Maximising staff 'buy-in' in the development of a whole school literacy approach

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Abstract

Literacy is crucial in enabling young people to achieve across the curriculum, and in the wider world beyond the school gates. Schools are expected to demonstrate that they have put in place a clear literacy policy, promoting high quality literacy teaching across the whole range of the school's provision (Ofsted 2014), in order to close the gap between the 'word poor' and the 'word rich' (Rigney 2010).

However, teachers can feel that literacy directives are imposed on them from above, as time-consuming 'bolt-ons' to their own subject teaching. This research suggests that a 'top-down' literacy policy may meet with resistance from staff, and fail to become embedded in their practice, thus being an ineffective tool with which to raise literacy standards. The project seeks to maximise teacher buy-in through taking a collaborative approach to policy development, guided by the overall research question: 'How do staff respond to an approach to policy design that seeks to consult teachers and enhance collegial professional development?'

Viewing the enactment of policy in schools through a cultural-historical activity theory framework, action research aiming to align community perceptions with policy development was designed, resulting in the collaborative drafting of a new literacy policy following a cycle of teacher interviews. A further action cycle of peer coaching was carried out with the object of empowering staff to implement literacy-focused pedagogical techniques in their classrooms. Feedback from staff and analysis of the peer coaching sessions has indicated that almost all staff involved were taking decisive action to engage with specific aspects of the new whole school literacy approach.

An emerging outcome of the action research has been the positive response to co-constructive professional discourse as a possible model for expansive learning (Engeström 1987) within a school in an isolated rural setting. A new Literacy Coach role has been created for the next academic year, to develop professional learning and support the enactment and translation of the literacy policy into practice.

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Introduction

A learning journey through action research

Only a year ago, when I was working in an 'Outstanding' city school and investigating the successful literacy policy there for my MSc in Learning and Teaching Part II assignment (Author 2014), I felt quite confident that I had identified the ingredients for a truly successful whole school literacy approach. Building on the work of Didau (2014), Barton (2010), Bryan & Westbrook (2000), Donaghey (2013), Faulkner et al (2012) and Hattie (2009), inter alia, I concluded that if subject teachers were involved in the process of developing a whole school approach, in which 'light touch' literacy across the curriculum was combined with a genuine focus on the literacy needed for excellence in their specialism and the key pedagogical techniques proven to impact strongly on all students' literacy development, it would enhance the likelihood of successful implementation of a policy towards which the whole school can feel ownership. And as May (2007:388) maintains:

> the degree to which effective literacy practices in both primary and secondary schools can be established, let alone sustained, is almost wholly dependent on the degree to which teachers take ownership of those practices, individually and collectively.... In other words, without wide teacher 'buy-in', literacy across the curriculum initiatives are bound to fail.

A change of job in September 2015 would take me back to my home community, to the tiny rural through school (ages 3 to 16) where I had acted

as a school governor for many years, and then worked as a teaching assistant supporting literacy. Having developed a course for functionally illiterate adult learners (some of whom had left the school only in the past few years) through the local Council's Lifelong Learning organisation, I was aware that literacy was an area in need of significant development in the school, which currently had no Literacy Policy in place.

It seemed to me that by studying the successful approach taken by my previous school, and by synthesising this with the literature on literacy in secondary schools, I could put myself in a good position to offer to design a literacy policy for The Rural School[1] that would have the potential to be effective and well-received by teachers. It would not involve 'bolt-ons' or tokenistic literacy activities that would take time away from deep learning in individual subjects. Instead, it would be rooted in teaching and learning techniques that respected and supported subject-specific literacies. My study of the perceptions of teachers at School X[2] had found that, even with dynamic literacy leadership and excellent training offered to all staff over the course of a three year programme, there was still some lack of 'buy-in' to the literacy approach. Reflecting on this, I wondered whether a more collaborative approach to policy design might give teachers more ownership of the literacy policy, and therefore make them more likely to accept and use it in their everyday practice.

This would be a challenging action research project, particularly as I was beginning as a new teacher in the school: with no official role as literacy co-

[1] The name of the school has been changed to protect the identities of staff and students.
[2] Pseudonym for the city school studied in my Part II Research project (Author 2014)

ordinator. Indeed, I would be second in an English department of two, and would have to be careful not to tread on the toes of my Head of Department, nor those of the literacy co-ordinators in the Primary phase of the school. Undeterred, I hoped that it would not only be possible, but perhaps an advantage to create a policy from the grass roots: that as a fellow-practitioner and action researcher, I would be able to enter into professional discourse about literacy with my colleagues in a more democratic manner, breaking the mould of irrelevant policy imposed from above.

I was fortunate to receive support from the Head Teacher for my proposal: which was to consult teachers about their perceptions of whole school literacy: the challenges and possible solutions, and then to provide information from this consultation to aid the Head of English in designing a literacy policy that could really be embedded in school life. In terms of time-scale, I was determined that the policy design process should not be hurried, and proposed that the policy would be presented for agreement from SLT and ratification by the Governors by July 2015.

What follows is a reflective account of the action research undertaken over the course of the year, leading to the successful acceptance of the policy by SLT[3] (it is scheduled for ratification by Governors in September 2015). The desired outcome of the project, however, was not just the policy, but a positive response from staff at The Rural School to the content of the policy, and a willingness to commit to engaging with it to improve their own

[3] Senior Leadership Team

practice. The route I would take in order to achieve these outcomes developed as I read and returned to the literature and as I learnt more about my context. The literature review, explanation of context and design of the action research are therefore integrated in the following account. It takes a chronological approach, as the year of action research was organic - shifting and changing with new understandings.

For me, this action research represented a significant learning journey, during which I had to reconsider my early confidence in what makes a successful literacy policy. While I remain convinced that good literacy is inseparable from good teaching and learning, and that the approach taken in School X is one which builds the foundations for genuine transformation of practice, and of literacy learning for children, I have had to accept that one approach will not work in every setting.

Specifically, I have learnt that for the outcome of an activity to be secure and long-lasting, the activity must be rooted in the community from which it grows. My reading over the course of the year has led me to frame my action research using cultural-historical activity theory, making the community central to the design of the activity - at the base of the triangle (Figure 12). I have had to compromise on some of my original aspirations for the whole school literacy approach, to use a range of different tools to bring about its completion, and to negotiate some tricky contradictions between my role and that of other staff in the school. However, I believe that the resulting policy, while somewhat limited in its goals, is securely enough based on community belief and practice in the school to maximise teacher buy-in

from the beginning. And this is only the beginning of a longer-term project: with community buy-in at least partially secured, I am ambitious enough to hope that this whole school literacy approach may in the future act as a springboard for organisational change: beginning to effect that transformation of teaching and learning with which School X's approach was able to start.

Research Questions

My title speaks broadly of a 'whole school literacy approach', but this has many strands, and is to be developed further over the next two or three years. The most tangible outcome of this year's action research is a literacy policy towards which teachers feel a sense of ownership, with the secondary outcome being the identification of ways forward for CPD[4] that make the wider approach more collegiate and empowering. The overall research question is therefore: **How do staff respond to an approach to policy design that seeks to consult teachers and enhance collegial professional development**?

My research was guided by subdividing this question into a series of smaller questions to help me design successive action cycles and analyse the outcomes of each cycle.

[4] Continuing professional development

Descriptive questions

1. Why does the school need a literacy policy?
2. What characterises an effective literacy policy?
3. What factors inhibit teacher 'buy in' to whole school literacy approaches?
4. What is the current context of literacy development at The Rural School?
5. How do individual subject teachers and support staff perceive literacy in The Rural School?

Causal questions

6. How can a collaborative approach contribute to the design of a democratic, jointly-owned literacy policy?
7. How is staff 'buy-in' to the whole school literacy approach evident following a collaborative approach to policy design?
8. How far can peer coaching and professional dialogue lead to staff 'buy-in' to the whole school literacy approach?
9. Do reflections on this collaborative approach to professional development and policy design indicate potential to develop a peer coaching approach to CPD in the future?

Questions emerging from CHAT

An emerging understanding of CHAT as a framework for the activities I was undertaking led to the formulation of a set of research questions that would have more far-reaching implications than some of the original questions

above, and that could guide the approach I take following the completion of this research project to the enactment of the literacy policy in school.

10. How does using an activity theory framework help me to understand the importance of community in policy development?
11. How far does peer coaching empower teachers to take ownership of the literacy approach, and progress towards expansive learning?
12. If the object of my first cycle of research, the literacy policy, now becomes a tool for literacy development across the curriculum, how can I use activity theory to frame the next stages of policy enactment and the development of the whole school literacy approach?

An Initial Review of the Literature:

1. Why does the school need a literacy policy?

Successive governments compete in their determination to tackle the scourge of illiteracy (the Conservative Party Manifesto 2015, for example, pledging 'tough new standards for literacy' (Conservatives.com 2015:33)), based on statistics such as those presented by the National Literacy Trust (Dugdale & Clarke 2008) linking a lack of literacy skills not only to employability, but also to health, housing, family life; even to the country's economic competitiveness in a global market.

This lack of literacy is seen as all the more important in the light of the need to close the knowledge gap for students from the more deprived sectors of

society. A key tool in closing that gap is the use of words, as a way of bridging 'the cavernous and uncrossable ravine' that Purcell-Gates (2006:182) perceives lying between 'children of poverty... and their full potentials as literate beings.' At School X, the 'Matthew effect' - premised on the theory that 'word-rich get richer while the word poor get poorer in their reading skills and life chances generally' (Rigney 2010) - was cited regularly during whole school meetings; a part of the social justice agenda that lies for many at the heart of the drive to improve literacy skills for our children. It was seen as crucial at School X that teachers were convinced of the purpose of literacy, if they were truly to 'buy in' and embed it within their teaching across the curriculum.

How can we achieve this just word distribution? Much of the work must, of course, be carried out in the explicit teaching of literacy lessons at primary school: firstly through the systematic synthetic phonics approach, and then through the National Curriculum's English programmes of study. However, 11% of students (DfE 2015:2) still reach secondary school at a level 3 or below in literacy; and for the higher attainers also, the embedding of good literacy is not a job that can be carried out by English departments in isolation. Ever since the Bullock Report (DES 1975), or further back, since the often-quoted statement by George Sampson, a School Inspector in 1921, that 'Every teacher in English is a teacher *of* English', not only the English department, but all teachers are held accountable for literacy development. According to the latest Teacher Standards (DfE 2012:11, standard 3), every teacher must: 'demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting

high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever their specialist subject.'

OFSTED (2013:6), sees the need to tackle literacy as 'urgent and essential.' Inspectors are instructed to 'consider the impact of the teaching of literacy and the outcomes across the range of the school's provision,' (Ofsted 2014:18) and when judging potentially 'outstanding' provision, they expect to see that 'Excellent policies underpin practice that ensures pupils…are making excellent progress in literacy' (ibid:49).

2. What characterises an effective literacy policy?

Look up 'whole school literacy policy' on the internet, and an 'abundance of seemingly 'ready to wear' material' (Ball, Maguire & Braun 2012:109) is available, ready to download and use, with a change of logo. However, many of these policies are long, wordy and overwhelmingly full of directives to improve every aspect of literacy - the sort of document that will tick a box, be put into a file to gather dust, 'incorporated into school documentation for purposes of accountability and audit, rather than to effect pedagogic or organisational change' (ibid:10). I was convinced from my reading and experience at School X that we could design a policy for The Rural School that would be simple, practical and effective: a 'less is more' approach to whole school literacy, 'helping departmental teams to focus on priorities, to share and develop good practice, and then to evaluate its impact' (Barton 2009:13).

During my research in School X, I had been impressed by two key aspects of the whole school literacy approach, both of which were strongly supported by the literature.

Firstly, literacy leaders at School X had been insistent that literacy teaching should focus on key 'student-centred pedagogical practices', as recommended by May & Wright (2007:374), which would make visible the process needed to form a bridge between the word poor and the word rich. Rather than bring in a raft of 'bolt-on' literacy initiatives, the school introduced a three year professional development approach to improving first questioning, then marking and feedback, and finally teacher modelling: all techniques espoused strongly by Didau (2014), Barton (2013) and Thandi (2008), proven furthermore by Hattie (2009) to have a measurable effect on student learning.

The whole School X approach was designed to put teaching and learning first, through a commitment to disciplinary literacies - the second aspect that I found particularly convincing. I was greatly influenced by the development of 'genre pedagogy' in the writings of Hyland (2007) and Donaghey (2013): through which an autonomous approach is taken by school departments to clarify and define the literacy needed for excellence in their own disciplines; developing a curriculum of which Bruner (1969:19) would have approved - which is 'true to the underlying structure of its subject matter'. A policy underpinned by these principles seemed to me to be the most sincere, pedagogically valid approach, and one which teachers would feel related directly to them and their practice.

The only prescriptive approach taken in the School X literacy policy was that teachers should use the Literacy Marking Code and Green Penning[5]. Ofsted inspectors expect to see marking that 'supports key literacy points' and sentence punctuation that is 'always corrected' (Ofsted 2011:44). At School X, I had found some resistance to the Green Penning approach, but the Literacy Marking Code was simple and clear, and teachers were positive about using the limited range of symbols in addition to their subject-specific marking. Given that marking and feedback feature at the top of Hattie's table of effect sizes (Hattie 2009), I hoped to introduce a Literacy Marking Code as part of the new approach at The Rural School, though I was aware that there was a danger of it being perceived as the 'pernicious but worryingly prevalent idea of the bolt-on' which Didau (2014:3) avows 'needs to be taken out and shot at dawn'. It would need careful mediation in its introduction.

If I was clear at this stage about what characterised an effective literacy policy, I was equally clear in my mind about some of the approaches outlined in the literature that I did not want to follow. For example, one of the texts I had studied carefully in my initial reading was McCallion's step by step approach (1998) to creating a whole school literacy policy. I wrote dismissively in my Part II dissertation of his 'narrow and mechanistic' focus on the explicit teaching of a subject's prescribed vocabulary (Author 2014). Similarly, I was unimpressed by the bolt-ons I considered Tyrer and Taylor were advocating in their 'Toolkit' (2013:9), suggesting that teachers should 'add to

[5] An approach used to encourage students to proofread and edit their work.

their core content', and recommending what appeared to me to be gimmicky solutions such as the 'Litbox': 'Get some large plastic boxes. Create a set of laminated resources...' (p31).

It was only following my research and data analysis in Cycle 2 that I began to re-conceptualise the activity that I was undertaking, and the importance of the community in relation to the tools used to create a literacy approach. At this point, I would need to revisit the literature again, and question some of my original conclusions about what makes an effective policy.

3. What factors inhibit teacher 'buy in' to whole school literacy approaches?

The underlying thesis from which my action research grew was that the main problem with literacy policies in schools was the 'top-down' imposition of a set of narrow directives, to which teachers were expected to adhere. These directives could lead to resistance from staff, and, seen as 'bolt-ons' to subject teaching, would become marginalised and ineffective. As Hendricks (2009:2) writes, 'when teachers are pressured to implement instructional models with "fidelity", ... they lose the ability to engage in the kinds of behaviours that are vital to professionals.' I wanted to design a literacy approach that would empower teachers to become confident literacy teachers in themselves, allowed to use their professional judgement to teach their own subject literacies as professionals, while still focusing on techniques proven to impact significantly on children's literacy development.

During my research at School X, however, I identified some specific problems with the design and enactment of literacy policies in schools, each of which could inhibit teacher buy-in.

One of the most straightforward problems highlighted by the literature and confirmed by my in-school research was that there can be conflicting understandings of what 'literacy' means. Some might see it as a purely functional issue - a 'diminished view of what 'literacy' encompasses, according to Ofsted (2013:4). Bryan & Westbrook (2000:52) suggest that we should understand it as a multidimensional concept, set within a wider context of subject learning, 'personal growth, family and community involvement'. But too broad a definition may lead to confusion among staff. My conclusion was that a literacy policy should make a clear 'distinction between the requirement to support functional literacy through whole school approaches and the autonomy given to teachers to develop their subject-specific content literacies' (Author 2014).

A key literacy priority that emerged through the literature was reading, in which, as Barton says, 'the stakes are very high' (2013:83). It seemed that a shared perception was growing among teachers that whole school literacy approaches were too focused on the development of writing: perhaps in response to the needs of Ofsted inspections, where periods of time spent reading in class might erroneously appear 'passive'. Some teachers at School X were critical of the fact that the school literacy policy did not focus on the need to support the functional reading of the lowest-attaining students, although this is identified by Ofsted as a priority for literacy across

the country. How to tackle this in a whole school policy is problematic. Bryan & Westbrook (2000:51) criticise the 'patchy, sticking-plaster' nature of 'interruption' strategies that withdraw students from classes, but Hattie & Yates (2014:53) champion such robust intervention, as they point out that students must learn basic reading skills before they can access the curriculum.

I did not want to impose my own views about the importance of reading on the literacy approach we were developing at The Rural School, but I designed my initial data collection in order to see whether the views of teachers here aligned with this perception, making them more likely to buy into the policy. If they did, I would gladly see reading at the heart of a whole school literacy approach.

4. How can a collaborative approach contribute to the design of a democratic, jointly-owned literacy policy?

Ball, Maguire & Braun (2012:2) observe that 'policy actors' are often seen to be only head teachers or senior leaders, while 'Teachers, and an increasingly diverse cast of 'other adults' working in and around schools, not to mention students, are written out of the policy process or rendered simply as ciphers who "implement."' I wanted to involve staff in the discourse surrounding policy design and enactment from the beginning. I hoped that this would ensure that 'the policy was mismatched in important respects to the beliefs and value of the implementing agents': a reason given for 'policy failure' by Robinson (2009).

Mary James et al (2007:68), when they were investigating 'learning how to learn' in practice, found that a cultural shift away from traditional leadership approaches to policy making needed to take place in schools, towards the development of a 'synergy' among staff, which would see teachers 'deciding and acting together', involved 'in decision-making and using their professional know-how in the formulation and critical evaluation of school policy'. My experience at School X had been of a policy that was designed and strongly led by the Senior Leadership Team, while aiming to align itself with teacher practices through the focus on autonomous teaching of the 'literacy needed for excellence in your subject'. My reading, and the fact that I was going into a small school, where whole staff consultation was a realistic proposition, led me to wonder whether a collaborative approach could be taken to the actual design of the policy.

Collaboration could also take the form of professional learning, and the literature supports Bryan & Westbrook's judgement (2000:52) that a key factor in the adoption of a successful literacy approach is good, sustained training for teachers ('*massive* INSET', as suggested by a teacher in Lewis & Wray's research (2000:8)). I had become aware, however, in my previous school of a level of resistance to whole school INSET[6] - to the standard model of professional development that involves one 'expert' teaching the rest of the staff. I certainly found resonance in Johnson's (2008, cited in Mertler 2013:26) characterization of:

> traditional teacher in-services as a gathering of teachers, usually after a long day of teaching..., who sit and listen to an

[6] INSET: In service training

> expert describe a new methodology, a new approach, or new instructional material that they typically do not believe relates directly to their classroom situations or teaching styles.

How could I create professional learning in relation to literacy that got staff asking questions, rather than being given the answers and told to act on them, or worse, provoking 'a collective groan' (Barton 2010)?

Tyrer & Taylor, in their 'Literacy Leader's Toolkit' (2013:46) raised my awareness of the importance of 'creating allies' in the approach to whole school literacy through training and professional development days, suggesting that the literacy leader say to staff, for instance: '"Let's have a go at a punctuation party!"' as a tactic for building teacher confidence in literacy teaching. However, this did not seem to me to go far enough in terms of creating a collaborative approach, instead being a somewhat trivial form of 'selling policy to staff' (Ball, Maguire & Braun 2012:45).

Reading further about the ways in which teaching staff are distanced from professional learning (Moloney 2009; Leandar et al 2008; Penlington 2008), I was particularly influenced by Jackson and Street's 2005 study, in which they describe collaborative enquiry as a process that 'involves individual practitioners in a school choosing to come together to investigate and learn more about an aspect of their practice in order to enhance the learning of the children they teach or the school as an educational community' (Jackson & Street, 2005:10). I found myself drawn in particular to peer coaching as a powerful collaborative tool: defined by Robbins (1995:206) as 'a confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect upon current practices; expand, refine and build

new skills; share ideas; conduct action research; teach one another; or problem solve within the workplace.'

I hypothesised that engaging staff in peer coaching dialogue about literacy teaching beyond the initial policy consultation interviews could lead to further teacher buy-in to the approach outlined in the literacy policy, as it would make the words on the page relate directly to their own practice, while encouraging them to feel that they were empowered to be literacy teachers in the context of The Rural School.

Creating an Initial Picture of the Context:

The Rural School is a small Church of England school providing education for all local children aged 3-16, after which they must travel away from home to attend college or other sixth-form provision. It has almost no pupils with English as an additional language and a very low proportion of Pupil Premium students. Having recently gone through upheavals in leadership, it was judged to require improvement by Ofsted in 2012. Results at the end of key stage 4, however, are consistently in the highest quintile of all schools in the country[7], with particular strengths in the core subjects, including English: with 86% of pupils gaining A* to C grades at GCSE in 2014.

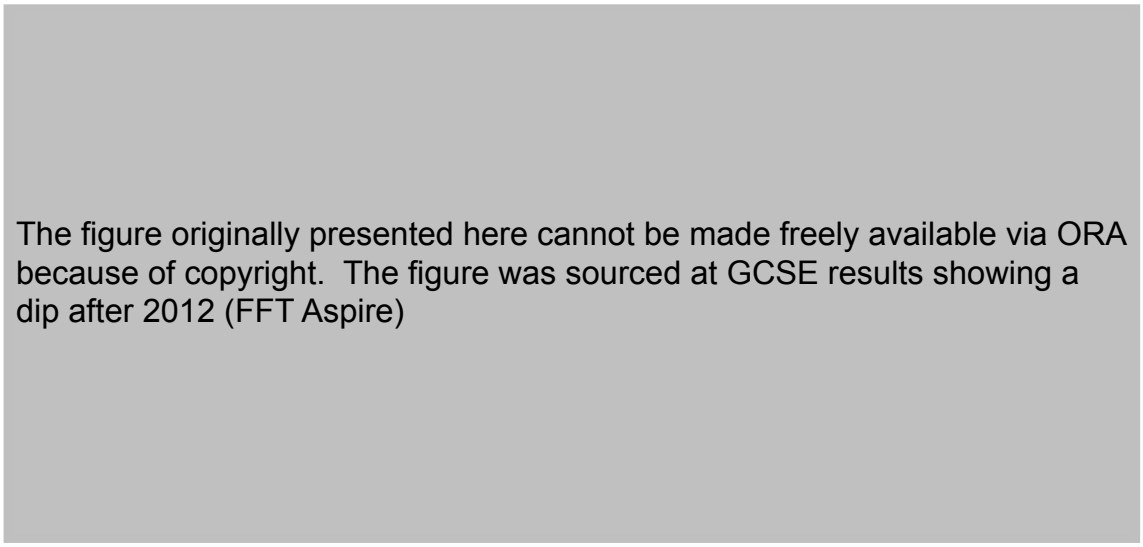
At first glance, therefore, the need for a new approach to literacy was not obvious. Before designing and embarking on my main cycles of action

[7] Data provided by Ofsted's School Data Dashboard

research, I needed first to establish a clear understanding of the specific context in relation to literacy development. To this end, I dug deeper into administrative data from the school, including performance tables from the Department of Education, school data for the previous three years accessed through FFT Aspire and current policies that related to teaching and learning at the school.

The only policies that were up to date were an Assessment & Marking Policy (with no specific reference to literacy), ratified in September 2014, and a Personalisation Policy (covering aspects of whole school pedagogy), from September 2013. I found later that the latter policy was no longer in use, and that there were no current plans to update it.

A closer look at the data provided by FFT Aspire and the DfE began to reveal some weaknesses perhaps masked by the above average results. While progress was good in Maths and English, there were a significant cohort of seven subjects with progress figures well below the national average. It might at this stage have been far-fetched to suggest that the downward trend in results and the re-introduction of SPaG marks at GCSE in many subjects in 2012 was more than a coincidence, but I wanted to find out more.



Active empirical research could not start until the project received ethical clearance.[8] However, in addition to finding out more about literacy data, I needed to discuss plans for literacy development over the academic year before then with the Head of English, who was keen that we should take a joint approach from the beginning of the year. While for my research agenda I would really have liked to wait to embark on the whole school literacy discussion until my research officially began, that was not realistic in a professional environment. In ethical terms, I could not manipulate the school's literacy agenda to support my findings. In this pre-data collection stage, I wrote brief general reflections about my communications with other staff in relation to literacy in my research diary, ensuring that no individuals were identifiable, to help me build up an initial diagnostic picture of the context for my research.

Because context and community emerged over the course of my research as crucial to the success or otherwise of the planned action, I feel that it is important to help the reader to picture that context as clearly as possible,

[8] Clearance received from the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), 5 December 2015.

within the bounds of confidentiality. I have therefore taken an interpretivist approach to the following account: necessarily impressionistic, in order to protect anonymity.

A snapshot of the literacy context at The Rural School, Autumn 2014

As the academic year 2014-15 began, I found that literacy was on the whole school agenda already. The first target on the previous year's School Development Plan had focused on improving literacy: 'To raise literacy skills particularly reading in KS3 & KS4'.

However, there remained no Literacy Policy in place. The previous Literacy Lead had left in July, following a year of long-term absence, and her replacement as Head of English in the Secondary phase of the school, Fay, was not appointed to the previous role of whole school Literacy Co-ordinator. Nevertheless, at the first staff meeting of the year to discuss Development Plan priorities, the Senior Leadership Team focused strongly both on literacy and on sharing good practice. From the top, there was clearly a desire to promote professional collaboration and to improve literacy teaching.

One of the first questions, having read the literature, was what sort of atmosphere would there be among staff when literacy was discussed? Focusing on teacher buy-in, I wanted to gain an impression of teachers' prior conceptions. Fay had given me permission to analyse anonymised data

from a questionnaire she had circulated among staff in July 2014, which revealed a very high level of confidence in teaching literacy across the curriculum. 11 members of staff had answered the questionnaire, giving an average rating of 4 out of 5 for their confidence in using a range of strategies to assess literacy skills, support and intervene in literacy. After this question, however, there had been rapid fall-off of respondents, many skipping the rest of the questions and only 3 out of the 11 stating that they would be interested in literacy-related training. This did not suggest to me promising ground for a new literacy approach.

I was to be pleasantly surprised. I had suggested in my analysis of the literature in my Part II dissertation (Author 2014:7) that there might be an 'over-statement of teacher resistance to content literacy': noting that I had found it hard to discover any hard data to support the anecdotal belief that teachers were fed up with literacy initiatives. On the first INSET day of term I discerned a positive attitude to improving literacy at The Rural School, not only from senior staff, but from subject teachers. At a results analysis meeting, 5 teachers independently brought up their perceptions (in tune with my own conjecture) that the new SPaG[9] marks had brought their overall GCSE results down, and requested help with tackling this problem.

The following day reinforced this desire to tackle literacy. My Head of Department and I had designed an INSET introducing the literacy approach we would be taking this year together. Focusing from the start on the question of staff 'buy-in', I had shared with her the ideas that I had gathered

[9] SPaG: Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

at School X about the importance of gaining a shared understanding among staff about the purposes of literacy teaching across the curriculum: acknowledged by Ofsted when they highlight the need to 'make the case for literacy in all subjects and answer the question for teachers, "What's in it for us?"' (2013:5). Working collaboratively, we had designed a short CPD session, where Fay began by introducing the social justice agenda - sharing ideas about the 'Matthew Effect' with staff, and I followed by proposing an approach that focused on the literacy needed for excellence in your subject. I took the opportunity to explain what I hoped to achieve during my year of action research (see Figure 2 below), and to make the 'What's in it for you?' explicit - that this was 'A chance to take ownership of the whole school literacy approach, and to make sure it is not just a tick box exercise.' From the beginning, I wanted to use the language of collaboration, in order to build genuine teacher buy-in.

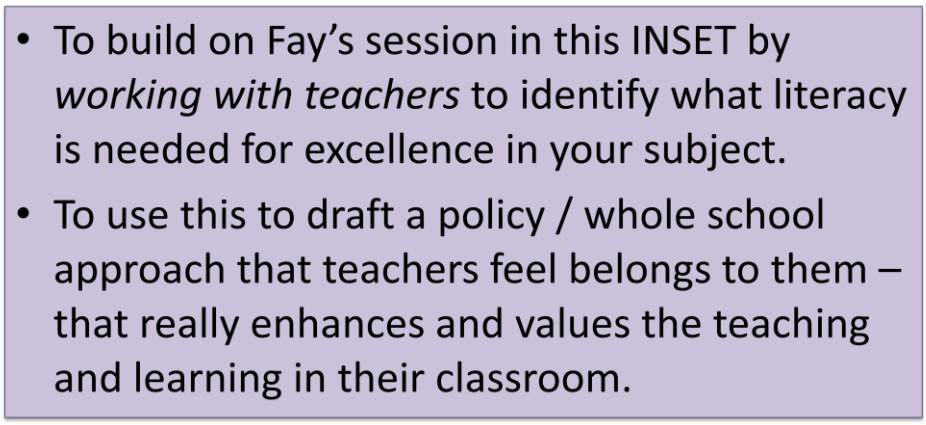


Figure 2 - 'Aims for this Year' slide from Literacy Inset, Sept 2014

Responses from teachers were overwhelmingly positive, feeding back their perception that literacy 'opens the door to everything', or 'is the key to success in all subjects.' (Anonymously noted in my research diary.)

Fay and I had also made a collaborative decision that she would introduce a Literacy Marking Code from the beginning - based on that used by School X. At this stage, we agreed that we would present it and model its use in our department, with a view to gaining feedback on whether this should be adopted as a whole school approach.

My initial snapshot of literacy at The Rural School revealed some contradictions in attitudes. Whereas staff the previous year had shown little likelihood of buying into a new literacy approach, perhaps concerns about SPaG marks in GCSE exams[10] had brought a new impetus. It was possible also that the collaborative approach Fay and I were taking was already impacting on teachers' willingness to engage.

It was now time to embark on the first stage of action research, to gain a clearer sense of my starting point, and to start working towards the creation of a collaborative literacy approach.

What is Action Research?

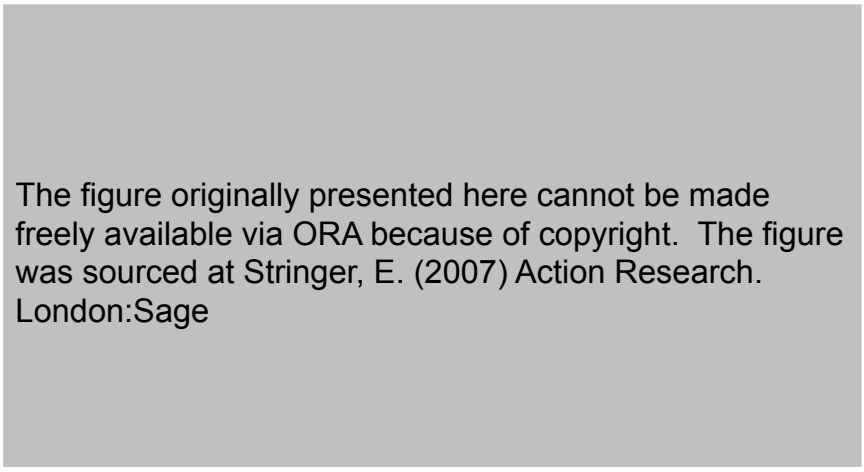
Whereas my research the previous year had focused simply on finding out about teacher perceptions, this year's project would go further in acting on those perceptions: aiming to be agentic in teacher change and development. I increasingly perceived a synergy between the empowering nature of action research and the ambition of my research project: to

[10] The full data relating to SPaG marking in the school's GCSE results was not available to me, so I had to rely on teacher perceptions of this.

empower teachers to take ownership of school policy and their own practice in relation to literacy. As Mertler (2013:23) writes: action research 'advances the notion of teacher empowerment... in complete opposition to the standard top-down, administrator-driven leadership.' This could sum up the approach I was taking to try to maximise teacher buy-in in the process of policy design and enactment.

