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***Coming to know* about teaching, its development  
and researcher practice through collaborative action  
research with adult education teachers in Sudan**

Paul Fean

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Philosophy (Education)

## **Declaration**

This thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Paul Fean

## Acknowledgements and thanks

At many points during my doctoral studies I imagined what I would write on this page to thank all those who have helped me over the last few years. Yet now that I come to write my acknowledgements, I do not feel that the words I write here can do justice to the sense of gratitude I would like to convey.

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شكراً جزيلاً  
Thank you

## Thesis summary

This study re-presents an open-ended process of *coming to know* through designing, conducting and analysing an action research project with youth and adult education teachers in Khartoum, Sudan. The inquiry responds to the overarching question: What knowledge can I generate about teaching, its development and my researcher practice through collaborative action research with teachers in Sudanese youth and adult education schools? This multifaceted focus encompasses reconnaissance into teaching practices and adult education, the processes of action research and teacher development and reflexive analysis of epistemological positioning and knowledge construction through our collaborative investigation.

The action research forms the substantive basis of this thesis, constituting diverse processes of coming to know by the participating teachers and myself. Our interactions as practitioners and researchers interrogated the teachers' contextualised, practical knowledge through academic mechanisms of data collection and analysis. The teachers reflected upon their taken-for-granted understandings of education, their school contexts and their practice, and re-cast them as more complex. Participation in the study resulted in the teachers becoming 'learners-focused' by developing greater focus on their practice, by being *mufetih* (observant and analytical), by being close to learners and by increased experimentalism. These dispositions were combined with a shift in the teachers' epistemological positions towards 'authoritative uncertainty', in which partial, contextualised and contingent knowledge was recognised as legitimate, facilitating re-construction of their knowledge to develop their practice.

In this narrative account, the field research is framed by my evolving theoretical understandings which informed the design, analysis and re-presentation of the study. An autobiographical introduction to my experience in Sudan outlines my nascent professional stance towards education development. I then explore my increasingly critical understanding of research on teachers and pedagogy in Africa and discourse on education quality in low-income countries. I discuss the formation of my specific researcher identity through postcolonial theorisation of my ethical stance towards making a difference in the field of practice, namely Sudanese schools. In this thesis, layered re-viewing, which derives from an epistemological stance of the partiality and contingency of knowledge, facilitates re-presentation of moments in which understanding is challenged and re-formed by theorisation and experience. Re-viewing literature and theoretical analyses brings new epistemological, ontological and ethical understandings, as my focus on 'the practical' in field research has been supplemented in the post-fieldwork period by 'the practical' in the academy, a contested domain of knowledge production.

To conclude this thesis, the position of 'authoritative uncertainty' is applied in the reflexive deconstruction of the study, as the action research process and outcomes are re-viewed through postcolonial and feminist theories to unpick the situated complexities of cross-cultural practitioner research and its representation. While coming to know is a continuous process, its representation in this thesis reaches an arbitrary conclusion by proposing how coming to know teaching practices, action research processes and reflexive researcher analysis might bring new perspectives to academic and policy initiatives for teacher development.

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# 1. *Coming to know Sudan*

## A starting point

“there is no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to *enable* what follows from them.”  
Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978, p.16)

The Arabic proverb states ‘*al-rafiq qabl al-Tariq*’, ‘[choose] the companion before the journey’. Before escorting you through the travelogue of this research journey, it is necessary to introduce myself, your authorial guide. I choose to begin this account in 2003, when, supported with an undergraduate degree in Arabic and French and some teaching experience, I went to work as an English teacher in Khartoum with the Sudan Volunteer Programme, a small non-governmental organisation (NGO). On the frequent occasions I have been asked, “What is your opinion of Sudan?” (a question often posed to foreigners), my standard response, “I came to Sudan expecting to stay for eight months...and stayed for three years,” gives a clue to the richness of my experience in the country.

It could be said that my period of living and working in the education sector in Sudan, between 2003 and 2006, left an indelible mark upon my adult life and, most likely, on my career. However, more accurately, this period allowed me to enact, experiment with, clarify and develop my professional and ethical objectives. I was later able to draw upon these in designing this study, substantiating the assertion that “personal experiences may provide motive and opportunity for research” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.32). It is, therefore, my prior experiences and observations of living and working in Sudan which form the starting point of this thesis, against the backdrop of the social and political conditions in which Sudanese friends, students, colleagues and their compatriots exist.

I begin by introducing my personal insights into Sudanese society based on my initial observations. The ‘rose-tinted’ picture of a fresh, slightly naïve volunteer is clouded by observations of the conditions of disparate groups of marginalised learners and teachers that I encountered through my voluntary work. This socio-political introduction is coupled with discussion of my experience of working as a teacher in Sudan, against the backdrop of education policies since the *Ingaz* Revolution of 1989. I then introduce



my personal and professional positions that form the ethical basis of this doctoral study by exploring the objectives of an education project I established. Subsequent reflections on a period of civil unrest in Khartoum in 2005 and the resultant awakening of my realisation of underlying social tensions in Sudan are related to the original research proposal for this study. I conclude by re-viewing these insights from my perspective in 2011, which acts as a reminder that while 2003 to 2006 was a period of *coming to know* Sudan, learning is an ongoing process, and new events and understandings result in re-conceptualisation and re-interpretation.

## **(My) introduction to Sudan**

Sudan is a country of diversity and contradiction. The arid desert of the north contrasts with the lush savannah of the (recently separated) south, the crowding of Khartoum with the isolation of villages and the flashy consumerism of urbanites with the traditional rural life. Ongoing conflict and oppression in the country contrasts with the stereotypes of Sudanese people, held in other Arab cultures, that they are warm, honest and funny, albeit with energy levels sapped by the African sun. Although Sudan's name historically derives from the Arabic '*bilad al-sudan*', the 'land of the blacks', Sudanese people are ethnically, culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse. Located at the juncture between Africa and the Arab world, whether multicultural Sudan is described as an Arab country or an African country depends on who is expressing their view. Moreover, the Arabic term *al-jinsiya* can mean both nationality and tribal affiliation, further indicating the contested nature of Sudanese national identity.

My early perceptions of Sudan are centred on teaching and the friendships I developed, rather than on the political situation. This focus was helped by media censorship, which restricted my access to local independent commentary. I started life in Sudan as a 23-year-old university teacher and became integrated in Khartoum youth culture. Surviving on a local wage of US\$100 per month meant that I gained an insider's view of the city as I was limited to the taking the bus instead of taxis, eating *ful* (beans) instead of pizza and spending evenings chatting over sugary tea instead of illicit *Johnny Walker* at exclusive ex-patriate parties. My knowledge of Khartoum bus routes, developed as I crisscrossed the city undertaking various voluntary projects, metaphorically reflects my insights into different Sudanese cultures and communities that I interacted with as a friendly outsider.

I became part of Sudanese society in Khartoum, a city that is dynamic and transforming. The city has seen increased migration as a result of the civil war and ongoing conflict in Darfur and unrest in locales across the country (Deng, 2006). The lack of investment in the regions has led to high levels of urban migration as individuals and families have re-located to Khartoum for health and education services, employment opportunities and security, reinforced by rapid economic growth, driven by oil exports and investment centred on the national capital (Gettleman, 2006). Even in Khartoum the difference in wealth and services is stark, as evidenced in the growth of luxury villas in districts of the capital, short distances away from people living in shanty areas without direct access to electricity and water. Migration to the national capital, resulting from conflict and poverty, brings the newly arrived, rural *ahl al-‘awad*<sup>1</sup> to the metropolis economically dominated by the *hanakeesh*<sup>2</sup>, each with disparate behavioural norms and socio-economic circumstances. Diverse ethnic identities, which are complex and relational, and associated with stereotyped characteristics<sup>3</sup>, contribute to the changing cultural mosaic of the city’s residents.

As time passed, I gradually adapted to my role as an educator in Sudan. The change was observable in the transition in my mode of dress from the t-shirts and flip-flops of a new volunteer to shirts and sandals that are appropriate for the respected position of an *ustaz* (a teacher<sup>4</sup>). Concurrently, my understanding of Sudan transformed as my knowledge gradually deepened. My life as a teacher in Sudan consisted of lesson planning, teaching and ‘hanging out’ with my students who became my friends. Encountering checkpoints in Khartoum at night and on many intercity routes outside the capital was a reminder that during this period of my life in Sudan the longest-running civil war in Africa was dragging on in the south of the country. Hopes for peace in the country peaked with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005, which marked the formal end of hostilities in the civil war in South Sudan and paved the way for elements of power-sharing. In contrast, the upsurge of simmering conflict in the western region of Darfur in 2003, described as “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis” in 2004 (Jok, 2007, p.115), met with an explosion of media, political and humanitarian interest and meant that Sudan was placed under an

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<sup>1</sup> Literally ‘Al-Awad’s family’, a humorous derogative term for people from rural areas, associated with being uneducated and poor levels of Arabic language, in contrast with modern and civilised urbanity.

<sup>2</sup> Singular ‘*hankosh*’, a humorous term meaning posh or spoilt associated with the growing urban middle class who have embraced consumerism and some western social practices.

<sup>3</sup> My jocular responses to questions about my own ethnic identity fluctuated between *khawaja* (westerner or foreigner), *halabi* (‘milky’, a pale-skinned Sudanese ‘Arab’) and *robatabi* (member of a tribe from northern Sudan, as they are reputed to be sarcastic).

<sup>4</sup> The Arabic term *ustaz* (or the female *ustaza*) can be used as a sign of respect to address anyone.

international spotlight. Beneath the sleepy and dusty appearance of Khartoum, my eyes were gradually opened to the human impact of Sudanese politics.

Throughout the politically turbulent period between 2003 and 2006, I was embedded in the education sector, mainly based in Khartoum, but working with students and colleagues from across the country. Although my focus was on teaching and becoming involved in Khartoum social life, it cannot be separated from the political situation in the country. Whether teaching in university or training teachers, volunteering with a local NGO that provided services for streetchildren or running English language courses in a long-term 'squatter' camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from South Sudan, I observed first-hand the effects of the Government of Sudan's policies on society and education. This doctoral inquiry into teacher practice and its development is situated in the Sudanese socio-political context, which I introduce through my experience as an educationalist in Khartoum and the observations of education policies and institutions, before linking these to wider social relations and, finally, to this study.

### ***'Becoming a teacher' in Sudan***

#### Teaching at university: "Don't discuss politics"

I started my work in Sudan as a teacher with the Sudan Volunteer Programme in Neelein University in Khartoum. My lessons, which I was at liberty to devise, mainly focused on general social issues. The social, political and educational context in which I found myself had arisen out of events following the *Ingaz* ('Salvation') Revolution of 1989. In this coup d'état, the National Islamic Front (NIF), an Islamist party, attained power and placed Omar Al-Bashir as President (Ahmed, 2007). The ruling party, which was later re-named the National Congress Party (NCP), and the President remain in power today. The regime's policy of Islamisation of Sudanese society and political institutions has aimed to build a national identity based on Islam, while maintaining the social, political and economic dominance of the elite riverain ethnic groups (Ahmed, 2007). The education system, notably in government administration and universities, was subjected to the massive post-revolution purge of opposition (in a policy entitled *al-salah al-'am*, 'public cleansing'), and replaced by supporters of the new regime (Ahmed, 2007). One manifestation of *shari'a* law, implemented in 1991 as part of the Islamisation policy, is the Public Order Law which prescribed the wearing of the *hijab* (a headscarf and modest dress) by women. This visible indicator of government policy was clear in Neelein University, a government university where even Christian female

students were required to wear headscarves. With origins from different parts of Sudan, my students held varied views on the centralising Islamic political agenda of the NCP, which has had both uniting and divisive effects in this culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse country. However, as I had been advised, I did not generally discuss political issues during my lessons in this government institution.

Teaching at university: “Teacher, what about the sheets?”

Students at Neelein University had given it the nickname ‘The People’s Republic of China’, due to the large class sizes and perceived overcrowding. The challenge of teaching English oral communication and writing skills at Neelein University to classes of, at times, over 100 students, provided valuable grounding in my practice as an educator. The situation of Neelein University was symptomatic of the wider context of Sudanese tertiary education, which has been expanded in the post-*Ingaz* period. The number of universities in Sudan increased from seven to 77 in the 1990s (Bishai, 2008), coinciding with underinvestment in education, observable in the large class sizes and limited facilities for teachers, and a decline in standards. Underinvestment in the tertiary sector was such that,

With resources stretched so thin, the older universities began to experience decay on their campuses as buildings were not maintained and broken equipment was not replaced. (Bishai, 2008, p.6)

In these crowded classrooms in Neelein University, I learnt to teach with limited resources, usually only a blackboard and chalk, attempting to engineer interactive activities for large classes limited by the seating of fixed lecture hall benches.

On starting work as an English teacher in Khartoum, I was struck by the low educational level of my students. The groups were often mixed ability, with some advanced students present. As well as the frequently restricted content knowledge, I adapted my approach to teaching to account for limited study and cognitive skills so the activities I offered were more structured and supported, and included revision of basic grammar and vocabulary. The educational experience of my students in universities, schools and centres had all been profoundly affected by the education policies introduced in the post-*Ingaz* Revolution period,

Today’s university population was raised under the full impact of the NIF’s Islamist policies and therefore does not have the exposure to critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong scholarship that a traditional liberal arts curriculum normally fosters. Their undergraduate experience has largely consisted of

preparation for examinations with very little understanding of research methods or thoughtful scholarly debate. (Bishai, 2008, p.7)

Frequent requests from students for 'the sheets' of lecture notes, which are the basis of examination, indicate an education experience which values fixed, given knowledge as the measurable outcome of learning. This was symptomatic of the Sudanese education system, in which certification appears prioritised over learning.

While the limited capacity of the education system is observable, it is the Arab and Islamic ideology of the curriculum which was the NIF's policy for cultural change towards a unified Arab-Islamic Sudan. This included a process of Arabicisation in the 1990s, in which the language of instruction at all levels of state education was changed from English to Arabic. This resulted in lack of teaching resources in the medium of instruction, and also had a disproportionate impact on non-native Arabic segments of the Sudanese population (Bishai, 2008). Education has, thus, become an integral part of the civilisation project of the NIF and delineates who are enfranchised and disenfranchised in this national vision.

The curriculum for Sudanese schoolchildren has thus contributed to the long internal conflicts and shaky peace. Schools everywhere inscribe the categories of national insiders and outsiders and create and reproduce powerful social boundaries that guard access to political power. (Bishai, 2008, p.8)

As I discovered when teaching English to southern Sudanese IDPs in their camp, education also provides a space for resistance. This includes marginalised southerners, displaced by conflict to Khartoum, seeking education to improve their economic chances and as part of the discourse of liberation and nation-building (Breidlid, 2005b).

The education experience in Sudan is marked by disparate levels of social inclusion and exclusion, which shows,

the varied forms of socialisation, acculturation and networking experienced by learners in Sudan, and highlight the contrast between those benefiting from, and those excluded from, the current economic boom in Khartoum. (Makris *et al.*, 2010)

This was clearly observable in my role in the English language sector. The growing economy, with an international focus due to the increasing presence of foreign development and humanitarian agencies and multinational businesses, has made English a sought-after skill, especially among young people. However, the outcome of the policy of Arabicisation is that these skills are limited, with the exception of the

children of the elite, many of whom attend private English-medium schools, and some Christians who have attended Church-supported English-medium schools. In addition, many with southern Sudanese origins are migrating to the south, where English is the official language, including in the autonomous education system. Therefore, my qualities as a native English speaker were in high demand. I taught English language evening classes in a community library in Omdurman to adult learners who were mainly university students and recent graduates. We became friends and I participated in the lives of those young people, often from western Sudan, such as Darfur, who have been attempting to study and find employment opportunities.

I also observed the impact of the centralisation of wealth and political power in Khartoum while facilitating short teacher training courses in several states in Sudan<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, through a range of voluntary work, I witnessed the effects of socio-political issues of poverty and marginalisation. Volunteering with a local children's NGO raised questions about the social factors that had led to children to become *shamasi* ('street child', from *shams*, meaning sun), and the political factors that led to diverse regions of the country being conflict-affected. Through volunteering in Soba Aradi, a long term 'squatter' camp for IDPs from South Sudan, I saw first-hand the human impact of the civil war.

#### Education: my personal/professional stance

Arising from my work as a university-based educator and a volunteer in various centres, I designed and implemented a voluntary education project in Khartoum, Student Action for Education (SAFE). My stance as an educator, which is indicated in the design of SAFE, is relevant to discussion in this thesis, as it shows my approach to teacher development and quality education. As the Director of SAFE, I trained Sudanese university students in approaches to teaching basic English through games and songs, and then provided mentoring support during their voluntary teaching placements. The project was designed so the volunteers would learn teaching skills through practice, collaboration and reflection, in addition to my mentoring support. The volunteers were encouraged to think about their learners' interests and participation in activities, and also to use supplementary games and songs (which were usually

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<sup>5</sup> The most extreme situation was the interruption of a training course by rioting high school students in eastern Sudan, which arose because the teachers had been on strike for three months due to unpaid salaries. That the teachers were committed to the training course during the Ramadan fasting period, even while unpaid and on strike, indicates the value they placed on the limited opportunities for professional development.

garnered from textbooks and other external sources). In addition to suggesting my views of effective approaches to teacher development, SAFE shows my belief in the role of education in enhancing social relations. SAFE was explicitly promoted in terms of the development of teaching and transferable skills of university students and the English language abilities of their pupils. A further aspired outcome was signalled in SAFE promotional material,

SAFE gives the volunteers the opportunity to gain and develop professional abilities and qualities which are required for an effective career, as well as *to encourage the interaction and dialogue between people of different backgrounds*. These skills and experiences are vital for the peaceful and prosperous future of Sudan, particularly as many of the volunteers would like to enter the teaching or development sectors. (SAFE, 2004)

Through SAFE, I hoped to bring together people from disparate sectors of Sudanese society which could support dialogue and shared understanding. Likewise, this research is grounded in a view of education as a potential site of sharing, learning and social development, which can be enhanced through active research approaches by external and practitioner researchers.

Among the compendium of activities of the SAFE Volunteer's Handbook was a song which had been devised by a southern teacher,

Peace, we want peace in the land,  
Peace, we want peace in the land,  
We are brothers, we are sisters,  
Mothers, *salaam salaam* (meaning: peace, peace),  
Fathers, *salaam salaam*,  
*Salaam alekum salaam* (Arabic greeting, literally 'peace upon you')

Peace, we want peace in the land,  
Peace, we want peace in the land,  
Darfur, *salaam salaam*,  
Juba, *salaam salaam*,  
Malakal, *salaam salaam*,  
Khartoum, *salaam salaam*,  
*Salaam alekum salaam*.  
(SAFE, 2005)

However, the chances of peaceful coexistence among the 'family' of Sudanese compatriots became diminished on 30 July 2005, and the fateful subsequent events.

#### Coming to know Sudan's social (dis)harmony

Having come to know Sudan over several years, my rose-tinted views were transformed during a period of civil unrest in Khartoum in 2005. Fundamental to

discussion in this study, it was my *perceptions* that changed, the social disharmony expressed in the riots had been an undercurrent throughout my residence in Sudan.

I arrived in Sudan towards the end of the civil war between the Government of Sudan and southern armed groups, principally the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), which was primarily over allocation of natural resources, regional investment and political power, but with ethnic, tribal and religious dimensions. Over the course of the war, which lasted from 1983 to 2005, about two million people were killed, four million were displaced and Southerners living in the north of the country faced marginalisation. I arrived in Sudan during peace negotiations that led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which brought the civil war to an end on 9 January 2005. Following the terms of the CPA, John Garang, the leader of the SPLA/M, became the President of South Sudan and Vice-President of Sudan in January 2005. With broad popular appeal, he was not only supported by southern Sudanese, and many northerners wanted to welcome him to Khartoum after his prolonged exile from the north. Three weeks later, he was killed in a helicopter accident. Some maintain that hopes for a united, peaceful Sudan died in the helicopter crash alongside the only person with the political expertise and popular support who could achieve it. This accident set alight the tinderbox of frustration, anger and tensions of segments of Khartoum society. Rioting was started by groups of southern Sudanese whose hopes for political enfranchisement and an end to marginalisation were seen as having also perished in the helicopter accident, while other 'northern' groups arose against the southern rioters.

Staying at home during curfew and hearing gunfire from the vicinity of the nearby transport hub which linked the outlying shanty towns with the city centre was not the cause of my changing perceptions. Rather, it was the reactions of some of my neighbours, friends and students, which laid bare underlying racism and discrimination. My first encounter of expression of such views occurred when I took the bus to flee from the outbreak of rioting in the city centre, where I met one of my 'northern' university students, who told me he had tried to go and help the military to beat up some southerners. While living under curfew, some of my neighbours expressed racist beliefs, such as describing southerners as having 'donkey brains'. It must be recognised that these views were expressed during a stressful period of civil unrest, but they indicate underlying social relations. There were also positive examples of social cohesion, for example, on the first day of the riots the Sudanese staff in the British Council left work in groups of mixed ethnicity, in order to avoid violent



encounters with the different groups of rioters. Overall, however, the hopes of realising the SAFE song's dream of "peace in the land" seemed remote.

"The peace has come" was the popular expression to describe the signing of the CPA in January 2005. I was struck by the phrasing of this statement and joked that peace had been brought to Khartoum in a suitcase by John Garang. However, without the attitudes, beliefs and practices which contribute to peaceful existence, political statements are empty. These events of 2005 formed the backdrop of the development of my initial doctoral research proposal, which focused on education and peacebuilding. My original research proposal highlighted my view of education as a means of developing peaceful social processes, stating that,

In discussions with students, teachers and civil society leaders I have become aware of general popular disengagement from both peace and reconciliation processes and civic action within Sudan. (Fean, 2006, p.3)

The transformation from the proposal to this thesis is articulated through the process of coming to know Sudanese education, its development and researcher practice that has involved methodological grappling, academic critiquing and re-immersion in Khartoum society.

#### Conclusion: Translating experience into the foundation for this research inquiry

This overview of coming to know Sudanese education and society, as well as my own professional development as an educationalist, acts as an abridged prologue to the process of learning through doctoral studies that forms the focus of this tome. The purpose of this chapter is not limited to describing the field context in which this study took place. Rather, the approach towards my professional practice and its representation provides indicators of the methodological foundation of this study. The interweaving of myself, pedagogic practices and the socio-political contexts derives from a view of the socially embedded nature of education. Fundamentally, coming to know Sudanese education and society involved constructing knowledge by interacting with students, colleagues, friends and strangers, each with different experiences and perspectives. While my initial period in Sudan coincided with the steepest learning curve, it is my prolonged immersion, with the development of language abilities, local knowledge and relationships, that facilitated coming to know Khartoum society. Yet this chapter has also shown how the perceptions I constructed through living in Sudan could be disrupted and transformed through new experiences.

This introduction to Sudan and the articulation of my professional stance laid the foundations for this inquiry. It introduced three germinating elements which subsequently flourished through academic nourishment and form the tri-partite core of this inquiry. These notions of education and pedagogy as grounded in society and culture, professional concerns with developing teacher practice and reflexive analysis of my own learning will be revisited, probed and rearticulated over the course of this thesis.

### ***Coming to know Sudan: a re-view***

Coming to know Sudan, just as coming to know education research, has consisted of the construction and re-construction of understandings arising from encounters with and interactions between new experiences, knowledge and theories. These shifts in understanding can be considered as ‘moments’ in the development of researchers,

A sentence, a luminous argument, a compelling paper, a personal incident – any of these can create a breach between what we practiced previously and what we can no longer practice, what we believed about the world and what we can no longer hold onto, who we will be as field-workers as distinct from who we have been in earlier research. (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005, p.1116)

The intellectual transformation I have experienced in these doctoral studies has arisen from a series of such ‘breaches’, which have generally occurred gradually and subtly, and are observable with greater clarity in retrospect than in-process. In this thesis I attempt to re-present the ways in which my understanding has been challenged and re-formed throughout this inquiry, thereby following the position that,

the researcher needs to be self-consciously reflective and thus that they need to be aware of their own growth in the process...It is through such a writing process we suggest that the researcher asserts and thus ‘creates’ themselves. (Brown and Jones, 2001, pp.7-8)

This thesis, therefore, comprises an action research study undertaken with and by Sudanese teachers located within reflections on the prolonged learning process which have interacted to form my doctoral studies. In place of offerings of ‘findings’ as fixed knowledge uncovered through research, I offer the process of *coming to know* that recognises that “The process of knowing is about moving oneself. An engagement with knowledge processes requires shifts in thinking” (Brown and Jones, 2001, p.112).

In the textual representation of coming to know in this thesis, I have used the notion of ‘re-viewing’, which draws on Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997, p.92) who suggest conducting a review that includes “looking back at (‘re-view’) and critically examining

(review) practice-based knowledge with the aid of disciplinary knowledge.” I conceive re-viewing in this text as a means of foregrounding temporal shifts in understanding of teacher and researcher practice by re-interrogating insights and experiences in light of new exposure to knowledge. My aim is to emphasise the construction and re-construction of partial and provisional knowledge through this study. An example of such shifts in understanding can be illustrated with an anecdote.

While working in Khartoum I developed a critical view of the Sudanese media. Several newspapers act as official mouthpieces for the government, exemplifying Orwellian ideas of the discursive control of power through the media. Journalists working for independent press were heavily censored, required capacity development and often supplemented their articles with contributions from international internet news (sometimes omitting to delete ‘click here’ from the print).

On occasions, I noted that these newspapers repeated the same article, printed twice, in an issue. “Incompetent editor,” I would think to myself upon noticing such a mistake, combined with gratitude that ‘my’ media is professional, balanced and eloquent, while ‘their’ media is ‘under-capacity’, censored and simplistic.

Then, a British colleague mentioned a conversation she had had with a Sudanese newspaper editor about media censorship. He explained that the newspaper was censored at the printing press by government officials. Previously, they had left blank spaces to indicate the censorship, but this had been forbidden by the censors. So, when faced with a censored article, the editors then repeated an article, in an act that they hoped the censors would not notice, but which was also a subtle rebellion that some of the readership might understand.

This insight transformed my view of the Sudanese press from being imbued with ineptitude to one of subtle defiance in an authoritarian context. Not restricted to temporal linearity, the knowledge also interacted with my prior personal theorisation to bring about re-interpretation of previously held critical understandings of the media. My interpretive theories were re-framed to be more open to subtle acts that might be impenetrable to me, but that later could become meaningful, with the benefit of new knowledge.

What does this story tell us about knowledge and this research? The intention of this anecdote is not simply to say, “Look at how naïve I was!” with the implication that I now claim to fully know. Rather, it is a story of epistemological understanding. This re-view problematises the preceding account of coming to know Sudan and in doing so disrupts modernist views of the linear development of knowledge. What I knew about the Sudanese press was undermined by learning something I did not even know that I did not know, leading to a re-formation of my understanding of the media and the broader social-political context.

Likewise, since developing my original research proposal, the socio-political context of Sudan has continued to evolve and transform. Following the indictment of the President of Sudan, Omar Al-Bashir, by the International Criminal Court in 2010, anti-colonial discursive constructions and ‘cult of personality’ formed the response of the Government of Sudan to ‘western interference’ in its national situation. While conflict in Darfur has continued, South Sudan seceded in July 2011 after almost 99 percent of southerners voted for separation in a referendum stipulated in the CPA. During this politically turbulent period, some of my friends have expressed critical views of Sudanese politics, while simply logging onto Facebook brings me updates of grassroots political movements in Sudan. These observations contrast with my initial research proposal and act as regular reminders of my transformed understanding of the society and politics of the country.

Multiple factors have influenced these changes in my perceptions, not least historical political changes in Sudan and internationally, but also my relationships with Sudanese friends, our relational identities, and knowledge and positions I have developed. How do these changes in my perceptions impact on this research? The certainty of my original research proposal, that Sudanese young people are disengaged from politics and education is the cause of this, is, to some extent, undermined. Had I failed to recognise the subtleties of political engagement of young people? Had my notions of politics and education, derived from my own cultural background, influenced my (mis)conceptions? What role had local knowledge played in the formation of my proposal, if any? What else might I learn which would lead me to re-cast my understandings of past, current and future experiences, knowledge and theorisation?

In sharing the re-view anecdote, I postulate that knowledge is partial, contingent and perpetually subject to revision. For this reason, I have framed the narrative representation of learning through this doctoral study as a process of *coming to know*.

This resembles, yet is distinct from, discourses of ‘becoming a researcher’ (Dunne *et al.*, 2005). While both ‘becoming knowing’ and ‘coming to know’ emphasise the same process, there is a semantic difference. ‘Becoming’ has a sense of finality as the focus is on the end result (i.e. being knowing), whereas ‘coming to’ emphasises the contingency of the outcome, ‘coming to know’ does not presume that a full end-state of knowing is, or can be, achieved. New knowledge brings new understandings to previously held notions, certainty is shaken and uncertainty might become a guiding disposition. What is left is the process of questioning as a means of deepening knowledge, such as through academic inquiry.

Over the course of the following chapters I explore the development of this inquiry and my position as a researcher (the two are closely entwined) through theorisation of the nascent ethical and methodological researcher positions implicit in my approaches to working and living in Sudan, as well as critical analysis of literature on teaching in Africa and education reform. These acted as foundations for the design of this study into generating knowledge on Sudanese teachers’ practice, its development and research and its subsequent analysis.

## 2. *Coming to know the academy*

“Research approaches inherently reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and want to live in. When we do research what we see reflected is ourselves located in our biography and culture.” (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.210)

Just as working in Sudan was a process of coming to know Sudanese cultures, politics and people, so too have my postgraduate studies been a period of coming to know theoretical frames of the social sciences and the academic field. This investigation centres on the process of generation of knowledge about teaching, teacher development and academic inquiry, which requires that my theoretical and epistemological positions are explicitly laid out in order to understand the methodological approach and subsequently to analyse the research.

The development of my researcher identity by coming to know the academic theorisation that underpins this study has not followed a linear trajectory. Although presenting a coherent theoretical framework that remained fixed for the duration of the research could fulfill the rhetorical demands of a doctoral thesis, for a nuanced representation of the research process, I foreground the temporal and circular developments in theoretical understanding. The account of my learning begins centred on myself as an ethical professional, expanding on the autobiographical representation which introduced this thesis, to show the foundation for this research. There follows exploration of the theorisation of ethical beliefs, which were both tacit and explicit, that informed the design of this study. After a temporal leap in theorisation, the final substantive section comprises a re-view, which draws on elements of postcolonialism and feminist theory to re-cast what I knew as what I currently know.

### **Becoming a researcher: “but I’m a teacher”**

Doctoral studies are a process of “becoming a researcher” (Dunne *et al.*, 2005), with the implication that this apprenticeship into research is, or at least can be, about more than the technical learning of research methods, but about taking on academic ways of knowing and doing. Upon commencing doctoral studies I initially experienced resistance to the identity of ‘researcher’ that I found attributed to myself, which conflicted with my prior identity as an educator and my propensity towards roles which have a direct social impact. The design of this study, like parts of this thesis narrative,

reflects my previous experience of working in Sudan. On commencing my field research, several Sudanese friends noted the similarity between my roles with SAFE and in teacher development (such as delivering training, observing lessons and mentoring teachers) and as a researcher (by facilitating research workshops, observing lessons and discussing with teachers). Due to the flexible possibilities of doctoral studies, I was able to develop a project that arose from my pre-existing ethical beliefs. These practical, tacit theories that I held were the foundation of this study, but they were channelled through academic theorisation in order to be articulated as a researcher position. By presenting my theoretical position through the gradual shifts in my fluid professional identity, I connect my personal and ethical stances with academic frames as the multiple guiding influences on the development this research.

My original research proposal, developed while working in Sudan, outlined an ethnographic study into “The impact of policies and pedagogical practices in youth education institutions on the development of peace and civil society in Sudan” (Feen, 2006). Loosely similar, but clearly distinct from the title you read upon opening this thesis. What, then, brought about these thematic and methodological changes? Discussion of theorisation of my stance as a researcher begins with my awakening to the possibility, or even inevitability, of personal ethical and political beliefs having roles in research. What existed as a personal ethical stance was theorised in alignment with postcolonial and feminist literature. This is explored with particular focus on ‘decolonising research’ and the emancipatory education of Paulo Freire. Rather than these developments in research planning being understood as shifts in my theorisation, they form part of the process of coming to know the theoretical and methodological diversity of the social sciences.

### **Encountering Freire: knowledge, praxis and cross-cultural research**

The development of my epistemological stance has occurred through dialectic consideration of my ethical beliefs, their theorisation and deepening knowledge of research methodologies, rather than a linear progression. Maintaining my ethical stance articulated in my prior role as an educator while in academia, conceptualised as facilitating developmental impact of research participants, was not enough for a novice in the academy and theorisation of my ethical objectives was required. I experienced a burgeoning realisation that academic endeavours are not limited to extractive methods, researchers can enact their ethical beliefs by “getting off the fence” and activism and

developmental outcomes can be part of the research process (Griffiths, 1998). Discourse of academic activism caught my attention, including claims that,

cultural relativism, read as moral relativism, is no longer appropriate to the world in which we live and that anthropology, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be ethically grounded (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p.410)

Such polemics facilitated reflection on the role of my personal ethical position in this study, which formed a process of coming to know the potential for developmental impact through education research and a rejection of pure ethnographic observation.

An introduction to the emancipatory potential of education practices was provided by Paulo Freire, whose work informed the development of participatory research methods, including action research. In his Marxian-influenced seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), Freire asserts how the oppression of certain groups by others has been maintained through socio-political structures, including education. As an educationalist, Freire outlines how education is used to facilitate the ideological domination of the ruling class, legitimising imbalanced socio-economic structures as 'common sense' in the popular psyche and limiting the development of critical cognitive processes (Mayo, 1995). It was his models of emancipatory education, however, which had a greater effect on the development of this study. Freire (1972, p.25) called for a pedagogy which,

makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation.

Freire's route to liberation is through a process of conscientisation, whereby members of oppressed groups reach 'critical consciousness' and learn to,

perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. (1972, p.19)

Freire's model of conscientisation is of an educational process, involving critical dialogue between the educator (often an outside intellectual) and the participants (the oppressed), based on the lived experience of the participants. Through a learning process based on the participants' existential context, and facilitated by a Gramscian educator-intellectual, the oppressed become empowered by being able to "perceive more clearly the relationship between what is going on in the world and what is happening to and with ourselves" (Lankshear and McLaren, 1993, cited in Mayo, 1995). Freire's work assisted in broadening my thematic knowledge, as well as in theorising literature on the "two faces of education" (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). More



fundamentally, it aided re-conceptualisation of research as a learning process, rather than simply a process of extraction.

Central to Freire's process of conscientisation were the use of local knowledge in learning, praxis and the role of outside facilitators. Freire (1972, p.68) explicitly values local knowledge which arises from people's experiences,

It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. (original emphasis)

Freirian critical dialogue is an attempt to 'reterritorialise' the 'minor' knowledges that embody the cognitive and cultural forms of the oppressed, which have been violently 'deterritorialized' by the dominant knowledge systems of the oppressor (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, cited in Gandhi, 1998, p.43). The focus on accessing the contextualised knowledge of teachers and learners was reinforced following my introduction to postcolonial theorisation. A critical moment in the nascence of a researcher position was my exposure to postcolonial thought through analysis of "the effects of epistemology...on the racialized/ethnicized and/or the non-western and non-white" (Lentin, 2006, p.1). Postcolonial critics classify conventional research as a means of perpetuating and strengthening historic imbalanced power relations through valorising certain forms of knowledge and knowledge production while marginalising or silencing subaltern voices (Smith, 1999). The 'post' of postcolonialism does not imply a clear break from the colonial period, but as a critique of the structures, outcomes and cultural understandings that arose from colonialism. Even after its independence in 1956, which marked the end of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, Sudan has remained marginalised in the current neo-liberal global political economy. Furthermore, not only is this research located within a postcolonial country, I am also a member of the coloniser society.

Postcolonialists attempt to foreground exclusions and elisions that confirm the privileges of western knowledge systems, recover marginalised knowledges, and reassert the epistemological value and agency of the non-European world (Gandhi, 1998). At the stage of research design, the aspect of decolonising research of greatest influence was that calling for privileging of marginalised, 'subaltern' voices. This informed the development of a research approach which would provide space for local knowledges, views and experiences. My rejection of the assumptions-laden concepts in my original proposal (including the purpose of education, the nature of 'peace' and

'civil society') was informed by postcolonial calls to access local understandings, in place of valorising my own. More critically, I began to see that the epistemological and methodological issues I had held to be the *kalam fadi* ('empty speech') of academic discussion were, in fact, of political and social import.

Valuing the knowledge of teachers was an expression of an ontological stance on the connection between one's personal theorisation and practice. This is reflected in Freire's concept of praxis,

men's activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Men's activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. (Freire, 1972, p.96)

In education, the gap between the rhetoric of policy and reform efforts thus becomes the result of a schism between theory and practice which does not facilitate practitioners' praxis. Bridging this gap with regards to pedagogy would require attempts to investigate and facilitate teacher praxis, reflection on how this could be achieved through research ensued. In stating that emancipatory action must consist of praxis and cannot "be reduced to either verbalism or activism" (1972, p.96), Freire's theorisation of the role of outside educators impacted on how I envisaged my role as a researcher. Following Freire, the educator-intellectual, acting as a facilitator, poses problems and problematises issues based on the lived experience of the oppressed participants (Mayo, 1995). Cross-cultural educators are conceived as,

actors who come from 'another world' to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world. (Freire, 1972, p.147)

Freire's depiction of a cross-cultural emancipatory educator inspired me to conceptualise my role as a researcher as a facilitator of collaborative learning. This suited my sense of hesitation in proclaiming 'how things are' or 'how things should be' in Sudanese schools, when, in fact, the teachers and students are the experts in this regard. Moreover, as a facilitator of cross-cultural dialogue, the Freirian educator-intellectual must,

move across the border that demarcates one's social location in order to understand and act in solidarity with the learner/s, no longer perceived as 'Other'. (Mayo, 1995, p.369)

Given my history in Khartoum this image is fitting as I had already been a 'border crosser' to deliver education and form relations with friends from the youth population of the city.

By presenting the development of a research identity through Freire, I do not contend that I have aimed to draw wholly on his work. Indeed, my early reading of Freire took a critical slant on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as I was particularly troubled by essentialist tendencies, which are open to postcolonial critique (Fean, 2007a). However, Freire's work has informed the development of a field of education research, notably participatory strands, in which I have located myself and this study.

