvement of 150 per cent, compared to no improvements by the Self-directed Group and Task Based comparison group. According to a two way repeated measures ANOVA, the F ratio is 81.0, $df = 1$ and a level of significance of $p = 0.000$ so there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests. Sphericity is assumed.

The rates of progress between pre-test and post-test can be seen in the line graph below, indicating the flat rate of the Self-directed and Comparison group.

Figure 6.4 - Line graph showing the 3 groups responses to Conduct



The quantitative results set out here suggest a consistent and marked improvement in all areas assessed of between 50 and 150 per cent by the Cogs group. In contrast a small improvement was made by both the Self-directed and Task-based groups in the area of Clarity, and a small improvement by the Self-directed group in Convention but no improvement by the Task Based comparison group.

A key point in these results is the pattern of the improvements. Whereas there were a small number of very small changes in the other groups, only the Cogs intervention resulted in gains in the final area assessed, Conduct. This is the most 'advanced' of the criteria since they are accumulative, so that Conduct calls upon the three other elements to bring about improvements in all aspects including 'presentation' and non-verbal communication such as self-presentation. As only the Cogs group had been supported and gained experience in the area of communication it appears a fair assumption that this rate of improvement is the direct result of the tuition.

6.6.2 Qualitative Analysis

Staff participants were able to observe and discuss from their perspectives as insiders within the school-based action research, knowing the students and other staff participants. The voices of the student participants were heard through oral interview feedback and semi-structured questionnaires, (see Appendix 7). The qualitative data was key to interpreting and understanding the quantitative data, the patterns that they show and a triangulation of any of the findings.

Tutors' oral account of experiences

Working within a large open area had its challenges of acoustics and noise transfer and of minor distractions by students from other classes arriving to use resources. However the study's tutors were already used to working together in cross curricular research, and experienced in managing problems preventatively before they occurred. The positive features were that the research team could observe across groups, which was informative when feeding back on the qualitative aspects of the study.

The experiences of the 3 group tutors and participants were sought after the interventions to provide qualitative data of a case-study type. These comments supplement and in some ways contribute to explaining aspects of the quantitative data. Comments were recorded by the following tutors:

Tutor 1 – The researcher who took Experimental Group 1 (Communication).

Tutor 2 – Teacher from the school: responsibility for Experimental Group 2 (Self-directed).

Tutor 3 – External teacher-researcher: responsibility for Comparison group 3 (Task-based).

Tutor 4 – A teacher from the school who provided access and support for the research, and gave contextual feedback on the project and the results.

Tutors' overall view: All tutors commented that the (new) open-plan study support centre proved a suitable environment in which to conduct the project, with the Year 8 class working well as three separate study groups for the first time. Tutor 4, who was a regular teacher of the class, and Tutor 2 who also worked in the school, both commented that the group of students as a whole had expressed that they felt pleased and 'proud' that they had taken part in the activities. These were important factors as there were no disruptive incidents which may otherwise have impacted on the administration of the project and subsequent reliability of the results.

Tutor 4: As the class's regular form teacher, Tutor 4 reported her observations during the project sessions that the students in all of the groups appeared to be 'occupied with learning'. In particular she noted in particular that 'many' of the students in the interactive group 'came alive', working and responding to each other in a way that she had not witnessed before. In retrospect, she felt that their experience in Experimental Group 1 (Communication) had long-term qualitative benefits beyond the immediate qualitative gains. In an overview of the class's 3 groups, she observed that Group 2 (Self-directed) were the quietest workers but were possibly 'not the most productive or self-regulated'.

Tutor 3: This tutor, who supervised the Task-based group, commented that she found the approach 'a challenge' to maintain, as she had for many years worked with students of all ages in an interactive way. She noted that the Task-based group appeared to find it difficult to be 'independent' and get on with their tasks and suffered from 'a loss of focus'; some participants left their work at times, lost attention and went 'off-task' making poor use of the study period. Only one or two persevered and attempted to use the resources in the Centre. She added: 'some of them walked across to friends in other parts of the area' and chatted but not about their tasks. It was as if they were, or felt, 'left to their own devices'. She attributed this to the developing teacher-student relationship that would eventually 'help them focus and support the kinds of genuine learning and progress that students can find really fulfilling.' Rather than improving across sessions most of the group's participants adopted a similar pattern each week; while they seemed pleased,

almost proud, to be working independently in the new area, they did not make much headway with their independent study skills, application or completion of the task.

Tutor 2: The tutor who had been responsible for the Self-directed group, observed that the whole group 'at the start worked well as independent learners' and 'enjoyed the access to the computers for their research.' She noted however that as time went on 'some began taking longer than others in planning their work', and this impacted on 'working out how long they needed to spend on researching on the computer and completing the final information booklet.' Tutor 2's comments were supported by Tutor 4 in her overview of the class as a whole, as above; she observed that Group 2 (Self-directed) tended to be the quietest workers but were possibly 'not the most productive or self-regulated.' Although the students remained 'busy' and on-task, Tutor 2 observed that after a while there was less self-initiated peer-peer interaction for 'exploration of personal views, choices, initiative and the swapping of ideas through dialogue.'

Tutor 1: As the researcher, responsible for Experimental Group 1 (Communication), I was not familiar with the student participants or the school. I made the following observations.

- It was interesting for me to work in the open plan Study Centre as on the surface it appeared that students were working either independently or in small groups. Although the participants had been in the same class since the beginning of the year many appeared not to know each other, shown in their initial reluctance to work together and the time needed for making friends.
- I noted that the confidence of individual students grew between the start of the project and the end, by which time the groups had gelled.
- The fear and embarrassment of expressing themselves in front of the group, seen in the initial session, greatly subsided. The students became a lot more articulate, confident and arrived early, appearing eager to begin.
- I was told by the class's regular teacher of English that she was 'astounded' by their progress orally. She had become aware that she had had many 'assumptions' about some students who had previously contributed less in class, that they were either 'quiet' in nature or 'lower attaining'. She 'admitted' that their change in performance had 'challenged' her assumptions.

Student participants' experiences of the 3 interventions

Separate feedback discussions were held with each of the 3 groups of participants. The discussion format was semi-structured, with a general 'opener' used to prompt comments

but not direct the focus. The following is a summary of the most significant points that were raised and/or endorsed by the majority in each group.

Experimental Group 1 (Cogs):

- The participants said they had found that they had 'got a lot done', 'learned to do new things' in their group (been productive) and had found the activities 'fun'.
- Several students commented that prior to the project they felt ...too shy to speak out...' in front of the whole class '...in case you get the answer wrong...' and that their experiences in the Cogs Group had given them confidence.
- They said they had enjoyed 'working with each other' (peers) '...especially as we hadn't really known some of them before, even though we're in the same class...' and that this had resulted in them making new friends.
- They had promptly become used to evaluating each other's' work, often enjoying it and finding it useful. They said they found evaluating each other 'OK, being in small group.'
- Group 1 participants did not make any comments about the other two groups.

Experimental Group 2 (Self-directed):

- All participants said they had 'enjoyed' the stories. One summarised 'they were really interesting, 'but a bit sad though as they made you think about what it's like to be a bit disabled' and all generally agreed they felt they could relate to the content.
- Two students together said that they 'felt quite mature in our group... we were left to work on our own.' They enjoyed the responsibility of carrying out 'research' and of 'being in charge of our own project, lesson to lesson.'
- They said they liked the teacher (tutor) as she was 'always ready to listen to you', 'really helpful' and 'showed you how to find things out.'
- Several participants said that they look forward to 'the chance to join the first group' (Group 1 Cogs) 'a turn at doing the kind of things they did.'

Comparison group 3 (Task-based):

- Participants generally agreed that they 'really enjoyed working on the computers', mainly because they did not often 'get this chance ourselves in the week' as much as they would have liked.
- Some commented that the time seemed to go fast at first but 'then the (later) lessons seemed to drag on a bit' and others nodded in agreement.
- Any further feedback, positive or negative, was limited.
- The attitude towards the supervising tutor was particularly interesting. The students initially hesitated to make any comment at all. Two or three went on to

make brief comments that were neither negative or critical about Group 3 tutor's approach, but then concluded very briefly that she was 'kind' and 'very nice'.

- They were curious to know from the other two groups (beyond what they had been able to observe and find out) 'what they'd been doing with their teacher in their sessions' and when it was their turn as part of the planned continuous rotation of groups.

Student participants' questionnaires

All 30 student participants voluntarily completed a semi-structured questionnaire following the final intervention session and semi-structured feedback discussions (see Appendix 8). This contained 6 open-ended questions related to preferred ways of working, group work, activities and their response to their group. From these I selected a range of responses to extract data to identify and triangulate any emerging patterns (see Appendix 9).

On these summary sheets the groups in which the respondents participated have been colour coded for ease of focus, A chart shows Group 1, the Cogs Group as blue, Group 2, the Self-directed Group as pink and Group 3, the Task Based (Control) Group as green. All names are fictitious.

The first question asked why each individual chose to work in a preferred way. Across all groups, most of the girls preferred to work in pairs or small groups. Sharon from the 'Self-directed' group wrote that she preferred *'working out ideas on her own and in silence.'* Of the remaining 29, 12 preferred working with a partner and discussing ideas, 17 preferred group interaction and discussing ideas. Regardless of the 3 different group activities, explanations showed parity in response. Ann (Gp1) stated *'I think I work better with my friends.'* Anabel (Gp2) liked *'a lot of teamwork and would cooperate well with a group'* and Giselle (Gp2) said *'in a pair there are no distractions.'* Elizabeth (Gp3) also commented *'I like to get another opinion on the ideas that I have, to see what they think, take in there (sic) input.'*

Question 3 probed the above theme for triangulation, asking whether they preferred to work as a whole class, in small groups, in pairs or on their own. Most showed consistency with their initial ideas. Anabel (Gp2) felt more confident working in a group and Ann (Gp1) repeated that she felt she worked better in 'pairs or small groups'. It is noteworthy that Sharon (Gp2) who liked to work alone, especially when writing her ideas, needed to concentrate. However, she also liked small group work as she was able to *'compare and listen to other people's opinions.'* Some girls wanted to be listened to as Helen (Gp3)

claimed, because *'There isn't a big group picking all different things'* (Q3) and Elizabeth (Gp2) conferred *'there is not to (sic) many people, easy to share ideas.'*

The remaining advantages of small group work focused on what I would term 'comfort zones'. Girls felt able to express themselves better and less self-consciously than in front of a large group. For example, three girls from Group 1 commented *'I like having conversations in pairs rather than in a big group'* (Jo) and *'it was a big chance for me'* (Ella) and Joan added *'We can have lots of ideas instead of just one idea.'* The pattern of responses in this group related more to technical components of presentation and the 'how' of communication with their audience; 'learning to look' at people, having 'conversations', generating 'ideas' together, 'projecting 'the voice and giving more 'detailed' explanations. Inter-subjectivity on a deeper level related to the success of the group's collaboration. Some of Group 1 reflected on the group ethos including Tanya who liked *'everyone to be involved'* and Diane's affective response that *'It's not so big that you won't get heard.'*

Problem solving approaches to learning further entered into the equation across the remaining two groups. In the Task Based group (3), Jane stated *'I like to know what people think'* and Sally positively commented on the ethos in relation to talking to the teacher 'without shouting'. This links closely to Harriet's comment regarding *'the way the tutors teach us is not like a normal teacher would have'* in the Self-directed Group (2). Lena added empathetically *'I learnt more about people who can't do certain things and you realise how lucky you are.'* Barbara (Gp3) reflected *'It made me interact with other people,'* (Q4).

Remaining comments regarding written assignments came from Almond (Gp2) who requested *'It would be better if we never did essays a lot'* (Q6). This may have reflected that she didn't think talking was real work. However, she commented that she really enjoyed the pre and post tests which were based on pro-active talk perhaps which suited her learning style more and enjoyed group work as the cooperation meant people could have helped each other *'if your (sic) stuck you can work as a group to solve it'* (Q1).

Less pro-active statements were witnessed by other girls such as in the Self-directed Group where Dawn said *'My imagination and writing skills have but not much has helped me.'* She admitted *'I was a bit let down'* (Q6) as she thought she would learn more skills. That the activities would be rotated so everyone had the same opportunities to learn was important was reiterated to the whole class at both the start and finish of the research. Sharon in the same group in contrast said she did not like the stories *'because sometimes I don't understand them'* yet she contradicted herself and stated that she liked them,

mentioned twice (Q2 and Q5). She was positive about the work as felt she had learned to pay attention to detail and concentration (Q4). Kathy (Gp3) wished she could be '*more creative*' (Q4) '*with ideas*'.

The concept of idea generation was illuminating. Carol (Gp2) commented '*You get a Big Bunch of ideas*' followed by Alice (Gp2) '*You have other people's opinions which might improve your own*' and Sue (Gp3) suggested '*you can share less ideas without having too many to dicside* (sic).' The thinking process was challenging for some and perhaps here she felt as if she could contain too many ideas in her head at once or process them into writing, although the latter activity she was unenthusiastic about.

Remaining ideas included Siobham (Gp3) who did not like the fact that the '*sessions go so quickly*' (Q6) and the work having '*been explained really well*' (Q4) quoted by Sumita (Gp2). The two final selected comments are by Harriet (Gp 2) who qualified '*the sessions really improved*' her learning (Q5) and Wanda (Gp3) who summed up what many interpreted as '*just being together*' (Q3).

Overall, patterns emerged primarily related to girls' responses to group size. The smaller the group (from paired work) within a group of 10, linked to quality of learning, for example not being daunted by too much information or having to decide too much. From my view as the researcher, it had been important the work was challenging. This was confirmed by pupils in Group 1 who confirmed they had changed in some ways, for example, in the way they felt more confident when presenting to an audience or felt less self-conscious in the smaller groups.

Teacher - pupil relationships were mentioned twice in the respect that girls responded well to the Study Centre ethos, being given responsibility to work independently. Yet for staff, monitoring was an issue and that activities would be rotated safeguarding equal learning opportunities for all individuals. Inter-subjectivity was apparent across all groups in the way the girls expressed how problem solving and exploring ideas with each other encouraged and motivated them to feed from and continue building on each other's ideas. Comparing, listening and decision making when talking into thinking the '*Big Bunch of Ideas*' was celebrated by Carol (Group 2).

6.7 Reflection

Our conversations within the team made an emotional impact on me due to the staff's surprise and concern regarding the levels of students in a 'good' school'. The results for me were also somewhat unexpected bearing in mind the contrast in background to the

students in Study 1. I then recalled the voices of the educators in Study 2, their values, concerns and commitment in seeking to find 'better ways' to communicate in the classroom which support children's narrative thinking and confidence. It suggests that if students are not helped to think and speak their thoughts well before Years 7 and 8, as in these two studies, many are likely to continue to experience barriers to learning and social interaction. Secondary schools are also likely to continue to see difficulties and 'dips' in attainment (Doddington et al., 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008).

Clearly the small numbers and relatively short time-scale of Study 3 meant that no conclusive or causal statements could be made. However the outcomes drew attention to questions about the development of children's narrative and communication processes in the early and primary years. I reflected that whilst 'language' difficulties are reported in research upon school entry, and their relationship to learning delay, there is little information on children's narrative competence per se. Nor is there much data on the degree of teachers' awareness and skill in encouraging and supporting children in earlier stages of development. A reflexive response to this from the action research was to pursue these questions further.

6.8 Conclusions

This study set out to build upon the previous cycle of action research, conducted in Year 7 at City School, in assessing the narrative abilities of students as they move into the *second* year of their secondary education (Year 8). Working with reflective practitioners the studies have provided an overview of this specific cognitive capacity across the first two years of secondary school. Whilst conducted in contrasting socio-economic and academic settings, the findings show that students in both age-groups encounter difficulties in the area of communication. In particular they still need to develop the capacity to construct extended narratives conveying meaning to others. Whilst many of the students at Bridge School were from families from professional backgrounds, and the school had an ethos and specific focus on promoting personal abilities, the assessments showed that they too needed a voice and support in this area.

The intervention study, carried forward from the previous cycle of action research, showed that a teaching focus on developing communicative competence was highly effective. An alternative intervention provided participants with regular opportunities to collaborate with peers and develop their study skills, however they did not benefit from this and made little progress in their communicative competence. After several weeks

their rates of narrative skill were almost unchanged and were similar to the comparison group.

This cycle of action research addresses the third question by suggesting that direct teaching strategies can make a difference to students' narrative thinking, their ability to assemble ideas and to improve expression in the short term. Participants, both teachers and students, responded positively to the communication intervention. The voices of the students in interviews and questionnaires valued the approaches of staff who listened to their views and perspectives. They echoed those of City School students who appreciated warmly staff who supported them with opportunities to talk, reason and present arguments in a focused way. In both settings the participants gained ownership of the learning. Some believe that working and studying independently are the main ways to 'raise academic standards'. The findings of this study point to a balance with focused opportunities for dialogue (Alexander, 2012) and exploratory talk (Howe and Mercer, 2012) as the way to enhance higher-order thinking and deeper understanding.

As narrative thinking also enables both the generation and assembly of ideas in clear and coherent forms it is essential for educators to monitor these key skills. The literature shows that without such competence in structured or 'formal communication' it is not possible for students to develop narrative schema and engage in independent academic learning. As Halasz and Michel (2011) summarise, communication skills are the 'common denominator' for everyone in learning, as they are 'generic transferable functional skills for personal learning and thinking.' If educators do not have the appropriate teaching methods to help students develop narrative skills through exploratory dialogue they may fail to progress because tasks are beyond their ability to think, understand and express ideas. This applies across all subjects, but at the secondary school stage this appears to be essential if the 'dips' (Doddington et al., 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008, Mercer, 2012) that are commonly seen are to be avoided. This is highly relevant to a curriculum in which abstract and disembedded ideas must be readily taken on board by students as they move towards national examinations and beyond

The findings suggest that if students are not helped to provide narratives, particularly of the extended type involving reasoning and argument, before Year 8, as in this study, they are likely to experience barriers to learning. The small numbers and relatively short time-scale of this project need to be taken into account and contribute to a partial truth within a bigger picture. However the data appears both distinct and interesting and appears to support the case for developing reflexive practitioners who can facilitate exploratory talk and narrative processes to support cognition and learning. This suggests a follow-up

project to investigate these issues in greater depth, seeking more clear-cut findings that can serve to influence educators' teaching and students' learning in secondary classrooms. It also points to the need to monitor children's narrative abilities from an early age and to provide opportunities for exploratory talk across the curriculum.