Three possible action research cycles began to emerge: aiming firstly to establish the community of enquiry, secondly to consult teachers and build the design of a literacy policy around their beliefs, and thirdly to develop further professional discussion that would empower teachers to use the policy positively.

I visualised this process initially using a 'Look, Think, Act' spiral or coil, following the model by Stringer (2007:9) shown in Figure 3 below.



The full action plan based on this model is attached in Appendix B.

As I travelled along the coils of the action research cycles originally designed above, however, I found that my methodology was not as simple as three 'Look, Think, Act' cycles would appear. In my introduction, I introduced the idea that my experience of action research had been that of a significant learning journey, stating that I would present my research as a reflective account. I was concerned that this would become too close to anecdotal storytelling to qualify as action research.

Similar reflections on the nature of action research as a practitioner researcher journey are outlined in Moloney's study (2009) of teacher morale in a Secondary college in Australia. She explains how a project that initially aimed only to 'increase the store of knowledge' within her school community became far more than that in terms of unexpected 'professional and personal growth' (Moloney 2009: 181). Moloney describes her paper as 'an auto-ethnography in a reflexive style', aiming to provide 'resonance' for others in their own practice and research. Her concerns mirrored mine, and her discussion led me to Brooker & MacPherson's 1999 paper exploring whether research of this nature may be 'little more than picturesque journeys of self-indulgence'. While the authors elucidate the dangers of romanticised accounts of practitioner experience that tell the reader more about the researcher than the topic, they do outline a reassuring rationale for 'empowering' accounts of practice, as long as it maintains a critical edge, providing 'sufficient description, deliberation and critique' (p219) to be 'clear in terms of purpose, modes of research investigation, ways of documenting research strategies and outcomes, ways of interpreting these outcomes, and drawing implications for further action and investigation' (p207).

Like Moloney, I have kept these strictures in mind while researching and presenting my research, trying to ensure that data is used within action research guidelines, and that my actions are clearly documented and critiqued with reference to the literature in the field. Because my research questions have unfolded and developed in the course of the year, I hope that the narrative approach is not too 'self-indulgent', and indeed that it can have resonance for others investigating collaborative practice, policy development and action research - as it demonstrates the importance of revisiting and questioning one's original hypotheses or approaches, taking into account a developing understanding of context, community and reflections on the data produced. I am aware also of the ethical considerations necessary, as in capturing my own reflections on my environment and community, like Moloney's, my 'narrative may well contain revelations for others' (p182).

Methodology, Collaboration and Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), ensuring that I was adhering to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2011).

Once ethical approval and permission from my Head Teacher were obtained, I introduced my project to the whole secondary staff, inviting them to take part in an initial online questionnaire, which would give them the

option of agreeing to participate in the second cycle of action research interviews. Participation at all stages of the project was voluntary: as explained by Hobby et al (2005:10), I needed to develop 'trust and credibility [as] the currency of informal influence, because colleagues have to want to help'. I was assiduous at all times in making sure that information was available about exactly what I was doing, and in asking permission and giving reassurance that anonymity would be protected, and was fortunate to receive the generous support of my colleagues: as Andrew said in his Cycle 3 peer coaching: 'I'm quite keen to support your work.' It was important, however, to be aware therefore of the likelihood that teachers' desire to support my research would influence their answers to my questions, wanting me to have a positive outcome. In general, I felt that the format of professional discussion chosen led to honest, genuine statements of opinion, but later in the project, the final questionnaires may have been influenced by a number of external factors.

From the beginning of the first cycle of action research, I kept a detailed research diary: an invaluable basis for reflection, which, as suggested by Hopkins (2002:172), 'provides an excellent record of how one's views and attitudes evolve over time.' The data collected according my original schedule from teacher interviews and peer coaching sessions provide the main basis for my reflections in response to my overarching research question. Along the way, however, my understanding has been influenced by a range of contextualising data and interactions - artefacts such as emails, minutes from meetings and my own notes on discussions with my Head of Department in my research diary. Being careful that none of these

breach ethical guidelines, I must nevertheless acknowledge their importance in my awareness of my own positionality as practitioner researcher within the school setting.

My role and collaboration

Action research, as defined by Mertler (2013:20) is in itself collaborative; 'that is, it is composed of educators talking and working with other educators in empowering relationships.' This project was collaborative at all stages. As Gheradi (2001:137) states, the formation of new knowledge is not likely to be brought about solely by the actions of the individual researcher, but to be created through 'multiple perspectives and negotiations'. Collaboration was particularly important in the context of The Rural School, where teachers experience that 'professional isolation which can have a detrimental impact on practice' (Emery, 2010:14) to an unusual extent, being at least an hour's journey from the nearest secondary school.

One of my concerns relating to this project was my role within the school as a recently qualified junior teacher. I was struck in my reading by the similarity of my position as action researcher in this project to that of a previous MLT student who was focusing on teacher collaboration in the establishment of a VLE[11] (Grove 2012:44), who stated:

> Thompson (2007) speaks of the importance of collaboration between higher power teachers and teacher researcher, and one of the challenges of this project for me as a teacher-researcher has indeed been the lack of an established position of authority upon which to draw.

[11] Virtual Learning Environment

Although James et al (2007:81) identify 'change agents' in schools who may not have any formal status, I was not sure whether I would have the authority to persuade the school to let me take the 'gradualist' approach that I believed might maximise teacher buy-in. As James et al also point out, the 'culture of inquiry, reflection and collegial learning' I was working towards does not 'sit easily within a high-pressure, high-stakes performativity agenda' (ibid:75). The pressure was not only on me, but on my Head of Department, who pointed out to me part way through my project, in March, that 'It's in my performance management that there will be a literacy policy in place by the end of the summer,' although she quickly relented, saying: 'I don't want to hurry you at all.'[12]

Fay, my Head of Department, would be the main collaborative partner with whom I would develop the literacy policy. As middle manager, and my link to senior leadership, she represented the 'strategic knot' characterised by Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995, quoted in Hargreaves (1999:132)), and was thus crucial to the success of the project. I was keen from the beginning to make it clear that she would be the lead decision-maker on the literacy approach in the secondary school, while my project would provide the groundwork for a collaborative approach. This was not a straightforward relationship, however, as I needed to take into account the pressure on Fay to produce results as Head of Department, and had to be careful from the beginning not to tread on her toes as she established herself in this leadership role. As Busher & Harris (1999:307) write in their study of subject leadership, 'organisational hierarchical distinctions are not neatly delineated' in many

[12] All attributed quotations used are from meetings where verbal permission was given for proceedings to be noted and used in my research.

schools, which, they warn, can lead to 'confrontation or continuous friction' (p312). Fortunately, Fay was supportive of my research, and receptive to discussing my findings and working together to design the next steps of the action. However, the lines of accountability were not clear in terms of responsibility for the whole school literacy approach, and the contradiction between our roles was to cause me some difficulties during the course of my project.

Cycle 1: Initial Data Collection

Cycle 1 in my Look, Think, Act planning spiral (Appendix B) culminated in the analysis of the online questionnaire sent out to staff to establish their self-identified perceptions of whole school literacy, and to ask for volunteers to participate in interviews to help plan a whole school literacy policy. The question schedule and analysis of answers are attached in Appendix C.

Findings of the initial stage of data collection

14 members of staff (out of 19) responded to the initial survey, from which I was able to identify the following points, and to use these to shape my design for action research further.

The doubts raised by McCoss-Yergian and Krepps (2010) and Faulkner et al (2012) about whether teachers were willing to embrace literacy teaching were not borne out by the responses to my original survey, with an

overwhelming majority of teachers agreeing that 'All teachers are teachers of literacy' (Figure 4 below).

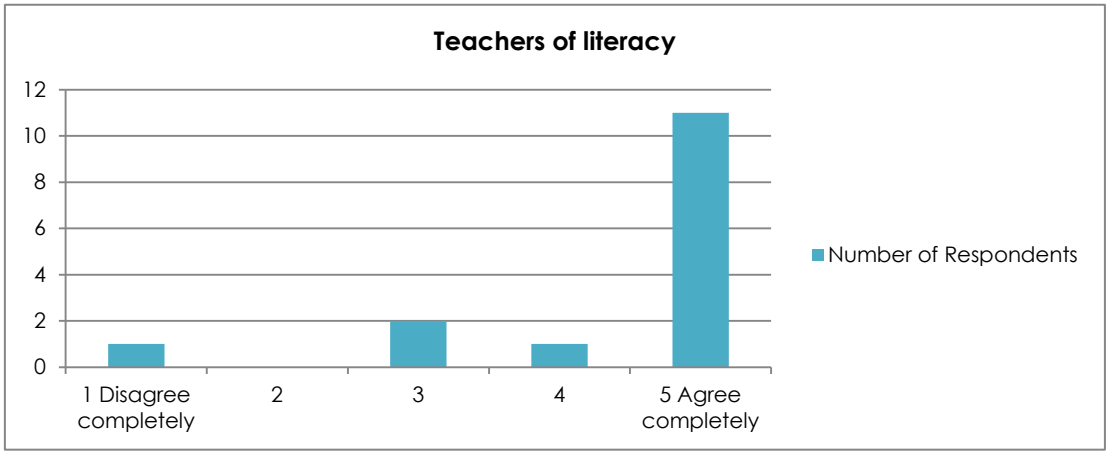


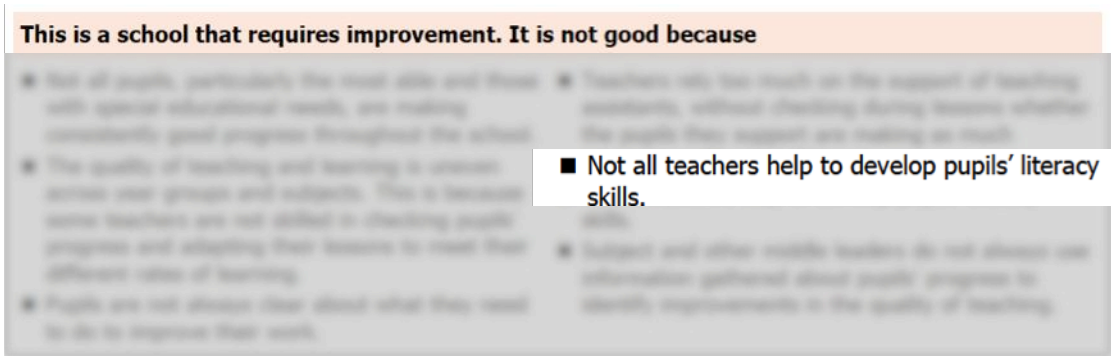
Figure 4 - "All teachers are teachers of literacy, with a responsibility to teach literacy skills explicitly." How far do you agree?

I was interested, however, by the high levels of confidence displayed by teachers in their literacy teaching: when asked 'How confident do you feel in teaching the literacy needed for excellence in your subject?', only a single teacher responded on the negative side of the scale, despite the concerns relating to literacy teaching raised in general professional discourse in the school. Nevertheless, most teachers were willing to participate in training in how to develop their students' literacy skills through subject teaching, and 12 out of the 14 volunteered to take part in my proposed Cycle 2 interviews aiming to consult them about their perceptions of literacy at The Rural School.

Ofsted report

The arrival of an Ofsted inspection team at The Rural School just before I launched my first cycle of action research, had a significant impact on the priority given to literacy at the school. While the school had been judged to

'Require Improvement' two years previously, the focus on leadership and management, had allowed teachers to feel that it had little relevance to their own practice. This inspection, however, confirmed the '3' rating a second time, this time placing teaching and learning in the firing line. Singled out for specific action was whole school literacy.


This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not all teachers help to develop pupils' literacy skills.

Figure 5 - Extract from Ofsted report, November 2014

This judgement had the potential to change the school's view of my research proposal in a number of different directions. I had been concerned in case the school would not have the patience to take my longer-term approach to building up teacher involvement in whole school literacy. Would Ofsted's judgement mean that Senior Leadership would insist on a literacy policy being put in place immediately and monitored closely? Fortunately, the judgement lent my plans validity in the eyes of the Senior Leadership Team: it was part of the action that was being taken to impact on whole school literacy. What would be interesting, however, was what impact the Ofsted report had on teachers' perceptions of their own practice, which had been criticised. Would this lead to defensiveness? Or would they be keen to improve their practice in response to the report?

For me, the findings of the Ofsted report validated to some extent my own observations in my initial snapshot of The Rural School. I had been

concerned that the high GCSE English grades belied my assessment that the school needed to take a new approach to improving whole school literacy; but the observations of the inspectors supported my interpretation. The impression I gained at school and noted in my research diary, however, was that the more vocal teachers, at least, were not convinced by the judgement, laying it at the door of politics, or of having 'seen the wrong lessons'. I was a little concerned, following these responses, that The Rural School might not fulfil May & Wright's suggestion that schools need to be 'critically reflective' (2007:373) in order to implement literacy across the curriculum successfully.

Cycle 2: Collaborative Policy Design

What did I want to find out? What was the aim of this cycle?

McCoss-Yergian and Krepps (2010:5) claim that it is 'teachers' *beliefs* about content literacy [which] often operate as barriers to implementation'. My aim in this second cycle was to identify the beliefs of teachers at The Rural School (Research question 6), but also, through consultation and discussion, to begin establishing a collaborative community, using findings from professional discourse to design a jointly-owned literacy policy (Research question 7).

Steps to make this policy collaborative:

The key 'Look' activity in this cycle involved semi-structured interviews with 11 members of secondary staff, recorded in MP3 format and transcribed. The

interview cycle was designed to create a collaborative approach not just confined to teaching staff; opportunity to participate had been opened also to teaching assistants and the SENCO[13], three out of five of whom had chosen to take part. Informed consent was given by all participants: identities to be protected and recordings deleted when the research was completed. I was positioned both as action researcher and colleague within this interview cycle, trying to gather data through the use of neutral prompts (see Appendix D), while participating in professional discussion, trying through the activity to build that 'bridge to professional knowledge' described by Aubusson et al (2009:100).

There were limits to the extent to which the design of the literacy policy would be collaborative. Consultation lay at the heart of the process that I had designed in order to maximise teacher buy-in, but I was not aiming fully to create a joint production with staff, despite recommendations in the literature that teachers should have the opportunity to construct their own knowledge and tools (Putnam & Borko 2000). Examples of good practice such as that explored by Chilla et al (2007) suggest the formation of Literacy Councils in order to establish 'teachers as leaders in school reform' (ibid:12), but in a setting as small as ours, this was not feasible. Instead, in collaboration with my Head of Department, I intended to bring my set of knowledge and skills to a process that consulted teachers and made explicit the ways in which their beliefs were used to construct the document.

[13] Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

Coding and analysis of interviews

Analysis of the Cycle 2 interviews took two forms. I had designed four questions in which discussion was stimulated and supported by the use of card sorts, enabling teachers to present a visual picture of their priorities, and eliciting further thinking from them about why particular literacy issues were so important to them.

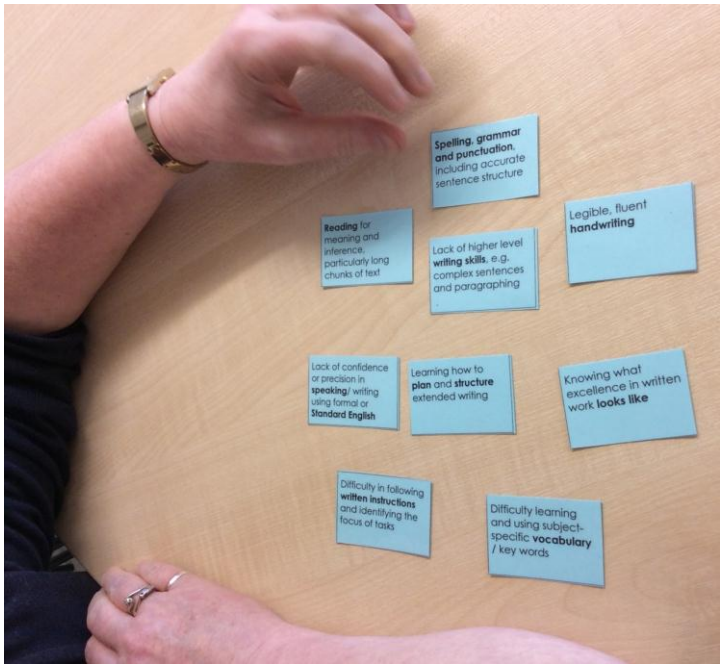


Figure 6 - Card sort to stimulate discussion for Question 4, Cycle 2 interviews

This allowed me to compare the number of responses for any one card, and by weighting them according to prioritisation, to calculate an overall staff perception for each question of this sort. Full evidence of the results of this analysis are attached as Appendix D.

Deductive analysis of the card sorts was supplemented by close reading and coding of the opinions given in interview, which at this stage appeared to be quite a straightforward process (Example of coded transcripts for question 1

attached as Appendix E). I wanted to find out what teachers' beliefs about whole school literacy were, what they thought should be foregrounded in the literacy policy, and who would be interested in further participation in improving literacy teaching. However, I found as I read that other themes were emerging. As Hendricks (2009:4) says, 'we find ourselves in a political climate that favours 'scientifically-based research', and indeed, my instinct is to look for a clean, simple approach to data collection, but I had to accept that my interpretivist positioning as researcher meant that new avenues would open for interpretation as I progressed. It helped to consider Basir's (2003:143) definition of coding as a 'dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing'.

I was not only looking for information on which to build a literacy policy, but also for clues to teachers' attitudes towards collaboration. I therefore considered how confident teachers were in their literacy teaching, and looked for evidence that they were interested in improving their practice. Were there any who saw a dissonance between their current practice and their aims for literacy teaching? And if so, how willing were they to take action on trying out new literacy techniques? What attitudes would they display towards professional learning?

Initial findings of Cycle 2 research:

Looking for evidence from the interviews of the specific focus areas and pedagogical techniques perceived by staff to be important, I found clear signposts towards what should be foregrounded in the Literacy Policy.

The first question was designed to make it clear to staff that they were participating in a shared policy design process, by asking for their contribution to a shared definition of literacy. There was an obvious tendency towards prioritising the functional aspects of literacy: reading, writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar. My inclination towards subject-specific literacies was not strongly validated, with only the Maths and Art teachers viewing literacy through the lens of their own subjects (Clara saw it as: 'How you can add meaning to art, by using poetry and text and literature'). A Wordle (See Appendix D for explanation) allowed me to visualise the way in which The Rural School staff interpreted literacy (Figure 7 below):

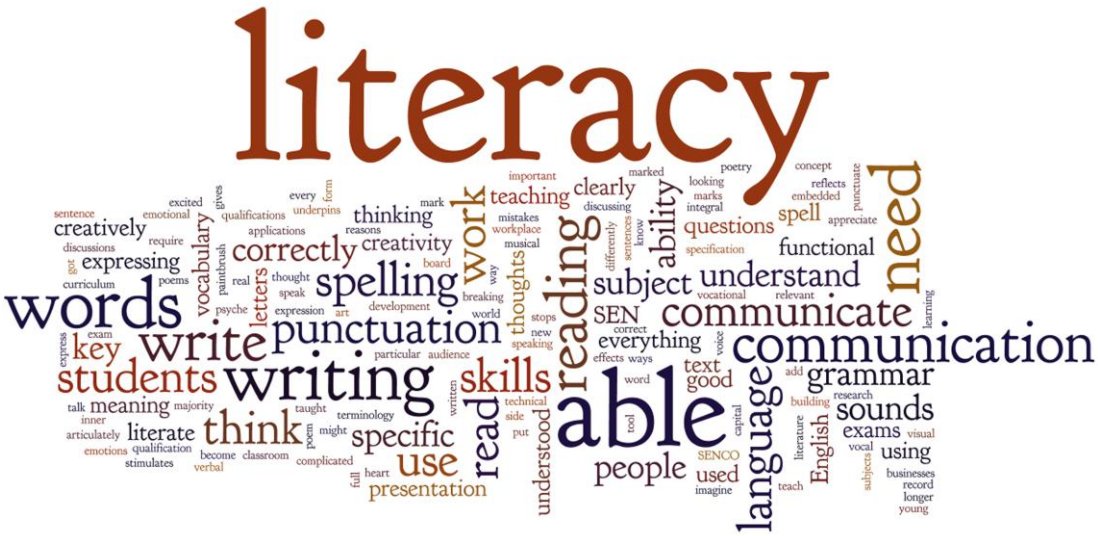


Figure 7 - Wordle showing the frequency of key words in staff definitions of literacy

'Concepts', 'verbal expression' and 'creativity' appeared in small print, partly through the input of the Primary literacy staff, whose more holistic approach to learning made them highlight the 'confidence to think creatively - to imagine... [which] underpins... everything.'

This functional approach was substantiated by the perception that spelling, punctuation and grammar were the greatest barriers to achievement in subjects across the board (Figure 8 below).

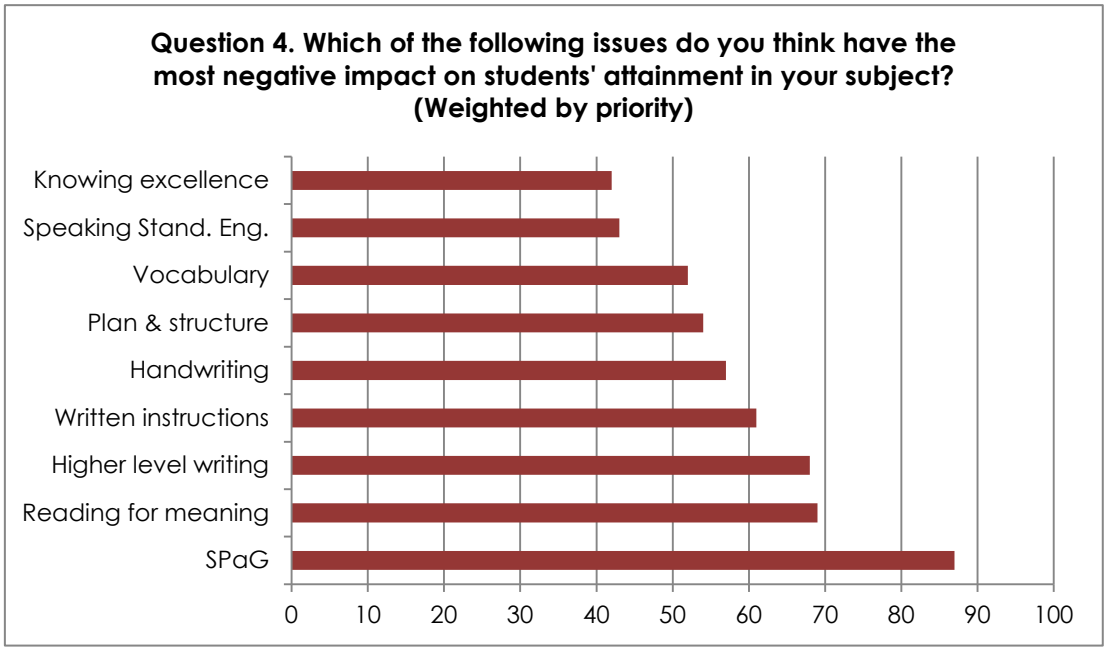


Figure 8 - Barriers to attainment

'Knowing what excellence looks like' - a barrier indicating the need for use of teacher modelling and success criteria - garnered a fairly blank reaction in contrast, ranging from 'Modelling for literacy? Mathematically that's not so important' (Jessica), to an honest: 'I don't know if they know what excellence in written work looks like, because I don't give them ... answers that I would give, because I don't know if they'd be any good to them' (Pete). Did this indicate too great a lack of awareness of key pedagogical techniques to allow me to centre the literacy policy around them? I had planned the three parts of question 7 to probe this possibility further, creating a second card sort, prompting teachers to think about the teaching and learning

processes that support literacy: a list of techniques gleaned from my reading (Hattie 2011, Didau 2014 and Barton 2013) and experience at School X.

A more contradictory picture begin to paint itself in the findings from these questions. Firstly, I had asked staff to pick out techniques in which they were particularly confident. This revealed a high level of confidence in using speaking and listening techniques such as using questioning, or teaching children to give verbal presentations, or take notes. I had noted that many of Ofsted's case studies for improving literacy (2013:10) give examples of a whole school focus on speaking & listening as a strength. At School X, the first literacy focus had been on questioning, with a specific aim to develop precision in students' spoken answers: teacher talk and collaborative pupil talk being the first step in promoting learning, as shown in Mercer's research (1995:114) and Thompson (2007). However, this was clearly not an identified weakness here, and would not receive support as a whole-school initiative.

Reading, however, which I had been keen to champion following my earlier research, looked more promising. It had been identified as the second greatest barrier to student attainment, and a clear majority of staff had answered 'Reading' to question 5 (Figure 9 below).

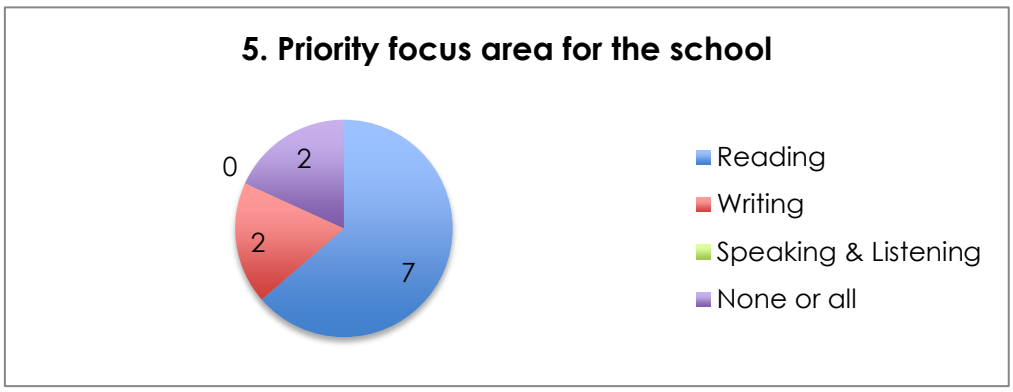


Figure 9 - Priority focus area for the school

Confidence among staff was very low in their knowledge of how to teaching reading strategies explicitly (see Figure 10 below).

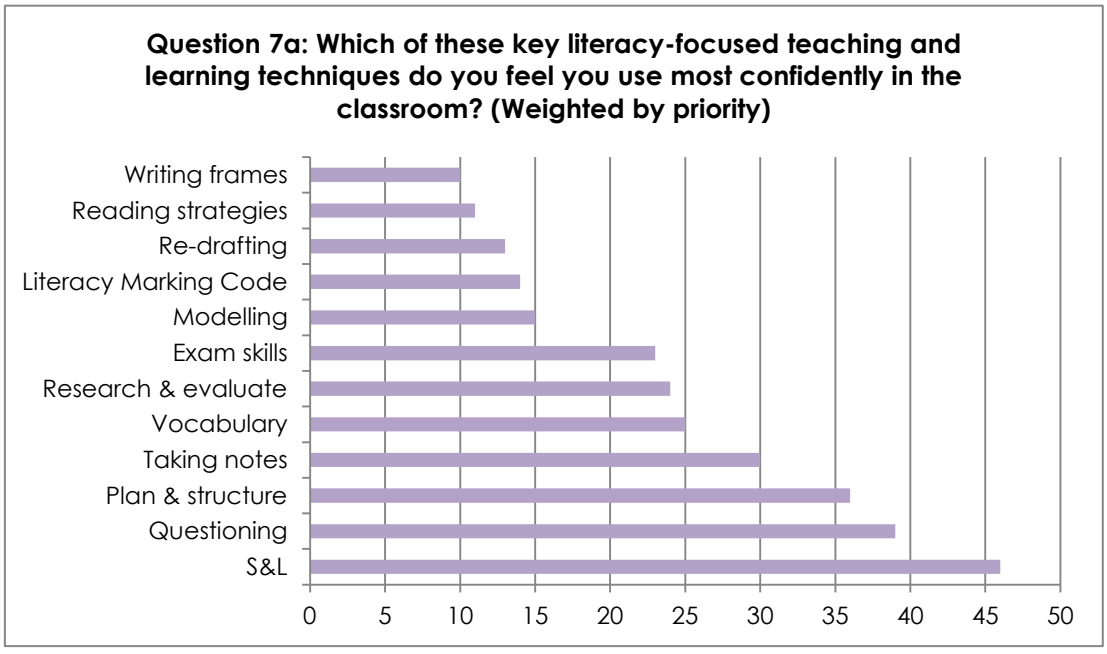


Figure 10 - Teacher confidence in pedagogical techniques

However, thereafter emerged a striking contradiction: although staff had identified reading as a possible whole school focus, and had little confidence in how to teach it, when asked 'Which techniques and approaches do you believe should be strengthened across the school?' only two teachers mentioned explicit teaching of reading strategies, and they

placed it low on the priority spectrum. It was only the Head of English who stated that reading was crucial 'in all sorts of subjects, ...if you're looking for research and evaluate', and the SENCO, who focused on the need to improve reading for the lowest attainers. Underlining this further was the fact that no teachers mentioned the teaching of reading skills in answer to the question: 'Which techniques would you most value developing further within your own practice?'

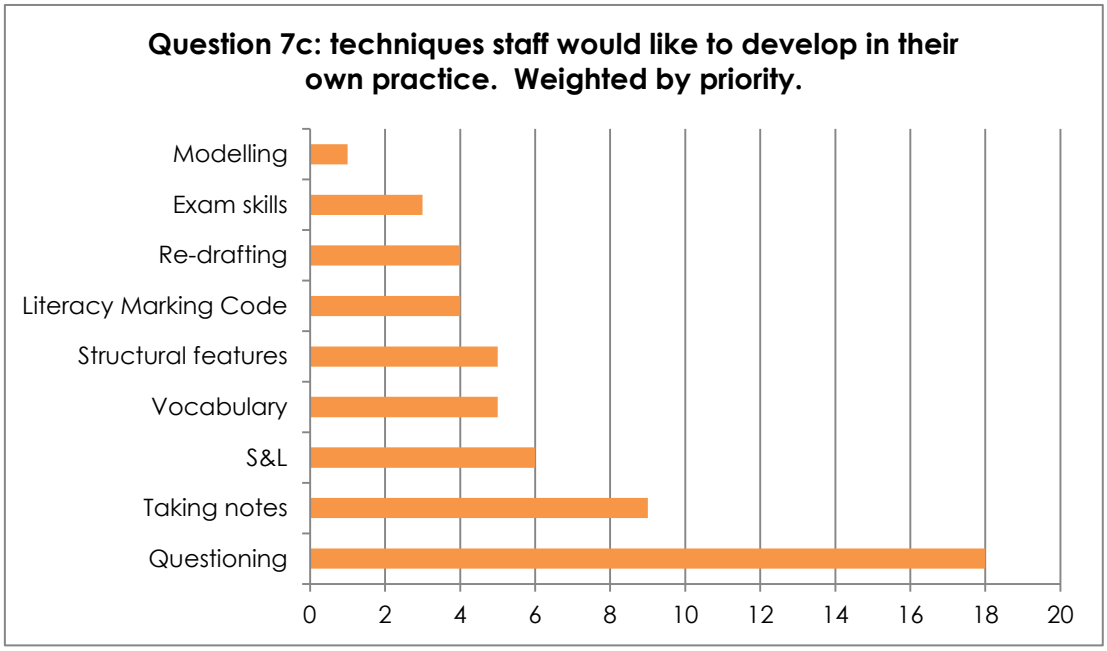


Figure 11 - techniques highlighted for personal professional development

Conversely, speaking and listening techniques suddenly emerged, having been dismissed as an area for whole school action, in this question; all but one of the teachers listing it as one of the areas they would like to develop.