### Conclusion: becoming a researcher

My apprenticeship into academic theorisation facilitated identification of my epistemological, ontological and methodological stance and a professional niche which suited my interests and ethical beliefs. Put another way, my interests and ethical beliefs were channelled through academic theorisation to craft a professional stance acceptable within the academy, or, at least, parts of the academy. During academic studies, after introduction to diverse research design approaches and philosophies of social science, my proposal developed to an action research project investigating "Values of teachers in Sudanese youth education centres: their nature, role in professional practice and influence on students" (Fean, 2007b). At the start of fieldwork it changed again to focus on teachers' practice in order to be grounded in 'the practical', and has subsequently been re-interpreted and re-developed until it formed this thesis.

My researcher identity is not fixed and, equally, I have had a shifting focus during the research process and changing understandings following encounters with knowledge. The preceding theoretical framing has signalled my initial preoccupation during the methodological design of this study with research 'out there' in the field of Sudanese education. My desire to find a balance between my perceptions of the abstractions and theorising of the 'ivory towers' and the practicalities of teaching and learning in Sudanese schooling led to plans to generate contextualised knowledge. Sudanese education was viewed as the field of practice, so fieldwork issues and outcomes for 'education and development' were my priority. However, this grounding of my stance has not remained fixed for the duration of this study.

### **Re-viewing theorisation: research as knowledge production**

So far, I have shown the linear development of my researcher identity, with the growth in my knowledge of theorisation implicated as a direct corollary. Yet the transition from

researcher as field data collector to researcher as producer of knowledge has required re-viewing, but not rejection, of the theorising which underpins the design of this study, notably postcolonial works with a focus on analysis, representation and knowledge production as exercises of power.

A contributing factor in this shift of focus is a transformation in my conception of 'the practical' from being purely situated in the classrooms of the teacher-researchers to also being located in the academy. My initial resistance to 'academic blah-blah' has dissipated as academia has been re-framed as a practical field, inhabited by practitioners with potential for direct social impact upon their own practice and professional discourses. As a practitioner within an academic field, my own practice involves engaging with contested concepts, paradigms and approaches, which has led to an interest in the politics of knowledge production. The influence of postcolonialism on this study has remained, but different aspects of the theories have influenced the various stages of the project. While issues surrounding participation or accessing subaltern voices informed the fieldwork plans, macro-level critiques of power-knowledge structures have become more pertinent during the process of writing this thesis. I begin by briefly returning to postcolonial critiques of knowledge production, particularly Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). This is then theorised according to Foucault's analyses of power, discourse and 'regimes of truth'. Subsequently, I explore feminist epistemologies and poststructuralism, which foreground the constructed nature of knowledge, indicating potential means of critiquing this study.

### **Encountering Said: Orientalist discourses and postcolonialism**

Like my British colonial predecessors, I have come to recognise that "Knowledge is power, in Africa and elsewhere," as Sir Reginald Wingate, Governor-General of Sudan, observed in 1918 (Johnson, 2007). In his classic work *Orientalism*, Said (1978) aimed to show how production of knowledge about 'the Orient' has maintained European power over its 'Other'. He critiques the European construction of the 'Other', through the homogenisation of Middle Eastern, Asian and African cultures as the primitive, degenerate, unchanging and feminine 'Orient' and argues that this binary structuring, constituted through processes of knowledge production, served to construct a civilised, rational, dynamic and masculine Europe (Said, 1978). Rather than the representation of the people and culture of 'the Orient' that it purported to be, Said describes Orientalism "as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient" (1978, p.95). In essence, Orientalists claimed,

the right to *speak for* the mute and uncomprehending Orient and, in doing so, relentlessly represent it as the negative, underground image or impoverished 'Other' of Western rationality. (Gandhi, 1998, p.77)

Said aimed "to show how 'knowledge' about non-Europeans was part of the process of maintaining power over them", thereby problematising the status of knowledge and blurring objectivity and ideology (Loomba, 1998, pp.44-5). As a non-native Arabic-speaker I have previously described myself as an 'Arabist', a term that implies expertise greater than simple language capabilities. Furthermore, I have been taught, through studying Arabic coursebooks, to describe myself as a *mustashriq* ('orientalist'). As an Arabic-speaker, then, would I follow in the footsteps of Orientalist researchers that Said describes?

What he [the Orientalist] says about the Orient is therefore to be understood as description obtained in a one-way exchange: as *they* spoke and behaved, *he* observed and wrote down. His power was to have existed among them as a native speaker, as it were, and also as a secret writer. And what he wrote was intended as useful knowledge, not for them, but for Europe and its various disseminative institutions. (1978, p.160)

So, am I an embodiment of a form of Orientalism? As Said implies, a response to such a question requires reflection on both how I undertake the research and how I represent the resultant knowledge.

In *Orientalism*, Said, like other postcolonialists, draws on Foucault's analysis of power, which provides a framework for constructing a complex understanding of power and knowledge. According to Foucault,

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. (Foucault, 1980, p.52)

As an exercise in knowledge generation, this research project is therefore the application and outcome of power relations. His analysis reveals "how discourses about knowledge create subjects and deploy power" (Hekman, 1990, p.69). In this sense, "Discourse includes and excludes in that it "authorises" certain people to speak and correspondingly silences others" (Kanu, 2005, p.508). The influence of Foucault's theorisation of discourse upon Said is explicit,

such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it. (Said, 1978, p.94)

Just as discourses have constructed the tradition of Orientalism, education research is discursively constructed through the exercise of power in the process of knowledge production in a regime of truth,

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p.131)

Research is such a regime of truth that produces academically legitimated knowledge and ways of knowing. Foucault's analysis also recognises the exclusion of "subjugated knowledge" from dominant ways of knowing, which is

a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (Foucault, 1980, p.82)

The privileging of scientific knowledge is enacted through the academic regime of truth and science dominates over other knowledges to be viewed as 'truth'. Academic tools are authoritative approaches to knowledge production in which the exercise of power results in,

the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge – methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control. (Foucault, 1980, p.102)

This research is located within the 'education' discipline "in which 'truth games' are played" (Ball, 1990). Re-viewing the development of my researcher identity through a Foucauldian lens re-forms it as self-disciplining to align with the normalising practices of the academy. This is not simply a process of adopting my ethical stance into my studies, 'becoming a researcher' has involved operating within an academic regime of truth in which specific theories, methodologies and practices are used to legitimise the knowledge produced.

Theories and research methods and themes in the social sciences have been influenced by historical relationships of domination in colonialism and imperialism (Stavenhagen, 1993). The globalised forms of ways of knowing that are constructed and re-constructed through regimes of truth have been critiqued as "epistemic violence",

The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity. (Spivak, 1993, p.76)

This critique of education research practices indicates a central element of postcolonial discourse which,

rewrites the relationship between the margin and the center by deconstructing the colonialist and imperialist ideologies that structure Western knowledge, texts, and social practices. (Giroux, 1993, p.185)

Such critique of cross-cultural education research leads to consideration of the more radical aims of decolonising research of “transforming the institution of research, the deep underlying structures and taken-for-granted ways of organizing, conducting, and disseminating research and knowledge” (Smith, 2005, p.88) into more equitable approaches towards diverse ways of knowing and doing. Having identified this point of critique, the possible theoretical tools for a researcher to engage in such actions must be prepared.

### **Encountering poststructuralism: deconstructing research**

Poststructuralists have critiqued the binaries of post-Enlightenment western thinking, which has been a “history of dichotomies, hierarchical and oppositional” (Usher, 2000a, p.22). Such binaries are exemplified in Said’s European/Other and corresponding oppositions of rational/irrational, civilised/primitive and developed/undeveloped, to name a few. Similarly, Freire’s concepts of oppressor/oppressed and conscientised/false consciousness follow the dualism model. Such binaries are problematic as they are simplistic, oppositional and hierarchical so that one is dominant over the other.

Although these opposites are supposed to be equal pairs, one of the terms in the binary is always privileged; it becomes the positive defining term, with the other term defined in negative relation to it, i.e. as lacking in the positive attributes possessed by the first term – or to put it another way, it becomes the Other of the defining term. (Usher, 2000b, p.164)

This critique makes explicit the limiting and constraining frames of analysis and also its discursive construction of inequality. Coming to know the poststructural concerns of epistemology and power led me to recognise the theoretical frames for understanding the social as,

in representation, the real is not simply being reflected ‘as it really is’ but is being constructed or shaped in a way particular to the codings of the signifying system. As we have seen, these codings take the form of binary, hierarchical and oppressive oppositions. (Usher, 1997, p.32)

Foucault and postcolonialists have shown that these legitimised ways of knowing are constructed and re-constructed through operations of power. Where does this leave me as a researcher? Committing to postcolonial calls to value local knowledge or to be reflexive towards the data collection and interpretation process seem limited once the gravity of the power play of research and representation are recognised. Yet this research into Sudanese teachers' practice seemed grounded in binaries of theory/practice, 'developed'/'developing' and researcher/researched. Feminist epistemologies and critiques of science offered a framework for recognising and disrupting these binary constructions of dominant/subjugated power relations.

Postcolonial and poststructural concerns of power-knowledge in research led me to feminist critiques of scientific practices and epistemologies that problematise mainstream social science which, through its position as a regime of truth, marginalises and oppresses alternative forms of knowing and being. Elements of science critiqued by feminists include: a singular, fixed concept of truth, objectivity, a universal subject of knowledge and the inter-translatability of concepts and discourses (Gross, 1986). As Haraway (1988, p.577) points out, science is both an ideology and a social process,

science – the real game in town – is rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one's manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of very objective power.

The scientific method is, therefore, critiqued in feminist scholarship as a regime of truth. In the place of 'objectivity', an alternative vision of promulgated,

Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not just transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (Haraway, 1988, p.583)

The situated nature of feminist knowledge echoes postcolonial privileging of context over generalised 'grand narratives'. Not limited to critique, one aspect of feminist theorising has developed as "a positive project of constructing and developing alternative models, methods, procedures, discourses etc" (Gross, 1986, p.195). Feminist poststructuralists attempt to work "at the hyphen" (Fine, 1994) of binaries that have been held in hierarchical relations in post-Enlightenment epistemologies and methodologies.

Instead of binaries which separate and exclude – subject/object, reason/emotion, culture/nature, masculinity/femininity – the feminist project is to replace them with a plurality of perspectives that dissolve binaries into continuums and disallow categories which maintain the privileging of masculinity over the feminine. (Usher, 2000a, p.26)



Feminist research is values-based and makes explicit its political nature as a social practice, as with postcolonial research, it “seeks to redraw the boundaries between epistemology, political philosophy and ethics so that we appreciate how power and unequal hierarchies are maintained, created and re-created.” (Usher, 2000a, p.22). This does not mean that feminist theorists proffer a (true) ‘truth’ to counter the dominant (false) ‘truth’. Rather, feminist theory,

aims to render patriarchal systems, methods and presumptions unable to function, unable to retain their dominance and power. It aims to make clear how such a dominance has been possible; and to make it no longer viable. (Gross, 1986, p.197)

Feminist theorising has implications for cross-cultural research in postcolonial contexts or with practitioners in an institutional setting, both pertinent to this study. Having moved beyond seeking the inclusion of women as the objects and subjects of pre-existing (patriarchal) research approaches, feminist social science has sought their critique in order to develop alternative methodologies and epistemologies. As Gross (1986, p.192) explains,

This was because it was not simply the range and scope of objects that required transformation: more profoundly, and threateningly, the very questions posed and the methods used to answer them, basic assumptions about methodology, criteria of validity and merit, all needed to be seriously questioned. The political, ontological and epistemological commitments underlying patriarchal discourses, as well as their theoretical contents required re-evaluation from feminist perspectives

Means of undermining this ‘will to truth’ include foregrounding the tensions, contradictions and messiness of social science research and representation (Lather, 2007) and deconstruction of the research ‘text’ (Hekman, 1990). It is the combination of critique and construction of alternatives which has influenced the development of this study, and subsequent reflections. Poststructural approaches are diverse as,

It is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing – spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see what constitute power/knowledge. (Lather, 1994, p.38)

Deconstruction provides a means of questioning and unpicking rules of knowledge production in order to open up alternative ways of knowing. Ultimately, this exposure to poststructural thought has led to,

The orthodox consensus about how to do research ‘scientifically’ has been displaced. What we are left with is not an alternative and more secure foundation but an awareness of the complexity, historical contingency and fragility of the practices through which knowledge is constructed. There is thus a loss of certainty in ways of knowing, what is known, and who can be knowers. (Usher, 2000b, p.180)

My faith in the production of certainty of knowledge through vigorous (and participatory) research has been replaced by a sense of the provisionality of knowing constructed through research.

Conclusion: *coming to know the academy*

Coming to know the academy through my doctoral apprenticeship has facilitated the development of my position as a researcher. This is not to imply a linear development of my thinking, rather there has been dialectic informing between my ethical stance and personal experience, theorisation and methodological development, combined with pragmatism. This research was founded on my ethical stance towards making a difference in the field of practice, namely Sudanese schools, and theorised according to postcolonial literature. The first part of this journey of developing a researcher identity showed how I have progressed from a curious and resistant novice to locate a niche of certainty of epistemology and methodological based on the ethics underpinning my stance. Yet this has been followed by a gradual stripping back of research practices to uncover the power-knowledge complex beneath. Poststructuralism has facilitated further peeling back to open up the certainty of academic thought and methods to be probed and questioned from a stance of uncertainty. The purpose of such deconstruction is to allow a blurring of concepts in order to deepen the complexity of understanding and “tease out and unravel some of the theoretical and ideological underpinnings” of practice, with the aim to “unsettle specific foundations with a view to opening them up and in so doing create possibilities for rereadings” (Brown and Jones, 2001, p.106). The poststructural turn of my theorisation acts as a reminder that theorisation is not simply a pre-prepared foundation for inquiry following a linear pattern, but is open to change, thereby offering potential means of re-viewing and questioning.

Poststructuralists have shown that “all knowledges are situated and are governed by the rules of those who are the knowers” (Usher, 2000a, p.27). As a producer of knowledge I have scope in determining how it should be read and analysed. Having re-presented this study as grounded in my professional beliefs, it is against this ethical, political and theoretical foundation that the research will be critiqued. This introduction to my researcher position provides a basis for analysis of cross-cultural postcolonial research practice, as well as the theoretical position from which teaching and its development are investigated through this study.

### **3. Reviewing and re-viewing literature on teaching in Africa**

My work and research in Sudan has been at a time when basic education is a “tragedy” in terms of quality and access, resulting from low government spending and decades of civil conflict (Badri and Bedri, 2007). My grassroots work in Sudan was a minuscule capillary enactment of global international education and development discourse, in which quality of education has become recognised as a priority concern (UNESCO, 2004, Barrett, 2011b). During 2005, the year in which the Global Monitoring Report on Education for All focused on “the quality imperative” (UNESCO, 2004), I was promoting communicative and interactive approaches to English language teaching – my vision of quality – through SAFE and several training courses for basic school teachers. Yet at other times while working in the Sudanese tertiary sector, I found the process of education so poor, according to my subjective criteria, that at times it failed to register as learning, let alone quality. Rather, a friend and I described the ‘pretend’ process of university education, in which students ‘pretended’ to learn by attending lectures and memorising ‘the sheets’, which fact-based exams ‘pretended’ to test, leading to the presentation of graduation certificates which ‘pretended’ to certify the completion of a university-level education. Admittedly, some of my students were conscientious and had excellent English language skills, but the majority had academic levels far lower than I had anticipated, reflecting the low quality of public schooling in the country.

The quality of teaching is singled out as potentially the greatest school-based determinant of student learning (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). This is reinforced by Sudanese education policy, which recognises that “Both quality and efficiency depend on the presence of a competent, motivated, dedicated teacher with a reasonable level of academic and professional knowledge” (General Directorate of Educational Planning, 2004, p.15). Unsurprisingly, given that “the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement” (Hargreaves, 1992, p.ix, cited in Jessop and Penny, 1998, p.393), there has been a surge of interest in teachers and their teaching by education researchers and development agencies aiming to improve the quality of schooling in low-income countries. However, conceptions of quality and effective approaches to pedagogic reform remain contested.

This chapter begins with a historical perspective of the development of education in Sudan during the colonial period and its manifestation in the contemporary context. I then outline my review and re-view of literature on teaching and pedagogic reform in

Sub-Saharan Africa and other low-income countries in a process of coming to know my position within academic debates in education and development. Founded upon my professional experience in Sudan, I draw on and question literature to build a complex picture of pedagogy in Africa. The local-global dialectic is then explored through discussion of international debates on pedagogy. As I operate across cultures in my research and education practice, in this chapter (and throughout this thesis) I reflexively postulate my position on cross-cultural research on pedagogy in Sub-Saharan Africa. Subsequently, my interest as an education development practitioner leads me to consider and critique approaches to implementing pedagogic reform in low-income countries, with particular focus on the interplay of theory and practice in teacher development programmes. This discussion establishes the thematic rationale for the design and focus of this study, providing a broad framework for subsequent analysis.

### **Development of education in Sudan: a historical perspective**

Given the influence of postcolonial theorisation on the design of this study, it is fitting to consider the development of education in Sudan in the colonial period, which took the form of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium from 1899, until independence in 1956. Although designated a 'condominium', a territory administered by two states, Sudan was ruled by a British administration (Seri-Hersch, 2011). During this period education policies evolved according to different political aims, ideological outlooks and the financial context (Seri-Hersch, 2011). However, education in Sudan pre-dates the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, mainly in the form of Islamic schooling in a *khalwa* (Qur'an school), as sites of learning Arabic, Islamic instruction and memorising the Qur'an, since the Islamisation of much of the country in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Seri-Hersch, 2011). Furthermore, during the Turco-Egyptian period (1820–1881), new *khalawi* and some elementary schools were introduced, as well as some by Christian and Protestant missionaries, while in the Mahdist period (1881–1898), *khalawi* formed the main education institutions, and state-sponsored and missionary schools created under the previous regime were abandoned (Seri-Hersch, 2011). Development of education from this point, under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium raises issues of the status of academic and technical education, processes of socio-economic inclusion and exclusion, and the situation of South Sudan.

From the start of the Condominium until the 1930s, the purpose of education was to develop the bureaucratic cadre for the administration of the country, through technical

and manual training (Seri-Hersch, 2011). Formal schooling was limited in the colonial period, in the 1930s there was only one secondary school and one technical school in northern Sudan (Mann, 2012). Posts in the colonial administration were tied to the education levels of the entrants, with entry to clerical posts accessed through secondary education, sub-professional and technical professions by post-secondary education and administrative and professional careers by university (Mann, 2012). The limited access to education, and its relationship to economic opportunities in the Condominium, meant that it was a process of the reproduction of inclusion and exclusion. Dominant Sudanese riverain groups used educational institutions to reproduce their own power, as shown in the large proportion of Arab students and sons of government officials, officers and merchants in Gordon Memorial College (later the University of Khartoum) (Umbadda, 1990, cited in Mann, 2012). From the 1930s public demand for provision of education increased, while the De La Warr Commission (1937) into education in British East Africa called for greater government investment into Sudanese education (Seri-Hersch, 2011). In the later stages of the Condominium, provision of schooling expanded and investment in education increased more than three-fold in the final decade of the Condominium, reaching 13.5 percent in 1956, compared with under 4 percent between 1899 and 1946 (Seri-Hersch, 2011). The number of government elementary schools increased, while coexisting with other forms of schooling, including *khalawi*, and mission, community, 'Ahli' ('people's'), 'Egyptian Government' and private schools, which provided education in Arabic, as well as English, Italian or Greek (Seri-Hersch, 2011). Adult education was also introduced in 1948, in the form of literacy campaigns, which included projects with specially developed materials and operated through 'literacy circles', with the purposes of literacy for development and spreading knowledge (Seri-Hersch, 2011).

Colonial administration of Sudan is marked by the separate treatment of South Sudan, which was ethnically, religiously and linguistically distinct from the North. In contrast with the development of a government education system in the North, in the southern regions schools were established by missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, with limited government interference until the 1940s (Mann, 2012). Provision of education in the southern regions by the government was limited, as for much of the Condominium period the stated policy was that the administration needed only "a few educated blacks" for minor clerical posts in the South (Johnson, 2003, p.15). These policies were part of a broader strategy to maintain separation between the North and South, including through the Closed District Ordinance Act (1920) and the Trade and Permit Act (1922), which required northerners to have permits to travel to the South, in

order to protect the southern cultures from Arab-Islamic influence (Jok, 2007, Mann, 2012). Further division of the regions was legislated in the 1928 Language Act, which stipulated that English would be the language of instruction in Southern schools while Arabic would be used in the North (Mann, 2012). The separate approach to South Sudan was officially proclaimed in the 'Southern Policy' in 1930, which separated the administration and development of the South from the North until it was abandoned in 1947. Provision of government education in the South increased following the 1946 decision to grant independence to Sudan. During this period government schools were established and Southern chiefs provided quotas of boys to be educated (Johnson, 2003). This developed the capacity of the early post-independence Southern leaders, but the prolonged earlier neglect of education in the region meant there were few Southerners experienced in administration and business at the time of independence in 1956 (Johnson, 2003).

Analysis of the development of education in Sudan during the colonial period informs understanding of the contemporary context. Issues of identity and language during the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium remain relevant, and the prolonged effects of the Southern Policy and other colonial decisions are clearly visible in the long-running civil conflict and secession of South Sudan in 2011. The resulting poverty and displacement are main contributing factors to the requirement for second chance adult basic education. The colonial provision of limited education opportunities for the purpose of administering the country established a hierarchy of education forms and institutions, in which academic study was prioritised. The content of formal schooling derives from western education systems, albeit based on the Arab-Islamic ideology of the *Ingaz* Government of Sudan (Breidlid, 2005a). While *khalawi* continue to operate in Sudan, the national system of formal schooling was expanded and increasingly demanded by the Sudanese public. Prioritising academic schooling has led to an ongoing stigma associated with vocational training (Mann, 2012), observable in adult education which offers formal certificate programmes to enable youths and adults to progress in the formal education ladder. The diversity of education provision and its role in reproducing economic, political and social inclusion and exclusion are observable in contemporary Khartoum (Makris *et al.*, 2010), such as in the case of the marginalised learners in the adult education schools of this study.

## Teaching in Africa: concepts, context and complexity

### Coming to know research on teachers and teaching in Africa

Following the surge in interest in education quality, the relative paucity of classroom-based field research in low-income countries has been cited as a limitation for formulating policies and bridging “the gap between the rhetoric and reality of educational development” (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005). In response, education researchers have recently focused on teachers and teaching in Africa, in an effort to illuminate classroom processes. In this section I consider African teachers’ pedagogic practices, located within social and material contexts, thus forming a foundation for subsequent discussion of academic discourse on these practices and efforts to implement pedagogic renewal.

Education in Sudan is characterised by,

limited resources, insufficient supplies of teachers, limited to no teaching and instructional materials and inadequate numbers of schools. Where schools do exist, they are frequently of extremely low quality with teachers who are poorly trained and seriously under qualified or schools are not within reach of the children (Badri and Bedri, 2007, pp.28-9)

This picture is replicated in research into schooling across Sub-Saharan Africa, which highlights the poorly qualified and poorly trained (or untrained) teaching cadre, large class sizes, poor facilities, shortage of textbooks and other learning materials and a low level of motivation and commitment amongst the teachers (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991, Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). The effect of these contextual and hierarchical conditions on African educators are such that,

they endure overcrowded classrooms, unsafe and unsanitary schools, abysmal housing, and the absence of the most basic classroom tools...they are at the mercy of bureaucracies which they perceive to be irrational, unpredictable and unresponsive. Teachers feel themselves disempowered by the system, and often by their own principals. (Coombe, 1997, p.113)

The deficit view of teachers in Africa is part of the story, yet a more hopeful tale is also possible. In contrast with the portrayal of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa as a “beleaguered and dispirited force” (Asimeng-Boahene, 2004, p.279). Buckler (2011, p.247) highlights the professional commitment of some teachers who

are dynamic, driven by their work, and have no intention of leaving the teaching profession...Their motivation, while fragile, is intrinsically linked to their desire to upgrade their qualifications, to acquire more skills and provide a better education for the children they teach.

While material conditions create challenges for African teachers, diversity in the holistic experience of individual teachers should be recognised.

Research into schooling in Africa generally shows that teaching follows a transmission model, which leads to teacher-centred pedagogy, rote learning and reified conceptions of knowledge as propagated by official sources, principally in textbooks (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). This form of teaching is described as fostering “only lower order skills” and exemplifying “the teaching/transmission paradigm as opposed to that of learning” (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). Such approaches follow Freire’s conception of “banking education” (1972). In Kenya, as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalent teaching practices are “teacher explanation punctuated by a question and answer approach, chorus class recitation, pupils copying from the chalkboard; written exercises and teachers marking pupils’ work” (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005, p.100). Simply put, this process involves the transmission and “ritualised recalling of information” (Hardman *et al.*, 2008, p.65).

Banking education “supports a concept of the teacher and textbook as repositories of expert knowledge, which need to be passed on to pupils unproblematically” (Jessop and Penny, 1998, p.397), an approach in which memorisation is an effective learning tool and knowledge is seen as fixed and fact-based. In this approach,

Knowledge is regarded as an entity that emanates from the textbook rather than as something that is constructed by teachers or students themselves in the light of their personal backgrounds, emerging needs, experiences and interactions with contexts. (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008, p.535)

As a result of banking education pedagogy, “Most of the learning tasks across subjects put a strong emphasis on factual, propositional knowledge (knowing that) rather than procedural knowledge (knowing how)” (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005, p.91), and the conclusion is reached that the classroom discourse does “not support pupils’ cognitive or linguistic learning” (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005, p.100). This approach to teaching and learning leads to a “paucity of voices on *the process of making meaning from the curriculum*” (Jessop and Penny, 1998, p.399). However, by in-depth engagement with teachers, rather than superficial study of classroom behaviour, Jessop and Penny also identified alternative forms of teaching and learning, a ‘relational’ approach in which “learning is seen as a process in which pupils actively engage while the teacher guides or facilitates this process” (Jessop and Penny, 1998, p.398).



Teaching is located within a “complex web of factors” in which pedagogic practices are negotiated by teachers within the structures of schooling, and therefore a “radical context-bound approach to the problems of education” is required (Avalos, 1990, p.204). Teachers operate within a complex social network, including headteachers, education advisers and inspectors (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). Yet, in addition to this hierarchy-based view of schooling, research has shown other factors that influence teacher practice, such as the views of the students and their conceptions of education (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). As examples of manifestation of hierarchical school systems, literature also depicts textbooks and the examinations system as being fundamental restrictions which prescribe the manner in which the teachers practise, to the extent that it could be claimed that the examinations system is said to be so powerful that it “completely determines the way teachers teach in schools” (Kanu, 1996, p.182), a claim which emphasises the perceived lack of agency of African teachers. Furthermore, in the context of predominantly Islamic countries, the deficit view of teachers is reinforced with the generalised view that they docilely accept their conditions, holding “a fatalistic disposition towards life...which makes them see whatever lives they live as predestined and the will of Allah, which cannot be changed” (Kanu, 1996, p.180). This deficit model of teachers impacts on how their practice is interpreted, and consequently on the measures taken for their professional development. Taking a negative view, factors constraining pedagogy include, “the environment, such as poor resourcing, low morale, inadequate training, inspectorial control, overloaded syllabi and overcrowded classes” (Jessop and Penny, 1998, p.397). Indeed, it is argued that for teachers “who are in educational systems at anything other than the professional stage, it is the environment in which the teacher works that creates the selection” of pedagogic activities (Johnson *et al.*, 2000, p.186). This position contrasts with explicit “teacher blaming” by emphasising the force of “environmental pressure” on pedagogy selection (Johnson *et al.*, 2000, p.181). However, it retains a sense of teachers in low-income countries as being subjects of contextual pressure and deficit situations, rather than agents of their own practice.

There has been an increase in research which highlights the importance of teachers’ conceptions, experiences and context. Critics of the dominant discourse surrounding education in Africa question the portrayal of the African teacher as an “authoritarian classroom figurehead who expects students to listen and memorize correct answers or procedures rather than construct knowledge themselves” (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006, p.155). Rather, they emphasise the complexity of schooling processes and the need to comprehend the teachers’ understandings of education objectives and teaching and

learning practices, as well as the importance of the social context of schooling, the environmental and resource-related factors and the teachers' sense of agency within school structures (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006). As argued by Guthrie (1990, p.227), it is "teachers' perceptions of the realities of the educational system and the context in which it functions govern their professional behaviors to a marked extent." For example, in discussion of his observations of inactive and seemingly disengaged teacher practice, Pryor (1998, p.223) speculates about the teachers' conceptions of teaching, which may relate more to "being present in the classroom, telling the children what the prescribed work was to be and putting ticks on the bottom rather than actually to facilitate learning". Such contextualised insights into teachers' views and practice are required to provide a deeper understanding of the schooling process, as experienced by teachers and learners, as well as the opportunities and constraints on improvement and innovation in schools.

Akyeampong and Stephens (2002, p.262) argue that teacher identity, which guides practice, is a "contextualised sense of self". Teachers' classroom practice is not simply the replication of practices learnt through teacher education programmes (admittedly, a high proportion of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa have received little or no professional training), but, rather, is shaped by their "personal socio-historical past, beliefs and values" (Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002, p.261). The social embeddedness of teaching practice is emphasised by Tabulawa, who claims that "Pedagogical processes do not take place in a sociological vacuum and as such cannot be understood when dislocated from their broader social context" (1997, p.192). He describes school structures in Botswana as "bureaucratic-authoritarian," which derives from "social, economic and historical forces, and that it has evolved over a long period of time" (Tabulawa, 1997, p.193). He asserts that 'banking education' "now constitutes the teachers' and students' taken-for-granted classroom world and is firmly embedded in educational institutions" and is "implicitly" implemented by both practitioners and learners in classroom interactions (Tabulawa, 1997, p.193). Teaching methods, even banking education, must be understood within the social, material and cultural context. Teachers develop these views through their own experience as students, a form of "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p.61, see also Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002). Research into African education must analyse "teachers' *reasoning* about teaching, learning and assessment" (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006, p.160, original emphasis), as well as their practice, which results from the practitioners' enactment of their tacit theories. Contextualised understanding, therefore, progresses beyond the superficiality of large-scale studies to provide insights into the conceptions,

experiences and practices of those ‘at the chalk-face’, and, fundamentally, act to counterbalance dominant concepts of professional practice, generally abstracted from western sources (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006).

### **Coming to know debates on education quality and pedagogies**

Achieving ‘quality’ undergirds efforts to improve education experiences and outcomes within the broader Education for All agenda (UNESCO, 2004). This, in turn, impacts on discourses on African pedagogy. However, the term ‘quality’ is contested, with varying conceptions and frameworks based on human capital theory, human rights and, more recently, Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach (Barrett, 2011b, Tikly and Barrett, 2011). International frameworks to assess quality have also been critiqued (Alexander, 2008). Pedagogy is “often the missing ingredient” in discussion of quality of education (Alexander, 2008, p.vii). Debates about the nature of ‘quality education’ vary between universalist proponents of specific pedagogic approaches, and postcolonial calls for the recognition of the indigenous knowledge and practices of education practitioners in their varied geographic, historical and socio-cultural contexts (Tabulawa, 1997).

Pre-conceived notions of pedagogy are articulated in the design and analysis of a range of education research. One example of this is Verspoor’s stages of teacher practice as: unskilled, mechanical, routine and professional (cited in Johnson *et al.*, 2000, p.183). Such a taxonomy of teachers and their practices is laden with assumptions. Claims that ‘unskilled’ teachers “rely on recitation, rote learning and memorisation” (Johnson *et al.*, 2000, p.183) fail to interrogate the epistemological nature of curriculum knowledge, the socio-cultural practice of education and the purposes of schooling found in the diverse contexts to which the taxonomy is to be applied. Such privileging of particular models of education becomes even more explicit in discussion of ‘learner-centred’ pedagogy. References in discourses on African pedagogies signal the dominance of particular conceptions of ‘effective teaching’, namely the “widely accepted social constructivist theory of learning” (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005, p.100), which is formulated as ‘learner-centred’ pedagogy. ‘Learner-centred’ approaches are recommended by development agencies and governments as a means of improving education quality (Croft, 2002b), while the ambiguity and familiarity of the concept helped it to gain local support in post-independence African states (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008). Characteristics of education propounded in the learner-centred approach include knowledge as constructed, rather than transmitted, and learning as an active process, language and communication are

emphasised as integral to developing cognitive processes (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008). This contrasts with pedagogies common in Sub-Saharan Africa which are viewed as traditional, teacher-centred and behaviourist (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005).

The 'learner-centred' fixation, articulated through the "polarised discourse of 'teacher-centred' vs. 'student-centred'" (Alexander, 2008, p.2), has a negative impact on education for several reasons. The privileging of 'learner-centred' approaches in academic and policy discourses acts to limit understandings of the conceptual and contextual rationale for teacher practice in Sub-Saharan Africa (Barrett, 2007). Alexander concurs that to impose 'child-centred teaching methods' is to "smother with a blanket of unexamined ideology a vital professional debate about the conditions for learning and the complexities of teaching" (2008, p.16). In a critique of donor education initiatives, Tabulawa (2003, p.10) has described learner-centred pedagogy as a western-derived "political artefact, an ideology, a world-view about how society should be organised", part of the canon of structures and practices which form the West's domination of former colonised countries. Tabulawa (2003, p.9) claims that the approach is presented "as if it were value-free and merely technical," so that any requirement to consider the context of education is obviated and the ideological nature of learner-centred pedagogy is masked. In undertaking this research I have endeavoured to distance my analysis from simplistic deficit models, in alignment with O'Sullivan's (2006, p.248) call to move the debate forward,

The deficit definition has for too long acted as a noose around the neck of those making efforts to improve it. We need to move away from the deficit explanation and focus on what can be achieved within the available contexts that are currently considered to hamper quality.

A "universalised pedagogy necessarily marginalises pedagogies based on alternative epistemologies" (Tabulawa, 2003, p.22). Therefore,

It is time to question the wisdom of all universally accepted "best" practices. What matters ultimately is whatever methods best bring about teaching and learning in specific contexts. (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.256)

This discussion is not to imply that learner-centred teaching has become a dominant discourse in Sudan to the extent literature states it has in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tabulawa, 2003, Altinyelken, 2010). Rather, my rationale is to highlight the prevalence of externally developed education initiatives which may not suit the material or perceptual context of education and the conciliation and contestation of such practices in academic discourse. Disrupting simplistic and essentialist binaries of

the culture-pedagogy complex would open up understandings of the complexity and fluidity of education processes in the postcolonial (Tikly, 1999). It is therefore necessary to invent “alternative, culturally responsive pedagogies” for the social practices of teaching and learning (Tabulawa, 2003, p.22). Education research and academic debate have roles to play in the imagining and implementing of this process.

The need for diverse approaches is particularly marked in adult education, the focus of this inquiry. Adult education was included in the Education for All goals, relating to both literacy and life-skills (UNESCO, 2009, p.19), yet behind this global agreement lies disparate purposes, forms and expected outcomes of the field. This is shown in the diversity of approaches, such as lifelong learning and formal, non-formal, vocational and basic education, and varying priorities, including literacy (Freire, 1972), skills formation and economic development (Tikly, 2003) and social justice (Hoff and Hickling-Hudson, 2011). This “terminological and contextual chaos” (Torres, 2003, p.33) indicates the contested nature of international discourse on adult learning. More fundamentally, even the term ‘adult education’ comprises cultural assumptions relating to ‘what is an adult?’ and ‘what is education?’ For example, if education is conceived by Senegalese villagers as “the process by which children are prepared by adults to live harmoniously in a community” (Diouf *et al.*, 2000, p.36), then for them ‘adult education’ appears contradictory. As an extreme case of schooling, adult basic education helps to understand the contextualised socio-cultural diversity of teaching and learning, as it raises specific issues that impact on teacher practice, such as learners’ backgrounds, abilities and motivation (Nafukho *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, reminiscent of the ‘learner-centred’ debate, participatory pedagogy promoted within international discourse on adult education may not align with the teacher practice or the learners’ expectations (Lauglo, 2001, p.40). The specificity of adult education requires understanding of local concepts and practices, such as through this study into teaching in Sudanese ‘second chance’ youth and adult schools, which could provide insights for broad debates on pedagogy and its development in diverse contexts.

#### Conclusion: coming to know a position on understanding teacher practice

Reviewing the literature facilitated the development of a theoretical position on education practices as being complex and socially embedded, which informed the design of this research. Subsequent re-viewing has helped to clarify a researcher position which takes a critical stance towards dominant absolutist notions of what education is and what teaching and learning should be, marginalising concerns for

diverse conceptions and socio-cultural contexts. This analysis centres not only on teacher practice in Sub-Saharan Africa but on the discourses of education research which form the discursive field of this study, in order to make explicit the burgeoning researcher position which drove the design of this inquiry.

That is not to say that understanding is a purely linear process, coming to know academic debates on education in low-income countries has also led to re-viewing my prior experience in Sudan. My perception of the 'pretend' education in a Sudanese university, in this re-view, is embarrassingly Eurocentric. It is based on my assumptions about education objectives and practices, which construct my own western education as the norm, and its colonially-derived Other as deficient. Yet through my shifts in understanding, my criticisms of teaching practices in Sudan have given way to greater consideration of their contextual rationale. Material and structural constraints left my Sudanese colleagues with limited resources and large class sizes, with financial and student in-take decisions imposed through the hierarchical structure of a government institution. Students' requests for 'the sheets' reveals a fixed conception of knowledge, to be assessed through examination. Even the revision practice I commonly observed, in which a learner from a more senior level was sought to 'explain' course contents to small groups, signals a cultural pedagogy. While I privileged the western individualistic notion of revising that I viewed as 'authentic revision', my students' actions show a understanding of learning as 'being explained' which does not neatly fit with my socio-constructivist model of peer learning. These reflect notions of 'banking education' knowledge and teaching (Freire, 1972), an approach which, due to my identity as a British volunteer teacher, I was able to deviate from. By being expected to offer a non-Sudanese education experience and not being constrained by a prescribed curriculum or examinations structure, I had greater liberty than Sudanese teachers in deciding how and what to teach.

This admission of Eurocentric views is not to engage in remorseful self-flagellation for my own cultural partiality. Indeed, my approach to teaching and the establishment of SAFE showed that I positively believed in the skills and abilities of my university students as "an untapped resource" in the existing education structures (SAFE, 2004, p.1). Rather, it is to reflexively illustrate the process of taking a particular stance towards cross-cultural analysis of education, whether through my own experiences or others' postulations through research.

