Research and the teaching of English: Spaces where reading histories meet

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses interconnections between research methodology and English pedagogy in a recent study I undertook. The study was designed to deepen understandings about adolescent reading, using particular English teaching approaches to generate data, mindful that ideas about what constitutes the act of reading are often wide-ranging. I elected to work with young people who regularly read for a variety of purposes and pleasures, in order to discover what construction of reading might be brought into relief by those who count reading as a habitual pursuit amongst the many other activities with which they engage. Readers' representations of reading and readership were also analysed from multiple theoretical perspectives: sociocultural, spatial and historical. The article focuses specifically on some of the implications of undertaking multi-faceted research in English classrooms, raising questions about how certain kinds of English pedagogy combined with case study research may lead to different constructions of young people as readers.

KEY WORDS: Adolescent readers; reading; reading history; case study; English teaching; spatial theoretical perspective; historical theoretical perspective.

DEBATES, CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

Recent debates about educational research include a number of issues pertinent to the research I discuss in this article, for example, the relevance of case studies (Simons, 2009), the perceived tensions between insider and outsider perspectives (Bridges, 2009; Smeyers, 2009), or the merits of qualitative versus quantitative methodologies (Hammersley, 2008; Smeyers, 2008). More broadly, there are also debates about the effect of competition for research funding on academic quality and what counts as research impact (Smeyers & Burbules, 2011). Related to the effectiveness of research, there is concern about its dissemination and how it reaches those who do not have easy access to academic journals, for example, practising teachers and teacher-researchers. It is, perhaps, little wonder that some scholars are urging the educational community to think again about educational research being conducted in its own right and for its own sake (Hogan, 2011), rather than as reactive to pressures of the economy or ranking of schools and universities in league tables. Research needs, above all, to feed back into the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

In addition to being affected by all the above concerns, research specifically into the teaching of English has had further pressures with which to contend, in particular the introduction of statutory national curricula, for example in England and Australia, and government initiatives, for example, standards-based reforms in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). Researchers have had to plot courses which acknowledge but are not necessarily determined by national agendas (Doecke, Green, Kostogris, Reid & Sawyer, 2007). Finding potentially transformative ways to

conduct research within the field of English is also challenging because it is a high-profile subject. Moreover, the practices of reading, writing and critically analysing texts lie at the heart of the discipline and are hence closely intertwined with research processes (Locke with Riley, 2009). It is, indeed, a complex area. Nevertheless, what remains important is that research in the teaching of English should offer fresh viewpoints from which researchers, teacher-researchers or classroom practitioners can reflect on and engage with their own pedagogy and its impact on students' learning.

Another prevailing challenge to the scope and nature of English teaching research is the proliferation of projects arising from teaching increasingly becoming a Masters-level profession. A Masters of Education (MEd) is usually research-based with a rise, therefore, in the amount of research undertaken in schools. Some school students may find themselves repeatedly asked to complete questionnaires or participate in small-group interviews, two of the most popular research methods adopted by teacher-researchers. As part of an "ethic of respect" (British Educational Research Association, 2011, p. 4), it behoves us to think very carefully about students' perspectives when they agree to take part in classroom-based research. In particular, we need to be mindful how research positions them. For example, much research into adolescent reading in the UK has tended towards a survey-style approach resulting in categorising and sometimes essentialising readers in ways which overlook their idiosyncracies. Many of these surveys, however, end with a plea for longer-term, qualitative research which focuses on reading in its wider context of social practices and cultural values (Bokhorst-Heng & Pereira, 2008; Clark & Foster, 2005; Love & Hamston, 2003; Manuel & Robinson, 2003; Millard, 1997; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008). I was interested in taking up this challenge of moving on from where surveys leave off and hence embarked on the study which I discuss in greater depth below.

The participants were members of a high-achieving English class of twelve- to thirteen-year-olds in a rural comprehensive school in Eastern England. The study was structured by five research questions divided into two related groups. The first set comprised substantive questions about the social and cultural orientation of young readers:

1.   Why and how do these habitual, committed readers read?
2.   How do they construe the material they read?
3.   Through what social interactions and cultural values is their readership shaped?

The second set was more methodologically orientated:

4.   How does interpreting the data from spatial perspectives affect the construction of readers, reading and readership?
5.   How does taking a historical perspective illuminate contemporary young readers, reading and readership?