A positive aspect of the interview cycle was the high proportion of staff (9 out of 11) willing to participate in my Cycle 3 collaborative CPD sessions. I had been concerned in my initial reflections on the professional culture of

the school that, particularly given the additional pressure after the Ofsted report, a lack of the trust and collegiality that Swafford (2000:113) identifies as crucial to creating a 'safe atmosphere in which teachers are willing to take risks as they learn new ways of teaching' might inhibit teachers' willingness to participate further in my research. Looking inductively at the transcripts for evidence of attitudes towards CPD, many staff gave positive responses such as: ' I'm enjoying this - I love this sort of talking!' (Clara), and ' You never stop learning, do you?' (Penelope). The affective dimension of the pressured, isolated professional environment did not seem to prevent teachers from feeling confident enough to participate further, but I wondered if it did have a bearing on the specific literacy teaching techniques they chose to focus on.

I began to question whether my responses to this data could be as straightforward as originally imagined. The levels of confidence stated by staff in their literacy teaching were high: 'There isn't one [pedagogical technique] that I don't use - and in equal measure' (Fay), but when offered a CPD opportunity, they chose to take it up in their areas of greatest confidence. Granville-Chapman's MSc dissertation (2012) pointed me towards Argyris and Schon's (1974) theories of action: 'espoused theory' and 'theory-in-use', which describe the gap between what people say, and what they actually do: not purposefully, but owing to inaccuracies of their own self-perceptions. I saw in these interviews a considerable dissonance between talk and action.

It seemed clear that there were contextual factors in play that were affecting teacher responses, whether it was my role as interviewer in place of a senior member of staff, or an attempt to avoid stepping out of their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1986) by choosing professional development in areas in which they were already confident.

At this stage of the project, I needed to stop, reflect on these contradictions, do further reading and then decide on the next steps for action research. More and more, I was finding that the simple Look, Think, Act cycles I had originally envisaged did not create a realistic picture of my experience of action research. Rather, I was experiencing what Moloney (2009:184) described as 'a blurring together of literature reading, data collection and data analysis'. I needed help to interpret the Cycle 1 and 2 data before I was able to plan a literacy policy that maximised teacher buy in.

Policy design

What did I want to come out of this part of the cycle?

My aim, in this 'Act' stage of Cycle 2, was to draft a policy that would be acceptable to teachers, SLT, Head of Department and Ofsted - and that could then become one of the tools for developing whole school literacy. Before beginning to draft the policy, I returned to the literature relating to policy enactment in schools, as I was realising that my original interpretation of the reading and aim for a literacy policy focused around high-value pedagogical practices such as modelling, questioning and feedback was not relevant in my current context. I had never thought that I would be able

to 'transplant' the successful policy from School X 'unchanged' (Ofsted 2013a:41), but now I realised that I needed to return to the literature to help me find a way forward that took context clearly into account.

Returning to the literature - Cultural Historical Activity Theory

When I had first approached the literature relating to literacy policies and literacy development in schools, I had been teaching at an outstanding city school, with strongly established teaching and learning practices and a much talked-about 'Professional Learning Culture'. I had hoped to take my ideas from this environment and apply them in the tiny rural local school, with the idealistic aim of creating a literacy policy that would build on the strengths, improve on some of the perceived weaknesses of School X's policy, and maximise teacher buy-in thereby. My findings from Cycle 1 and 2 were showing me that one approach would not fit all contexts. I became aware that I would need to take a 'situative perspective' as outlined in Putnam & Borko (2000). They suggested that for teacher learning and hence organisational change to be effected, cognition needed to be situated in particular environments, and 'stretched over the individual and various artifacts such as physical and symbolic tools' (p13). Perhaps I needed to consider more closely the environment in which I was working, and how that interacted with the tools I was using in the development of a literacy policy.

Ball, Maguire & Braun (2012:20) point out that there are surprisingly few studies that foreground the contextual dimensions of policy enactment in

schools, but that 'most schools have distinct sets of professional cultures, outlooks and attitudes that have evolved over time and that inflect policy responses in particular ways'. Ball (1994:28) had drawn my attention to 'an explicit concern for community' that seemed to be missing from many teacher development programmes, and this became central to my reading in the next stage of the project.

In trying to visualise the complex interactions that I was bringing to bear on the policy design process, I had studied Ball, Maguire & Braun's diagram demonstrating their 'thinking about policy enactment' (2012:Figure 7.1) with little sense of illumination. As they say, it is a 'model that is in flux', taking into account many affective dimensions of human action, as well as the material and social contexts of the school. However, in order to move forward with policy design and my action research, I needed a clearer lens through which to view the process. My MSc supervisor drew my attention to Cultural Historical Activity Theory as a framework that could be used to visualise action such as I was taking, and this became a turning point in my project. Using a socio-cultural frame as 'a heuristic framework for asking important questions that other theories may not raise so clearly, and for seeing relationships among those questions that may guide design and evaluation' (Daniels & Edwards 2004:310), I was able to situate my analysis of teacher responses within the context of the whole school culture, and see how these might affect my planning of a whole school literacy approach.

Triangulating Ball et al's analysis (2012) of policy enactment within the situated realities of schools, the literature suggesting that off the peg policies

are doomed to be pushed to the back of a dusty shelf, and Engeström's second generation activity theory model (Engeström 1987, 1994, 1999a), I visualised a model to demonstrate the possible weaknesses of a top-down imposed, inflexible literacy policy, as shown in Figure 12 below.

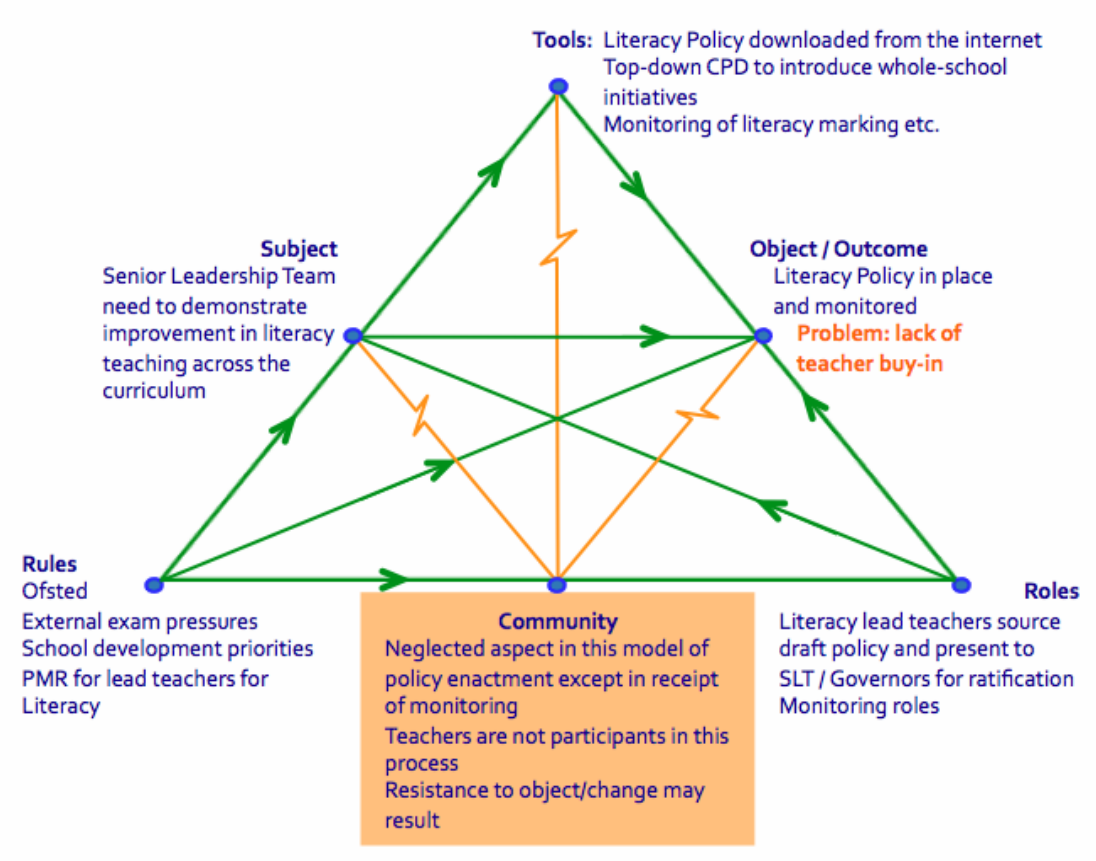


Figure 12 - Traditional model for the enactment of a Literacy Policy in the Secondary school, viewed through a CHAT framework

This model seeks to explain the negative perceptions teachers held towards policy decision making in the school, shown in their Cycle 1 responses (Figure 13 below), by demonstrating the lack of connection from Subject, Tools and Object to the Community. It suggests that the policy enactment may be motivated primarily by the rules and compromised by a lack of staff buy-in.

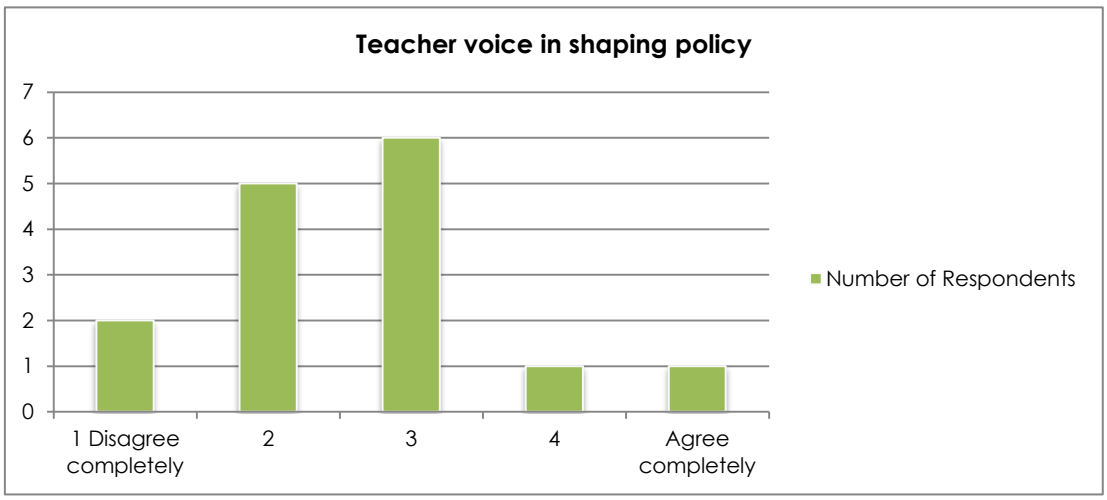


Figure 13 - Question 4, Cycle 1 survey: My views are important in shaping policy and teaching and learning approaches in this school." How far do you agree?

Responding to the contradictions highlighted in this initial model, I visualised a new framework with the school community in its central position, anchoring the base of the triangle and interacting with all the other nodes of the triangle to achieve the object of a literacy policy that teachers would engage with in their developing practice. (Figure 14 below)

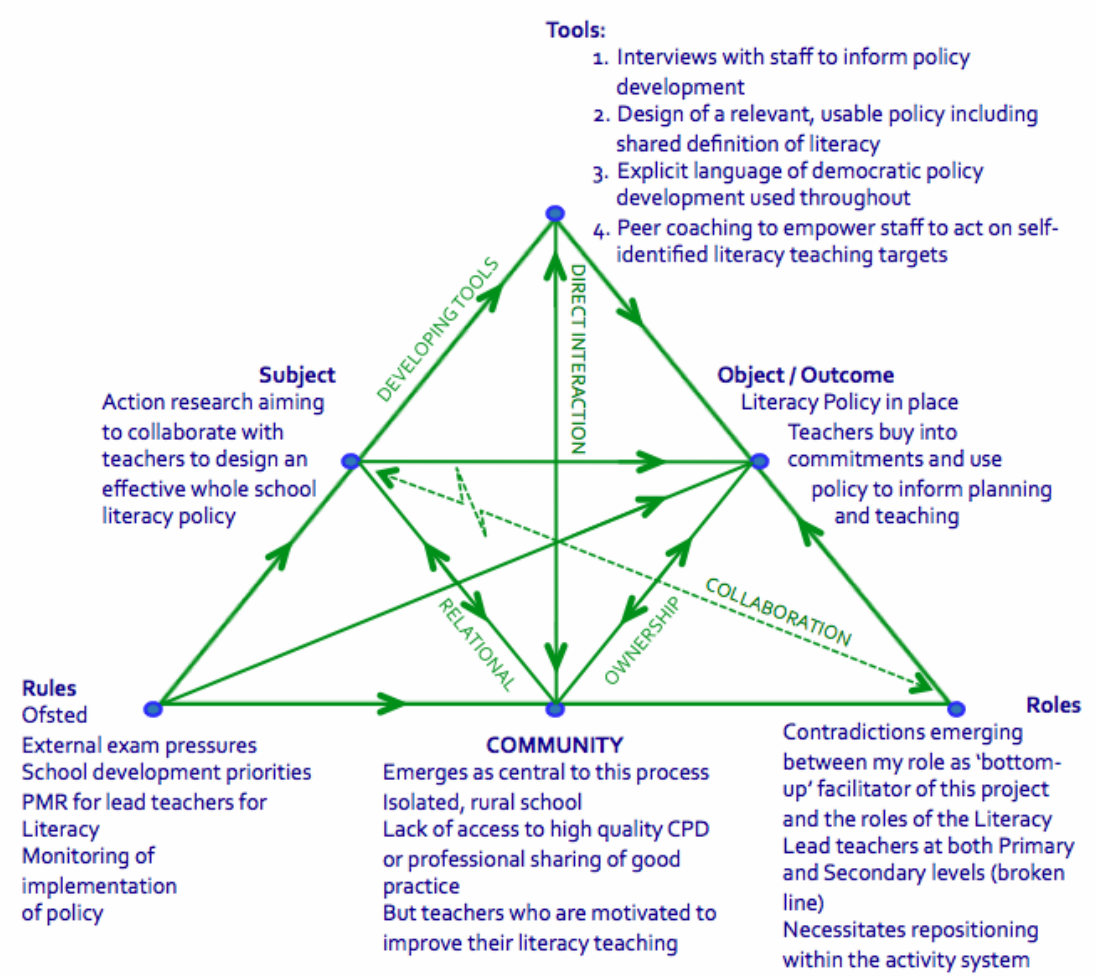


Figure 14 - Theoretical framework for action research aiming to align community perceptions and practices with policy development

Contradiction in roles

Although a much more positive model, I could still see contradictions emerging, particularly in the relationship between myself as Subject, and the roles of my Head of Department and the Literacy lead teachers in the primary phase. Moloney (2009:184) describes how a teacher's position within the school 'significantly influences the opportunities to disseminate knowledge.' This became a particular challenge at this stage of the action research. While I felt that the data collected was building up to create a strong picture of the literacy needs of the school, I had to be extremely

diplomatic in how I offered this knowledge to senior staff, in such a way that it would form a basis for discussion, rather than appearing as if I was trying to tell them what to do.

It was important that I took into account the importance of collaboration in my action research. While I might sometimes find my understanding of literacy and of the perceptions of the community in conflict with that of higher power teachers, I needed to accept that sometimes my activity would need repositioning in response to their input. On occasion, this could be frustrating, when, for example, my Head of Department circulated a questionnaire duplicating and sometimes confusing the questions I was asking; but it was also extremely useful to gain the input of more experienced practitioners, such as the Deputy Head's advice not to 'include too much in this. Too much will just be ignored by staff' (Notes from literacy meeting, 15 January 2015). This advice, acted upon, formed the basis for many of the positive feedback comments once the policy had been shared with staff.

Collaboration with primary colleagues

One of the material contexts that I had to consider in planning the design of the literacy policy is the school's 3-16 make-up, whereby we have a primary and secondary phase in one building. In terms of the culture of the school, however, the two phases are very separate: primary downstairs and secondary upstairs (interestingly, two of the teachers who did not participate in my research were the two secondary teachers who teach downstairs: I wondered whether that material separation leads to more professional

isolation). I didn't feel that contributing to the specific primary literacy approach was within the scope of my role or research, but welcomed collaboration from the Primary Literacy lead teachers on agreeing the overarching definition and values of the whole school policy. It was agreed to have separate pages for the two phases of the school, although this might lead to a tangible lack of alignment between the two approaches.

Return to McCallion

My learning from activity theory had made clearer for me the need to pare away my prior conceptions about what would make a 'good' literacy policy (in particular, a whole school focus on reading, and central importance given to high value pedagogical techniques), in order to produce a policy that was responsive to my context.

I now developed a more nuanced understanding that literature I had previously dismissed as 'old-fashioned' might be relevant to my school environment, which was perhaps not fully engaged with up to date thinking on learning and teaching, being isolated from professional learning. One book I had been dismissive of on first reading was McCallion (1998), finding his key vocabulary approach limited. However, now I found myself needing to revisit this reading, as I couldn't rush straight into a transformation of teaching and learning, as needed by the 'genre pedagogy' approach I would have liked to have taken. My colleagues had overwhelmingly identified SPaG and key vocabulary as priorities in literacy teaching, and

therefore, I needed to accept that they would be the right starting point for a Rural School literacy approach.

Returning to McCallion, I found clear guidelines for the process of designing a literacy policy, starting, as I had, by asking:

> What are the values and principles by which the school currently operates - in particular, the key attitudes and approaches to literacy... which have resulted in its being the type of school that it has been.
>
> (McCallion 1998:3)

The author's iteration of the importance of the programme being 'owned by the school' (ibid:4), and being 'relevant to the school... challenging, achievable with effort and measurable' informed the final drafting of the policy I was to submit to SLT.

Rationale for policy design

Building on Cycle 2 interviews, feedback on earlier drafts during literacy meetings, and discussion with Fay, my Head of Department, I drafted the Literacy Policy attached as Appendix F. A brief rationale for the separate sections of the policy follows.

1. Definition of literacy

The shared definition of literacy aimed to set a tone of collaboration at the outset, and to ensure that there was no confusion about what literacy across the curriculum would mean.

2. Key principles

These focus on why literacy is so important, and state, as agreed by all teachers, that we are all teachers of literacy. In this section, groundwork is provided for a possible future focus on teaching and learning, but it is not made into prescriptive action steps at this stage because of a lack of engagement with literacy-focused pedagogical practices among staff.

3. Key commitments

As agreed with Diane, the Deputy Head, the key commitments made in the policy were kept very short and to the point, as shown below:

Marking and Feedback

- All departments will use the **Literacy Marking Code** (attached) to help students to see and correct weaknesses in their work.
- This will include taking time for students to **act on feedback**: to edit their work and improve spellings, grammar and punctuation.

Subject-specific Literacies

- All departments will identify and explicitly teach those aspects of literacy which are **relevant to their subject area**.
- This includes the accurate use and spelling of subject-specific **key words**, which may be recorded in books, files, literacy mats, electronically or in classroom displays.
- All departments will identify and teach the literacy needed for success in external exams, including recognising **command words** in exam questions, **reading** source materials with understanding, and **structuring answers**.

Figure 15 - Key commitments from The Rural School draft literacy policy, June 2015

The commitments were more aligned to external pressures, such as exam success and the need for Ofsted to see evidence of literacy marking, than I had originally envisaged. However, they grew out of triangulation of the literature supporting the effectiveness of marking and feedback (Hattie 2009) and key vocabulary (McCallion 1998, Barton 2013, Lewis & Wray 2000), my

understanding of teachers' responses to consultation, and my collaboration with the agenda of senior staff with responsibility for literacy.

4. Section on Reading, Writing and Speaking & Listening

Again, this section sets out wider school commitments to literacy development, as a baseline for future growth rather than as immediate action steps - but each has the potential to be tested, challenged and improved as the school moves towards expansive professional learning in relation to literacy.

While feedback from SLT, and a reluctance to tackle the teaching of reading strategies from staff participants had discounted for the short term the initial perceived inclination towards a whole school reading focus, I believed that providing robust intervention for struggling readers remained a high priority. This was one area in which my own beliefs about social justice and the rules in terms of what Ofsted expect to see bypassed community perceptions, and I included the following:

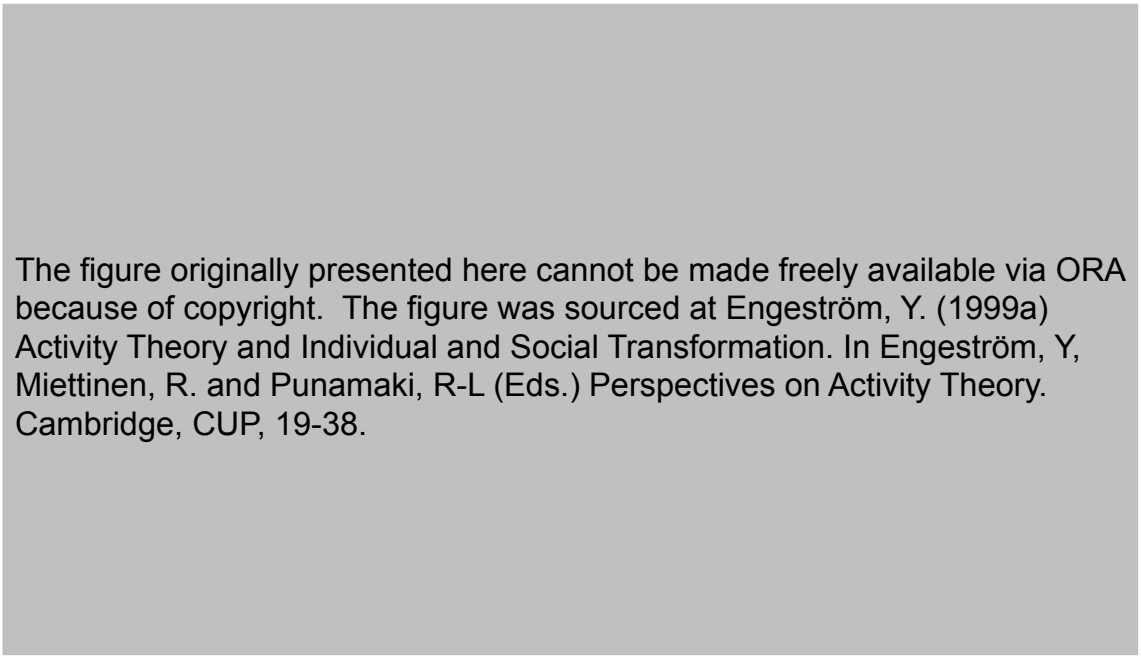
> Literacy leaders ensure that pupils' progress is not held back by an inability to read accurately and fluently. The English department and the SENCO help those who have fallen behind to make substantial and sustained progress in their reading, as this will affect their writing, confidence and behaviour in every subject.

This policy was presented to Fay on 18th May, who responded: 'I love everything you've done!', then to SLT for approval thereafter. It would be presented to staff in June 2015, giving me an opportunity to assess how far the teachers 'bought in' to the approach it represented.

Cycle 3: Peer Coaching

Meanwhile, I was embarking on the third cycle of the action research. This action aimed to encourage and empower staff to engage with literacy in their own practice. Their participation signified buy-in - but I was also interested in analysis of the ways in which they responded to peer coaching as a professional development technique; whether this could be an approach taken to improve professional learning through the establishment of a collaborative community of enquiry. I had, by now, moved away from seeing this research project as a spiral 'Look, Think, Act' cycle, finding it much more useful to use a CHAT framework.

While in Figure 14 above, I had visualised my research as a single activity system involving a multiplicity of tools, it helped me at this stage to rationalise the differing paths that my action was taking as two interacting activity systems: the 'third generation of activity theory' proposed by Toiviainen and Engeström (2009:96): in which the unit of analysis 'should include two activity systems, at minimum, orienting towards at least partially shared objects of activity.' In this case, the object of the each triangle was teacher buy-in to the literacy policy, but they could combine together to generate a new object: expansive learning (Engeström 1987). A clearer version of Figure 16 is shown as Appendix G.



Literature relating to peer coaching:

Peer coaching is one facet of the much-fêted (Saunders 2002, Hargreaves 2003, Street & Temperley 2005) concept of collaborative enquiry, the process of which sees individual practitioners come together to explore an area of their practice, leading to improvement of the professional learning community of the school. The hypothesis with which I began this project was that teachers were more likely to 'buy in' to a literacy approach if it came from them, rather than being a top-down directive. I hoped that the consultative approach to the design of the literacy policy would achieve this in part, but believed that staff would see the policy more as a practical aid to their teaching if they were actively involved in investigating their own literacy teaching practice, debating teaching techniques and setting themselves targets for development. For change to be embedded in individual practice, we need to help develop a culture that 'supports and encourages debate' (Hargreaves 2003: xvi).

Peer coaching is becoming a fashionable model for professional development in schools, if the proliferating 'How to' literature is anything to go by. Specific instruction relating to coaching teachers in the pedagogy of literacy is less easy to find in the UK; in Australia and the States, however, Literacy Coaches have an established role in the professional development for teachers, disseminating the pedagogical content knowledge that my reading had identified as crucial in being able to teach the literacy needed for excellence in every subject. Gill, Kostiw & Stone (2010) explain how Literacy Coaches in Victoria provide 'essential leadership for a school's entire literacy program by helping create and supervise long-term staff development processes'. This was fascinating to me, and validated my idea that peer coaching might have a facilitative role in empowering teachers to be teachers of literacy.

Cycle 3 would therefore consist of peer coaching sessions with the 9 staff participants in Cycle 2 who had identified an literacy-related technique on which they would like to work further. Participation would be completely voluntary (one of the 'Musts' highlighted by Swafford (2000:112)). In order to ensure that I approached this in a fashion most likely to foster Swafford's 'atmosphere of trust, respect, collegiality and confidentiality' (p113), I needed to read more practical guides to coaching such as Allison (2014) and Beere & Broughton (2013) to compensate for the lack of training criticised in coaching programmes by Simkins et al (2006).

I was nervous, as a new arrival, of how the sessions would be received, and felt it crucial that I should take an informed approach to creating a

reciprocal coaching environment, in which teachers felt they were developing their own practice and adding to the knowledge of the school through professional discussion, rather than being 'coached' to suck eggs by a newly fledged teacher. I would be careful to introduce each session with an explanation of the 'peer coaching' term that re-aligned the process as a form of collaborative professional discourse, positioning the power equally between coach and coachee.

> ... it's officially called peer coaching, but I find 'coaching' is a misnomer - because it sounds to me as if I'm supposed to be going along on a bike beside someone shouting at her! But it's the opposite. It's not about me telling anybody how to do things or what to do, it's about actually creating an opportunity for peer professional discussion,... where we can all kind of identify steps we can take to improve literacy in our practice....
>
> Author, interview with Murray

Leat, Lofthouse & Towler (1990:46) cite Garmston's (1987) 3 forms of coaching: technical, collegial and challenge coaching. Much of the literature refers to the last of these, targeting specific problems in teachers' practice. I wanted to ensure that my sessions were clearly collegial - consisting of reflection and professional dialogue between teachers.

I also wanted to avoid the 'contrived collegiality' described by Hargreaves & Dawe, which is essentially a top-down approach masquerading as a collaborative culture that they warn may 'deprofessionalize and disempower teachers' (Hargreaves & Dawe 1990:239). I needed to generate genuine dialogue and trust, within a non-hierarchical structure, which could 'actively encourage critical reflection about the ends and means of their work and about the connections between them' (ibid:240).

The reading led me to question, however, how far the peer coaching approach would take me in terms of creating learning experiences 'powerful enough to transform teachers' classroom practice' (Putnam & Borko 2000:14). I was aware that this was only a first step in the direction of developing literacy knowledge and practice through the use of the discourse community. For now, I was not aiming to take teachers into that uncomfortable area where they had to question their own practice. As Ball points out in his essay exploring 'scaled-up' teacher learning, 'Encounters with the reform visions can be deeply uncomfortable' (Ball 1994:18), but it is that confrontation of 'discontinuities and discomforts of role, content and practice' (p15) that holds real potential for change. Lofthouse et al (2010) support this view in their findings that 'Without challenge and dissonance there is small probability of coached teachers changing their beliefs, which is strongly associated with effective professional development' (p46). Nevertheless, 'politely refraining from critique and challenge' (Putnam & Borko:16), I was positioning myself as an encourager rather than a challenger - something that would be clear when I came to analyse my contributions to discussion. My socio-historical analysis of the strange contradictions between teachers' awareness of weaknesses in their literacy teaching and their contrasting choices of areas to focus on in these sessions suggested to me that teachers needed to build up confidence in their practice and community before they were challenged to scrutinise them too much.

The lens of activity theory proved again a powerful tool for planning and examining the process of peer coaching as a facet of teacher

development, such as that explored in Hodkinson & Hodkinson (2005), where they argued for the construction of more expansive learning environments, taking into account the practices and cultures of the school.

Interestingly, Lofthouse and Leat, whose practical guide to peer coaching (Lofthouse, Leat & Tyler 2010) had provided me with a clear approach to my coaching sessions, had also used the application of CHAT to help them reflect on how peer coaching interacted with organisational cultures (Lofthouse & Leat 2013), and found that coaching did not always 'transplant readily' to English school, because of contradictions they identified between the object of coaching activity and the target-driven culture of education. As I was using peer coaching as a tool to engage teachers with the school's literacy approach rather than to impact on standards, this contradiction was not obviously in evidence. However, other contradictions, such as a reluctance among some senior staff to engage in the process, did begin to emerge, causing me to reflect on the potential efficacy of peer coaching as a tool in future years.

Methodology for Cycle 3

In Cycle 3, I took a complex position between researcher, practitioner and coach. Whereas in Cycle 2, my research role had been to the forefront (although the consultation itself was intended to affect teachers' attitudes), now I was interpreting and translating (Ball et al 2012) the literacy policy for colleagues, seeking to encourage ownership of the new policy ideas in a way that felt almost manipulative in relation to action research.

I needed to consider my methodology to prepare for the difficulty highlighted by Putnam & Borko: how I would tackle the 'agenda-setting dilemma' - that I wanted 'to see teachers' practice change in particular directions while empowering the teachers themselves to be meaningfully involved in determining the changes' (2000:21).

Peer coaching rules rather than those associated with action research informed my approach to these considerations. The nine sessions were not structured by a list of neutral questions, though they loosely followed the iSTRIDE framework for peer coaching: 'establish strengths, identify targets, review reality, find ideas and options for action, make a decision about next steps and, finally, evaluate the outcome' (Beere & Broughton 2013:Kindle). I took no notes, as I was following instructions for active listening, establishing a physical rapport with staff through body language and eye contact. The aim was that teachers would guide the sessions as much as I did. Instead, I created MP3 recordings of all the coaching sessions, with the informed permission of participants, then transcribed them. How far the recording inhibited discussion was hard to tell: I certainly was not aware of any moments where participants glanced at the iPad or seemed to self-edit what they were saying.

But how would I use this to collect evidence about teachers' engagement with the literacy approach? It would be easy for me to confuse the different objects of my peer coaching cycle, so I needed to clarify for myself the desired outcomes and how they related to my research questions:

Desired outcomes for peer coaching:

1. To involve staff **actively** in the whole school literacy approach through the development of **tools** they could use in their own teaching practice, making the policy more real to them. (Research question 8)
2. To ascertain how staff **responded** to the peer coaching method, exploring how **successful peer coaching** could be as a way of sharing professional development in the future. (Research question 9)
3. To contribute towards the establishment of a **collaborative community of enquiry, or expansive professional learning.** (Research question 11)

So I wanted on the one hand to analyse the sessions for evidence of buy-in to the whole school literacy approach, while on the other, to explore how far peer coaching created a sense of empowerment for coachees, and whether as a coach, I was creating a collaborative discourse, in which we could co-construct techniques to tackle whole school literacy.