## **Reforming teaching in low-income countries**

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, teacher development is a challenge (Lewin and Stuart, 2002). In Sudan, recruitment and training of teachers is a priority, “first and foremost it is urgent to increase the pool of well trained and qualified teachers” (Badri and Bedri, 2007, p.60). Unsurprisingly, given the critical role teaching plays in schooling, ways to improve teaching and learning processes have been the focus of research and literature in the field (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). Despite this recognition of the problem, ways of training teachers to improve quality of education, like the conception of quality itself, is contested.

In my previous work in Sudan I frequently sought to reform teacher practice by introducing “modern teaching methodologies”, such as “interactive pedagogical techniques, including games, songs and communication activities”, in contrast to the “traditional teaching techniques” which I held partly responsible for the low standard of English (SAFE, 2004, p.2). Such efforts are a tiny part of long-enduring global reform initiatives through development apparatus. Comprising “Well-meant but inappropriate reforms,” these measures have had limited impact on forms of teacher practice in Africa and add up to “considerable failures” on the part of education leaders (Guthrie, 1990, p.119). Considering the education experience more broadly, forms of schooling, pedagogy and knowledge that were developed and spread under colonialism remain resistant to change (Tikly, 2001). The interrelation of context, pedagogy and reform means that it is imperative to,

assess the feasibility of a transferred innovation vis-à-vis the changed cultural setting in order to minimise the chances of tissue rejection of the innovation. This is an area seriously under-researched in Africa, which, ironically, is a big borrower of Western-initiated curricular and pedagogic innovations. (Tabulawa, 1997, p.203)

Given that “Educational effectiveness is so dependent on context that sweeping solutions are unusual” (Guthrie, 1990, p.231), it is necessary to think about the change process, as well as the nature of the reforms themselves, in diverse contexts. For researchers with an interest in making a difference in the site of practice, taking a stance on education practices and their ‘quality’ might be insufficient, a stance on how to bring about change is also required. This process of coming to know education reform practices has included issues of cross-cultural transfer, teacher development and pedagogic renewal.

### **Cross-cultural transfer of education practices**

Because “pedagogical innovations are social constructions influenced by the wider social context” (Tabulawa, 1997, p.189), pedagogy reform efforts are likely to be ineffective if contexts and concepts are not considered. Initiatives to reform teaching have historically focused on pre-service and in-service teacher training, in which the deficit model of teachers is replicated through the conception of the participating teacher as an “empty vessel” (Shaeffer, 1990, p.95). Akyeampong and Stephens (2002) note the dissonance between the experientially-founded professional theories of new teachers and those frequently presented in teacher education programmes. Cultural and contextual factors act as challenges to attempts to shift from teacher-centred to socio-constructivist approaches (Hardman *et al.*, 2008). Research into learner-centred teaching in low-income countries has uncovered challenges in its use, frequently posited as the result of misunderstandings, selective usage or rejection of the approach by educators, based on their conceptions of their practice and school contexts (Mtika and Gates, 2010, Sriprakash, 2010). Negative views of this situation, such as observations that teachers’ views act as “filters” to implementing change initiatives in practice (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007), are reflected in the top-down design of teacher education programmes in which the knowledge and experience of teacher educators are valorised over those of the teachers, to whom modes of practice are transmitted (Shaeffer, 1990). Teacher education is intended to bridge a gap between practitioners’ current practice and their desired behaviour, although there may be lack of clarity of both the nature of such behaviour and the means of realising it (Dyer, 1996). One reason given for the limited impact of teacher education programmes is that they do not challenge the views of teachers regarding the nature and form of quality teaching, principally because teacher educators hold the same conceptions (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). In discussion of an in-service teacher education programme in Namibia, Dembélé and Lefoka (2007) observed that the participating teachers were “aware of the necessity to incorporate learner-centred principles in their teaching, but seemed to lack skills to do it.” The reasons given for the limited impact of training for pedagogic reform relate to the teachers’ “previous schooling experience..., their poor academic and professional backgrounds, as well as teaching conditions” (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007, p.536).

Guthrie (1990) argues that understanding of classroom contexts and teachers’ underlying conceptions of their practice is required to analyse the introduction of education reform. Perceptual, structural and material contexts frame the practice



teachers engage in, and therefore act as barriers to and facilitators of pedagogic reform (Guthrie, 1990). These include examination structures and the views of teachers, students and their parents (Tabulawa, 1997). Returning to the example of 'learner-centred pedagogy', such reforms can be viewed as "dysfunctional" as it does not allow learners to practise rote learning skills or directly relate to examinations (Tabulawa, 1997, p.201). In this 'technicist' view, failure to adopt innovations is attributed to poor training programmes, lack of resources and, ultimately this position "invariably leads to the support of the ideology of blaming the victim, in this case, the teachers" (Tabulawa, 1997, p.192). Re-positioning the focus of 'blame' from African teachers to educational planners, teacher educators and researchers places the process of developing and implementing innovations under the spotlight. As Guthrie (1990, p.119) explains,

All too often the failures have been blamed not on the innovators, who lacked understanding of the theoretical and practical barriers to change, but on the teachers who did understand.

Understanding educators' conceptions and practices is an integral and essential part of the process of teacher development and reforming pedagogy.

Calls for teacher development to "facilitate rather than impose knowledge" (Hardman *et al.*, 2008, p.68) contrasts with common approaches to training, as it would privilege the construction of theorised practices, rather than the imposition of theories and ways of doing. Even some of those who apparently subscribe to the deficit view of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa seem to accept that they have the potential to instigate improvements in their practice. For example, Lockheed and Verspoor (1991, p.91) note that the goal of teacher education is to "encourage teachers to think about how they teach and why they are teaching that way." In coming to know pedagogy reform processes I have been drawn to approaches which include elements of collaboration between teacher educators and practitioners. Such initiatives, including participatory teacher development (Shaeffer, 1990), mentoring (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008) and action research<sup>6</sup>, share a rejection of the 'empty vessel' conception of teachers, preferring contextualised construction of theoretically grounded practice based on relationships, communication and agency. In participatory development, teachers are the agents, rather than the subjects, of change, which enables them to define and analyse challenges in their practice (Shaeffer, 1990). Following a "reflective practitioner" model (Schön, 1983), this approach constructs teachers as autonomous learners, whose practice is grounded in context and theorised according to experiential

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<sup>6</sup> Literature on action research in Sub-Saharan Africa is mainly discussed in Chapter 4 and to inform data analysis subsequently in the thesis.

knowledge and collective dialogue (Shaeffer, 1990). These approaches offer alternative models to technical or deficit views of teachers, as well as insights into the theory-practice dialectic, but also raise a variety of procedural issues.

Despite the dissemination of dominant western education discourses as “best practice” through pre-service and in-service teacher development, “there remain very major gaps in many developing countries between theory and practice” (McGrath, 2008, p.1). Similarly, a “theory-practice gap” between the teachers’ theories of teaching and their practice, resulting from the conditions they operate in, notably large class sizes and an examination-oriented system, has been observed in reports of teacher education projects (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). Such seemingly simple statements belie the complexity of notions surrounding the interrelation of theory and practice, the process of theorisation and the legitimacy of knowledge of practitioners vis-à-vis researchers, teacher educators and policy-makers. Attempts to bring about change in teacher practice have been criticised for “failing to deal with the complexity of teachers’ knowledge, work and identity” and lacking “sufficient grasp of the nature of change processes and the way that these are mediated by cultural, political and economic environments” (McGrath, 2008, p.3). This critique echoes aspects of coming to know in this research which rejects technicist views of education, calling for complex analysis of both existing teaching practices and pedagogic reform processes.

Teachers may develop favourable views of teaching innovations, but then not apply them in their classroom practice. Even when teachers respond favourably to pedagogic reform in training environments, they are often unable to implement changes in their classrooms (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008). Factors leading to this situation include ineffective delivery of training, teachers’ personal stances, school cultures and examinations structures (Mtika and Gates, 2010). It is argued that these problems of pedagogy in low-income countries are not due to infrastructure, but due to the “absence of strategies and skills to cope with” challenges that include teaching several classes simultaneously, needs of new learners and heterogeneous groups of children (Dyer, 1996, p.38), and therefore any innovation must support the development of teachers’ strategies. The process of applying theories through negotiation with teacher practice and contexts requires analysis. Support for trainees, in the form of collaboration with teacher educators is recommended, as they “cannot be effective change agents if they are set adrift without support in their work environments” (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008, p.536). These approaches provide a legitimate and supportive environment for teachers to experiment with their

practice, which they generally have limited opportunity for (Stuart, 1991). Such collaboration or 'co-learning' is based on reflection through a "growing dialogic relationship where a teacher educator and teachers share their perspectives and experiences," which acts as a bridge between theoretical training and contextualised practice (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008, p.543). Peer modelling and feedback among primary teachers has also been identified as a means of changing teaching practices in Sub-Saharan Africa (Hardman *et al.*, 2008). There are multiple challenges to creating an environment for teacher reflection in non-western countries. In Pakistan these include lack of school-based support, limited subject and pedagogic knowledge and absence of habits of questioning and inquiry among teachers (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008). For researchers, however, it is necessary to analyse assumptions of dialogue and relationships in collaborative teacher development (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008), particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Such approaches recognise the socio-cultural complexity of teacher practice, yet are likely to retain a hierarchical oppositioning of mentor-mentee and theory-practice.

As Kanu (2005) has shown in the Pakistan context, western education assumes particular constructions of the self, discursive practices and modes of learning which are culturally particular. Localised adaptable approaches for teachers and teacher educators would respond to calls for,

the abandonment of hegemonizing forms of knowledge that are rooted in Eurocentricism, in favor of dialogue with knowledges and identities which have been submerged or marginalized in the global power/knowledge relations. (Kanu, 2005, p.512)

Therefore, it is necessary to consider other ways of knowing from an epistemological position, not just knowledge itself, but *ways of knowing*. A notion of contingency in education blurs the division between theory and practice by leaving both open to construction and re-construction through ongoing encounters of knowledge and experience. A form of contingency in education has been put forward by Vavrus (2009), who, in her reflections on a period at a teacher education college in Tanzania, described the contextual specificity of teaching as the "cultural politics of pedagogy", which includes the "cultural, economic, and political forces that privilege certain approaches to pedagogy" (2009, p.309). Vavrus propounded an alternative pedagogic model of "contingent constructivism" grounded in the conceptions of the practitioners and her perception of differences between accepted pedagogic practices and school contexts in Tanzania and those supposedly promoted in the college. Vavrus (2009, p.310) proposes,

what is needed is a contingent pedagogy that adapts to the material conditions of teaching, the local traditions of teaching, and the cultural politics of teaching in Africa, and beyond.

In this 'contingent constructivism', inquiry and discussion-based learning is blended with formalistic approaches within teacher-centred formats (Vavrus, 2009). This indicates that effective teaching can take multiple forms and is contextually dependent, further research is required that brings to the fore alternative forms of quality teaching, its context and teacher development processes for pedagogy reform. This provides an opening for my vision of this research in which teacher reflection and resulting changes in practice are a form of teacher development and knowledge production.

### **Conclusion: re-viewing reviewing**

This literature review has articulated my position that teacher practice is a complex, culturally and socially situated activity. Reflexively re-viewing my professional experiences in light of this understanding shows the conceptions and assumptions that ground my practice as an educator are explicit social constructs, not universal aspects of education. Turning to investigating others' practice, this position brings a need to seek to understand the socio-cultural complexities in which education is embedded. My understanding of my previous experience in Sudan has been re-framed through coming to know academic research into education, as has already been glimpsed through re-viewing 'pretend' education practices as congruent with the structural context, concepts and epistemologies of teaching and learning in Sudan. Yet ultimately this literature review is not about teacher practice in Sub-Saharan Africa per se. Originally conceived as an analysis of teaching practices in low-income countries, the subject of analysis has been re-centred to include the discourses of the literature itself. Research ceases to be read as representation of 'the real', but as a claim of how 'the real' should be analysed, represented and interpreted.

Re-viewing the literature review through this theoretical lens requires re-framing the subject of inquiry from teaching to normalising practices, such as education research and teacher development, and seeking alternatives. Within normalising paradigms of pedagogy, teachers' conceptions can be constructed as *misconceptions*. Deficit perceptions of African pedagogy have even been represented through medical metaphors, describing the classroom as "the location of the illness" of poor quality education (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.247), resulting in the prescription of child-centred pedagogy as an "antidote to traditional teaching" (Altinyelken, 2010, p.157). The result

of this “epistemological ethnocentrism” (Reagan, 2005, p.5) is the disempowerment of African teachers, whose pedagogies must be ‘cured’. Valuing understanding teachers’ views in relation to their practice is not to romanticise ‘practitioner knowledge’. Rather, this debate aims to move understanding of practice forward by re-centring the critique from the teachers to the nature and function of the discourse. This critique of prescribed pedagogies is located within broader poststructuralist analyses of ‘development’, which is re-conceptualised as the discursive construction of low-income countries as un/underdeveloped (in contrast to the developed West) which legitimises political, economic and social interventions under the title of development (Escobar, 1995). The development discourse acts as a normalising process, through which those excluded from the ‘norm’ are classified as deficient and become subject to disciplinary mechanisms, whose technical conceptions mask their political and ideological basis (Escobar, 1995). Furthermore, assessment of teaching practices against externally developed conceptions and criteria of quality education, such as ‘learner-centred’ pedagogies, acts as a ‘disciplinary technology’ through which teachers are constructed as deficient and subjects of interventions (Tikly, 2001).

Extending the re-view of my experiences in Sudan and discourses on education and development leads to questioning of assumptions of approaches which do not include inquiry into socio-cultural concepts and practices. Technical views, in particular, can mask the complexity of education, leading to simplistic interventions which frequently fail to consider the interface of external theory and local practice. This stance has formed an ethical position that aspires to undertake research that follows an “orientation stressing the potential rather than the shortcomings of the teachers” (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006, p.173) and seeks to understand the socio-cultural groundings of practice as a necessary precursor to envisioning and implementing reform. Clarification of this researcher position helps in recognition of sources of dissatisfaction with the education reform literature as pertaining to the constructed divide between theory and practice and its oppositional hierarchical positioning in which theory is dominant. Technical discourses decouple theory from the complexity of practice. Furthermore, teacher practice is cast as deficient, to be acted upon by educationalists and policy-makers through the application of theory. Portrayal of the agentic deficiency of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa corresponds with reliance on externally developed theorisation. As discussed about the situation in Ghana,

the culture of dependency on external knowledge in terms of research has become the norm. Teachers continue to rely on externally manufactured knowledge, which may not have any bearing on real classroom experience. (Asimeng-Boahene, 2004, p.277)

So, education planners are in the difficult situation that teachers rely on externally developed knowledge, although it is not relevant to their classroom contexts. Yet they also reject or fail to fully implement theoretically grounded initiatives (Guthrie, 1990).

This study is located within academic debates on teacher practice and pedagogy reform in low-income countries, which form two of the central themes of inquiry. However, reviewing and re-viewing the literature has also resulted in my critique of approaches to research and intervention which fail to adequately account for the socio-cultural specificities of pedagogy and teacher education, leading to the requirement of reflexive analysis of my own research practice. The tripartite core of this inquiry, teaching, its development and research practice, are therefore interwoven and co-constituting.

## 4. Translating a postcolonial ethical stance into an action research methodology

So far in this thesis I have presented the process of coming to know my position as a researcher in the academic field of international education. I have explicitly outlined my values that have guided the design of this research, as it is impossible to remove the researcher's subjectivity from the research process (Lather, 1991). Poststructuralists have shown that all science both constitutes and is constituted by values, albeit masked by discourses of rationality and objectivity (Usher, 1997). My postcolonial ethical stance can be articulated in three interrelated claims,

1. In-depth qualitative knowledge is required to understand teaching practices and education reform
2. Research can 'make a difference' in practice
3. Participation of teachers in research supports education development

A professional stance that developed through my experience of education in Sudan, situated within global debates on pedagogy and teacher development, combined with theorisation of my ethical stance towards cross-cultural educational research, has been articulated through the action research design of this study. In this chapter I outline my position on research issues which have been central to the adoption of an action research model, revolving around the axes of epistemology, 'making a difference' and participation. This forms the foundation for presentation of the translation of my ethical and philosophical stance into a methodological position, which acts as a frame of reference for later analysis. After this, I present the research questions which arose from reviewing theoretical and research literature and my methodological position.

### What is action research?

Action research is "the study of a social situation with a view to improve the quality of an action within it" (Elliott, 1991, p.69), which can be undertaken by educators as an approach to both professional development and researching education practice. Action research<sup>7</sup> is intended to bridge theory and practice, and to bring together the roles of

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<sup>7</sup> Since the term 'action research' was coined by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, it evolved to be used in education by Corey and, later, Stenhouse, who developed a vision of teachers as researchers (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009). This concept of teacher-researchers has been further developed through the classroom action research of Elliott (1991), while Carr and Kemmis (1986) contributed by locating the methodology within critical theory.

researcher and researched (Greenwood, 1999). It is a broad approach, common features of action research inquiries are that,

they seek to improve practice and to contribute to theory; they integrate research and practice; and they tend to be action oriented, exploratory, situational, flexible, adaptive, systematic and rigorous. (O'Sullivan, 2004, p.589)

Applying this approach to an education context is,

a process in which the actors in a social situation, such as a group, a community or a classroom, take deliberate steps to study their situation and to improve it concurrently; systematic enquiry and change are both built into the process. (Stuart, 1991, p.130)

The practitioners' inquiry into their practice leads to change in their practice in such a way that it is informed by their reflexive study. Within education, action research may be undertaken by a teacher or teachers, with or without the involvement of a professional researcher. The bridging of research and practice in action research means that it remedied my reluctance to 'become a researcher' (Dunne *et al.*, 2005) as,

In generating research knowledge *and* improving social action *at the same time*, action research challenges the normative values of two distinct ways of being – that of the scholar and the activist. (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009, p.5)

I have therefore been able to become a researcher while also being a form of practitioner.

The key features of participatory action research are that it is a social process, participatory, practical and collaborative, emancipatory, critical and recursive (reflexive and dialectical) (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998). In action research practitioners engage in spirals of cycles of planning change in their practice, followed by acting, observing and reflecting, although the stages are usually more open and adaptive than this (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998). Approaches to action research are diverse, but follow a similar pattern,

First, the *reconnaissance* phase where what is happening now is systematically investigated. This is followed by an analysis and the *development of interventions* in the field aimed at improving some aspects of practice. Interventions are then *implemented*. This process is *monitored* in order to learn about the nature and management of change, and subsequently *evaluated*. (Dunne *et al.*, 2005, pp.25-6, original italics)

As the final evaluation can also be considered as reconnaissance, the action research cycle continues (Dunne *et al.*, 2005).



Action research has been identified as suited to low-income countries, where both qualitative research and capacity building are required in ongoing efforts to improve the quality of education (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1996). As an inherently flexible methodology, through “remodelling” processes the approach can be changed when translated from ‘Western’ to ‘Southern’ contexts (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009). The take-up of the approach in Sub-Saharan Africa has been slow, but there are an increasing number of reports on action research in such contexts, which inform the following analysis of my objectives in adopting an action research model for this study.

## **Epistemology**

### ***In-depth qualitative knowledge is required to understand teaching practices***

This study was designed in response to critiques of large-scale research, which are “perceived by most teachers as unrelatable to the realities of their specific classrooms” (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1996, p.444), while also failing to capture the quality of education experiences or regional disparities (Buckler, 2011). Data to monitor education quality is limited in Sudan, as in other Sub-Saharan African countries (Tikly and Barrett, 2011) and is primarily monitored through analysis of examination results, which indicate low performance (Badri and Bedri, 2007). However, quantitative outcomes-based assessment gives limited insight into the education process (Barrett, 2011b), whereas detailed qualitative research is suited to inquiry into teaching and learning due to its “concern for context” and “sensitivity to local needs and conditions” (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1996, p.440).

Going beyond calls for research into teachers’ lived experiences (Buckler, 2011) and classroom discourse (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005), the importance of investigating educators’ conceptions and the socio-cultural complexity of pedagogy underlines this study as,

Unless we can interrogate teachers’ understanding of instructional practices from instances within their own context, and gain their viewpoint as to how these accomplish desirable learning, we may only draw superficial conclusions about their competence and understand little about how to improve the less effective teachers. (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006, p.159)

This claim arises from my ontological position that teachers practise according to their contextualised understandings. These must be investigated to gain a meaningful

insight into their teaching, which is an essential part of the process of teacher development and reforming pedagogy.

In designing this inquiry I aimed to generate knowledge based on the “situated understanding” of the participating teachers (Elliott, 1991), and thereby uncover the complex nature of their practice in youth and adult education centres in Khartoum. Action research is of particular relevance to inquiries into African education due to its sensitivity to the context and the focus on the concerns of practitioners, issues which may not occur to outsiders (Pryor, 1998). This approach aims to draw on teachers’ “wealth of ‘practitioner knowledge’” to access “unrivalled intimate knowledge and experience of the school situation”, as well as to penetrate the “deep, intricate and jealously guarded ‘culture of practice’” which other research paradigms are unable to access (Wright, 1988, pp.283 and 285). Such an approach is intended to avoid assessment of teacher practice according to externally developed criteria of ‘quality’ by uncovering the conceptions and reasoning of Sudanese teachers.

Given the subjective, inherently social aspect of education, in this study I attach importance to the “significance of meaning, to a person’s lived experience, and to the social processes through which these are constructed” (Powell, 1997, p.143). Action research involves the study of “the real, material, concrete, particular practices of particular people in particular places,” rather than primarily aiming towards generalisation or abstraction (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998, p.24). Through prolonged dialogic investigation, this research was intended to produce knowledge of “why and how an event happens [that] is understood by reference to concepts, systems, models, structures, beliefs, ideas and hypotheses” (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, cited in Dunne *et al.*, 2005, p.26). The action research was designed so that the participants would discuss and investigate issues relating to education to develop insights and approaches relating to their particular situations as teachers of *their* specific subjects in *their* schools with *their* students.

Through co-generative inquiry, action research accesses “local knowledge and analyses” and is “built deeply into the local context” (Greenwood and Levin, 2005, p.54). The knowledge of the study was constructed and “grounded in individual perspectives and positions” and requires that we,

look for knowledge from different perspectives, in the context of the social and historical situations in which it was discovered, interpreted and constructed. (Griffiths, 1998, p.82)

Through facilitating participants' dialogic reflection, action research

engages people in examining their knowledge (understandings, skills and values) and interpretive categories (the ways they interpret themselves and their action in the social and material world). (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998, p.23)

In action research, teachers become researchers and engage in reflection and discussion to analyse multifaceted aspects of their profession and can collaborate to gain insights from multiple viewpoints, which shed light on the conceptions, context and practices which constitute teaching and learning. Through ongoing dialogue and reflection, the research participants and I had to analyse and interpret "intersubjectively, from one's own point of view and from the point of view of others (from the inside and the outside)" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p.574). The Freirian facilitator promotes reflection of participants by "making the familiar unfamiliar (and making the unfamiliar familiar)" in order to "'uncover' or 'unmask' hidden forces at work in the situation" while also "illuminating and clarifying interconnections and tensions between elements of a setting in terms that participants regard as authentic" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.573).

Participatory research provides a means of liberating "the limited conceptions of knowledge and power tied to the Enlightenment project of the West", opening up legitimate epistemologies based on representation, relations and reflection (Park, 2001, p.83). Such a postmodern approach to research replaces "order, homogeneity and determinacy as the prime goal of research with diversity, difference and indeterminacy" (Usher, 1997, pp.6-7). The methodology of this inquiry is premised on the postmodern acceptance of the limitations of attempting to establish a 'truth' which is generalisable across contexts (Somekh, 2006), and the desirability of contextualised knowledge which can give an insight into a temporally- and spatially-limited arena. The postmodern epistemological stance is such that,

what we call 'truth' is always and only provisional, and that it is always fallible, that it is always shaped by particular views and material-social-historical circumstances, and that it can be approached only intersubjectively – through exploration of the extent to which it seems accurate, morally right and appropriate, and authentic in the light of our lived experience. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.580)

This stance corresponds with calls to 'decolonise' research, which privilege understanding the lived experiences of marginalised groups rather than the construction of grand narratives (Smith, 2005). My socio-constructivist epistemological stance, which corresponds with action research, is such that "the perspectives, opinions and viewpoints which teachers do have are an essential part of the reality of

educational practice” (Wright, 1988, p.287). Action research, therefore, is a tool for gaining contextualised insights and teachers’ experiential knowledge, which are required for understanding the complexity and socially embedded process of schooling.

***Knowledge is required into the complexity of education reform***

Qualitative research on teachers’ conceptions and practice is required as “a better understanding of context is essential if teacher education policies are to be meaningful” (Buckler, 2011, p.244). A pertinent critique of education development research is that,

in rushing to help teachers to behave differently, little time has been spent on asking the question, ‘Why do teachers behave as they do?’. Too much time has been spent on, ‘How can I make them behave otherwise?’. There has been a pre-occupation with moulding teachers’ behaviour and thereby researchers have missed, by default, the need to understand teachers’ un-transformed behaviour first. (Johnson *et al.*, 2000, p.180)

With calls for debates on the nature of quality in diverse contexts becoming increasingly vocal (Barrett, 2011b), research offers a mechanism for investigating, exchanging and critiquing views locally and globally. Observation of lessons can help to clarify diverse notions of quality of education by taking into account the teaching context and educators’ realities, cross-cultural transfer of reforms, questioning of international ‘best practices’ and indigenous approaches (O’Sullivan, 2006). Through in-depth ethnographic research I aimed to not only record the teachers’ “espoused theory”, but also observe their “theory-in-use” (Schön, 1995). In addition, “Combining observation with talking to teachers to uncover their theories of learning and teaching, and then working with them to test these” is required to inform efforts to improve education quality (Croft, 2002b, p.335). My interest in researching teaching in Sudan was not simply to record and analyse, but to support its development through conducting research that could enhance understandings of education reform possibilities. Action research is a way of doing this as collaborative inquiry allows researchers to “gain access to the intimate and passionate purposes of individuals whose lives and work construct those practices” and therefore “has the capacity to transform social practices” (Somekh, 2006, p.2).

The diversity of human action means the social world is constantly changing, which can be studied through action research as it is “primarily applicable for the understanding of change processes in social systems” (Hult and Lennung, 1980, cited in Avison, 1997, p.197). Action research can combine ethnographic and practice research to understand the complexity of education reform, which is required as,

What needs to be remembered, then, is that educational practices are social practices; educational reform is social reform. It must be understood in a social, cultural, political and economic context. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.207)

Action research highlights the potential for change in education, including opportunities and constraints, while also providing examples of the transformation process. Action research facilitates understanding of the complexity of the classroom and 'capillary' power relations that circulate between teachers, learners and other stakeholders, rather than focus on hierarchical power relationships in schools, as well as the curriculum and examinations. Action research investigates education processes as embedded in society,

in considering how practitioners may help to bring about rational educational change it has to be acknowledged that educational institutions are shaped by social pressures, practices and policies outside practitioner control. Changing educational practices and institutions, therefore, not only requires the involvement of practitioners in changing their practices, but also in confronting the constraints on their action. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.206)

Action research therefore provides a way of analysing changes in pedagogy and the relating environmental, structural and perceptual constraints and opportunities. Processes of dialogue and reflection lead to the questioning of personal and institutional assumptions, thereby revealing the power relations in which processes of change are embedded and the "conflict between forces for change and process of institutional-cultural reproduction" (Somekh, 2006, p.2). Through use of the action research model, I aimed to uncover not just teachers' views and their role in professional practice, but also the ideological and political structures in which the education system is embedded, as well as institutional-cultural reproduction and change processes. The assumption of teacher agency in action research contrasts with research which focuses on deficits of practitioners, learners and resources and thereby discursively disempowers teachers and research subjects.

## **'Making a difference' and participation**

### ***Research can 'make a difference' in practice***

Upon entering academia I retained a propensity towards making a direct impact in education, in which teachers play a key role (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). Coming to know the diversity of methodological approaches to research and correlating ethical positions opened my eyes to the potential for making an impact in the field of practice. Gone was my naïve positivistic understanding of researcher activities: not only *could*

education research have a positive impact on participants, for the purposes of my doctoral study, it *should*. By involving teachers as action researchers, I anticipated that the study would have positive outcomes for the participants, their teaching and, consequently, their learners. This would satiate my desire to continue some form of ‘practitioner’ role that ‘makes a difference’ to education, rather than simply recording and analysing social practices for the purpose of publication in the academy.

As action research is “investigating reality in order to transform it” (Fals Borda, 1978, p.33), the inherent role of change in the methodology is clear. Participatory action research, which has an emancipatory theoretical basis, begins with the belief in the capacity of ordinary people to create transformative and action-oriented knowledge (Smith, 1997). Growing from the work of Paulo Freire (1972), participatory action research makes a link between research and social transformation as,

By involving people in gathering information, knowledge production itself may become a form of mobilization; new solutions or actions are identified, tested and then tried again. (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006, p.77)

Working collaboratively, this research aims to uncover any “distortions, incoherence, contradictions, and injustices” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.579) in teacher practice. The methodology is a means of making a difference,

because action research deliberately mixes discourses – and thereby erodes the boundaries between action and knowledge-generation – that it is uniquely suited to generating and sustaining social transformation. (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009, p.6)

It is therefore suited to both undertaking change and understanding change processes. This corresponds with efforts to decolonise research by building the capacity of educators in formerly colonised countries (Smith, 2005).

Action research, especially critical approaches, has been identified as having potential emancipatory outcomes (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and aims,

not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them. In particular it seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society. (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.28)

This explicit political motivation corresponds with the emancipatory objectives of postcolonialism. It is a potentially liberatory process, helping people to “unshackle themselves” from “the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust and unsatisfying” social structures, with the important proviso that,

if they can't release themselves from these constraints, how best to work within and around them to minimise the extent to which they contribute to irrationality, unproductivity (inefficiency), injustice and dissatisfactions (alienation) (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998, p.24)

The emancipatory action research process involves a "collaborative, critical and self-critical inquiry by practitioners...into a major problem or issue or concern in their own practice" (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996, p.3). Through undertaking research, participants are able to develop their 'critical consciousness' of illegitimate structural and interpersonal constraints and begin to move towards freedom, autonomy and social justice (Cohen *et al.*, 2000), as I envisaged in my postcolonial views influenced by Freire.

By facilitating an action research project for the teachers, this study followed a,

research tradition that encourages teachers to investigate their own practice on the job [that] will by definition be educational, in that it attempts to make sense of the reality of immediate situations and enables enquirers to account for their own educational development (McNiff, 1988, p.11)

This research is implemented according to the belief that by articulating their views and reflecting on their teaching, teachers may improve their professional practice, thereby falling within the "reflective practitioner" paradigm of Schön (1983). By acting as a means to promote greater criticality of practice (Somekh, 2006) amongst teachers with a low level of training, practitioners' experience was valorised as a source for professional development. This approach could bridge the disjuncture between the teacher education and the 'chalk-face' realities in African schools (Pryor and Meke, 2008). Reflection and practice, leading to praxis, was anticipated to support teachers' development through use of particular pedagogical techniques or by forming the self-image of "reflective educators", rather than "highly skilled technicians" (McNiff, 1988, p.xiv), and the development of propositional knowledge, 'know that', and procedural knowledge, 'know how' (Ryle, 1949, cited in Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

Proponents of participatory educational research emphasise the benefits for participants, including confidence, professional interest and skills (Heneveld, 2007). Literature on action research emphasises the complexity and messiness of the development process (Walker, 1994), which leads to diverse and unpredictable outcomes that can be broadly categorised as technical, practical and emancipatory (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Examples of forms of outcomes observed in action research include teaching methods (Stuart and Kunje, 1998), adaption of learner-centred pedagogy (O'Sullivan, 2004) and teacher reflectiveness and confidence

(Walker, 1994). However, some action research is criticised for leading to superficial technical changes, rather than critical transformations (Dunne *et al.*, 2005). The diversity of outcomes, both within and between projects, shows the flexibility of the methodology. As a result, the question ‘what can happen?’ when action research is used in different cultural, environmental and institutional contexts is open to academic analysis.

Admittedly, as the one who hopes to gain a doctoral qualification, I am likely to be the greatest beneficiary from this study. However, the design of this inquiry was intended to facilitate critical reflection and dialogue amongst all participants, as well as more engaged and creative teaching methods, through mutual learning. This would take a step towards balancing the positive outcomes of professional development for all involved.

#### The other side of the ‘making a difference’ coin

My position on the possibility of action research to make a difference for teachers and learners was matched by my negative view regarding the limited potential of research to impact on education policy, planning and practice in Sudan. My observation of empty desks and bureaucracy in Sudanese federal and state ministries means I have limited expectations of government action to improve the quality of education. This sentiment was summed up by a colleague following completion of an assignment for a Sudanese ministry, who replied to my pondering about any potential impact of the findings in the final report by stating that it would be given “a beautiful place on a shelf”. Furthermore, the theoretical focus of university-based teacher training in Sudan, and the limited use of the practicum, means that even if my findings were to inform Sudanese teacher educators, I believed it might be articulated as theoretical knowledge, rather than as the basis of reformed practice. If teaching policies are not being implemented in practice, as shown in research (O’Sullivan, 2004, Altinyelken, 2010), what would be the point in me undertaking research to inform policy? Besides, Sudanese teachers and teacher educators would have limited access to any of my research publications, particularly outside Khartoum. Given this broad context, a small-scale intervention through action research seemed the most appropriate means of enacting my ethical stance towards benefiting an aspect of education in Sudan and avoiding producing research that simply acts as *kalam fadi* (‘empty speech’) in the site of practice.



### ***Participation of teachers in research supports education development***

Pedagogic innovations depend on the understandings and changes in practice of teachers, non-implementation by practitioners may result from a disjuncture between theory and practice. Other studies point out the inappropriateness of some interventions, such as particular visions of 'learner-centredness', to the context of African classrooms (O'Sullivan, 2006). Action research for investigating education in diverse contexts is part of the growing influence of the participation discourse in development (Chambers, 1997). Participation of teachers in research arises from claims that conventional research often makes limited impact on educators in Sub-Saharan Africa that can lead to improved learning, due to the exclusion of practitioners' voices, while generalisations about education by researchers "are inadequate for producing the shared knowledge among practicing educators that will commit them to changes in educational practice" (Heneveld, 2007, p.657). This indicates a contradiction between theories and practice, manifested in the "gap between professional knowledge and the demands of real-world practice" (Schön, 1983, p.45), and the role of research in maintaining this. This gap becomes a chasm when the theories are externally developed and contextually inappropriate, yet full implementation on the part of the educator is expected.

Recalling Schön's geological allegory,

On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the use of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowlands, problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution. (Schön, 1995, p.28)

Figuratively locating myself, as a university-based researcher, on the high ground and replacing the 'swampy lowlands' with the desert climate of Khartoum schoolyards, the sentiment is clear: theory and practice are distinct in their focus, approaches and attitudes towards messiness of process and understanding. For professional knowledge to be seen as legitimate in academic regimes of truth, theorisation from the 'high ground' has been predominantly based on "technical rationality" in which "practice is instrumental, consisting in adjusting technical means to ends that are clear, fixed, and internally consistent" (Schön, 1995, p.29). Models of technical rationality are dominant in the development sector (Wallace *et al.*, 2007), while masking of such rational models as neutral and value-free have been critiqued in education (Tabulawa, 2003). Action research bridges the constructed division between 'high ground' theory and 'swampy lowland' practice in education as both are the subjects of transformation,

Participatory action research does not regard either theory or practice as preeminent in the relationship between theory and practice; it aims to articulate and develop each in relation to the other through critical reasoning about both theory and practice and their consequences. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.598)

Teacher-researchers hone their 'knowing-in-action' (Schön, 1995) through processes of reflection, dialogue and practice, leading to praxis. By constructing knowledge with teachers in action research, this study offers a means of bridging theory and practice as mutually informing aspects of education reform.

The question "can the subaltern speak?" has preoccupied postcolonial theorists (Spivak, 1993), who have explored ways of enacting the agency of marginalised people through research, rather than their conventional roles as subjects of studies on issues of external importance. Action research is a form of resistance to conventional 'colonial' research practices, which are critiqued as,

a means of normalizing or domesticating people to research and policy agendas imposed on a local group or community from central agencies often far removed from local concerns and interests (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.572)

Action research is collaborative process, described as "co-operative inquiry" which is undertaken "*with* people rather than *on* people" (Heron and Reason, 2006, p.145). Participants can work in partnership to implement change, as the transformative character of action research allows participants to,

make critical analyses of the nature of their practices, their understandings, and the settings in which they practice in order to confront and overcome irrationality, injustice, alienation, and suffering *in these practice settings and in relation to the consequences of their practices in these settings*. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.592, original italics)

This aspect responds to my dissatisfaction with some research that investigates teaching practices, but not teachers' underlying reasoning, as well as concerns surrounding the cross-cultural transfer of education initiatives (Guthrie, 1990). Action research was appealing as it is,

a grassroots, development-oriented approach, dialogic rather than didactic..., which might encourage the growth of endogenous models rather than uncritical acceptance of imported ones (Stuart, 1991, p.132)

Deep educational change requires transformation in materials, methods and theories of learning (Fullan, 1991) and action research offers a tool to bring about such change in educators' conceptions and practices (Walker, 1994). By engaging teachers in research, I aimed to identify local understandings of education, teacher practice, and

ways of improving it, as well as any obstacles to such reform. Rather than imposing approaches, action research allows practitioners to question, analyse and formally theorise their practice and creates space for experimentation and adaptation of theories by negotiation of contextual and perceptual factors.

### Participation within action research

Participation is fundamental to action research. McTaggart (1997, p.28) defines “authentic participation” as,

sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership, that is, responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice.