CHAPTER 7 - Study 4: An assessment of nursery children's communicative competence, the views of parents and adults: England and Japan

7.1 Introduction and Rationale

As the literature shows, problems of communication can have a major effect on pupils and their academic attainment by the end of primary school. The findings of Study 1 showed that these problems can continue into secondary school, the results showing a large proportion of Year 7 students encountering difficulties. Other research findings show that communication difficulties are not confined to lower attainers, lower socio-economic areas or just boys, and that such difficulties can affect the quality of students' learning and attainment in the longer term.

Research shows that when young children move from the informal relationships and language used in the home to the formal relationships and speech used in school it demands of them new skills and language. It is known that this results in communication problems for many at this age, that these can have a marked effect on their academic performance, and that they are widespread across countries and cultures. Whilst international comparisons of educational 'outcomes' are high profile, the beginnings of language development are seldom compared across cultures. The study reported in this chapter explores young children's early cognitive-linguistic development, as well as sharing with parents their perspectives and values, comparing them with their counterparts in the Japanese context.

The findings of Studies 1 and 3 show that English pupils from differing socio-economic and academic backgrounds can still meet challenges in interpersonal communication by Years 7 and 8. The findings of Study 2 showed that educators in the secondary school saw this as an important element of teaching and learning, whilst assessing their own communication skills as low level.

Although known to be successful school learning, little is known about the understanding and views of parents generally on this matter in the pre-school sector. Similarly, little is known about the understanding and views of parents regarding the development of communication skills, despite being their children's first and constant educators. In the

process of conducting the previous three studies it became clear that communication was not an issue that had initially been at the forefront of the educators' minds. For example, in Study 2 the participating teachers and assistants openly expressed concern that they had previously had little awareness of the matter, but remarking that they considered communication was an issue for staff supporting students with learning and/or behaviour difficulties. However, both groups of educators responded positively to the support provided. Overall there was agreement as to the importance of educators developing high level communication skills and on reflection a concern emerged that it did not form part of initial professional training or research.

7.2 Research Questions

The issues that made an impact on all of us in the communities of practice in the preceding studies combined with my reflections on the three studies reported in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the insights gained from teaching across the age-groups, and my comparative studies in different parts of the world. An interaction between them and the discussions that I shared in such contexts led me to the final cycle of action research in collaboration between myself and Japanese colleagues. Our research questions were: i) What is the nature of English children's narrative competence immediately prior to school entry; how does this compare with children of the same age in a contrasting culture, in this case Japan as a country from within the Pacific Rim. From both perspectives we sought to enquire ii) What is the nature of teaching strategies, styles of teacher-pupil communication, the development of children's narrative competence, and their inter-relationship, from UK and Japanese educational perspectives?

7.3 The Fourth Cycle of Action Research – Study 4

I continued to reflect along the insider-outsider continuum in this study as previously within an evolving relationship. On the basis of the action research studies reported in the last 3 chapters I shared my research interests in children's language development and teacher education with colleagues at both university and school levels in the UK and, for many years previously in Japan.

Background to the research

We shared our interests and questions in a triangular nature during my visits to early years classrooms in England and my conversations with my long-term partner in Japan, our exchanges and mutual study visits to schools in both our countries. I had shared my ideas about a perceived difference in narrative competence between the children in both

countries as they start school. Although this approach differs markedly from Japanese philosophy and practice, there was great interest on all sides and a collaborative comparative action research study was born and planned. A potential tragedy occurred when my long-standing partner in Japan became ill and was faced with having to withdraw from the research context however I formed a new relationship with another Japanese colleague. She was an education post-graduate of a long-established red-brick British university, was familiar with British schools, an experienced English-Japanese speaker and studying for a doctorate. We felt our relationship was a 'parallel discourse' (Dale and Robertson, 2007). Based on a deep appreciation of each other's conceptual understandings and communication, relationships between my new Japanese colleagues and myself grew rapidly. I felt the community trusted me as an insider with collaboration focusing on ownership and reciprocity. I reflected on the heuristic which would conceptualise my relationship with the new research partners.

Action research model

In reporting the action research I use the model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), addressing in each cycle: Identification & Planning - Implementation – Analysis - Reflection.

i) Identification

On this basis, the interests of the English nursery school staff, the Japanese university colleagues and my own team grew into a comparative study involving British nursery schools, Japanese kindergarten and Japanese elementary schools in contrasting socio-economic areas. I had been familiar with taking formal and informal steps to access school settings at a geographical and cultural distance in comparative study-visits over the previous twenty years. Working at a distance from my new Japanese research counterpart required reflexivity and sensitive respect to assent, access and consent, paying attention to the community's cultural ethos and eidos of the communities. I started from the etic, of my 'particular cultural perspective' (Fossheim 2012) and sought to challenge my assumptions by working with colleagues gathering 'emic' information and data through observations, interviews and focus groups towards a developing etic by co-constructing knowledge with the participants. Whilst I had visited Japan on previous study visits as a researcher, I took into account that I was working with a new Japanese research partner, in different settings, and that '... no ultimate presence can be an authorising centre...' (Scott and Usher, 2011, p.31). In the Gadamerian sense, I did not wish to take my 'pre-understanding' of this intercultural context for granted in the belief that it could be described as etic or culturally generalisable. A newly formed relationship

would need to emerge within a developing emic balanced with an etic influence. For example, I knew that the Japanese concept of 'amae' or open-mindedness was embedded in group decision-making (Nishimura et al 2011) yet I needed to become actively involved with this experience anew in a 'situated cultural learning approach' (Zhu and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013).

Due to my deepened understandings of Japanese culture and consistency within their value system, I was able to fully immerse myself within the etic of the community. I understood the concept of amae and engaged with the Japanese group as an integral member once I was in the country. This involved daily after-school meetings with the Japanese team (as documented in Study 4), empowered within the hermeneutic circle. In the Study the Professor suggests in an understated manner that: 'In Japanese education our context is important. Recent events such as the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and the devastating Tsunami of 2011, reconfirms our need to place humanity at the heart of the educational process'.

I argue that we need to work towards a more balanced, relaxed and developmental curriculum in tune with real life. This involves valuing human endeavour over skills and abilities which I know are emphasised in the West. Hence, the idea of persistence to do the best we can for the good of the whole group and the individuals who belong in it is a key factor in children's development and learning' (Study 4, section 7.9.6). In the spirit of participatory action research, participants exchange dialogues of pre-understanding related to that which they are researching '...simply through the fact of sharing a world with them' (Scott and Usher 2011, p.32), placing inclusivity at the heart of human understanding.

Cultural data was obtained through questionnaires and informal interviews, accessing the voices of parents and educators on the subject of developing their children's communication skills. The final part of the research design involved reviewing the qualitative data in relation to the quantitative aspects of responses to the questionnaires and interviews.

There was a need for a deep understanding of values within the cultural context which involved translation. Word for word translation could have led to 'misrepresentation of information as well as skew research findings' (Fossheim, 2012). However, my Japanese counterpart was not only fluent in both languages but also a knowledgeable and skilful interpreter, with sensitivity to diverse cultural contexts. Our in-depth discussions worked well to uncover these cultural nuances to ensure integrity in the representation of

Japanese responses. The process of 'back-translation', back and forth between the languages, also ensured accuracy in written materials including interview questions.

ii) Planning

As discussed earlier, departing from informal relationships and language used in the home to the more formal relationships in school can be demanding for many young children. All partners reflected that whilst 'language' difficulties are reported in research upon school entry, there is little information on children's narrative competence and language delay per se. Nor is there much data on the degree of teachers' awareness and skill in encouraging and supporting children in these earlier stages. We had identified and wanted to compare these issues by examining young children's early narrative development as well as how parents and early educators perceived their children's development within both countries. Although I had already conducted studies with colleagues in Japan I still had many specific questions to investigate in this domain and pursued these in a fourth cycle of action research. Through collaboration with 'the researched' (Ashworth, 2008) I went on to transparently question my assumptions to date: how was the study being influenced by my own biography? This applied notably to the linguistic, descriptive elements of the data collected and their interpretation (Yardley, 2008, p.250), which was particularly pertinent to this study with the role of language at the heart of the learning process.

A two-part comparative action research cycle was planned to address whether, at the point of school entry, around age five, English children possess the skills necessary for dealing with standard classroom discourse. It sought to answer whether they have the cognitive capacity to understand and interpret adults' instructions and questions in school, and whether they have the cognitive and verbal competence to orally communicate simple facts and to construct a simple narrative, story or account.

Study 4 used four research methods: i) Interviews with nursery school participants; ii) observations in nursery-school and elementary classrooms; c) questionnaires with parents; d) informal conversations with parents and nursery staff; e) focus group discussions with educators. I planned to explore these issues by: a) examining the relative cognitive-linguistic starting points of representative groups of young children as they enter compulsory education; b) seeking to investigate the cultural and pedagogical context of early education in Japan, including the voices of parents and educators on developing children's communication skills. The perspectives were interrelated and led to a comparative study of two parts, involving projects conducted in England and Japan.

These are now entitled: a) 'Young children's narrative competence and the views of teachers and parents on early learning'; b) 'Pedagogy and practice in Japan related to developing young children's communicative and narrative competences'.

iii) Implementation

In view of the challenges I had identified among secondary school participants across differing socio-economic areas, reported in Chapters 4 and 6, I planned to compare the narrative development of children of pre-school age across matched socio-economic areas in England and Japan. The English study was carried out in nursery schools in the south-east Midlands in the UK. In Japan it was carried out in kindergartens within the south central region, with 55 English and 55 Japanese children aged approximately 4 years old. In the UK, I carried out the research myself. In Japan it was administered by my Japanese research counterpart in liaison with me at Mid-Japan University with a team of four who had expertise in working with young children. They had higher degrees, advanced level English language in the field of education. All four assistants demonstrated high degrees of consistency and reliability when carrying out the research with young children and awareness of research ethics, (see Appendix 10).

7.4 Research Design

This study is designed to observe aspects of young children's schema for narrative development. It explores the relationship between what they actually do, what they understand and what they are in fact able to do spontaneously if suitably prompted and questions how we might assess young children's strengths more effectively. The research design relates to the Vygotskian concept of identifying the learner's Zone of Proximal Development in order to identify and build upon existing knowledge and concepts. The design draws upon socio-cultural theory and the ways in which cultural context may shape and inform children's language, conceptual development and interpretation of events. Both Vygotskian and socio-cultural theories relate directly to the relative significance attributed to early social and conversational experiences. Narrative structures described by Bruner as 'an instrument of mind in the construction of reality' (1991, p.5-6) in turn shape the content and structure of children's writing, as well as their comprehension and interpretation of text.

7.5 Research Methods

In order to further investigate the cultural context of early education in the host country, the second aspect of the study included observations of the young participants whilst

undertaking the interviews, all of which involved practical 'activities'. The methodology takes into account developmental and linguistic theory, what is known about the difficulties that can be encountered when interviewing very young children and participation in social practices guided by adults which needs to be sensitively nurtured.

Participants

In deciding upon the age of the participants it was taken into account that most English children start Primary school in the 'Reception' class (Foundation 2) at age 4+ and the first year of Primary education in Year 1 at age 5. Japanese children prepare for school at 5 but start compulsory education at age 6+. In order to take a mid-point the activities were administered to participants whose age was around 5 years.

There were 55 Japanese and 55 English pupils aged 40-59 months. The mean age of the Japanese participants was 49.09 months; the mean age of the English was 50.15 months, showing no significant difference between ages at a level of $p < 0.001$. There was an overall gender balance, with 56 males and 54 females. The children came from a mix of lower and middle socio-economic status homes.

Materials

The young participants were invited to engage in activities which elicited an oral narrative. This was designed to assess their competence in generating, assembling and organising a small number of propositions in: i) Interview questions about the purposes of everyday items that are known to be familiar to nursery children aged five; ii) listening to and immediately retelling a short story as a reliable indicator of learning potential. Cultural features that provided meaning in each of these tasks were protected, as meaning-making was a key component of the cognitive assessment criteria. In view of the immaturity and short concentration spans of the participants' interview questions avoided complex oral responses due to the risk of inaccurately assessing their levels of understanding.

Everyday Knowledge questions

The questions asked related to the personal understandings essential for comprehending received language, i.e. animate/inanimate function, space, time and comparatives. During the interviews it was taken into account that young children's responses often need to be carefully considered and/or to be lightly probed for clarification, whilst not providing undue structure since this is what the questions explore.

The questions were introduced in the familiar style of a game or quiz show such as is shown daily on television. The original trials and a pilot showed that the five year-olds responded well to activity. The concepts tapped were: *personal understanding, animate/inanimate function, space time and comparatives*, as all of these concepts are known to be essential in everyday conversation. Given the age of the children, personal perspectives were anticipated. It was the task of the researcher to probe and interpret their responses, be they direct answers or examples given by way of explanation, in order to access' their meanings. It was for this reason that the research assistants had been selected on the basis of experience in working with the age-group as well as a higher degree and linguistic skills.

Participants were asked 5 short questions: 1) *How old are you?* 2) *Which animal barks?* 3) *What do you use a spoon /chopsticks for?* 4) *When do you go to bed?* 5) *Which is bigger, a cat or a mouse?* The aim was to elicit narratives so that their structure and length could be observed, using a different method to the story re-telling. This design was used in order to view narrative competence taking two different approaches to gain a general indication of responses for the age group and to compare across cultures for any universal or contrasting trend. Responses were then coded according to the capacity to convey relevant and in-tact information in narrative form.

Story re-telling

The story-line told to the children was about a child being visited by a relative who had a basket in which was hidden a dog and consisted of a series of events which participants were asked to recall and re-tell. As the aim of the activity was to measure the children's comprehension and their ability to piece together the related events, the story content consisted of 9 main ideas or propositions. Each of the propositions, including comments and acts, was embedded within a separate sentence in order to be within a five year-old participant's cognitive-linguistic capacity. For the purposes of meaning and sense 9 propositions were included but the average expectations for the age-group were for the accurate recall of 4. Each proposition was to be assessed according to i) accuracy of its place in the sequence; ii) accuracy of syntax; iii) accurate total 'intactness' of the piece of information.

In human communication, producing stories utilises distinct story-like patterns to communicate with others in everyday talk (Miller, 1995; Schank and Abelson, 1995). Evaluating communicative competences at school entry was aimed at contributing to evaluations of the role and influence of the family, the educational system and the wider society in relation to personal development and achievement.

The Japanese researcher and research assistants who were experienced in working with the age-group confirmed that the content was familiar to Japanese children and valid for research purposes, and 'back translation' ensured reliability. A pilot was firstly carried out immediately prior to the research periods in the UK to allow for feedback and minor modifications. No children with special educational needs, including language or learning difficulties, were included. The same procedures were followed in Japan.

During the research process the interviewers and interviewees were visible at all times to the staff of the nurseries. In Japan the Japanese children's oral responses were also examined for reliability and validity through reverse translation carried out by the researchers on a daily basis throughout the period. This also allowed attention to be paid to the nuances of language due to the sensitivities of interpretation.

Administration

A pilot was firstly carried out by the researchers immediately prior to the research periods in the UK and Japan to allow for feedback and minor modifications. The Japanese researchers then identified a range of kindergartens in different socio-economic areas and a range of children which matched the UK nursery sample for age, gender and their first language as Japanese. The same procedures were followed in both countries.

The Japanese research took place in May, at the beginning of the school year which starts in April. In the UK research took place in June, towards the end of the UK school year which ends in July. The dates in Japan were those which had been agreed by the researcher's university and were compatible with those of the Japanese research assistants' employer. In the UK the dates suited the researcher's university; the heads of the three nursery schools also suggested that there would be greater flexibility during the summer term to accommodate the research with the participants. Whilst the children were seen at different points in their nursery/kindergarten experience in the UK and Japan, this was unavoidable bearing in mind there was a match of average age. Whilst the research with Japanese participants at the start of the school year contrasted with the research with UK participants at the end of the school year might suggest major differences in educational experience this was not necessarily the case as many Japanese children start at kindergarten between ages one and two on a part-time basis.

Research shows that it is important that very young children feel as relaxed as possible during the interviews, as this enables them to be as forthcoming in their responses as possible and to perform at their best. Prior to commencing the research the researchers ensured that they made themselves known to the young participants as friendly and

trusting figures by spending a period of time in the nursery classes before commencing the interviews. Joining the children in their play or everyday tasks, reading stories or joining in with singing rhymes allowed the children to get to know the researchers in a familiar setting so that subsequent activities would be unlikely to cause apprehension. It also allowed the researchers to become familiar with the children and to ascertain their individual levels of confidence, which assisted interaction with the child during the activities. These points are particularly important when working with 4-5 year-olds.

The children remained within the main play area of the nursery/kindergarten during the activities to ensure they felt secure and relaxed. They were interviewed individually in a quiet bay to reduce distraction and to ensure their responses were clearly audible. The process was carried out at a relaxed pace, designed to take a relatively short amount of time to avoid tiredness and loss of interest. On average the time taken exclusively for the language activities was 20 minutes. A small number of children paused to chat about home, pets, interests etc. however the experienced researchers and research assistants handled this skilfully and the activities were readily resumed and completed.

7.5.1 Methods of Analysis

The methods of analysis are set out below according to each activity.