First, I pulled out the themes of attitudes to the literacy policy and professional learning, highlighting positive and negative references to these to allow me to perform broad brush inductive analysis of how far teachers were 'buying-in'. On a deeper level, however, I wanted to evaluate whether staff saw the policy as relevant to their own practice, and how far the coaching process facilitated or catalysed action.

Examining empowerment, I would have liked have drawn in more detail on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989), and to have used close notation, such as that devised and exercised by Jefferson (1984), De

Fina etc al (2006), Janks (1997) or Irwin and Hramiak (2010). The scope of this project, however, made it impossible to carry out detailed analysis of language as a form of social practice. Like Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012:15), I explored 'very superficially' some aspects of the language of the coachee, in order to see how powerfully they were interacting with the literacy approach.

I found there were a bewildering array of different ways in which to analyse this data. Reading Engeström's investigation (1999b) of the phases of knowledge creation, I was attracted by his account of Nonaka & Takeuchi's matrix (1995:62), tracking patterns of discourse from debating a problem, through sharing sympathised knowledge, to analysing a problem systematically, creating concepts and justifying them, and finally to constructing operational knowledge. The sharing of sympathised knowledge characterised the approach I had taken in Cycle 2, and perhaps I could explore how this cycle followed the patterns of 'Externalisation' and 'Combination'. Engeström himself refines this into his 'expansive cycle' (1999b:383), a more detailed cycle including 'implementing the model': by 'concretizing it by means of practical applications'. This step was important for me in analysing the processes of peer coaching.

The most simple model I found was Lofthouse et al's study of peer coaching in a cluster of schools (2010b) to help me consider the dimensions I could categorise in my coding: the key takeaway from this study being that perhaps the apogee of coaching success was 'co-construction' - or 'exploratory talk' as Mercer might categorise it in his taxonomy (Mercer 1995).

All these approaches followed a similar ideal progression from the establishment of 'sympathised knowledge' through important moments that exemplify professional learning, towards the goal of collaborative talk that actually creates new solutions and puts them into action: the stage at which we are creating expansive learning. This was therefore the framework through which I created my coding system of talk categories.

If the key purpose of this action cycle was to translate the tool of the literacy policy into initial action, I was therefore looking for the decision by teachers to take specific actions in order not only to illustrate buy-in to the policy, but also making practical steps in professional learning. I was looking for the shift from 'dilemmatic discourse' to a more positive construction where teachers were becoming 'increasingly agentic' (De Fina et al 2006:214).

I developed a hierarchy of levels of response to coaching, below, with which to code my data:

Level	**Talk category**	**Characterised by:**
1	Acquiescence	One sided - led by coach Coachee use of continuers - agreement, maybe some questioning
2	Descriptive action	Describing current practice: "I do...", "I often..." Often initiated by coachee, but not collaborative talk Could be characterised as 'sympathised knowledge'
3	Potential action (cumulative talk)	Often more balanced turns, building on each other's points Identifying problems, asking questions, evaluating problems and considering action - modality: "I could...", "I might", "Perhaps I'll..."
4	Decisive action	Initiating decision-making Definite verbs: "I will...", "Yes, I'll...", "I am definitely going to..." Innovating: suggesting new ideas to the coach
5	Co-construction	May involve dissonance - internal or external recognition

	(collaborative talk)	of gap between theory and practice Working with the coach to create new professional knowledge / action Balanced turns Reflective discussion about professional learning - constructing professional learning culture Collaboration with other members of staff / networks

Figure 17 - Coding system for analysing talk data from peer coaching sessions

Potential action and decisive action would indicate buy-in to the literacy approach. Co-construction indicates more than this, that teachers are empowered as teachers of literacy to contribute to professional learning and develop the professional knowledge of the school.

To make it manageable, I did not examine and quantify every turn in the conversation, but colour-coded all transcripts quickly to get a general impression of the levels of talk that characterised them. I then chose to looked more closely at one interview where I considered that I could see the development of learning from Level 2 towards Level 5, coding it so that I could justify my analysis. In picking apart this coding process, I was examining:

⇒ **Turns** - who initiated topics and how the balance of talk played out;

⇒ **Tone** - how positive or negative staff were about professional learning and the literacy approach;

⇒ **Innovation** - building on or creating new ideas; and

⇒ **Modality** - the use of modal verbs in particular to denote the level of action characterising teacher responses.

Having identified certain patterns in speaking that seemed to me to denote participants' level of engagement with ideas for teaching literacy in the classroom, I was particularly interested in the modality of their discourse. Fowler (1985) organises modal verbs into the categories of possibility, necessity, prediction and permission. Lillian (2008:3) takes a wider view, stating that:

> ... modality is understood as encompassing much more than simply the occurrence of overt modal auxiliaries such as may, might, can, could, will, would, shall, should, must, and ought. Rather, modality concerns the writer's (or speaker's) attitude toward and/or confidence in the proposition being presented.

My perceptions of modality in teachers' speech could be integrated into my analysis of descriptive action, potential action and decisive action. I also looked for examples of **dissonance** (Lofthouse et al 2010b), as this is a 'sign of shifting thoughts and beliefs (p21). Could I see examples of where dissonance might signal a move to initiation, new ideas, action and co-construction?

I then summarised each interview (Appendix I) according to what characterised it, particularly looking for incidents where decisive action was generated, or talk moved onto co-construction. This evidence could help me to judge the 'success' of this action cycle - were teachers buying in to the literacy approach, and how promising was peer coaching as a model for developing expansive learning?

Findings from Cycle 2:

First and foremost, in response to Research question 8, I wanted to evaluate how far the evidence showed that staff were actively involved in the whole school literacy approach.

Their involvement in the peer coaching sessions on its own indicated a willingness to engage with literacy teaching. 5 of the 9 teachers had chosen topics to work on that related clearly to the priorities picked out in the draft literacy policy: marking and redrafting for spelling, punctuation and grammar and approaches to key vocabulary and exam command words. Analysis of the types of talk they used could indicate further how far they were buying into the literacy approach.

A clear progression could be seen in 8 of the 9 transcripts from descriptive action at the beginning, where sympathised knowledge was being developed, through potential action to decisive action later on indicating that the literacy approach was successfully 'ascending from the abstract to the concrete' (Engeström 1999b:383). In Penelope's session (Appendix H), for example, we can see that the first half is characterised by her descriptions of what she currently does in the classroom, but the interview becomes dominated by potential action at around the half-way point: 'I'm probably...', 'If I started...', 'I could use....' Only 6 turns are categorised as decisive action, but these come close together and show an intensity of definite verbs: 'I will do that...', 'I will definitely use that', 'I'll use it before the summer holidays.' One teacher, Jane, had already taken decisive action after the Cycle 2 interview, working with her students to produce laminated key vocabulary

mats. Jane was clearly an innovator, picking up an idea mentioned in professional discussion, and then transforming it into a collaborative learning opportunity for her students. '...that was just an idea I got from talking to you, I think, the first time', she said, but then progressed to explain in detail how: 'They could own it then. Because they'd done the work themselves.'

The only coachee who did not commit to decisive action was Justine, the SENCO. Interestingly, all three of the senior members of staff participating: Justine, Fay (Head of English) and Andrew (Key Stage 3 Leader) showed a similar pattern of dominance of the talk, characterised by a lot of descriptive action, sharing their own good practice with me. Did they feel reluctant to be 'coached' by a junior member of staff? It was important for me to be aware of the affective dimension of people's differing roles in the organisation; perhaps peer coaching was not a promising tool to promote expansive learning in higher power teachers: a conclusion borne out by the fact that the other two senior leaders had dropped out after the Cycle 2 interview stage.

Andrew, however, although following a similar descriptive pattern, showed significant buy-in to the literacy approach, and openness to professional change: moving beyond decisive action to Level 5 co-construction. He had contacted me before the meeting to share a history-specific mark scheme that he was planning to put into place in response to the literacy approach (Appendix J), and now wanted to move on to planning an approach to 'green penning'. Andrew showed an awareness of situational dissonance in the organisation of The Rural School: 'where lots of staff, without being too

unfair, are quite protective of how they work, and don't particularly want to change to suit someone else', and a willingness to support organisational change, offering suggestions about how to 'trial' different aspects of the literacy policy, and show 'it's actually proved to work'.

Despite a lack of co-construction from the other two senior members of staff, it was the development of this Level 5 collaborative talk in the majority (6) of the interviews that was exciting in relation to Research questions 9 and 11, considering how peer coaching could lead to expansive learning and prove a good model for future professional development in an isolated setting.

In many of these interviews, there were extended periods that saw an even balance of initiation and turns, in a positive pattern of cumulative talk leading to co-construction, where the coachee was working with the coach to create new professional knowledge: such as ideas created with Jane about making 'Jings' (online presentations) with students to explain exam command words, or the co-construction during the meeting with Murray of a template for note-taking in the Cornell style. One of the ways in which I had characterised co-construction was potential collaboration with other members of staff or networks: the 'relational turn' explored by Edwards (2010). This emerged during three of the sessions. Both Jessica and Rachel explicitly brought shared knowledge from separate CPD training to bear on ideas that were being discussed, linking them to other forms of knowledge developing in the school and beyond. Murray's session was particularly interesting in terms of how the material context led to collaboration with others; he had chosen to meet in the staff room, and the discussion of how to improve

students' note-taking skills naturally widened to include coffee-drinking colleagues: drawing in Andrew to talk about note-taking in history, and rousing Rachel to join us and offer suggestions: 'I've done a study skills on it, if you want....'

These examples of co-construction indicated to me at least patches of fertile ground in which peer coaching was helping to promote not only teacher ownership of the literacy policy through decisive action, but also the potential within the organisation for expansive learning. Four staff explicitly made positive comments about professional learning, including some directly relating to the peer coaching sessions:

> 'There: you've made changes already! I thought I was helping you, but now you're helping me!' (Jessica)
>
> 'I think, if it [further peer coaching] was offered, I would definitely take it up. Because... we all get complacent. And I think - like this! ... Having this conversation with you has made me think.' (Penelope)

The final stage of 'iSTRIDE' (Beere & Broughton 2013) - evaluation - should always involve a follow-up session to the peer coaching, where coachees discuss the decisive action they have taken, evaluate its success, and set new targets for further development. The sessions that I facilitated were only a toe in the water of the peer coaching cycle, and the time pressures of the end of the academic year meant that most staff would not be able to implement their plans until the Autumn, let alone feed back on their effectiveness. However, my inductive analysis of the sessions themselves indicated that the water was promisingly warm, and led me to hope that further peer coaching would be possible in the following year.

Analysis and Conclusions

The end point for this year's action research into staff 'buy-in' to the development of a whole school literacy approach was the agreement of the policy with senior staff, and then its presentation to the staff as a whole. Working collaboratively through consultation with staff, and meeting with literacy leaders, my Head of Department and I had created a policy which was ready to be presented to teachers for their feedback. Without the 'validation' of the knowledge we had created (Hargreaves D 1999:128) from senior leadership, and the ensuing ratification by school Governors, this year's action research might remain just the 'idiosyncratic 'tinkerings' of individual teachers' (ibid:138), but the policy had been agreed and now needed to be disseminated to staff, so that it could become a structure for action on literacy development in the school.

Measuring staff buy-in was always going to be a highly interpretative process - able perhaps to give me insights rather than generalisations. Each step of the process has been guided and measured by my own assessments of how far staff are buying in - from analysis of numbers participating in consultation, to notes in the research diary from school meetings, to the coding and analysis of the peer coaching sessions. However, I was keen to use a tool to sum up staff response at the end of the year.

I decided not to try to fit in another interview cycle: partly because of time, but also because I was concerned not to lose 'buy-in' and develop 'burn-out'! One of the tensions I had experienced due to a contradiction in roles was the occasional conflict between my Head of Department's timescales for action and my own. At various times during the year, Fay sent out questionnaires or set up literacy meetings with staff without collaborating with me. I was worried that if we both pestered staff too much with literacy initiatives, they would tire quickly of the whole approach. So I designed a short and simple questionnaire. It was only a blunt tool for assessing buy in, to be triangulated with my analysis of teacher responses from all three action research cycles.

Presentation of literacy policy and feedback

Fay and I created a joint presentation for our meeting in June 2015, to present the new literacy policy to 16 members of staff. Fay started by talking through some of the literacy teaching techniques that staff might want to use, and offering help and advice for how to embed these in their own practice. Some of these were misaligned with the priorities in the policy that staff themselves had identified for action, and I could sense a feeling of disengagement in the room. However, she kindly allowed me to follow this by introducing the policy itself, which I did with an explicit focus on the collaborative process. The title of the presentation was 'Aiming for teacher ownership of the whole school Literacy Policy', and I explained in detail the consultation process that had gone into its design, mediating each section

of the policy by pointing out its 'teacher-led features', justifying the key commitments by reference to teacher collaboration in identifying them.

I then handed out a questionnaire asking staff for feedback on the policy, which they filled in on the spot. I was very aware, here, of the very imbalanced position I was taking as researcher, having sought to influence teachers' thinking strongly through my use of language, and then asking for their views. These could clearly not be taken as neutral data, but some of the questions would provide useful feedback nevertheless.

Analysis of findings from questionnaire

Within the questionnaire (Appendix K), I gave an opportunity for general feedback on the draft policy, and then used a schedule of sliding scale questions designed to offer some points of comparison with earlier data collection.

The general feedback was positive: the general theme being that staff were pleased with its clarity, seeing it as 'Good - simple to use'. Five members of staff went on to give suggestions, such as: 'Make the Secondary bit bolder', 'collaborative talk' which suggested that they felt that they had a voice in the process of policy design, a proposition backed up by the fact the positive responses to the questions:

2. How far do you feel that you have had the opportunity to contribute to the whole school literacy approach? (See Figure 18 below)

3. How far does the draft literacy policy reflect your priorities for the teaching of literacy within your classroom? (See Figure 19 below)

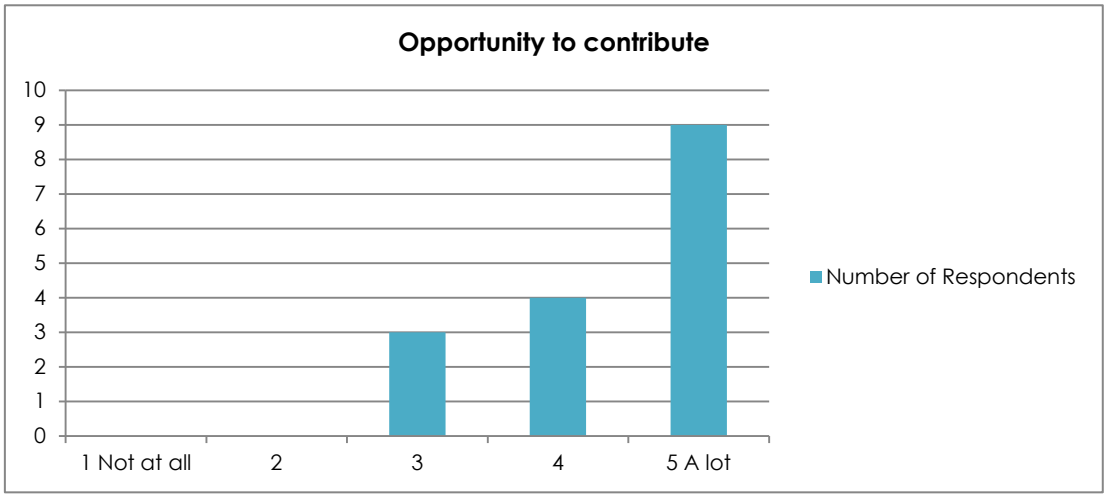


Figure 18 - chart showing responses to question 2 above

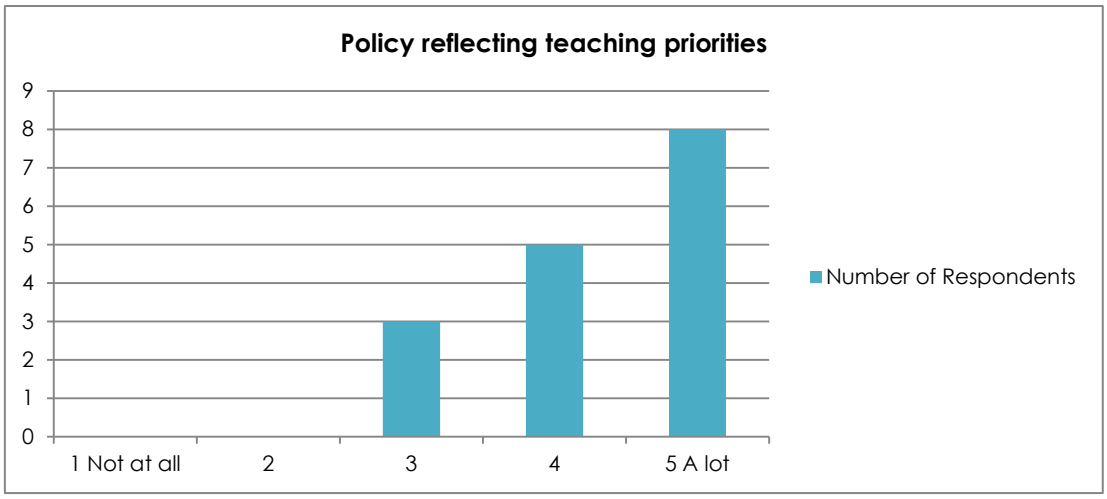


Figure 19 - chart showing responses to question 3 above

These figures contrasted pleasantly with the negative perceptions at the beginning of the year of how important teachers' views were in shaping policy in the school (Cycle 1 questionnaire).

So, teachers were happy with the policy, but more importantly, how far were they going to engage with it? This was central to my overall research question, so I asked teachers to expand on the question: How far, and in what ways, do you think this policy will impact on your teaching of literacy

within your subject area? All responses but one remained in the neutral to positive zone, and three teachers identified key areas that would affect their teaching, one replying: ' This is already affecting my delivery, as I have begun work on identifying subject specific literacy already with [Author]'.

Overall, there was a slight shift in attitude towards openness to professional learning. Where the initial survey had shown surprisingly high levels of teacher confidence, and a generally neutral mind-set in relation to literacy training, and secondary analysis of data from Summer 2014 had demonstrated considerable reluctance to accept professional development, now staff were talking about improving their practice in a dynamic way. Building on my analysis of talk relating to 'decisive action' in the peer coaching sessions, I asked staff about the 'specific actions' they aimed to take within the next year to develop their students' literacy. All 16 respondents were able to identify clear next steps, apart from the two who planned to 'Continue with ones already using!', with an even spread of plans between teaching command words, using the Literacy Marking Code, and developing students' vocabulary.

6 out of 16 respondents did not respond to the question about further professional development (Figure 20 below): including 4 out of the 5 members of staff who had not volunteered to take part in my action research.



Figure 20 - Question 6. In which areas of literacy teaching would you welcome support or further professional development?

This could optimistically be taken to suggest that participation in the action research had helped to develop a 'growth mindset' (Dweck 2012) towards professional learning, in comparison with a control group of non-participants; but of course, the self-selection of participants predicates their open attitude to professional development in the first place.

This final questionnaire confirmed that staff did not perceive the pedagogical techniques that I had originally envisaged spearheading the literacy approach as priorities: very few suggested training in teacher modelling or questioning. The socio-cultural approach to situating our policy design in the context of teacher attitudes appeared to have secured teacher buy in to the literacy priorities we identified as a staff body. I felt that it had been right to leave my ideals about transformational teaching and learning techniques on the back burner, while forefronting the ingredients of an acceptable policy for The Rural School.

However, the willingness to act on specific commitments from the policy was somewhat diminished by the fact that only half of the respondents answered the question about the form they would prefer their CPD to take, suggesting that the burn out which was concerning me needed to be taken into account when planning the next year's approach. That said, 7 of the 8 who responded positively were those who had participated in peer coaching, and all these chose either Professional discussion or Sharing good practice as their preferred modes of CPD. These collaborative forms of teacher learning were clearly the most welcomed at The Rural School.

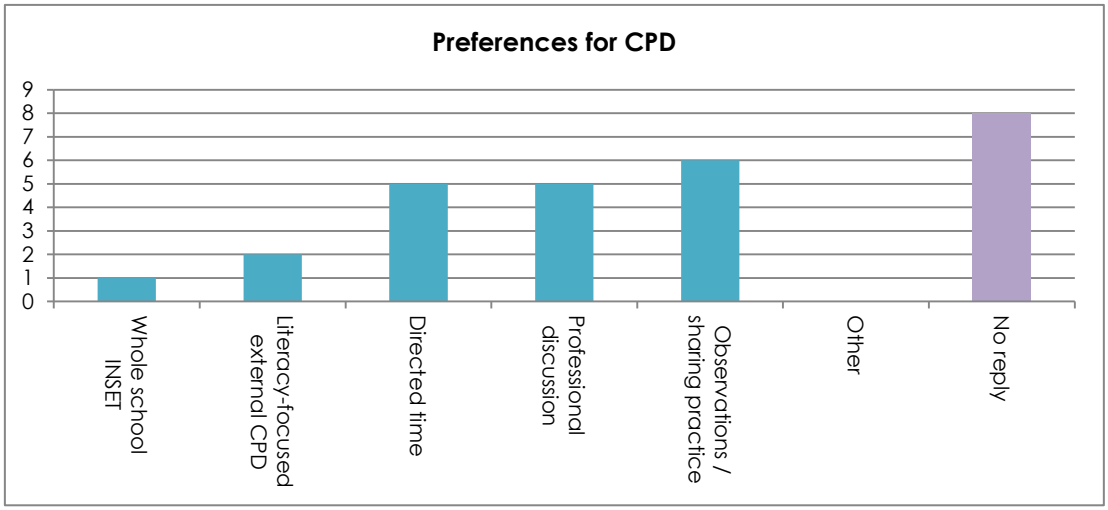


Figure 21 - Question 7: What form would you prefer this CPD to take?

How successful had my chosen tools been in maximising teacher buy in to the whole school literacy approach?

The first and second cycles of this action research aimed to establish an understanding of the socio-cultural context in which a new literacy approach was being developed, including the perceptions, unspoken assumptions and rules influencing the staff community at The Rural School.

Building on these, I aimed to design a new literacy policy that reflected the priorities of the staff, and was aligned closely enough to their prior knowledge and attitudes to encourage them to interact with it, without at this stage taking them far out of their comfort zone. In an atmosphere of instability caused by two critical Ofsted reports, and working within a very isolated, rural environment, I had had to accept that my early idealistic aim of creating the perfect, pedagogically challenging literacy policy was not aligned with my new context. Instead, the policy would focus on a few achievable commitments highlighted by the teachers themselves, while offering the opportunity for further development in future years. It was hoped that the consultation process undertaken in Cycle 2 would maximise buy-in by establishing a collaborative culture around the literacy approach.

The third cycle of this action research was the beginning of what Ball, Maguire & Braun (2012:45) would call 'translation': the complex iterative process of enacting policy through talk, meetings, training and the production and use of artefacts such as documents, posters etc. Ball et all go on to say that:

> Translation is simultaneously a process of intervention and compliance. As teachers engage with policy and bring their creativity to bear on its enactment, they are also captured by it. They change it, in some ways, and it changes them (p48).

My hope was that the peer coaching cycle would have engaged teachers, and perhaps 'captured' them, allowing them to take ownership of the policy through decisive action as the new school year began.

Following Cycles 1 and 2, a literacy policy had been designed in collaboration with the Head of English, agreed by the Senior Leadership Team, and given positive feedback by staff, whose perception of their own alignment with its commitments was significantly more positive than their lack of interaction with previously agreed teaching and learning policies.

Out of the 19 secondary teaching and non-teaching staff in the school, 14 had participated in the initial questionnaire, with 12 taking up the opportunity to be consulted on the design of the literacy approach. Of the 7 who did not participate, 2 were leaving the school, leaving only 26% of permanent staff who chose not to be involved. These staff were all involved in discussion at one time or other during the year, and one chose to contribute in a different way by sharing literacy materials that he was using in his own subject. In such a small school, I had a fantastic opportunity to maximise teacher buy-in to the literacy approach through collaboration or participation in action research.

Analysis of the peer coaching sessions in Cycle 3 demonstrated that almost all staff involved were taking decisive action to engage with specific aspects of the whole school literacy approach.

The emergence of co-constructive talk and positive feedback within the peer coaching sessions indicated that this could be a positive model for future development, and that the professional isolation of The Rural School need not stand in the way of expansive professional learning.

All these positive indications of teacher buy-in to a whole school literacy approach, however, need to be balanced by an awareness of the significant limitations of the project.

Limitations of the project

I am aware that this approach to policy design has been in some ways quite limiting, in that in order to root it firmly in the community of the school, I have had to strip away the focus on teaching and learning techniques that I would hope to see in my ideal literacy policy. This literacy policy is built on shared understandings - 'sympathised knowledge', perhaps (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995); and aims in the first instance only to tackle areas of concern where teachers have agreed and will welcome it: literacy marking, subject-specific vocabulary and the literacy needed for success in external exams. This does raise the question of whether In keeping policy focused and manageable, we will actually lose some of out impact on literacy teaching. The accountability of the literacy approach has not yet been fully considered. This impact will have to be measured carefully over the next two or three years, before we can begin to judge, as a school, how successful it has been.

As yet, there is a significant voice missing in the literacy approach: that of the student. By focusing exclusively on teacher perceptions, only a part of the picture is revealed. As Swafford (2000:109) says, the goal of teacher learning is 'always the same: to improve instruction for all children'. I am writing in this

study about 'teacher buy-in' - but the bottom line must be how effective the literacy policy is in improving student literacy. I am aware of the concerns raised by Faulkner et al (2012:37) that students 'are sometimes resistant to being taught literacy in learning areas'. And if the students, next year, don't 'buy-in', will teacher buy-in be resilient enough to keep them going in the face of apathy or resistance?

Again, returning to the literature that I had read and dismissed at the beginning of my project makes me realise the potential in areas I have not considered in developing a whole-school literacy approach. Tyrer and Taylor's (2013) use of students as literacy consultants and literacy tutors is held up as a good practice example by Barton (2009) and Ofsted (2013). Furthermore, they involve parents as a key factor in a successful whole school literacy approach. My focus on teacher buy-in has so far not allowed me to open my horizons to the possibilities of considering not only the teacher community, but the student and wider parent community as central to my activity.

The issue of roles has been a limiting factor in this research. In some ways, I have seen my lack of authority as a strength, as it places me centrally within the community at the base of my activity triangle, but it also brought frustrations, as I did not have a strategic planning role through which I could develop the next phase of activity. The need to negotiate with the roles of the Head of English, the Primary literacy leads and the Deputy Head Teacher meant that some aspects, such as the relationality to the Primary literacy approach were somewhat tokenistic. I was aware that my 'tinkerings', as

characterised by Hargreaves (1999:138) in isolation could do little to create organisational change, and could only hope to contribute towards the development of the 'more deliberate, explicit and collective process of professional knowledge creation at school level' that he recommends.

Looking Forward: Impact, Sharing and Strategic Planning

Stringer's research spiral doesn't end: the third coil is left ready to join to the next, and the third generation of activity theory sees triangles being joined together in networks. To plan for the implementation of the new Literary Policy, and the development of the literacy approach into embedded pedagogical action that would actually impact on students' literacy requires consideration of how I would share my findings from my action research, and what part I could play in strategic planning for literacy development over the next two years.

For my action research to be successful, it needs to have an outcome that can be shared in order to improve the community of the school. The new literacy policy is a tangible outcome, which is an improvement already insofar as it fulfils a requirement from Ofsted. This has been shared already with staff and SLT, and is awaiting ratification from Governors, but it will need continuing mediation as a tool for improving literacy across the curriculum. Many teachers have exhibited initial buy-in, but some will still not be on board, seeing it as, on the whole, irrelevant to their practice. For the policy to become a central part of a complex process of change in relation to

literacy teaching, there will need to be further alterations in teachers' thinking, attitudes and pedagogical skills. May (2007:389) identifies three phases of implementation of a successfully sustained literacy approach, of which The Rural School may be seen to be entering the second:

> The second phase is, thus, where schools gain some literacy traction; they experiment with research-attested literacy strategies and knowledge, and teachers develop, along with this new knowledge, their self-reflective skills and a more focussed literacy community of practice.

It is only in May's third phase that sustained changes in literacy practices over time are likely to gain the ultimate goal of improving students' literacy outcomes across the school.

The emerging object of my research activity was the development of a collaborative approach to professional learning at The Rural School. What could I extrapolate from my findings about the potential to develop a peer coaching approach in the future? (Research question 9) Very excitingly in terms of personal impact, the school has decided as a result of my work on peer coaching for literacy this year (and in response to the Ofsted report) to create a part-time temporary role of Literacy Coach, to facilitate and monitor the implementation of the policy; which I shall be taking on from September 2015. There is significant potential within this role to play an active role in planning both to consolidate and expand our learning from this year within our community.

The job description is, as yet, not completely clear; I will continue to work in collaboration with my Head of Department, and will have to balance

carefully peer coaching and policy monitoring roles, between which there could be considerable contradiction. I must be careful not to be pressured into confusing coaching as learning with coaching as compliance, creating contrived collegiality, rather than deepening 'buy-in' (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).

Again, I return to activity theory as a lens through which I can view the next steps, building on my research from this year (Research question 12). The literacy policy now becomes the one of the tools, along with peer coaching, for working towards the ultimate object of measurable improvement in student literacy (Figure 22).

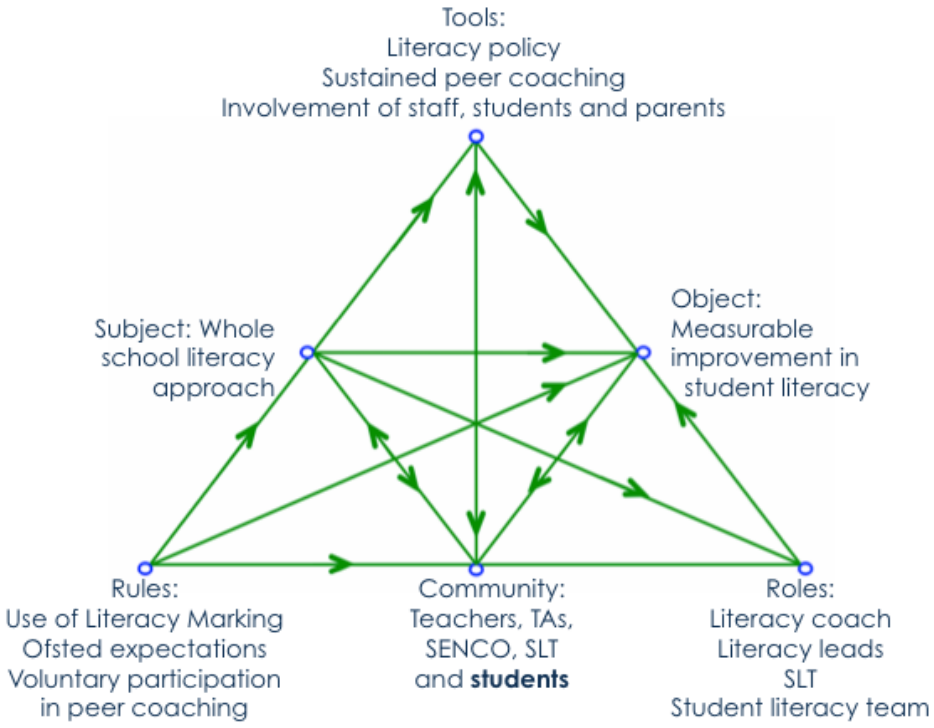


Figure 22 - possible model for activity through Phases 2 and 3 of sustaining the whole school literacy approach

The other significant change to my proposed activity system is the expansion of our school literacy learning community to include students and parents or families. From September, while keeping a dual focus on how teachers 'do' literacy, I must plan how to bring the students into the loop; both in terms of auditing and measuring progress, and in engaging them to lead their own literacy development where possible.