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Richard Pring draws a distinction between "research which is firmly embedded within the social sciences and which may well be relevant to education, and research which arises from distinctively educational concerns" (Pring, 2004, p. 9). My research unequivocally arose out of educational concerns. The project formed part of my role as a teacher educator in a higher education institution working in close partnership with a number of different schools in the region. I was keen that whatever the research involved would be of intrinsic interest to the participants and make a contribution to their learning, as well as being potentially replicable by anyone involved in the teaching of English. As a researcher, I brought a number of educational experiences to bear which contributed to the shape of the research project and informed its rationale. For example, I had worked for seventeen years as a secondary school English teacher and almost as many years again as a teacher educator. I had always had a particular interest in understanding more about young people's reading and had previously carried out several small-scale projects on which I was keen to build (for example, Cliff Hodges, 1989; 2009). I was strongly influenced – as both teacher and researcher – by case studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, which offered finely grained accounts of different young people as readers (Fry, 1985; Meek, 1983; Sarland, 1991), an approach I was keen to emulate. Although there were more recent case studies (Hynds, 1997; Moje et al., 2008; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), they tended to focus more on the breadth of adolescent literacy than I wished to do, and were undertaken in the context of the USA rather than the UK. My research was also influenced by strands of English pedagogy research, practice and scholarship within the UK prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum and the National Literacy Strategy, in particular work which often had literary reading and related theoretical debates at its heart (Jackson, 1982; 1983; Meek, 1988; Meek, Warlow, & Barton, 1977; West, 1986; 1987).

Because my research arose from educational concerns, I always planned to initiate it from within the English classroom. I was keen to research in a context in which ideas would be generated by (and between) learners with their teacher and where it might be possible to find a rich variety of reading and discussion about texts. I also knew that young people's wider knowledge and experiences beyond the school are an integral part of their reading and learning, so the classroom would only form a small part of the empirical setting. Much of the students' reading would take place elsewhere and would require a range of complex methods to generate data. Like most researchers of reading (and, indeed, English teachers), I would be reliant on readers' representations of reading to learn about their ideas. I will outline in more detail below the methods I adopted and the English teaching practices with which they were aligned.

An important aim of the research was to work with young people who do regularly read for a variety of purposes and pleasures, rather than those who – for whatever reason – do not. I wanted to discover what construction of reading might be brought into relief, when evidence was generated by young people who count reading as a habitual pursuit amongst the many other activities with which they engage. The number of students in the group fluctuated between thirty and thirty-one, with one or two changes as they moved from Year 8 into Year 9. The majority remained in the class across the eighteen months of the project. I already had a professional

relationship with the class teacher, Rosa[1]. She was an exceptionally keen reader herself and was eager for her class to participate in my research, if they wished to do so. What constitutes reading is a fraught issue, though, complicated by young people's perceptions of what is meant if they are asked about reading in the context of school. Furthermore, independent reading undertaken by adolescents is not usually audible, still less visible. Therefore, a major design issue was to devise research methods that would encourage participants to represent their reading verbally (whether in writing or talk) and visually. I also felt the methods should embody good English teaching pedagogy, and engage and motivate students in their own right, rather than simply serving as a means to an end.

ENGLISH PEDAGOGY

All along, it seemed to me that since the work was intended to be educational, the English classroom was a prime site in which to conduct it. The underpinning idea was always to engage students in activities that were intrinsically worthwhile, which would bring together knowledge for teaching with students' prior learning in a supportive but stimulating environment. The activities would be characterised by their propensity for intellectual endeavour and acknowledgement of readers' diversity. The idea was that the research would not only generate useful data, but also engage and be interesting to the students. Rosa was very enthusiastic about the English teaching activities I envisaged as research methods. We agreed that the whole class would undertake them, but it would be up to the students and their parents/carers whether they participated in the interviews with me and offered their work as data for my research. Though explicit English pedagogical decisions were integral to the project, Rosa's classroom teaching *per se* was not a focus for analysis. Instead, my intention was to achieve an intricate understanding of the students as readers and see to what extent bringing various theoretical perspectives to bear on the study might enable different constructions of reading to be raised.

I did not want students to come to their interviews with me without having previously given some thought to the issue of reading. The class first of all, therefore, created collages based on critical incidents of their personal reading histories (Burnard, 2002). These we called their reading journeys or "rivers of reading" (Cliff Hodges, 2010b). Rosa had asked the class to reflect on special moments or key reading experiences through which they felt their readership might have been shaped, for example, a habitual social practice such as being read aloud to, the discovery of a new favourite author, the pleasure of sustained reading of a much-loved series, recollection of a challenging text which developed them as readers. To provoke discussion, Rosa devised a parallel activity, which involved thirteen members of the class arranging themselves as a timeline of her life according to thirteen pre-identified stages (written on cards). Then they had to place the books she had brought into the classroom from home along the timeline, depending on which stage in her life they thought she might have been reading them. As well as being very enjoyable, the activity reminded students to look back over their reading as far as they could remember. They could thus begin to get a sense of their reading histories as trajectories, as they plotted them on their collages.