Everyday Knowledge questions

Answers to the everyday knowledge questions related to personal understandings essential for comprehending received language: animate/inanimate function, space, time and comparatives. Individual responses were entered on the recording sheet. During the analysis period it was taken into account that the responses might need to be carefully considered bearing in mind the young age of the participants and need for clarification. Responses were recorded qualitatively and also categorised by the researcher.

Story retelling

Whilst 9 propositions were included in the story for the purpose of ensuring coherence and meaning, the expectations for the age-group was that a maximum of 4 could be recalled with accuracy. Each one recalled correctly was coded according to: i) correct recall of the proposition; ii) the accuracy of: its place within the story sequence; iii) total 'intactness' of the piece of information. As with the everyday knowledge questions, the story re-telling marking process also resulted in a total correct score for each participant.

Quantitative analysis was complemented by the close scrutiny of individual responses to identify any further cultural patterns or differences in the children's knowledge within the

two groups (Philipsen, 1975, p. 21). Observations of children's overall responses were also made and recorded in order to complete the individual representations.

7.5.2 Validity and Reliability

In the design of the activities, situations familiar to children in both cultures were used. In replying to the questions the children were free to respond in their own words. That is, no specific words or terms were required in their responses as a repetition of those used by the story-teller. This was aimed at ensuring natural and full expression as a valid examination of their conceptual knowledge. Care was taken to ensure that children found it easy to respond to the questions and represent views, ideas and concepts. Outcomes were designed to prompt spoken and gestured responses. In the early stages of this research, the experiments were carried out initially with English children matched for age as well as equal numbers of boys and girls in order to identify any gender differences in the results and amend the activity designs if necessary. This was not an issue however so the activities were not changed.

The linguistic accuracy of target questions had been tested for reliability and validity at the developmental stage through double-blind reverse translation by the native speakers of Japanese in collaboration with both teams and their colleagues. This involved the translation of a Japanese response into English, followed up by an English version translated back into Japanese by a different native speaker in a 'post' research meeting. The two versions were discussed and compared for consistency of meaning and any minor differences resolved.

The Japanese children's oral responses were also examined for reliability and validity through reverse translation carried out by the researchers on a daily basis throughout the period. This also allowed attention to be paid to the nuances of language due to the sensitivities of interpretation. It was felt any ambiguity was less likely to apply to the everyday knowledge questions. The Japanese children also coped well with the content of the story they were to re-tell and no significant issues arose.

7.6 Japanese School Studies

In each kindergarten and elementary school the opportunity was taken to observe events occurring during a typical day. Incidents of teachers interacting and listening to children, styles of communication and relationships were observed. Videotaping using a small camera provided retainable evidence, accompanied by contextual notes and where possible staff's later explanations of events.

7.6.1 Methods of Analysis

During each day in all participating kindergartens there was free and open access, with no timetable given for visits to particular places or at particular times, apart from notifying the team of special events. Many observations were recorded in field notes on scenes of arrival and departure, regular provision for indoor and outdoor play, structured learning, music, dance, origami etc. interactions and actions of children, parents and teachers. In some instances daily plans were provided as well as children's activity sheets, school booklets, and letters to parents (written in Japanese).

The analyses consisted of making sense of the kindergarten and elementary school day and week, the timetable and structure, unwritten 'rules' and expectations for the ways in which children interacted. The aim was to try to identify the relationship with the views of educators, academics, staff, parents and the language test results. Within the time constraints of the scale of this study and length of the thesis the analyses are presented in part and these are still on-going.

7.6.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were addressed for observing very young and vulnerable participants, adhering to the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2011) and which met the standards of each country was obtained through the participating universities and schools which prior to project clearance and commencement. Parents were contacted by head-teachers, informed of the methods and purposes of the study and their informed consent obtained for observation of their children in school hours. During observations the interviewers and interviewees were visible at all times to the staff of the nurseries.

Please see Appendix 10 for details of the ethic procedures carried out in this study.

Research in the kindergartens

During each day in all six participating nurseries there was free and open access. No timetable was given for my days in the nurseries in relation to particular places or times, apart from notifying me of any special events going on that I would not be aware of. Observations of 'typical' everyday events were recorded in ethnographic style field notes: arrivals and departures, provision for indoor and outdoor play, structured learning, music, dance, origami etc. interactions and actions of children, parents and teachers. In some instances Daily Plans were provided by staff as well as children's activity sheets, school booklets, letters to parents (written in Japanese).

Research in the elementary schools

Other observations were conducted in elementary schools. In order not to walk into lessons mid-way it was necessary to plan ahead. In most cases however I was asked which subjects, activities or age-groups I wanted to see on arrival in the morning and this was arranged. During breaks and lunchtimes I was free to visit any part of the school. Children mostly stayed indoors due to the weather and moved around the two-storey buildings to visit friends and activities as they wished without overt adult supervision. My observations were unstructured and exploratory in nature, incorporating an ethnographic approach.

I followed interactions of interest by exploring and discussing them with the staff involved to access their interpretations. The analyses consisted of making sense of the school day and week, the timetable and structure, unwritten 'rules' and expectations for the ways in which children interacted. The aim was to try to identify the relationship with the interpretations and meanings of educators, academics, staff, nursery parents and children's responses to the interviews and story-re-telling task. Based on group discussion, my research consisted of daily after school meetings with the teachers, followed by meetings with the research team in which the conversation involved lengthy reflections of talking around the subject. Often this appeared informal with refreshments and ending in group consensus. My role as researcher needed to be reflexive and empathetic.

This involved working 'jointly' with my participating colleagues (Ashworth, 2008. P.21) discussing my interpretations and assumptions to externalise the 'explicit consideration of specific ways' in which they had been influenced by me as the researcher. This was essential in view of the descriptive means by which observational and linguistic data were captured and, in particular, the way in which they were interpreted (Yardley, 2008, p.250). This was most effective through interaction where cognitive and affective responses are synthesised. My Japanese colleague comments: 'This approach is known as a 'wet' (uetto) as opposed to a dry (dorai) style. The former concept involves the expression of feelings, affective responses and reflection towards learning, in contrast to a more rational response of just giving an answer' (Study 4, section 7.9.6). Shared understandings of this nature sensitised my reflexivity as to how we may need to appreciate that language styles are culturally specific (Minami (2002, 2011) and that a holistic approach is required when developing empathy. This idea is common to Pring's (2003) philosophy on becoming a person. It is also explicit in Abiko's (2011) concept that developing empathy relates to 'totality' of character development.

7.7 Japanese Parents' Questionnaires

A single, open ended survey in the form of a semi-structured questionnaire was offered to Japanese parents with an explanatory letter explaining that the project was to access the views of parents on early learning. Parents were asked to rank the values of everyday activities in the home for their children's learning. Some examples are as follows. The value that they attach to: talking with the child at mealtimes; reading books with their child. The value of their child: attending extra classes or clubs; learning or studying alone; using the computer for play or study; watching television; spending time with grand-parents; playing games in groups. In interpreting the results and their possible meanings reference was made to informal conversations with parents occurring at other times. This was combined with further information gathered during this other field visits, discussions with educators, academics and the literature contributed to the qualitative analysis and interpretation of parents' responses.

Questionnaires

The single, open ended survey in the form of a questionnaire was handed out to kindergarten parents explaining that the project was to access their views on early learning. A series of questions asked parents to give views on the value of everyday activities in the home for children's learning, ranking each activity listed as either: a) Not important; b) Slightly important or c) Highly Important (see Appendix 11). The questions asked are:

As a parent the value that they attached to:

- talking with the child at mealtimes
- reading books with their child

As a parent their view on the value of their child:

- attending extra classes or clubs
- learning or studying alone
- using the computer for play or study
- watching television
- reflecting on his/her actions for developing talk
- playing with friends
- spending time with grand-parents
- playing games in groups

The questionnaire was distributed when collecting their children from kindergarten, and parents were asked for them to be returned to a sealed box in a pigeon hole before the end of the research period in the school, to ensure as high a response rate as possible (Basit, 2010, p.95).

Participating parents

The questionnaires were received by parents whose children had participated in the language activities and had previously been made aware of the research project. The questionnaires were distributed early in the process, at the end of the first day in the nursery or kindergarten, to allow as much time as possible for consideration, completion and return by the time the team had completed the research in the nursery/kindergarten. Each questionnaire was handed out by the researcher. In Japan this was with the support of either one of the research assistants, the class-teacher or head-teacher, according to availability, in order that translations of its purpose could be explained and any questions answered.

Ethical considerations

Ethical safeguards were addressed and adult participants' informed consent was obtained through both universities and all schools which met the standards of each country, prior to project clearance and commencement. In the UK the researcher and the teachers explained the purposes of the research project and questionnaires to parents. Completion was voluntary and the returns rendered anonymous as they were un-named, no personal or sensitive information was requested and the forms posted in person into a closed box. Follow-up informal interviews with parents occurred by opportunity. Based on group discussion emphasis, my research consisted of daily after-school meetings with the teachers, followed by meetings with the research team where the conversation involved lengthy reflections of talking around the subject. Often this appeared informal with refreshments and ending in group consensus.

The questionnaires were distributed at the end of the first day to the 55 parents in England and the 55 in Japan. The response rates varied, with 55 returns from parents in Japan and 34 in England, a total of 89.

7.7.1 Method of Analysis of Parent Questionnaires

Parents' ratings in response to the questions were collated and tabulated. A Chi Square analysis was used to ascertain the statistical significance of results in the two countries and the findings compared. In interpreting the results and their possible meanings

reference was made to informal conversations with parents occurring at other times. This was combined with further information gathered during this other field visits, discussions with educators, academics and the literature contributed to the qualitative analysis and interpretation of parents' responses.

Informal conversations with Japanese parents and kindergarten staff

Insights into the perspectives and values of parents and kindergarten staff were obtained during informal conversations with staff, teachers, assistants, clerical, kitchen and maintenance staff in all 6 kindergartens. The reason for this is that in Japan all categories of staff are awarded equal status within institutions and businesses. In the kindergartens staff made themselves available and were ready to participate in a conversation or discussion. These were informal and sometimes transitory meetings so that notes were not always made immediately, however their views all contributed to the bigger picture.

7.7.2 Focus Group Discussions with Japanese Educators

The focus group discussion took place at Mid-Japan University and involved colleagues from kindergarten to university level. They shared my interests and questions related to education and culture. I provided key questions and dilemmas as a focus group each person sharing their own beliefs and values and their views on Japanese cultural perspectives and practices. Some of the focus group spoke English well, however to ensure exchanges in which issues were explored there was much two-way translation. For the most part I allowed the discussion to flow without interruption. This served to facilitate a spiral which took ideas to a deeper level looking at values and, in particular, philosophical matters. When there was a natural pause and when I needed clarification I conferred with my Japanese partner who added probing questions. In view of the translations this was a lengthy process.

7.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were addressed for assessing very young and vulnerable participants, adhering to the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2011). The activities were benign and designed to interest the children. Informed consent which met the standards of each country was obtained through the two participating universities and the schools which prior to project clearance and commencement. Parents were contacted by head-teachers, informed of the methods and purposes of the study and their informed consent obtained for inclusion of their children in the study. During the research process the interviewers and interviewees were visible at all times to the staff of the nurseries.

Ethical safeguards were addressed and adult participants' informed consent was obtained through both universities and all schools which met the standards of each country, prior to project clearance and commencement. In the UK the researcher and the nursery teachers explained the purposes of the research project and questionnaires to parents in person and I made myself available to parents on named days to discuss the activities in person. Completion was voluntary and the returns rendered anonymous as they were un-named, no personal or sensitive information was requested and the forms posted in person into a closed box.

Acceptance of the research by children and those working with them needs to ensure they feel comfortable and able to make free choices. A preliminary, informal day was organised so participants could familiarise themselves and talk with me; I remained in the play area so they could involve me in their unstructured play if they wished. Lindsey (2010, p.119) argues that an explanation of 'who the researcher is' is essential as: 'young children will normally require an oral explanation expressed in a manner that communicates effectively.'

The research schedule involved a one-to-one interview with children lasting around ten minutes seated in a quiet corner of an open play area of their nursery. They were asked firstly about questions about every day matters and then to respond to a short story. Questions were asked in the style familiar to young children; examples are when in the home they might be asked about items in a picture or story book such as 'Who goes Quack-Quack..?' or 'What do you with your tooth-brush..?' The purpose of the questions was to discover how the four year-olds used narrative, how much they could express about particular everyday items and events, and if they could re-construct a very short story about a lady with a dog. As Kjøholt (2012, p.12) suggests, 'children like adults are strategic, narrative-making beings.'

By informing parents I had anticipated that they would communicate details of the project and its activities to their children, however this was also undertaken by staff in the relevant classes in the school. Remaining complex issues focused on anonymity and consent. In terms of what the research might 'give back to the children' I hoped that they would enjoy and benefit from the one-to-one activities involving narrative development. Feedback could also help support and further their competences. (For details of the ethical procedures in this study please see Appendix 10.)

7.9 Results and Analysis

The analysis of responses to the studies conducted with pre-school participants and parents are presented separately in parts 1 and 2 of the following sections.

7.9.1 Interviews Conducted with Nursery School Participants

Responses to the everyday knowledge questions and story re-telling task were analysed according to the ways in which participants represent narrative used for two purposes, namely the:

- a) meanings that individual participants hold for everyday knowledge and stories;
- b) relationship between language, action, meaning and task success.

Following collation of the results, patterns and correlations across ages, countries, tasks, strategies and understanding were then examined. The results of the language tasks are presented below.

7.9.2 Everyday Knowledge Questions

Responses to questions in the everyday knowledge questions varied according to question but mainly by country. As table 7.1 below shows, scores and percentages varied widely between participants in the two countries. Perhaps the simplest question was the use of a spoon since it will have been used every day with a young child from the age of 6 months yet less than half of English children could answer this, compared to a response of 91% regarding the use of 'a spoon or chopsticks' by children in Japan. Similarly straightforward was the question 'which animal barks?' since a dog is perhaps the most familiar animal to young children, possibly because of its loud bark, and it features in most toddlers' picture books. Furthermore this question required only a one-word answer and it was fairly open-ended, for example it could have been: dog, doggy, puppy, Fido etc. or the Japanese equivalent. The question was only answered correctly by just 32% of English children compared to 71% of Japanese.

Table 7.1 Frequencies and percentages of English and Japanese participants providing correct answers to the Everyday Knowledge questions (N=110)

Questions	England		Japan	
	N	%	N	%
How old are you?	44	81	54	98
Which animal barks?	18	32	39	71
What do you use a spoon/chopsticks for?	26	47	50	91
When do you go to bed?	24	43	43	78
Which is bigger – a cat or a mouse?	7	12	39	71

Sizes of a cat and a mouse were also found even more difficult by English participants at 12% compared to 71 % of the Japanese children answering correctly using just one word. In fact this score of 71% represented the lowest for the Japanese as all other scores were above that, reaching 98%. The most difficult question perhaps was ‘what time do you go to bed?’ as it required either a time on the clock or a chronological position within the day, for example, after tea, television or bath, or before my brother, when it gets dark etc. Yet 43% of the Japanese managed to answer compared to 24% almost a half of the English. 19% of UK children did not say how old they were compared to just 2% of the Japanese participants. This was an important finding in children’s developing awareness of the ‘self’ occurs before an understanding of the world, yet these children were placed in a position within the nursery and the world of trying to make sense of their surroundings.

Mann Whitney tests showed the mean rank of scores for the English children to be 50.96 and for the Japanese to be 60.04, revealing a significant difference between the two sets of everyday knowledge scores ($Z = -2.87$, $p = 0.004$, 2-tailed). As outlined above, the 5 questions were selected from 100 in the original trials (Sage, 2000), to be the most commonly answered by children aged around 5 years. The average age of the participants in the study reported here was a little below that, at 4 years 10 months, but even allowing for this small difference the English scores were very low.

7.9.3 Story Re-telling

The recalling and assembling of elements of the story was found difficult by all young participants (see table 7.2). One proposition was managed by between a quarter and two thirds, two propositions by a tenth or less. Comparatively the Japanese children recalled the story more completely and coherently, demonstrating a better sense of narrative than the English children who paid greater attention to individual items in the story as a whole.

Table 7.2 Percentages of English and Japanese participants accurately providing up to 4 propositions in the Story Re-telling (UK, N=55; Japan, N=55)

Number of Propositions	England			Japan		
	Correct Proposition	Correct place in Sequence	Information intact	Correct Proposition	Correct place in Sequence	Information intact
1	26%	26%	4%	62%	62%	7%
2	11%	11%	2%	10%	10%	4%
3	2%	2%	0%	6%	6%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%

7.9.4 Language Tasks Overview

Mann-Whitney tests showed mean ranks of the combined language scores of English participants to be 36.31 and the mean ranks of the Japanese participants to be double that at 74.69. There were no gender differences in the mean ranks of UK scores. For example, for the English boys this was a success rate of 20.75%, with a standard deviation of + 6.97. For the girls the mean rank was 20.04% with a standard deviation of + 7.09.

According to a Spearman correlation test there was a strong correlation between the results of the everyday knowledge and story- telling tasks at $r = + 0.311$ with a significance level of $p < 0.001$ (two tailed); $sd = +7.04$. This suggests that individual children achieved a similar score on both activities and that the overall result was consistent, suggesting the activities were a good reflection of their ability. In fact the consistency and correlation obtained in the original trials of the tests had been key reasons for selecting the activities for use in this study.

7.9.5 Qualitative Analysis of Language Tasks Data

The quantitative results above reflect the importance of communication and narrative thinking and structure to all learning. The major difference between participants on the language tasks showed that the English children found narrating events difficult and most struggled to assemble information. The fact that the Japanese children were more able to retell the story information correctly appears to directly reflect this emphasis in the kindergartens.

Five UK nursery and five Japanese kindergarten children's responses to the Cultural Knowledge Quiz and Story Retelling activities

Both activities were administered to 110 nursery children, 55 respectively in the UK and Japan. This data is supported by quantitative data which assessed all children. For triangulation purposes, 10 children's qualitative responses are depicted to further question and illuminate findings.