Can the changes being effected by these developing activity systems be shared further, beyond the Rural School community? Perhaps the peer coaching tool can be connected to other professional learning networks, to develop links much needed in our isolated setting. I had dared to hope in my introduction that the whole school literacy approach might in the future act as a springboard for organisational change. If this action research project supports the hypothesis that teacher buy-in to a whole school literacy appraoch can be maximised through collaborative policy design and peer coaching, and if the use of these tools can be shared through professional networks, then we are at least taking steps towards becoming a 'knowledge-creating school' (Hargreaves 1999).

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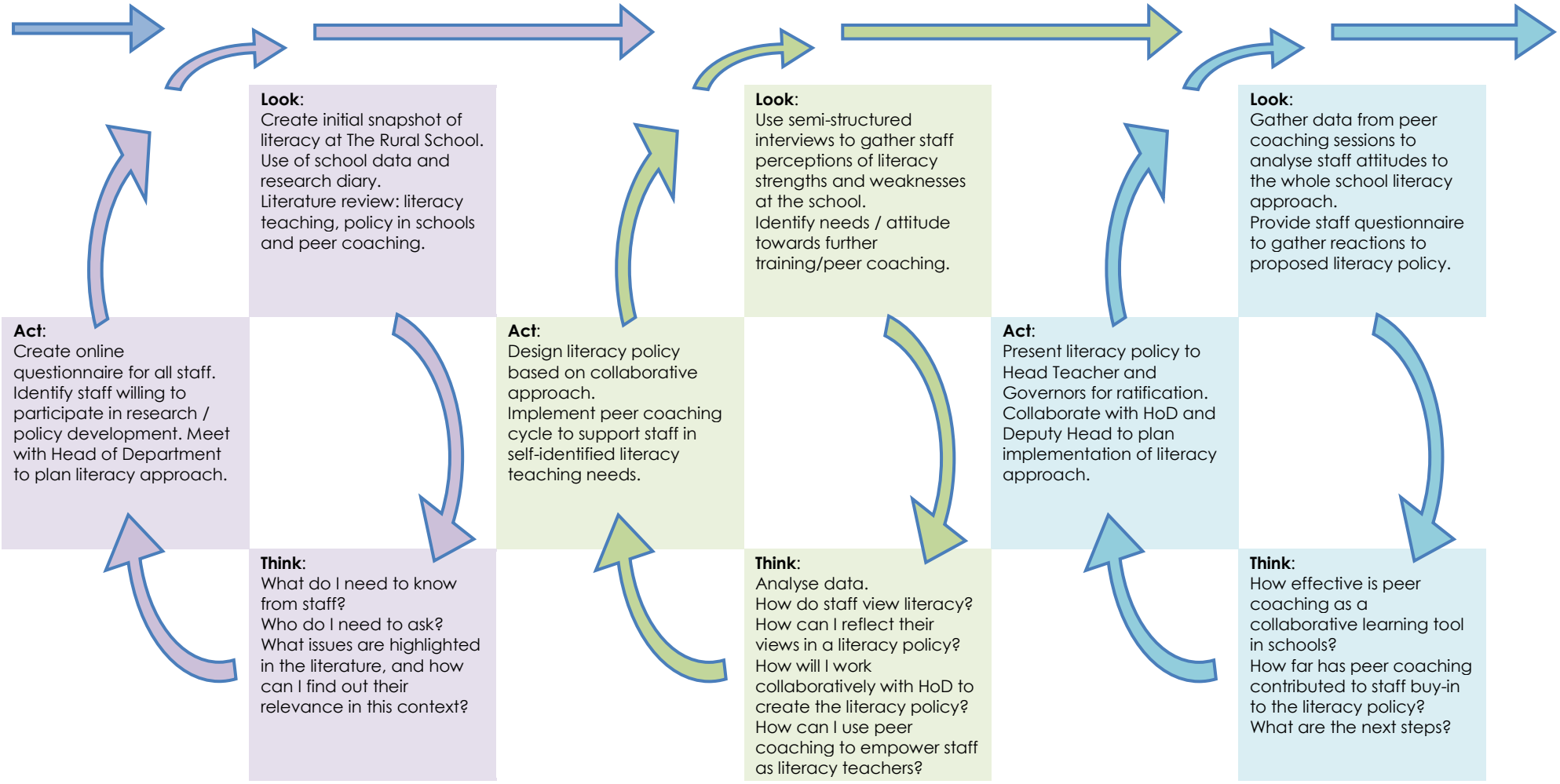
Appendices

Appendix A

Staff involved in collaboration (all names have been changed to preserve anonymity):

Responded to Cycle 1 questionnaire only	**Bob**	Maths teacher
	Gareth	Science teacher - leaving the school before Cycle 2
Participated in Cycle 2 interviews only	**Diane**	Deputy Head and teacher of Extended Project Qualification
	Clara	KS4 Leader and Art teacher
Participated in all 3 cycles	**Fay**	Head of English and Drama
	Rachel	HLTA
	Jane	HLTA and teacher of Computer Science
	Pete	PE teacher
	Andrew	KS3 Leader and History teacher
	Murray	Teacher of RE and Geography
	Jessica	Teacher of Maths
	Penelope	Teacher of Food Tech, Travel & Tourism BTEC and Child Development
	Justine	SENCO
Volunteered to participate but took long-term leave	**Jeanette**	Head of Science
Collaborated through meetings and interview	**Hannah Sophie**	Primary Literacy Lead teachers

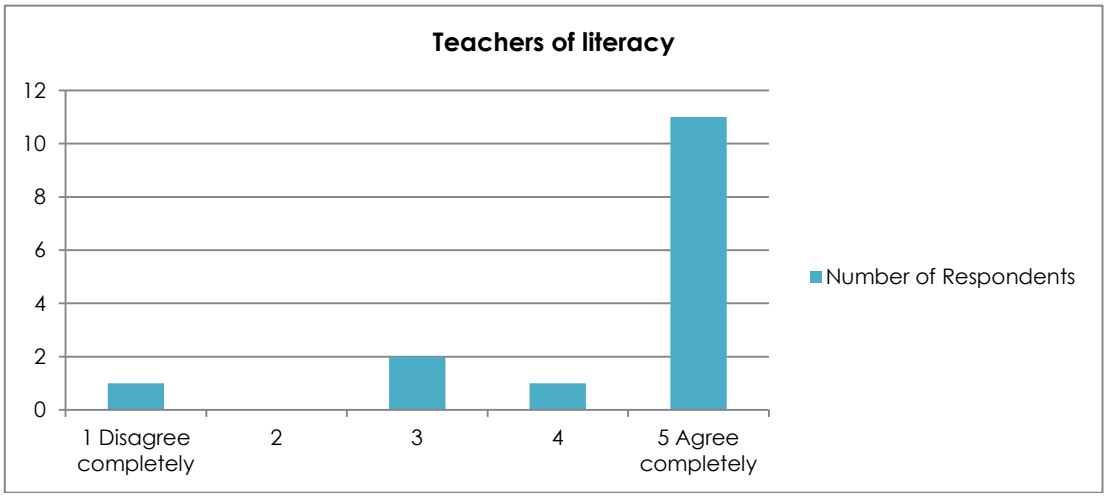
Appendix B: Initial action research planning spiral, based on Stringer (2007:9)



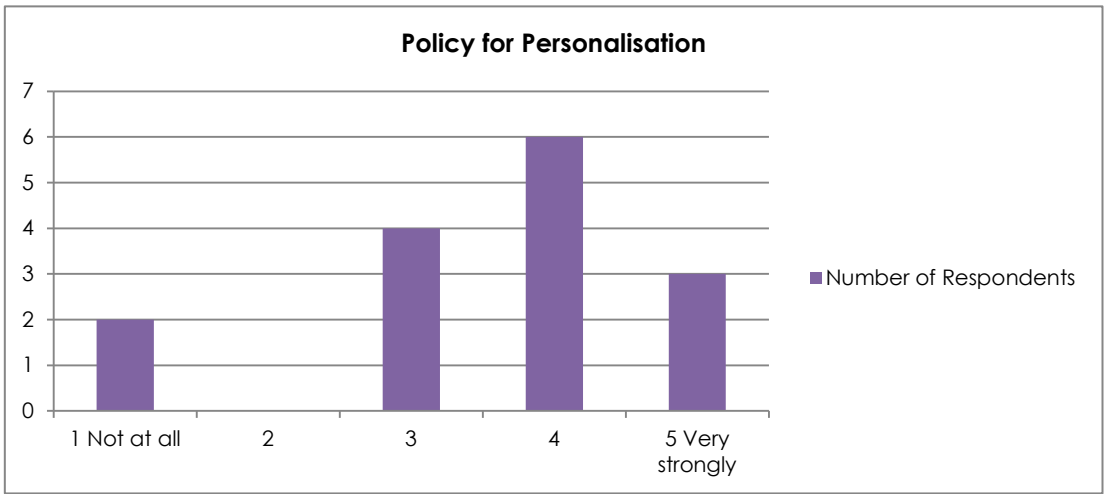
Appendix C: Short literacy teaching survey and results

Thank you so much, kind colleagues, for filling in this short survey! I have asked you at the bottom of the form to include your name so that I can contact you about a follow up interview (if you have ticked the box saying you are happy to participate). Please be assured that all your responses will be treated completely confidentially, and that all findings from this survey will be anonymised in my final dissertation.
* Required

1. "All teachers are teachers of literacy, with a responsibility to teach literacy skills explicitly." How far do you agree?
Mark only one oval.
1 2 3 4 5
Disagree completely Agree completely



2. How far does the school's Policy for Personalisation influence the teaching and learning in your subject area?
Mark only one oval.
1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Very strongly

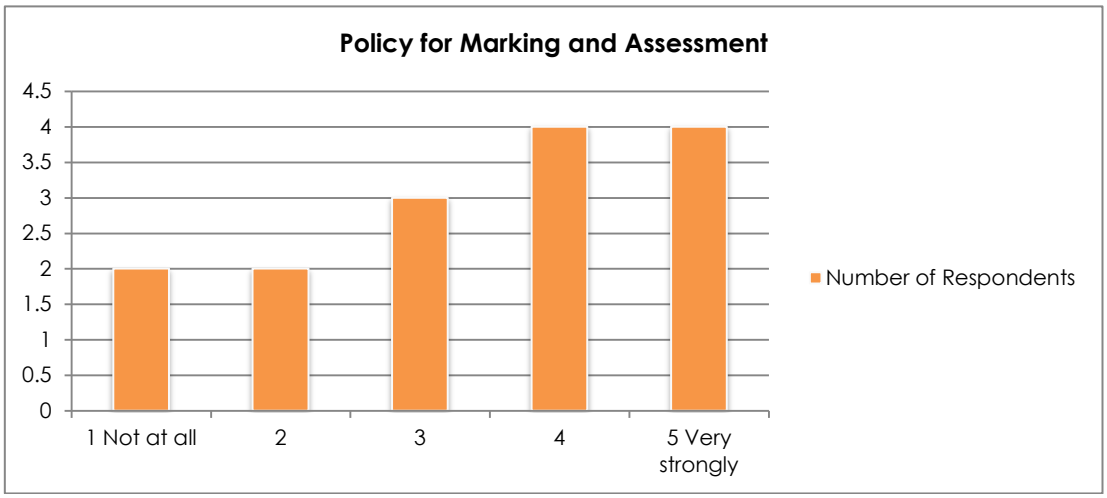


3. How far does the school's Policy for Marking and Assessment influence the teaching and learning in your subject area?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very strongly

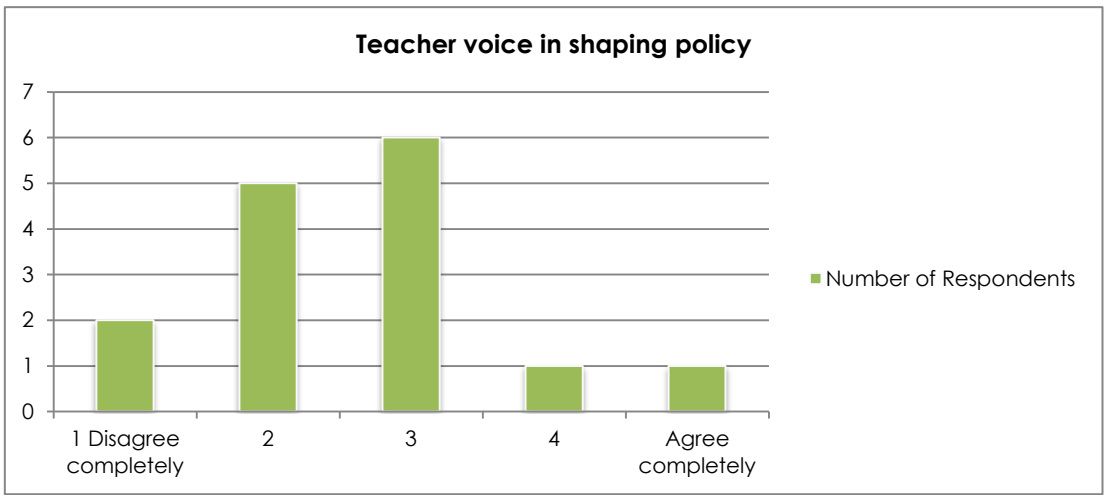


4. "My views are important in shaping policy and teaching and learning approaches in this school." How far do you agree?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Disagree completely Agree completely

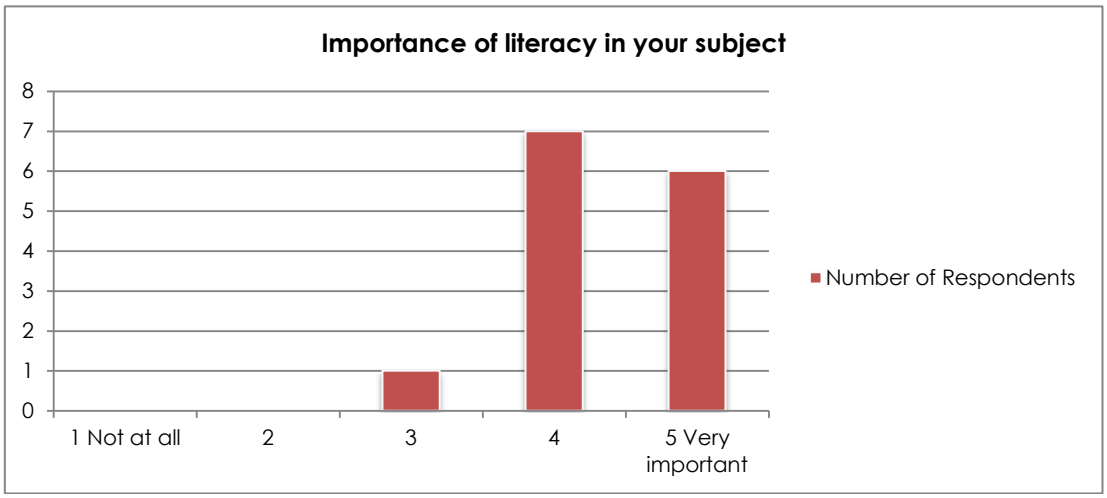


5. How highly do you rate the importance of literacy for high attainment in your subject?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all important Extremely important



6. How confident do you feel in teaching the literacy needed for excellence in your subject?

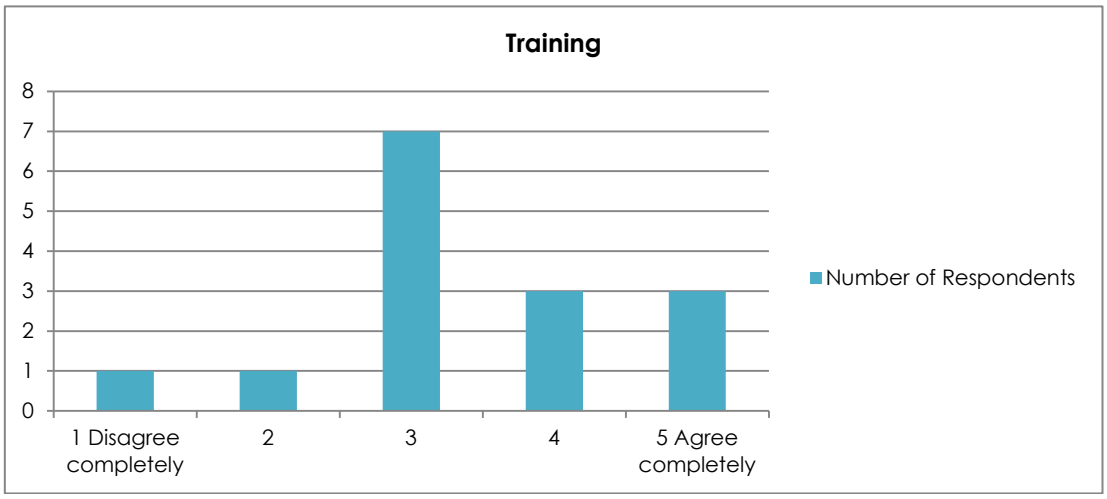
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all confident Completely confident



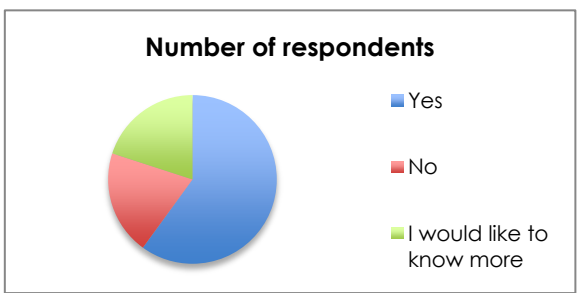
7. "I would like to have more training in how to develop students' literacy through my subject teaching." How far do you agree?
Mark only one oval.
1 2 3 4 5
Disagree strongly Agree strongly



Would you take the opportunity to participate in a collaborative CPD project that aims to:

a. Consult you about the design of an effective whole school literacy policy;
b. Discuss in a 1:1 interview the key literacy-focused techniques and approaches you believe would be most effective within your subject, identifying the teaching and learning approaches that you would most value developing further in your own practice;
c. Provide an optional 1:1 collaborative CPD session to develop resources or practice in a literacy focused area identified by you?
Each stage of this project is completely voluntary; participants in the interviews may choose freely whether to continue further to take up the CPD opportunity or not.

8. I would be happy to take part in a 1:1 interview consulting me about literacy teaching in my subject area. *
Mark only one oval.
Yes
No Stop filling out this form.
I would like to know more - please contact me with further information

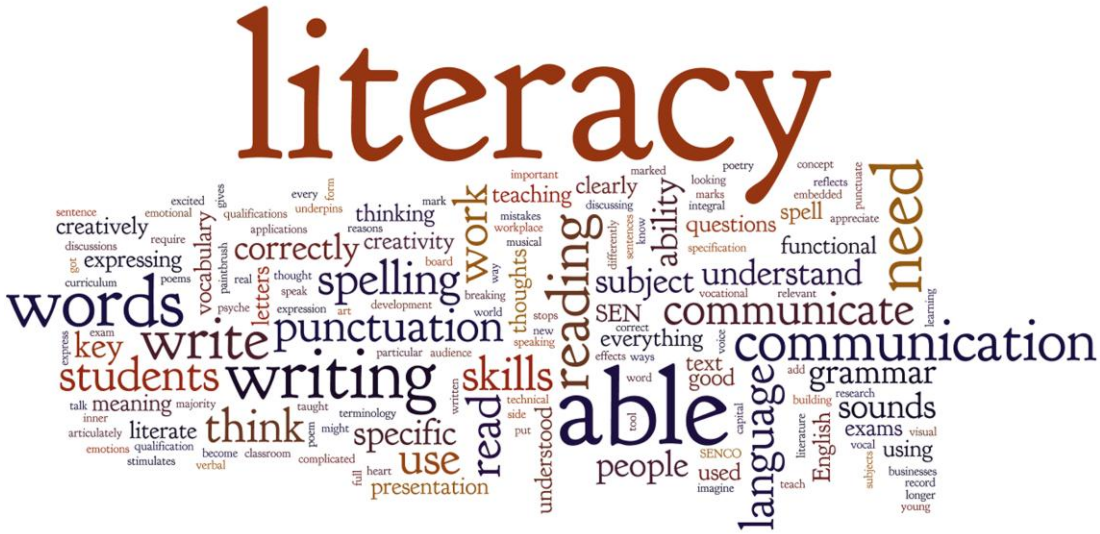


Appendix D: Responses to Cycle 2 interviews and data analysis

Question 1

1. **How would you, as a subject teacher, define literacy? What does it mean to you in the classroom?**

All responses to Question 1 were collated, and a 'Wordle' (http://www.wordle.net) created as a visual tool to identify the most frequently used words. Common words are automatically discounted, while other words are given greater prominence according to their frequency.



The most important words were then used to write a shared definition of literacy to begin the policy, which was discussed and agreed with senior staff.

Shared definition:

<u>At The Rural School, we believe that:</u>
To be literate is to be able to understand language and communicate your thoughts in both speech and writing. To become literate is to develop the key skills, including fluency in reading, a wide vocabulary (including subject-specific key words) and accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar, to succeed at school and in the workplace, and to express your ideas clearly and creatively.

2. **Can you tell me about something you feel you do particularly well to help students develop their literacy?**

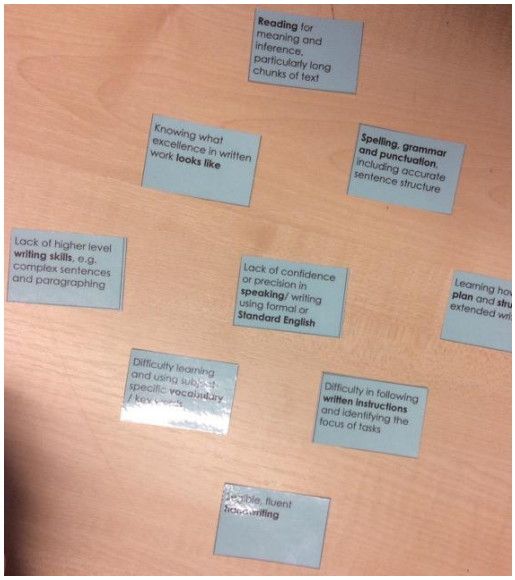
Responses coded within interview transcripts.

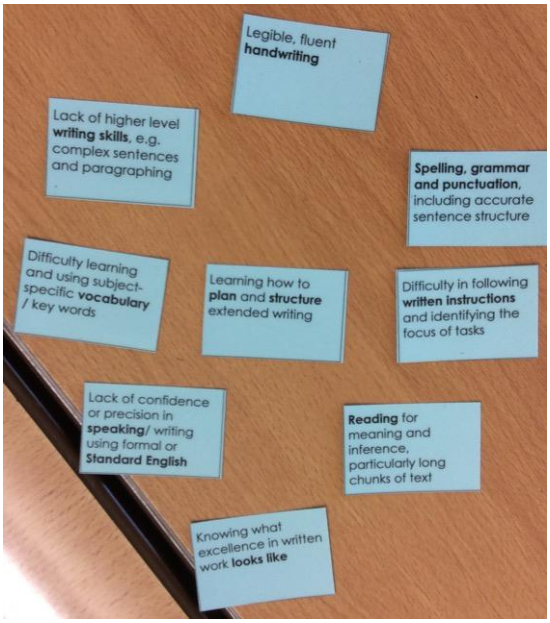
3. **Do you have specific concerns about how student literacy may be affecting achievement in your subject?**

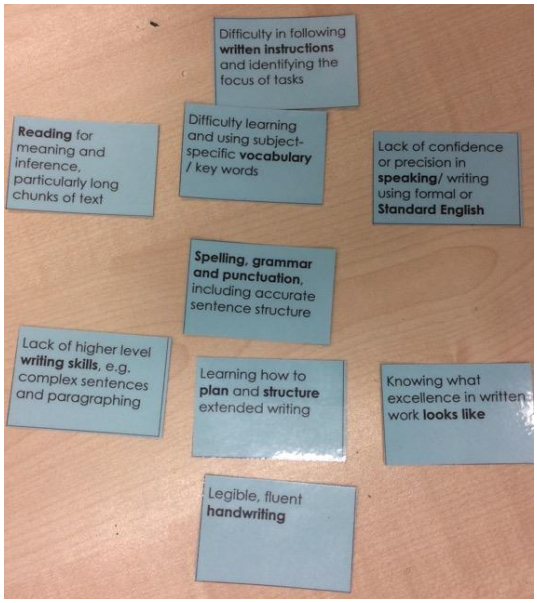
Responses coded within interview transcripts.

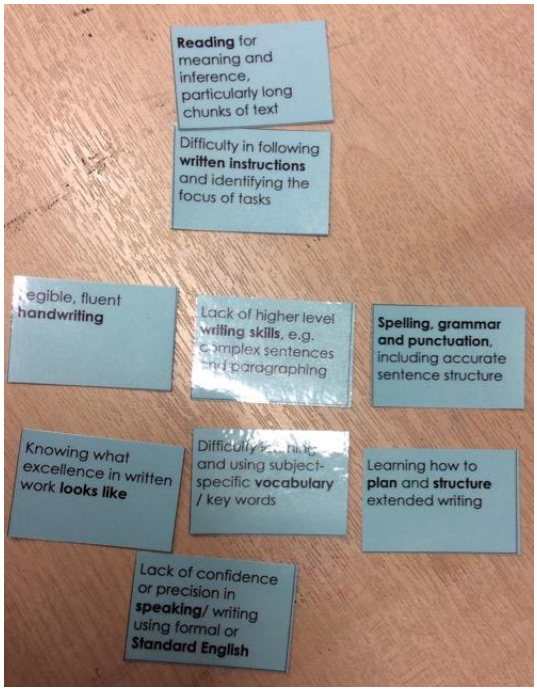
Question 4

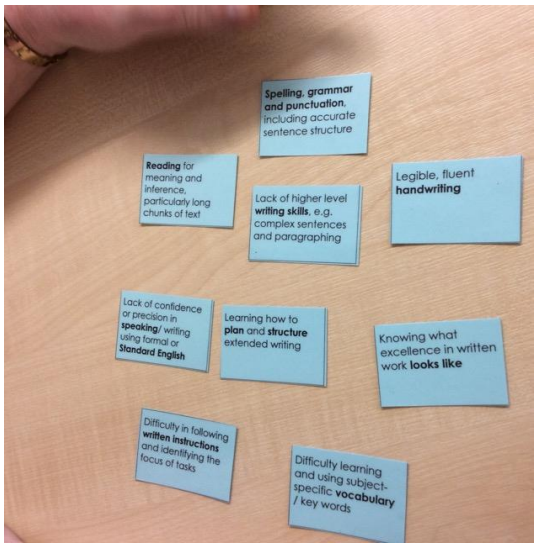
4. Which of the following issues do you think have the most negative impact on students' attainment in your subject? [card sort]

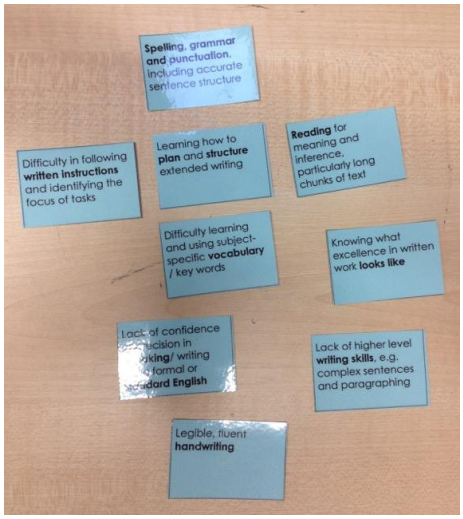


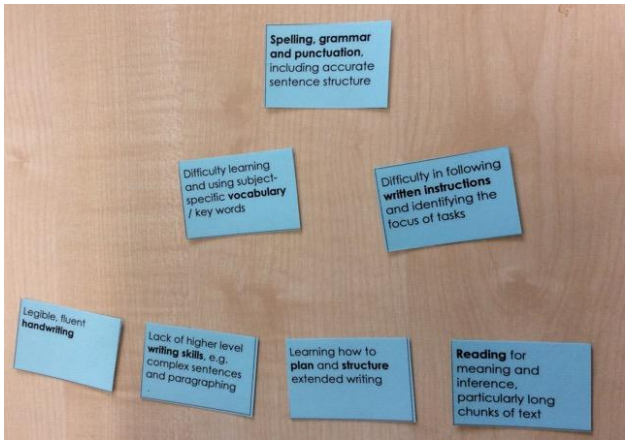









Spelling, grammar and punctuation, including accurate sentence structure
Difficulty in following written instructions and identifying the focus of tasks
Learning how to plan and structure extended writing
Reading for meaning and inference, particularly long chunks of text
Difficulty learning and using subject-specific vocabulary / key words
Knowing what excellence in written work looks like
Lack of higher level writing skills, e.g. complex sentences and paragraphing
Legible, fluent handwriting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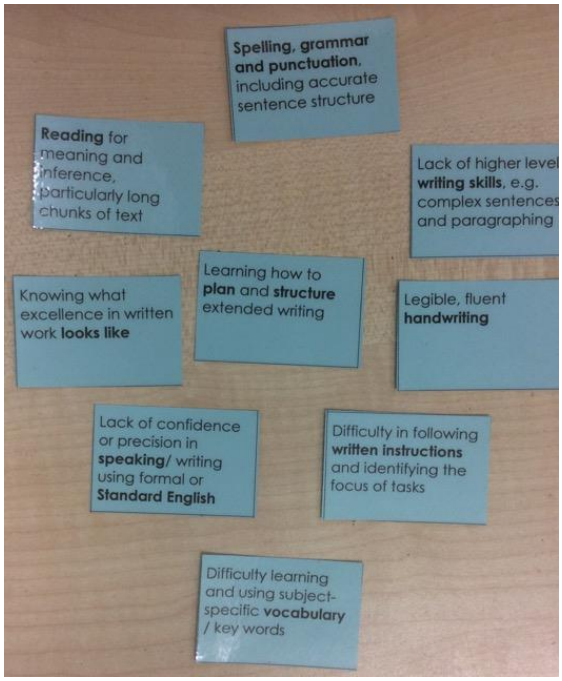
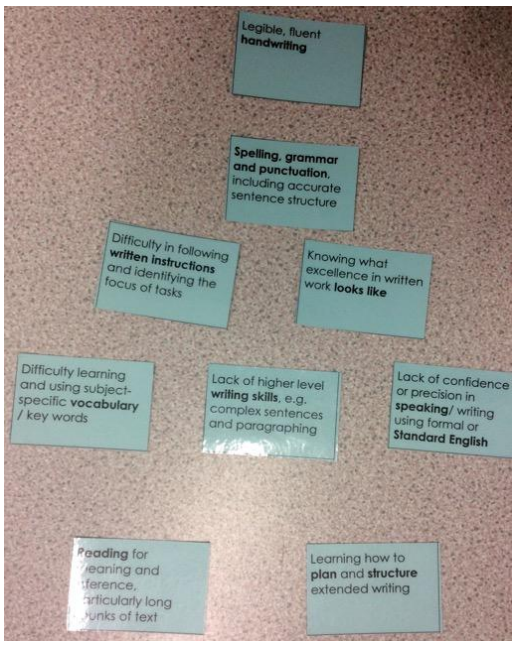