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[1] All participants' names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

With awareness of their reading histories having thus been heightened, the students were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews with me in small groups of fours or fives. The interviews took place during English lessons, in a separate room, over a period of several weeks. Each lasted approximately forty-five minutes. I opted for small-group semi-structured interviews rather than focus groups in order to learn more about each student as a reader, both by engaging with their individual ideas in the discussion and afterwards by reflecting on their interactions with one another. As I have described elsewhere (Cliff Hodges, 2009), talk of this kind not only generates valuable data for research purposes, but also lies at the heart of sociocultural approaches to English teaching. It raises issues about the role of the researcher and her or his involvement in the discussion. In my case, I was an *outsider* but someone genuinely interested to know students' *insider* perspectives on reading. It is worth noting that students often appeared to be simultaneously positioned as outsiders to one another's reading practices and preferences and as insiders of their own reading, hence the importance for me as the interviewer (as would have been the case had I been their teacher) of sustaining the momentum so that new understandings about reading might be reached, not just between me and the students, but amongst the students themselves. In this way, the activity had the potential to be intrinsically interesting, not just a conduit for channelling data.

The third activity involved students carrying out a semi-structured interview with a parent or grandparent to discover more about one of their close family member's reading, past and present. They then wrote up the interview afterwards. The interviews included questions which overlapped with those I had already asked students in the small-group, semi-structured interviews, as well as others chosen by the students in discussion with Rosa. Prior to conducting the interviews, the class did some English work on interviews as a genre, using pre-selected examples with children's writers from the WriteAway website (*Just Imagine*, 2012)[2]. This unit of work, like the others, had firm roots in English classroom practice, where teachers have often sought out volunteers within and beyond the school for young people to interview. When the interviewee is as well known to the interviewer as was the case here, the situation is delicately poised since it is important that answers to the questions are authentic, not ones where the answer is already well-known. Although the students' interviews with me showed they often knew quite a bit about the adults' current reading preferences, it appeared they knew much less about their past reading histories.

Lastly, the class were introduced to the idea of writing reading journals, another activity which Rosa and I co-planned. Rosa read a short story by Roald Dahl with them, asking them to jot down tentative thoughts and ideas before, during and after reading it, thus charting their responses as they occurred. This kind of writing is very different from the almost ubiquitous "point-quotation-explanation" (PQE) paragraphs that students are required to hone for examination success. Instead, it deliberately encourages hesitant, fledgling ideas which, if written down, can be revisited and reflected on later. I produced a booklet of guidance for keeping reading journals, based on experience of using them in my own English teaching. The students were given a special exercise book in which to write their journal, and asked to complete some entries before, during and after their reading of an independently selected book.

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[2] See http://www.justimaginestorycentre.co.uk/

Consent was sought from all the students and adults for their participation in the project overall. The majority were willing for me to use their work for my research. For all the interview transcripts and reading journals I received, I wrote individual notes of thanks to the students, including a brief comment about something that caught my attention. I did not want them to feel that when their work became data it was no longer interesting in and of itself; it always was.

INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN ENGLISH PEDAGOGY AND RESEARCH

As will already be clear, my pedagogical and research interests are socioculturally oriented. In terms of pedagogy, it is the sociocultural aspects which, Robin Alexander insists, locate it "in time, place and the social world, and anchor it firmly to the questions of human identity and social purpose without which it makes little sense" (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). Within such pedagogy, Alexander writes, "dialogue is central: between self and others, between personal and collective knowledge, between present and past, between different ways of making sense" (2010, p. 199), enhancing teachers' understanding as well as students'. Alexander's claims are based on extensive research in primary schools, but they chime readily with the kind of secondary English teaching in which my research is rooted, where ideas are generated in the classroom through social interaction between learners and the teacher. In the context of reading, such teaching may lead to thoughtful engagement in independent reading and genuine discussion about students' book choices or use of reading journals (of the kind outlined above) in which readers articulate tentative, developing thoughts about their chosen texts, and teachers respond with "authentic questions" (Nystrand, 2006, p. 400). It is an explicitly Vygotskyan approach, where the interaction is "aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening functions" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 188). A feature of such teaching, likewise Vygotskyan in origin, is teachers encouraging students to exploit their cultural funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and create a sense of coherence between home and school experiences. I was keen to design a research project informed by these kinds of pedagogical considerations in order to see whether and how they affected the data that could be generated and the way young readers might thence be constructed.

READING, READERSHIP, TEXTS AND READERS

A further factor shaping the research was the way I conceptualise reading, readership, texts and readers. My ideas about reading are predicated on Louise Rosenblatt's idea of the process as a "transaction" (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 180). The transaction itself is intellectual because it involves the reader in activity such as marshalling knowledge, interpreting the text, reasoning and reaching an understanding. It is an event because it is a dynamic process not a static entity. It is susceptible to change and hence inherently unstable, presenting interesting challenges for research.