In contrast, simple ‘involvement’, possibly under the guise of ‘participation’, “creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realization of the plans of others” (McTaggart, 1997, p.28). In this research I imposed the concepts of collaborative action research and dialogic and reflective processes, which must be problematised as they differ from pedagogical approaches found in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Pryor, 1998). This approach contrasts with the model of teachers in low-income countries as lacking agency within oppressive hierarchical structures and material conditions and their depiction or self-views “as government servants, as ‘deliverers’ of a nationally-decided curriculum, rather than as ‘reflective practitioners’” (Stuart and Kunje, 1998, p.379). The challenge of implementing an action research project in such a context is described as a “struggle with the tensions that exist around teachers’ agency within a professional culture where taking responsibility for one’s practice is not considered normal” (Pryor and Meke, 2008, p.4). Furthermore, teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa operate within institutionalised power structures, which could impact on their ability or sense of agency to undertake action research (Asimeng-Boahene, 2004). Walker concurs that action research is based on values that include “teacher empowerment, democratic practice, enlightenment, and emancipation”, leading to tensions between the didactic, authoritarian approach to education in post-Apartheid South Africa, and the expectations of the reflexive practitioner in action research (1994, p.66). While it is essential to recognise diversity of approaches to learning between cultures, some research is open to accusations of cultural essentialising, such as claims that Islamic culture and social structures limit the reflective capacities of teachers from the United Arab Emirates (Richardson, 2004). However, others rebut such claims, citing the possibility of reflection through supportive processes in teacher education (Clarke and Otaky, 2006). In Malawi, Stuart and Kunje (1998, p.381) recognised the need to

assess the extent to which the “climate and conditions at the school would permit such an approach to problem solving,” as well as the need for support and facilitation.

It is vital that I question my role in the inquiry, as “researchers must be self-aware of their position within the relationship and aware of their need for engagement in power-sharing processes” (Smith, 2005, p.97). Although collaborative and participatory methods are used to investigate the lived experience of groups and communities, the efficacy of such projects to deal with diversity has been questioned with particular critique on failing to account for imbalanced power relations between participants, such as those resulting from differences in age, gender, economic status, ethnicity or religion, or varying personal attributes, such as confidence, communication skills and degrees of commitment (Guijt and Shah, 1998). Furthermore, the different power positions of university-based academicians and school teachers become emphasised in low-income country contexts, requiring reflection on the “real power and skill differences” (Walker, 1994, p.70). According to Walker “teachers do not need experts to intellectualise for them, although they may need support in theorising their practice” (1994, p.67), but she highlighted the tension between promoting reflection and intervening in teacher practice to provide critique. Yet, by “handing over the stick” (Chambers, 1997), the authority of the academic knowledge of the facilitator becomes decentred to support teacher learning and confidence. The role of the ‘expert’ becomes facilitation of the articulation, probing and development of teachers’ expertise.

### Ethnography and action research

While the centrality of action research to the project has been underscored by its inclusion in the title of this thesis, I have also drawn on both the methodology and methods of ethnography in the design and implementation of the study. The characteristics of ethnography are relevant to this study, namely the focus on understanding social behaviour and insider perspectives within a specific setting, and the use of rigorous qualitative research methods to identify arising concepts and theories which are grounded in the data (Pole and Morrison, 2003). The research aimed to understand teachers’ practice and their conceptions, an ethnographic angle given the methodology’s focus on insider accounts of social action. The change process in the action research facilitated observation and recording of the participants’ situated understanding of the developmental experience, providing rich insights into processes of teacher education or pedagogy reform, based on the practitioners’ perceptions. Ethnographic approaches traditionally attempt to limit the impact of the

researcher and to reflexively engage with the issues raised by researcher participation in the research site. However, this is recognised as problematic and questioned in such approaches as 'militant anthropology' (Scheper-Hughes, 1995), which corresponds with my desire to 'make a difference' in the field.

As the classic ethnographic research method is participant observation, these disciplinary debates ultimately raise the question: 'participation in what?' On a conventional level, I followed ethnographic approaches as a participant observer in the sites of investigation, by joining the teachers in their schools, speaking with students and even on a few occasions teaching English when a teacher was absent. Furthermore, as a participant in the action research process, with its explicit objective of change, I gained ethnographic insights into the developmental process. Overall, the action research facilitated a greater degree of participation between me and the teachers. Throughout the study, I also drew on ethnographic techniques, including observations in schools and classrooms, discussions with teachers and students, as well as some formal interviews, all recorded in my omnipresent research journals. This form of participant observation facilitated insights into the practices and understandings of the teachers. Furthermore, in their action research projects, the teachers also drew on ethnographic methods by keeping simple observation notes and interviewing their students and learners in order to gain deep understanding of their research topic. Overall, ethnography and action research are complementary and mutually informing methodologies, as action research facilitates a greater degree of participation.

Ethnography provided a basis for the action research, as it enabled me to understand the practices and underlying conceptions of the teachers, and also helped to clarify the teachers' understandings. I expected that the teachers' participation in action research would provide greater detail to my ethnographic insights, yet the participants' research in fact led to greater complexity of understanding as my concepts were questioned and re-constructed as their inquiries progressed. This is evident in the case of Yahya's study (Chapter 6) and the questioning of fundamental notions, such as 'being educated'. While ethnography is commonly associated with the field experience, the approach is also pertinent to the post-fieldwork period, due to its concern for representation. This focus on reflexivity in data analysis and processes of writing and representation is in alignment with ethnographic concerns of 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). It is this requirement for reflexivity in the writing and representation of research which has informed aspects of interpretation and discussion in relation to the reflexive research question on my own learning about research. In sum, the result

of the mutually facilitating ethnographic and action research approaches is a thick description of both teachers' practices in adult education in Khartoum and the action research intervention, which highlights the conceptions and perspectives of the participants throughout the developmental process and makes explicit reflexive considerations raised in the study.

### Conclusion

The action research design of this study derives from my ethical position towards epistemology, participation and 'making a difference' that were theorised through postcolonial and Freirian literature. They also correspond to my stance that in-depth qualitative and participatory inquiry provides the necessary complexity of understanding of pedagogy and its reform in low-income countries that bridges divisions of theory and practice in order to support its development. Explicitly establishing the theoretical basis for following action research facilitates subsequent analysis of researcher practice that can inform postcolonial and cross-cultural inquiry.

### **Research questions**

In this thesis I have narrated a story of the awakening of a researcher position, through the postcolonial theorisation of an ethical stance, informed by tripartite sources: my experiential and intellectual encounters with Sudanese education, research into pedagogy and its reform in Africa and theoretical frameworks for analysis in the social sciences, principally postcolonialism and poststructuralism. The elements of pedagogy, teacher development and my own researcher practice form the core of this study and are articulated in the overarching research question:

*What knowledge can I generate about teaching, its development and my researcher practice through collaborative action research with teachers in Sudanese youth and adult education schools?*

The multifaceted focus of the investigation encompasses reconnaissance into teaching practices and adult education, the processes of action research and teacher development and reflexive analysis of knowledge construction through this study. This overarching question interweaves the three strands of this inquiry, which derive from the following sub-questions.

*1. What did I learn about teachers' pedagogic practice and school context through action research?*

I have presented how working in Sudan was a process of coming to know the society through a gradual layering of understanding and experience. My insights have been shown to be partial and provisional, leaving space for in-depth academic inquiry that draws on my existing local knowledge and language skills. As a teacher in Sudan I attempted to design and conduct lessons that would suit the culture, competencies and contexts of my students. This recognition of the social embedded nature of pedagogy was retained in my role as a researcher, leading to my critique of superficial, technicist models of pedagogy. Freire and postcolonial theory have informed the design of this participatory study as a means of accessing teachers' practice and reasoning. This highly contextualised knowledge is intended to contribute to academic debates on pedagogy and its reform in low-income countries.

*2. How did the teachers' practice and understandings of adult education change through undertaking action research?*

Doctoral studies have sharpened my professional focus on teacher education and development that was first indicated by the establishment of SAFE and provision of training workshops in Sudan. Literature on teacher development has emphasised the limitations of efforts to institute pedagogy reform, which I have claimed results from the disjuncture between theory and practice. By following an action research methodology, this inquiry attempts to both interrogate and reform teacher practice, thereby offering insights for teacher education. This model of active participation of teachers also corresponds with my postcolonial ethical stance of making a difference in the field of practice.

*3. How did my understandings of my practice as a postcolonial cross-cultural action researcher change through the study?*

The portrayal of my shift from teacher to action researcher over the preceding sections of the thesis illustrates the role of identity and values in research. Theorised according to postcolonial theory, my ethical stance has prioritised participation in knowledge construction, local knowledge and conceptions and 'making a difference' as central to this study. I translated these positions into selection of an action research approach in alignment with literature that claims the methodology offers a means of achieving

'empowerment' of participants and 'making a difference' in terms of observable outcomes, although these claims are contested. Responding to this question considers shifts in understanding of the action research approach, which could inform its adaptation for teacher education in low-income countries. Furthermore, the reflexive nature of the study provides deeper insights into knowledge construction and representation in cross-cultural research, as well as the tensions and opportunities in undertaking such studies.



## **5. Doing action research: “a wonderful mess”**

The action research conducted with Sudanese teachers in youth and adult education was completed in a dual-phase process. I present the practical research steps undertaken during fieldwork in Khartoum with a group of teachers from six schools over a one-year period. This acts as an introduction to the eclectic research process, which I described during fieldwork as “a wonderful mess”, to be analysed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. In this chapter I give an overview of the research design, and then present the chronological stages of the field study: gaining access and introducing the participants; the overall reconnaissance phase; the action research phase, including reconnaissance and developmental stages. This process is represented through a frame of linear chronology, for the sake of narrative clarity, although the process consisted of blurred stages, and cyclical feedback and feedforward of data and knowledge construction, which were experienced differently by the various participants.

### **A starting point for researching Sudanese youth and adult education**

Throughout this thesis I elaborate on the process of coming to know teacher practice in youth and adult schools in Omdurman, a largely residential area of Khartoum, demarcated by its location west of the River Nile. This is not to imply that I approached these institutions as a clean slate. I had developed a degree of familiarity with teacher practice in adult education as I had organised and monitored SAFE voluntary placements at four of the schools in the research, as well as in other centres.

Broadly, I could identify with the teachers, having worked in education in Khartoum for several years. As SAFE Director I was aware of the difference between the socio-economic situation of some SAFE volunteers (Sudanese university students) and the learners in youth and adult schools, particularly in signs of relative material wealth, such as clothing. I also noted the enthusiasm of the adult learners for education, despite their impoverished circumstances. Through relations I built with SAFE, I co-taught an English language teaching (ELT) course for adult education teachers with the British Council in 2005. I renewed and strengthened some of these relations through undertaking this research. Between 2003 and 2005 I taught English in a library in Omdurman close to several of the adult education schools, so it was unsurprising that I met several ex-students in the Khartoum Evening School which offers English courses in addition to adult basic education.

While this research is centred on teachers and their practice, it is set amongst Sudanese youth society, as most of the learners in the study are aged in their teens and twenties. Having lived and worked in Khartoum in my mid-twenties, I had developed relevant cultural knowledge. By building friendships with my students from university and adult education, I had participated in their social life over several years. I had taught English in adult education in Omdurman and therefore had friends with similar backgrounds, socio-economic circumstances and daily experiences as some of the learners in this study. I had spent time with them in their homes and broken fast with them and their families while fasting during Ramadan. I also lived, like some of them, in a *beit 'azabi* (unmarried men's houseshare) with other international volunteers and, due to our limited stipend, eaten limited local staples, such as lentils and *ful* (beans). I had sat with these friends over tea or *shisha* (smoking water pipe) or at the internet cafe and discussed studies, employment and other issues that young men talk about. Through chatting with friends my Sudanese Arabic skills developed, including some of the street slang used by a *shamasi* ('street child'), which sometimes caused people to describe me as *mufetih*<sup>8</sup> (observant and analytical). Although clearly an outsider, I was frequently told "you have become Sudanese", which I subsequently pondered,

*Should I be more reflexive about the "you have become Sudanese" comments? I tend to just brush them off. (26 May 2009)*

My knowledge of Sudanese society, customs and language is likely to have impacted on how I was perceived by the research participants.

### Adult education in Sudan

Through arranging SAFE volunteer placements in adult education centres, I developed personal and professional relationships with the adult learning sector, which played a role in my choice of adult education schools as the site for this study. For a prolonged period, governmental education policy has highlighted youth education as an 'urgent necessity', citing the large number of out-of-school young people as a challenge to achieving Education for All (UNESCO, 2000). Adult and youth education centres operate in Khartoum and across Sudan, and the Federal Ministry of Education has expressed intention to expand this provision, particularly in war-affected areas (General Directorate of Educational Planning, 2004). Adult education is overseen by the

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<sup>8</sup> *Mufetih* has connotations of having open eyes. According to the Sudanese joke, a person who is *mufetih* may be asked, "Were you born in an eye hospital?"

Sudanese National Council for Literacy and Adult Education, under the General Secretariat for Literacy and Adult Education of the Ministry of Education (The National Council for Literacy and Adult Education, 2008). These are responsible for the operation of adult education provision, including accelerated learning institutions, vocational training and literacy classes. While some adult education and vocational training institutes are directly operated by these bodies, the adult education schools in this study were established and managed by the headteachers and staff. The schools pay annual registration fees to the Adult Education Unit of the local government, and receive some administrative support, such as in arranging student participation in public examinations and monitoring of teacher and school performance. The adult education schools operate in the afternoon and evening, and generally use the buildings of government schools, which are usually vacant during these periods<sup>9</sup>. Rather than government support, these adult education schools receive the funding for their operating costs from the monthly fees paid by the learners.

The provision of education in these centres offers the students, who often have paid work or family responsibilities in the morning, 'second chances' to gain qualifications and subsequently access economic opportunities (World Bank, 2007). The need for 'second chances' and the existence of adult education schools derives from the socio-economic and political situation of Sudan, including the effects of prolonged conflict in South Sudan and Darfur, as well as lack of investment in the regions. The students in the adult education centres are generally from impoverished, though disparate backgrounds, often from families who are economic migrants or displaced from areas of conflict. Many of the learners are teenagers and young adults, who often dropped out of basic school as children due to impoverishment and family responsibilities, such as following the death of a parent. Other students access adult education without any experience of formal schooling, or having only attended a *khalwa* (Qur'an school). The adult education schools in this study offer a compressed basic school programme, which allows learners to develop literacy and numeracy skills, and gradually progress until the eighth grade and completion of the Basic School Certificate. This structure is integrated with the formal education ladder, so it is possible for adult learners to progress to secondary school and university.

These schools therefore make formal basic education available to youth and adult learners as a 'second chance'. While there are specific adult education textbooks for

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<sup>9</sup> This was the case with four of the schools in the study, the remaining belonged to a religious school and a trade union organisation.

the lower level 'eradicating illiteracy' phase, which were used in some of the schools, in subsequent levels standard textbooks were used. Furthermore, some adult education teachers also teach in standard morning schools. This context provides an extreme case of Sudanese schooling, in which the content and processes of basic education are followed by marginalised youth and adult learners, who have diverse backgrounds, experiences and aspirations. This provides a rich site for the investigation of the concepts and practices of teachers and processes of their development.

## Starting the research project

### Access

I was aware that access to Sudan would be a challenge, having had difficulties in gaining visas in the past<sup>10</sup>. A visa application submitted to the Sudanese Embassy in the UK generally requires authorisation by a Ministry in Khartoum. An unexpected offer of a short-term, part-time English language teaching position (and visa sponsorship) provided a serendipitous and timely means of gaining entry to Sudan.

Based on my experience of working as an independent foreigner to establish SAFE, I believed that my interaction with government officials to gain access would be enhanced by using *wasta* (personal connections). I, therefore, arranged for a headteacher of an adult education school that I knew through SAFE to introduce me to the Acting Head of the Adult Education Unit of Omdurman Locality. At the meeting with this gatekeeper, my doctoral research was authorised without hesitation. I was told I could commence *"As now, because you're well known, there's no any problem"* (9 July 2009) and full access to the adult education schools of my choice was allowed without conditions.

Access to the six sample schools was confirmed in meetings with each headteacher, who acted as secondary gatekeepers. Each headteacher was asked to identify three teachers as research participants, with the request that at least one was female. The headteachers' acceptance of the research was facilitated by the official permission from the Adult Education Unit, my previous relations with five of the schools and my identity as a western academic who had previously worked for the British Council in Sudan.

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<sup>10</sup> While working in Sudan, the frequency of international friends and colleagues being forced to wait outside the country for a visa to be issued led us to affectionately name the experience '*visa limbo hell*'.

### Returning to Sudanese adult education

To undertake this study I returned to adult education schools in Omdurman, where the students, mainly teenagers and adults<sup>11</sup>, follow a compressed curriculum which allows the students to complete the eight grades of basic level schooling in under four years<sup>12</sup>. In addition, two of the schools in the study also run an 'English section' which offers affordable open English language courses to students who range from uneducated young people to university students and graduates. In all the schools, classes are co-educational, with female students usually representing up to a third of the students in the class. The schools are open in the late afternoon and early evening for two to four hours each day. Adult education schools are located across Khartoum and in other cities in Sudan. There are 44 centres providing adult education, in various forms, registered with one Local Government in Omdurman.

By their nature as older learners who did not attend or complete basic level schooling, the students in the adult education schools are from impoverished backgrounds, with family origins from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and South Sudan, as well as other regions. They predominantly live in economically-disadvantaged areas on the outskirts of Omdurman. The students have a low level of educational experience, ranging from no schooling to limited studies in a standard basic school or through studying in a *khalwa* (Qur'an school). Almost all the male students and some of the female students work in the informal sector during the day, otherwise the female students have family responsibilities<sup>13</sup>.

Adult education schools are located within the buildings of government schools and other institutions and operate independently. Most of the schools in the study are one-storey concrete buildings, while one, located in a social club belonging to a union, uses cane shelters as classrooms. In oversubscribed schools, a limited number of classes, usually lower grades, may be taught in the schoolyard. The schoolyards provide a social space for learners and teachers before, during and after lessons, with tea sellers

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<sup>11</sup> The youngest age for entry into adult education is eight years old, as this is the cut-off point for standard basic schools to accept a new student into Class 1.

<sup>12</sup> Classes 1 to 4, which each last six months, are the 'eradicate illiteracy' levels, and include lessons in Arabic language, maths and Islamic or Christian studies. Classes 5 and 6, which also last six months each, are the 'supplementary' levels, and include additional subjects, such as English language and 'Man and the Universe' (covering elements of science and geography). Classes 7 and 8 each last for one year, and follow the same syllabus as in standard basic schools.

<sup>13</sup> Female students with family responsibilities are most likely to help their parents or siblings, as there are few married women studying in these schools.

on the school grounds and mats for prayers. Learners in adult education schools pay fees, which vary between schools and levels. Fees range from US\$6 to \$20 per month, as well as a registration fee (usually around US\$6) and other occasional costs, such as examination fees and for electricity. The higher grades of the basic level of adult education are more expensive than the lower grades, as these are the examination grades (Grades 7 and 8).

### Selected schools and participants

I selected the six schools from Omdurman Locality as field sites, with the intention of visiting one each day<sup>14</sup>. The rationale for selection included my prior relations with four of the schools through SAFE, as well as contact with the other two, and, pragmatically, their close location to public transport routes. An additional reason for selecting Al-Kubri School, a mixed but predominantly southern and Christian school, was for increased representation of the diversity of Sudanese cultures.

A total of 19 teachers participated in the first phase of the research<sup>15</sup>, including two of the headteachers. The group of participants was fairly representative of adult education teachers. For example, most of the teachers in the adult education schools have university degrees. Some studied in the Faculty of Education, while the remainder have received little or no teacher training. Many work as teachers in standard morning schools or in jobs outside education, others are also university students or recent graduates. The teachers in these schools generally live in fairly impoverished areas of Omdurman and, like the students, come from diverse areas of Sudan, including the Nuba Mountains, Darfur and northern Sudan. Therefore, they belong to different tribes, some speak indigenous languages, in addition to Arabic, and they practise different customs and traditions, however, they have the shared experience of living, studying and working in Khartoum.

The participants' motivations for participation varied, with composite reasons including a desire to gain professional experience and to learn about issues in adult education and research, to practise English with a native speaker and to be involved in a doctoral study with a western researcher. The teachers' commitment to the research also varied, as indicated by irregular attendance at discussion sessions by some of the

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<sup>14</sup> All the schools close on Friday and those with a Christian affinity also close on Sunday.

<sup>15</sup> Three teachers from six schools, plus one additional teacher who joined to replace his colleague who withdrew to attend a course for his non-education daytime employment.

participants. I recruited a relatively high number of participants as I anticipated some would drop out prior to the start of the action research phase.

#### Gender and ethnicity in participant recruitment

The majority of the teachers in the adult education schools are male, but women are also represented on staff. There were no female English teachers in any of the participating schools, so my ability to conduct the research in Arabic facilitated female participation in the project. My request to headteachers that one of the three participants from each school should be female was moderately successful, only one school did not identify any female staff member who was interested in participating. This was balanced by the selection of two female teachers by another school. One headteacher included a female member of staff from the Adult Education Unit of Omdurman Locality as a participant, although she did not regularly teach in the school.

In the hope of forming an ethnically and religiously diverse group of participants, I deliberately included a predominantly southern, Christian school in the project. This was intended to move towards greater representation of the multicultural composition of the country, although all the schools are ethnically and religiously diverse. However, I found the practice of 'ticking off' categories of participants from different ethnic groups as problematic, as the project was a form of teacher development, not a purely anthropological exercise. Furthermore, two of the teachers put forward by the headteacher of the southern, Christian school were female, Muslim teachers from western regions of northern Sudan. This highlights the complexity of social relations in Sudan which do not fit easily into essentialising ethnic divisions.

### **Research design**

This investigation takes the form of a collaborative action research project (McTaggart, 1997), drawing on an interpretive framework of action research (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). The action research project involved "self-reflective enquiry" by participants (Carr and Kemmis, 1986), combined with ongoing co-generative processes of interpretation and analysis, resulting in knowledge being co-constructed through a collaborative cycle of dialogue and reflection by the researcher and research participants (Levin, 1999). The research began with an exploration of the teachers' views of their practice, the "thematic concern" of the initial stage of the collaborative inquiry (McTaggart, 1997, p.27), followed by action research conducted by the teacher-

researchers. Overall, the fieldwork of this study lasted from June 2008 until July 2009. The field research was divided into two phases: the overall reconnaissance phase and the action research phase.

### Phase 1: Reconnaissance

Following an initial period of setting up the study and gaining access, the first research phase lasted from August to November 2008. This reconnaissance phase followed participatory and ethnographic research approaches, in which 19 teachers participated in weekly discussions of issues in adult education, combined with my school visits, classroom observations and informal interviews. Discussion topics included teaching and learning, students in adult education schools, students' development, culture and education and the textbooks. The purpose of the overall reconnaissance phase was for the teachers to articulate and clarify their understanding of their practice and theorisation, thereby enhancing my own comprehension of teaching in youth and adult education in Khartoum, which would enhance my ability to support subsequent teacher-led initiatives during the action research phase. A prolonged reconnaissance phase also facilitated the development of relationships between the group of participants and with me (Pryor, 1998).

### Phase 2: Action research

The second stage of the study, the main action research phase, lasted from January to June 2009. The ten teacher-researchers had all participated in the first phase and had exhibited high levels of commitment to the study. Over the six-month period of the action research phase, the participants implemented individual research projects relating to an aspect of youth and adult education that they selected, almost entirely focusing on teaching and learning issues. The teacher-researchers participated in weekly research workshops (for research planning, data analysis and discussion of issues arising from the different research projects) and carried out individual data collection and analysis activities. In addition to supporting the teachers' research projects, I also engaged in ethnographic data collection activities, as a form of 'triangulation' of the teachers' own research and to gain insights into elements of the adult education experience of interest to myself. The project ended with a presentation session in which each teacher presented their research experience and findings, forming the dissemination element of the teachers' inquiries.



### My roles

Throughout the project I was both an action research facilitator and an ethnographic researcher. The insights from these roles were in dialogic relations as the insights I gained through supplementary data collection and analysis enhanced my action research practice, while my ethnographic understandings gained greater depth and complexity through knowledge from the teachers' action research projects. My research role was that of a facilitator, guide, formulator, summariser of knowledge and raiser of issues (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Throughout the research, I devised discussion topics and used materials gathered from ongoing school observations in research workshops, thereby facilitating data collection and interpretation in a culture which privileges oral communication (Pryor and Ampiah, 2004, Miles and Kaplan, 2005). Although I designed and guided the process, I maintained an open view of how it should proceed, which was informed by feedback from the participants. The teachers selected their own research topics and decided how their study should develop, supported by our ongoing discussions.

### Languages of the study: Arabic and English

Throughout the study, discussions with teachers and students were predominantly conducted in Arabic, the common language of the participants. English was used on individual bases with research participants who preferred to practise their language skills. My use of Arabic profoundly affected the depth of discussion enabled through direct communication. Documents related to the study, including data collection activities and handouts for research workshops, were usually written in both Modern Standard Arabic and English. The inclusion of English was in recognition of the benefit of additional exposure to the language, particularly for the participants who specialised in ELT. As a result of my academic background in Arabic, I was able to understand school and classroom discourse and curriculum materials. This in-depth qualitative study was advantaged by engaging with the language of the research participants themselves (combined with code-switching) to understand their conceptions and practices. Conducting research in Arabic and my disposition towards learning helped to blur the expert-participant hyphen and facilitated building our relations.

My language skills were matched by my insights into Sudanese culture. Simple examples of using Khartoum youth slang and my cultural knowledge can be found in interviews with learners about their family backgrounds. If a respondent told me he

lived with *al-haj* and *al-hajah* (literally, a man and woman who have done the Hajj pilgrimage), I understood that he lived with his parents. Conversely, when learners, such as young men from Darfur, told me they had migrated to Khartoum with their *akhwan* (literally, brothers), a quick probing question of ‘are they your ‘full’ brothers?’ would usually reveal the ‘brothers’ were, in fact, fellow villagers from the same ethnic group.

## **Reconnaissance phase**

The overall reconnaissance phase mainly comprised weekly discussion sessions with the participants based on participatory research methods, and my school visits and lesson observations, which provided ethnographic data and opportunities to discuss observed events in-situ. During this phase, I frequently contrasted my experience of conducting research with my previous role as a trainer and mentor of volunteer Sudanese teachers with *SAFE*, often commenting, “*In the past, I said, “don’t do that, do this,” but now I ask, “why do you do that? And they always have an answer.”*

The participatory research workshops in the overall reconnaissance phase were established as ‘discussion sessions’ (*jilsat al-niqash*), which reflects the traditional learning process of Islamic education. Discussion sessions were held weekly with the participants for two hours. The focus of the discussion sessions started on teaching and learning, before moving to perceptions of the students, and broader issues, such as the curriculum. An overview of the discussion topics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Discussion sessions August to December 2008

Session	Topics	Activity
1.	Introductions	Introductions
		Expectations, hopes and fears
2.	Teachers and teaching	Describe a good teacher
		Examples of good teaching
3.	Teaching	What is teaching?
		Teachers' activities
4.	Learning	What is learning?
		A person learns when...
5.	Your students	Typical students in your school
		Differences between classes
		How is your school suitable for your students?
6.	Child and youth development	Child and youth development
		Influences on child and youth development
7.	Education and your students' development Exemplary students	Influence of education on your students' development
		Exemplary students
		Comparison of exemplary and real students
8.	Problems and solutions in teaching	Problems you face in education and teaching
		Example of problem you faced in teaching and how you resolved it
9.	Introduction to action research	Conceptions of traditional research
		Example of problem you faced in teaching and how you resolved it
		Who controls or influences education?
10.	Teacher's goals and influence on education	Your professional goals
		What aspects of education are under teachers' control?
		Your identity and your teaching
11.	Culture and education	Sudanese culture, values and morals
		Culture and education
12.	Culture of your students and education	Culture and education
		Differences between your students' backgrounds and the school system
13.	Values, behaviour and skills	Open and hidden curriculum
		Quote from Ministry of Education on values, behaviour and skills
14.	Curriculum	Most/least effective curriculum/textbook
		Textbooks (English, Arabic, maths)
		Research feedback questionnaire

The ideas for some of the initial discussion topics were drawn from Akyeampong *et al* (2006), while the activities were based on various participatory and action research sources (e.g. Altrichter *et al.*, 1993, Pretty *et al.*, 1995, Chambers, 1997), as well as from my own experience of teaching and facilitating discussion groups. Each discussion session began with a warm up activity, which was often based on my

experience of ELT. A selection of the handouts from discussion sessions is included in the appendix.

The discussions took different formats, including open discussion, structured question-based discussions, simple oral presentations and participatory methods including brainstorming, listing, debating, ranking and timeline activities. To promote participation of all members of the group, the format of activities varied to include written individual responses and pair, small group and whole group discussion and feedback, as well as one-to-one discussions during school visits. Discussion activities often incorporated written responses, to increase the amount of data I was able to record, as the sessions were entirely in Arabic.

#### School visits and lesson observations

I visited each school once a week during the overall reconnaissance phase to observe lessons and discuss with teachers. By observing lessons, I aimed to gain greater understanding of the teachers' practice and the learners' experiences of education. Subsequent in-school discussions and written responses to my questions facilitated the teachers' expression of the reasoning underpinning their practice, as well as their perceptions of contextual factors. I also video recorded at least one lesson by each teacher towards the end of the reconnaissance phase, after we had built a rapport and the teachers and learners had become accustomed to my presence. My questions were often of a technical pedagogic nature, relating specifically to the lesson I had observed. The teachers' self-representations may indicate their perceptions of 'good practice', but through my immersion and regular discussions and observations, the teachers' standard teaching was recorded.

### **Action research phase**

The second stage of the field research, the action research phase, lasted from January to June 2009. Over 22 research workshops and weekly school visits, this phase built on the initial reconnaissance to develop deeper knowledge of youth and adult education and potential for development. The research format of weekly meetings complemented by my school visits remained unchanged in the action research phase. However, the content and purpose of these activities changed, as shown in the transition from naming our weekly meetings 'discussion sessions' in the first phase to 'research workshops' in the second phase. The teachers, therefore, progressed from

being conceived as participants in discussions to researchers within a supported framework. Each teacher selected a topic relating to their teaching and investigated it by engaging in reflective activities and collecting and analysing data.

The action research phase comprised three main stages: starting the action research, reconnaissance and trial of new ideas in teaching.

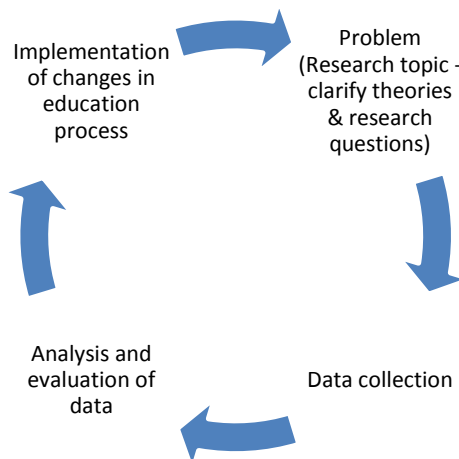
### **Starting the action research phase**

Action research projects were undertaken by ten participants who had shown high levels of commitment to the project during the first phase. Participation in the action research phase of the study therefore resulted from a dual-stage process of selection and self-selection, which ensured the teacher-researchers were relatively committed to the study. This is particularly noteworthy as many of them worked in mornings and evenings, in addition to family responsibilities, yet also engaged in research activities over the prolonged study period. Even with this group, the participation of individuals fluctuated at times over the course of the project. Sadly, one of the participants, Mus'ab died of an underlying health condition mid-way through the action research process.

The efforts towards forming a diverse group of participants at the start of the fieldwork resulted in the inclusion of four women among the ten teacher-researchers. Although several of the participants in the first stage of the project were Christian, they did not continue to the second phase due to their work and family commitments, so all the teachers in the action research phase were Muslim.

I introduced the participants to action research concepts at various stages of the first phase, including in the initial brief about the study and in discussion session 8 and 9. This was primarily to inform the participants about the nature of the project. A simple model of action research was used to present the methodology to the participants, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Action research cycle as shown to participants



In discussion sessions 8 and 9, the participants' conceptions of traditional research were elicited, in order to contrast with the theory and practice of action research. Even at the start of the action research project, the teachers' conceptions of traditional forms of research were noticeable, as shown in initial questions from participants about the format of the final report they expected to write, rather than focusing on the research process itself. This indicated the participants' conception of research as 'desk research' rather than a practice-based or participatory model.

#### Starting the individual action research projects

The action research phase began with a fairly prolonged period of open reflection to identify potential starting points, followed by selection and clarification of research focuses and planning of research activities. The initial period included the following stages, with many activities developed from Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993).

Table 2: Research workshop activities during first eight weeks of the action research

Workshop	Objectives
1.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction to teacher's reflection</li> <li>2. Explain plans for action research phase</li> <li>3. Brainstorm possible areas of research – finding a starting point</li> <li>4. My role as researcher and ground rules</li> </ol>
2.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify five potential starting points for action research projects</li> </ol>
3.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify five potential starting points for action research projects</li> <li>2. Write starting points as research questions</li> <li>3. Describing the starting points</li> </ol>
4.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selecting a research area</li> <li>2. Describe first impressions or assumptions relating to the research question</li> <li>3. Identifying additional information which is required to further understand the situation</li> </ol>
5.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop more reflective writing of notes</li> <li>2. Define terms used in research projects</li> <li>3. Write sub-questions for each topic</li> </ol>
6.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify elements of your research topic</li> <li>2. Introduction to the reconnaissance stage</li> <li>3. Planning the reconnaissance stage</li> </ol>
7.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify your research sample</li> <li>2. Consider various different data collection methods</li> </ol>
8.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarify some points relating to the research topics</li> <li>2. Identify in-depth research points relating to your students</li> <li>3. Discuss how to write detailed reflective notes</li> <li>4. Select data collection methods you will use in your research</li> <li>5. Plan your data collection activities for this week</li> </ol>

### Selecting research topics

The individual and collaborative processes of reflection and discussion showed the teachers' issues and interests in their practice, leading to the selection of their research focus. This was framed within the parameters of the project which I had designed and facilitated, including criteria such as 'issues under your control' and I also helped the teachers to reframe their reflections in order to extrapolate potential starting points.

The action research process began with the teachers trying to identify multiple alternative starting points for their research, through activities that included 'incomplete sentences', 'your strengths and weaknesses in teaching' and writing daily reflective notes. These writing activities were used to draw out the key themes which indicated areas of interest to the individual participant. I anticipated that some of the teachers might select research topics which would not be appropriate for action research, particularly broad issues they would be unable to act upon in the developmental phase of the study. For this reason, I facilitated an activity in which the participants brainstormed elements of education under their individual control, under their control

with their colleagues, and not under their control. The aspects under the teachers control were, unsurprisingly, classroom-based, comprising of: teaching methods, monitoring pupils, 'order' inside and outside the class, other activities and assessment. The aspects under the combined control of the teachers and their colleagues were the same as those listed as being under the teachers' control, but with a school-wide reach. The aspects not under the control of the teachers were as follows,

1. *The curriculum: represented in the planning, development and continuation of the curriculum, or in changing it.*
2. *The teacher: Teaching Staff Authority*
3. *Order and discipline: through attendance and behaviour – visits*
4. *Other activities: school courses, celebrations, field visits*
5. *Assessment: timetable*

This stage marked the first time the teachers were asked to reflect openly to identify issues. Previously, discussions and reflections had been highly structured by questions and activities I prepared. These open reflective activities were initially problematic, as I recorded after the 'incomplete sentences' activity,

*Teachers seemed to find activity difficult – maybe unsure of what I wanted them to do. Is the concept of having a reflective conversation difficult? Maybe too open ended and unstructured... (24 January 2009)*

Participants were also asked to keep reflective notes to consider different starting points during the first month of the action research. These were frequently brief notes on lesson activities and other problems, such as unpunctuality of learners. My notes on written reflections by Nuha, one of the most conscientious of the participants, indicate the limitations of this approach,

*fairly long and detailed, but still predominantly a list of classroom activities, with a few observations of e.g. what was successful. (31 January 2009)*

Based on literature on action research in Africa, as well as my experience of teaching in Sudan, I had expected that the written reflections would be brief and descriptive, with limited levels of reflection and analysis. I attempted to find a balance between open reflective activities, such as diaries and peer reflective conversations, and structured activities. My role in guiding the research was to help teachers to extrapolate points from their reflective activities to develop into a research inquiry. The topics which the teachers selected to investigate are outlined in Table 3.



Table 3: Participants' research topics and subject specialisations

Participant	Research Topic	Teaching Specialisation <sup>16</sup>
Al-Kubri School		
Nuha	Students' concentration	Arabic language (Class 5)
Sara	The suitability of the curriculum for the students	Arabic language (Class 3)
Al-Souq School		
Maryam	Students' attention in class	Maths, People and the Universe, Islamic Studies
Khartoum Evening School		
Abdelaziz	Students' writing skills (English)	English language
Adil	Students' reading skills (Arabic and English)	Arabic language, Islamic Studies, English
Yahya	How education affects students	English language
Al-Masjid School		
Mus'ab	Students' understanding	Arabic language (Class 8)
Al-Hadiqa School		
Hadiya	Students' 'courage' (e.g. to perform in public)	Arabic language, maths
Al-Muhata School		
Rasheed	Teaching English effectively	English language (Class 8)
Bashir	Students' communication skills (English)	English language

In action research, teachers may focus on issues different from those usually investigated by university researchers (Pryor, 1998). For example, the importance of the students' attention or concentration in class is indicated in its selection by two of the teachers, arising from their observations of the impact of fatigue on learners and their education.

#### Becoming researchers: reconnaissance

For several weeks after the selection of topics the workshops comprised research planning activities, including an activity entitled 'what more do you need to know about the situation?', mind maps, research sub-questions and dividing each research topic into sub-topics.

Reflecting the importance of ethnographic understanding of the school context, as well as cognisance of the propensity of teachers in other action research projects to focus on innovations in teaching rather than reconnaissance data collection (Pryor and Meke, 2008), the participants' research was divided into two phases. These were based on

<sup>16</sup> The teachers taught different subjects, their main subjects and the focus of their research are included in the table.

two research questions: the 'reconnaissance question' on the 'current situation' and the 'developmental question' on 'how to improve the situation'. For example, the research questions for Adil's inquiry into reading skills were,

*Reconnaissance: What are the students' levels in the reading skill?*

*Developmental: How can I develop the students' reading skill?*

Each research topic was divided into sub-topics, often including 'the students', 'the curriculum' and 'teaching methods', among others. These were used to plan the reconnaissance phase, in particular participants were asked to identify a sample for their study and were introduced to different possible data collection methods. I provided a limited amount of informal training in research methods, but the focus was on the teachers collecting data and learning through the process. I asked the participants to start their reconnaissance phase by collecting data on one of their sub-topics. The sub-topic of 'the students' was included in most research projects, and most participants generally started their research by interviewing or writing observation notes about their students, in part due to my advice that this was a clear approach to starting the projects.