Spelling, grammar and punctuation, including accurate sentence structure
Reading for meaning and inference, particularly long chunks of text
Lack of higher level writing skills, e.g. complex sentences and paragraphing
Knowing what excellence in written work looks like
Learning how to plan and structure extended writing
Legible, fluent handwriting
Lack of confidence or precision in speaking/ writing using formal or Standard English
Difficulty in following written instructions and identifying the focus of tasks
Difficulty learning and using subject-specific vocabulary / key words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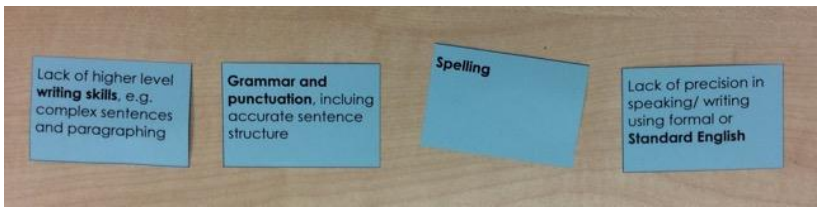
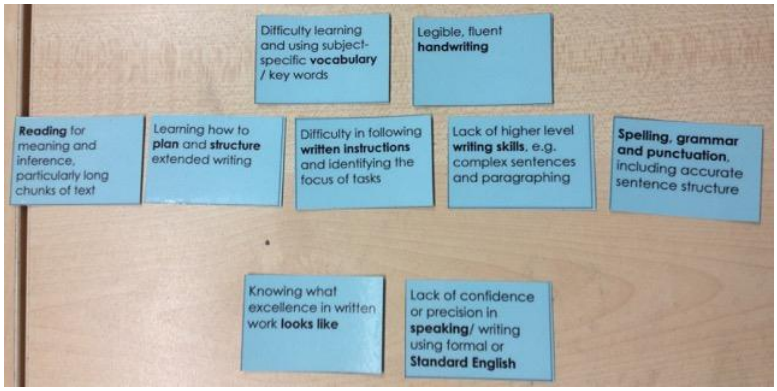
Learning how to plan and structure extended writing


Lack of higher level writing skills, e.g. complex sentences and paragraphing
Grammar and punctuation, including accurate sentence structure
Spelling
Lack of precision in speaking/ writing using formal or Standard English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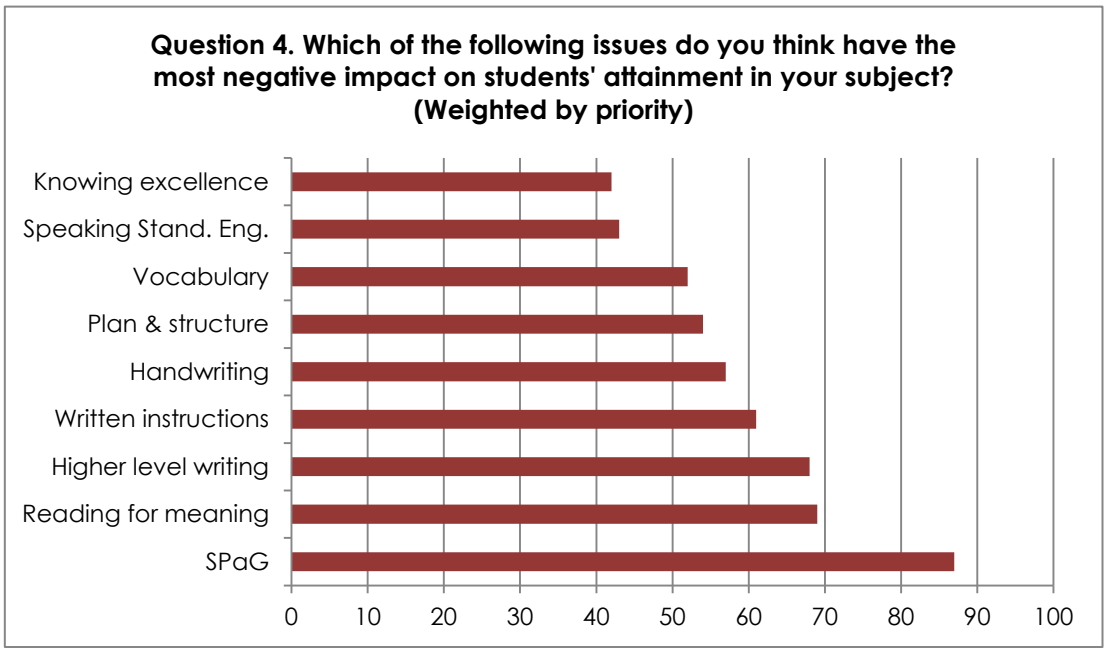
Spelling, grammar and punctuation, including accurate sentence structure
Knowing what excellence in written work looks like
Lack of confidence or precision in speaking/ writing using formal or Standard English

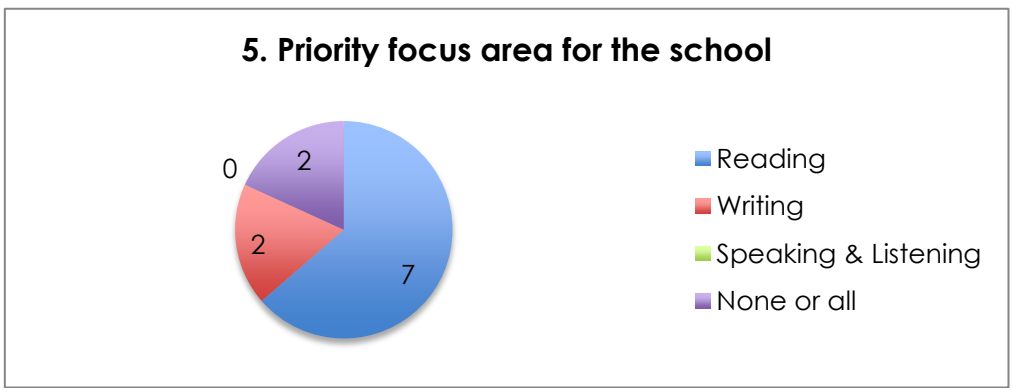
Overall prioritisation of literacy problems perceived by staff as barriers to achievement in their own subjects calculated by recording the number of correspondents who picked out particular cards, then weighting them according to where they ranked them in order of importance. 9 points were given for the most significant barrier and 1 for the least significant.

Barriers	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Total**
SPaG	5	2	3		1					**87**
Reading for meaning	2	4	1	1			1	1	1	**69**
Higher level writing	1	2	2	3	1	1		1		**68**
Written instructions	1	3	2	1		2			2	**61**
Handwriting	3	1	1	1	1				4	**57**
Plan & structure		1	1	4	1	2			2	**54**
Vocabulary	1	2		1	2	1	1	1	2	**52**
Speaking Stand. Eng.	1			2	2		3		3	**43**
Knowing excellence		1	1		2	3		1	3	**42**

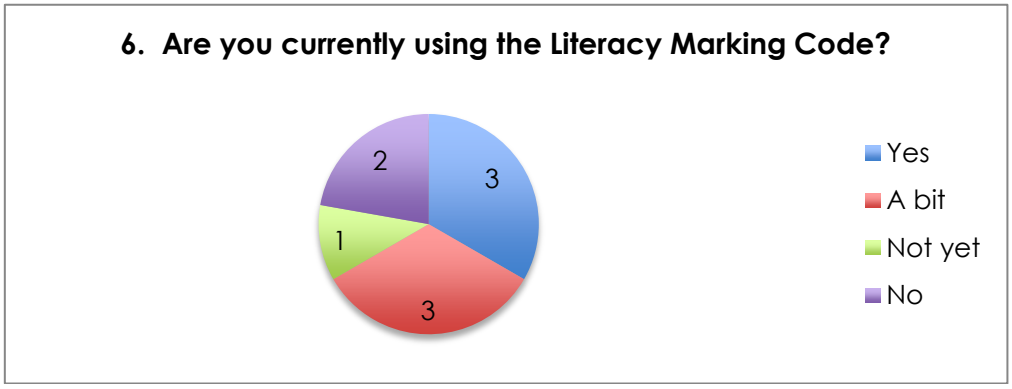
NB: Handwriting polarised opinion: scoring either very high or very low in terms of the importance placed upon it by teachers.



5. If you were to choose a particular literacy area for the whole school to prioritise over the next two years, which would it be: reading, writing or speaking & listening? Why?



6. Are you currently using the Literacy Marking Code in your students' books? Do you expect them to act on literacy marking, by writing out spellings or improving work? How far do you see this as a priority in your teaching?

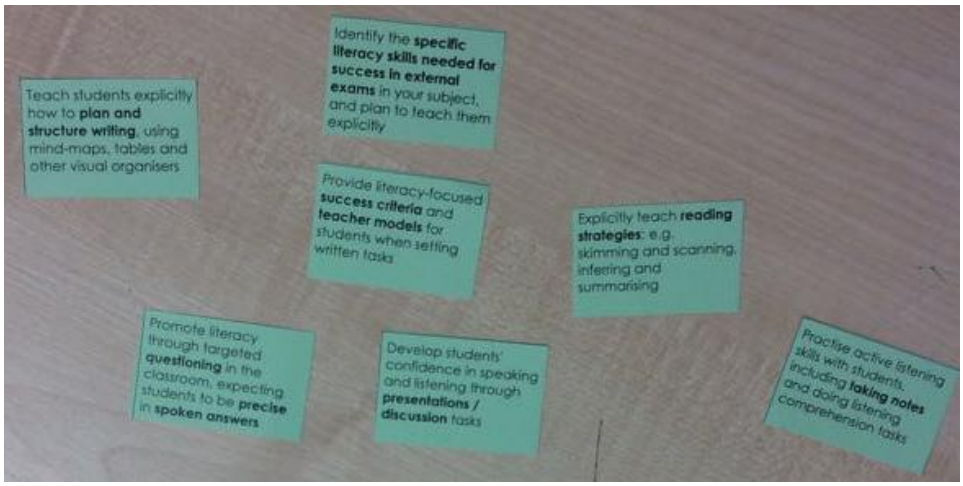


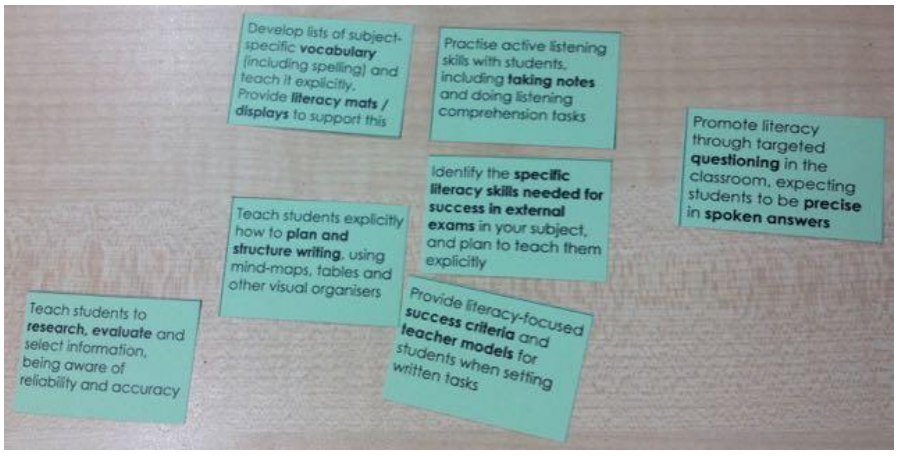
Question 7

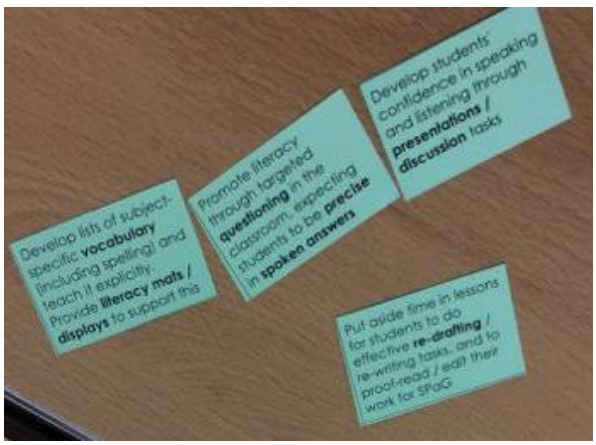
7. These are all teaching and learning techniques which have been proven to impact strongly on student literacy, and therefore on their progress across the curriculum.

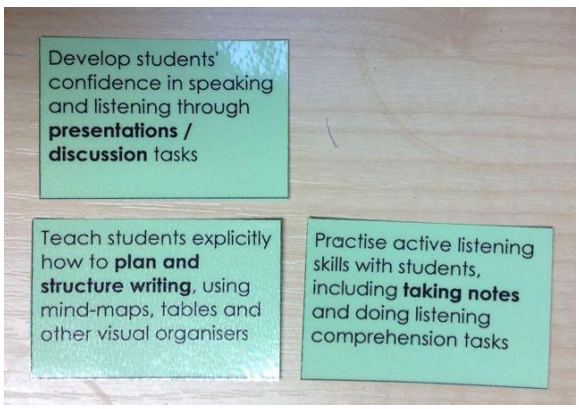
Question 7a: Which of these key literacy-focused teaching and learning techniques do you feel you use most confidently in the classroom?

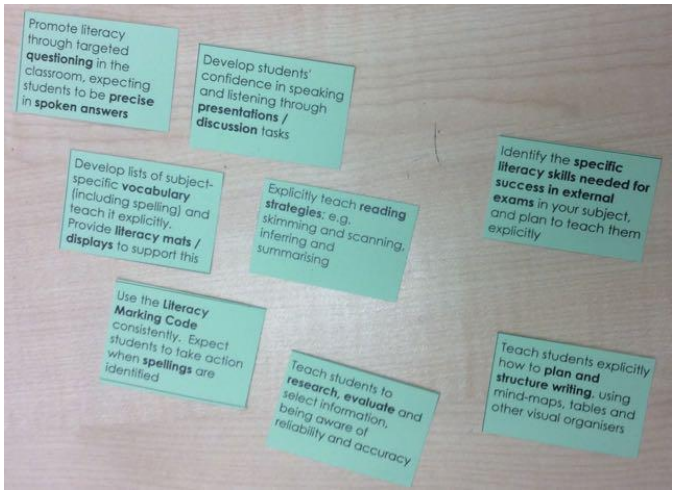
1. Photographs of cards chosen (not all teachers chose to pick out specific cards)
2. Graph to represent the frequency and priority of teachers' choices.

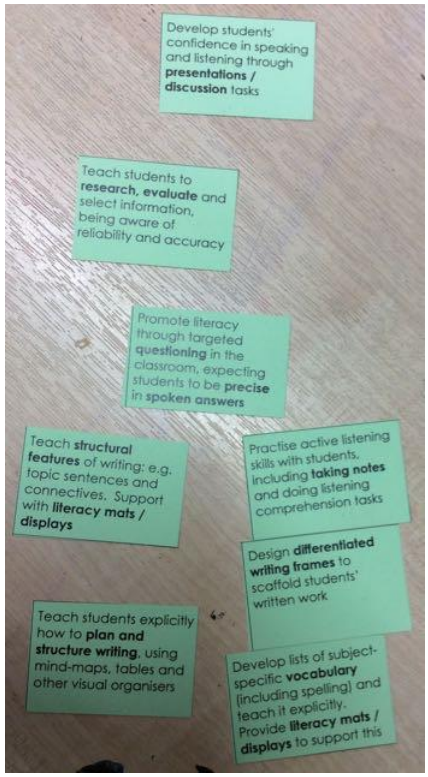


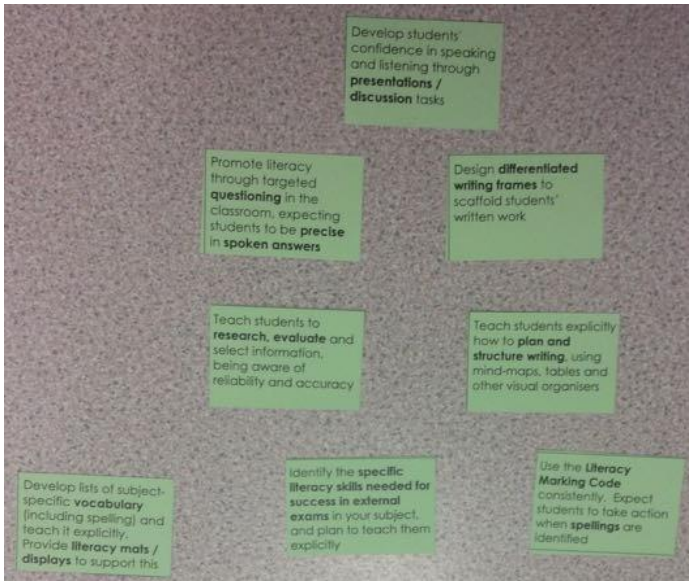


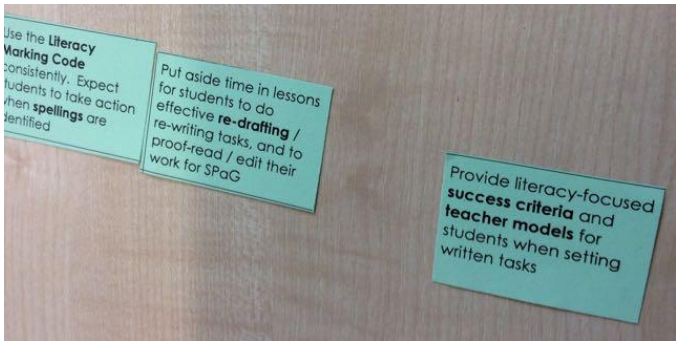


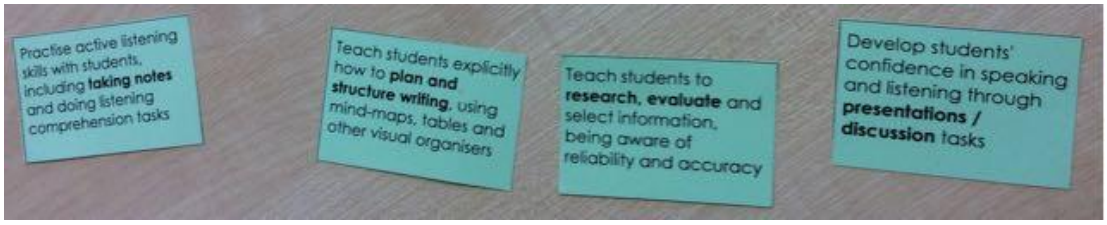



Promote literacy through targeted **questioning** in the classroom, expecting students to be **precise** in **spoken answers**
Develop students' confidence in speaking and listening through **presentations / discussion** tasks
Develop lists of subject-specific **vocabulary** (including spelling) and teach it explicitly. Provide **literacy mats / displays** to support this
Explicitly teach **reading strategies**: e.g. skimming and scanning, inferring and summarising
Identify the **specific literacy skills needed for success in external exams** in your subject, and plan to teach them explicitly
Use the **Literacy Marking Code** consistently. Expect students to take action when **spellings** are identified
Teach students to **research, evaluate** and select information, being aware of reliability and accuracy
Teach students explicitly how to **plan and structure writing**, using mind-maps, tables and other visual organisers


Develop students' confidence in speaking and listening through **presentations / discussion** tasks
Teach students to **research, evaluate** and select information, being aware of reliability and accuracy
Promote literacy through targeted **questioning** in the classroom, expecting students to be **precise** in **spoken answers**
Teach **structural features** of writing: e.g. topic sentences and connectives. Support with **literacy mats / displays**
Practise active listening skills with students, including **taking notes** and doing listening comprehension tasks
Design **differentiated writing frames** to scaffold students' written work
Teach students explicitly how to **plan and structure writing**, using mind-maps, tables and other visual organisers
Develop lists of subject-specific **vocabulary** (including spelling) and teach it explicitly. Provide **literacy mats / displays** to support this


Develop students' confidence in speaking and listening through **presentations / discussion** tasks
Promote literacy through targeted **questioning** in the classroom, expecting students to be **precise** in **spoken answers**
Design **differentiated writing frames** to scaffold students' written work
Teach students to **research, evaluate** and select information, being aware of reliability and accuracy
Teach students explicitly how to **plan and structure writing**, using mind-maps, tables and other visual organisers
Develop lists of subject-specific **vocabulary** (including spelling) and teach it explicitly. Provide **literacy mats / displays** to support this
Identify the **specific literacy skills needed for success in external exams** in your subject, and plan to teach them explicitly
Use the **Literacy Marking Code** consistently. Expect students to take action when **spellings** are identified

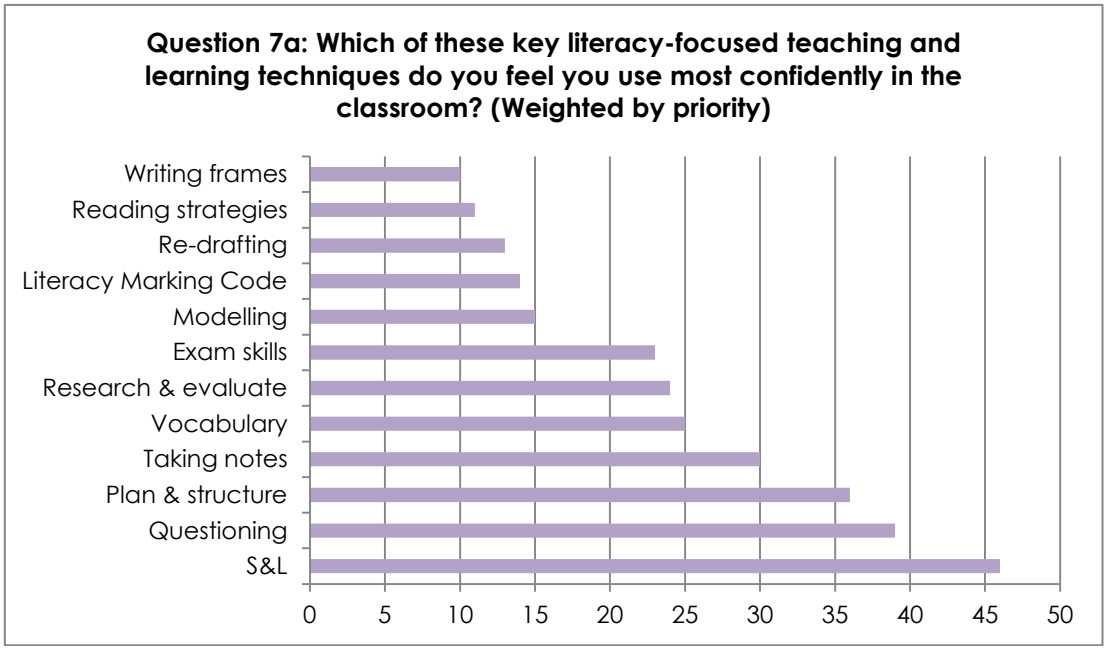

Use the **Literacy Marking Code** consistently. Expect students to take action when **spellings** are identified
Put aside time in lessons for students to do effective **re-drafting** / re-writing tasks, and to proof-read / edit their work for SPaG
Provide literacy-focused **success criteria** and **teacher models** for students when setting written tasks


Practise active listening skills with students, including **taking notes** and doing listening comprehension tasks
Teach students explicitly how to **plan and structure writing**, using mind-maps, tables and other visual organisers
Teach students to **research, evaluate** and select information, being aware of reliability and accuracy
Develop students' confidence in speaking and listening through **presentations / discussion** tasks

Overall prioritisation of techniques in which staff felt most confident calculated by recording the number of correspondents who picked out particular cards, then weighting them according to where they ranked them in order of importance. 8 points were given for highest confidence and 1 for lowest confidence.

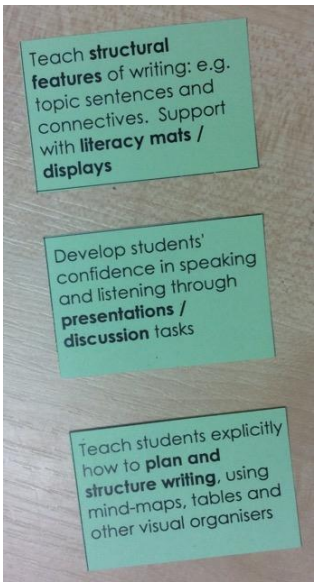
	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Total**
S&L	6				1				**46**
Questioning	2	1	2		1				**39**
Plan & structure	1	2		1	1	1	1		**36**
Taking notes	2	1		1			1		**30**
Vocabulary	2			1		1		1	**25**
Research & evaluate		2		1		1	1		**24**
Exam skills	1		2			1			**23**
Modelling			2			1			**15**
Literacy Marking Code	1					2			**14**
Re-drafting	1			1					**13**
Reading strategies			1	1					**11**
Writing frames		1				1			**10**

NB: staff who identified confidence in teaching reading strategies were both support staff.

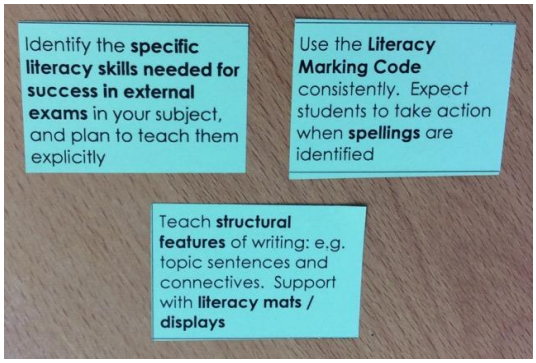


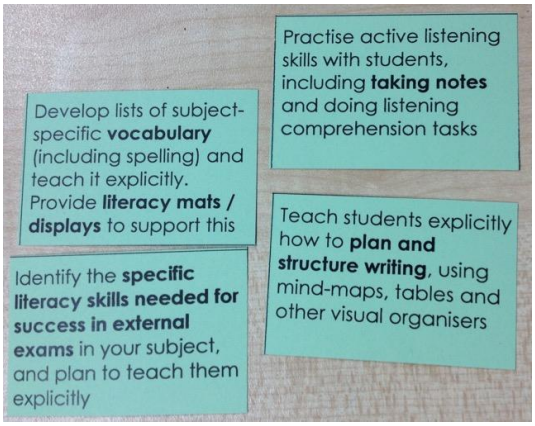
Question 7b: Which techniques and approaches do you believe should be strengthened across the school?

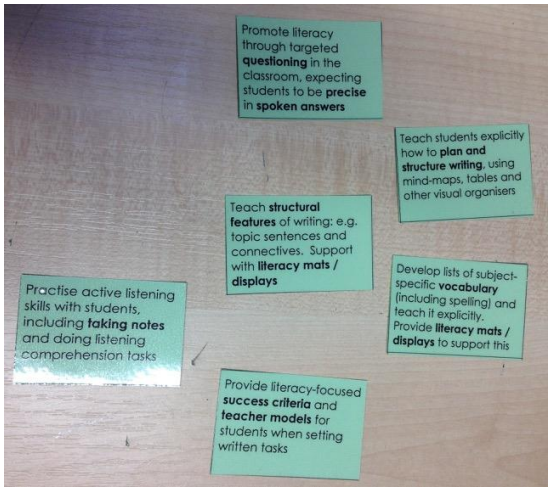
1. Photographs of cards chosen (not all teachers chose to pick out specific cards)
2. Graph to represent the frequency and priority of teachers' choices.

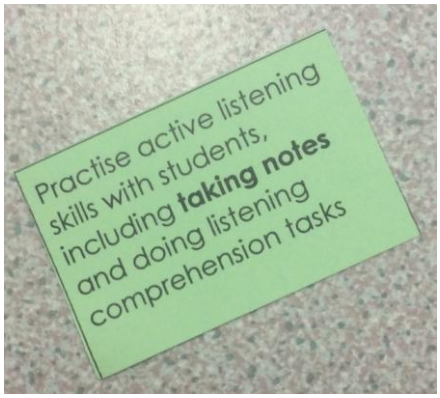


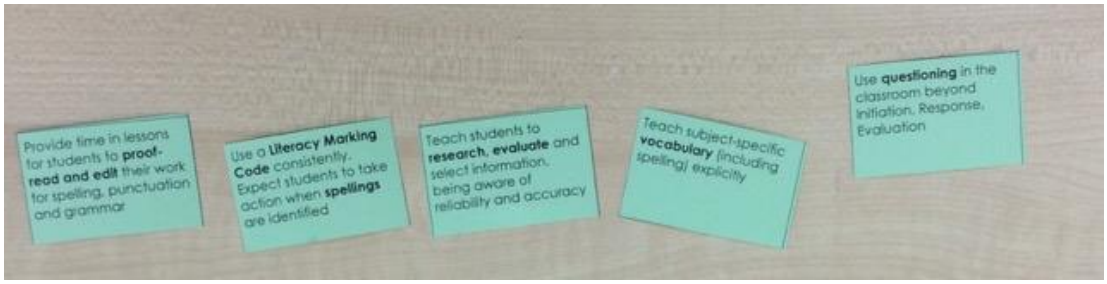


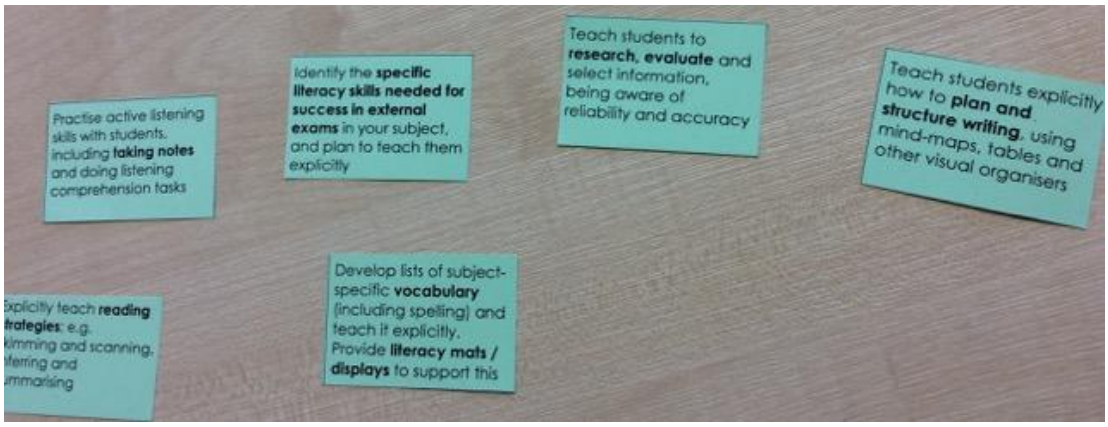


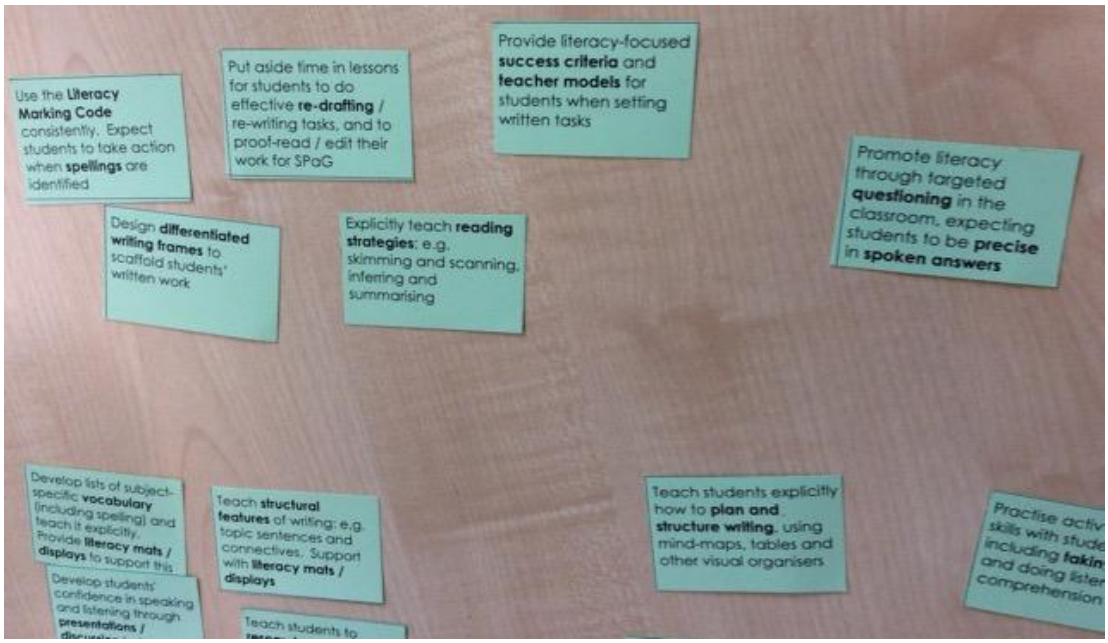







Provide time in lessons for students to **proof-read and edit** their work for spelling, punctuation and grammar
Use a **Literacy Marking Code** consistently. Expect students to take action when **spellings** are identified
Teach students to **research, evaluate** and select information, being aware of reliability and accuracy
Teach subject-specific **vocabulary** (including spelling) explicitly
Use **questioning** in the classroom beyond Initiation, Response, Evaluation


Practise active listening skills with students, including **taking notes** and doing listening comprehension tasks
Identify the **specific literacy skills needed for success in external exams** in your subject, and plan to teach them explicitly
Teach students to **research, evaluate** and select information, being aware of reliability and accuracy
Teach students explicitly how to **plan and structure writing**, using mind-maps, tables and other visual organisers
Develop lists of subject-specific **vocabulary** (including spelling) and teach it explicitly. Provide **literacy mats / displays** to support this

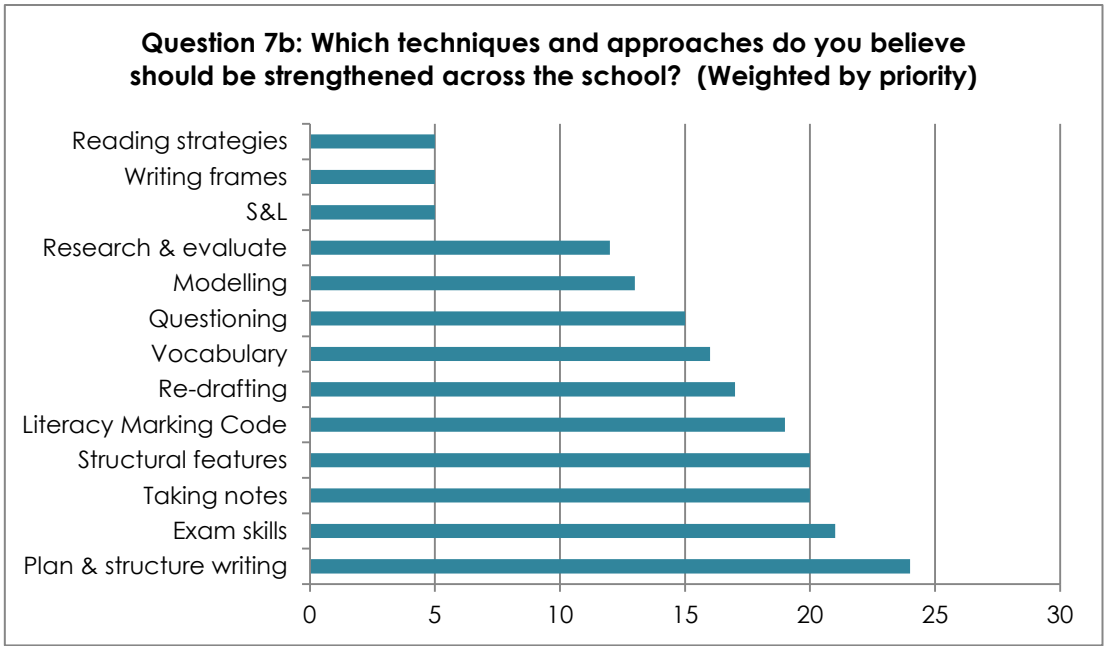

Use the **Literacy Marking Code** consistently. Expect students to take action when **spellings** are identified
Put aside time in lessons for students to do effective **re-drafting** / re-writing tasks, and to proof-read / edit their work for SPaG
Provide literacy-focused **success criteria** and **teacher models** for students when setting written tasks
Promote literacy through targeted **questioning** in the classroom, expecting students to be **precise** in **spoken answers**
Design **differentiated writing frames** to scaffold students' written work
Explicitly teach **reading strategies**: e.g. skimming and scanning, inferring and summarising
Develop lists of subject-specific **vocabulary** (including spelling) and teach it explicitly. Provide **literacy mats / displays** to support this
Teach **structural features** of writing: e.g. topic sentences and connectives. Support with **literacy mats / displays**
Develop students' confidence in speaking and listening through **presentations /**
Teach students explicitly how to **plan and structure writing**, using mind-maps, tables and other visual organisers

Overall prioritisation of techniques and approaches that staff believed should be strengthened across the school calculated by recording the number of correspondents who picked out particular cards, then weighting them according to where they ranked them in order of importance. 6 points were given for top priorities and 1 for lowest priorities.