Readership, though obviously related to reading, is a different concept. It is an abstract notion which is shaped not only in and through the process of reading, but through the accretion of other cultural properties such as attitudes towards and acquisition of reading material, relations with other readers, critical engagement with

a range of related concepts such as authorship, publishing and so on. However, the wording of my third research question above, which seeks to learn about the social interactions and cultural values through which readership might develop, deliberately leaves open the issue of agency and the extent to which readership is actively shaped by individuals rather than merely being determined by the social actions and cultural values of others.

The third factor shaping the research is the concept of texts. From the outset, students were encouraged to consider an open-ended definition of texts. However, most of the data generated related to narrative fiction reading in printed book form. Invitations to reflect on electronic texts seldom resulted in extended discussion. Instead, students took a utilitarian attitude to what they read on computer, seeing it as a means to an end – to find out information, play a game or communicate with others – not an end in itself. Thus, the object of a major element of the research, the text, was largely determined by students' preference for narrative, especially fiction but also biography and autobiography.

Finally, there is the reader. However socially and collaboratively we enact our reading – whether parents with children, siblings together, a class with their teacher or in a reading group – and however carefully a text is paraphrased or represented, no one can ultimately read a text on another person's behalf. As I have already argued, there has been no shortage of reading research which attempts to measure or classify the scope of young people's reading, categorising readers in ways which diminish their distinctive qualities. My research, on the other hand, would have at its heart more idiosyncratic experiences of readers.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

As may already be apparent, my work lies within the domain of what Michael Crotty identifies as social constructionism (Crotty, 2003). Constructionism rejects the view that knowledge is discoverable or recoverable from anywhere outside the human individual; rather knowledge exists in the interaction between human beings. *Social* constructionism, argues Crotty, results in meaning-making amongst a group rather than meaning-making by an individual. Social constructionism thus resonates with Rosenblatt's ideas about reading, especially her argument that meanings are constructed in a transaction *between* reader and text rather than residing *within* either individual reader or text. They can therefore be made available for discussion and re-construction in dialogue with others. Kenneth Gergen, a leading proponent of social constructionism, argues that it is not simply an individual way of thinking, but a specifically collaborative venture: "Constructionist ideas are resources for use, not maps or mirrors of the world … The primary question is, what kind of world can we create together when we place [them] into action?" (Gergen, 2009, pp. 166-167). The apparently solitary reader is actually engaged in a joint transaction, with other readers and with wider social practices and cultural values, by means of which the text comes into being, for example via its authoring, publication and marketing. As Rosenblatt argued several decades earlier, "Actually, reading is a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context" (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 26). Reading thus implies active rather than passive engagement between people and texts. Rooted in such beliefs, my research likewise needed to draw on teaching activities and research

methods involving both transactional reading and social constructionist meaning-making.

A SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE

There is also, however, a correspondence between Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, Gergen's social constructionism and a third theoretical perspective I adopted in the design of my research, namely Doreen Massey's concept of space, created from interrelations between space and time (Massey, 2005). Whilst the transactional and social constructionist perspectives illuminate what readers actually do and what action reading might lead to, Massey's spatial theorising illuminates how readers and reading may be differently configured altogether. Critical discussion about reading in the past has tended to treat space and time as alternately in the ascendant (for example Fish, 1980; Leander & Sheehy, 2004; Soja, 2004). An influential conception of the conjunction of time and space in narrative is Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope (1981), but his concern is chiefly with the novel. More recently, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) have argued that multimodal texts encompass both the temporal *and* the spatial and, indeed, my interest within this study is what happens when both space and time are considered simultaneously. Massey, a cultural geographer, is interested in relationships between social practices, cultural values, language and ideas, and in recognising their past and present histories and interconnections. A key work is *For space* (Massey, 2005), in which she argues that we need to reconceptualise space in relation to time, rather than separately from it, so that we come to see space as formed by a "meeting-up of histories" (p. 4).

There are significant implications of this reconfiguration of time-and-space. For example, rather than envisaging some communities as more advanced than others, Massey urges us to view them as contemporaneous. In the process of making this shift, space comes to be perceived as a sphere formed by a multiplicity of trajectories, whether of animate or inanimate entities. Furthermore, these trajectories are constantly in transformation, not static; space is always in progress, "predicated upon the existence of plurality" (2005, p. 9). One outcome of this redescription is a revision of how others' social practices, cultural values and histories are constructed. It makes fixed categorisations (or stereotyping) hard, if not impossible. In terms of young people as readers, it makes their past achievements explicit, is receptive to their present practices and offers open-ended future prospects.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A final, but still related, perspective from which the data in my research were analysed was a historical one which complements both Rosenblatt's interest in reading as a process taking place over time and Massey's integration of space and time. The idea stemmed from reading the work of historians of reading, particularly that of Jonathan Rose and his attempts to understand more about how ordinary readers in nineteenth-century Britain might have read (Rose, 2001; 2007). Rather than assuming that readers' responses can be deduced entirely from evidence such as library lending or book marketing records (Rose, 1995), he turns to what readers actually wrote. Whilst he is mindful of potential bias inherent in the accounts of

working-class men and women motivated enough to write their autobiographies, he argues that they are nevertheless individuals who read and whose testimonies therefore count.