At this stage, the transition from reflective participants to researchers became apparent. The purpose of the range of planning activities was for the participants to clarify and envisage how their research would proceed, while also maintaining a flexible view of their plans. Planning of the research was iterative, continuing to develop as the projects proceeded. I generally provided a significant amount of scaffolding for research planning activities, which often included suggesting broadening research topics (such as considering positive, as well as negative, examples of student learning or focusing on students' backgrounds instead of students' unpunctuality), developing research questions and identifying possible directions for the inquiries.

The developmental aspect of action research required that the teacher-researchers, as the participants had become, sought knowledge and improvement in their practice. This led to greater questioning of the positions of the participants and requests that they seek data to gain deeper understandings of their research focus and consider it from different viewpoints. In research workshop 8 I tried to facilitate greater criticality among the participants by bringing data about the students from a discussion session in the initial phase and asked the participants to write additional questions, I hoped that this would lead to more comprehensive questioning in the teachers' reconnaissance. I

repeated this activity with examples of the participants' own reflective notes, with the aim of developing more comprehensive written reflections.

### **Teachers' reconnaissance**

Action research is methodologically eclectic (Cohen *et al.*, 2000), the teachers and I used a wide variety of instruments to collect the data, such as interviews with students and teachers, structured and unstructured observation notes, questionnaires and diaries. Presentation of the data in weekly research workshops provided an opportunity to draw out the key themes, and through subsequent discussion the teachers supported or questioned the issues raised based on their own professional and personal experience. My role in the teachers' research included questioning, problematising, reframing issues, providing activities and suggesting further research activities. Furthermore, I collected data from some learners, such as through informal interviews and some participatory research with groups of learners. These generally gained insights about an issue pertinent to the overall study or individual research projects and provided the learners' views to contrast with those of the teachers. Some of this data was then fed back to the teachers for discussion, providing a further level of analysis.

### Reflection and participant observation

Making notes on their reflections and observations was the most common form of data collection by the teachers. Such independent, unstructured written activities were introduced at the start of the action research phase to assist in identifying potential starting points. These notes were frequently limited to simple descriptions of lesson contents or incidents in school (such as latecomers), with little in-depth analysis. Furthermore, I noted that Maryam often made notes about issues she had raised previously, rather than events she had noticed in school. However, the notes formed the basis of discussion, which deepened the reflection and analysis, and were often reframed to identify broader related issues to be investigated.

### Interviews

Based on my guidance, most teachers began their research by interviewing their students, who constituted an important sub-topic in the studies. Interviews of learners typically included questions on their personal information (age, geographic origins, and

living situation), previous experience of education, current employment, motivation for studying and views of the school and their lessons (such as their favourite subject).

#### Video recording lessons and discussion

I video recorded lessons by each of the teachers as the basis for reflective discussions and to create an ethnographic record of their practice. Video-recording of the teachers' classroom performance was primarily used to promote their reflection on their practice, and was not included as a data source in subsequent analysis. The 'video recall' technique was also used so that teachers could observe and discuss their practice, particularly in the developmental phase. This provided a further opportunity to understand the teachers' rationale for their practice and with one participant, Rasheed, to compensate for his limited independent data collection activities. Playback of video-recorded classroom practice facilitated discussion of the rationale for teacher practice, which was recorded in my research journal. The participants responded positively to the method, but the discussions generally focused on the technical aspects of classroom practice, and as such were constricted in comparison with open-ended topics related to teaching. The teachers responded favourably to the use of video for teacher development, but it played only a minor role in this study. Techniques for the use of video recall were not effectively developed, due to the intensive requirement of time and resources, such as for editing or watching videos with the participants, as well as the fairly large number of teachers in the study. Instead, this study mainly engaged interpersonal approaches to research, such as interviews or informal discussions with and between teachers and learners.

The video-recording of the teachers' classroom practice also indicates my pre-conceptions about the requirements of field research and the outcomes of action research. My decision to record the participants' lessons arises in part from the open-ended nature of ethnographic research and a concern to collect a comprehensive data-set, in case it was required in the post-fieldwork analysis. It also resulted from a technical conception of the effects of action research, in which the pedagogic impact of participation in the project would be observable through 'before and after' snapshots of the teachers' classroom performance. However, video data has not been included in the analysis, because this thesis does not focus on the technical aspects of teacher classroom practice, but derives from a broad notion of their roles in education and development through action research. Unlike the limiting lens of the video camera, data recorded in my research journal, the primary data source in this text, incorporates

insights, observations and interviews from diverse aspects of interactions with teachers and students. While this research focus is the main reason for the absence of video data from the analysis of this study, practical issues, including time and translation of video data from Arabic, also constitute limiting factors in the use of this method.

### Questionnaires

There was limited use of questionnaires by the teachers in their reconnaissance. The main example was Rasheed, an English teacher, who sought information from his learners by using a questionnaire, which included questions on the learners' views of English language, his teaching method and my visits to their lessons. The questionnaire was used as a classroom activity during which the learners answered orally. On another occasion, Abdelaziz asked a class of his students to write a short response to a question on a piece of paper, which he collected and analysed.

The limited use of questionnaires may derive from my stance that ethnographic methods, such as interviews and participant observation, are more suited to such small-scale practitioner research and also require less preparation.

### Field visits

I undertook field visits with three of the participants for us to gain ethnographic data on issues related to their research.

I visited a *khalwa* (Qur'an school) with Adil as on several occasions teachers had observed that learners who had attended a *khalwa* had good literacy and memorising skills. As Adil's research was on literacy, I thought it would be interesting to learn about the teaching methods used in the *khalwa*, and to see how they differ from those used in mainstream education. Adil, who has strong Islamic beliefs and practices had been to *khalawi* (plural) before, but on this occasion he was going as a teacher-researcher. I acted as the prompt by suggesting the visit and also supported the legitimacy of the visit as an interested outsider by attending to learn about *khalwa* education.

I arranged two separate field visits with Yahya and Hadiya to the homes of their students. This was to gain ethnographic insights for my doctoral study and for the teachers to gather data for their inquiries, although part of their motivation for doing this

was to assist me. In a sense, this was ‘home ethnography’ for them, but not in the context of the ultimate reporting of the activity, in a doctoral thesis for a British university.

I also accompanied some teachers on other visits, such as to visit a headteacher who was ill in hospital, to a wedding and to the family of Mus’ab to extend our condolences after he died. Having lived in Sudan for over four years, such visits were part of my life there, so I do not consider them uniquely as ethnographic experiences, but they form a foundation on which my understanding of Sudanese society is built.

#### My ethnographic data

I undertook supplementary data collection activities in order to inform discussion with the teachers to further develop their projects, as well as for this thesis and my broad understanding of youth and adult education in Sudan, such as gender issues and teaching methods. These activities generally focused on the learners and included interviews, focus groups and use of participatory research methods. I also interviewed several male learners at their homes and sites of work, however, I was unable to arrange any home visits with female students, due to norms of gender relations.

#### Data sharing and analysis

After the teachers started collecting data for their research (by research workshop 10), the weekly workshops focused on discussing the teachers’ data and identifying the next steps of their inquiries. Through discussion, the teachers compared their experiences, extrapolated themes and identified gaps and means of gathering further information.

These open discussions were supplemented with other issues which I introduced as they related to particular action research projects or to the overall study. These issues include ‘Your Identity and Your Interviews’ and ‘The Identity of Researchers – Insider/Outsider’ (research workshop 13) and textbooks (research workshop 15), differences between male and female learners and co-education (research workshops 18 and 19). Teachers regularly raised or pursued a point in the discussions which were tangentially related to the research. Overall, the teachers generally learnt more about their topic, rather than progressing along a clearly demarcated research route towards finding out the answers to their research questions.

One challenge in implementing this research was that the teachers were very busy. Some were employed during the day, as well as in the afternoon and evening schools. Even during my school visits there were limited times for us to discuss due to the short daily duration of adult schooling and few breaks. The teachers, therefore, had limited time during the week to do research or discuss with others. Furthermore, teachers exhibited different degrees of commitment to the study and attendance at research workshops fluctuated at times. Participation of a few during the initial phase was impacted by their involvement in other courses, while another was unable to participate in the second phase as he was not granted time off his national service as a hospital security guard. In addition, the teachers did not always collect data to discuss at the research workshops.

### Ethical issues

Maintaining high ethical standards forced me to reconcile research ethics with practical concerns. The collaborative inquiry, combined with the adult education context, meant that ethical practices were sometimes messier than presented in theoretical ethical statements, such as the university ethics checklist. This can be exemplified by the issue of informed consent of participants and learners. The informed consent of the participants to participate in the study is clear, given their prolonged active involvement in the project. Their names have been changed in this thesis, to preserve their anonymity, and I also received signed authorisation from the teachers for the use of photos and videos of them when presenting the research. However, gaining informed consent from the learners is more problematic. I must be reflexive about the extent to which the learners consented to participating in my study, such as by being interviewed by me, given our disparate power relations. Furthermore, obtaining consent which is genuinely informed could be challenging as the limited educational experience of the learners hindered their understanding of the purpose and form of the research I was undertaking. I always attempted to explain my research to the learners I spoke to, but the interpersonal ethnographic nature of the study means that conversations provided data.

Gaining informed consent was particularly problematic in relation to observing lessons, and particularly when video-recording. When visiting a class for the first time, and when video-recording, I introduced myself and my research to the learners. I also asked permission to video-record, which was never refused, which is likely to be

influenced by the hierarchical power relations. Even if this attempt is accepted as, to some extent, informed consent, the irregular nature of adult education means that some students arrived late to find me collecting data in their lesson, without being informed or consenting. My attempts at 'pragmatic ethics' to respond to this issue can be illustrated in my use of video-recording. As teacher-centred instruction was used for almost all of the time, I placed the video camera at the back centre of the classroom to capture the teachers' individual pedagogic performances. When asking permission from the learners, I always emphasised my focus on the teacher and that I may only record the backs of learners' heads, in order to assuage any concerns some of the learners may have held. The only deviations from this model took place during the 'trial of a new idea' in teaching in the final stages of the action research process, in which two teachers introduced innovations which required the active participation of the learners on the classroom stage. I video recorded two of these lessons, but due to the difficulty of gaining genuine informed consent, I explained to the learners at the end of the class that I would not show that video to anyone. Such pragmatic ethics also relates to 'interpersonal ethics' (Rowan, 2001), in which it is necessary to reflexively consider my relations with the research participants and learners, as well as my role in the facilitation of the collaborative group.

### **Developmental phase: trial of a new idea in teaching**

Development of the participants' teaching approaches was supported through sharing of ideas with other teachers and problematisation of their practice in discussions, even during the reconnaissance phase, as well as exposure to new activities in research sessions, such as warm-ups. The developmental stage of the project began with discussion of different teaching methods which could be used to respond to the issues subject to the teachers' investigations. In the final stage of the action research the teachers devised, conducted and monitored a 'trial of a new idea in teaching'. The participants' trials are shown in Table 4.



Table 4: The participants' 'trials of a new idea in teaching'

Participant	Research Topic	'Trial of a new idea in teaching'
Al-Kubri School		
Nuha	Students' concentration	Introduction of different teaching approaches
Sara	The suitability of the curriculum for the students	No trial – resigned from school during phase
Al-Souq School		
Maryam	Students' attention in class	Revision questions at the start of each lesson
Khartoum Evening School		
Abdelaziz	Students' writing skills (English)	Focus on writing, weekly writing homework related to students' lives
Adil	Students' reading skills (Arabic and English)	Seminar for English learners, more repetition for basic Arabic
Yahya	How education affects students	No trial – focus on reconnaissance
Al-Masjid School		
Mus'ab	Students' understanding	No trial – died during phase
Al-Hadiqa School		
Hadiya	Students' 'courage'	Weekly practice reading aloud to the class
Al-Muhata School		
Rasheed	Teaching English effectively	Eliciting meaning of words
Bashir	Students' communication skills (English)	Use of games and activities to teach English

Three participants did not undertake a 'trial of a new idea', for various reasons, signalling the unpredictable nature of adult education.

Some participants used ideas they had already experienced for their trials, others used ideas gained from colleagues in the action research project or in their school. Participants also collected data to monitor the progress of their new method in teaching, which was shared in subsequent research workshops.

### Ending the field research

To conclude the project I organised a seminar and certificate award session at the British Council, in which I delivered a presentation on action research, followed by short presentations by each participant on the process and findings of their inquiries. This provided a clear purpose for a final mind map activity which acted as a tool for all the participants to summarise their research.

All participants, headteachers and teachers from the six schools were invited to attend the seminar, but the attendance of guests was limited, with different schools

represented. Representatives of the Adult Education Unit of Omdurman Locality were invited, but unable to attend. All teachers who participated in the project received an 'experience certificate', which indicated that they had either participated in the overall reconnaissance phase or conducted action research.

In the final research workshop, we discussed ways of continuing the action research projects, both collectively and individually, formally and informally. The participants expressed interest in organising monthly discussion sessions with their colleagues from the project, which would be hosted in different adult education schools each month. However, these were never organised, which the participants attributed to being busy. I left Sudan a few weeks after the end of the action research project, so was not available to facilitate such discussion sessions.

### **Data analysis and writing up**

The data analysis process can broadly be divided into two stages: in the field and in the post-fieldwork period. As participatory action research, field data was generated by the teachers, as well as through my own ethnographic data collection and reflections on the research process. During the field study, data analysis was a collaborative process, conducted through ongoing cycles of dialogue and reflection. Data collection and analysis involved a continuous process of probing and interpretation in which meaning and significance of observations were drawn out and reconstructed in discussions and workshop activities. Through discussions with teachers during school visits and in research workshops, I raised issues that had arisen from data as points of questioning to be discussed with the participants according to their diverse perspectives and experiences, while maintaining open concepts to engage with diverse understandings and positions. During the action research phase, the participants undertook collaborative analysis of their colleagues' data through questioning of the teacher-researcher on the presentation of their observations and interview notes. Teachers frequently probed the data to extrapolate points, such as the background and causes of the phenomenon observed and possible responses or alternative actions. This cyclical approach to data collection engaged the heterogeneity and development of experiences and perspectives of the teachers, which was layered in the knowledge construction process of the field research. Through this approach, data was both analysed and further generated, while engaging with difference and change, to respond to the research questions on the teachers' practice, its development and the collaborative research process.

During the period in the field, which spanned one year, a wide array of data was generated. This included a series of research journals that comprised notes on interviews, classroom and school observations and discussions with teachers and students, as well as my notes and the written responses by teachers from the discussion sessions and research workshops. The data covered both teacher practice and action research process, and its analysis would respond to the tri-partite inquiry into teacher practice, its development and the research process, including reflexive concerns. In contrast with the field experience, data analysis following fieldwork was largely a solitary process, albeit with the support of a doctoral supervisor and embedded in an academic environment. The process involved a continuous process of reading and re-reading the fieldnotes and reflecting on observations, discussions and critical incidents to extrapolate emerging themes on teacher practice and reasoning, the action research process and my researcher role. Rather than coding this large volume of data, an ongoing process of reviewing the fieldnotes facilitated a layering complexity of analysis that was informed in dialectic with evolving focus and understanding of the knowledge under construction. This process was supported by focusing on specific aspects of the data for presentation of analysis-in-progress in academic arenas, such as conferences. Furthermore, during the 'writing up' process, data analysis was further refined in dialogue with thematic, theoretical and methodological literature. The writing process was therefore entwined with data analysis processes, as this written text resulted from continuing interrogation of field data and academic literature.

Quotations in this text are mainly from notes in my research journal, supplemented by data from teachers' written responses and discussions in research workshops. Data quotations presented in this thesis without reference to specific research workshop activities were taken from my research journal.

## 6. Reconnaissance: *Coming to know* teacher practice

In this chapter I re-present the process of coming to know teacher practice through action research reconnaissance. Coming to know refers to my own learning and that of the participating teachers as distinct, symbiotic processes, as the teachers articulated their views and considered different viewpoints, including those of their colleagues and learners. The study provided an arena for concepts of teaching and learning to be articulated, questioned and re-constructed, which led to cases of taken-for-granted understandings to be reflected upon and re-cast as more complex. Representation of this learning begins by following the common ellipsis of teacher practice as classroom practice, resulting in a focus on teaching methods as the subject of reflection, discussion and observation. Conceiving teacher practice as a socio-cultural and environmentally responsive activity, the perceptual and contextual factors that influence pedagogy are explored. Subsequently I build up understanding of the complexity of education, which reveals the inherently technical focus of the initial data collection process. Coming to know teacher practice in youth and adult education is facilitated by thinking outside the 'black box' of the classroom through investigation with the participants of their education objectives, their learners and the curriculum. Gradually, a picture of the socio-cultural complexity of teaching and learning in these schools is built up that problematises the simplicity of the original image and shows the benefit of layering of knowledge as understandings and assumptions were discussed and reformed with greater complexity through action research. The process of coming to know teacher practice in adult education is then shown through a case study of action research reconnaissance by Yahya who investigated 'how students change through education'.

### Getting started

When visiting the schools I would sit on plastic chairs in the schoolyard and chat with the teachers, after having shaken hands with all present. Before lessons and in breaks teachers generally sat in the schoolyard or in the school office. At these times students might approach the teachers to ask about educational or administrative matters or engage in conversation. Teachers could ask students (usually young males) to run errands, such as to bring tea or a cold drink for the foreign researcher 'guest'. As this was how I started my school visits, it is fitting that I begin by presenting the teachers and their discussions. Teacher discussion in school was usually on general topics.

Prior to the action research project, the teachers said they rarely discussed teaching and learning issues with their colleagues<sup>17</sup>, except in the event of requiring technical information from a subject specialist. The only form of reflection the teachers mentioned was lesson preparation (although I rarely observed lesson preparation, except for reading the textbook lesson to be taught in the forthcoming period). However, the absence of collaborative arenas for staff discussion is not meant to imply that the teachers did not reflect on their practice.

This limited level of professional discussion does not mean that the participating teachers were not motivated. On the contrary, in their definitions of teaching, the participants revealed their perceptions of their profession, with teaching described as an “art”, a “desire” (Hadiya) and “the profession of the Messenger and the Prophets” (Rasheed). In these statements they are cast as skilled, motivated and as undertaking a moral religious duty, reflecting research that has highlighted the experiences of motivated teachers in Africa (Buckler, 2011). Teachers in adult education operating in the afternoons and evenings are more likely to be motivated, as most do this as additional work. A common theme in the teachers’ explanation for their motivation was that teaching is a ‘humanitarian’ job, which is a particularly strong motivator for working in the challenging environment of adult education. Other factors for working in adult education schools include, for the less experienced teachers, gaining professional experience which could lead to teaching in a standard school<sup>18</sup>.

## **Coming to know teacher practice: *ta’lim***

### **Teachers’ conceptions of education I: *ta’lim***

I began reconnaissance by focusing on teacher classroom practice in discussion sessions and through lesson observations. My objective at this stage was to understand teacher practice, its context and rationale, by investigating teachers’ perceptions and contextual factors. This technical focus constructed a layer of understanding of teacher practice which was subsequently built on through further collaborative inquiry.

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<sup>17</sup> One participant mentioned ‘the experience of other teachers’ (11 February 2009) as a starting point for his research project, as he perceived the lack of staff discussion as a problem in his school. However, he was unable to continue to the action research phase due to his National Service commitment.

<sup>18</sup> Within one year after the end of the research project two of the female teachers had gained employment as teachers in standard schools and stopped teaching in the adult education school.

Educational objectives and conceptions of teaching and learning are the foundations on which teacher practice are based. As an initial step, teachers were asked to write definitions of 'teaching'<sup>19</sup>, which included,

*Teaching: it is the ability to pass on information or an idea to the receiving person and to assess his personal conduct. In a simple way.*

*It is the process which is completed through passing on unknown information or knowledge to the learners or receiver [through] reading, writing, questions, accompanying exercises and other information.*

The definitions referred to 'passing on information' which reflects Freire's (1972) 'banking education' model of teaching in which static, factual knowledge is transmitted from the teacher to the learners. As the aim is the learners' comprehension of the information, 'simple' methods are used. The participants also wrote definitions of learning, the following is representative,

*It is the process of receiving new ideas or information into the mind of the learner or the student.*

This also reflects the banking education paradigm in which learners are constructed as the 'receivers' of the transmitted knowledge, with the textbooks as its source and the teachers as its conduit. This transmission model is implied in the Arabic term generally used to mean 'education' and, importantly, used as the translation of education in this research. *Ta'lim* is the causative verbal noun form from the word *'alm* (to know) and therefore means 'causing someone to know' and relates to formal teaching and learning processes.

The patterns of teaching and learning in adult education in Khartoum were fairly formulaic, albeit with some diversity according to the subjectivities of teachers and learners. Following discussion of teachers' classroom activities, the summary of headings of one group provides an overview of a typical lesson,

1. *Greetings and general view (of the classroom)*
2. *Revise the lesson – preparatory questions on the new and previous lessons*
3. *Writing the date and title of the lesson*
4. *Progress of the lesson:*
  - a. *Examples/explanation of the examples*
  - b. *Model reading of the explanatory text by the teacher*
  - c. *Explanation of the new vocabulary*
5. *Questions and comprehension*
6. *Writing the summary*
7. *Group reading and individual reading*

<sup>19</sup> This term in Arabic, *al-tadris*, is a causative verbal noun meaning 'making someone study', and therefore has connotations which are closely related to *ta'lim*.

8. *Solving exercises*
9. *Monitoring/corrections (Discussion Session 3, 23 August 2008)*

Most of the points on this list were observed in each lesson, but this would vary according to the level, subject and specific learning points of the lesson. The order of activities would not always be as that outlined above, for example, 'group reading and individual reading' often followed 'model reading' by the teacher. In addition, learners might copy the summary written on the chalkboard at any point after it is written by the teacher, except when they are asked to participate in oral activities.

Pedagogic elements can be summarised as 'presentation/explanation' (including "examples/explanation of the examples", "model reading" and "explanation of the new vocabulary"), practice (such as "questions and comprehension", "group reading and individual reading" and "solving exercises") and monitoring or corrections. "Writing the summary" could relate to both the teacher transcribing the main text of the lesson onto the chalkboard and the students copying it into their exercise books.

### **Classroom teacher practice**

#### Presentation of information

Ritualistic practices often featured at the start of lessons. These included greetings and writing the date and title on the chalkboard, which was seen to provide structure to the lesson. Adult education in Khartoum is embedded within the context of a religiously observant society, which is dominated by the Muslim majority, but there is also a large Christian minority. Religious greetings were used, '*bism Allah*' ('In the name of Allah') was usually written on the blackboard at the start of lessons. Participants' lists of teacher activities included the minutiae of classroom behaviour, such as drawing lines on the chalkboard with a ruler, indicating a ritualistic approach to teacher practice.

The Arabic term used to describe the 'presentation' stage of pedagogy translates as 'explanation'. This conception of presentation as explanation was enacted in teacher practice. In almost all subjects, information was presented through reading a text from the textbook or by providing examples (especially in mathematics) which were also generally taken from the textbook. In all subjects, difficult words (as identified by the teacher) were explained to the learners, usually after the text had been read several times. Reading techniques, which all involved reading aloud (although pupils could

individually read silently of their own accord), included model reading by the teacher, *talqeen* (students repeat the text a few words at a time, after the teacher) and individual reading aloud by pupils. These different methods were usually used in the same class, progressing from more to less teacher-controlled approaches. It was also standard practice in the English language lessons of basic adult education for the teacher to explain the meaning of words by translating them into Arabic, although explanation in the more advanced open English course classes was given in English. In mathematics examples were given by the teacher, usually taken from the textbook, and the learning point was explained.

Multiple readings, led by the teacher, and 'explaining' of the subject content were perceived as required for several reasons, which are particularly pertinent to adult education. The explanation of the information was needed to be understood by the learners, who might lack basic knowledge to comprehend the point due to limited education experience or poor attendance in class. The teachers' rationale for reading aloud and use of *talqeen* included for the students to learn pronunciation and to understand the vocabulary. Pronunciation is important in the oral tradition of Islamic culture, even the term 'Qur'an' means 'recitation' (Fischer and Abedi, 1990). Oral modelling and recitation might be required as diacritic vowel marks are not usually shown in authentic Arabic reading material, except the Qur'an. Due to the Arabic diglossia<sup>20</sup> (Ferguson, 1996) information in the textbooks was presented in Standard Arabic, and so might not be clearly understood by learners who had poor literacy skills, if the Standard Arabic term was different from that used in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic or if their mother tongue was not Arabic.

#### Practice and student participation

Forms of student practice in adult education included oral and written activities. In addition to reading aloud to the class, pupil participation was usually in the form of answering questions which were given orally to the whole class, generally based on questions in the textbook. Exercises were then done orally, during which the teacher asked questions of the whole group, and learners raised their hands and clicked their fingers (a method of gaining attention in public in Sudan) and might call, "Teacher,

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<sup>20</sup> Diglossia of Modern Standard Arabic and the various colloquial versions of Arabic is sometimes compared with the relationship between Shakespearean and contemporary English. This comparison is misleading, as in Arabic, unlike English, almost all formal written materials, including newspapers and correspondence, and formal oral communication, including factual media and speeches, are presented in the Modern Standard version.



teacher!” to be selected to answer the question. The information in the textbook was often written on the chalkboard and referred to as the ‘summary’, which learners copied into their exercise books. Students might also write the practice activities in their exercise books, which involved writing the questions and the answers which were discussed orally or copying from the chalkboard. Copying the summary into exercise books was viewed as important by students and teachers, as they provided essential records of information required for examinations. Copying from the blackboard, which is critiqued as an ineffective method of rote-learning could be viewed as a logical response to the students’ lack of textbooks due to economic impoverishment in the context of an examinations-focused education system.

Teachers recognised the importance of student participation, albeit in highly structured forms. The teachers used praise to encourage the learners to participate, such as, *“You are a clever guy”* and *“You are conscientious”* (Mus’ab, 20 January 2009). Teachers expressed belief that lower ability or less confident learners would be encouraged by seeing their colleagues answer questions in class and then participate more. By selecting specific pedagogic approaches, teachers claimed to promote certain aspects of personal development, for example, developing a ‘spirit of cooperation’ which could include informal communication skills, sharing and mutual support. Conversely, teachers also mentioned developing a ‘spirit of competition’ in the class to encourage the students’ self-improvement. This was often mentioned in discussion of the education of male and female students together (unlike in standard basic schools), although there were generally fewer female students in the class. The teachers’ views were replicated in discussion of co-education with some students, who viewed the competition between male and female learners in class and during tests as positive. However, some students highlighted being embarrassed while making a mistake in a co-education context as a particular problem.

#### Monitoring and corrections

Teachers recognised the importance of assessing that the learners had understood the lesson. Some stated they could assess this through student participation in class, responses to questions and reading. Open questions to the whole class were used, in which learners generally volunteered to answer, meaning the assessment could be limited to the confident or more able students. Further assessment of the learners and monitoring of their progress was done through regular tests. The regularity of the tests varied between schools, some were held on a monthly basis. The end of each grade

was marked with tests to decide student progression. Only the final examination for the Basic School Certificate, at the end of Grade 8, was prepared by the Ministry of Education for all students completing this level. All other tests were prepared by the teachers in the schools.

The teacher might monitor the learners as they wrote the answers. In addition, after the lesson and later in the day the students brought their exercise books to the teachers, who did on-the-spot checking and corrections, providing oral advice to learners about their exercises. This process relied on the students approaching the teacher for correction, otherwise it depended on the individual teacher to ensure that all pupils' books were corrected. This was the most commonly cited method of monitoring students' learning. This reflects the conception of the teacher as a conduit for passing on knowledge, which includes checking that the information has been learnt by the students.

### **Coming to know factors affecting teacher classroom practice**

My classroom reconnaissance revealed formulaic textbook-based teaching that derives from conceptions of teaching and learning and technical understandings of presentation ('explanation'), practice, monitoring and correction. Up to this point, the findings are reminiscent of research on pedagogy in Africa that uncovers didactic teaching in resource-deprived environments. Inquiry into teachers' reasoning that underpins their practices reveals a socio-cultural view of education, such as a transmission model of pedagogy, the teacher as explainer and the diglossia of Colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic. More complex understanding of teacher practice in relation to perceptual and conceptual factors was generated by discussions that gradually progressed from a classroom focus to consider the circumstances of the learners and education structures, such as examinations and the curriculum.

### Learning about learners in youth and adult education

The teachers were aware of the impoverished and disadvantaged situation of the students, as Adil observed, "*People [students] of the evening have more problems*". The learners recognised their marginalisation from economic, political and employment opportunities. As one student commented,

*We are as the people forgotten at the corner of the world. We are poor, from our roots we are poor. (Male learner in adult secondary school, 29 March 2009)*

As a result of economic and social marginalisation, the students had a low level of educational experience, ranging from no schooling to limited studies in a standard basic school or through studying in a *khalwa* (Qur'an school). Learners cited 'circumstances' relating to poverty as being the primary reason for not studying when younger. The death of a parent and the subsequent obligation to undertake paid work or domestic duties was frequently given as a reason for leaving formal education as a child. Almost all the male students worked in the informal sector during the day, such as selling in the market or as labourers. There were fewer female students in the adult education schools, these undertook family duties during the day and some worked in paid employment, for example as tea sellers. There were few married women studying in these schools, as they were seen to prioritise looking after their children over pursuing their own studies.

The lower abilities of most of the students were remarked on by the teachers, who observed that they were slower and less effective learners than children in basic schools due to a combination of poorer cognitive abilities as older learners and their limited education backgrounds. The learners generally achieved low examination results and the schools had high incidences of dropping out before completion of all basic level grades. The learners' circumstances, particularly their work lives and impoverished economic conditions, were perceived to negatively impact their studies. The following description of their 'typical students' by the Khartoum Evening School teachers was a fairly broad introduction (6 September 2008).

1. *Most of them are old, their ages range between:  
Most of them are from 15 to 35 years  
Few from 35 to 55 years*
2. *Most of them are workers*
3. *They have definite desire for education, despite their work circumstances*
4. *Most of them are slow in understanding – few are fast in understanding*
5. *Most of them do not like homework*
6. *They avoid the examinations*
7. *They love to enjoy themselves*
8. *A lot of absence*
9. *They do not accept failure*
10. *They ask a lot*
11. *They desire knowledge*
12. *Social background – some of them are married and live with their wives in Khartoum and the others are outside Khartoum. Some of them live with their families and the others live as bachelors<sup>21</sup>.*
13. *They live in the outskirt areas of the capital city, and some live inside the capital*

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<sup>21</sup> In reference to male learners. The schools had some female learners, but most were unmarried and lived with their families or relations.

14. *Some of them have educational experience in Holy Qur'an khalawi and the others studied the first class of basic level and some have not studied at all*
15. *Muslims and Christians*
16. *Most of them are from the countryside*

Other responses at this early stage of the research illustrate the initial technical focus of the study, such as *"they aren't inclined to playing a lot"* (Mus'ab and Amna), *"there are pupils who can answer questions"* and *"there are pupils who have good handwriting"* (Nuha and Sara).

Due to the limited educational experience and age of the learners, they were generally perceived as having low academic levels in relation to curriculum standards, as Abdelaziz commented in reference to the English textbook *Spine* (Sudanese Practical Integrated National English),

*I'm not going to say that the students in this class are stupid, but they are...weak students. Spine 3 is difficult for them. (3 September 2008)*

This was reinforced in discussions of the curriculum, during which some teachers critiqued the textbook, *Spine*, due to the mismatch of the level with the abilities of their learners,

*There are words in it which are higher than the level of the learners. In it there are some activities that the learners do not benefit from because they are not suitable to their level. (Yahya, Abdelaziz, Bashir, Jamal and Adil, 29 November 2008)*

As a result, simple activities were required, principally explanation, reading and controlled practice.

The adult learners were seen to require simple formulaic teaching approaches, resulting from their limited educational experience. Similarly, questions on the previous lesson were used to check the learners' understanding, which was particularly important in the adult education schools which had fairly poor levels of attendance and punctuality. As the teacher's role was to take the learners *"from the known to the unknown"*, the instructor had to check that what had previously been taught was 'known' before moving on to explanation of the next lesson. The importance of practice was recognised by the teachers, as shown by comments by Yahya,

*Give exercise to see if they understand it. They are slow learners, so need more practice. Some slow learners, some are very old. Because they are part time students. Morning working, evening adult education. Gradual progression. Feel interested if practise. (3 November 2008)*

The effect of the students' limited education experience was compounded by their daily work and part-time schedule of adult education. This deficit view of the learners was expressed by Yahya who stated that a high use of repetition was required in adult basic education, saying that he needed *"to repeat information everyday for 3 or 4 days, or 5 or 6 – to fix in his [the student's] mind"* (2 February 2009). Furthermore, he categorised learners in discussions as 'gifted', 'slow' and 'weak', implying students possessed fixed abilities, although he felt it was the role of the educator to effectively teach these different types of learners.

### Learners' views and teacher practice

Understanding the school context requires analysis of the operations of power relations. Any portrayal of the teacher as the sole wielder of power who makes unilateral decisions on pedagogy would be simplistic and misleading. The students reinforced the views of the teachers, as shown in the learners' conception that a good teacher is one who 'explains well', reflecting the banking education model. This was compounded by the students' self-images as weak learners, as some commented *"Our heads are thick"* and *"My head is empty."* Bashir described how this could lead to prolonged remedial tuition,

*Bashir: When I teach [taught] a dialogue, they [the students] say, "No, I don't know the letters." Last week I decided to begin the letters again...*

*PF: So, they've been learning the English letters for two years!?*

*Bashir: Yes, but I've not taught them [the class]. (23 April 2009)*

A student in another school commented that he liked repetition of lessons, as it helped him to understand, and equated bad teaching with being unable to understand the teachers' explanation of the subject content (12 May 2009).

The role of learners in influencing teacher practice was discussed by Abdelaziz, who mainly taught open English courses,

*if you want to apply theory, it cannot succeed because of the environment. For example, in reading comprehension, when you read...[educational] series say pick out new words, put on the blackboard, ask students to read silently and ask them to explain. If you applied that here the students would be miserable and disappointed and say that teacher knows nothing about teaching. (17 March 2009)*

Here, the pressure on teachers to conform to students' and others' expectations of teaching is shown as the teachers' professional reputations would suffer. This sentiment was echoed by Sara, who had been surprised by my question of whether

she could omit a lesson from the textbook and responded, *"It's possible, but the students will ask to be taught it"* (18 April 2009).

### Mixed ability classes

The size of classes in adult education varied between schools and grades. Class size could occasionally be as high as 100 students and the smallest class size I observed was one! A class size of 30 to 60 was fairly standard. The schools were co-educational, and the proportion of female students in each class could reach one-third, but it was generally much lower than this. The students' daytime work was viewed as leading to poor punctuality and attendance, as well as poor academic performance as learners were tired in class and had limited time and energy to revise lessons, a particular problem for preparing for examinations. Teachers recognised that some learners were absent from school when they could not afford to pay the fees and then returned to school when they had enough money to re-start class. This absenteeism was a further challenge to the teachers as Bashir explained,

*The problem [is]...continuity of the students affect the learning. The students [are] not always in the class, absent short time or long time and again [return to] the class. And the class has new pupils...always we suffer from this problem all the year. (23 April 2009)*

Some teachers mentioned headteachers might allow individual students to pay in instalments if they discussed the issue, which placed the onus on the learner to approach the teachers about finances. Disruption to teaching and learning was also caused by the occasional interruption of classes by school management to collect fees from the learners<sup>22</sup>.

The different levels and experiences of the learners were exacerbated by the schools' registration and progression policies. The disorganised and unpredictable nature of the learners' lives meant that the registration of new students was kept open throughout the academic year. This led to new students joining classes without having the relevant skills and knowledge required for that grade at that point in the academic year. The grade the learners joined was allocated by the headteacher after a discussion with the new student (but generally they were not permitted to join Class 8, the examination year, without studying Class 7 before). In addition, if learners passed an end-of-grade

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<sup>22</sup> On one occasion a teacher arrived in a class I was observing to check for students who were "cheating" by attending the course without paying fees. However he left after the teacher, Yahya, informed him "we have a guest." A student then turned to me and whispered jokingly, "Come here everyday!" (19 January 2009).

exam with good marks, they might request skipping a grade and joining a higher class, in order to progress through education stages more rapidly. Similarly, learners could insist on progressing through grades with the same cohort, even if they faced academic challenges. This was described by Abdelaziz in relation to his open English course,

- Abdelaziz: Big problem in this level – I decided to let him go back to handwriting...I told him to go back – but he refused.*
- PF: Why?*
- Abdelaziz: Because he doesn't want to leave his colleagues. But I'll try to tell him. But I didn't promise to help him – this is with myself...*
- PF: Can students refuse?*
- Abdelaziz: These are adult students, they're not like other students...If you ask them to go back...as if it's a scandal for him to leave his colleagues and go back...This case repeatedly since I started teaching here to now. When you find a weak student and tell him to go back, he'll refuse. (17 March 2009)*

As a result, some of the learners lacked the required subject knowledge. This was particularly problematic in relation to Arabic literacy skills or in a subject such as English language, which builds on prior knowledge. Mixed ability groups of youths and adults with diverse levels of education experience acted as contextual factors that supported use of formulaic didactic teaching and highly structured textbook-based lessons.

### Textbooks and resources

The material environment and school structures affected how the teachers operated. Classroom facilities were limited to a blackboard, benches (sometime with additional chairs), desks, a light, and a few had a ceiling fan. Electrical supplies were often disrupted due to the network or delays in purchasing credit. The teachers had limited teaching resources and mainly just used the chalkboard. There was surprisingly little discussion of the limited teaching materials and resources, as the reconnaissance focus was on how the teachers operated in their current situation. Classes with large numbers of students were sometimes disrupted at the beginning of the lesson while learners brought additional seating to the classroom. The lack of sufficient numbers of chalkboard dusters meant that teachers often sent a learner to bring one from another class to clean the board. Due to their impoverished circumstances, many learners did not have the necessary school materials, particularly textbooks, so many students might share one copy. Occasionally teachers photocopied teaching resources and collected money from the learners to cover the costs. In adult basic education I

observed this for the use of past test papers in lessons, in open English courses supplementary materials were sometimes added to courses.

Textbooks played a fundamental role in adult education. Classes were often entirely based on a lesson in a textbook, with the teacher using the provided text and exercises as the class activities, and they usually ended with students copying or completing exercises from the book. As many of the students often did not have the textbook, a large proportion of time was spent each lesson by the teacher copying texts and activities onto the blackboard. They provided curriculum content knowledge in texts and examples and learning activities, as shown in one teacher's response 'In your opinion, what is the most effective curriculum or textbook that you use? Why?',

*The book of Arabic language Class 5 is useful, there are useful sections of texts supported by questions which are useful to the pupils. Likewise, there are grammar lessons and some of the dictation grammar benefits them more... (Nuha, 29 November 2008)*

This response is representative of the technical focus of the teachers' answers, rather than expressing critical socio-cultural curricular concerns. Textbooks were primarily viewed as containing texts which provided the information required by the learners and the opportunity to develop and practise literacy skills, as well as questions to check comprehension.