Where this was not clear, talk data was used to identify prioritisation.

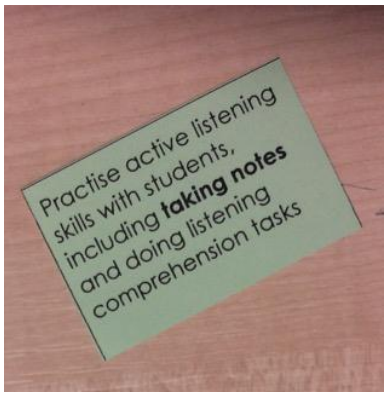
	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Total**
Plan & structure writing	1	2	2				**24**
Exam skills	3			1			**21**
Taking notes	3				1		**20**
Structural features	2		2				**20**
Literacy Marking Code	3					1	**19**
Re-drafting	2	1					**17**
Vocabulary	1	1		1	1		**16**
Questioning	2			1			**15**
Modelling	2						**13**
Research & evaluate	2						**12**
S&L		1					**5**
Writing frames				1	1		**5**
Reading strategies				1	1		**5**

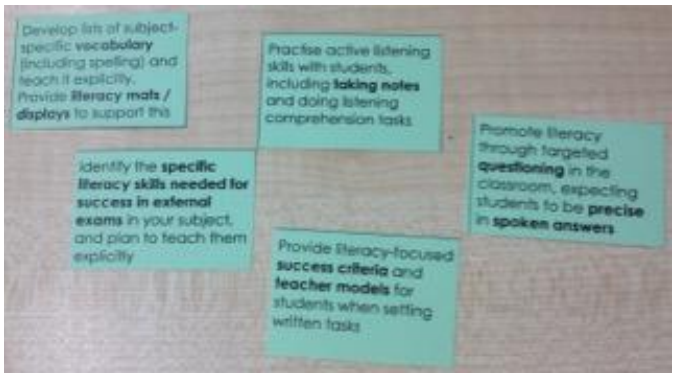
NB: both respondents who identified teacher modelling and success criteria as priorities for improvement were non-teaching members of staff from their observation of teaching.

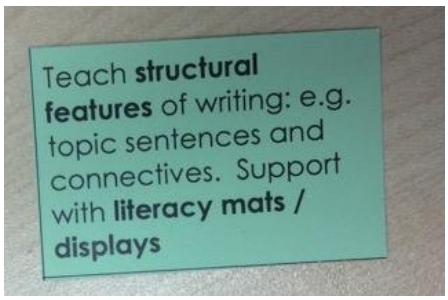


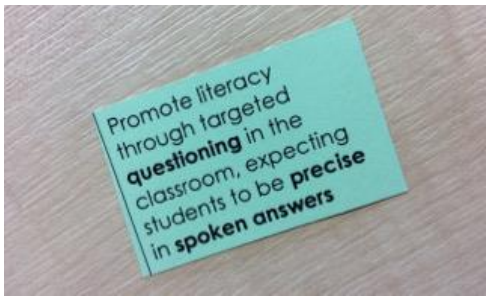
Question 7c: Which techniques would you most value developing further within your own practice?

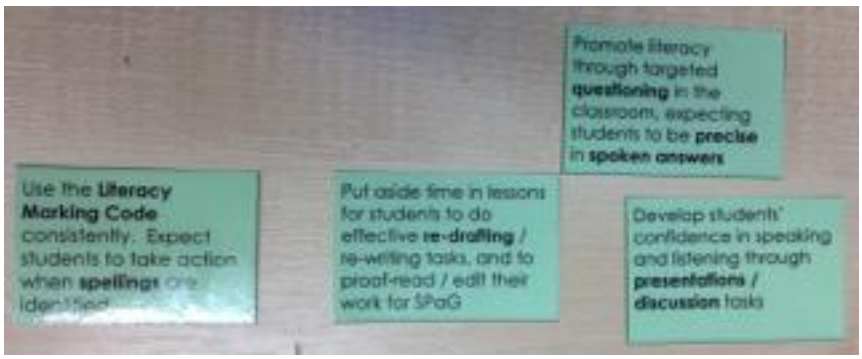
1. Photographs of cards chosen (not all teachers chose to pick out specific cards)
2. Graph to represent the frequency and priority of teachers' choices.









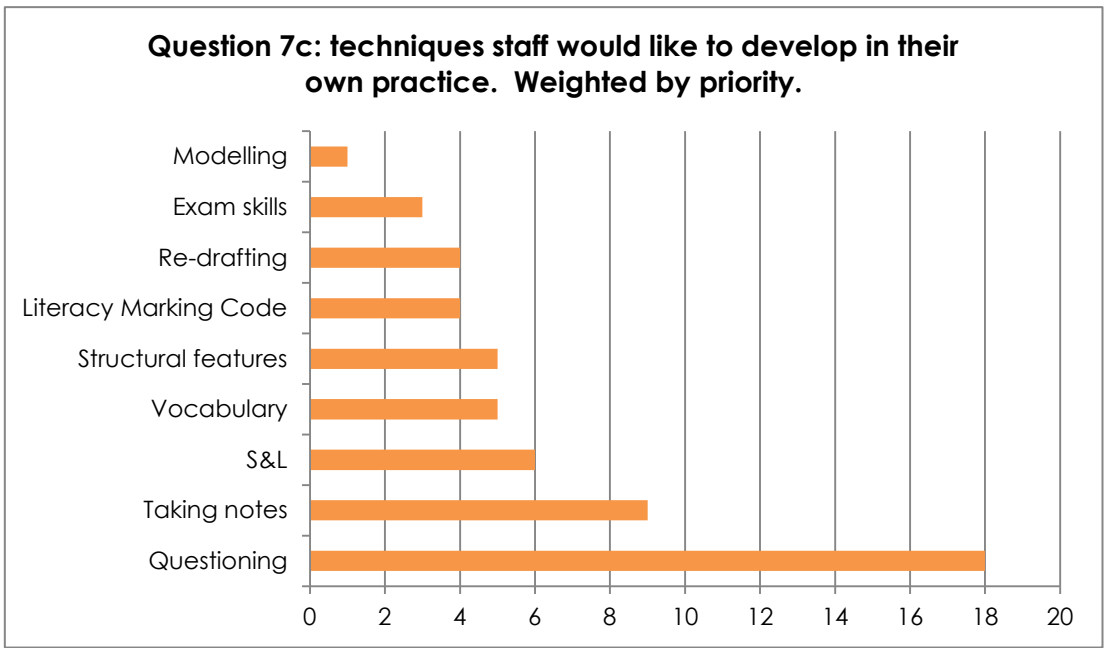




Overall prioritisation of focus areas for staff's own practice calculated by recording the number of correspondents who picked out particular cards, then weighting them according to where they ranked them in order of importance. 5 points were given for top priorities and 1 for lowest priorities.

Where this was not clear, talk data was used to identify prioritisation.

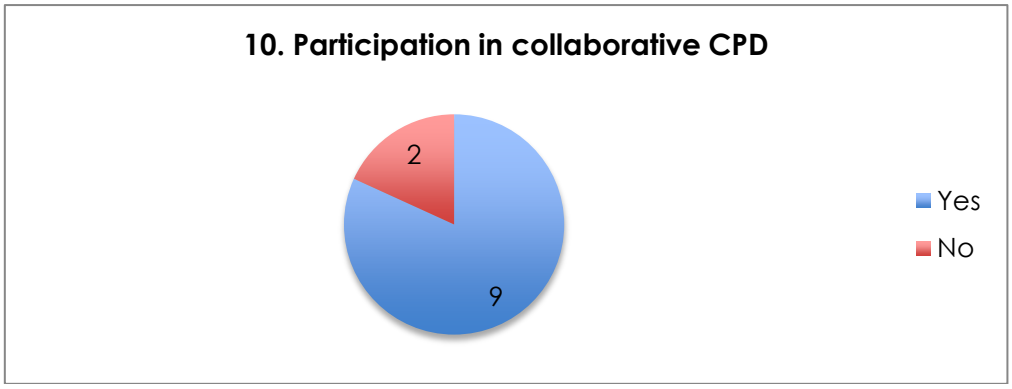
	5	4	3	2	1	**Total**
Questioning	3		1			**18**
Taking notes	1	1				**9**
S&L		1		1		**6**
Vocabulary	1					**5**
Structural features	1				1	**5**
Literacy Marking Code		1				**4**
Re-drafting		1				**4**
Exam skills			1			**3**
Modelling						**1**



Question 9
9. Can you identify any different areas in which CPD or peer support would help you teach the literacy needed for excellence in your subject?

Responses coded within interview transcripts.

Question 10
10. Would you be interested in participating in a 1:1 collaborative CPD session in the summer term, focusing on one of the areas you have identified?



Collaborative CPD requests:

1. Questioning
2. Targeted questioning
3. Spoken precision
4. Own spelling, punctuation and grammar
5. Literacy mats
6. Marking
7. Command words for exams
8. Redrafting/green penning
9. Taking notes

Appendix E - Coding of Cycle 2 Interviews - Question 1 extract from grouped transcripts

All interviews separated into individual questions for analysis for each of these answers; key points highlighted in **bold**.

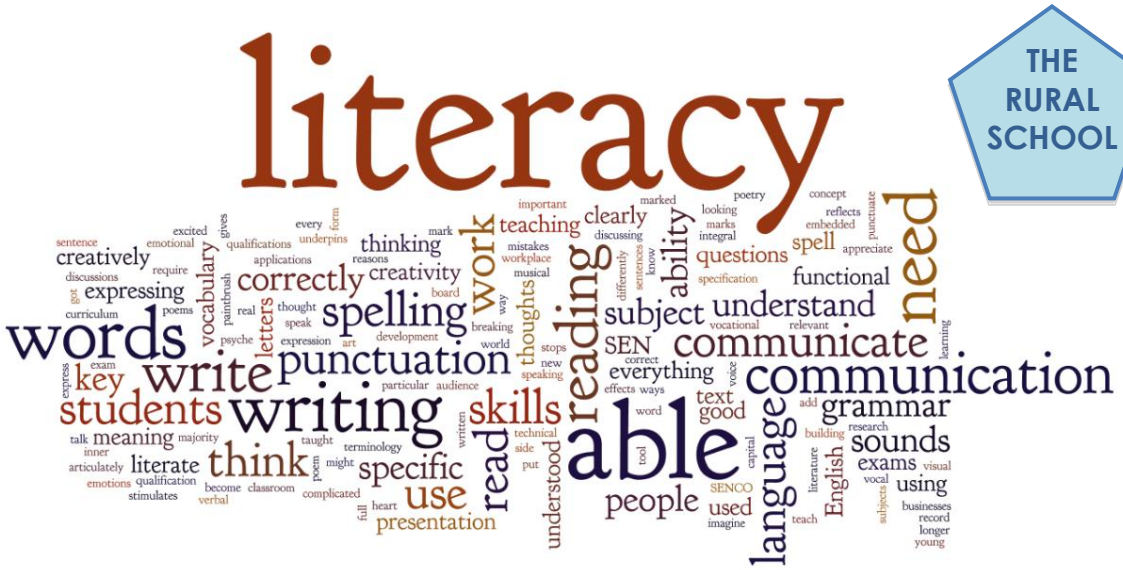
Dimension	Subcategories
Specific focus areas	**Speaking and Listening** **Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar** **Exam Skills** **Writing** **Reading** **Lowest Attainers and SEN** **Handwriting**
Pedagogical techniques	***Vocabulary*** ***Questioning*** ***Teacher Modelling*** ***Marking and Feedback***
Coaching and CPD	
Subject-specific literacy vs Functional literacy	
Consistency across the curriculum	
Explicit/implicit teaching	
External pressures	
Confidence (+) or (-)	

Qu	Practitioner	Transcription	Reflections
1	**How would you, as a subject teacher, define literacy? What does it mean to you in the classroom?**		
1	Jessica Maths	In SEN, it's about communication... **reading**... **writing**. Is there a fourth? Listening.... **In maths, it's all of these**... but I tend to think mostly in term of ***technical vocabulary in terms of where the two cross***.	Subject-focused
1	Diane EPQ	Two aspects for me. First of all, I think you've got general, **functional literacy**, which is both verbal and in **writing**. But for me, that's more about the skills, the literacy skills young people need when they leave us, and actually what they need out in the real world, in terms of job applications and writing letters to people:	Functional literacy most important.

		that sort of thing. And then I've got a concept which is about functional literacy. I think probably the **majority of students are functionally literate by the time they get to Year 9, but some SEN students are not** - so I've got that aspect of literacy. And then, the subjects that I have taught here over the past couple of years, the **literacy requirements for them are very specific.**	Subject-specific very exam focused
1	Penelope Food Tec	I think it is able to communicate both in **writing** and actually in speaking, **because the way you speak reflects what you record on paper.**	Ref to S&L
1	Andrew History	For me, literacy means being able to understand and use the native language; the ***language*** that is used in the classroom, the language they work in.	
1	Murray Geog RS	Your initial thoughts, obviously, are to do with **reading** and **writing**, but then you think is there such a thing as **emotional literacy**? So you start thinking, well, what does that mean? To be literate with your emotions? To understand and appreciate ways of expressing yourself. I guess literacy has at its heart, expression in vocal form, so sounds. Musical literacy... are you expressing your inner thoughts through sounds? **What I can make with my voice box, my words?** So in that sense, is literacy all about being able to express yourself clearly, articulately, and be understood, I guess. Literacy is being understood by whoever your audience might be. So communication - two way communication using sounds? That sounds very broad....	Further dimension sees a deeper view of literacy
1	Rachel TA	I think it's about learning techniques of how writers put their work across, really really breaking it down and picking to pieces a text or a poem, and looking at the effects, and discussing the reasons why they've used them in their work. It can be **reading particular novels, plays and poems and just spending longer than you would just reading them**, actually breaking them down and having discussions and talk about what it means to the students. Have they thought about....? Getting them to think differently.	Confusion between literacy and literature?
1	Clara Art	I think of words, and I think of how people use ***words***, and how they might **write words in a visual way**. How you can add meaning to art, by using poetry and text and literature. How it informs and stimulates creativity in art.	Subject-specific
1	Justine SENCO	As a **SENCO**, literacy means building on both **reading** and **writing** skills, the **ability to spell and punctuate**; the **ability to understand and read for meaning**. So it's another paintbrush, really - it's another tool.	SPaG - SENCO view
1	Fay English	It means everything that is s**poken**, **read** and **written** in the English Language.	

1	Pete PE	Off the top of my head, it would be to be able to **read** and ... **read** and **write**, really.	
1	Jane Comp Sc	For me, ***it's my students being able to write correctly the key words they use, like algorithm***, and specific words they need for the subject and **they will need to write in their exams**, and therefore need to know how to spell correctly. **And obviously, in their exams they have longer questions, 6 mark questions**, that they are marked on, and they need **to be able to correctly write sentences and use full stops and capital letters and relevant punctuation**.	Subject-specific, with exam focus
1a	Hannah Sophie	Thinking creatively - the creativity side of it, isn't it? It underpins... everything. The confidence to think creatively - to imagine, isn't it? It's, like, an integral aspect of teaching of every subject. With good literacy skills, you know, if it's embedded in their psyche, in their thinking, in their being, then they're able to communicate in any.... It's being able to communicate, isn't' it? It's the communication development. In a way, it gives them the ability to become excited by new curriculum areas... you know, if you've got a good literacy basic, then actually doing science, French, languages become so much easier. **Without having to worry about your spelling and your grammar and your punctuation**.... **That communication's so important, isn't it? Being able to communicate clearly**.	Primary response: much more holistic

Appendix F: The Rural School Literacy Policy, June 2015



Wordle created from TRS teachers' definitions of literacy

At The Rural School, we believe that:

To be literate is to be able to understand language and communicate your thoughts in both speech and writing. To become literate is to develop the key skills, including fluency in reading, a wide vocabulary (including subject-specific key words) and accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar, to succeed at school and in the workplace, and to express your ideas clearly and creatively.

Through literacy teaching, we help pupils:

- to gain functional ability in the use of written and spoken English;
- to be able to adapt their language to different audiences, contexts and purposes;
- and to become confident and able readers for information, meaning and pleasure.

Key Principles at all Key Stages

- At The Rural School, we have the opportunity to provide education for our young people from the age of 3 through to 16. The effective and explicit teaching of literacy is among the best strategies we have for ensuring that we promote achievement for all.
- Learning at all Key Stages and in all subjects requires students to develop and apply literacy skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Therefore, **all teachers are teachers of literacy**, with a responsibility to teach literacy skills explicitly.
- At the heart of good literacy teaching are the **core aspects of good teaching and learning practice**: devising and sharing progress-focused **learning intentions**, providing **success criteria** and **models**, supporting and stretching all students through **differentiation**, and providing high quality **marking** and **feedback** which is acted upon by students. The school's Marking and Assessment Policy outlines good practice in these areas, and should be read in conjunction with this Literacy Policy.

Literacy in the Secondary Phase

In The Rural School, we recognise that literacy teaching across the curriculum has a dual focus: on consistent teaching of core English skills, and on the literacy needed for excellence in each individual subject. The teaching methods for delivering these literacy objectives are the responsibility of the department and teacher; however, the key commitments below should inform planning and delivery in all subject areas.

Marking and Feedback

- All departments will use the **Literacy Marking Code** (attached) to help students to see and correct weaknesses in their work.
- This will include taking time for students to **act on feedback**: to edit their work and improve spellings, grammar and punctuation.

Subject-specific Literacies

- All departments will identify and explicitly teach those aspects of literacy which are **relevant to their subject area**.
- This includes the accurate use and spelling of subject-specific **key words**, which may be recorded in books, files, literacy mats, electronically or in classroom displays.
- All departments will identify and teach the literacy needed for success in external exams, including recognising **command words** in exam questions, **reading** source materials with understanding, and **structuring answers**.

The Rural School is committed to improving literacy in three key focus areas. Staff are encouraged to use the school Literacy Handbook, which can be accessed from the school website, as a resource for approaches and strategies proven to help deliver the following **outcomes** for Reading, Writing and Speaking & Listening: Further advice on using teaching and learning techniques mentioned here can be found in the Literacy Handbook on the learning platform of the school website: www.rural.com.

Focus on Reading

- Literacy leaders ensure that pupils' progress is not held back by an inability to read accurately and fluently. The English department and the SENCO help those who have fallen behind to make substantial and sustained progress in their reading, as this will affect their writing, confidence and behaviour in every subject.
- Wider reading and reading for pleasure within the taught curriculum is a priority at The Rural School, as research has proven the correlation between reading and children's education success.

Focus on Writing

- Students are taught to write with confidence, enjoyment, fluency and understanding, orchestrating a range of independent strategies to self-monitor, evaluate and correct. They develop their powers of imagination, creativity and critical thinking and are able to communicate these effectively, using a wide range of vocabulary. They have the opportunity to practise extended writing by hand throughout the school.
- Students develop their ability to write in a variety of forms, choosing appropriate language for different purposes, contexts and audiences.

Focus on Speaking & Listening

- Students can use Standard English with precision and coherence. They listen carefully to others, responding thoughtfully and constructively in discussion, debate, presentations and in response to targeted questioning.

APPENDIX to the Literacy Policy

The Rural School Literacy Marking Code

Guidance

The Literacy Marking Code is used across all Secondary subject areas. It is displayed in classrooms and, where appropriate, will be stuck into student books or files. Students are expected to act on the literacy feedback given.

Guidance for teachers suggests that they mark only two or three key spelling mistakes in assessed work, with particular focus on common errors and subject-specific vocabulary, rather than covering the page in red pen. This encourages students to learn from their mistakes and to write the words accurately in subsequent work.

Consistency of marking across the curriculum helps students to understand the importance of spelling, punctuation and accurate sentence structure in all their academic writing.

Literacy Marking Code

The Rural School

Symbol	Meaning/student action
sp	Spelling mistake. Students should record the error; e.g. by writing out 3 times onto a spellings page.
//	New paragraph needed here.
/	New sentence needed here.
p	Punctuation mistake – change to correct punctuation / capital letter.
^	Additional word / information needed here.
?	Meaning unclear – rewrite so that the meaning is clear.

Guidance for students

These symbols will be used to help you improve the quality and accuracy of your writing in all of your subjects at school.

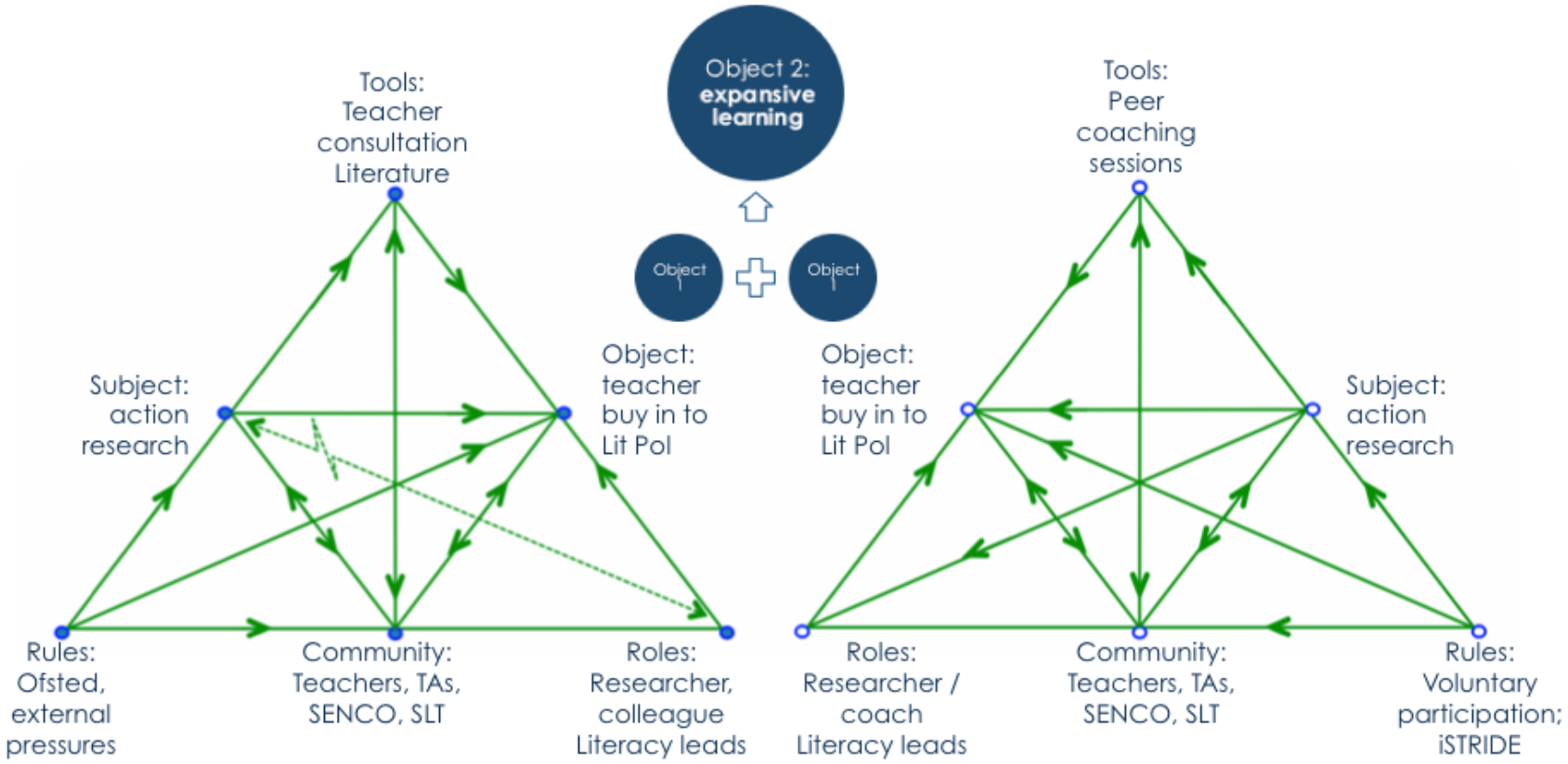
Remember: the accuracy of your writing matters. Take care not to repeat mistakes again and again.

Literacy in the Primary Phase

...to be attached.

Appendix G: Two interacting activity systems (After Engestrom 1999)

Cycle 2: policy design, and Cycle 3: peer coaching



Appendix H: Example coded transcript of Cycle 3 coaching session with Penelope

Food Tech teacher who has been teaching for 20 years, 12 of them at The Rural School.