Cultural Knowledge: UK respondents

I selected 5 UK nursery children to answer 5 questions related to themselves and their environment. Participants were 4 years of age and (fictitiously) named Jamie, Albert, Reika, Sylvia and Bert. All questions and answers are represented in a colour coded grid in Appendix 12.

All 5 children knew their ages. The second question was 'What animal barks? They all stated a 'dog' apart from Reika who replied 'meow, a cat.' Bert elaborated a familiar story incorporating rhyme reciting 'Tuscan, *Tusky Wusky*, me and Karen's dog.' The third question was 'What do you use a spoon for? Answers corresponded to food or mealtimes. Reika suggested 'breakfast' which we may have assumed was for cereal or porridge while Bert demonstrated to 'mix more dinner.' The remaining three children commented 'to get your beans up with,' 'so you can eat your things' and 'little peas'. The last remark by Sylvia excluded a verb and did not give a full context in this case.

Question 4, 'When do you go to bed?' witnessed Bert giving a specific time of 'half past 9'. Jamie and Reika both said 'at night'. Albert mentioned 'who' he went to bed with, 'I go to my bed, go with Poppy cat too' and Sylvia stated 'when it's raining' which could have inferred anytime dependent on weather conditions.

Story Retelling Responses: UK respondents

Children were asked to listen to a simple story of 9 propositions about a girl acquiring a cat (Appendix 13). In the story retelling Jamie began accurately with a good conventional story opening 'Once upon a time' showing he was aware of this genre. He then added 2 characters 'Tina, the little girl' and the 'cat', totalling 2 ideas. He omitted the context of the story as in 'who' or 'how' the cat arrived at the girl's house. Albert referred to this as in 'they knocked at the door', followed by 'It's a cat eating sandwiches.' He may have logged the word 'basket' mid-story stringing events into his own narrative. Subsequently he shared his own narrative 'I got a cat called Oscar but sometimes he bits me when he's poorly and he doesn't feel well and then he goes to the vets.' It's noteworthy that the cat is clever in the respect that he appears to have human qualities whether intended or not. Being a young child he is able to converse in complete sentences although not totally related to the task. Reika briefly remembered 3 ideas 'basket with a cover over it', it made a 'meow' and arrived at 'it was a cat'. She appeared to be acting out the sequence in her head. The most coherent answer was Sylvia's response who gave 4 detailed propositions involving the three main characters 'Tina', the 'Aunt' and the 'cat'. Although she omitted the start of the story she described the remainder accurately in complete sentences. Bert, in contrast, felt unable to retell the story yet resiliently stated 'I learnt to wheel on my bike. Did wheelies', talking about his achievements; an effective strategy for avoidance.

The final question 'What is bigger – a mouse or a cat?' led to 3 correct answers. Jamie interrogated the question, internalised it then, thinking out aloud asked 'Mouse? No a cat.' Reika replied 'just a dog'. She may have been reflecting on the previous quiz and Tuscan which were more meaningful to her.

Cultural Knowledge: Japanese Respondents

This selection consisted of 5 kindergarten children who all knew their own ages including one 3 year old girl called Miki. The remaining children were (fictitiously) named Taji, Kazuki, Yuka and Sanzo. Sanzo said he was '5 years old'. He continued 'tomorrow is my birthday but maybe it's not true.' Either he was unsure if it was really true or didn't know his age. However, it is worth comparing this answer within the context of the remaining 4 questions as to its validity. In response to question 2, all answered correctly as 'dog', 'doggy' or 'maybe dog'. The last answer was given by Sanzo, once again questioning. The third question 'What do you use chopsticks for?' was well answered by everyone. Miki said 'food, ugh, grab food' skilfully imitating the action, with a pincer like movement, not necessarily meaning she was greedy but demonstrating how to hold chopsticks. Sanzo replied in the third person 'when she eats supper.' Then he confirms 'Yesterday, I ate.' It is noteworthy that when 'he' or 'she' are translated, it may mean 'one' as in 'when one eats supper'.

The 4th question about bedtime is specifically answered by 4 children as in at '9', '7' or '10', '5 or 5 o'clock early', compared to Sanzo who recalls 'different' times. It would have been worthwhile probing this response. The final question regarding the size of the cat compared to the mouse produced varied responses. Yuka juxtaposes the order in which the question was asked. She questions 'Mouse is smaller', whereas most replied the cat was bigger. Sanzo gives a comprehensive detailed answer 'cats are bigger than mice, because mice are small.'

Story Retelling Responses: Japanese respondents

Taji says he enjoyed the story responding affectively and not necessarily answering the question. Kazuki tells the story in the second person 'Well. Open the door. Then, knock on the door, then open the door. Then, blanket comes out. Very soft and fluffy and inside it was a cat. It meows.' Though there is repetition and the staccato manner of the door opening through phrases, he manages to thread through the story with 5 propositions with a start, middle and end and to assemble the narrative. Yuka similarly starts off with phrases but based around the characters, the 'cat was in the story', 'Auntie was in too' and 'come to the girl's house'. The focus is primarily on the cat; 'it was soft and cuddly', demonstrating an ability to visualise and hold the ideas in her head.

Miki, the 3 year old, focused mainly on the cat, describing it as 'fluffy', that it 'meowed' and was 'covered in a blanket'. She omitted characters although inferred the girl stroked it.

Sanzo's response was 'Cat'. He said he 'enjoyed' the story, similar to Taji, then said 'a mouse was in the story.' Was this possibly referring to the 5th question above?

Discussion related to Cultural Knowledge Quiz

Regarding the Cultural Knowledge Quiz, all children knew how old they were. Most knew the animal which barked was a dog with the exception of Reika's cat, however it was still an animal. Most responded well to question 3 regarding using a spoon or chopsticks although Sylvia just said 'little peas' out of context, although between the lines, it is easy to work out what she meant. The bedtime responses were noticeable with Japanese children predominantly giving specific answers such as exact times in contrast to only Bert stating 'half past 9'. Sanzo would have been interesting to probe as he seemed to give detailed responses as if wishing to carry on with a conversation, yet in the story retelling, this may have been unapparent. The final questions about the size of the cat being greater than the mouse showed that the Japanese tended to conceptualise response within whole sentences, for example, Sanzo's full response (stated earlier) compared to mostly one word answers of UK children in this sample.

Discussion related to Story Retelling

Regarding the two sets of children, qualitative data triangulates some of the assumptions made by educators in how children assemble narrative through conversation. These responses show at times that the agenda of the educator may be far removed from the child's agenda and perhaps we should be reflecting on a common learning culture. It is interesting to note how children in both groups may elaborate their own narratives quite freely and in a comprehensive way although different to researcher expectations. Examples are Bert's story about Tuscan the dog and Sanzo talking about his birthday. All children appear to enjoy animals. Albert talks at length about his cat Oscar. Evidently, these are meaningful to their social and more importantly imaginary world which may be hidden from the teacher.

Many children favoured the cat and gave affective responses after listening to the story, particularly in the case of two Japanese boys. Kazuki and Sylvia both give coherent narratives in some detail and are able to memorise 4 to 6 propositions as Kazuki did. Although Bert felt unable to retell the story, he had the confidence to say this and talked in terms of his achievements of his abilities to do 'wheelies' on his bicycle.

The qualitative analysis shows that, while the Japanese children were limited in the number of propositions that they could recall and assemble, they had a greater sense of

telling a narrative than their English counterparts. Intact information was also slightly better demonstrating their ability to organise and sequence events in order.

The correlation found between the results of the two language activities therefore suggests, not that the English children were unable to understand spoken language, that they did not know the answers to the everyday knowledge questions or that they were unable to recall the story's events; all English children were able to respond to the questions. Instead it seems likely that, according to socio-cultural theory, they were not familiar with communicating the 'everyday' content of the material in the two activities and with the demands of the two different narrative genres. That is, they were less likely to be able to communicate their responses as they had not yet developed the mental schema, i.e. narrative structures, to express their ideas and meanings.

[Extracts from the Japanese participants' response to the everyday knowledge questions can be found in Appendix 13.]

The large and significant difference between Japanese and English participants on the combined language tasks, and the finding that many of the English children found narrating events difficult and struggled to assemble information, was endorsed and perhaps explained by the qualitative data as Japanese children were more vocal in classroom activities and had more opportunities according to the pedagogy (see following section).

7.9.6 Qualitative Analysis of Japanese School Observations

Qualitative data obtained in discussions and classroom observations in the 6 Japanese kindergarten and elementary schools revealed a high level of adult awareness of the major shift required of young children when moving from informal home talk to the more formal styles of school talk. This pattern is known to be representative of the views of parents from other nurseries in Japan based on my personal observations during 2 previous field visits to other areas of Japan, detailed discussions with educators, the viewing of video material and reading of the literature.

Kindergarten classroom organisation

The classroom observations showed that formal speaking (in class) was coached as part of normal daily practice in the 6 Japanese kindergartens. This was facilitated by a strategy of providing regular opportunities for *all* children in kindergarten classes to communicate their ideas. For example, floor markings in different colours were provided in all classrooms so that children could independently set out their small chairs in different configurations as

requested by the kindergarten teacher. These were: a horse-shoe shape, a square and two rows facing each other, each layout designed to support a range of whole-class and small-group activities. Each seating configuration was used for a different type of formal communication: conversing individually with the teacher at the head of the horse-shoe; discussing in groups of two or three; addressing the children seated in the line opposite; speaking to the class individually in turn around the horse-shoe. This took place often whilst receiving an object and explanations from the teacher and passing on both to the next child; observations included passing a real-life baby doll with care as the teacher explained reasons for holding the head correctly; passing around a large kettle containing cold juice and pouring it for their neighbour whilst saying appropriate polite messages; passing a large tactile picture book and pointing out the points of interest in the story they had just heard. All of these events involved each child in listening to and then using narrative and narrative structures in specific contexts, many of which could be considered to involve 'everyday knowledge'.

The two lines of seating were used to ensure all children could clearly observe a display, watch a demonstration and participate in associated tasks and discussions, all of which had been carefully structured to involve narrative. All indoor and outdoor activities were designed to involve small groups of children, a strategy used to promote their communication and collaboration skills; examples of this was the riding of trucks and tandem bicycles outdoors; using a collection of giant cartons plus string and sticky-tape creatively, resulting in a train, a 'mountain' trek for insects to conquer; a sand-pit of several metres with a tap at one end, encouraging taking turns to fetch buckets of water. The collaborative and cooperative nature of these small-group activities made clear demands on communication and narrative.

Outdoor activities

A sunken tiled 'sports pitch' of a few meters in length was used as both a small swimming-pool and a short, high-sided pitch for ball-games. Both types of sports activities promoted social as well as physical development through team games and pair coaching. Whilst the forming of teams is less common with 4 and 5 year-olds in the UK, it is fundamental to Japanese kindergarten practice and the children are noticeably skilled, encouraging and helping each other, patiently taking turns etc. The teacher placed responsibility for keeping the score on the children; as they called out each result either the teacher or a child recorded it on a giant sized score-board, clear for all to read. There was a marked emphasis on sharing excitement with whoever was winning and on mutual celebration with the victors, promoting thoughtfulness and de-centring. These were noticeably 'noisy'

occasions, as considered by English standards, as the children chatted excitedly with their peers, summing up what had happened, expressing their hopes for the winner etc.

Literacy activities

The use of text to communicate was used consistently to convey information on signs and labels in all of the kindergartens. This was reflected in the books used by adults and children alike, with the familiar Japanese-style 'cartoon' illustrations. These do not regularly feature in western texts, yet these pictures convey a great deal of detailed and subtle meaning to the reader which serves to support understanding of the text. It is seen in, for example, books written for parents and kindergarten staff which provide narratives explaining how to teach children to greet each other, lay the table, clean and tidy away. Cartoon-style illustrations depict each stage in the activity and speech bubbles set out how to explain the process to the child. Books and signs of this type and used and pointed to by teachers in the course of the day, modelling the activities, reading the words and asking the children to make sense of the text.

Narrative presentations

Formal 'public speaking' on a larger scale was seen, including that by kindergarten children. All classroom activities have regular daily sessions in which children sit in a circle and share ideas and listen to each other in turn. This will involve at least half of the class and care is taken to include all children; those not contributing spontaneously will later be encouraged and supported to contribute and provide their narrative. This demonstrates great sensitivity and skill on the part of the teacher in 'drawing' them into the turn-taking by showing interest and beginning by asking focusing questions.

At regular points in the year parents were invited to formal presentations; some involved a parent giving a public acknowledgement of their child's progress, declaring personal attributes and achievements including knowledge, skills, kindnesses etc. Other events involved the child presenting to the adults objects that the class had made, journeys and activities undertaken or applauding the kindnesses or achievements of particular children. Here again whilst this is sometimes seen in the UK, the task of presenting formally and alone in assembly is generally undertaken by much older children, age 8 or above.

Formal 'manners' were also a daily feature in kindergarten classrooms. The children changed into indoor shoes upon arrival, placing their outdoor shoes neatly on their own shelf. Each day began with sitting in a circle and greeting their teacher and classmates. In the classroom at lunchtime the children were expected to set their own place at the table, talking it through and helping each other. Those staying for a hot lunch collected and laid

out their cutlery and drinking cup; adults oversaw that the whole activity was undertaken in an orderly manner with polite turn-taking. Those with a packed lunch untied the fabric napkin knotted around their lunchbox, set it out as a place-mat and placed their cup and mini chop-sticks in the correct position. The children served the meal, while an adult supervised in the background. The server asking what each would like and each child verbalised their response; simply pointing was considered 'impolite' and in this case the nearby adult would prompt them to 'ask nicely'. Eating was a calm and sociable occasion, the children talking quietly together throughout. Clearing away and cleaning the tables was just as organised and collaborative. In all situations the teacher took the role of 'facilitator'. She modelled, demonstrated and explained not just the procedure but the reasons; for example not just to 'tidy and clean the table' but also the need for cleanliness in case somebody draws a picture, the paper gets stained by a piece of food left from lunch and the child is upset and disappointed as he had promised to present it to his grand-dad after school that afternoon'.

At the end of each day the kindergarten children returned their chairs to the horse-shoe, put on their outdoor shoes and coats and sat on their seats, calmly chatting ready for dismissal. Together they said 'good afternoon' to their classmates. They then filed past their teacher who was kneeling by the door. Each stopped to bow and say 'Good afternoon Teacher'; at eye-level the teacher nodded a bow to each child individually in return as she said to the child (for example) 'Good afternoon Miss Yukka'

As explained above the qualitative data were confirmed to be representative of other kindergartens in Japan based on previous field visits in other regions, discussions, video material and research literature. Data from my previous field visits, obtained in other regions, principally took the form of video footage of classroom observations and some jottings made during conversations with colleagues from the university and schools in those regions. The following is one example of retained evidence in the form of retrospective field notes made following an elementary school lesson that had been captured on video during a previous study visit to Japan:

"Oak Elementary: Year 1 class (7 year-olds). Maths lesson – subtraction to 10. Children seated in separate lidded desks, in two's, facing front of class. Long whiteboard; lots of large magnetic shapes and pics. Lesson interactive – using rabbit magnets for very practical subtracting. Children engaged, enjoying. Teacher very smiley, challenges them, expects all respond. Children call out ideas/suggestions. Loud. Very verbal approach – children have control."

This style of pedagogy was seen to be replicated many times, both my previous study visits in Japan and in Study 4. There was a consistency in informal, practical and oral approaches which triangulated with the explanations of educators in the schools and the university focus group.

Study 4 also involved observations of participants undertaking the research tasks. Further consistency was seen when the staff in each kindergarten organised the participating children into short 'queues', seated on a small row of chairs ready for their turn. They waited calmly and patiently, chatting cheerfully to their classmates. Due to the collaborative nature of most of their usual classroom activities they were not used to undertaking activities alone on an individual basis. Furthermore, they were not required to do tasks for assessment purposes as this is against the theory and philosophy of Japanese nursery and early years education. The belief is in children learning collaboratively and in teachers observing their social and linguistic development in naturalistic situations. The teachers and head teacher had therefore been curious to know how they would react, wondering whether or not they would be able to understand such 'dis-embedded' questions in an unfamiliar situation and whether they would fully participate.

For all of the above reasons as the young participants left their classmates to join the researcher they were initially quiet, nevertheless noting the familiar toys that had been set out on the small table for reassurance. What made an immediate impression on each of the research assistants was how each child looked directly and deeply at her, appearing to consider whether or not she liked and trusted the assistant, with some not speaking or responding at first. Being Japanese, the assistants were aware of two factors at play: i) that the individual situation was unfamiliar to the kindergarten children; and ii) that the Japanese culture involves getting to know newcomers well before making any commitment to a relationship whilst always being polite. The issue was soon overcome however, partly because the assistants had made themselves known to all of the children and mainly because they were all skilled in communicating with and interesting the children, initially with the colourful toys. Thereafter the activities were conducted with ease and the participants responded well and not one refused.

The reaction of the staff who had observed the activities was one of surprise that the children responded so positively and openly in lone tasks. The teachers said that they had learned something new, that the children could act independently and 'strongly'; this led to much subsequent discussion amongst themselves and with the research team. The

positive and open response of the participants supported the reliability and validity of the results.

7.9.6.1 Analysis and Comment on Kindergarten Observations C [1-3]

The following provides an analysis of 3 linked observations conducted in a kindergarten (Appendix 14): On approaching the kindergarten setting in the morning it was noticeable to see a neat, unsupervised line of children arriving at school in a well-mannered and orderly way. Each child formed a caterpillar like formation clad with satchels on their back. It was evident to see a neat and safe arrangement which involved crossing a busy road on exit from the local railway station from which the children had travelled. Discreetly following at the back was an adult who ensured no one was left straddling at the end of the line.