For contemporary researchers of reading, reading histories offer valuable evidence of the trajectories of individual readers in the past as well as the broader historical development of reading as a pastime. Rose acknowledges a considerable debt both to Richard Altick's detailed history of mass public reading in the Nineteenth Century, *The English common reader* (Altick, 1957), and David Vincent's scholarly work on nineteenth century autodidacts, *Bread, knowledge and freedom: A study of nineteenth century working class autobiography* (Vincent, 1981). Altick's work, like a social realist painting by William Powell Frith or Ford Madox Brown (a panoramic sweep constructed of manifold small details), is vast in its scope whilst also attending to the detail of common readers, "nameless but exceedingly numerous" (Altick, 1957, p. 12), within the religious, social, political and educational contexts of their times and those that preceded them. "The autobiographies written by this little group of self-taught men are far more illuminating than pages of statistics and generalisations. They tell us where individual youths managed to find their books, what they read, and under what circumstances" (1957, p. 244).

Rose is able to develop those insights further, drawing, like Altick, on autobiographical accounts of ordinary people including textile workers, colliers, stonemasons, farm workers, servants, carpenters, mill workers and school teachers. He argues that reader-response theory, which pays due attention to both text and reader, is an essential scholarly tool if we are to recover a sense of how those readers read, rather than just what. Such reading histories offer not only methodological pointers as to how new research might be conducted and evidence gathered, but also ongoing, interconnected studies of both social and individual reading patterns, in the light of which the continuities or disjunctions with new data can be examined. What, for example, might result if a young person's reading is viewed historically not just in the immediate present, and if her or his parents' reading histories are brought to bear as well? What differences might be perceived as regards, for example, reading and gender or reading and socioeconomic disadvantage?

One characteristic these reading histories have in common with both Rosenblatt's and Massey's ideas is a commitment to their subjects' distinctiveness. Rose argues that such a stance is crucial since evidence collected by historians of reading shows readers read variously and independently, not predictably (Rose, 2007). Broad categorisations, for example by class or gender, are often keystones of purely theoretical research but, says Rose, they offer weaker predictive information about reading preferences than empirical data. Indeed, as he argued in a conference keynote address in 2008, "variousness is significant; idiosyncracy constitutes a pattern" (Rose, 2008). A social constructionist perspective affords a chance to see what kind of patterning idiosyncracy might form.

METHODOLOGY: A (CASE) STUDY

I now turn to the methodology which shaped my study. I use the term "study" deliberately because it encapsulates the notion of paying close and continuing

attention to a topic, scrutinising it from various perspectives. The word can also mean a preliminary "trying out" of ideas for a more definitive later work. That, too, seems appropriate here. However, there is a third meaning of the word "study" which is relevant, one taken up by Massey in a provocative chapter on research methodology, "Imagining the field" (Massey, 2003), in which she invites the reader to reflect philosophically on the traditional dichotomy between research conducted in the field and in the study. Referring to the naturalist Georges Cuvier in late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century France, she rehearses debates about where researchers are best placed to carry out their work. The study (or in Cuvier's case, the museum) offers distance from the field with the chance to reflect critically, make comparisons, gain an outsider perspective; the field, on the other hand, offers the vividness and immediacy of being an insider, embedded in a world in action.

However, Massey is also concerned with how language itself shapes the researcher's stance. In anthropology, for example, the imagination of the field is "a significant element in the articulation of the relationship between the anthropologist and the peoples being studied. It substantially affects, recursively, the nature of the encounter" (2003, p. 76). She dwells on Richard Rorty's argument that since language is the means by which we come to know what we know, we need new vocabularies to articulate new ideas to replace those which have become entrenched or outworn; in Rorty's words, we must make "an attempt at redescription" (Rorty, 1989, p. 45). Indeed, "the field" is not "out there waiting to be discovered; rather, it is already linguistically constructed and the researcher's aim must be imaginatively to reformulate this construction in such a way that new avenues can be opened up, new ideas and practices can flow" (Massey, 2003, p. 77). The design of my research touched on many of these issues, for example, who might constitute the insider or the outsider at different points in the process or what constituted the field.