Cycle 3 coaching - responses and notes: transcription where relevant
Coded for general themes of:

Theme	**Subcategories**	
References to literacy policy	Positive tone	Negative tone
References to professional learning	Positive tone	Negative tone

Coded according to different talk categories - levels of coaching talk:

Level	**Talk category**	**Characterised by**
1	Acquiescence	One sided - led by coach Coachee use of continuers - agreement, maybe some questioning
2	Descriptive action (sympathised knowledge)	Describing current practice: "I do...", "I often..." Often initiated by coachee, but not collaborative talk
3	Potential action (cumulative talk)	Often more balanced turns Identifying problems Asking questions Evaluating problems Considering action - modality: "I could...", "I might", "Perhaps I'll..." Building on each other's points
4	Decisive action	Initiating decision-making Definite verbs: "I will...", "Yes, I'll...", "I am definitely going to..." Innovating: suggesting new ideas to the coach
5	Co-construction (collaborative talk)	May involve dissonance - internal or external recognition of gap between theory and practice Working with the coach to create new professional knowledge / action Balanced turns Reflective discussion about professional learning - constructing professional learning culture Sharing professional knowledge to create new understandings Collaboration with other members of staff / networks

Penelope coaching	1.7 34.59 mins		
My explanation sets up			So what I'm doing in these sessions is: it's officially called peer coaching, but I find 'coaching' is a misnomer - because it sounds to me as if I'm supposed to be going along on a bike beside someone shouting at her. But it's the opposite. It's not about me telling anybody how to do things or what to do, it's about actually creating an opportunity for peer professional discussion, where - and it counts towards CPD, so it can go down for anyone who does it on their PMR, spending an hour of CPD discussing literacy in their subject.... and it's actually an opportunity for you to talk about what you might like to do, and perhaps to identify some next steps that might be useful.
			So you'd talked about questioning...
Innovation Initiation Suggesting new ideas Use of 'we'		So it's 'Peer Professional Development'... PPD... [Laughs]	Yeah! Ooh - nice!
		PPD	**I'm writing it down! Peer Professional Development.**
		Well, we're very good at finding initials for everything that we do here, aren't we?	**... So, um, you were saying that something you'd be interested in working on in terms of literacy... When I spoke to you earlier, I remember that you said 'We can always keep on learning, can't we?'**
Collaborative Initiated by Penelope Not co-constructive But recognises dissonance Reflecting on		**Well - yes - and I think that the older I get... what worries you, when you're getting older in teaching, is that you get set in your ways, and you are resistant to change. And... to a certain extent, that can be true. But I think, because, in this school and over at LLL, I'm constantly being asked to do new and different things, I then have to change my approach to the things that I do... The things that I do all the time, and have done for years week in week out, I am probably resistant to change on]; and I think that's something that's embedded in**	**It is, isn't it.** **[Yes]** **[True, ya...]** **[Ya]** **[Mmm**

professional learning		**all of us.**	
		We feel comfy and cosy in what we're doing, and if someone says 'do something different', you're out of your comfort zone, rabbit in the headlights, 'oh my goodness, I can't - don't want to do that.'	**Mmm**
Gives situational explanation Collaboration		**So, but because I'm constantly being asked to change subjects and to do new things... I'm constantly having to look for new strategies to get me through. Having to find new ways that, perhaps the more disadvantaged learners that I have, will be able to improve without my being stuck in my little rut: 'it's my way or the highway'. And I don't really - I'm not really like that, because really all the time, especially with differentiation, we're looking all the time, aren't we that we've got this one who doesn't understand this, this, this, this or this - so what can I do? Well - look it up - oh, maybe I can try this.... talk to a colleague... I do this - maybe give it a try.**	**Mm**
Descriptive of own practice	3.22	**Especially with literacy - because it's... an important part of what I do, in school, but it isn't - you know - if you look at Travel and Tourism, I'm looking at the whole subject. So I'm making sure they do the work, pass the units.... ... And then, when they write it, particularly with BTECs, they're not so worried about ... the odd spelling mistake, or lack of punctuation...**	**And are there... are there SPAG marks in the BTEC?**
Initiating Describing Building sympathised knowledge		No - there are in Child Development, because it's an AQA GCSE - so there are in the GCSE - but because the BTECS originated from this vocational, practical standpoint, they're not like that - so it's more - because they were always targeted at low ability pupils - oh - sorry - pupils who were not so academically able.... who had amazing practical skills - who could cook for England, or make stuff.... And so, because of that, the way BTECs are written, they were	Mmm. Yeah.

		always written so that children could repeat the work....	
Building sympathised knowledge		But now that BTECs have had to be brought in line since the Wolff Report, with GCSEs, um, the Wolff Report was a really important document for BTECs - because if you remember a few years ago they were seriously devalued... they were almost like the NVQs.... So now, if a student does a piece of work, and it's not right, you can't be prescriptive.... You have to say 'read the specification again' and go and do it. But they still haven't made any difference to the SPaG. They still accept poor spellings... Which surprised me, because there's always a SPaG mark for the GCSE. So, with me, spelling and grammar is really important. I can't stand it!	Well, as a Functional Skills teacher as well, you... really see what a difference it makes to people if they don't have this skills in their lives.
		And Y is now punctuating really well, and using preposteries! He absolutely makes me die! I can't say apostrophe any more! 'Is there a prepostery in here, Penelope?'	Oh! Dear of him! Preposteries.
Dissonance - reflection on professional learning		**But he now understands the value of it.... So for me, having adult learners at that ability has been an absolute revelation, because it's made me think very carefully about what I actually do with students.**	
Descriptive		90% of what I do is KS4. I run 4 GCSE-type subjects. ... But by the time they get here, they should know this stuff! [I know]. They should be able to punctuate. I accept that there are some people who just can't spell very well. But you expect a certain level of spelling and grammar.	I really hope that .. the cohort we're seeing coming through now - you're going to see the difference.
	8.22	I hope so. I mean, the likes of XX, who left school last year - he's a NEET. I'm doing work with him. His spelling is atrocious. Not only is his spelling atrocious, his bank of words is appalling.	Mmm.
		[Explanation of giving him spellings he didn't know, like	I'm not surprised, but I don't think he's be alone in that. It's

		miscellaneous.]	something Justine said, actually... we've talked a lot about the vocabulary you need for your subject, but general vocabulary seems to be getting weaker...
		...Really poor. Cos I use words... I've been very fortunate. My parents liked me to talk properly.... I'm a Jordie, actually....	And that's what a lot of our students don't get, do they? They don't hear those words at home. So, we've got to teach them...
Potential action Questioning		Yes. So how do you... in English... When do you get the opportunity to widen their vocabulary? I try to do it in here, but if they're not listening to you... it just washes over them.	Yeah... maybe that's somewhere... where questioning.... I mean, how can we use questioning to improve people's vocabulary?
		Mm.	Because it's something - you'd mentioned questioning as something particular. Because questioning can be used for so many different purposes.... [] But also, to improve their thinking... so maybe, to say: 'Can you think of a different word you could use for that?'
		And you and I could probably think of three.	Yeah, exactly.
		But they probably couldn't think of one. .... So with XX, at 17, I'm doing that with him all the time. So I might say to him now: 'Um, you know, oh help me to get this out, Alun, because this cupboard's full of miscellaneous items' and then I'll say 'What's miscellaneous?'....	That's great, isn't it.... You know, having people like you, in other subjects, improving people's vocabulary, is going to be so important for the new English GCSE. [Explanation] And actually, the more we increase their vocabulary across the school, the better they're going to do in English. [Mm] And the better they do in English, the better they do in everything - we hope.
		I make vocabulary a sort of a game [Goes on to explain in detail]	**That's something - I think that's something I could definitely improve on myself... Because it's that atmosphere of trust, isn't it?**
Cumulative talk		It's ok to say!	You can get a questioning environment, where children know they can ask a question....
			Did you have an idea, in terms of using questioning, of

			anything that you want to focus on...? I mean, what do you think you do do, in terms of questioning, that works well?
Descriptive		I think, um, one of the phrases I use all the time is 'What do you think'. I don't say 'Tell me the answer to this', because I think that's intimidating, and I think a lot of students will... um... feel on the spot. [Further explanation - valuing their opinions]	Yeah. Yeah. But you're actually valuing....
Evaluative		It's giving them some ownership of it....	It is great.
Descriptive But heading towards evaluative - level 3	18.30	I do question all the time. I say to somebody: 'That's really good, how did you do that?' And I say 'What do you think? How do you think you - we - should go about this?'	Yeah - and 'I wonder', you know...
		So I try to just give them some autonomy, as much as I can. And then they feel proud of what they've done, because they don't think 'Oh, Mrs Scott has just told me to do that.' They feel they've come to the decision on their own. Even though they haven't really! Because I've guided and manipulated the conversation....	Mm. That's really good. Mm. I was... this just made me think, because I compiled some questioning things.... And just one of the people who was writing about questioning was saying that it's that thing of not asking them what they know, and not letting them say 'I don't know', but saying 'I want to know what you think'...
Potential action - identifying problems Cumulative - active agreement - finishing turns		... Mm, and it doesn't matter if it's wrong...	exactly. And actually, personal opinion is so important.
	20.23	**In a lot of ways it's hard for me to do that.... But in a lot of ways it's easier for me to do that, because I've seen that it has worked.**	Exactly. And it's not just that you've been doing it for 20 years. Even if you've only been doing it for a year, you feel safe. And you go - I've finally found something that works! So I'm just going to do that now! And then you have to make yourself feel uncomfortable...
		... and that's what we all resist.	Yeah. What do you think, then, you could improve in your questioning? What - do you have any ideas of things you'd like to try?
Critical moments - reflection on process of professional learning		**I think you can always improve. And sometimes, I'll have, like, bold moments. And at this moment in time, sitting here, I'll think 'I can't think of anything', but often, you're in the middle of doing something, and you'll say something to somebody, and you actually see them looking engaged for a minute, and you'll think 'Oh, oh oh, oh, this is going to work**	

		with them! I'm going to run with this' - and so you'll carry on that stream of questioning....	
Potential action Identifying problems (could be level 5 awareness of dissonance) Questioning self - voice within		**So I think that sometimes I am a little rigid, especially in subjects I've been doing a long time that I'm very secure in, and where I've experienced the same, um, responses to things - so over the years, we're going to make this, and oh, nhnh, I don't like that kind of thing. So, I can be resistant. So, I think the thing I need to always keep in my mind is: am I being fair? Am I being too rigid here? Am I sticking to my principles because that's what I've always done....?** **... What I need to do is to keep reminding myself of the good things I do in getting children to question and think, and to not be afraid, and to talk to me...**	
	22.30	[But if they come in, and I'm 'Right, come on - we've got this to do today! You need to get your heads down! We need to get on with it!' Straightaway, I've set the scene. You will come in. You will not ask me - I don't mean to say you will not ask me questions.... So I have to make myself have a different approach at the very beginning of that lesson, so they come in and they feel that they can talk to me.	I love the way that you're focusing on the children asking the questions. Because, so often when we talk about questioning, it's all about the questions the teacher's asking. But, um, you've got a real focus there on how the children get to ask you questions.
Identifying problems Dissonance - internal	23.17	But it's important to me. Because, very often, I don't know always what they need to know..... **So, when I set the wrong tone when they come in the door, because I've got out the wrong side.... And I just pin them to the floor...** **And that's terrible. And I feel terrible when I do that.**	Do you think it's like, because what I really like to do, is - well, I'm going to think of a couple of practical things I can do to get me doing that. And maybe I'll just do them once or twice, but if I plan to do it, um... I mean - would you be interested in trying out a particular type of questioning for engagement?
		Yeah - course.	**Like, um - I did, at my training, we had a whole set of questioning for engagement, um, activities you could do. And you might just do one in a term, and then you might, just to get the children - and some of those are ones where you're getting the children to respond to your questions, and some are getting them to come up with questions at the beginning**

			of a topic.
		Mm-hmm?	**Like, I really like... I do this one maybe once or twice a year, and it definitely leads to them feeling like they've got some sort of ownership of it, like you're saying.**
Potential action - modality leading to decisive action (definitely)		Yeah - you see, on a day where I know, that I'm probably going to be a bit you know.... Because - I don't know about you - but we all have days where we think 'You know what - I just want this lesson done!'	Oh, absolutely.
		But if I started that lesson with something more fun, and something that is encouraging...	Yeah - and actually, something that's easier for you, because they do the work.
		Yes - I definitely would.	This cover the table thing, I really like, um - and it's - you've got your students in their groups, round the tables, and you just get - I don't use post-its because they're too expensive, so I just get some pieces of paper....[Explanation]
Led by coach		OK? Mm-hm.	So they might be about to start a topic where they have to ... make a brochure about the Isles of Scilly.... So they have to come up with lots of ideas and questions about what people want to...
Very positive potential action - leading to decisive action Cumulative talk - adding to idea and visualising action Still modal verbs, but with certainty		**Oh yes - that's a really good idea!**	...um, know about the islands. And then, you just give them a certain number of minutes. [Explanation]
		Oh yeah, yeah, that's really good. Yeah, yeah.	...and there's a bit of a competition - who's come up with the most ideas?
		Ah! I think that's a brilliant idea!	And then, they might decide, what are the best three ideas we've come up with....
		Oh - I think that's a brilliant idea. Because I'm actually thinking about that, because Travel and Tourism are doing something quite similar at the minute. And I could use something quite similar, like now, tomorrow! Um - I think that's brilliant. That's amazing. It's exactly - yeah - and if I knew that I was having a day when maybe I wasn't going to be - you know.... but that would be brilliant. I would definitely do	That would be so cool...

- 'definitely' Positive tone Becoming decisive action - still some modal verbs, but specific time targets Innovating - developing idea		**that.**	
		I could probably do that next week. Because we're just about to do... some work on a countryside place, a seaside and a city. And they've got to make recommendations for different groups of people. So, I can use that, and go: right: Penzance. Come up with loads of facilities for older people, and facilities for children (I mean, we are talking about Penzance here! [laughs]). And 'accommodation! What accommodation do you think there is? And then, once they've done that activity, they can then go to the internet and see if what they've said is true. And if what they've said matches up with the reality. And yes, I could do that next week. I'd love to do that.	Cool! And can I just ask - send this to you?
Decisive action Change to active verbs		But I think that would also be very useful for me. So I will do that, and I'll tell you what the results were.	Ah - thanks, Penelope - that's great!
Decisive action - active verbs and timed targets		I can use that. I will definitely use that. I'll use it before the summer holidays, and I'll let you know - please do, because it will remind me. And it'll take me 5 minutes to chop up some paper, and then I'll set it. Because there's 4 of them in that group, so they can go in pairs. No, I'll do that.	Thanks, Penelope!
		Not at all.	It's been really great, talking to you, and hearing about your approaches to questioning. And I think it's really unusual. I think most teachers, when they hear the word questioning, just think okay - who'm I asking the questions to..... But not that many people are talking about how you are empowering students through questioning, and that makes me think, too.
Reflective discussion of professional learning Collaborative		Well, I think I stumbled upon it and it works. You adapt, as you need to go on. And I think we're lucky in this school, because we've got lovely students, we've got lovely facilities, we've got small classes... **And it enables you, doesn't it, to try things out.** Cos if you've got a class of 35, and	Yes. And it's also got its challenges. So when you've got four students, getting them talking, thinking, responding, is really hard because you have to put so much energy into it, don't you?

		it's 90% crowd control, and if you get 10 minutes work you're lucky... I can't imagine being in that situation again.	
		Well, yes! Actually yes!	So, it's finding ways to actually get the energy out of them....
Awareness of dissonance		You don't think of it, because you get so used to doing it. Because I've been in this school over 12 years... so it's almost become embedded in my psyche - I know what to do! But yes - for somebody new coming in....	Yes - I miss my bonkers classes of 30, where I'm trying to manage the energy.... And now I've got these eight who come in and write their learning objective.... So I need to change my style of teaching....
			I mustn't keep you. PPD! What was it? Peer professional discourse! Would you like to give me a sound bite on how well you think this can work in a school environment.
Collaboration Positive response to peer coaching Innovation - idea of surgeries		**I think, if it was offered, I would definitely take it up. Because I don't think anybody - we all get complacent. And I think - like this! Has made me think just now. Having this conversation with you has made me think.** So it's just somebody now and again.... If you did - a surgery, session, and we knew that once a month or once a fortnight, whenever it was, you were going to be in there, or in a classroom, 4.00 to half past four, or at lunch time or something, and we could come in and go 'right - this is where I need a bit of help...'	Let's have an idea between us...
		...let's talk about this. What can we do? I would attend. I think a surgery would be great.	Thank you very much!

Appendix I: Brief summaries of coaching transcript data

Analysis: Penelope

Penelope's turns:

Level 1	4
Level 2	13 (first half)
Level 3	17
Level 4	6
Level 5	11

⇒ Characterised by potential action and collaborative talk about professional learning
⇒ Progression through the session from Level 2 (first half) to Level 4 (towards the end)
⇒ Very positive about professional learning
⇒ Idea for literacy technique initiated from me, but translated into decisive action
⇒ Collaborative talk about professional learning: Identification of dissonance, of socio-cultural factors in professional learning - get bogged down, but then can take risks in a small environment. Need to stop and think about how to improve practice.
⇒ Initiation: Penelope takes the lead on discussion of professional learning, while I take the lead on suggesting a new idea - then she picks it up and runs with it. Not co-construction, perhaps, but collaborative talk / innovation and awareness of dissonance

Analysis: Justine

⇒ Characterised by a lot of descriptive action / sympathised knowledge, led by Justine
⇒ Very short interview, because of external time pressures
⇒ Justine not interested in following her original identified issue - precision in spoken answers
⇒ Talks about collaborative talk and co-construction
⇒ Most of the positive language about professional learning and the decisive action came from me
⇒ Her reaction to my idea was potential action
⇒ She led on suggestions - shows buy in to literacy approaches, but not so much to peer coaching as a way of changing her professional learning
⇒ Doesn't show likelihood of changing practice according to literacy approach - little reference to literacy policy
⇒ However, some openness to innovation - from her own observation of dissonance

Analysis: Pete

⇒ Characterised by Level 1 discussion - led by me, but with engaged questioning from Pete.
⇒ Mostly very led by me - specific training requested and given - different pattern from others.

⇒ Mediating artefact brought by me and accepted by him, leading to decisive action.
⇒ Awareness of a dissonance or difficulty and wanting to find a specific way of tackling it.
⇒ Not looking for innovation in teaching practice.
⇒ Some potential action, followed by decisive action - but cumulative not exploratory. No mention of further CPD.
⇒ Some initiation at the very end - questioning.
⇒ Choice of topic shows buy in to need for SPaG - literacy policy
⇒ Some mentions of what 'you expect' in terms of literacy, and using the Literacy Marking Code - acceptance and awareness that it is necessary for attainment.

Analysis: Jessica
⇒ Clear decisive action - very positive and receptive to new ideas
⇒ I provided the stimulus material - use of a mediating artefact (Engestrom), which was renegotiated and revised - co-construction.
⇒ Then Jessica takes initiative and discusses innovation.
⇒ Co-construction in positive use of professional learning from two other sources - Hargreaves collective professional knowledge creation / combination N&T
⇒ Choice of topic shows buy in to literacy policy focus

Analysis: Andrew
⇒ Balance of initiation by him - often the case in leadership.
⇒ Leadership role, like Justine, Fay and Diane and Clara previously
⇒ Some descriptive action (again shown by leadership)
⇒ Willing to look to internal dissonance - tricky things - and take action on them
⇒ Clear decisive action
⇒ Some conflict / dissonance - dialectic to create co-construction - questioning aspects of policy
⇒ Co-construction - even balance of talk at times, both making suggestions
⇒ Awareness of socio-cultural context - some resistance to professional learning / change
⇒ Responding to this with suggestions - willing to promote organisational change to some extent

Analysis: Rachel
⇒ Balance of initiation from me - could this be because of different positions - her as TA?
⇒ Lots more initiation from me - use of mediating artefacts - creates a more one-sided approach?
⇒ Balance of cumulative talk, exploring and establishing sympathised knowledge
⇒ Identifying and agreeing problems - formulating and evaluating problems
⇒ Not co-construction as such - less confidence in own practice
⇒ But gradual move from descriptive to potential to decisive action
⇒ Awareness and willingness for professional development
⇒ Not a clear link to literacy and the literacy policy

Analysis: Jane

⇒ Balanced talk - a lot led by her, describing her decisive action
⇒ Decisive action: Jane had gone away and acted on our discussion in Cycle 1 - action research creating action
⇒ She is an innovator - taking one idea and coming up with another or improving it
⇒ I used a mediating artefact, but it didn't mean I was the initiator - she also produced mediating artefacts towards the beginning, demonstrating innovation
⇒ She took ideas from the suggestion, then innovated with further ideas
⇒ Co-construction of ideas for tackling exam focus
⇒ Choice of coaching topic shows buy-in to literacy policy focus

Analysis: Fay

⇒ Balance of initiation with her.
⇒ Leadership role - specifically leading me
⇒ Perhaps I was more tentative at initiating because of contradiction in roles
⇒ I spend a long time listening to descriptive action and establishing sympathised knowledge - level 2 talk
⇒ But it is positive, in terms of planning a specific literacy intervention - level 3 and 4 planning of decisive action
⇒ While she said she was positive about CPD in her interview, she was also very confident in all literacy techniques
⇒ No concept of needing CPD - from a basis of confidence, though aware that some practice can be improved
⇒ You can see some element of iSTRIDE, but I am not guiding this: it is professional discourse
⇒ Plenty of initiation and co-construction - but more in the form of a department meeting than a coaching session
⇒ Clear buy-in to literacy approach

Analysis: Murray

⇒ Characterised by potential action - questioning and evaluation, and by collaborative talk
⇒ Lots of initiation by Murray - fairly even spread of talk
⇒ Murray brings mediating artefact, and so do I - co-construction of knowledge between us - power shared
⇒ Starts with descriptive action, building sympathised knowledge
⇒ Cumulative talk, questioning lead to potential action
⇒ Lots of initiation, and some decisive action (his idiolect involves 'could've' and 'might've' a lot - but planning to take specific action this term)
⇒ Great examples of co-construction - how he and I work on the note-taking pro-forma together and plan mutual action
⇒ Awareness of dissonance - not joined up
⇒ Including Andrew and Rachel - collaborative talk
⇒ Took place in the staff room - only place where this was possible - but he chose the venue (awareness of material context). Open to discussion

Appendix J: History Literacy sheet sent through by Andrew

New coding system for history marking, sent through by Andrew in response to literacy initiative.

History targets

The work you complete in class and at home will be marked using the target list below. Where you see a 'T' code in your book, you should use the list to look up the target and write it out in the margin. If you can, take action on the target by writing any corrections/improvements onto the piece of work in another colour. Drafting and improving written work is part of being a good historian! Use the advice to improve future work.

T1	Write using full sentences.
T2	Use paragraphs to structure your answer.
T3	Use PEE – point, evidence, explanation.
T4	Explain what you mean further.
T5	Give an example to back up this point.
T6	Give your opinion/judgement.
T7	Show more balance.
T8	Link back to the question here.
T9	Use a specific source to back up your view.
T11	Check your spelling.
T12	Make sure that this is in your own words.
T13	Develop your conclusion.
T14	Make a link to another factor here.
T15	Finish this piece of work!

Appendix K: Final literacy policy survey and data

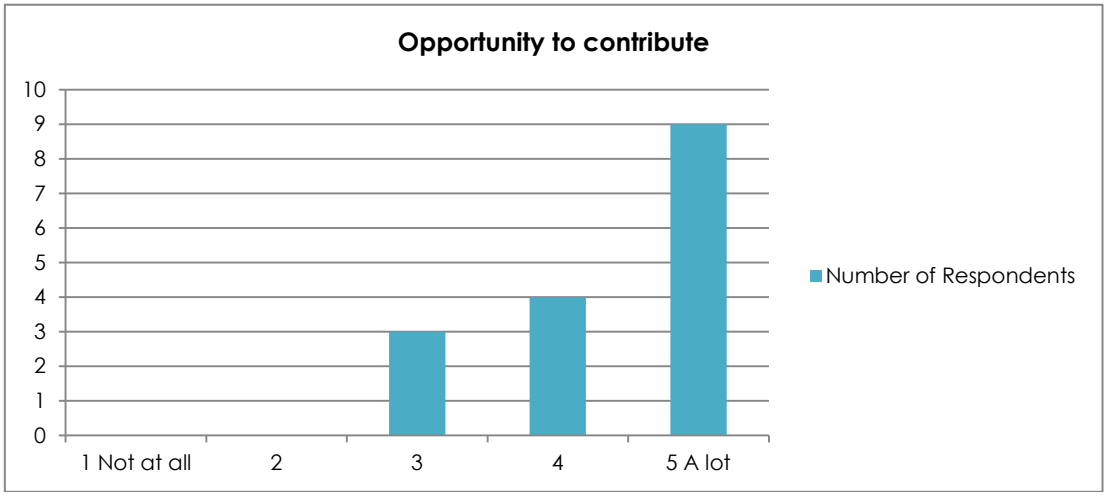
Teacher responses to the draft Literacy Policy, 15 June 2015

1. Would you like to add any comments or suggestions about this draft Literacy Policy?

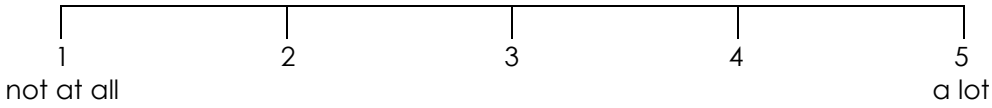
⇒ Very good policy - personal opinion is that functional literacy the most important - don't know that this comes through or reflective of the views of others.
⇒ Looks great. I will definitely do the key words work in my subjects. The literacy marking's more difficult in maths and computing, but I'll use the sp symbol.
⇒ Make the Secondary bit bolder.
⇒ I really like how simple and clear it is. I'd like to have access to some more guidance about how to use things like questioning, success criteria and modelling to help students develop their literacy.
⇒ Good - simple to use.
⇒ Three key focus areas could be made bolder on the document.
⇒ To fit onto one page would be good. It is really concise and clear.
⇒ Nice and short and simple.

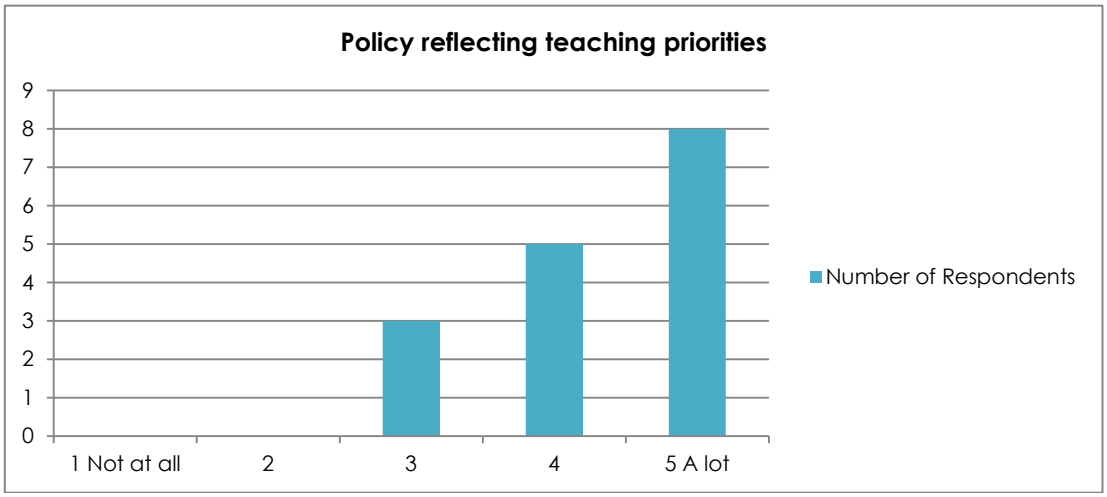
2. How far do you feel that you have had the opportunity to contribute to the whole school literacy approach?



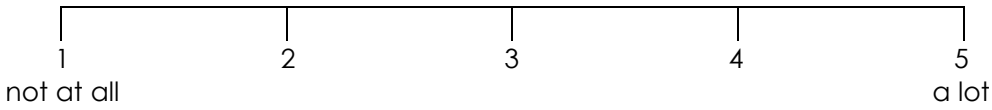


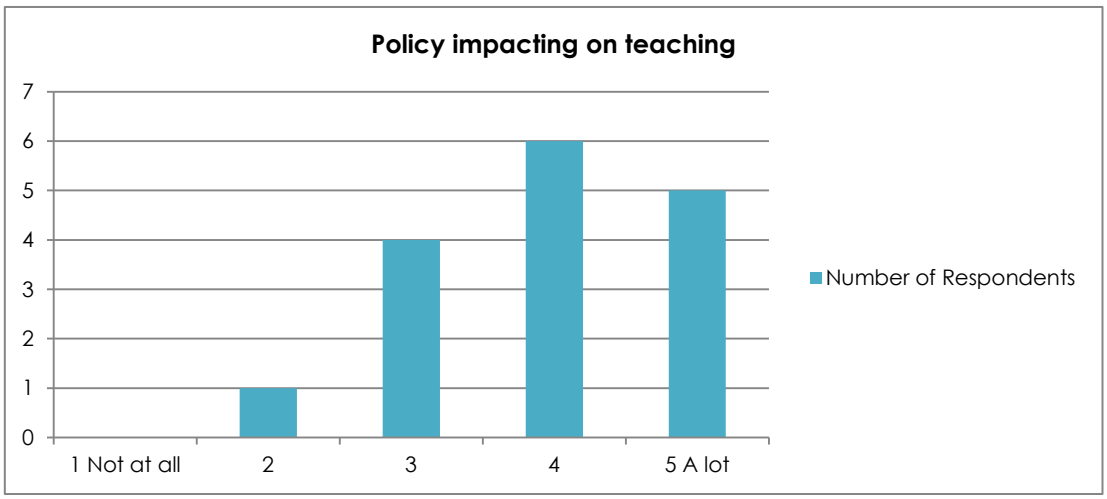
3. **How far does the draft literacy policy reflect your priorities for the teaching of literacy within your classroom?**





4. How far, and in what ways, do you think this policy will impact on your teaching of literacy within your subject area?





⇒ This is already affecting my delivery, as I have begun work on identifying subject specific literacy already with [Author]
⇒ Not the top mark because as a TA, I don't do much marking. But I'll use the Literacy Marking Code within class.
⇒ Doing a lot of it already!
⇒ Already do most of what is recommended.
⇒ I'll use the literacy marking code for the spellings, and make them write them out. The command words and key words are important. I was already doing the key words, but need to work more on the command words.

5. What specific actions do you aim to take within the next year to develop students' literacy in your subject teaching?

⇒ Reappraising target page for students that fit with the policy.
⇒ Identify exam / key / command words - use mark scheme for spag.
⇒ Get newspapers / magazines for tutor group. Stick policy into books for next year.
⇒ As above. Teaching command words and practising with them.
⇒ Focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar.
⇒ Use of code. More reading in class. More feedback time.
⇒ Already use a subject literacy mat at KS4. Will be developing with KS3.
⇒ Teach command words Use marking policy
⇒ Continue as I am. Print out more key words.
⇒ Display or subject specific vocab
⇒ Using better questions to help students develop their thinking and practise speaking their answers, so that their written work improves. Using the Literacy Marking Code in class to help students spot mistakes and correct them on the spot. Checking on understanding of command words in class. Using some different questioning techniques in small group work.
⇒ Green penning and editing marked work
⇒ Trigger words for exam prep link to Blooms Taxonomy
⇒ Continue with ones already using!
⇒ More emphasis on key words and basic errors with a balanced view on targeting words used on a regular basis.
⇒ Analysis of language used in new curriculum. Key words displayed. Command words.

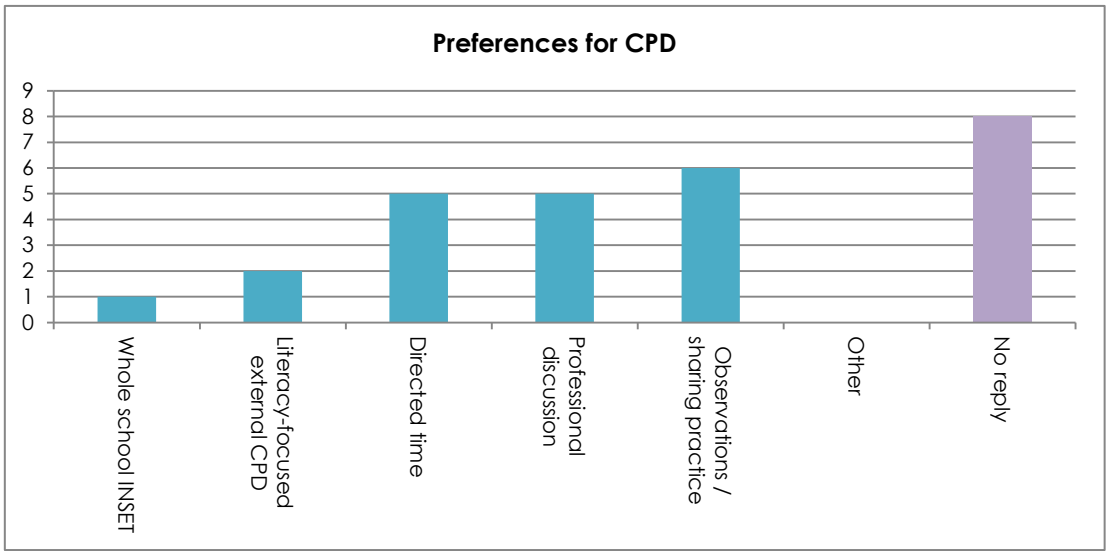
6. In which areas of literacy teaching would you welcome support or further professional development?

☑ Using the Literacy Marking Code
☑ Identifying and teaching literacy for exams
☑ Teaching reading techniques
☑ Teacher modelling for writing
☑ Planning and scaffolding extended writing
☑ Using questioning in the classroom
☑ Promoting students' speaking and listening
☑ Other:



7. Would you prefer this CPD to be in the form of:

☑ Whole school inset
☑ Attendance at literacy-focused CPD on the Mainland
☑ Directed time put aside for preparing materials / focusing on individual practice
☑ Professional discussion with peers
☑ Observations / sharing of good practice
☑ Other:



8. Did you take part in an interview with Author to discuss your ideas about whole school literacy? ☑

Yes: 11
No: 5

9. Did you take part in a follow up peer coaching / peer professional development session? ☑

Yes: 9
No: 7