As the children entered the grounds adjacent to the kindergarten the playground was well prepared with several activities ready for children to opt in to. This ensured no time wastage. On arrival children disbanded from their entrance and knew exactly where to leave their outdoor clothes and bags; each having their own personal locker and shoe box to change into their plimsolls. There were no instructions from an adult. Everyone was encouraged to get involved immediately through well practised routines which functioned like clockwork and were happy to meet with friends in a noisy and enthusiastic hubbub of noise and excitement. There were clear boundaries as to how the children should conduct themselves with maximised resources and choices of activity ready on arrival encouraging individual need and group work.

Other children who chose more strenuous exercise or cycling carefully took the bikes out from their racks, clearly treating the equipment with care and respect. Children who were good at cycling, especially uni-cycling, demonstrated their agility in a safe area which also had parallel support bars for novices to try it out within a stable environment. All children patiently took turns and watched each other and often commented as to how they could improve their technique. They praised each other for their efforts in what was a positive and challenging activity.

On the perimeter of the playground, gardening groups had already been working, nurturing, watering and tending to plants in a systematic way. Some of the children were monitors who were given responsibility, for co-ordinating this activity. Each had their own job to carry out and took responsibility, donning the correct apparel, such as gardening gloves, overalls and face masks. Equipment was taken from a storage area which was well labelled. There was also a rota in the area indicating who was leading the group for

the day. Equipment was tidied away when completed in a calm manner. The whole activity was executed independently without adult supervision, though the kindergarten teacher's presence observed the success of the activity almost from a distance. No instructions were given orally and children had to rely on each other with scaffolding from pre-prepared wall charts, pictures and diagrams and a chores list.

Surrounding the kindergarten were varieties of creatures some in tanks such as crayfish, a hen in a pen who had an injured wing and a turtle in an open pond. Some children were routinely feeding the creatures, cleaning out the tanks where necessary rarely with the help of a teacher. The teacher merely prompted a few questions, for example, regarding the hen; 'Do you think the hen is getting better? How can we improve her condition?' Such questions encouraged the children to take ownership and responsibility for the problem. One child responded, 'Yuka is improving because she is in a pen on her own and has space to move around. We feed her well and take it in turns. We talk about her amongst ourselves so we know what to do next. I also sing to her.'

Another group were having a beetle race and had built a complex walkway for the creatures made of paper straws among foliage. They had stop watches and were calculating how long the beetles took to climb in and out of the lush environment. They recorded their attempts, taking care not to harm the creatures or overcrowd the scene. Natural curiosity and discovery prompted much conversation and laughter as the beetles appeared to be quite proficient at tightrope walking as they persevered with the activity!

In all the above activity choices there was an atmosphere of co-operation and collaboration with kindergarten staff handing over the exploration and learning to the children in a secure and optimally resourced area, related to shared, daily life routines. Everyone was occupied, allowing for a child centred approach with varied opportunities for sustained conversations and interaction; a happy and energetic atmosphere with something for everyone at all levels putting in maximum efforts to succeed.

Observation C.1: Music Activity

This was a pro-active outdoor music activity which began with 3 child monitors. One fulfilled the role of an 'orchestra' conductor. He donned a coloured cap to protect him from the sun as he stood on a small, moveable rostrum opposite 6 children who formed a mini percussion orchestra, assembled to take the lead from the boy. They chose cymbals, bells, tambourines and wooden clacking instruments, which monitors had laid out in clearly labelled baskets for them to choose from. The 2 remaining monitors took their

roles. A girl held two coloured fluffy hand pompoms and prepared to dance to the music which she was about to switch on.

The third monitor pointed to a blackboard drawing attention to 20 cartoon pictures telling the story of the song in sequence with a small amount of writing under each caption. Children firstly had to listen to the song then assemble the order of the narrative to match the song they listened to. Then they repeated the whole sequence singing along with the music. The orchestra were attentive and worked as a team intently taking the lead from the conductor who indicated how the group needed to observe him and pay attention to the story line as well as play their instruments in time to the beat. He explained the second monitor would also help them to keep time if they lost their place. A kindergarten assistant hovered in the background waiting to swap the pompoms for two coloured ribbons which she would pass to the girl in the second part of the song when the child indicated to her the right time to do so.

After the first-run through the conductor asked the children how they felt the performance had gone and how it could be improved. One child said 'I liked to follow the story best when I played my bells. I wanted to watch the pompoms and how Kiko danced and found it hard to do everything at once.' The conductor asked the rest 'What can she do?' The monitor pointing to the story said 'Follow me first then when we do it again follow the pompoms.'

This activity demanded multi-tasking. It led to some interesting conversations which highlighted how the task affected various participants. Some of the evaluative comments arrived at ensured for an improved performance and the processes which led to this emphasised the children's agenda and gave value to children's reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the activity. The roles of the monitors facilitated the group's responses both musically and orally regarding the importance of feedback to enhance performance. A mother remained in the background throughout the performance and clapped at the final concert. The activity gained momentum with more children waiting their turn to join in. The activity was open ended. After a long session of 30 minutes, the children swapped roles giving the conductor a break and allowed a different child to copy his role model of how an orchestra and his assistants cooperate with their leader.

Observation C.2: Water Play

In contrast to the orchestra, this was a quieter outdoor activity for a smaller group of 4 children, 2 boys and 2 girls, collected a large bucket and filled it with water. One child went to get 4 colour-coded plastic cups to hand out to each of the team. Another child

collected a bag of small coloured jewel-like chippings and poured them into the water. There was much excitement at the colours and amount of chippings which plopped into the water. The conversation which took place showed a sharing, caring attitude to include everyone.

Children were interested in each other and were excited to talk about what they had done. One child was not as dextrous as the others and clumsily dropped the gems back into the water which created a spontaneous fun like atmosphere with one boy encouraging her to try again. Everyone in the group helped and supported each other. The activity was sustained for 20 minutes. All children were fully engaged with the task and regularly asked each other how they thought they were getting on. There was allowance for mistakes which added to the fun. All children tidied up at the end and washed the equipment and their hands, still talking about what they had experienced. The activity gave them many reasons to talk more about it later.

Observation C.3: Building an aeroplane

This was an activity which was cumulative. It was an example of a smaller activity which built into a larger project over 3 days. It started with 4 children working indoors constructing their own aeroplanes out of cardboard boxes, newspaper and sellotape. The children started with a cubed design modelled in a Maths lesson by the teacher the previous day. They decided to add cubes which acted as the body of the plane and stuck on integral wings. All worked as a team as they had to hold the models in place for each other to put on the sellotape. Other children from outside became interested in the group's work and they also started to join in. One suggested they could build a runway out of some plastic PE equipment which was stored at the side of the classroom. They carefully did this and continued to make a hangar out of 3 hula hoops as they interwove a story around the objects. This was followed by suggestions from the children that they could paint their planes to distinguish one from another.

The conversations that ensued highlighted the technological problems of how to refine the plane. One child suggested to the teacher that the whole class could be involved in the project. The teacher took the initiative and called the class together for a meeting. She encouraged the original core group to exhibit their planes with each child explaining in front of the class how the designs evolved and the individual features of each. Children took ownership of the whole project suggesting how certain features of the models could be improved and complimented each other on their achievements. Extension of thinking skills through problem solving was evident with one child suggesting integrating artwork

from a different perspective; an aerial view of what the passengers on the plane might see from the sky to the ground below.

In the above case, open time limits were given to a larger project based on a more complex play situation which encompassed in depth problem solving from a real life context which was meaningful to the whole class. There was little formal instruction and no writing. Peers offered positive criticism to each other. Children listened to each other attentively in a co-operative whole class dynamic of giving and receiving ideas, with praise for each other's contributions demonstrating an inclusive ethos.

Overview of the observations

Overall, reflecting on the above activities in both the kindergarten and elementary classroom observations, key principles appeared to provide continuity in vision and learning processes. The nurturing of children's relationships to each other and secondly, the building of group work potential and capacity, through the dynamic interaction and participation for all. It is interesting to note the teacher's role in the above learning process. She maintains a low key presence with little direct teaching, allowing the children themselves to explore the theme, topic or activity. This served to allow in depth and sustained talk to develop through the natural environment and problem solving activities arising through spontaneous events. She also acted as an observer and facilitator. She knew where and when to intervene, although minimally, in the sense of noticing what may lead to a more in depth project such as the building of the aeroplane, linking an incidental activity into a larger scale project or enterprise generated by the children's motivation and interest to explore a theme further. It was possible to observe how this empowered learners and gave confidence and prestige to what was initially a seed of an idea.

Turning this into a full scale enterprise demonstrated children's reflection on their learning, highlighting key features of individuals' work to the whole class. It also facilitated self-management and the children's ability to work towards a more refined blueprint as in the original model of the plane; that is, the creation of the airport context and accurate design ideas as in the identification of the Japanese red and white flag as a logo on one of the exhibits. The 'light touch' contingent questioning role modelled by the teacher encouraged children to articulate and extend ideas more elaborately, with children taking the lead themselves in asking their peers how and why ideas came about 'Is the model finished?' This was followed by their genuine mutual evaluation of efforts put into the tasks and ways in which further extension work might enhance learning. There was a total absence of rewards and punishments by the teacher. The whole class were fully engaged in the process and appeared to be confident in their ownership of it.

7.9.6.2 Qualitative Analysis of Elementary School Observations

The following is an overview and analysis of a lesson observed in an elementary school taken by a pupil who is nearly eight years of age. The lesson is classed as 'Human Relationships' as it is a session in which a child leads the learning of classmates and supports them with activities, asking questions and reflection. Although not taking place every day such lessons are a regular occurrence and the role of the class teacher is typical and representative of the other teachers and lessons observed during this and previous study visits to Japan.

[Please refer to the detailed observation notes for this lesson, Observation A, to be found in Appendix 15].

Observation A: Haruki's lesson in elementary school: Context, Analysis and Comments

The teacher introduces the lesson at the start and takes a lead role in introducing the theme of the lesson on alkalines and acids with ease and confidence. It is interesting to note the children's supportive body language in encouraging Haruki to speak up by hand gestures. They are conscious not to interrupt the flow of his thinking by calling out that they cannot all hear him addressing them. Both Haruki and the class self-regulate their own behaviours so the teaching may begin.

At this point, the teacher scaffolds the main theme of the lesson as a support and reinforces Haruki's chosen topic after which time she almost becomes one of the class members herself adopting the role of assistant who moves into the sidelines giving Haruki a leadership role. The Toban system is also witnessed as Haruki introduces his two monitors who have delegated responsibilities; one a resource helper and observer and the other a girl who acts as a scribe, noting down on the blackboard all oral contributions which make any thinking about the topic transparent. This is a team approach. The teacher is a discreet presence in the room however she does praise the qualities of persistence and elaboration in the way the children articulate and extend their ideas in public.

Haruki organises the experiment well with the aid of his helper, he shares out the liquids so the children may actively engage with the subject matter. Children spontaneously call out, for example, the colours the paper turns on the liquid. Haruki provides an excellent role model, listens well to children's feedback and responds to ideas. He also probes further by asking interrogative questions to prompt the children's thinking further, 'Why not pick another colour?' The lesson appears light hearted and fun, but with in- depth learning taking place and the development of conceptual understanding as children build on each

other's ideas, their strengths and needs in a public forum. All children are engaged in the task as they talk about things that are working for them and problems they encounter in a 'butsukariai' manner known as bumping into each other. At the same time Haruki reflects on how the whole class are working and is conscious that some children are working at a slower pace, for example, 'some haven't finished yet.'

The final 15 minutes of the lesson is devoted to a plenary leading on to the children's reflections and evaluations of the lesson. This is well timed and dialogue with peers is skilfully and remarkably sustained. Children listen to each other well and question misconceptions such as 'why does lemon juice and vinegar turn pink and baking powder turn blue? Many children call out a range of answers now talking in turn. Haruki facilitates more questioning, 'any more questions?' One child elaborates 'if we didn't use red cabbage would the paper change colour?'

Affective praise is used by one girl who openly comments that she thought the presentation was well done and comments on Haruki's teaching style, 'it included experimenting with others and also involved information sharing with us', she positively states. Haruki also comments modestly on his own shortcomings empowering the peer group's feelings about their learning, 'at first I was worried if it worked or not but it worked.' Further discussion lends to comparative answers with thinking of a high standard, 'you can compare it'. His approach is inclusive and encouraging, 'do it at home'. Towards the end of the plenary one child is concerned about taking her work home.

Towards the last section of the period the teacher subtly moves to the front of the room in order to invite children who may not have participated during the lesson and give them an opportunity to contribute: 'Who didn't speak today in the lesson?' Comments by 3 children are made with a range of questions including factual, exploratory and evaluative. The teacher then brings the lesson to a formal close. She praises Haruki and states that the lesson was 'a great achievement for us all.' She also comments that it is the level of challenge which makes the Masterclass prestigious and conveys a sense of high expectations of new knowledge well received and well met. This appeared to confirm an appropriate role model for future presentations and learning.

Within this half hour lesson, it is interesting to compare several points of continuity linking to observations conducted in the kindergartens. The kindergarten cultivated a social and ethical curriculum through daily routines, care towards nature and the nurturing of creativity through an awareness of language and thinking, the elementary system shows continuity in educating the whole person. Belief in working towards key goals of being friendly, not giving up, having energy and developing self-regulation balance socio-

emotional goals with academic learning. Reasoning through group talk is acted out on many levels, related to thinking of others, intersubjectivity, developing a sense of audience and purpose in the manner language is used to respond to others, appreciating nature and contributing to groups and society as a whole.

This sense of belonging and identity is aimed at further developing the nurturing of children's relationships from the pre-school years in an informed manner into elementary education by building on group work skills and capacity.

7.9.6.2.1 Overview and analysis of school observations

The Toban system of rotating leadership was observed consistently across the kindergarten and elementary settings. It appeared to demonstrate children's respect for self and others living in natural harmony without force (*shizen ni and muri naku*) purporting to the development of global citizenship. In all classes observed 4 key elements appeared consistent across the curriculum, triangulated by the content of the teachers' meeting recorded see section 7.9.6.5 below) the first is 'tomodachi' or friendship. Within groups children are encouraged to develop a sense of unity through empathy; how individuals' reactions may affect the thoughts and feelings of others. This is enhanced by 'hansei' or reflection. Not only being aware of others but articulating how tasks were carried out in a group and might be improved was paramount and embedded in practice. This lent to a meta-cognitive approach through problem-solving or 'mondaizukuri' and the development of open personal relationships.

Thirdly, 'gambaru' or persistence is important. The lesson observations showed how children could improve their work and creations by listening to positive criticism conveyed in a motivating way so as children did not lose face but were encouraged by their peers to try harder to improve their work. This was carried out with 'genki' or energy. Spontaneity and fun are inherent in the learning process.

Finally, there was consistent evidence of children learning to develop self-regulation, particularly 'jibun no koto o jibun de suru', translated as 'taking care of your own responsibilities.' This covers a wide range of responsibilities, in this context those pertaining to: i) the physical organisation in the environment; ii) the use and care of resources; iii) time management, plus iv) rotas and schedules which clearly require children to decide on what roles they will be required to perform. All of these add up to developing autonomy in the context of an early education that is underpinned by moral reasoning in preparation for lifelong learning, involving both children and teachers. All the ideas contribute to building what Abiko (2010) defines as 'totality of character' in the context of 'receptive social competence'.

7.9.6.3 Results of Parent Interviews

Of the 55 questionnaires distributed in the UK nurseries, 34 were returned. Of the 55 distributed in the Japanese kindergarten, all 55 were returned. As the following tables illustrate, differences were found in the values that English and Japanese parents attached to the activities they carry out with their children. Some of the questions related more directly to 'education', such as reading, whilst other questions were less overt, asking about activities around the home, such as mealtimes. Chi Square tests showed that the extent of these differences varied in statistical significance.

Firstly, a look at the questions which focused more clearly on 'education'. Table 7.3 below shows that whilst three-quarters of the English parents attached great importance to reading with their child, 100 per cent of the Japanese did so (Pearson Chi-Square = 14.22, df = 2, p = 0.001).

Table 7.3 Frequencies of parents' responses to the value of reading books with their child (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	2	6	26
Japanese N=55	0	0	55
Total	2	6	81

The next question to which the parents' answers differed significantly is a matter which is culturally related. Table 7.4 below shows that whereas English parents had mixed views on the value of children attending classes or clubs, all of the Japanese parents awarded this great importance (Pearson Chi-Square = 66.08, df = 2, p = 0.000). Attendance at classes is often mentioned in relation to Japanese children, but not always those of this young age.

Table 7.4 – Frequencies of parents' responses to the value of extra classes or clubs (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	11	17	6
Japanese N=55	0	0	55
Total	11	17	61

Strong cultural differences are also seen amongst parents in relation to their children using the computer and watching television, both of which can have educational value. Table 7.5 below shows that whereas over two-thirds of the English parents value children spending time on the computer, the vast majority of Japanese parents awarded this little or no importance (Pearson Chi-Square = 23.78, df = 2, p = 0.000).

Table 7.5 – Frequencies of parents’ responses to the value of their child using the computer for play or study (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	8	23	3
Japanese N=55	41	14	0
Total	49	37	3

The difference was even starker in relation to watching television. Table 7.6 shows, as below, that almost every Japanese parent considered watching television to be of no value at all. In contrast, around fifty per cent of the English awarded it of some or great importance (Pearson Chi-Square = 18.9, df = 2, p = 0.000).

Table 7.6 Frequencies of parents’ responses to the value of their child watching television (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	22	11	1
Japanese N=55	54	1	0
Total	76	12	1

Japanese parents attached to talk however were significant, as shown in Table 7.7 below. All of the Japanese parents awarded ‘reflecting on actions for developing talk’ great importance, with the vast majority declaring it to be ‘highly important’. This compared to just over a half of English parents, who had more mixed views including around a fifth stating reflection to be of little or no importance (Pearson Chi-Square = 22.98, df = 2, p = 0.000). This may well relate to the traditional Japanese practice of reflection or ‘hansei’, discussed earlier.