Adil's responses in discussion of the most and least effective textbook can be contrasted to extrapolate aspects of his understanding of his practice. The textbook that Adil perceived as most useful was 'Jurisprudence and Theology' for Class 7, part of the Islamic Studies curriculum, because,

*It conveys a lot of what the teacher requires in explaining the lesson and questions at the end of every lesson. The teacher makes the students answer the questions and the teacher is not required to make his own questions a lot because enough are present to revise the lesson and confirm students' understanding of the lesson. (29 November 2008)*

The textbook is therefore the source of knowledge and questions for teachers. The role of the teacher is "explaining" the content and then to "confirm students' understanding" by asking the textbook questions. This picture was contrasted when the teachers criticised the quality of some textbooks and discussed the required teacher practice in those subjects. This was shown by Adil when he described *Spine 1* as the 'least effective curriculum or textbook',

*This book is not very useful for me as a teacher because teaching it depends more on the efforts of the teacher. For example: there are only pictures in some*



*of the lessons and some of this requires explanation from the teacher and writing examples which carry the meaning of the pictures present in the lesson. (29 November 2008)*

Therefore, a poor quality textbook is one which does not include the required knowledge in written form, so the teacher must provide the information and examples. Furthermore, the questions and exercises should also be provided, otherwise the teacher must add them.

The role of the teacher in interpreting and applying the curriculum effectively was emphasised, although Adil observed that a poor quality textbook puts responsibility on the teacher, who must be creative and engage in “*the art of teaching*” (28 March 2009). Teachers relied on the textbooks to show explicitly how to teach the content as shown in discussion of *Spine*,

*In it there is implicit teaching of rules and...if the teacher is not qualified and trained he is not able to transmit the information. (Yahya, Abdelaziz, Bashir, Jamal and Adil, 29 November 2008)*

The capacity of Sudanese teachers to do this was questioned,

*The problem is not all the teachers are qualified to add. They're called teachers of English language, but they're weaker than Spine. (Abdelaziz, 11 May 2009).*

Therefore, teachers were considered to have potential agency to adopt appropriate pedagogic approaches when following the textbook, yet the potential was seen to be limited by the perceived unqualified and untrained nature of the Sudanese educators. This contrasts with official rhetoric on textbooks, as the Sudanese Ministry of Education's policy states,

The textbook is a main element in the quality of education. In the absence of a competent teacher, the textbook is indispensable to ensure a minimum level of learning outcomes. (General Directorate of Educational Planning, 2004, p.15)

The teachers' criticisms question the notion that some of the textbooks deliver such a “minimum level”.

#### Enforcing the curriculum: examinations and school advisers

Teachers' reasoning for the continued use of the curriculum, even by those who felt it was ‘weak’, included reference to centralised authorities, in the form of the Federal Ministry of General Education. This perception of hierarchical power relations was

shown by the general agreement of the participants that it was not possible to omit sections of the curriculum, even if it was not useful to the students,

*PF: If it's in the curriculum but not useful to students, do you still teach it or leave it or change it?*

*Bashir (and all): Teach it, it's in the curriculum, from the Governate. (29 November 2008).*

This was of particular relevance to adult education, in which the learners had distinct needs based on their backgrounds, ages and social circumstances, yet after the initial grades they studied the same curriculum as child learners in standard schools. Formal structures, including examinations, headteachers and school advisers, were identified through discussion as impacting on teacher practice.

### Examinations

Students cited their ambitions to progress through education and study in secondary and tertiary levels, although this goal would be challenging for many due to their socio-economic circumstances. Learning to pass examinations therefore formed a central element of schooling. The students were assessed through monthly tests, examinations at the end of each grade and the Basic School Certificate at the end of Class 8, a national qualification that allows progression to secondary level. The teachers recognised the importance of examinations and used approaching tests as a motivator during class talk to encourage the learners to study or revise particular points. Teachers in adult education devise all tests and examinations, except the Basic School Certificate, and the assessment system ties the teacher to delivery of the national textbooks at a prescribed pace. Although the teachers mentioned the 'individual differences' of the students, teaching was done on a whole class level, with one-to-one discussions between teacher and student limited to when marking exercises following the end of a lesson. The students, therefore, followed a 'lockstep curriculum' and the whole class progressed at the same rate. 'Delivering' a national curriculum, even one perceived as poor quality, is not necessarily an indication of an unreflective or unagentic practitioner, but is a relevant objective in a context where qualification through assessment is valorised (Guthrie, 1990, Tabulawa, 1997).

The structure and content of examinations impacted on teacher practice. For example, Abdelaziz explained why he had used "only a 'fill-the-gap' exercise, and not a more free practice activity" in his Class 8 English lesson,

*Because this lesson [is] according to the final examination and in examination always the questions [are] like this – fill the gaps. (17 September 2008)*

The examinations were perceived as restricting teacher practice, as reinforced by Rasheed in a discussion following observation of a lesson from *Spine*, in which he stated that the students had studied the learning points (the seasons) previously, so they did “not need to do it again.”

*PF: You’ve told me you think this is a weak syllabus.*

*Rasheed: Yes, but this is set by the Ministry of Education, students will be examined in it.*

*PF: Can you change it at all?*

*Rasheed: I can’t change it, but I can make courses, special [private] courses. In [a private] course I can teach from Oxford Book. This course can let them know more than [Spine]. (19 March 2009)*

Therefore examinations, which tested the students’ knowledge of the textbook content, restricted teacher agency in adapting the curriculum to the context of the learners through self-discipline or the act of power relations from others, such as the students. However, as indicated in this discussion, there was potential for alternative tuition outside the jurisdiction of the Ministry. This was frequently in the form of private courses, particularly for students in the final examination year of basic level education, albeit at additional cost to the learners.

#### Teacher colleagues and school management

Teacher classroom practice was set within the broader power relations of the schools. The adult education schools functioned under the supervision of the headteachers, who primarily had administrative roles and generally followed fairly authoritarian management approaches. Their responsibilities included monitoring the progress of teachers and students and making management decisions. Headteachers set the registration and progression system, which were of particular importance as diverse-ability classes were highlighted as challenges in teacher practice. The headteacher was also responsible for designing the timetable, including the duration of the lessons, which were generally limited to about half an hour per lesson, due to the perceived inabilities of the learners to concentrate for prolonged periods. School managers, therefore, influenced teacher practice through monitoring teaching and setting rules for registration and progression of the students. The authoritarian role of headteachers was indicated in one school, where the headteacher “*decided alone*” to begin basic

English language tuition from Class 1 (instead of Class 5), about which an English teacher commented,

*I think he decide[d] that through the experience...You can say he's [a] political headmaster because make the English language for students easy and like it. (Bashir, 7 May 2009)*

The authoritarian approach to school management was shown towards the end of the study when Sara resigned from her position in an adult education school after refusing to teach higher grades of basic level, which the headteacher insisted. This also shows the unpredictable staffing of adult education. For example, of the ten teachers who started action research projects, only seven remained in post in their schools one year after the end of the project. Relatedly, another staffing issue was the level of absenteeism of teachers, which caused further disruption. This led to the problem in some of the schools of 'lesson clash', which arose when a teacher (or more) was absent and so one teacher provided lessons for two or more classes at the same time, usually by setting and explaining exercises consecutively to each group. This was raised as a particular problem in some of the schools in which teacher attendance was irregular at times, emphasising the impact of school management on teacher practice and students' education experience.

### School advisers

Teachers operate within other structures of power relations, such as local government education inspectors, reflecting the restrictive role that school inspectors can have in African contexts (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006). These particularly relate to how teachers use the textbook, in terms of progressing through the curriculum and the teaching methods that are used. School inspectors were viewed by some of the teachers in the study as having inadequate or antiquated teaching skills, which could be due to widespread nepotism in the current political system.

The relationship between textbooks, examinations and school advisers was illustrated by a discussion with one teacher (who was also the headteacher) about whether the information in the lesson I had observed was important or useful to the students. The teacher responded that the knowledge was useful to progress to secondary level, and that,

*School inspector said this lesson (carbon) is very important. The inspector sees that the teacher is completing on time, or finds out why late. (Units to complete are set out by the Ministry).*

The focus of inspection was therefore on the correct pace of progression through the textbook, rather than other indicators of 'good practice'.

This structure of teacher monitoring raises questions about the possibilities of teacher innovation, as shown when I asked why Rasheed had not omitted or changed the lesson,

*I cannot leave the lesson. There are some inspectors who come around and check students' notebooks... if you changed the lesson, you'll be punished. (19 March 2009)*

So, the teacher could be 'punished' by the school adviser. The involvement of school inspectors in adult education was more limited than in standard schools, yet this reasoning was still given, reinforcing the importance of perceptions and self-disciplining of teachers. The impact of this form of supervision was shown by Abdelaziz's contrast between his practice as a teacher in adult education and in a standard children's school. He observed that because there was less supervision in adult education, he was able to be more creative and responsive to his learners,

*during my visit to his house, Abdelaziz commented that his teaching in morning schools is not as successful as in the Khartoum Evening School, as he must follow the textbook and cannot be creative. The supervisor is very traditional and does not welcome new methods. (Research note about 19 June 2009).*

Even in the context of Khartoum, different micro-level forces and power relations exist between institutions, and even subjects and teachers. This shows that the structures in which teachers operated could restrict their practice, as the extent to which they could act upon their understanding of their learners' needs was limited by external factors, such as the school adviser and examinations, and teachers' self-disciplining in response to them.

#### Conclusion to teacher classroom practice: ta'lim

Through the preceding analysis of *ta'lim*, a transmission model of teaching has been shown. Inquiry into the perceptual and contextual factors that influence teacher practice has shown an approach suited to the socio-cultural and material environment of adult education in Khartoum. The ages, backgrounds and education experiences of the learners, as well as the impact of their daily work, were given as reasoning for formulaic teacher practice that included structured reading and reinforcement activities. Examinations were a fundamental element of schooling and teaching to the textbook was maintained through self-disciplining, and operations of power relations among

school management, advisers, learners and teachers. The teachers perceived their agency as limited in terms of adapting the curriculum, due to examinations and school advisers, as well as learners' expectations. In contrast, the teachers expressed a sense of agency in adding to the curriculum, but voiced concern that not all Sudanese teachers had the skills to do this. This process of coming to know required recognition of the grounding of teacher practice in their conceptions and institutional contexts.

### **Coming to know education as a complex social process: *turbiya***

Movement towards constructing a more complex picture of teacher practice in adult education was spurred by my dissatisfaction with emphasis on technical elements of pedagogy. This arose, to a large extent, because I pursued technical insights into classroom practice at first, due to my desire to facilitate learning on issues of direct practical relevance to the participants, although I also had an interest in socio-cultural aspects of education. Technical views of pedagogy were held by the teachers and informed much of their action research throughout. Yet the movement towards the interrogation of teacher identity, culture in the curriculum and the specificities of the adult learners led to greater understanding of the complexity of their practice.

Discussions of school textbooks and specific issues of teaching youths and adults have already been represented in relation to classroom practices for *ta'lim*, as the teachers usually provided technical responses to such questions. Returning to these topics with a socio-cultural lens of analysis assisted in constructing understanding of teacher practice that takes into account the specific situation of the learners within the context of Sudanese society. This process of coming to know involved multiple layers of data collection, including discussion and reflection with teachers, at times prompted by insights I had gained directly from learners in order to include different viewpoints. Furthermore, aspects of the teachers' coming to know through undertaking reconnaissance as part of their action research are included, as the learners featured heavily in that stage.

#### Teachers' conceptions of education II: *turbiya*

To progress from technical to socio-cultural complexity, the research considers *turbiya*, a concept related to education that arose through discussion. The word 'education' in Arabic can comprehensively be translated using two terms together: *ta'lim* and *turbiya*. The most common translation of education, *ta'lim*, has connotations of gaining

knowledge, whereas *turbiya*, usually associated with children, relates to moral and behavioural development<sup>23</sup>. The teachers' role in *turbiya* was indicated in part of the definition of teaching by Nuha,

*In addition, teaching comprises of a larger meaning of ta'lim of behaviour and the importance of this is shown in that the Ministry of Education was entitled 'turbiya and ta'lim' and 'turbiya' first and it is the most difficult type of teaching in my opinion.*

As Nuha mentioned, the dual meanings within the process of education is illustrated in that the Sudanese Federal Ministry of General Education was previously named the 'Ministry of *turbiya* and *ta'lim*'. In addition to formal teaching processes, the teachers saw themselves as having an explicit role in the personal and social development of the students. Hadiya's response to 'what is learning?' neatly summarises the dual processes of *turbiya* and *ta'lim*,

*It is learning how to write and how to read and to have knowledge of what happens around you so you are able to discuss in all sittings and society and to be cultured.*

This shows a holistic perception of schooling which enables the learner to actively participate in public society. Adults have usually already undergone *turbiya* as children, so it is specific to the education of marginalised and impoverished adults, distinguishing it from other courses, such as university level. Gaining knowledge through *ta'lim* is also a form of *turbiya* as people need knowledge in order to function in public and for 'educated' behaviour.

Teachers in adult education schools were aware of the circumstances of the learners, perceiving them as having many personal, social and economic problems, and tried to interact with them appropriately. Student behaviour and the explicit role of the teacher in *turbiya* was expressed early in the study by two teachers, Jaber and Maryam, who included in their responses on 'typical students'

- *There are some whose behaviour is not commendable [such as by] standing at the gates after the end of the school day or before the beginning of the school day.*
- *There is a constant need for guidance.*
- *They are distinguished by respectability and high morals, except for a few (6 September 2008)*

This highlights *turbiya* as a fundamental element of adult education. It became apparent that 'chalk and talk' teacher practices were only one part of the role of the

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<sup>23</sup> Almost all Standard Arabic words are based around three root letters. The root of *ta'lim* relates to knowledge and the root of *turbiya* relates to growing or upbringing. Both words are in the causative verbal noun form.

teachers. Pursuing analysis of *turbiya* opened up ways of understanding education and the social role of schooling in students' personal and social development.

*Turbiya*, teacher practice and 'being close'

With *turbiya* as a guide to understanding teacher practice, the role of educators in advising and interacting with learners becomes foregrounded as an integral part of the education of youths and adults. This emphasises observations of out-of-lesson interactions, in-class discussions of a personal and social nature and socio-cultural analysis of the curriculum. 'Being close to the students' was highlighted as an important quality of good teachers, particularly in youth and adult education. This was for pedagogic reasons, to know the learners' levels of comprehension and academic progression, and also for pastoral reasons, so the teacher could provide support if the learner faced any problems in their education or personal lives.

Discussion of aspects of the teachers' identities highlighted the importance of teacher-student relations and emphasised the interpersonal role of the teacher. One response about the effect of teachers' age on their practice stated that,

*Age has an effect because...the students get along with those who are in close ages and they do not like the person who is older because he feels differences between them. (Unnamed response)*

The preference for teachers to be close to their learners was not limited to responses on age, as shown in a response on gender,

*Men's and women's teaching does not differ, but sometimes men are better at teaching boys and women are better at teaching girls. That is my opinion [because] each of them is closer to the other and understands them. (Nuha)*

In the co-educational context of adult education in Khartoum, both male and female instructors taught mixed-gender groups, with a larger proportion of males. Nuha's view was not shared by other teachers, but the point to emphasise from these quotations is the importance placed on teachers 'being close' to the learners so they "*get along*" and understand each other, rather than feel "*differences between them*". Interestingly, in the diverse socio-cultural context of Sudan, the participants did not perceive that teachers' ethnic groups (tribes) impact on their teaching<sup>24</sup>. However, the teachers highlighted the importance of shared social experiences by stating that a teacher who is *hankosh* (posh or spoilt) would face difficulties in teaching in adult education schools,

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<sup>24</sup> The only exception was in relation to language issues, such as in the situation of a teacher who is able to explain a lesson to a non-Arabic monolingual group in their mother tongue, which is unlikely to occur in the ethnically mixed context of adult education in Khartoum.



as their economically privileged backgrounds and different social experiences would limit their abilities to interact with the learners and teach effectively (1 November 2008). Similar social experiences and status was felt to be by far the most important aspect of the teachers' identities, rather than gender, age or ethnicity.

Rather than forms of identity, teachers emphasised the importance of social interaction as the means of 'being close' to the learners, as shown by Adil's answer to a question about the role of his personality in his teaching,

*My personality plays a role in the ease of dealing with pupils – using simple words – and the appearance – impressive expressions during teaching and good friendship with the pupils.*

This teacher felt that his way of interacting with the learners, including his language and appearance, was an essential element of his identity as an educator, even describing his relationship with his learners as 'friendship'. This perception was reinforced by the observations of a headteacher, who commented that students "*cannot learn from their enemies*" (Jaber, 7 June 2009). The teachers enacted their role in *turbiya* through role-modelling behaviour in the schools, particularly through maintaining positive relations with students. The role-modelling aspect of teachers' practice was mentioned by Nuha,

*...The teacher should have a strong personality because he is a model for his pupils and many of the pupils become teachers as models of their teachers.*

Teachers' understandings of the personal qualities of a good teacher included being sociable, patient, honest and of good appearance, indicating the traits of being educated that the learners should develop through education.

Relationships between teachers and learners depended on the individuals, and were affected by personal factors, such as age and gender, as well as, for example, the length of time and regularity that the learner had attended the school and the number of students in the class or school. The relationship dynamics were embedded within the hierarchical school structure, but the element of 'friendship' was also mentioned. For example, on one occasion I saw a teacher say to a student who was walking past us, "*Don't you shake hands with your friend?*" in order to be greeted. On another occasion, I observed the same teacher,

*Several students come to say hi to Mus'ab, they seem happy to see him after his break from teaching. (21 April 2009)*

Further observed examples include Sara's relations with a female student of a similar age, which included us giving her advice when she joined us in the staff room after her boyfriend had 'given her the hammer' (a slang expression meaning he had ended their relationship). As an extreme example of 'positive interpersonal relations', Yahya married a former student from the open English course in his adult education school.

The school environment facilitated teacher-student interaction, as well as student-student interaction, as all schools had large courtyards and shaded areas in order to sit outside during the hot afternoons. The importance of out-of-class interaction for building relations between teachers and students and helping students to integrate in the schools was highlighted in Yahya's reflective notes,

*A new student – says Khartoum Evening School is different from other schools:*

- *the way teacher talks to students ('modest and tranquil and answers any question that he faces in the class')*
- *teacher eats falafel with students in school*
- *teacher drinks tea with the students*
- *students can ask questions about things that concern lesson inside/outside the class. (9 February 2009)*

Teachers observed that the interpersonal relations between staff and learners in these schools contrasted with teacher-student relations in standard schools. One teacher observed that in adult education, "*students are mature, they can appreciate their responsibilities,*" whereas in standard schools, punishment must be used to push students to fulfil their duties, such as doing homework (Tayeb, 21 May 2009). He also commented that, "*Older students cannot join a normal school as they may feel shame.*" Students made similar observations, such as one student, who said that he 'finds himself' in the school, which was later defined by students in another school as,

*to find yourself ... to share common interests, to be very comfortable at the place or to be very comfortable with the people you are dealing with.  
Actually, it is a matter of the same concept, the same moral and same etiquette.  
(Student and former student of an open English course, 7 June 2009)*

This shows that the student felt comfortable in the school due to the common backgrounds of the adult education community.

### Turbiya and classroom practice

The teachers frequently mentioned 'giving advice' as a means of promoting positive student development, which reflects the didactic process of *ta'lim* and the role of the teacher in giving knowledge. As one teacher commented, "*I can talk, I can advise, I*

*can guide*” (Tayeb, 21 May 2009). This advice often related to studying, such as punctuality, bringing a pen and exercise books, and regular revision. Teachers used their knowledge of the learners’ personal situations in giving advice, such as when Maryam reported advising a group of students to attend regularly, look after their books, be respectful to teachers and colleagues, and “*we know you’re working students – take time from your private life to read [study]*” (8 March 2009). Teachers’ advice also extended to public behaviour, such as appropriate clothing, friend and family relations and personal hygiene. The role of *turbiya* was important in adult education as the students had limited experience of formal education and were not used to ‘school culture’ or the ‘school environment’ at first.

Religion was an integral constituent of education and particularly in the *turbiya* process. This was made explicit in the names of the Religious Studies subjects, which were entitled ‘Islamic *turbiya*’ and ‘Christian *turbiya*’. No other subjects were specifically referred to as *turbiya*. This relation between education, *turbiya* and religion was expressed by a Christian English teacher during a discussion about his use of a short Christian text as a dictation activity,

*I have a role to take them from good to better, from wrong behaviour to correct ones... In the beginning we told them, I used to advise them you’re not here only to learn English, it’s also to improve your behaviour... Not just academic studies, but also improve your spiritual relationship with God, whatever your religion. (William, 19 November 2008)*

This emphasises the purpose of adult education in the behavioural development of the learners and the role of the teachers in envisioning the aspired model of an ‘educated person’.

### Gender and *turbiya*

Some schools included cultural extra-curricular activities, which were gendered practices, with girls likely to participate in traditional singing and dancing, sometimes joined by boys, while playing sports, such as football, was almost entirely a male activity. These took place in school ‘open days’ (at least annually) or in weekly timetabled ‘activities sessions’. According to the teachers, the aims of these activities were for enjoyment and to maintain the students’ interests in schooling, rather than for broader cultural reproduction or intercultural dialogue purposes. Out-of-lesson activities were also gendered, for example students spent time with their friends before or after lessons, but, in general, girls were expected to go home soon after school

ended in the evening. I was informed of this by some of Abdelaziz's female students who had said that they were disadvantaged by being unable to participate in discussion groups after class, as they had to return home. On telling Abdelaziz about this, he responded that, *"he knew it, but I emphasise it to him"* (13 April 2009).

Some out-of-lesson activities can be viewed as a form of 'hidden curriculum'. Additional duties, such as cleaning or running errands were part of the experience of the learners. In schools with younger learners (mainly teenagers), the learners were responsible for cleaning their classrooms prior to their lessons. This was a gendered activity, boys were more likely to clean the board or remove litter, girls were more likely to sweep. Forms of monitoring this cleaning were also gendered, according to my limited observations in one school, while one female teacher sometimes helped the girls to sweep, male teachers gave orders for the students to fulfil. During lessons a boy might be sent to other classrooms to look for a chalkboard duster and then clean the board. Through participation in such activities, learners might develop their sense of the hierarchical respect for those in authority and older people, a feature of Sudanese society, as well as a feeling of responsibility for their own environment. Teachers viewed these practices as part of the students' development of a sense of responsibility for the school environment and also highlighted their gendered views of students' activities and models of their personal and social development.

#### *Turbiya* and learners' aspirations

The importance of *turbiya* in adult education was shown by the learners' motivations to study. These were primarily to gain Arabic literacy skills and curriculum knowledge for assessment in examinations in order to progress education levels. When asked why they studied, the common response from students was "to learn" and "to become educated". The transformative nature of education was indicated through teachers' and learners' conceptions of 'being educated', which frequently related to interpersonal interaction and ways of communicating, as shown by comparison of 'educated and uneducated' people,

*Someone not educated, he just like an animal, he don't know anything about life...Educated people, if [they] want ask you, say 'Please, I want your help.' Uneducated says, 'Hey,' without pleasing. (Male former student of open English language course)*

The aspiration to 'become educated', relating to interpersonal behavioural norms, must be located within the social context, in which those who were perceived to be educated

gained respect and were viewed as being able to participate in public life. The link between being educated and respect is shown by the verse of a poem which was well-known, quoted and written on some school murals,

Knowledge builds a house which does not have a column  
and ignorance destroys a home of dignity and respect

This was echoed by other adult learners who gave examples of modes of greeting and ability to participate in discussions as characteristics of educated people. As a female adult learner explained about her reasons for studying, *"I want to know so I can speak. If you don't have Arabic, you can't speak...In front of society, if a person doesn't have Arabic, they can't speak in front of people"* (Hajer, 26 April 2008). An 'educated' person is therefore someone who is capable of participating in society and communicating, confident, knowledgeable and respected. The process of 'becoming educated' is closely related to interpersonal abilities of learning to interact with peers and teachers, as well as developing literacy skills and gaining school knowledge.

The transformative process of education was marked in the context of adult schools in Khartoum, as the students were mostly impoverished and from rural areas, with limited educational experience. Furthermore, in Islam, becoming educated is a religious duty, as mentioned by some students who linked their desire to gain literacy skills with their ability to read the Qur'an. Some teachers described the uneducated learners, particularly before joining adult education, as *'mutakhalif'* ('primitive'), and I observed a student who the teacher perceived as misbehaving in class being described as a *'shamas'* ('street child') (9 September 2008). Whereas, some teachers claimed the learners become *'muthaqaf'* ('cultured') and *'muadab'* ('civilised') through education. The socialisation of learners through schooling was implied in comments made by a male student who, using an Arabic expression *'zai al-nas'* (literally 'like (the) people'), explained that he studied in order to *"read like people"* and *"speak like people,"* privileging the behavioural norms of educated people, which acted as models for the learners. Adult education, therefore, explicitly facilitates the development of norms of behaviour which were viewed as 'civilised' and privileged over the practices and attitudes of the learners' rural origins and marginalised communities on the fringes of the national capital.

Learners' aspirations to 'become educated' were emphasised by the limited economic outlook of students following adult education. The prevalence of the *wasta* (personal connections) system to access jobs and other opportunities in Sudanese society

disrupts the assumed direct link between qualification and employment. This system affects learners across educational levels, as shown by one tea seller and learner in an adult education school, whose university-educated children were unemployed, who commented that *“They don’t give work to people, only if you have strong wasta”* (Hajer, 26 April 2009). As they were excluded from the dominant political and economic groups, adult education students were likely to have *wasta* which was limited to those in a similar socio-economic situation and, therefore, faced challenges in finding work other than in the low-skill informal sector. This was shown in a discussion with a headteacher,

*PF: Can education help someone who doesn’t have good wasta?*

*Jaber: Now it’s very difficult. You can but only if you have good certificates with excellent degrees. Sometimes they can be lucky, but not always*

*PF: What happens to students who don’t have an excellent certificate?*

*Jaber: They can agree with simple jobs or anything he can gain his life satisfactory. Even if he don’t satisfactory, but what can he do? (19 April 2009)*

According to the headteacher, studying could improve employment prospects, but only made a significant impact if the learner gains *“good certificates with excellent degrees”*. This was unlikely to occur in an adult education school, where learners generally achieved low examination results. The result was that adult learners were likely to find employment in low paid *“simple jobs”*, and have little other opportunity, even if they were ‘not satisfied’. Given this context, the process and outcomes of adult education can be understood by framing the analysis through *turbiya* and *ta’lim*, rather than through a human capital focus on qualifications and employment.

### **Beyond technical ta’lim: re-viewing the curriculum and the learners**

Coming to know *ta’lim* and *turbiya* re-cast our understandings of teacher practice as part of a socialisation process, as any technical practice takes place within a socio-cultural complex. This process of coming to know has involved building up a picture by layering technical practices and reasoning with diverse insights from teachers and students and out-of-lesson observations, framed through local concepts of *ta’lim* and *turbiya*. To build up a picture of the social complexity of education, I return to the issue of textbooks which problematises the initial technical interpretations by re-interrogating the curriculum with a socio-cultural analysis.

To say that the teachers were unaware of the imbalanced and oppressive power relations in Sudanese society and therefore required “conscientisation” (Freire, 1972) is

problematic. For example, teachers were aware of social phenomena which marginalised their learners, such as *wasta*. The teachers recognised the multicultural nature of Sudanese society, which includes diverse ethnic groups, religions, languages and customs. They also recognised the promotion of the governing groups' Arab-Islamic traditions and values through the ideology of the curriculum (Breidlid, 2005a). One of the more politically involved teachers, from western Sudan, expressed the view that "*Arabs feel they're class one, they should rule over the others*" (12 March 2009). For example, texts in the Arabic subject were often based on Islam and Islamic history, as well as northern Sudanese society. The teachers had different opinions on the effects of this, as well as differently formed political opinions, which were expressed to varying degrees.

The teachers were only able to identify a limited number of lessons in the Arabic Language textbooks which referred to diverse Sudanese cultures. The conception of 'culture' was of customs and social practices, such as musical instruments and marriage traditions, as posited by Sara,

*We find many Sudanese cultures but the textbook presents part of these cultures. For example, in the book for Class 3 we find the book discusses Nuer [a tribe in South Sudan] culture. Very weak representation because it does not represent all the cultures, but limited cultures. There is the book of Class 5 'Al-Mawrid' that presents the culture of popular Sudanese musical instruments, so it shows each culture of all the tribes present in Sudan. (11 April 2009)*

The dominant culture, represented in education, was normalised. I questioned this while observing an activities session in a mainly 'southern' school, as the boys played football and the girls practised traditional songs and dances,

*Superficial? Culture about dances and weddings only? Compare embedded nature of Arab Islamic culture in school textbooks. (21 April 2009)*

Some teachers were not critical of the government's ideology in textbooks, based on their observations of the effect of the textbook content on the learners and their educational performance.

*Hadiya says she's not found a Christian example in the textbooks, 2 Christians in Grade 5 "They write the lesson, solve the exercises as normal and participate in the lesson." (4 November 2008)*

This stance was repeated by other teachers who felt that even the students marginalised from the ideology were interested in learning about Islamic culture, as it was useful knowledge for them. This reasoning arose from teachers' focus on

students' participation and progress in learning within the existing education system, rather than on questioning components of the school structure itself.

Conversely, some teachers were critical of the government's ideology in textbooks. Others felt that this focus frustrated or angered the students, but accepted that they must learn it for the examinations. The omission of students' cultural knowledge from the curriculum led a southern headteacher to comment that learners did not 'find themselves' in the textbooks,

*If we want Sudan to be one country that means he should find himself in the education...Here in this syllabus, we can't find ourselves, as southern Sudanese...We look as if we're not one people. If we're one people and we live in one country, we should know about ourselves. (Headteacher, 25 April 2009)*

Mus'ab explained that "Most of those books talk about Arab culture only" which had negative effects. He created an allegory using my origins from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in the North-East of England,

*Your state in...Newcastle. You're from Newcastle and you're studying in London. If they don't mention Newcastle in your studies, you won't feel comfortable...you'll hate the subject. You'll say, "Every day London, London. Give me something from Newcastle." (21 April 2009)*

This sense of ambivalence towards the Arab-Islamisation of textbooks was occasionally exhibited by learners when questioned. An example of such sentiments comes from two southern, Christian girls who I found reading a text about the Islamic festival, Eid al-Adha.

*They're both Christian (I ask), southern, so I asked how they feel about studying texts about Islam. They said that it's okay, they read and answer the questions (i.e. study as they should). Would they prefer to study about Christianity? "Yes." Is it in the Arabic language books? "No." (6 June 2009)*

As part of the marginalised population, they were less likely to possess this privileged knowledge through their own lived experience, and therefore lacked the 'cultural capital' which would advantage them in education and examination (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This perspective was given by one headteacher,

*Even in maths and geography and science you can find examples of the Islamic religion. Sometimes the students who aren't Muslims, they don't know the answer. (25 April 2009)*

Students were marginalised from the forms of knowledge validated by the government. The challenging education context and limited 'cultural capital' could formulate learners' subjectivities as underachievers.



Socio-cultural issues in adult education were epitomised in questions of language, as shown in discussion of a text entitled '*Watani*' ('My nation') from the Arabic language course for Class 3. The text begins,

*I am a small boy, I love my country, I live contentedly and happily in it, as my father and ancestors lived. I love my language Arabic which I speak, because it is the language of the country and because it is a beautiful language. (Albustan Part 2 textbook)*

In discussion of the text with Hadiya after her lesson, she estimated that around 85 percent of the learners in her school speak a *rotana* (minority indigenous language). Indeed, even she speaks the language of her tribe, which originates in western Sudan. However, she expressed her valorisation of Arabic as "*the mother tongue of the nation*" and the "*basic and main language*" (27 May 2009). In Sudan, terms used to describe languages indicate recognition of their legitimacy. Arabic, English and other international languages are each considered a *lugha* (language), whereas minority Sudanese languages were referred to as a *rotana* or *lahja* (dialect) or described as 'tribal' or 'local'. The dominance of Arabic over other languages was signalled by Hadiya in discussion of the '*Watani*' text,

*In the end, the language unites them [the learners] and it is the Arabic language, despite the difference in lahjat (dialects).*

When asked whether there was any difference between how Christians and Muslims view Arabic, Hadiya responded, "*No difference. Sometimes you find a Christian who speaks Arabic more eloquently than a Muslim.*" This is representative of the opinions of some of the teachers who believed government ideology in the textbook had limited effects on the diverse learners, which they validated using their observations of their classroom performance. The normalisation of the cultural dominance of the government's ideology was particularly visible in adult education in Khartoum where learners from across Sudan, speaking different indigenous languages, became acculturated to using Standard Arabic through schooling, in addition to Sudanese Arabic through their day-to-day experience of living in Khartoum. This study made explicit some forms of oppressive power relations, such as the educational disadvantage of learners who do not speak Colloquial Arabic as mother tongue, which had previously been observed by the teachers, but this did not result in overt questioning of the fundamental political role of language in education.

The dominance of Arabic (and English) is a microcosm of the wider issue of the recognition of certain cultures and the censoring of others. Following discussion of the

topic 'Education in my school reflects the culture of the students who study there' (15 November 2008), I summarised the position of some of the teachers,

*Students don't have a culture until they go to school (i.e. they're uncultured) – possibly due to conceptions of 'culture'.*

This reflects a dominant culture which has become normalised, even by those who are excluded. Knowledge was internalised by learners through their recognition and privileging of what is 'knowledge' or even what is 'culture' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This could be seen in statements made by some of the teachers, who commented that their students, when starting school, "*don't know anything*" or "*have no culture*". This was explicitly stated by one teacher, who wrote "*the students themselves are uncultured*" (Mus'ab). The internalisation of the dominant knowledge by the learners themselves was indicated in comments such as "*my head is empty*" and "*our heads are thick*". Dominant forms of knowledge were given value and recognition through inclusion in the curriculum, whereas the learners' own experiential knowledge and culture was generally excluded and therefore not socially valued. The exception to this was found in specialist subjects referring to social elements of different cultures in Sudan, such as 'Our Clothing' and 'Our Housing'. These were seen as irrelevant and redundant as the adult learners had such knowledge based on their experience, which was recognised by the teachers. Overall, the enculturation of the learners was not viewed as transformation from one culture to another, rather, according to some teachers they were without culture and they became cultured.

### Conclusion

Layers of collaborative reflection and learning have gradually built up a socio-cultural analysis of teacher practice and education, which reveals contested views of the process of 'becoming educated' and the role of culture in education. The issue of culture and the curriculum has emphasised the diverse views of the teachers, and also some differences between their perspectives and my own. The participants reflected on the limited 'cultural capital' of some of their learners and introduced contested understandings of what constitutes knowledge, raising concerns surrounding its validation, such as through the curriculum. On reflection, the focus of this analysis and my questioning also exhibits an essentialising view of culture as ethnic or religious. The partiality and contingency of this understanding is shown through analysis of 'how students change through education', the subject of Yahya's reconnaissance study that adds further complexity to the process of 'becoming educated' through adult schooling.

## **Yahya's action research: how students change through education**

### **Coming to know the socio-cultural complexity of adult education**

Yahya was an English teacher in the Khartoum Evening School, where he taught students in the basic level section, who formed the main focus of his research, as well as open English courses. Yahya's study was the only one to focus primarily on an anthropological issue, rather than being directly related to pedagogy, as such, it was limited to reconnaissance. His topic, 'how the students change through education' was originally included as a discussion topic and also arose when considering various starting points for his research. Yahya's research extends my analysis of *turbiya* as he considered the diverse and contradictory aspects of the process.

I had an increasing perception during Yahya's research that it was limited in processes of data collection and critical reflection, due to my technical view of what constitutes good research. However, re-viewing and analysis has highlighted the complexity of this study and its insights into adult education. His research emphasises the transformative nature of education, as a process of *turbiya*, the teacher's interest in the personal and social development of the learners and social issues surrounding this, which incorporate questions of power, marginalisation and oppression, thereby inferring a relation to 'critical' research. The layering of knowledge through my reconnaissance and Yahya's research shows the provisional and partial nature of the knowledge constructed, which is open to questioning and re-construction through inquiry.

### Coming to know Yahya's view on *turbiya*

Yahya lived in an impoverished residential area on the fringes of Omdurman. He worked as manager of his blacksmith workshop in the morning and taught English from mid-afternoon until the evening. Yahya was from a socio-economic background relatively comparable to that of the learners. As he said, "*If not for English I'd be a laundry-cleaner*" (30 April 2009). He further indicated this position when he planned to investigate adult education school drop-outs and commented that there were many "*Especially in the area I live in*" (21 March 2009). This similarity of experience, as well as his background as a learner of the open English course, emphasises his position as an 'insider' in his research context. Admittedly, the complexity of human identity,

including markers such as professional position, gender, age, religion and ethnicity, problematises this overly simplistic labelling.

Yahya articulated strong judgemental perceptions of the youth and adult learners as “raw,” “wild” and “primitive”<sup>25</sup>, relating especially to students who had just entered education and focused on behavioural and cultural norms. The backgrounds of the learners, from rural areas or the impoverished outskirts of Khartoum, were perceived by Yahya to be the cause of their “primitive” nature,

*Behaviour of students in Arabic section [adult basic education] they're very poor, they behave sometimes badly because they come from countryside or outskirts, it's their first time to read and come to school (26 January 2009)*

In stating that the learners were “from the outskirts,” where impoverished migrants from across the country reside, he introduced the binaries of urban/rural, educated/uneducated and cultured/primitive, contrasting the adult learners with those who are educated, ‘civilised’ and ‘cultured’. The diverse cultures of rural areas of Sudan were perceived as being the sources of ‘poor behaviour’ in places where the students “never learnt anything before” (26 January 2009). The students’ backgrounds were viewed as increasing the complexity of the work of teachers in adult education, creating challenges in knowledge and skill development of learners, as well as in the inter-personal relations of students and teachers.