Whether to describe my project as a case study rather than just a study raised yet more problems. Michael Bassey's detailed account in *Case study research in educational settings* (Bassey, 1999) shows the hostility there has often been towards case studies and the accusation that they are lacking in rigour or unyielding of generalisation. Debates about case study research have whittled away some of its nuances, leaving it apparently enfeebled. Looking at earlier writing, the concept regains something of its freshness. Lawrence Stenhouse, for example, articulates ideas generated at the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s. He argues that it is precisely because a case is an instance that it gains stature. Although it is not, like a sample, representative, generalisation can still arise where there is an accumulation of case study data, generated over time (Stenhouse, 1978). Bassey's summary of the vicissitudes of case study research ends with an acknowledgement of one of Stenhouse's former colleagues at CARE, Helen Simons, writing almost twenty years after Stenhouse about what she still perceives to be one of the essential strengths of case study, namely that the interaction it allows between the individual and the whole, the unique and the universal, can be construed as a paradox, not a problem. She argues that we need to welcome the inevitable complexity of the people and situations we research, analysing tensions but not always seeking to resolve them: "To live with ambiguity, to challenge certainty, to creatively encounter, is to arrive, eventually, at 'seeing' anew" (Simons, 1996, p. 238). Simons' use of the word "encounter" signals an approach to research in which the researcher expects to come up *against* something that is different and to focus on what arises when different

trajectories meet. An expectation that the researcher will also tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty is arguably at odds with firmly identifying a specific "case", especially when I was working not only with a whole class of students but the adults they chose to interview as well. For all these reasons, I preferred to describe my research as a study.

WORKING WITH THE DATA

The chief focus of this article is the interrelationship between research methodology and English pedagogy. Space precludes addressing the data analysis in any depth. However, in order to contextualise the overall discussion, I refer briefly to some of the analytical processes I used in conjunction with one another to create an understanding of the participants as readers and to some excerpts from data generated by just one girl (Andie) and her mother (Maria).

Although numbers of participants in the study fluctuated across the four different activities, the data included twenty collages, twenty-three students' contributions to small-group, semi-structured interviews, transcripts of twenty-six interviews with a parent or grandparent, and twenty-one reading journals. The analytical processes I adopted needed to accommodate the intricacy and dynamics of the data. I drew on methodological techniques allied to those familiar from English pedagogy, for example, thematic coding and critical discourse analysis, both of which correspond closely with ways of analysing literary, linguistic or multimodal texts. I also used techniques derived from reader response theory, which involved focusing closely on how readers represented themselves in their transactions with texts, grammatically, metaphorically or discursively. In addition, bringing a spatial theoretical perspective to bear involved attending to evidence of participants' reading over time and in the spaces created in their juxtaposition with other people's, whilst bringing a historical perspective to bear meant studying participants' individual memories of childhood reading as well as recollections of reading in the past more broadly.

The spatial and historical perspectives, in particular, provided a constant reminder that readers (like rivers) are always on the move and any analysis needs to do justice to the dynamics of their trajectories. Alastair Pennycook, although writing specifically in the context of applied linguistics, critiques versions of critical discourse analysis which present "a problematically static view of both language and society [in which] there is little space for an understanding of human agency, interpretation or change" (Pennycook, 1994, p. 126). Instead, he argues for a form of analysis which is "not concerned with how discourses (texts) reflect social reality, but how discourses produce social realities" (1994, p. 130), an idea he develops further to include spatial as well as social interaction in more recent work (Pennycook, 2010). In the context of conducting classroom-based educational research and writing from a sociocultural perspective, Neil Mercer likewise draws attention to the need for analytical tools which do justice to the complexity of what is often being enacted. "Any specific interaction in which two people are engaged in solving a problem together," he argues, "has a historical aspect and a dynamic aspect" (Mercer, 2005, p. 140). In a similar vein, both the analytical processes and the perspectives I adopted worked interdependently to deepen my understanding of the readers. In the excerpts below, there are traces of Andie's trajectory, both its substantive features and its momentum

as it jostles with others' trajectories *en route*, providing an instance of the kinds of data the English teaching activities and research methods yielded. Even in such a small amount of data, the complexity is clear, reinforcing the need for analytical processes sophisticated and multifaceted enough to accommodate data collected over time, in different contexts, with different people.

Andie's collage

I have referred in some detail to Andie's and some of the other students' collages elsewhere (Cliff Hodges, 2010a, 2010b). Here, I want to focus on the pedagogical and methodological significance of the activity for teachers, learners and researchers. The actual process of making the collages involved students talking with others at home, thinking about what they read when they were much younger compared with now, and discussion during the lesson in which the collages were constructed. It also involved selection of material, both the physical material of the collages themselves (paper, cloth, pictures, and so on) and the imaginative material of the students' reading and readership. Observing them at work in the classroom, I noted the often exuberant discussions they had with one another as each collage visibly began to give shape to a reading trajectory.