Table 7.7 Frequencies of parents' responses to: 'how important is the child reflecting on his/her actions for developing talk?' (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	7	8	19
Japanese N=55	0	2	53
Total	7	10	72

A possible relationship between cultural and child-rearing practices may be reflected in the finding that almost all of the English and Japanese parents considered that children helping them in the home was generally important for developing talk, with no significant differences (Pearson Chi-Square = 1.84, df = 2, $p = .4$ [ns]; $U = 874$, $p = .43$ [ns]). The reasons for this are not clear-cut however; it may have been that children helping parents was not seen as a worthwhile activity in itself for such young children, that parents' time is not well spent on this or that such activities do not generate valuable types of talk. In all cases this finding contrasts markedly with the significant Japanese response to the question regarding 'the value of talk' shown above.

A similar response was found regarding talk at mealtimes, shown in Table 7.8 below, where there were no significant differences between parents in the two countries (Pearson Chi-Square = 6.09). The Japanese response may again have reflected cultural differences, in particular a variation in child-rearing practices. At mealtimes in Japan there is closer adherence to manners and eating, with Japanese parents paying close attention to teaching children how to eat different dishes 'correctly' and how to use bowls, plates and chopsticks in the correct manner.

Table 7.8 - Frequencies of parents' responses to 'how important is talk at mealtimes?' (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	5	8	21
Japanese N=55	1	11	43
Total	6	19	64

Differences between countries were noted when it came to activities which involved children interacting with other people. For example in Table 7.9 below it can be seen that parents valued mostly highly the time their children spent playing with friends (Pearson Chi-Square = 10.41, df = 2, p = 0.001).

Table 7.9 – Frequencies of parents’ responses to the value of their child playing with friends (N=89)

	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	6	28
Japanese N=55	0	55
Total	6	83

Whereas some value was attached by English parents to children playing with groups of friends, all of the Japanese saw this to be of importance (see Table 7.10 below), with the majority seeing it as highly important Pearson Chi-Square tests show the differences to be highly significant (- 16.05, df = 2, p = 0.000).

Table 7.10 Frequencies of parents’ responses to: ‘how important is the child playing games in groups?’ (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	8	5	21
Japanese N=55	0	19	36
Total	8	24	57

The same applied regarding children spending time with grandparents, seen below (overleaf) in Table 7.11. This showed that almost all of the Japanese parents attach great importance to this in contrast to less than half of the English parents. The results of a Pearson Chi-Square test finds the difference to be significant (18.92, df =1, p = 0.000).

Table 7.11 Frequencies of parents' responses to the value of their child spending time with grand-parents (N=89)

	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	19	15
Japanese N=55	7	48
Total	26	63

In another social activity, that of parents playing with their child, there was no statistically significant disagreement between English and Japanese parents. 100 per cent of the Japanese thought this important and almost all of the English. Similarly, no significant differences were found in responses regarding children playing outdoors, both agreeing at just below and above 80 per cent. It may be that the question was unclear and that responses may have been more decisive if a particular outdoor activity had been mentioned.

The final set of results reflects two aspects examined in previous questions: i) children learning and ii) children learning with or without support: the value of letting their child study alone. To recap, Japanese parents' responses to questions concerning education were highly positive, as were their responses to other activities at which children were accompanied. In contrast in the matter of children 'studying on their own' Japanese parents did not rate this as highly important; they rated it lower than for any other issue apart from use of the computer and television.

Table 7.12 Frequencies of parents' responses to the value of letting their child learn/study alone (N=89)

	Of little or no importance	Of some importance	Highly important
English N=34	5	16	13
Japanese N=55	9	20	26
Total	14	36	39

However, the difference in the responses of English and Japanese parents to this question, as can be seen in Table 7.12 above, was not statistically different (Pearson Chi-Square = 1.023, df = 2, p = 0.6 ns). What cannot be deduced is the reason for the similar response-rate such as, perhaps, the age of the children.

Arguably, overall the views of English parents and Japanese parents appear reasonably distinct. The Japanese parents valued activities in the home in relation to the degree of communication and collaboration involved for the child. It was less about the nature of the activity or material, such as the meal, the computer, the television or the game, and more about the opportunity it provided for one to one interaction. The differences identified are statistically significant however it is the interpretation and the values that are under discussion. This is a matter discussed in more detail below and informed by the qualitative data.

7.9.6.4 Results of Informal Conversations with Kindergarten Staff

The data presented here represents a summary of the impromptu conversations that took place with kindergarten staff such as the cook, the visiting peripatetic teacher, ground staff, cleaners, assistants etc. In the course of the nursery day they often approached the research team to offer a comment or explanation about the children's play, equipment, activities and achievement. This was not expected to such an extent but was greatly valued as it indicated the 'whole school' and community approach to the education of the child in Japan.

The following are examples of conversations. During a noisy outdoor musical percussion event, with children beating instruments along with taped music, a kitchen hand tapped my shoulder to say (in Japanese) 'They like this a lot, they're all having real fun. This is the conductor (pointing to a four year-old moving a baton in time) she's really skilful, she's very good at it and they're learning how to stay in time with the music.' She nodded, seeming pleased to share her knowledge about the children's progress and cooperation.

In a different kindergarten the security officer, a uniformed young man wearing white gloves and cap with a badge, acknowledged the team's arrival in the early morning. He came up to point out and explain that the young children in the adjoining elementary school (aged seven upward) were arriving together as 'good, trusted friends', then pointed towards a garden in the corner at the front of the school. He informed us 'They are looking after the garden, learning to use the tools well. They must know that it's important to care for their school and our world.'

During lunch-times children sat to eat together then tidied away before cleaning the tables in pairs and washing the floors. At the end of the day partners put on the plastic 'Toilet slippers' and set about washing down the toilets and tiled floors. An assistant who noted our interest came over to talk us through it: 'Young children must learn how to look after themselves, after all when they are older they will have to do it. If they don't clean it and

the toilet is dirty they won't like it and nor will their friends. They are also caring for each other when they do these jobs in school.'

In addition to the information provided by these staff we also noted the similar, detailed set of shared values and explanations that they were able to give based on developing young children's sense of responsibility and care. The adults' own use of narrative and explanations was also noted, alongside care attention for us as visitors and researchers.

7.9.6.5 Extracts from Educators' Focus Group Discussion held at University

Present: Minister of Education (Nara area), University Professor, Japanese Researcher, Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, Teacher, English Researcher

HT: Each elementary has its own unique context, however there are 4 consistent principles at the core of pre-school and elementary Japanese Education which focus on the education and development of the whole child. These are: friendship (tomodachi), persistence (gambaru), energy (genki) and self-regulation (nakayoku) and reflection (hansei). The yochien (kindergarten) and elementary environments provide a rich and interesting context for the application of knowledge through doing; activities in which children join together are always used.

UP: Friendship and relationships are the condition for this. Conversation involves more than the understanding of the other as an object of knowledge or framing the other in one's own perspective. Moreover it is a matter of mutual learning, by being attentive to others. Being open minded to others can both extend one's own thinking and those of others. This is an active problem solving approach to learning and understanding, dating back to Dewey's thoughts and writings.

DHT: 'Genki', known as zest for life is both a vision and an active learning process. It is a philosophy which places group dynamics and cooperation at the heart of the learning process. Those in the child's immediate circle known as kin friends help the child to resolve conflict through talk, turn taking and reflection.

UP: In Japanese education our context is important. Recent events such as the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and the devastating Tsunami of 2011, reconfirms our need to place humanity at the heart of the educational process. We need to work towards a more balanced, relaxed and developmental curriculum in tune with real life. This involves valuing human endeavour over skills and abilities which I know are emphasised in the West. Hence, the idea of persistence to do the best we can for the good of the whole group and the individuals who belong in it is a key factor in children's development and

learning.

JR: Yes everyone joins in a continuous dialogue transparent to all. It is interesting to notice how the teacher's role facilitates this process as you observe activities in both of our yochien and elementary school. We discuss this philosophy in our university tutorials as we must really understand this purpose. This approach is known as a 'wet' (uetto) as opposed to a dry (dorai) style. The former idea involves expressing feelings, affective responses and reflection towards learning in contrast to a more rational response of just giving a correct answer.

ME: It is important to listen to the understanding of teachers and how they can improve participation for all. Parents also have ownership of how this can be improved in open discussions. They are also invited in to ceremonies and lessons to observe how their children may learn and how all can contribute. The Moral Curriculum underpins this; it encourages reflection, empathy and reciprocation towards each other. Reasoning and hansei are very important in this, from the earliest years and our teachers are always working on this.

7.10 Reflection

City, suburban and semi-rural environments were selected for the study to represent what was usual in education at the kindergarten stage. In each school generous and open opportunities were given to look at a typical day, including scenes of arrival and departure, indoor and outdoor play, children, parents and teachers. Examples of parents and children saying goodbye and of pupils communicating and cooperating were collected. Recordings of teachers facilitating action, listening to children, comforting and encouraging good communication and relationships were important data. Videotaping provided essential evidence although there are compromises in collecting such information. The observations provided in the main text capture how Japanese staff facilitate extensive, qualitative opportunities for true collaboration and exploratory talk. There is a deliberate move by teachers to ensure equality amongst pupils; whilst appearing to take a passive role, often at the side of the class, they do so in order to place the children in a higher position to give them the right and confidence to take the lead. Observation A in the elementary school shows Haruki leading science activities he has planned at home. He is helped by two friends, the purpose of the lesson being 'the development of human relationships', encouraging children to help each other to learn and in doing so develop 'self-regulation' and reflect upon their experience of leading the session and what they learned. The session ends with time allocated to children's

reflections and evaluations of the lesson. Observation B involves teacher and children in a concrete re-experiencing of a study-visit to the fire station (see Appendix 16).

The action research observations, records and collaborative discussions shared by the staff involved in both countries showed that, while the 'everyday' nature of both enquiries with children prompted a good response rate, the English children and the Japanese children responded at different levels. We considered whether, according to the socio-cultural interpretive paradigm, this reflects a culturally-developed awareness of how to communicate in response to the 'everyday' content of the material and to the demands of two different narrative genres. It may also suggest that children are less able to communicate their interpretations of facts and re-tell a story if they do not possess the mental schema, including applying narrative structures, or emerging language with which to make sense of the situations and express meaning. Whether this is a 'weak point' for UK children would need to be investigated further i.e. when dealing with information gaps and 'missing pieces' in conversation and when communicating using narratives (Bruner, 1986).

The views of parents regarding their children's learning greatly informed and enhanced my understanding of how children enter school in the Japanese cultural context and the early beginnings of education are of great interest. The views of the parents clearly reflected those of educators in their own country. The study has, uniquely, accessed the values and pedagogical beliefs of kindergarten staff which have contributed to a clear picture. The relative values placed on individuality, collaboration, communication and cooperation emerged alongside styles of school talk, cultural values and goals. Classroom observations revealed a high level of knowledge and skill among kindergarten and elementary school staff in the domain of interaction, inter-subjectivity, communication and support learners' for narrative structures. Triangulation of the findings, including the background of children's responses in the language interviews, focuses attention on the very nature of theory, values and professional practice embedded in the initial education of teachers in both countries.

7.11 Discussion

The research questions posed for this study can now be addressed in a discussion of the design, administration, results and analyses. In answer to the first question, the activities were designed to appeal to the children so that they would be keen to participate. They were also designed to make sense to them as the content was based on situations which

are familiar to them in their everyday lives. The use of story, and its retelling, interested and involved the children ensuring full participation. Consistency of results for individual children on the story re-telling and everyday knowledge tasks appears to confirm that they are, amongst others, good indicators of learning potential as children respond by reproducing known information according to their cognitive and linguistic abilities. Cultural features that provided 'meaning' in the tasks were retained for both groups of children (Anastasi, 1988, p.298).

The findings overall suggest that pupils are less likely to be able to communicate their interpretations of facts or re-tell a story if they do not have the mental schema for narrative structures or the language with which to make sense of the situation and express meaning. Both capacities relate to dealing with information gaps, inferring the 'missing pieces' in conversation gaps and communicating using narratives (Bruner, 1986). Both kinds of difficulties were found among secondary school students, including those in a more socially advantaged area where this might not be immediately apparent.

Elsewhere, in young English and Japanese participants' narrative competences in everyday knowledge and story-retelling tasks a correlation was found between responses to questions by both the English children and the Japanese children. It seems unlikely that this was because both sets of children did not understand the spoken language as all were able to respond to the questions. Instead it seems likely that, according to socio-cultural theory, they were not aware of how to communicate in response to the 'everyday' content of the material and the demands of the two different narrative genres.

From a qualitative aspect however, Japanese children were found to be more adept at forming lengthier narratives in their story responses. Their responses consistently showed that they were able to recognise the conventions that are required in the assembly of meaning. As research shows, extended narratives are generally associated with more elaborated thought. It may be considered that the low level of everyday knowledge of the English children in the nurseries relates to aspects of the data obtained with the English secondary school students in Study 2. There appear to be implications for classroom pedagogy at all stages of education and these are considered in the Conclusion in Chapter 8.

Thirdly, the views of parents regarding their children's learning greatly informed and enhanced our understanding of how children enter school in other cultural contexts. Japan was selected as a country amongst a small number in which educational and industrial performances consistently exceed that of the UK (Ofsted, 2012) and the early beginnings of education are therefore of great interest. The views of the parents clearly

reflected those of educators in their own country. For example, the surprisingly little emphasis in academic instruction found in the Japanese kindergartens compared to England also appeared to be directly reflected in the responses of Japanese parents and other staff, all of whom stressed collaboration, communication and cooperation. Relaxed but ordered and collaborative parenting and education was aimed towards good communicative competence as confirmed by the questionnaire responses, observations and informal conversations.

Fourthly the study has, uniquely, accessed the views of nursery staff which have contributed to a clear picture against which to compare educational outcomes, industry and society. Relaxed but ordered and collaborative Japanese kindergarten pedagogy emphasised good communicative competence as a strong base for later learning, as conveyed in Japanese parents' questionnaire responses and informal conversations. These features are not seen consistently in British nurseries and relate to UK educational and child-rearing philosophies. Particularly evident was the contrast between an emphasis on the individual child in the UK, and the Japanese emphasis on collaboration, communication and cooperation, seen in Japan. Informal conversations combined with extensive reading of the literature indicated a generally good level of adult awareness of the major shift required of young children when moving from informal home talk to the more formal styles of school talk. In particular the sensitive ways in which this process was supported and provided for in collaboration between parents and educators.

Activities in the Japanese kindergartens and elementary schools were concrete to promote a meta-cognitive approach to problem-solving is taken and 'gambaru' or persistence is important. This was carried out with 'genki' or energy. Spontaneity and fun are inherent in the learning process and children are thereby openly encouraged to develop a sense of group unity, empathy and intersubjectivity, to consider and verbalise how one's reactions may affect the thoughts and feelings of others. There was consistent evidence of children learning to develop self-regulation, particularly 'jibun no koto o jibun de suru' or 'taking care of your own responsibilities'. This included the teachers' response to squabbles and disagreements, when they handed responsibility to the children, patiently waiting for them to calm down, reflect and openly discuss the disagreement and resolution. This is enhanced by 'mondaizukuri', the establishment of open personal relationships and 'hansei' or reflection in which narratives capture how tasks were carried out in a group and might be improved. The lesson observations showed how children could improve their work and creations by listening to positive criticism conveyed in a

motivating way so as children did not lose face but were encouraged by their peers to try harder to improve their work.

The results of this study suggest that it is the shared cultural values and goals that provide the strong base of communicative competence and thinking found in Japan, known to be the key to learning about written words and numbers. This finding suggests that this reflects the strong and consistent foundation for later learning and success in Japan laid at an early age. UK children have to acquire the skills of personal development such as communication, narrative competence and reasoning in the home with parents and family to prepare them for school. In Japan, classroom observations revealed a high level of knowledge and skill of its staff in the domain of interaction, communication and the development of learners' narrative structures. The high level was consistent throughout all of the nurseries visited during both this and previous projects. This single finding, against the background of all the results, appears to focus attention on the very nature of theory, values and professional practice embedded in the initial education of teachers in both countries.

The Japanese research process took place at the start of the school year so Japanese participants might have had less experience than the UK children. However many Japanese children start at a day kindergarten between the ages of one and two on a part-time basis, partly so that mothers can work but mostly because parents place great value on pre-school education. It may therefore be the case that the four to five year-old Japanese participants had had the same amount or more kindergarten experience than their UK nursery counterparts. If the results had shown that the Japanese participants demonstrated less knowledge this may have been relevant, but it was not the case. The large and significant difference between Japanese and English participants' responses to the combined language tasks, endorsed by the qualitative data from observations, showed that in this study the Japanese children were more vocal, whereas many of the English children found narrating events difficult and struggled to assemble information. The English nursery children's low level of everyday knowledge can be compared to that of the English secondary students from City and Bridge Schools. This is important as everyday knowledge is an important factor for both speakers and listeners when dealing with information gaps in conversation and narrative. As discussed earlier it provides the 'missing piece' in the information given (Bruner, 1986). This suggests that an examination of how and when 'everyday knowledge' is shared with young children in the UK, and whether this takes place in UK nurseries in the same structured way that everyday knowledge and narrative structures are shared with young children by both parents and educators in Japan.

In a global society involving international cooperation and collaboration this comparative study seeks to bring greater insights and understanding of both individual and group functions, and differing degrees of balance between the two. It respects cultural differences resulting in unmatched variables, and importing educational practices without such consideration is inappropriate. Nevertheless the above results appear to warrant wider examination in relation to international levels of performance in core or 'transversal' skills.

Being aware of diverse educational practices across a background of diverse cultures helped me to ensure that the design of the research made 'major efforts' to understand the 'production and dissemination of cultural ideas and practices' (Uskul and Kitayama, 2011) and challenge 'arbitrary, culture-bound, and taken-for-granted ideas about beliefs and practices.' The 'vertical collaboration' between researchers and the research assistants prompted 'mutual interrogation' (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007), i.e. conversations and debates between academics and HE students from both countries on matters regarding the educational processes observed. This was a particularly rich period for all the action researchers, as we shared the perspectives and knowledge of experienced English support assistants and teachers in nursery and secondary education in different socio-economic circumstances in quite different parts of the country as well as two generations of native Japanese educators, staff and parents in pre-school, elementary and university education. Their personal insights, perspectives, conversations and knowledge served to guide my subsequent observations and enquiries throughout the cycles of action research.