The direct correlation between being from a rural area and ‘uncivilised’ behaviour was made explicit when Yahya raised discussion of critical incidents on students’ poor hygiene, as some adult education teachers “are suffering a lot from advising about hygiene” (6 April 2009). Such advice was given directly, such as to the boy who was told he “smelled like a goat that urinates on itself” and that he should “go and bathe” as his smell would disturb colleagues in the class. However, Yahya took a different approach to giving advice to girls, as he explained,

*Even we have girls, we told her friend to tell her to have a bath. They are sensitive people, girls... when you advise her like this she'll feel shamed [so use indirect way]. (6 April 2009)*

Yahya noted that a student’s poor hygiene was “according to his place where he is from” (6 April 2009). Furthermore, in responding to a student who spat on the floor inside the classroom, Yahya reported saying “This is not a village” (6 April 2009). This equates rural life as unhygienic and distasteful, contrasting with the ‘civilisation’ of contemporary urban society.

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<sup>25</sup> The Arabic term for primitive relates to being ‘backward’ or ‘retarded’.

In articulating examples of the deficiency in knowledge of some of his “*stupid students*” (6 April 2009), Yahya indicated what he perceived as basic information. For example “*they don’t know who is Omar Al-Bashir*” (the President of Sudan since 1989) and “*He asked them what’s special about the date when it was ‘9/11’. They said it’s just a normal date*” (26 January 2009). So, the knowledge students should learn to be civilised members of society included current affairs and politics. Other additional information was required to operate effectively in society, for example,

*We have elections in June – so they know what elections are. An introduction to electing, it’s going to benefit them in the future as they don’t know anything. (2 February 2009)*

Yahya therefore prescribed the forms of knowledge a ‘civilised’ person should possess, but also showed that learning in adult schooling was not limited to the content of textbooks, in contrast with the focus on the curriculum in the prior analysis of *ta’lim*. Yahya’s deficit view of the learners included their perceived lack of knowledge (or, rather, what was recognised as knowledge) and their behaviour. These perceptions were engaged in his professional practice of *ta’lim*, to rectify lack of knowledge, and *turbiya*, to address ‘uncivilised’ behaviour.

#### Coming to know Yahya’s views: education as a transformative process

According to Yahya, adult education was a transformative process, through which the “*wild people*” gradually change as “*education affects them completely*” until “*they behave as a human*” (26 January 2009), a transition from “primitive” to “civilised”. His focus was on the behaviour and attitudes of the learners, stating that “*All the people are good, but sometimes they behave like children*” (2 February 2009). The conception of the youth and adult learners as ‘behaving like children’ indicated the importance of *tubiya* in adult education. As the term has connotations of ‘upbringing’, this is contradictory given that the learners are older, not children.

Yahya highlighted the behavioural changes of the learners, observing that upon reaching Class 8, the learners “*know how to deal with people, they know how to be hygiene*” (26 January 2009). Indeed, to be civilised is to be fully human, while to be primitive is to be deficient and incapable of social interaction. “*If you’re not educated, people look down upon you... they’ll look at you with scorn*” (27 April 2009). This reflects students’ aspirations towards ‘being educated’, which relates to behavioural norms and attitudes, through the transformative process of adult education. Yahya

mentioned one of the female students in Class 7 as an example of a learner who had changed through attending adult education. According to Yahya, in the past,

*She was very cruel. She didn't know how to talk to people when she was in Class 1. Now she practises love, buys presents. (1 June 2009)*

When this student was asked to describe how she had changed through education, she mentioned gaining literacy skills and other school knowledge, followed by “even behaviour” as “in the past if someone asked something, I did not understand. Now, if someone asks, I understand and respond correctly” (1 June 2009). The outcome of *turbiya* in adult education therefore relates to social interaction, not simply cognitive development.

Yahya recognised that students were influenced by their peers through personal interactions, observing that,

*Some students affect other students in all ways (education, morally, dealing, 'training' and other ways). (17 March 2009)*

Yahya had tried to facilitate the social development of his learners, such as by attempting to mix “good students from English class to help students in Arabic class [i.e. basic adult education] – Yahya got pleased, the situation improved, even their clothing improved” (26 January 2009). In this model of socialisation, students who have more advanced education levels and relating behavioural norms mix with the adult education learners who should be transformed through *turbiya*.

#### Complexity of *turbiya*: un/educated people

Yahya collected data through informal interviews with a range of respondents, including students and other members of the school community, combined with our collaborative reflections that led to gradual evolution of his inquiry. In his study he unpicked several assumptions of the overall research, opening adult education and teacher practices to alternative understandings.

In discussion of Yahya's informal interview with a student in a low grade of the open English course, he showed his view of the influence of teachers,

*Teacher affects the student and his morals and that is reflected in his dealing with people and behaviour. (17 March 2009)*

Early in Yahya's research he problematised the simplistic conception of the transformative process as purely positive and expressed interest in “Research into

*students who behave badly because their teachers behave badly*" (23 February 2009). He recognised the role modelling influence of teachers, stating that *"Students behave like you, they are influenced."* He illustrated this, *"Some of them I found using harsh [swear] words, because their teacher taught them"* (23 February 2009). Arising from this, Yahya decided to investigate both students and teachers in his inquiry and emphasised the complexity of education as a positive and negative process and the apparent contradiction of some 'civilised' teachers who, at times, behave 'uncivilised'.

Subsequently, Yahya began to consider the apparent contradiction of 'educated people who behave badly' and 'uneducated people who are educated'. The latter indicates the crux of the issue, as 'educated' was used by the teacher as a synonym for 'behaves politely with people', reinforcing the conception that, despite the knowledge memorisation focus of schooling, education does not simply relate to literacy and gaining knowledge. Indeed, as the Arabic proverb quoted by a teacher states, *"Not everyone who reads is educated."* This is reflected in Yahya's observations that,

*There is some people that are educated people that behave badly, they behave like children. There are some people who are uneducated, they behave better than that. (20 April 2009).*

This indicates the increased complexity of Yahya's articulated understanding that developed as he conducted his research, and led him to seek to interview respondents who were 'uneducated', 'uneducated and behaves well' and 'educated but with bad behaviour'. In doing so, he inverted some assumptions that directly relate education to 'becoming educated'.

Yahya identified an illiterate tea-lady in the school as a prime example of someone who was uneducated but behaved well,

*She's the best one, she behaves good and she's a modest one, and she's dealing with teachers and students as if she's an educated one, but she's not, she's better than those who are educated. (27 April 2009)*

Emphasising the distinction between 'being educated' and 'behaving in an educated manner', Yahya commented about the tea-lady, *"Some people think she's an educated one, but she can't read"* (13 April 2009). The teacher's identification of a tea-lady in his school as an example of an 'uneducated person who behaves well' shows the alternative forms of learning that were practised in these schools. When asked how she learnt to behave as she does, although she was illiterate, she said, *"Through good treatment and 'close interaction'"* (27 April 2009). This indicates an informal, socio-constructivist model of learning. The seeming contradiction in Yahya's research could

be resolved if it is recognised that a person could exhibit norms developed through *turbiya*, even without having undergone a formal *ta'lim* process. By selling hot beverages in the schoolyard, the tea-lady provided a space for discussion and informal learning between students, as well as with teachers, located within the school environment, yet outside formal pedagogy processes. This mirrors the school itself, which provided a space for interpersonal learning amongst the students who were diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, age, geographic origins and life experiences.

Yahya's research highlights the limited technical view of the initial stage of the research and the complexity of the *turbiya* process, while also questioning the binary oppositions of educated and uneducated. It also shows the importance of *turbiya* in adult education, given the students' aspirations to be 'educated' and the possibility that to have completed schooling does not automatically equate with 'being educated' in terms of behavioural norms.

### Being critical...?

Yahya had a critical understanding of oppressive political structures in Sudan which have led to social exclusion and marginalisation. He criticised Sudan's education system and its use for social control in a typically colourful outburst,

*People nowadays reach university and get nothing. People are reading and writing for nonsense things. People who are graduating from university and know nothing. That's why people are staying in government and they're ruling for a long time because they [the public] are primitive people. If they're educated people they'll not all then stay in government and rule a long time...This is the situation in Sudan now: nonsense people, nonsense government, nonsense anything. (27 April 2009)*

Yahya's politicised stance problematises the paternalist construction of the process of 'critical conscientisation' which assumes participants' ignorance of oppressive political structures prior to the transformative research activity. However, critical research also requires that participants question the oppressive effects of their own beliefs and practices. During later stages of Yahya's research, I attempted to encourage him to take a reflective turn to focus on his own practice. I first recorded this concern in my research journal after Yahya had, typically, expressed strong views about a particular "wild" and "strange" learner who he imagined had "just come from the forest" and had quarrelsome behaviour which led him to wonder "I'm afraid he's going to eat you." Following this discussion I recorded the "Need to think about effects of Yahya's thinking of his students on his teaching – e.g. views of different students, ethnicities, gender



etc.” (30 March 2009). This concern for attempting to promote Yahya’s critical reflection remained throughout the research process, with similar comments occasional recorded in my research journal,

*Points for Yahya: reflexivity – Yahya’s views (prejudices? Assumptions?) and his professional practice. (15 April 2009)*

This concern arose from my underlying interest in facilitating teachers’ critical reflections, although this was in tension with the possibility of imposing my views.

Even shortly before the end of the project, I asked Yahya several times to discuss how his views of the learners affected his practice, yet I did not receive a relevant answer, as he continued to reflect ‘out there’ on his learners, rather than on his own practice. Yahya continued to view his role as transforming learners from “primitive” to “civilised” through education,

*PF: But I still mean, like, do you think that you have the right to decide how people should behave?*

*Yahya: Yes, every teacher, not me...any teacher, yes, [has the right] to change any...behaviour (25 May 2009)*

Yahya’s research project gradually wound down towards the end of the overall study. His focus turned to preparation for his marriage to one of his former students and building an additional room at his family home. While other participants undertook and monitored ‘trials of new ideas’ in their teaching, Yahya’s project remained as reconnaissance.

### Coming to know through Yahya’s research

For Yahya, coming to know through action research was not a technical process, although in his final presentation, he focused on learning specific teaching activities as the outcome of his participation in the study. The process of coming to know has comprised layering of knowledge through collaborative inquiry. My analysis of socialisation through adult education, which centred on ethnic and religious diversity by contrasting the curriculum with the learners, has been shown to be superficial. In my analysis of *turbiya*, while I questioned the form and social impact of the curriculum, I did not apply my critical lens to the teachers’ roles, but focused on their classroom practice and the curriculum. However, Yahya’s research forced me to view adult education in a way which is open to complexity and contradiction and as embedded in social practices, not limited to the classroom. Deeper analysis by Yahya has clarified the complexity of the research and *turbiya*, by using his insights into social relations and

behavioural norms. Such layering of knowledge emphasises the partiality and contingency of understanding, which is open to alternative interpretations and inquiries.

Yahya made similar comments about 'how students change through education' during a discussion held at the start of his research as towards the end, but he also articulated his view of 'uneducated' people who behave well, showing greater complexity of his understanding of education and society. Yahya's study does not comprehensively fit definitions of critical action research of,

a process in which people deliberately set out to contest and to reconstitute irrational, unproductive (or inefficient), unjust, and/or unsatisfying (alienating) ways of interpreting and describing their world (language/discourses), ways of working (work), and ways of relating to others (power). (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998, p.24)

Yet Yahya showed that he was critically aware of oppressive structures which marginalise specific groups and undertook processes of questioning and reflecting to build complex understanding. However, as Yahya replicated colonial binaries of 'civilised'/'primitive', he echoes Freire's (1972) view of the internalisation of oppression by 'the oppressed'. Drawing on this case study, being critical can be considered as when teachers reflect on and question their views, in dialectic between what is 'out there' and 'within' their practice. Outcomes are likely to be diverse and conflicting and open to further reflection and re-construction of understandings.

### Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the process of coming to know adult education and teacher practice through action research reconnaissance. Re-presentation of this process has explicitly shown the layered construction of meaning as the inquiry progressed. This was founded on dialogic processes, the teachers and I constructed knowledge about adult education that was overt in its fluidity and partiality. The constraining impact of conceptions on the production of knowledge was shown in the initial technical focus of discussion and resultant understandings that arose from an education-as-*ta'lim* definition that holds 'banking education' implications (Freire, 1972). Through the teachers' participation in construction of knowledge, we gradually recognised the socio-cultural complexity of adult education, which is not limited to classroom practice, but pertains to notions within Sudanese society of *turbiya* and what it means to 'be educated'. Yahya's analysis of 'how learners change through education' led to the troubling of seemingly simple definitions of educated/uneducated

that asks for re-consideration of the purposes of adult education and the corresponding necessary teacher practice.

This research into Sudanese adult schools is not simply located within a field of knowledge on education, it is located within discourses produced through the power-knowledge complex. As analysis of research activity, this discussion of coming to know pertains not only to education in low-income countries, but to discourses on education in low-income countries, namely how knowledge is produced. This process of coming to know shows how education can be misrecognised based on assumptions of what education is, what it should be and what it is for. The increasing complexity of understanding of education achieved through layering of knowledge illustrates the benefits of approaching knowing as a partial, provisional and ongoing process, which is framed by structuring concepts that are constraining as well as constructive.

## **Re-viewing literature: coming to know through reconnaissance**

### **Coming to know teacher practice: *ta'lim* and *turbiya***

The formulaic approach to teaching in Sudanese adult education was reminiscent of reports of classroom interaction in other African contexts in which rote learning and closed questioning dominate (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005). Although teachers in low-income countries have been cast, unlike their counterparts in economically wealthier contexts, as being oppressed by their material environment (Johnson *et al.*, 2000), teachers' reasoning for their practice in this study did not primarily centre on resource deficits. Rather, the reconnaissance into teacher practice derives from the position that,

Unless we can interrogate teachers' understanding of instructional practices from instances within their own context, and gain their viewpoint as to how these accomplish desirable learning, we may only draw superficial conclusions about their competence and understand little about how to improve the less effective teachers. (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006, p.159)

Through this contextualised analysis of teacher practice and reasoning, their tacit knowledge was made explicit. The starting point of the research was participants' concepts of teaching and learning, which indicated a transmission model of pedagogy. This was further analysed through classroom observations and discussions to understand teacher practice and their reasoning that revealed their perceptions of their roles as educators, use of textbooks, language and literacy issues and the specific

abilities and needs of the adult learners. The teacher is thus an explainer of textbook knowledge that is given to and retained by the learners, which is monitored and assessed through examination. The specific situation of adult education is such that the learners have diverse mother tongues, limited literacy skills and impoverished socio-economic circumstances that limit their learning opportunities. This supports Tabulawa's (1997) claim that education is a socio-cultural activity, in the case of *ta'lim* in Sudanese adult education, as a process of both passing on and explaining knowledge.

Overall, this reconnaissance showed the professional practice of the youth and adult education teachers and the correspondent "perceptual and contextual factors" (Guthrie, 1990, p.227) that impact on the teachers' sense of agency and selection of pedagogic approaches. These included teachers' perceptions of the role of the textbook and relating attitudes towards curriculum knowledge, as well as disciplinary structures, such as examinations, school advisers, management and the influence of learners' views. This highlighted the social embedded nature of pedagogy and the underlying reasoning of teacher practice. This formed a partial picture of teaching that was limited to classroom practice, arising from the assumptions that relate education to outcomes-focused assessment. Analysis of teachers' foundational conceptions of education as being both *turbiya* and *ta'lim* opened up alternative ways of conceptualising, analysing and understanding their practice. I investigated issues according to my understandings of the Arab-Islamic ideology of the curriculum, as well as gender and language issues, revealing the diversity of teachers' views. However, Yahya also brought inequalities to the fore by investigating social perceptions of being educated and other socio-political concerns. Gradually, the inquiry showed the process of socialisation of the teenage and adult learners into dominant urban cultural norms. As a result of Yahya's insights I have moved towards a stance of greater complexity and recognition of the diversity of perspectives and the partiality (in both senses) of my view.

### **Coming to know teacher practice: implications for research and teacher education**

Reconnaissance into teacher practice has shown that a technical analysis is limiting and at risk of obfuscating the social complexity of education. There was a danger of 'false certainty' of analysing Sudanese adult education simply as *ta'lim*, particularly if this study had been limited to the overall reconnaissance phase without the insights

from Yahya's and others' action research<sup>26</sup>. This acts as a reminder of the partiality of research and the arbitrariness of its enclosure and subsequent packaging as knowledge. In constructing this knowledge, foundational assumptions of shared understandings of education were rejected in favour of probing the teachers' conceptions of their practice. In this manner, the certitude that characterises the design of some research with pre-selected criteria gave way to a position of uncertainty and seeking to know. This shows the constraints of our concepts of education on our analysis, if it could be understood as *ta'lim* or *turbiya*, are there further concepts that remain unaddressed? This underscores the necessity in research to be open to questioning one's own views by embracing a stance of uncertainty and recognising the messiness and complexity of education processes.

The insights into adult education in this reconnaissance have questioned a plethora of assumptions. Teachers, often seen as authoritarian, operate within and are influenced by multidirectional networks of power relations. The learners might complete education but remain excluded from employment opportunities due to *wasta*, contrasting with the assumptions of human capital theory. Even those students who complete education might not be considered 'educated', depending on behavioural norms. Behind assumptions of shared understandings, there are diverse conceptions of education, language and culture, to name just a few. Research that includes alternative understandings of education and, notably, socialisation processes can be found in academic approaches, such as anthropology of education or the capability approach, as well as in specific areas, such as social justice and gender issues (Unterhalter, 2005, Tikly and Barrett, 2011). These areas share a common feature: education is recognised as a complex social process, not simply a technical activity. These broaden the scope of analysis to include the social context and behavioural and cultural norms promoted and developed through schooling.

Further research is required in low-income countries which provides an arena for teachers to reflect in order to develop "a more sophisticated account of teaching and learning and how they might go about actualizing it" (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2006, p.171). Even in the reconnaissance phase, the inquiry analysed aspects of pedagogy required for teacher education as it uncovered "the features of pedagogical reasoning that lead to or can be invoked to explain pedagogical actions" (Shulman, 1987, p.13). These were based on the concepts and contexts of the teachers, situated within the socio-

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<sup>26</sup> In the break between the two phases of research my supervisor informed me that I had collected enough data for an ethnographic doctoral thesis, albeit not the action research doctorate I sought.

cultural complexity of adult education. The study proceeded to provide insights into research and teacher education through the participants' implementation of diverse inquiries.

## 7. Teachers' action research: becoming learners-focused, *mufetih* and experimental

### Becoming 'learners-focused'

The action research phase was intended to deepen teachers' knowledge and develop and implement contextually relevant innovations. A recurrent observation by the participating teachers was that they became more 'focused' on their practice. For example, as Abdelaziz observed after I had explained the handout for a discussion on textbooks, *"While you do this it makes you focus on your students more"* (20 April 2009). Adil also recognised becoming more focused towards the end of the project, *"There are things we know, but we didn't do it with accuracy"* (13 June 2009). For example, after Bashir had made notes evaluating elements of *Spine*, I asked 'did you know this before?' He responded,

*Yes, but without care or importance...but when you ask me 'how does the textbook teach and develop [communication skills] and what's your opinion of the lesson?' All that lets me analyse the book. But I felt there's a problem in this book...actually I researched this problem [previously], but not deeply. (23 April 2009)*

Engaging teachers in a process of questioning promoted their formalised reflection and 'focus' on aspects of their teaching.

The teachers recognised their practice as being centred on the cognitive and social development of their learners, so overall the teachers became more 'learners-focused' through their action research activities. Even during the overall reconnaissance phase, some teachers became more 'learners-focused',

*William: When teachers present their ideas on the board, they learn from each other.*

*PF: Example of things learnt?*

*William: Need to consider the students and their backgrounds, e.g. come from work, need to keep them active...Some teachers are new, haven't considered this. (4 November 2008)*

When planning their research, all teachers included a subtopic of 'the learners'. They also mentioned 'being close' to learners as an aspect of the role of a teacher. The clearest indication of being learners-focused at this stage was in Mus'ab's decision to change his research topic from 'teaching methods' to 'pupils' understanding'. He explained that the topic of teaching methods *"is not very related to the students, it's*

*related to the teacher.*” He changed his topic as he wanted to “*develop his students*” (10 February 2009). Even prior to this, in feedback at the end of the overall reconnaissance phase, some participants requested that I interact more with the learners during my school visits, whereas I had been primarily focused on building relations and understanding with the teachers. This term reflects the teachers’ use of the Arabic term for ‘focused’ during our discussions and because an alternative to ‘learner-centred’ might disrupt any conception of it as a fixed dominant paradigm. Becoming ‘learners-focused’ was not an externally pre-formulated objective, but arose through analysis of the action research. Overall, the research could be considered a ‘learning-centred’ process for the teachers (O’Sullivan, 2004).

To explore the action research process of becoming learners-focused, I use snapshots from different teachers’ projects to explore how their practice and dispositions changed through undertaking action research by being *mufetih*, by being close to students and colleagues and by becoming experimental.

### **Being *mufetih***

Through undertaking action research the teachers developed a disposition towards being *mufetih*, a slang Sudanese term meaning being observant and analytical<sup>27</sup>. The term was linked with action research during the teachers’ reconnaissance phase when Mus’ab commented that in following the approach “*you need to be mufetih*” (27 January 2009). The questioning and reflecting of the reconnaissance phase facilitated being *mufetih*, but in the action research phase the teachers took more active roles.

#### **Being *mufetih*: learning about learners**

The participants gained information about the backgrounds of the learners, their aspirations and views on education through interviews. For example, in research workshop 10 Adil presented summaries of his interviews with four students he categorised as good and weak readers, arising from his research focus on ‘reading skills’. The following summary, based on my notes, exemplifies the type of data he gathered,

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<sup>27</sup> The use of a local slang term, rather than Standard Arabic, is intended to integrate some of the teachers’ language in analysis of research, instead of an imported academically validated lexicon. To a Sudanese person, the use of this term in an academic text may be humorous, as the formal context is incongruous with its normal usage as slang.



*Areej is 23, in Class 7, she is a weak reader. She has lived with her maternal aunt since she was small, on the edge of Khartoum. Her mother died when she was two, her father died when she was seven. She has never previously studied in school. In 2002 she entered the Khartoum Evening School, and she has studied Classes 1 to 6 without skipping grades. Now she is in Class 7. She has a problem reading and recognising the letters. She is not married. She wants to continue to study to develop in the future. (21 March 2009)*

The reported interview data was followed by questions from the other participants, leading to a general discussion. For example, Hadiya asked how Adil could help Areej, given that she has studied in grades one to six, but cannot read. Adil emphasised Areej's desire to continue her education, but later recognised that, although she benefits affectively from studying, she would be able to progress until Class 8, but then be unable to pass the Basic School Certificate examinations. Other discussion topics arising out of Adil's data included the relationship between learners' reading skills and their previous education experience, and the effects on children's education of parental divorce and being raised by relatives. Being *mufetih* does not just involve making observations, but also drawing conclusions and seeking to know. In his investigation into students' backgrounds Adil clarified his view that learners who had studied in a *khalwa* (Qur'an school) when younger usually had more advanced Arabic literacy skills than their peers. On my suggestion, Adil and I visited a *khalwa* to learn more about teaching practices there, with a view that Adil could gain some ideas about methods of teaching literacy.

The participants also discussed their experience of interviewing their students. Adil reported that he,

*got to know students' problems in detail, if they've got social or academic problems...Got to know the levels of the students...[I learnt] nothing surprising, but learnt in detail what made the students leave education [when younger] (21 March 2009)*

Having taught and built relations with the learners over several years, and also coming from residential areas of Omdurman, the teachers felt they learnt "*nothing surprising.*" Rather, the depth of detail gained is of importance, arising from being focused. Although the teachers knew the impoverished backgrounds of the learners, they conducted research to learn more and possibly question their prior views. Gaining insights into both social and academic issues was important as they affected the learners' school experience and achievement. Adil later commented, "*From this I imagine all their problems are the same*" (21 March 2009), indicating that he would generalise his interpretation of the interview data to his understanding of his learners,

so he would be more attuned to the learners' social situations and their effects on education.

Being *mufetih*: the curriculum and the learners

Being *mufetih* involves observing and drawing conclusions, so it is not limited to classroom practice, but can include broader social issues. The challenges of developing a *mufetih* disposition are shown in analysis of Sara's research on 'the suitability of the curriculum for the students'. Sara was a teacher in an adult education school in which the majority of the learners and teachers were southern Christians, but she was Muslim with family origins from western Sudan. Therefore, it could be expected that she would have a critical awareness of the impact of the linguistic and cultural content of the curriculum, yet this was not the case. Although she noted that the curriculum was not entirely representative of the different cultures of Sudan, she also highlighted the presence of aspects of some different Sudanese cultures in textbooks.

Initially focusing on technical teaching issues, such as dictation and students' in-class participation, I encouraged Sara to move towards critical analysis by considering the backgrounds of the learners and the curriculum content. In her research, Sara kept observation notes about her Arabic language lessons, interviewed her students about their backgrounds and views on the Arabic language subject, and conducted content analysis of one textbook. The responses from her learners and her own analysis generally focused on pedagogic issues, such as the difficulty and length of the reading text and the forms of accompanying exercises.

Any analysis of the content of the curriculum along explicitly 'critical' lines was done through discussion with me, based on questions I raised. I raised the issue of the diversity of learners, emphasising the plurality of 'learners-focused'. Later in her action research, Sara and I discussed issues of religion in education, such as on one occasion following an Arabic language lesson on 'the Migration of the Prophet to Medina', an important event in the early development of Islam. Our discussion began with a typically technical response from Sara,

*PF: Is the lesson suitable or not?*

*Sara: Suitable – so the students know the background of Islamic religion*

*PF: Is the level suitable?*

*Sara: Also suitable, not difficult words*

*PF: How did the students benefit from the lesson?*

Sara: *They benefited – this is a model so they know something about the Islamic religion.*

We continued with further prompting to question the use of Islamic topics to teach Arabic to a Christian student,

PF: *A boy student is not Muslim – how did he benefit?*

Sara: *He learns how Mohammed went from Mecca to Medina...*

PF: *I ask why separate Islamic/Christian religious studies lessons but put Islamic history in the Arabic book.*

Sara: *The Ministry of Education decides. There is no effect on a Muslim/non-Muslim of studying Islamic history in the Arabic language subject. (7 March 2009)*

This exchange shows Sara's focus on pedagogy, while I pushed towards critical sociological reflection, which was typical of many of our discussions.

The positions expressed by Sara were that all students were interested in Islam, whatever their religion, and that the Islamic focus of the curriculum has no effect on the learners. She believed that *"All learners want to know about the Prophet and the start of Islam,"* because even *"Christians are curious, not to become Muslims, but for information"* (12 May 2009). Her evidence for her claim that the lesson attracted the students was that Christian and Muslim students both asked questions. However, on another occasion Sara observed that the Islamic focus of the Arabic curriculum would disadvantage non-Muslim students (and those who do not speak Arabic as mother tongue), noting that Christian students *"probably can't do questions as don't know words, but Muslim student knows words – be easier"* (3 November 2008), indicating awareness of the lack of 'cultural capital' of some learners (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Even towards the end of Sara's research, she continued to focus on pedagogic issues. For example, after I encouraged her to interview her students about the textbook, she generally focused on technical issues, rather than on cultural aspects of the curriculum. The process of reflection, questioning and articulating views was important, and through collaboration I brought students' socio-cultural backgrounds into her reflections on her professional activities. I aspired that the participating teachers would critique the curriculum and education system, but they were more focused on pedagogy. Sara's experience shows that through action research she became more *mufetih* and learners-focused. Being learners-focused recognises the diverse backgrounds of students and the impact of their socio-cultural situations on their learning and being

*mufetih* is a means of understanding the learners' views through discussion and reflection.

### 'Being close' to learners

Conducting action research facilitated interactions between the participants, their students and colleagues, which developed 'being close' and strengthened relations. This was particularly visible in Maryam's research project into students' attention in school, as discussions with learners formed the core of her data collection. This had practical impacts, such as when she negotiated for a learner who could not afford to pay fees to be excused, which led to improvements in his attendance and academic performance (7 June 2009). Towards the end of the study Jaber, the headteacher of Maryam's school, observed,

*The students they love her because she follow them...She knows the personal information about the students, maybe she [the student] has no father, no family, with her own problems... (Jaber, 7 June 2009)*

The headteacher continued to show the impact of positive relations between teachers and learners,

*It makes a relationship between teacher and students, and also it encourages the students to be in the school to be near with closer with the teacher...because the student cannot learn from their enemy... you must be friends (Jaber, 7 June 2009)*

Therefore, through identifying the learners as an element of the research projects, the teachers became more focused on the backgrounds, interests and needs of their students. By interviewing the learners, the teachers gradually developed closer relations with them. Furthermore, as the teachers gathered data on their learners, they could also generalise it to develop their broader conceptions of the socio-economic situations of their students. The headteacher of another school made a similar observation, who commented on Yahya, Adil and Abdelaziz, "*the relation between them and their students became more...near to the students*" (9 June 2009). Being close was a process of *turbiya* which was seen as helping students develop their interpersonal skills, strengthening of this disposition was one of the main outcomes of the action research on teacher practice.

In contrast to teachers' accounts of limited collegial discussions, the action research facilitated debate amongst the participants, as well as with their colleagues in their schools. This process of being close was developed multidirectionally and

strengthened relations between participants, with their colleagues in their schools and with their learners. For example, the headteacher noticed changes in Maryam's behaviour with other teachers, observing that she held discusses with her colleagues, which she did not do in the past. This could have an impact on her professional practice as,

*Maybe she learn from others that the life must be with those whom you are with them you can be close with them and you can participate with them, if you have a problem you can say it so maybe the other can help you to solve it... (Jaber, 7 June 2009)*

In this sense the action research developed the teachers' dispositions towards collegial dialogue leading to changed practice.

### Being *mufetih* researchers

In the study I was concerned with research issues, especially the impact of power relations. I integrated reflexive processes into the research design, so the teachers would be *mufetih* about their roles. This included being 'insider' researchers, ethics and informed consent of learners, as well as validity and the evidence base for teachers' findings and claims.

As participants in the schools, the teachers had insider knowledge and relationships with their students and colleagues. Furthermore, the teachers lived in similar areas of Omdurman and had some shared experiences with the learners, meaning they possessed insights into their students' lives. The teachers recognised the value of insider researchers over outsider researchers due to their knowledge of the learners and the context, as well as due to their existing personal relationships. This was also observed by others, for example, at the end of an interview a respondent told Yahya,

*You know well our problems, teacher, and you feel the biggest part of it and know it.*

While the teachers recognised that I supported the development and implementation of their research, they did not identify any topics in which I would be advantaged in collecting data by being an outsider (11 April 2009).

The importance of explaining the research to the students and seeking their consent was emphasised to the participants. However, issues of ethics and power relations were of greater concern to me, as the academically trained external researcher. Some

learners asked the teachers about the research when they were approached to be interviewed,

*PF: Do you explain the research?*

*Hadiya: They ask.*

*Adil: "Why me?" they ask.*

*Hadiya: When you explain, they answer the questions. (11 April 2009)*

Adil also observed that learners "*all want to be interviewed after seeing their colleagues [be interviewed]*" (11 April 2009). The teachers reported that the learners reacted positively to being interviewed,

*PF: How did the students feel [about being interviewed]?*

*Adil: They were happy as they know the teacher feels interest in their problems. They welcomed the questions. (21 March 2009)*

The participants had mixed opinions about the trustworthiness of learners' responses, a research issue which I raised and problematised due to the obvious power relations between teachers and learners. In particular, I felt learners might give responses which were deemed to be polite and inoffensive to the interviewer, according to the Sudanese cultural practice of *mujamilla* (courtesy or flattery), but the teachers had diverse views on this. Among the most problematic instances of the trustworthiness of data collection, in my view, was a questionnaire developed by Rasheed. The questionnaire included questions related to his practice as an English teacher, such as "Do you like English language? Why?" and "The way of teaching, is that [an ideal] method or not? Why?" Furthermore, rather than being completed anonymously, the questions were answered orally by individual students during a lesson. Unsurprisingly, Rasheed reported his findings that,

*All of them say they like English, because it's an international language. Most of them said the way of teaching is the [ideal] method way because they're understanding what the teacher says. (2 April 2009)*

When I quizzed, "*You are a teacher, will students say mujamilla?*" He responded,

*There is no mujamilla, because they are not politicians. To make mujamilla or not, they are still underage.*

Rasheed's learners were mainly teenagers and his conceptions of their ages informed his view of these research issues. In addition, he supported his position by stating that there had been some diversity in answers, such as one learner who claimed to not like English. This stance on the honesty of the learners responses was echoed by some other teachers. For example, Abdelaziz claimed,

*When a teacher asks students and they respect him, students must answer accurately and honestly. (11 April 2009)*

Although, on another occasion Abdelaziz recognised that this ideal would also depend on the identities of the interlocutors,

*a student could be saying the truth or the opposite. For example, a person may not like Britain, but say he likes it if talking to a Brit. (28 March 2009)*

This capacity of learners to subvert data collection by not being open and honest with the interviewer was illustrated by some teachers' experiences,

*There are three brothers in class one. They always arrive at the end of the first lesson. Maryam spoke to one of them, named Ahmed. When she called him to come to talk with her, he was afraid. She asked Ahmed why he and his brothers arrive late. He replied that he did not know them or where they work. Maryam replied, "I know you work in a shop together." In the end, after Maryam explained the purpose of the research, he replied correctly. (11 April 2009)*

This issue of *mujamilla* of respondents is not limited to insider research. For example, one teacher advised me that "*all the students will lie*" about a planned question for a participatory research activity on the statement "I learn things that are useful in my life in this school" (14 May 2009). By initially building relationships with the teachers, who were my participants and gatekeepers, how I was viewed by the learners might have been affected. The potential effects of this were shown when a female open English course student, who I had interviewed, approached me to arrange a second meeting, stating "*Next week I will tell you all of the truth, because last week I was afraid*" (30 May 2009). She later explained that she had thought, "*Maybe you have relation between teachers and maybe you tell*" her critical feedback of the school (8 June 2009). The identities of the teachers and learners, such as their ages and genders, also affected their mutual power positions and actions. For example, Hadiya raised gender as an issue in gaining responses from learners, "*some students react differently to male and female teachers. If a female teacher calls him, he doesn't come, but if a male teacher calls, he comes quickly*" (11 April 2009). Teachers and learners in adult education were held in mutual holds of circulating power relations (Foucault, 1980). The relationship was not enacted to the same hierarchical extent as in children's schools, as indicated in the 'friendship' element of teacher practice and their out-of-lesson interactions with students, but there was a difference in power positions that required researcher reflexivity.

These issues of *mujamilla* and trustworthy responses also relate to an ethical concern of informed consent. By not providing truthful answers, the learners subverted the data collection and the notion that they consented to participate in an activity which required their open and honest answers. In addition to *mujamilla* and lying, avoidance of

responding can also be interpreted as a refusal to give consent to participate in the research exercise. This was shown in the different types of issues that the teachers felt they could or could not discuss with their learners, such as asking learners about their tribal affiliation. Teachers recognised that learners could 'become shy' when being interviewed, in essence this was choosing not to answer questions and doing so in a socially appropriate manner. It shows that respondents also had power in the interviewer-interviewee dynamic, and could resist through not participating. The teachers concluded that the types of questions that could be asked without a learner 'becoming shy' depended on the relationship between the two. The research participants should be conceptualised as fluid individuals that fluctuated in the changing contexts of the research process, rather than fixed, homogenous 'insiders'. Just as a headteacher commented that students cannot learn from their enemies, teachers-as-researchers cannot gather data from their enemies, so positive relationships were needed. In sum, action research casts teachers as learners and therefore dependent on students

Being *mufetih* can also have a reflexive element. However, when asked to reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses, the notion of replacing an external authority with internal reflection was problematic. Nuha's response that "*I can't know this, someone else can see this*" (17 January 2009) was reinforced by William and Maryam who agreed that "*only another person can assess you*" (24 January 2009). Such views also led to hesitancy expressed by some teachers about seeking knowledge from colleagues who did not have the desired academic qualifications, as well as the belief that the participating teachers with less professional experience would benefit the most from participating in action research. These reactions reflect perceptions of hierarchical structures of 'expertise' throughout the schooling system which can objectively assess and formulate plans for development, revealing a tension between self-reliance and external assessment. The constructivist process of knowledge generation gradually became more apparent to the participants, as my role was recognised as providing questions, rather than answers. This was highlighted in a conversation with Nuha,

*Nuha – happy with participation in the project for the new information. I said, "The information is from you." She said, "You bring the questions," and she'll benefit when she tries to solve the problem. (31 January 2009)*

The socio-constructivist epistemological basis of action research was explicitly recognised in this encounter in which "*new information*" was a direct result of questions and problem-solving, prompting articulation and clarification of teacher knowledge that



was partial and contextually embedded, generating potential for deepening teacher knowledge through subsequent inquiry.

### Being *mufetih*: conclusion

Overall, the research process led to greater focus on the learners' backgrounds and abilities. On a technical level, learning about the students helped the participants to teach more effectively, as they were more likely to accurately understand the learners' levels and interests. For example, after Sara interviewed two students about their backgrounds, previous education experience and problems in writing and completing exercises, she commented that following the interviews she would "*Know areas of weakness of students and work on resolving them*" (11 April 2009). In addition, Maryam said that she, "*Knows the students' circumstances and how to solve them. Pays more attention to the students' participation in class*" (11 April 2009). The participants reflected upon the cultures of the learners, of Sudanese society and of the curriculum, which led to greater understanding of education processes and their impact on the learners.

As part of being learners-focused, the teachers roles became more dialogic. This dialogue developed positive relations between learners and teachers. As one headteacher commented, "*In my opinion the teachers must be closer to the students and know their situation. Even their secret thing they can tell you*" (Jaber, 10 May 2009). In classroom practice, teachers should know the abilities of their learners to pitch their lesson at a suitable level. The student might be more likely to seek additional help from a teacher if they have good interpersonal relations, which could improve academic achievement or retention in education. Given the role of *turbiya* in adult education, being *mufetih* supported the teachers' pastoral roles in understanding and helping students.

The process of discussing with learners required recognition that they had experiences and views which were of benefit to the teacher. Rather the 'empty vessels' of banking education (Freire, 1972), the learners were possessors of knowledge, experiences and viewpoints that were sought by the teacher. This interpersonal aspect of action research disrupted the standard direction of knowledge transmission in schooling. Seeking information from learners and being *mufetih* can therefore be considered as developmental outcomes of action research to inform teachers' professional knowledge.