Andie's collage is a highly abstract drawing of a river. Six flaps, each decorated with a mini-collage of book covers, open out to reveal miniature autobiographical reading narratives underneath. The collage as a whole not only tells us verbally how Andie perceives the course of her reading over time, but visually clusters certain kinds of books together in spatial arrangements simultaneously. The grammar of the language and the grammar of the design together create a space where Andie represents herself as a reader interconnecting with other important readers in her life, for example, her mother, father and grandmother, who all read with her and supplied her with books when she was young and, in due course, a friend's young children to whom Andie somewhat incredulously now finds herself reading aloud in turn. The collage includes extensive details of books she read and the fictional characters with whom she became intimately acquainted. She remembers making up games to play with all her favourite story characters during school lunchtimes, sometimes getting her friends to join in, too. Two of the decorated flaps on the collage include several book covers depicting animals: kittens, rabbits and especially dogs. Underneath, Andie writes[3]:

> My favourite animal had always been a dog, I was forever pretending to be one and finally on my Mums birthday my Dad agreed we could get one. I was so excited and read every book I could get my hands on about them, when [the dog] came I spent as much time as I could with him … I often read to him while he was falling to sleep my favourite was the story called Just Dog by Haiwyn Oram and Lisa Flather and I read it to him many times.

When, for various reasons, the family could no longer keep the dog, Andie remembers: "I was heartbroken and stopped reading the books I read to him because they only reminded me of when he left". Here, arguably, is precisely the kind of evidence on which Rose says reading historians should base their research when he calls for them to "enter the minds of ordinary readers in history, to discover what they read and how they read it" (Rose, 2001, p. 1). Andie's vignette does not simply show

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[3] The grammar, spelling and layout of Andie's writing have been retained.

a young girl reading books about dogs; it suggests a space created from social practices which involve reading intertwined with her knowledge of real animals, imaginative play, using reading to acquire factual knowledge about dogs, transformation of learned behaviour about reading aloud and recognising the emotional connections between reading and real life. The collage thus not only makes explicit some of the ways Andie's reading history has been shaped and its possible future trajectory; it also provides data for contemporary and future researchers and historians of reading.

Small-group interview

When Andie participated in one of the small-group interviews with me and three other members of the class, two boys and a girl, the conversation took a number of interesting twists and turns. It included lively argument about diary-writing, something it turned out Andie herself did. The boys asserted that diary-writing was something only girls would do, although Andie's friend, Victoria, reminded them of Michael Palin and his popular Himalayan travel programmes explicitly based on diary-writing. Several of Andie's contributions to the discussion added to the construction of herself as a reader evident in her collage. For example, Andie reiterates that it is her mother, Maria, who knows her best as a reader, acknowledging that they share similar reading interests. Andie describes her mother as a keen reader and remembers being read to when she was little:

> Um, my mum always read loads like, but she's got like, she's working a lot now so she doesn't really any more but she used to always like read a book in a night or something, yeah, and she'd like read little bits out to me and stuff… and then I really liked animals when I was little so I used to read like books about them and pretend I was animals in the book.

However, Andie's mother continues to act as an important figure in her daughter's reading:

> Um, well my mum brought me this book and it's called *Berserk* and it's on there [*pointing to her collage*] and I didn't think I would like it but then I really really enjoyed it because I didn't think the, because it was about writing a letter to a murderer and um and I didn't know whether I would like it or not because I thought that that would kind of be it, like, but it was actually really good.

As was the case with other members of the class, the combination of Andie's collage and the data generated by the small-group talk was highly thought-provoking for me as a researcher. One facet, however, emerged from both as needing further investigation and that was the role of adult family members in their children's or grandchildren's reading histories. Rather than conducting a survey myself, I set up another English teaching activity, based on the idea of interviews as a popular genre of reading and writing, which would lead to the students interviewing a willing adult about their past and present reading.

Andie's interview with her mother

Andie's interview with her mother allows Maria to speak for herself, as it were. Andie's transcript of the interview shows which questions she asked and in which

order. The opening question was: "Can you tell me about where you grew up and what it was like for you as a young person living there?" Maria replies:

> Okay, I erm … I lived and grew up in the Eastend of London when I was very small, it was a place filled with a variety of people from different cultures. My mother owned a dressmaking shop which was very busy and I always enjoyed watching customers come and go, large and small ladies being fitted with outfits, rolls of fabric being rolled out and the sound of the sowing machine sort of humming in the background. At the age of nine my family moved to the countryside and I was amazed to see vegetables and fruit growing in the back garden.