The collation and reflection period upon completing this study led, not only me, but also participating teachers, assistants and tutors, to focus on the content and style of teachers' education in the UK. Philosophy and psychology featured highly in discussions and collectively our thoughts turned to enquiring more deeply into the process by which new teachers are educated and trained.

My preparatory research in Japan over the preceding few years had included visits to universities, joining trainee teachers' lectures and seminars, some of their placements in schools, studying published video-recordings of school lessons and reading academic literature. I had scrutinised the published Japanese curriculum in addition to observing lessons and held follow-up meetings with participating teachers to analyse and discuss events and practices seen in the lessons observed. I have taken into account that working with selected participants in selected settings cannot represent all children and institutions in any country as there is no single, narrow approach to dealing with children and

variation is normal and that in issues of generalisation it is important to be reflective ('hansei') and reflexive.

It is not suggested that the success of the Japanese approach can be 'imported' and unproblematically adopted for use in the UK, as discussed above (see p.63). As the observations and analyses convey, Japan's pre-school and elementary school pedagogies both build upon and reflect culturally-specific ways of relating to and interacting with young children. The longitudinal studies conducted by Tobin, Wu and Hayashi (2011) in the pre-schools of three countries confirm that while some aspects of a nation's nursery-school practice change and develop, much of it remains consistent as it both replicates and reinforces key features of a nation's culture.

Abiko (2011, p.362) strongly argues for acknowledgement of the importance of 'kizuna' as bonds or ties as a form of 'social capital' that contributes to human learning activity. He refers to the 'essential usefulness and benefits of human relationships' which are seen in Japan to relate to relative educational success. This is characterised by three variables related to relationships: i) the school refusal ratio (an indicator of friendship bonds); ii) the divorce ratio (an indicator of parental bonds), and iii) the ratio of home ownership (an indicator of ties to neighbours and community). This theory could be seen as more persuasive than a simple association with economic status because human resources are more important than economic resources in the educational circumstances and the school context.

Yet borrowing such an analysis would be both disruptive and ineffective, and would at least demand a long-term approach to re-education for teachers and parents. Yet we could learn lessons from what we have in common and assess whether we need to think about our own attitude to the values which we all consider worthwhile for the greater good of humanity. As the review of literature and research findings in this thesis shows, there is a strong, international academic basis which supports Japanese early education pedagogy. This material, combined with the discussion and demonstration of classroom practice, could inform professional moves and how we might re-educate each other. Japanese education reflects practical humanist traditions such as 'wa' (harmony between man and nature) with a moral curriculum based on 'give and take' ('on and giri') upon which the Japanese have developed a strong 'group philosophy'. These influence the cognitive and linguistic processes planned for and developed through the social interaction skilfully applied by teachers in Japanese classrooms.

In the processes of collecting and analysing data there is no set 'general' meaning conveyed by facts themselves. As Yardley (2008, p.236) argues, when seeking to make

sense of reality we draw upon our personal beliefs to interpret data, exposing the reflexivity of our individual consciousness. With regard to generalisation, Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) argue that, in qualitative research, resulting theory can only be reflected upon to provide a theoretical explanation of the experiences of others in a similar situation or class of phenomena, rather than generalised to other populations.

Having experienced a wide range of Japanese preschool practices, customs and beliefs I then shared the data obtained to gain a broad and contextual view of accepted practice. I took up many opportunities in both Japan and the UK to discuss information with professionals who have worked in Japan's schools. On this basis I eventually came to understand that the pedagogies and practices that I had encountered were, in essence, representative of Japanese methods as they were based on the same pedagogical beliefs and principles. This included an informality related to the balance of power between teacher and taught, an inclusive approach to sharing ideas and knowledge, and the value of talk in learning.

CHAPTER 8 - REVIEW, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTION

This thesis has explored the relationship between students' learning problems and their difficulties at times to express and present themselves to others through cohesive narrative accounts. I argued that classroom studies suggest that research findings on the fundamental role of narrative and narrative thinking per se in children's learning, and teachers' communicative competences in supporting these processes, have yet to be taken fully into account, planned for or explored in sufficient depth in UK education.

8.1 A Review of the Action Research

In all four studies, ranging from secondary to nursery schools, as the researcher I have endeavoured to provide insights by interpreting findings triangulated through qualitative and quantitative data and a methodological heuristic. This journey has included working in a range of situations in which it appears some children are required to read and write at a level beyond which they can think and speak. The action research reported here has illuminated my biographical profile as researcher and the development of my identity through self-reflection and reflexivity. Secondly, it has attempted to enhance existing knowledge focusing on achieving inter-subjectivity through the development of narrative through exploratory discourse.

8.1.1 Findings of the Secondary School Studies

Collaboration with teaching colleagues in two contrasting secondary schools in the UK, conducting activities to gauge the thinking and narrative abilities of students in Years 7 and 8, showed that many participants experienced considerable delay in developing narrative structure and expression. At City School around eighty per cent of the Year 7 cohort had problems in constructing a narrative orally.

A further assessment conducted with the 200 students in Year 7 suggested that their cultural knowledge (Grice, 1975, p.89; Daniels, 2008) was poor, or at least patchy, for their age. This was a matter of concern considering the cultural basis of concepts in the secondary curriculum. Responding to a short test requiring brief answers and one sentence suggested that lack of knowledge was not the greatest problem for students, as similar limitations were revealed in their ability to structure and narrate events. I questioned whether some students knew the answers however as the questions were in a

dis-embedded and de-contextualised context they may have had no sense of interest or ownership.

At the same time, City School staff were asking to be supported in understanding their classroom communication difficulties. Informal discussions with support assistants and teachers revealed they felt they had had insufficient opportunities to reflect upon these matters in any detail. Subsequent support and knowledge transfer over a period of two terms led to increased confidence and working on cross-curricular developments with other staff to improve provision and teaching in both communication and literacy.

At Bridge R.C. Secondary, which had an ethos and specific focus on promoting personal abilities, and where students were from higher socio-economic bands and achieved well, staff participants were under pressure to implement an effective study skills programmes in a new centre and felt out of their comfort zones. Student participants too felt unsure that they had the necessary skills and did not feel equipped to enter the culture. Staff were later concerned to discover problems in the students' fundamental communicative competence and the oral ability to structure and narrate events. Using a five-week communication skills intervention (Cogs) with a group of children in City and Bridge secondary schools was positive with high levels of participation, enjoyment and collaboration. The post-test results showed a consistent and marked improvement in all areas of communication. Importantly, student participants recalled the value of the interventions 4 years later in City School.

In City School a second intervention, the strategy game of Go was trialled, involving dialogue and arguing the reasoning behind their moves and how these played out. The third, control group, had not begun the carousel of extra-curricular activities. Go participants showed consistent gains in post-tests of around 60 per cent, suggesting that opportunities to communicate with structured support may improve narrative thinking, the ability to assemble ideas and to improve expression in the short term.

In Bridge Secondary's new Study Centre the second intervention group was Self-directed. Students investigated and researched a theme, discussing and collaborating if they chose but preparing a report independently. The third, comparison, group was Task-based, researching and preparing a report independently under supervision. Only the communication intervention Cogs resulted in gains in Conduct, the most 'advanced' of the criteria since they are accumulative, calling upon all elements including self-presentation. As only the Cogs group had been supported in communication skills the improvement may result from the tuition.

8.1.2 Findings of the Pre-School Studies

Study 4 sought to identify early narrative competence. The communication skills of pre-school children in the UK and Japan presented a new dynamic, exploring how mental representations of things, people, actions and events are encoded and expressed in comparative cultures. Would these young children respond to a quiz game and retelling a story differently in their particular cultural contexts and would their thinking processes be the same? Did my assumptions regarding the development of narrative competences in younger children differ to those relating to older children? Significant differences were found between the Japanese and English pre-school children's responses to the story retelling and the quiz about everyday items. The observations and examination of the qualitative data suggested that the Japanese children were more vocal whereas many of the English children may have found narrating events difficult or struggled to assemble information. The English pre-schoolers' lower level of everyday knowledge could be related to data from the secondary school students obtained in City School. This was potentially a key finding as everyday and general cultural knowledge are important factors in conversations. When listening to narratives and dealing with gaps in information, cultural knowledge provides the 'missing piece' in that provided by the speaker (Bruner, 1986). There may be issues of validity and reliability in relation to the methods, particularly the interviews, questions and elicited narratives. The similar patterns of responses within the schools and within the countries have been of note however. As I discuss below, there are matters to take into account such as the effect of non-naturalistic interactions and future studies could avoid these methods.

8.1.3 Discussion of the Findings

How we share common experiences with others and develop reflection and review is through problem solving. Bruner (1966) argues this is primarily dependent on narrative mental schemas being present and active, the way to bring order by storying events. This calls for high levels of thinking and communicative competence to solve increasingly complex situations, demanding both critical and creative thinking. The findings illustrate some of the barriers created for students in accessing and expressing ideas in situations in which the teacher instructs and transmits knowledge, as reflected by Mercer (2012) and Alexander (2012). These studies and the research literature show it is important to address these difficulties as Years 7-8 are critical in children's cognitive and personal development. At the end of this time many schools allocate students to attainment sets when embarking on the GCSE syllabus. The long-standing early Key Stage 3 'dips' (Doddington et al., 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008; Mercer 2012) suggest that the concerns

of 11-13 year-olds too are to be noted. The results indicate that when considering school demands to interpret the complex information presented in lessons, there is a need to understand that some students may not respond adequately due to several factors. These apply across many subjects in the secondary curriculum of which abstract and dis-embedded ideas must be rapidly taken on board. Assessments and formal exams often contain dis-embedded and decontextualised material which for many learners may have little meaning. Upon entering secondary school children are expected to grasp what is said and read at great speed which requires relevant mental and linguistic structures in order to rapidly order and make sense of what they read and hear. As the City Secondary results show, the same students had difficulties dealing with decontextualised language (Peterson and McCabe, 1994) in both tests. The cognitive-linguistic skill of narrative thinking is closely associated with both the extraction of meaning, as in listening and reading, and in the construction of meaning in talk and writing. When formally required to construct narratives, as in these assessments, the students with difficulties had problems drawing upon existing knowledge; further barriers were created when required to express it in a narrative which requires the sequencing of place, subject, object and events.

Another element that many students struggle with, even from age 7-8, is considering the perspectives of others in social exchanges and drama when required to take the 'narrative view' (Myhill, 2012) of others. Perspective-taking underpins thinking and problem-solving at advanced curriculum levels such as in literature and history studies. As Bruner (1986) outlines, these children must progress to constructing meaning through 'consciousness', perceiving and understanding the thoughts of others. Tomasello (2008) also highlights non-verbal communication in reading 'between and beyond the lines' to uncover what is intended (Frid, 2000) and makes an inference for assessing the attitudes, emotions and social status of others (Hargie, 2005). The students successful in the Cogs communication groups all achieved good scores in the most complex 'Conduct' element, suggesting that these all-round competences could support their learning across the curriculum.

Effective communication is seen by Tomasello (2008) to involve inferring a speaker's social intentions by tuning-in through intersubjectivity, developed through narrative (Pi'eh, 2003; van Oers, 2003; Engel, 1999). The students struggling in this study are at additional disadvantage as strong cultural intersubjectivity is closely associated with well-developed social and collaborative competence (Vygotsky, 1962; Bruner, 1996, 2006; Rogoff, 1993). In turn it increases intellectual and emotional perspective taking (Berman and Slobin, 1994) and 'positioning' (Yoshitaka et al., 2002), all of which involve higher order thinking.

8.1.4 Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Action Research Findings

Social constructivist studies in the educational literature, many of which focus on individual subjects such as science, maths or reading, report on student interaction and improvements resulting from collaboration and problem-solving. Others consider the role of the teacher, the way language is used to scaffold learning, the types of questions asked and the collective knowledge shared in the process of group work. Many of these studies are based on the idea that the locus of cultural knowledge is within individuals, in contrast with studies in the socio-cultural domain which regard learning and understanding as a social process. From this perspective the culture, including knowledge, language, traditions etc., comes to be used by the next generation through the social, collaborative sharing of activities (Rogoff, 1997). These activities become internalised through making sense and meaning (Bruner, 1990) as thoughts become internalised discourse, processes termed by Daniels (2005) as social phenomena.

Socio-cultural approaches to classroom investigations such as those of Cobb et al. (1991) observe how teachers can facilitate social situations in which children collaborate in maths and science problems-solving through talk and the validation of each other's ideas. As these and other studies show there needs to be an equality of 'power' between the children talking and learning together. The intervention trialled by Webb and Farivar (1999) identifies four fundamental elements to success; i) children initially getting to know each other; ii) developing communication skills necessary for collaboration, e.g. turn-taking; iii) activities which involve helping each other and iv) language necessary for generating 'explanations'. It is of note that the successful large-scale intervention studies of Brigman and colleagues (1999; 2008) focus not on 'basic skills', but on developing children's social skills through interaction, communication and sharing. Reflection by children, central to both the Japanese curriculum in prompting evaluation and analysis, is also seen as a key element in Brigman's study (2008). In this view, by seeking intersubjectivity with others, argument and persuasion pave the way for agreement and understanding (Wegerif, 2005).

8.1.5 Learning from Action Research in Japan, a High-Context Culture

A strong and noticeable feature in schools to age 12 in Japan is the emphasis on children's practical efforts and collective responsibility 'for the common good', based on the philosophy of Dewey (1938). Finn (2012) sees the pedagogy as a forward thinking, hands-on approach. Its national curriculum acknowledges talk as the 'primary mode' of expression (MEXT, 2010), and dialogue, rhetoric and communication as highly relevant 'to daily life and jobs' (Kariya, 2010, p.11). These processes are in accordance with the

Japanese culture of 'high-context' styles of communication, associated by research (Alexander, 2011) with the achievement of consistently high-level social, educational and commercial outcomes.

When talking with Japanese parents and listening to young children's extended narratives and hearing their interpretation, it is evident that, as Minami (2002) reports, rich informal types of talk are used in the Japanese home with children 'in context'. The literature suggests that parents provide 'extended' forms of dialogue and questions, as opposed to description. Minami explains that these constitute the means by which young Japanese children become inducted through and into a subtle interactive communicative style; how they learn that each communicative act contains its own implicit codes, hidden messages and inferences which need to be interpreted and explicitly responded to by the listener. Observations of parents and teachers clearly demonstrate this through the time taken to explain and point things out, patiently listening to the child's response and nodding in acknowledgement.

As the findings of this study and the literature show, a key feature of any narrative is the context. This is central to both interpersonal communication and pedagogy in Japan, the two being closely related (Rogoff, 2003) with relationships seen as the key to the development of intersubjectivity. I observed this as clearly a major focus for parents, kindergarten and elementary teachers in social interactions and the objectives of lessons. They also indicated an awareness of the shift required of young children when moving from informal home talk to the more formal styles of school talk. These processes relate to the dual Japanese concept of 'friendship-support acknowledging progress' (Fuki, 2002) and sensitivity to interactions that can affect children's emotional and cognitive responses to learning and hamper or facilitate their performance (Yoshitaka et al., 2000).

'Taking care of your responsibilities' is for the good of others. Teachers' responses to squabbles are to pass responsibility back to the children, giving time to calm down, reflect and openly discuss the disagreement and resolution at length. This is enhanced by 'mondaizukuri', the development of open personal relationships and reflection in which narratives analyse how tasks carried out in a group might be improved. In the UK many children have to acquire the skills of personal development such as communication, narrative competence and reasoning in the home with parents and family to prepare them for school. It is reiterated by a contrast between the emphasis on the individual child and individual progress in the UK. This contrasts with the primary educational focus in Japan on communication, collaboration, achieving inter-subjectivity and children engaging in reflective narrative to develop self-regulation from the early years onward, working

towards inner-speech.

These practices mirror the 'space for reflection' that Wegerif (2005) argues is needed for the generation of ideas, metaphor and creativity. The parent questionnaires and interviews confirmed little emphasis on academic instruction in Japanese kindergartens, reflecting the responses of Japanese staff. Relaxed, ordered and collaborative parenting and education aim towards good communicative competence. Nursery staff's research participation enriched the picture, providing their insights and interpretations with which to compare educational and, to some degree, social outcomes.

8.1.6 Implications of the Action Research Studies for Educators

Classroom relationships and styles of communication are recognised as the key to the development of intersubjectivity. In their UK studies Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) record that the highest scores for teacher quality are characterised by teachers' respect, social support and concern for their pupils. Of note in the studies in this thesis are student participants' voices in interviews and questionnaires valuing the approaches of the staff who had listened to their views and perspectives. They echoed those of other students who warmly appreciated staff who provided them with opportunities to talk, reason and present arguments in a focused way, including those interviewed four years later. In both settings the students gained ownership of the learning.

The educators in both City and Bridge Secondary Schools also had, at different times and in different parts of the country, arrived at similar conclusions and concerns. They had made an association, in part more implicit than explicit, that their means of communication did not match well with the needs of their students and sought both knowledge and practical support. In both cases their approaches resulted in action research.

8.1.7 Exploratory Talk and Narrative Thinking

At Bridge Secondary, many students were from families with professional backgrounds, there was a specific ethos to promote personal development and many students did well academically. However, staff perceived that some students did not possess the 'confidence' to engage in collaborative or self-regulative independent learning. The intervention study showed that a teaching focus on developing communicative competence through exploratory talk enhanced motivation and accelerated thinking skills and expression of ideas in a group. Voices of students were heard in their positive evaluations of the interventions in interviews and questionnaires.

Mercer and Dawes (2010) argue that the fundamental difficulties related to narrative confirm the need for 'exploratory talk' in the classroom facilitated by the teacher with focused opportunities for dialogue (Mercer and Howe, 2012) to enhance higher order thinking and deeper understanding. However, the studies reported here appear to confirm that, as Mercer and Howe (2012, p.18) suggest, such 'extended narrative accounts and detailed explanations may never be heard' in the common round of classroom life. Only if the teacher gives the student time and voice can a pupil 'extend turns to express their thoughts and reveal their misunderstandings' (Mercer and Howe, 2012, p.17). Yet as Halasz and Michel (2011) reiterate, communication skills are the 'common denominator' for everyone in learning and 'generic transferable functional skills for personal thinking and learning', as the students and teachers in Year 8 at Bridge, a semi-selective school, confirmed.

The participants' narrative responses are also of concern because, as Myhill (2008) argues, oral language patterns are 'mirrored' in their writing. Her research (Myhill, 2009, p. 265) shows that particular support is needed when students are required to produce writing that is 'ordered by a sequence of events.' In such cases the teacher can support them in a generative narrative so that they can formulate what they are thinking, a mutually supportive process. Once they 'hear what they think' they can grow in confidence and perhaps elaborate as they paint the picture and make their ideas more concrete in context. This I can confirm from classroom experience is a major issue in some schools and classes where many students, from nursery age to adult, resort to shrugging their shoulders as they cannot answer. The findings of this research suggest that the root cause is limited cognitive-linguistic competence that needs both encouragement and scaffolding.

Myhill points out that when pupils move on to forms of writing that are 'non-narrative', in subjects such as geography, mathematics and science, it is the pupil who has to decide on the order in which s/he sets out the facts and that this calls upon the ability to 'operate a mental dialogue between content and rhetoric at the 'knowledge-transforming phase' (Myhill, 2009, p.272). Myhill (2010) also highlights the fact that there are many children who struggle to construct the perspectives or 'narrative views' of others, as discussed above in relation to perspective taking and subjectivity. Here too, narrative competence underpins insufficient competence and confidence. Once these areas are addressed the child can go on to prepare, as Myhill (2012) suggests, an 'oral rehearsal' as a scaffolding for their writing.

Bearing in mind these challenges, it is of note that while tests abound in school the curriculum and assessments rarely focus on how students' cognitive-linguistic representation is constructed and how well it is expressed through narrative competence. Despite what is now known about the limitations of what children can convey in writing, 'achievement' in the UK continues to be measured principally by academic educational performance at a formal level and considered to be effective. The requirements of the current Education Secretary are for teachers to place pedagogical emphasis on testing, control and discipline and to avoid the danger of idle chatter (Alexander, 2013). However this low-context approach has been found to be ineffective and counterproductive in education (Hall, 1976; Minami, 2004), as research across 20 countries confirms (Alexander, 2012). Who owns the narrative?

8.2 Recommendations

I acknowledge that the small numbers and relatively short time-scale of this project need to be taken into account, however I hope that the findings may contribute to a partial truth within a bigger picture and offer my thoughts on this following much discussion with colleagues.

8.2.1 Recommendations for Improvements to the Research

The action research reported here emerged in response to genuine situations and dilemmas and the calls of both students and staff. As such the designs and methods were pragmatic but underpinned by experience and a knowledge of theory. Constraints were placed upon numbers of participants, timing, duration and staffing, with the best possible arrangements fought for at the time. The project did not begin with an intention to write up the research in a wider context therefore the plans were not tidy but responded to the needs in the school, a common characteristic of much educational action research.

The test materials have prompted much critical consideration and better established resources and methods could be sought, a matter to be consulted with specialists. There might have been a danger of cultural bias in the materials and content used in the Japanese project however I had many hours of discussion with my Japanese university and school colleagues which resulted in the choice of questions made and I ultimately accepted their decisions.

The interviews with the educators in all schools would be improved if greater time could be allocated for probing and, if acceptable, extended to reflective diaries, although I am aware of the drawbacks of time constraints and validity. The action research at City

School was curtailed following structural changes however if an extended study could be conducted the longer-term biographies and narratives of the educators could provide rich data. Richer data could be collected from recordings in order to examine the narratives of pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher dialogues in different circumstances in micro detail. These would be subject to ethical considerations and the dangers of either a Hawthorne effect or other non-naturalistic phenomena affecting reliability. The tests in this study were designed to address school concerns however the results may reflect students' responses to school methods of teaching and assessment.

When a researcher is an 'interested researcher' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 356) truth is seen to be asserted through reflection that is 'dialectic'. It is supported by cultural-historical pre-understandings in order to reach a 'compromise of intentionalities' (Lisle, 2000, p.118). In the diverse contexts in which I was working I was able to be open-minded and aware. For example, in Study 3, I perceived that educator participants felt comfortable and confident in my presence. They commented upon my empathetic understanding and success with previous teacher trainees with whom I had worked in their school. They became interested in my previous research in School 1 which acted as a springboard for development. Study 3 was also built on strong working relationships and confidence of a partnership tried and tested in the past, developed from trusting, equitable foundations. Clear boundaries were established, since my research role and responsibilities concerned working in two institutions, the school and the university (see section 3.6). Coming to know the world through collaboration and communication with other professionals (Angen, 2000, p.385) action research supports the concerns of the learning community. I sought to represent their voices as authentically as possible in searching for the truth (Gadamer, 2004) concerning the challenges and barriers faced by participants which I recognised, had experienced and empathised with.

8.2.2 Recommendations for Follow-Up Research

I believe that the data from these studies are of interest and support the case for developing reflexive practitioners who can facilitate exploratory talk and narrative processes to support cognition and learning. There appears to be a need to monitor children's narrative abilities from an early age yet there is relatively little information on the extent, pace and nature of children's progress in narrative development and its interaction with the learning process. For example, the degree to which the narratives children construct go on to inform and underpin the texts they later construct, recognised by Myhill (2009) to be a matter of significance. As the literature review shows the range and quality of children's experiences are extremely wide and hard to anticipate so data on this would

be valuable. There appears a shortage of models and materials identifying paths of development which enable narrative progression to be guided and acknowledged. As van der Veen and Poland (2012) suggest, an assessment of communicative competence and children's oral narratives can provide insights into their development, progress and cognitive achievements. A model or framework for supporting and acknowledging individual pupils' narrative development would be a further constructive and valuable addition to both teachers' academic and professional development.

The findings from this thesis appear to suggest that if students at all levels are not helped to provide narratives, particularly of the extended, elaborated type involving reasoning and argument, well before Years 7/8 as in this study, they are likely to experience barriers to learning. Indeed, the assessments suggest that many of the Year 7/8 students across different settings need a voice and support in this area.

I have reflected upon questions regarding the authenticity of my representation of participants' voices as an insider in the two projects at City School. I addressed this in accordance with the essence of hermeneutics in a 'compromise of intentionalities' (Lisle, 2000). Indeed, as the action research stemmed from the concerns of those in the learning communities with whom I worked and with whom I had empathy, it was my aim to represent participants' voices as authentically as possible in order to access truth (Gadamer, 2004) about the challenges and barriers they faced. In fact it was the close collaboration and communication with staff (Angen, 2000, p.385) that proved to be a strength. I was able, at best, to understand the staff's ideas more clearly by working closely with them. This allowed the opening up of perspectives from all sides. They were familiar with me and my role in staff development and problem solving. In contrast, an outsider would not have built up the trusting and meaningful relationships in which participants' experiences were shared and been unlikely to have achieved the same level of authenticity. For example, in Study 2, Bill the teaching assistant comments that the sessions had given him confidence particularly in relation to difficulties with a specific staff member. He felt he had resolved the issue by asking the teacher to include him in more of the planning of lessons for a group of challenging students. It was effective as the staff member that Bill had mentioned joined the research group and eventually became more open and conversant (see section 5.7.4).

As the studies at City and Bridge Secondary schools show, and the observations in Japan reflect, closely related is the matter of the classroom skills of teachers and teaching assistants in the domain of classroom communication, and their relationship with levels of personal confidence. As Alexander (2001) argues, much rests upon their values, beliefs

and academic knowledge, however there are few findings related to the basis of their 'cognitive actions' (Lave, 1998). Research is therefore needed on the competences and personal levels of confidence of staff in the area of classroom communication. In a relatively short amount of time over two terms, City School educators enhanced their own knowledge and understanding of how to develop their own communicative abilities in dialogue with each other.

The findings of this thesis raise three main issues:

- a) How communication can be furthered within the time constraints of School Development Planning.
- b) How to meet the needs of different groups of staff as learners.
- c) How to provide a balanced approach in addressing staff's individual and group needs by offering a mechanism to facilitate staff responding to each other in an inter-subjective enterprise.

The voices of reflective and reflexive practitioners in both countries have shown that the development of praxis is the momentum for participatory practitioner research. Collaboration across schools and across countries can inspire the development of educators' communicative and narrative competences in the classroom. It can embrace the inspiration, identified by the practitioners in this study, to systematically provide opportunities for genuinely dialogic and exploratory talk to prompt extended, elaborated narratives and higher order thinking.

Future research should examine educators' experiences, views and choices more readily. My experience as researcher led me to believe that hearing the voices of others would be more empowering, encouraging self-reflection amongst professionals so they aspire to new heights as would their students. The research design would do well to prioritise educators supporting students at the beginning of their secondary education, but preferably in the years before. Context is a key feature of both interpersonal communication and pedagogy in Japan, as the two applications are closely related (Rogoff, 2003), yet context has not been examined extensively in relation to classroom practice and teachers' interactions. As Shirakawa and Iwahama (2009) argue, issues of how and when children's activities differentiate into individual thinking, social activity as speaking and listening and solitary reading and writing are unresolved and require further research.

Upon returning to the findings and discussions I believe that participatory practitioner research by educators enabled them to explore more deeply their own experiences,

perspectives, choices and needs in relation to communication in classrooms. Against the background of all the action research, participatory practitioner research by educators focused attention on the nature of theory, values and professional practice embedded in the initial education of teachers in both countries.

8.3 Conclusion

Narrative mental schema are essential to bring order to experience through sizing, storying and responding to events (Bruner, 1966). They also underpin the high levels of critical and creative thinking and communication required to solve increasingly complex situations. Essential elements of socio-cultural theory as an explanatory conceptual framework were applied to a specific area of enquiry across four studies aimed at understanding the educational functions of exploratory classroom talk. I reviewed empirical research on the nature of teacher-pupil interaction, narrative thinking and learning initially informed by a socio-cultural perspective. Action research involved critical reflection which analysed and synthesised meanings through language as a medium of dialectic reflexivity for self and others. Gadamerian (2004) hermeneutics synergises this exploration more deeply, focusing on how the communication of meaning contributes to knowledge. It exposes tensions within a broader cultural system which 'affect those who must operate within it' as it is '... much concerned with inter-subjectivity - how humans may come to know 'each other's minds...' (Bruner, 1996; pp.11-12). Relating theory to practice, I draw attention to the following findings related to learning processes:

- Narrative thinking is shown to be fundamental to children's narrative and communicative competences, which in turn support their understanding of the spoken word, both in everyday life and in schools.
- Against a background of quantitative data comparing international test results published by TIMSS, PIRLS PISA and the OECD Report (2013), the thesis presents detailed qualitative data at the level of individual students across age-groups.
- The findings of the studies show differences between participating English and Japanese children in their narrative competences and everyday knowledge as early as age 5. By age 12 to 13 English students from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds were found to continue to experience difficulties in narrative competence and thinking.
- The implications are for educators to consider a prolonged informal period of pre-school provision in the UK, possibly to age 7 as in Japan. Its informal pedagogy

allows young children to engage in collaborative talk for most of the day, longer than in the more structured primary school system.

- Related to this is the implication that greater flexibility in the secondary school system is required as the educators at City School suggested. Individual staff voiced their experiences and views that allowing staff and students to increase classroom time for talk, discussion and argument would help to improve both narrative competence and communicative competence.
- This appears necessary taking into account Alexander's review of research findings and his critique (Alexander, 2005, p.17) that currently teachers pay little attention to receiving and reviewing children's narratives etc. As he sums up, teachers need to be able to rapidly scaffold and advance children's thinking: '...in the space of a few seconds, hundreds of times each day...'
- Such developments have wide implications for the initial and continuing education of teachers at all levels, in particular regarding the cognitive and affective learning potential of communication in the classroom.
- This would include the introduction of a reference framework to support educators' understanding and monitoring of children's language development to the secondary school and beyond.

These implications lie within a 'contentious' context (McAdam et al., 2001) as current educational policy in Britain, supported by policy borrowing, is in contrast placing greater emphasis on more formal structures and pedagogy. In contrast, the processes of research and 'policy learning' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) could be supportive in this regard since the pedagogies of Japan are seen to be highly effective with regard to student development.

Reasons for the patterns in the results of the studies are complex and require further, longitudinal research. Nevertheless it seems important to consider the relationship between the findings obtained with Japanese children in the kindergarten, and the approach observed consistently in Japanese early years classrooms throughout the kindergarten and elementary school to age twelve. Its pedagogy reflects and amplifies the approach to Japanese child-rearing; that is, it is based on promoting collaboration and communication with peers, talk and reflection. Society, parents' and educators' approaches show consistency with the Japanese National Curriculum in which oracy is at the core. It may be contrasted with the relative consistency over the years in UK curriculum pedagogy in its emphasis on formal approaches and writing. Whilst there have been some attempts to raise the profile of oracy they have not achieved major changes, which Alexander (2000) and others would relate to political reasons.

The results of international tests such as PISA and TIMSS may not be considered reliable means of educational comparison. However in the light of the findings of Studies 1, 3 and 4 in this thesis, the consistent attainment of Japan's young students among the highest internationally by ages nine and fourteen may prove to be of particular interest. In relation to the findings of Study 2 with educators, and Study 3 comparing approaches to teaching learning, Japan's practical classroom pedagogy and spiral curriculum related to oracy and narrative competence may be considered to be points worthy of greater attention amongst UK educationalists and researchers.

The main contribution of this thesis is to highlight these practices which stem originally from Japanese cultural roots. Communicative and narrative competence lies at the heart of the educative process supported by a language across the curriculum embedded in its Moral Curriculum. The Japanese Minister for Education reflects, 'It is important to listen to the understanding of teachers and how they can improve participation for all. Parents have ownership of how this can be improved in open discussions. They are also invited into ceremonies and lessons to observe how their children may learn and how all can contribute. The underpinning Moral Curriculum encourages reflection, empathy and reciprocity towards each other. Reasoning and 'hansei' are very important in this, from the earliest years and our teachers are always working on this' (see section 7.9.6).

8.4 Personal Reflection

I have long reflected upon international investigations and reviews, including those reviewed for over a decade by Alexander (2003; 2008; 2012) which echo my own experiences and arguments that talk and narrative are not recognised by many UK teachers as supporting cognition. The findings also confirm my observation that some teachers may not consider their communicative competences as adequate to support these processes. Yet the situation contrasts with the consistent conclusions of researchers and employers that effective communication involves a sophisticated process which has to be learned. I note that Alexander finds 'an historically rooted tendency to detach talk from reading and writing and ... make it subservient' (Alexander, 2009, p.15). He compares this with the 'integrated' approaches 'prominent in the curricula of many other countries' (Alexander, 2010, p.24) such as Japan. Yet, narrative thinking, in particular, is acknowledged as the first, most direct, concrete form of thinking and is in daily use (Bruner, 1993; van Oers, 2009).

In the first three studies my researcher stance was not value free or neutral as I challenged several assumptions and ideas about children and their learning. My own

reflection lay at the heart of this thesis across all studies, illuminating the difficulties inherent in transforming knowledge and moving from implicit to explicit understanding regardless of age and maturity.

Some continue to believe that lone study and working 'independently' are effective in 'raising academic standards', often for school or political purposes. As Wegerif (2005, p.236) argues, students should not be seeking to develop 'pre-specified nuggets of knowledge' but listening and responding to others, expecting and respecting their different viewpoints. The Japanese official approach differs to that in the UK. Abiko (2011) from the Ministry of Education argues that teachers must support children in making meaning by using their internal psychological processes. Shirakawa and Iwahama (2009) demonstrate the skill of Japanese teachers in scaffolding children's narratives. Their research demonstrates how speaking aloud fosters inner speech and enables children to retain narratives in their minds to provide a mental framework for thought. Their findings show that the process reduces children's use of egocentric speech from 36% of utterances at age 3 to 11% by the age of 5.

I have observed how kindergarten and elementary school teachers in Japan have strongly-held beliefs about modelling, facilitating and scaffolding children's cognitive and affective capacities. Like parents, their aim is the development of inter-subjectivity. The results of the UK-Japan research suggest that it is the shared cultural values and goals that provide the strong base of communicative competence and thinking, known to be the key to literacy. This finding suggests a reason for the strong and consistent foundation for later learning and success in Japan is laid at an early age and depends upon what Bruner (2009, p.132) calls the 'attunement' of the teacher to the expressions and intents of members of a classroom.'

I have shared with colleagues in Japan a culture in which adults value their role in facilitating dialogic, exploratory talk which develops in children confidence, conceptual understanding and reasoning through the capacity for narrative thinking. The results of the tests with kindergarten children in Japan appear to reflect this. If education is to 'make' sense, it inevitably involves philosophical considerations within the theory of knowledge or epistemology in which the basis and nature of different kinds of knowledge claims are analysed critically (Gadamer, 2012). The principles of moral reasoning are well established and long-standing in education in Japan, in the same vein as Kohlberg (1981) suggested. As Pring (2010, p.31) argues, a failure to engage in such philosophical thinking results in the 'reduction of learning to the ability to memorise and to repeat propositions or formulae – to meet behavioural targets – without the deeper

understanding of a particular way of knowing.' Gadamer (2012, p.553) summarises that language is a creative power, 'the single word whose virtuality opens for us the infinity of discourse... the freedom of expressing oneself and letting oneself be expressed.'

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Note: APPENDICES 1- 17 are to be found in VOLUME 2