Maria then speaks about her memories of the secondary school she went to and how far she was encouraged to develop as a reader there:

> I went to an all girls school and I can remember feeling quite lost. It wasn't the local school so none of the friends I had made went with me, I don't really remember being encouraged to read at school but it did give me good use of a library.

Like many of the other parents, Maria affirms that reading has been extremely important to her in the things she has gone on to do since leaving school and, indeed, that she reads in connection with her work, hobbies and interests:

> Yes, reading has provided me with information for my background as a designer and it has also provided me with the ability to understand important information in all aspects of my personal life, it keeps me informed with world issues and as a leisure activity it provides me with an escape whenever I need it.

One of the questions suggested for students to ask the adult they were interviewing was: "How would you describe your influence on me as a reader, when I was younger and now?" Andie's mother claims: "Well from the moment I was pregnant I read to you and I have enjoyed sharing books with you ever since." Had I been doing the interviewing myself, I would have been fascinated to ask her to expand on this comment. Why did she do that and what did it mean to her? However, the moment passes and, instead, Andie goes on to ask what her mother thinks are some of the similarities and differences between what she used to read when she was Andie's age and the sorts of things Andie reads now:

> Well the similarities are that many stories we have read are the same, the differences appear in the characters and settings, also we have seen the development of women as heroines and matters are discussed nowadays that were considered socially unacceptable when I was your age.

This activity afforded many more opportunities to generate data than can be listed here, for example, the way it expanded students' learning about their reading histories into a more distant past (the childhoods of their parents or grandparents) and drew attention to the spaces formed by the meeting up of their own and the adults' reading histories.

Andie's reading journal

The final activity in the project – completing a reading journal of a self-selected book – brought the data back to the present moment. At the outset of her journal, Andie expresses some anxiety about the task:

> JUST BEFORE WE START – I would like to say this reading journal might be different to a normal one. I started this exercise very excited but soon got frustrated because I was so worried about the journal I couldn't get into the book. Therefore because I get through books so quickly I have decided to finish a book before writing about it.

Having established that she could write her entries retrospectively rather than chart her ideas as she went along, she proceeded to write about seven books. Her entries are more like a log than a journal, recording facts such as dates during which the book was read, how many stars she awarded it, title, author, previous books by the same author already read, and a few quick comments on the plot, often in the style of a sound-bite or teenage magazine fact-file entry. Her second entry, for example, reads:

> Started and ended 4th of July – STARS ****
> My second book is called 'Stop in the name of pants' by Louise Rennison.
> Previo books read by her – all of the eight other books she has written – I loved everyone of these books and would quite happily read them all again. The whole series is about the confessions ie diary of a teenage girl name Georgina Nicholson. I think I like these books so much because I find I can relate to her.
> THOUGHTS ON NEW READ
> START – excited, as the last book ended on a cliff hanger I had been waiting some time for this one to come out!
> MIDDLE – I found it a little slow and fighting against the erge to skip pages. A lot of talk about her luuuurve god, pretty much normal stuff a girl would write about in her diary.
> END – Left on another cliff hanger – TORTURE!! But at least I know there is another exciting book on the way!!

Despite her initial concerns, Andie's journal entries have an exuberance about them as she warms to the task. They offer evidence of the amount and variety of her reading over time (three days for Meg Rosoff's *Just In Case*, a single day for Louise Rennison's *Stop In The Name Of Pants*). In addition, discourse analysis of the style in which they are written, for example her lexical, orthographical and graphological choices, suggests the minutiae of her fluctuating attitudes and feelings about the books she reads. There is even a tantalising echo of her group's argument about diary-writing embedded within the entry: "A lot of talk about her luuuurve god, pretty much normal stuff a girl would write about in her diary…".

Together, these very short extracts from the data show how each activity positions Andie differently, requiring her to reflect on herself as a reader from multiple angles, past and present. Although patterns begin to be visible, the scope and timescale of the reflections inhibit simplistic judgments about achievement and a more complex picture continues to emerge.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In the current climate of English teaching in England, serious questions are often raised, not least by beleaguered classroom teachers, about whether the kind of pedagogy on which this research is predicated is feasible, given the perceived expectations within and beyond the school that what takes place in the name of English counts towards tests, examinations and league table results, rather than being valued for its own sake. Accounts of reading from the past on which I have drawn – both from historians of reading and from students' and family members' memories and recollections generated within this project – suggest that exploring the spaces where reading histories meet has the potential to reconfigure some of the ways in which teachers and researchers perceive young readers. If that reconfiguration leads to a broader and deeper sense of what it means to be a reader and hence to more productive English teaching and learning in the classroom, the research is worth replicating in other contexts.

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