## Becoming experimental

By conducting collaborative action research I hoped the participants would benefit professionally, which I initially envisaged as changes in technical classroom practice. No specific model of teaching was promoted to the teachers, except for their exposure to my workshop activities and some of my views expressed occasionally during discussion. Rather, I envisaged a non-prescriptive process giving space for teachers to experiment. I facilitated generation of some ideas, such as through discussion of certain teaching methods or ways of overcoming particular problems which had been raised by participants. In the 'trial of a new idea in teaching' some teachers sought ideas from their colleagues then planned and implemented innovations in their practice.

### Becoming experimental: new ideas in teaching

Some of the teachers became experimental through use of different teaching activities they were exposed to in the discussion sessions and workshops, especially warm-up and research planning activities. My use of participatory research with some groups of learners provided an opportunity for the accompanying teacher to observe this method in use. On one such occasion, Abdelaziz commented, *"Although I know this way, but I never use it in class"* (30 March 2009), indicating that he might use such an approach to class discussions in the future. Furthermore, on occasion I modelled the use of teaching activities when I was invited to teach part of an English lesson I had been observing or when I occasionally covered English lessons during school visits when a teacher was absent. Yahya showed his appreciation of the interactive teaching activities,

*Yahya used 'chainwords' in class – successful. "We're waiting to have more of these things. Most of our teachers aren't doing these things inside the class, most are thinking of giving information. This is a result of your work...It's the first time to practise these things even our university teachers – they practise the traditional ways. Now we've benefited as no one knows these things." (16 February 2009)*

Use of games and activities as warm-ups and practice activities reflected the teachers' recognition that the learners were often fatigued when attending the afternoon and evening schools. Bashir's research into using games and activities in ELT showed that students like *"games and dialogue and [being] active"* and teachers who are *"active and nice"* (13 April 2009). Consequently, he introduced games into lessons as his trial of a new idea, and reported that *"the pupils very interesting in this trial, these*

*activities...they asking me all the time, "Again, again, these activities" (27 May 2009).* He thereby showed himself to be learners-focused by recognising the value of enjoyable activities in schooling. The teachers were able to add, but were less able to omit, activities due to examinations, perceptions of the curriculum and learners' expectations. In addition, warm-up activities were more likely to be used in English lessons, which might be due to the explicit objective of learning how to speak English, whereas Arabic focused on literacy development. My modelling of activities constituted limited technical changes for the teachers, which reflects the standard mode of transmission of expertise through training and differs from the reflection, discussion and inquiry of the action research.

### **Becoming experimental: trials of new ideas in teaching**

The final stage of the action research consisted of the 'trial of a new idea in teaching,' in which most of the teachers planned, conducted and monitored an innovation in pedagogy. Even mid-way through the action research phase, I continued to ponder, *"What can I do to make the teachers think more imaginatively about their teaching?"* (17 May 2009). Sharing approaches to teaching became an explicit part of the project, when I began to introduce discussion questions about ideas for pedagogy relating to the teachers' research topics. This was intended to facilitate the teachers' reflection on their own practice, as well as to provide ideas for the 'trials of a new idea in teaching'. Ideas for the innovations mostly came from the participants themselves or through discussions with colleagues in the action research workshops and in school. I initially conceived of changes in teachers' classroom practice as 'informed action', understood as praxis based upon insights gained through data collection and analysis. However, it transpired that the Arabic term that I used for this phase, selected for linguistic clarity, 'trial of a new idea in teaching' was a more accurate description of the process, as I observed,

*I'm not really considering the trial phase as 'informed action' as I don't generally feel that the data collected in the reconnaissance has really 'informed' the action that's being tried. Maybe I'm not seeing it though... (3 June 2009)*

The methods used in these trials drew on approaches that were conventionally used in Sudanese education, as well as innovative methods that were suited to the context of adult education in Khartoum.

Among the simplest trials of new ideas was Maryam's introduction of revision questions at the start of each lesson, as part of her research into student attention in class. By

asking questions to the whole class on the content of the previous lesson, she aimed to enhance student concentration and support continuity of learning, which was a challenge as some adult learners had irregular attendance and punctuality. Starting each lesson with revision questions corresponded with Maryam's conception of the role of a teacher to take the students '*from the known to the unknown*'. A further simple example of integration of new teaching approaches into practice is Rasheed's increased use of eliciting and questioning. During the action research process, discussion of video-recorded lessons prompted focus on aspects of Rasheed's practice, particularly the educational effects of *talqin* (repetition by students of words and phrases after the teacher) and student understanding of English, in contrast with repetition. This led Rasheed to elicit student understanding of words in English texts by asking the meaning in whole-class questioning, as part of the 'teacher explanation' stage of an English reading lesson, before continuing with conventional methods of model reading, *talqin* and copying the text. These examples illustrate the role of action research in prompting teacher focus on specific aspects of student learning and the integration of methods of questioning into regular classroom practice to monitor and promote learners' understanding.

Adil's 'trial of a new idea in teaching' developed his practice to include both greater rote learning and more student participation in class to improve reading skills. To enhance the reading skills of learners of a basic Arabic literacy class, Adil introduced more whole-class repetition, in response to the perceived slow learning abilities of the older adult learners. In contrast, for learners in a more advanced class, he introduced a 'seminar' English lesson, in which students orally presented short memorised texts to the whole group from the classroom stage. This 'learner-centred' approach is relevant to the context of adult education, as the student presenters reinforced their knowledge of the textbook through memorisation and participated through presentation to the whole class, mimicking teachers' conventional didactic pedagogy. These developments of the teachers' classroom practice show that the action research led to adapting the use of conventional teaching methods in ways that were relevant to their research topics or in response to collaborative discussions. They also show greater innovation in practice, while remaining in alignment with teachers' conceptions of effective pedagogy and the adult education context, including the abilities of the learners.

Further examples of changes in teachers' classroom practice through action research are included in the following case studies of Nuha, Hadiya and Abdelaziz. Hadiya's

trial exemplified a simple pedagogic innovation that was relevant to the context of adult education. Nuha's trial indicates the development of a more creative, reflective and responsive approach to teaching.

#### Hadiya's research on students' 'courage'

Hadiya selected developing students' 'courage' as her action research topic, referring to confidence to participate in public events, notably through public speaking. As Hadiya defined, "*courage is facing society*" (25 February 2009). She perceived confidence in public speaking, including participating in whole-class activities, as essential to the students' academic development, as expressed in the proverb she quoted, "*There are two [types of people] who do not learn – the shy and the arrogant*" (27 May 2009). This sentiment was shared by a female student I asked about reading aloud in class, who stated that "*If you learn, you don't become shy*" (13 May 2009). Hadiya also linked the development of public speaking skills to the students' lives outside of school and their abilities to function effectively in society. This shows that how she conceptualised learning impacted on her practice as she aimed to develop her pupils' skills in alignment with her perception the role of schooling in *tubiya* and the social conceptions of 'becoming educated'.

Hadiya showed slightly less commitment to the action research project than her colleagues, indicated by irregular data collection activities and attendance at research workshops, but her trial of a new idea is an example of a simple and effective teacher-led innovation. Hadiya allocated one Arabic lesson each week for Class 3 students to individually read aloud a pre-studied text in front of the group, each followed by teacher feedback on their public speaking skills. The trial was limited but effective and appropriate for the teachers' and learners' conceptions of the role of *turbiya*. As I recorded in the research journal,

*I like this as Hadiya's focus on bravery – basically 'public speaking' is a more holistic view of education. The students are developing a skill that's useful in their lives, and it's not formally assessed through exams. Also, I think we could see impact on students' public speaking skills – maybe within a few weeks, or after a longer period as long as Hadiya continues with the trial. (3 June 2009)*

This innovation indicates the abilities of teachers to conceptualise skills for the psychosocial development of their students, even if they are not directly assessed in public examinations, and to adapt the use of textbooks to introduce relevant teaching activities that correspond with their conceptions of education. In this innovation Hadiya

maintained her role as a teacher because she had taught the text in a preceding lesson, ensuring the compatibility of the trial with the standard teaching approach of the teacher 'explaining' knowledge (such as the meaning of vocabulary items and how to pronounce them) and giving advice, in this case on public speaking. The activity was suitable for students' levels of literacy and knowledge and the textbook was used and reinforced, thereby suiting the requirements of following the curriculum as re-reading acted as revision of the text and was therefore useful examination preparation

Hadiya's innovation was also relevant to the Islamic socio-cultural context, as the approach to literacy is historically situated. The Qur'an is traditionally recited, so reading in Arabic is associated with recitation aloud, therefore pronunciation is important. This can be contrasted with the notion of 'silent reading' which was viewed as unacceptable to the learners. This was particularly relevant in Sudanese adult education as those with non-Arabic mother tongues faced additional challenges in pronunciation and vocabulary recognition. Pronunciation might be viewed as important as most contemporary authentic Arabic texts do not usually include diacritic vowel marks, although these are included in low grade textbooks. Furthermore, practising reading aloud or reciting texts supports memorisation which is considered a useful skill in Sudan and in Islamic contexts.

Action research facilitated Hadiya's clarification of her objectives in supporting learners' *turbiya* through gaining confidence. The action research provided a framework for her to put her ideas into practice by adapting her method of applying the curriculum. Hadiya devised her innovation according to her own view of what 'quality education' should achieve for her learners, suiting the contextual factors in which she operated. Her innovation was learners-focused as the students presented one-by-one and she gave them each individual advice, albeit in a format which replicated teacher-centred didactic practice. The process of devising and monitoring an innovation in pedagogy supported development of a disposition of experimentalism.

#### Nuha's research on students' concentration

Nuha, who was a committed and conscientious participant, selected 'students' concentration' as her research topic. It was a fairly open topic, which Nuha narrowed by researching and reflecting upon the students and teaching methods in the Arabic Language subject. Even before the formal start of her 'trial of a new idea', Nuha had experimented with dividing into sections any texts found in the Arabic textbook which

she deemed too long for the learners, so each section could be read and re-read, and spread over consecutive lessons. As a limited alteration of the prescribed textbooks, this could be viewed as a reactive adaptation of teaching to correspond with the perceived standards of the learners. Nuha also introduced weekly tests for her learners to encourage them to revise regularly and to monitor their progress.

To prepare her 'trial of a new idea in teaching', Nuha asked two colleagues to provide written answers to her question "*what are the suitable teaching methods that make the pupils concentrate more?*" (19 May 2009). Looking for new ideas was part of being *mufetih*. The feedback from one colleague was based on a coursebook from an undergraduate course in Education with the Sudan Open University, the other was from a colleague who also taught in standard morning schools. This illustrates how the project promoted professional discussion within the schools and a disposition of 'being close' with colleagues, as well as building relations between teachers and students. As her trial, Nuha decided to try two new teaching methods in a lesson over a one-week period and then ask the learners which they liked, she would combine their responses with her own observations to assess the efficacy of the approaches. Initially, Nuha tried three teaching methods, which we summarised as making students think (without the teacher giving the answer immediately), giving a rule which the students applied and giving praise (26 May 2009).

In the first trial lesson that I observed, Nuha said she tried three different teaching methods, which consisted of stimulating thinking (teacher explains part, makes students think and answer questions), incentive or encouragement and the 'assessment or discovery method' (teacher explains examples, students apply the rule) (4 June 2009). I encouraged Nuha to try eliciting from the learners, which I observed in an Arabic lesson with just three students (6 June 2009). In this lesson, she explained to the learners that she was trying a new teaching method and wrote examples on the board which included one example of the change in case endings resulting from certain inflection markers (the grammar rule of '*inna* and her sisters'). Nuha then asked the learners to state what they observed and elicited the rules of '*inna* and her sisters'. At the end of the lesson, Nuha asked the learners their views of the teaching method, so she was learners-focused in the activity and its evaluation. Two of them gave positive feedback, but the weaker student said that he preferred the rule to be presented by the teacher. This shows that 'learner-centred' approaches of teaching, such as eliciting, may be restricted by students.

I felt there was limited distinction between Nuha's previous and new methods and she commented that *"there is not a difference, except there is more concentration"* by herself on her practice and its effects. In essence, through her action research project Nuha had become more focused on her learners' levels of concentration and how to improve it. I recorded that when Nuha tried new ideas in her teaching, the *"students do seem to be a little livelier and more active in the lesson"* and asked myself *"Is it due to the change in Nuha's teaching?"* (6 June 2009). I recorded Nuha's feelings about the trial,

*Students said they like both ways, but in her opinion this way (eliciting the rule) is more useful as it shows the level of the students' understanding of the lesson. (6 June 2009)*

In a research workshop Nuha reported that she could observe the impact of the trial. She felt that the incentive (praise) and 'stimulating thinking' (explain part, make students think and ask questions) methods had the stronger effects and even the weak student in the class had improved (6 June 2009). Nuha had been one of the most committed participants throughout the project, and I had hoped to see more radical change in Nuha's practice,

*I expected more from Nuha's trial, as she's not really trying something new – though we can see it fits with accepted education practice as was mentioned in colleague's Open University textbook. (4 June 2009)*

This contrasts with my later views on the nature of teacher development and innovation, which recognises that Nuha's reflection and engagement with different methods and learner feedback were innovative and effective approaches. In fact, Nuha's changes in teacher practice resulted first from greater professional focus and being *mufetih* by observing and reflecting. It facilitated 'being close' to colleagues and sharing their ideas, as well as being close to the students in order to ascertain their views. This was a creative and reflective model of teaching, in which the teacher engaged with the views of the learners as a means of practising effectively. The combination of teacher creativity and engagement with different viewpoints to evaluate practice exhibits an understanding of the provisionality of knowing which is integral to teacher experimentalism.

#### Becoming experimental: conclusion

The action research provided a framework which facilitated the trials of new ideas in teaching and the implementation of other creative approaches. The changes were relevant to the socio-cultural context as the ideas were from the teachers themselves



and their colleagues in the action research and in their schools. In my initial reading of the trials of new ideas I was influenced by technicist discourse and was disappointed by the limited change in teacher classroom practice, but in subsequent reflections I have clarified the underlying dispositions developed by the teachers. Both Hadiya and Nuha's trials of new ideas could be conceived as 'learners-focused'. Hadiya was *mufetih* by identifying an aspect of student development that she conceived as important to her specific learners, as public speaking was a central to 'being educated'. Her innovation remained within the parameters of teachers' and learners' perceptions of education, but by practising public speaking from the stage at the front of the class, similar to a teacher, each learner participated and received individual feedback. Nuha experimented with different approaches to presenting information and student practice, exhibiting a disposition towards creative, reflective practice. She was learners-focused by monitoring the students' participation and learning, as well as eliciting their opinions on the new techniques. Overall, the disposition of experimentalism, shown in introducing new methods and monitoring their outcomes, was of greater importance than technical changes during the study.

### **Becoming learners-focused: outcomes of action research**

My concern for observable impact on the teachers was clear and became stronger as the study progressed, as shown in this typically self-questioning extract,

*Just wondered if we're going to see any change in professional practice through these projects. Yes, teachers are learning lots, but I think most of the topics are...basically overarching issues, not specific problems that need to be resolved. Is this true? Impact is likely to be in deeper professional knowledge, research experience, than in the minutiae of pedagogical activities. (18 April 2009)*

This quote indicates that I conceptualised 'impact' in terms of improving technical practice. However, this internal dialogue also shows that other forms of potential impact I considered included "*deeper professional knowledge*" and skills or insights resulting from the "*research experience*". My ongoing concerns regarding this issue prompted my doctoral supervisor to advise me "*Don't get too hung up about change*" (John Pryor, December 2008). Subsequently, I expressed my limited expectations of observable impact on teaching practice,

*I'm in the process of letting go of expectations that we'll see any great change in teaching methods. (23 April 2009)*

This concern that I risked 'getting hung up about' reveals a tension between my technical expectations of teacher development and the tacit outcomes of action research.

Each teacher achieved different outcomes from their participation in the project, depending on the individual, their research focus and activities, and was fairly proportionate to the level of commitment shown towards the inquiry and professional practice. Many outcomes of the action research were implicit and vague and might subsequently be enacted through different forms of continuation. Some teachers exhibited qualities of reflective and responsive educators, such as Nuha, who trialled and monitored different teaching methods. Yahya highlighted his use of particular activities I had modelled in research workshops as an important outcome. Personal tacit outcomes were also significant, such as Maryam's strengthened relationships with her colleagues and students and Bashir's increased confidence in his practice. Despite the range of research experiences, each participant received a standard 'experience certificate' at the Action Research Seminar and Certificate Ceremony, which marked the end of the project. These certificates acted as physical outcomes that were fixed, identical, authenticated and observable, in contrast with the diverse and tacit nature of learning through action research.

My regular school visits played an important role in encouraging the ongoing efforts of the participants, as Adil observed,

*I ask Adil what he thinks of the project, he says it's good – But it requires the teachers to be serious, like Nuha. I ask how I can facilitate this. He said by 'monitoring'. I ask 'how?' He said by visiting – as I do. Adil said teachers are busy and have their own problems, and may put their papers [research activities] aside. (2 February 2009)*

The research project did not formally continue (although this was discussed), due to limitations of time and the lack of a committed organiser following my departure. Also, any continuation without an external academic researcher could be viewed as less 'legitimate'. I held a fixed view of the expected continuation and outcomes of the research project,

*I have formal view of continuation – e.g. sustainable only if teachers meet weekly in formalised setting. But, it's more likely they'll discuss with colleagues in their school or do other informal 'research/discussion' activities. (20 June 2009)*

A broad view of outcomes is required, that is not limited to pedagogic issues and cognisant of the potential for longer-term impact to become clear following the end of

the study, through the informal continued enactment of the qualities, skills and practices the teachers developed.

Some of the participants continued using action research methods following the end of the doctoral project. I observed one example of 'being close' six months after the end of the project, when I visited one of the schools and found Maryam sitting in a classroom alone with a student. They were in conversation and Maryam was making notes. When I asked what she was doing, she replied, "*A case study*," as the learner had recently joined the school, so she wanted to find out his background and previous education experience. This anecdotal evidence, combined with corroborative comments from other participants after the project, shows that the experience of the action research led to appreciation of the importance of dialogic relations with students and colleagues. The strengthening of relationships between participants and other members of their school community was an important outcome of action research. Unlike the fixed and measurable outcomes of schooling, in the form of periodic examinations, the processes involved in action research did not have a clear end, as the teacher reflection activities could be engaged by the teachers throughout their careers.

An open conception of outcome in action research is required that encompasses personal and professional skills and dispositions. The teachers' participation in the research project had outcomes indirectly linked to classroom practice. For example, teachers developed public speaking skills through presenting their research experience in the seminar at the end of the project. Some teachers also benefited from networking opportunities at an ELT conference in Khartoum, where I delivered a presentation on action research with Abdelaziz. In terms of direct career development, following the research project, two of the female teachers began teaching in standard basic schools, having developed teaching experience through their work in adult education. More broadly, following my presentations on reflective teaching and action research in various English language academic forums in Khartoum, I raised the profile of the approach. One Sudanese university that I have strong links with has introduced an action research component to its Teaching English as a Foreign Language course, an academic education association has formed an action research 'Special Interest Group' and an ELT conference under the theme 'The Autonomous Teacher' with an action research strand is under development. I do not claim credit for such developments, but my presentations during fieldwork informed discussions of action research and teacher development in Khartoum. Such ripples of impact might contribute to education

development in Sudan, exemplifying the diverse and unpredictable forms of action research outcomes.

### **Abdelaziz's action research: writing skills**

Abdelaziz mainly taught open English courses at the Khartoum Evening School and also taught in a government basic school in the morning. Abdelaziz had clear views on teaching and learning, which were well articulated during the study, and was viewed as a skilled teacher by his colleagues. He expressed his professional commitment when I commented that one of his students had told me that he was "*the best teacher.*" "*I'm trying to be,*" he replied (6 April 2009). Abdelaziz's action research on students' writing skills illustrates the iterative process of data collection and analysis and the development of a disposition of experimentalism.

Abdelaziz's school context and practice differed from that of most of the teachers in the research project. The open English courses took place in the same school and at the same times as adult basic education. Learners in the open English courses generally had greater education experience than those in basic level classes, often secondary or university level, but were generally from similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. They studied English daily for one hour with the sole intention of developing their language skills. The aims of Abdelaziz's English language teaching, his students' education experience and aspirations created an environment where he felt enhanced agency to engage in creative practice. Some structures that impede teacher agency, such as school advisers, expectations of curriculum delivery and external examinations, were absent in Abdelaziz's open English course teaching context.

The steps of Abdelaziz's research are presented to illustrate the process of teachers becoming *mufetih*, experimental and learners-focused through action research. In addition to data from my research journal, this section includes extracts from a script prepared by Abdelaziz, with my support, for a presentation which we delivered at a conference organised by the Association of Sudanese Teachers of English Language towards the end of the action research project in June 2009.

Reconnaissance phase: cycle of teaching and data analysis

Abdelaziz selected writing skills as his research topic as he felt this issue was a problem for the students and because they were intrinsically valuable to the learners and they also have an instrumental value in improving their language abilities. Abdelaziz composed two research questions for his project,

*Reconnaissance: What are the problems/difficulties which face my students in writing skills?*  
*Developmental: How can I solve these problems? (9 February 2009)*

Abdelaziz's research was fairly clear and well-structured. We subdivided his research topic to include elements of writing, writing activities, the curriculum, the students and teaching techniques (9 February 2009). He focused on problems in writing, teaching methods and understanding the students' interests, and later on new teaching approaches. The initial phase of Abdelaziz's research consisted of "a cycle of teaching (including writing skill in each lesson), writing activities, error analysis, find reason for errors...and further teaching" (23 February 2009), essentially an ongoing cycle of data collection, analysis and action.

In the first stage of his research, Abdelaziz took notes on writing errors in homework while correcting the students' exercise books. These included punctuation and capitalisation, sentence structure, grammar (such as tenses and prepositions) and Arabic (first language interference) (9 February 2009). Abdelaziz kept narrative notes on his individual students, showing recognition of his students as individuals with diverse abilities and needs. He became more focused on writing errors and their causes, as he observed,

*After discover – most errors in 3 classes, e.g. punctuation, structures, meaning  
 → look for reason – is it due to me? Or the syllabus, the book they're studying?  
 After that I'll search about the reason. (23 February 2009)*

After analysing students' written work, Abdelaziz outlined the causes of problems in students' writing as the result of lack of focus in the curriculum and by teachers and learners,

- a. *School syllabus – Spine and other textbooks used in Sudan focus on reading or communication skills, more than on writing skills*
- b. *Teachers – many teachers don't focus on writing and consider it as a subordinate skill in terms of their teaching*
- c. *Students – students in the Khartoum Evening School rarely write in English in their daily lives, and focus on speaking, listening and reading when practising English*

- d. *Arabic language interference – many of the problems in use of expressions, punctuation, grammar and spelling can be traced back to ways of expressing in the students' mother tongue (17 June 2009)*

Abdelaziz modified his teaching to focus on writing in order to develop his students' skills and to gather data for his study,

- a. *I taught rules of writing, based on their errors (e.g. capitalisation, structure and tenses)*
- b. *I gave more writing exercises*
- c. *I tried to encourage the students:*  
*By emphasising the importance of the writing skill (e.g. for work)*  
*By promising a prize to the best writer at the end of the course*  
*(17 June 2009)*

This cycle of teaching, data collection and analysis took place weekly from February until June 2009. Abdelaziz monitored the learners and their progress in writing,

*Abdelaziz: I will try to make them like writing.*  
*PF: How will you know?*  
*Abdelaziz: I have to be close to the students – I'll try to notice, to see if they interact with this way or not. (23 February 2009)*

'Being close' to the learners was related to being *mufetih*, such as in Abdelaziz's assessment of his students' levels, interests and the efficacy of the teaching methods he used.

Abdelaziz's research provides an example of the tension in my role due to the possibility of imposing particular teaching methods based on my experience as an English teacher in Khartoum. Although I occasionally drew on this knowledge when discussing teaching with Abdelaziz, any input was couched in questions to problematise their use in his context. For example, after sharing a photocopied chapter about teaching writing skills, I asked Abdelaziz, "*What ideas are useful to you in this context? Why? Not useful? Why?*" (15 April 2009). By doing so I specifically highlighted the importance of avoiding the uncritical adoption of teaching methods.

Through his reconnaissance phase, Abdelaziz analysed students' errors in writing English and reflected on their causes. He focused on writing skills and tried to respond to learners' needs by undertaking remedial tuition and setting weekly homework in order to improve their writing skills and to provide a data source for his error analysis. This form of being 'learners-focused' can be conceived as "learning-centred" (O'Sullivan, 2004).

Being *mufetih*: re-framing the focus to error correction

Through discussion of Abdelaziz's analysis of students' written mistakes, we broadened the scope of his research. In particular, I identified and problematised Abdelaziz's inferences that the same mistakes were repeated in learners' writing. For example, Abdelaziz observed that the learners made the "*same errors as before*" (30 March 2009) and a mistake reoccurred "*even though I've told him repeatedly*" (1 April 2009). This led us to identify the problem as being related to methods of error correction, rather than simply tuition of writing skills, which I framed by asking 'which is the most effective method: teacher correction, peer correction or self-correction of learners?' This facilitated further reflexivity by Abdelaziz, as the aspects of his practice under analysis then included both teaching writing and correcting errors.

The methods of error correction used by Abdelaziz at the start of the study included written correction in students' exercise books and individual oral explanation after class, as well as providing general feedback through revision activities. The forms of written feedback given by Abdelaziz showed nuanced understanding of the learners. For example, he explained that he did not use Xs when marking written work "*as it makes the students miserable*" (17 March 2009), rather, he put dots under mistakes. He also gave comments of good, very good and excellent, and provided oral formative feedback if approached by the student. I supported Abdelaziz's *mufetih* moves by posing questions on aspects of the mistake correction process that I found problematic. One principal concern was that the practice of brief written feedback and one-to-one oral discussions after class depended on learners approaching the teacher, thereby relying on their interest and confidence to seek formative feedback.

Abdelaziz was *mufetih* by considering methods of mistake correction from different perspectives. He gathered data on whether the learners preferred correction by the teacher, peer correction or self-correction by asking his students and using a simple survey method. He summarised his findings as,

*Students do not trust their colleagues to correct, some students are concerned that their colleagues are incorrect. Most prefer that the teacher corrects. (11 April 2009)*

This corresponds with the conceptions of teaching and the role of teacher as 'explainer' held by learners and educators in adult education in Sudan. Abdelaziz also devised a questionnaire for teachers in his school, which asked about the advantages and disadvantages of the three methods of mistake correction, students' 'trust' of their

colleagues and how to tackle writing errors (27 April 2009). Abdelaziz explained his view of effective methods of correction,

*Abdelaziz prefers that students correct themselves and others – to learn. If easy, let students correct themselves freely, without supervision. If difficult, let students correct, but with supervision. (11 April 2009)*

This data was discussed with other teachers in a research workshop so they could share their knowledge and experiences of the different approaches (11 April 2009).

By analysing his findings, his knowledge of the context and his practice, Abdelaziz extrapolated that the problem underlying ineffective mistake correction was student self-reliance. Abdelaziz's observation that "*students need to be trained to learn for themselves, to trust in themselves*" formed the basis his 'informed action' on methods of error correction. His long-term goal was that he "*will try to bring system to make students trust their colleagues – but this'll take a long time (after my research and I travel out)*" (18 May 2009). In the short term, Abdelaziz intended to give advice to his learners, replicating the practice commonly used in adult education *turbiya*. He had realised that it was necessary for students to develop approaches to peer support and feedback, as he had noted that "*some students correct others by laughing at them, it makes them angry*" (11 April 2009). He explained his plans to develop learners' self-reliance in education,

*First – give more advice about depending on selves/colleagues. Show them importance of this. E.g. if you are mistaken, you can discuss with your colleagues frankly. And also your colleagues are very close to you. And when you ask your colleague about some mistakes, he can also ask you. This will encourage you to learn more and more. (15 April 2009)*

This shows that Abdelaziz felt that he could only introduce approaches to in-class peer correction in a structured and gradual manner, cognisant of the educational norms and conceptions of the learners which impact on teaching practice.

### Becoming experimental

Abdelaziz's 'trial of a new idea' was intended to develop students' writing skills. Abdelaziz highlighted the dichotomy between school-based knowledge and the daily experiences of the students,

*You find students who know what's written in the book, but they can't use it in real life...Some students come here, they say they know English, but they can't use it in their lives. (18 May 2009)*



He was *mufetih* by not just considering student performance during lessons or in assessments, but by observing their out-of-lesson practices and making connections with their personal motivations for learning English. Abdelaziz's 'trial of a new idea' consisted of devising writing topics that "*concern students' real lives*" (18 May 2009), requiring him to be *mufetih* and close to the learners in order to understand their lived experiences. Over a five-week period, Abdelaziz gave weekly writing homework on specially selected topics that related to the students' lives. Rather than asking learners to 'write a composition', I suggested giving each writing task a 'purpose and audience' to add realism. The writing tasks for his intermediate students included,

*A report about the Khartoum Evening School for the Ministry of Education*  
*An informal letter to your friend in Britain to tell him about summer in Sudan*  
*A report on 'why students learn English' based on information the learners collect from others in the school*  
*A formal letter to apply for a job*

Abdelaziz reported the outcome of his intervention,

*Abdelaziz noticed: These current students are better than students taught previously because he concentrated more, those [previously] he just gave "composition, composition." (8 June 2009)*

This is unsurprising, as he had focused on teaching and correcting writing skills for months. He observed,

*Most of the students have improved their writing skills, even the weak students now try to write. Now all students have desire to develop their writing skills, even those who disliked writing at the start. (17 June 2009)*

This shows he was learners-focused by recognising the diverse abilities of his students. He also intended to replicate the trial across all his classes,

*From now I plan to apply the approaches of writing from the beginners' classes up to the advanced levels in order to see the result of these approaches at different levels. If this is not successful, then I will look for new approaches to try. (17 June 2009)*

The greatest impact on his professional practice is indicated in the final line, "*If this is not successful, then I will look for new approaches to try.*" Abdelaziz, thus, developed a disposition towards experimentalism through identifying, researching and acting to resolve challenges, as well as monitoring the result, thereby constructing the role of the teacher as reflective and responsive, and methods of pedagogy as contingent and open to revision.

The outcome of Abdelaziz's participation in the study was summed up in his response to my suggestion to deliver a joint conference presentation, which he described as a

*“Golden chance for me in order to go forward. It’s given me a push forward”* (20 April 2009). Shortly after the action research project, Abdelaziz pursued a postgraduate diploma in education, showing continued focus on his professional practice. He informed me six months after the end of the project that he intended to conduct action research about his learners’ communication skills. It is the development of focus and professional dispositions that support ongoing efforts to improve practice.

#### Abdelaziz and theorising in action research

Throughout the study Abdelaziz articulated views on the relationship between theory and practice that provide insights into the action research process. Abdelaziz critiqued ‘one-size fits all’ education theorisation, stating *“if you want to apply theory it cannot succeed because of the environment”* (17 March 2009), in this case referencing the influence of learners’ conceptions of ‘good education’ on teacher practice. Abdelaziz also critiqued some theories as not being suited to the context of adult education,

*you’re talking about teaching theory, but the problem is we are outside the theory...We want a new theory for adult education. (28 March 2009)*

This stance indicates recognition of a theory-practice gap and the need for understanding the context of teacher practice in order to develop effective and relevant pedagogic innovations. Yet he also expressed a conundrum as he sought authoritative guidance through *“a new theory for adult education.”* Valorising teachers’ contextual knowledge led to Abdelaziz’s critique of abstract theories, but raises the question: what is an alternative source of authoritative knowledge?

In contrast to his desire for new theorisation, Abdelaziz expressed his use of an experimental approach to teaching,

PF: *Where did you learn these techniques?*  
 Abdelaziz: *By my own experience I have some series [books] e.g. communicative approach. I’ll try to apply some of this in my teaching – some succeed, some fail. By this way. (10 March 2009)*

Here he describes a ‘trial and error’ approach to teaching ideas he has read about in teaching books, vocalising his sense of his own authority in questioning theoretical approaches. However, teachers in Khartoum have limited access to education resources, as I discussed with Abdelaziz,

*I asked if he has teaching books, he said no, just sheets – doesn’t have them now. These books aren’t available in the market. (1 April 2009)*

This action research has shown that teachers, who have limited access to printed resources, could draw on the knowledge and experiences of their colleagues if a conducive arena is available. Abdelaziz also described how to develop his professional theories, namely through experimentation and the incorporation of externally devised theories, such as from academia, with his own experiential knowledge. As he commented,

*I'll make changes in my teaching to see the best way for me and my students. I have to be flexible...The theory of teaching comes through experiment (gestures circle). For example, if you tell me how to teach, I'll also try my own way. (2 February 2009)*

This conception is closely related to the epistemological basis of action research, which aims to bridge academic theorisation with teachers' experiential knowledge in order to develop deeper contextualised understanding and situated praxis. Conceptions of teachers' knowledge as authoritative replaces the valorisation of abstract knowledge – that many African teachers do not have access to – with valorisation of their own knowledge that can be legitimately constructed, such as through action research.

### **Conclusion: developing dispositions and epistemological shifts through action research**

Through conducting action research the teachers became learners-focused, as the process facilitated greater focus on aspects of being a teacher. Development of teachers' dispositions of being *mufetih* and experimental to understand and attempt to improve their practice through action research included shifts in their epistemological stance and sense of the locus of authority in producing professional knowledge. Yahya's comment prior to the formal start of the project illustrates the changes in dispositions,

*Yahya again asked me for advice about teaching. In particular – how to deal with 'slow learners', 'weak learners' and 'gifted learners' in the same class. I asked – what do you think? What have you tried? He answered that he hadn't tried anything in particular and wanted to draw on my experience... (30 July 2008)*

Here, Yahya exhibited a fixed but vague classification of his learners according to a taxonomy of 'slow', 'weak' and 'gifted'. Furthermore, he valorised my academic knowledge which, he hoped, could resolve a perceived problem in his class, casting my theoretical knowing as authoritative, in contrast with his situated experience. When I sought his own insights, he claimed that "*he hadn't tried anything in particular*," indicating a limited sense of agency or experimentalism to resolve practical problems.

This hierarchical sense of authoritative knowledge was expressed at various points during the study, notably during discussions of textbooks which were often perceived as being designed by 'education experts' in the Ministry of Education. Mus'ab's rationale for refusing to designate a textbook to be the 'least effective' shows this stance,

*Any subject, curriculum or textbook is considered to have been prepared by thinkers and educationalists so we believe that all of these subjects which the teacher teaches are useful... (29 November 2008)*

Such epistemological positions place knowledge developed externally in authoritative institutions as dominant over the teachers' own experiential knowledge. However, action research is a legitimate knowledge production process and influenced the participants' positions on epistemological authority. This shift was signalled in a rhetorical question posed by Abdelaziz in the penultimate research workshop,

*Have we benefited more from Paul or from discussions with colleagues? (13 June 2009)*

This shows how the participants' perceptions of the source of useful knowledge had shifted to being contextualised and co-constructed. Discussion of this epistemological shift incorporates dispositions of being *mufetih* and experimentalism and concomitant concerns of agency and authority.

#### Being *mufetih*: constructing knowledge

Action research frames education as a site of inquiry and constructs teacher-researchers as those who know about their practice but also seek to know more about it. The research design signalled to the teachers that what they knew was important and valuable, but equally, they could investigate their practice and what they could find out was also of value. For teachers to construct knowledge by making observations and analysing through reflection and discussion "*you need to be mufetih*" (Mus'ab, 27 January 2009). Far from being an individualistic process, those around teachers, such as learners and colleagues, had valuable knowledge and different perspectives, and knowledge could be co-constructed by 'being close' to them. This contrasts with initial views of me as the main source of valuable knowledge, and a change in epistemology so that the value of situated knowledge vis-à-vis academic knowledge was recognised. As the inquiry progressed, my authoritative expertise in action research approaches, rather than pedagogy, was drawn upon more, leading the teachers to reflect and discuss ways to improve teaching and learning. Growth in confidence through

participation was explicitly shown by Bashir, who progressed from claiming, “*I have no experience*” (12 February 2009) to subsequently recognising that he had contributed “*my experience, my few experience*” to the study (14 May 2009). This was not simply increased confidence in his abilities, but a greater sense of authority in his professional knowledge. The teachers’ sense of the limitations of their agency to critique textbooks was expressed on one occasion by Bashir’s refusal to accept that he was analysing a textbook, simply describing it. As he said,

*I’m again saying ‘not this evaluation’, because I cannot. Evaluate this book for doctors...There are doctors, they are higher than me. (23 April 2009)*

Despite his protestations, Bashir undertook his own inquiry into the textbooks, thereby showing a sense of confidence in his abilities and contextualised knowledge, even though he couched it in terms of ‘describing’ and not ‘evaluating’. By doing so he implicitly postulated the legitimacy of his own experiential knowledge of the curriculum. The process of being *mufetih* by questioning and reflecting in action research positioned the teachers as constructors of authoritative contextualised knowledge on their practice. In sum, the teachers’ epistemological view of authoritative knowledge for practice shifted from being abstract, fixed and absolute to being situated, partial and constructed through reflection and collaboration.

#### Being experimental: contingent knowledge

Action research, as an academic mechanism, is an authoritative process of knowledge production within a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980). My identity as a western academic reinforced the legitimacy of the project. Informed by postcolonialism, I aimed to catalyse change but endeavoured to delimit the extent of my imposition on teacher practice, resulting in ‘holding back’ my views and conceptions of ‘quality education’ during the study. While the role of teachers in *turbiya* was to help students to “*know right from wrong*” (William, 19 November 2008), my non-prescriptive intervention was generally termed in phrases such as “why are you doing that?” and “what else could you do?” In the context of imbalanced power relations in research, emphasised in cross-cultural research in formerly colonised countries, ‘holding back’ constitutes self-prohibition of the proffering of authoritative knowledge. ‘Holding back’ is a negating term, but ‘giving space’ is a more useful concept as it is conducive to teachers’ construction of authoritative knowledge and growth in confidence and self-reliance through being *mufetih* and experimental. This process is more accurately conceived as ‘holding back-giving space’, through which I supported the development of a particular

authority-epistemology complex that led to the teachers' sense of agency in constructing knowledge. In other words, in the absence of an authority providing certainty for change in teacher practice the teachers were able to enact their own professional agency. A disposition of uncertainty aids a researcher or teacher educator's actions in holding back-giving space as the certitude of existing beliefs and assumptions becomes diluted, foregrounding efforts of seeking to know and a blurring of theory and practice.

The action research approach provided methodological certainty in accepting uncertainty as a step towards improving practice, facilitated by authoritative 'holding back-giving space'. A disposition towards experimentalism was expressed by various teachers towards the end of the project,

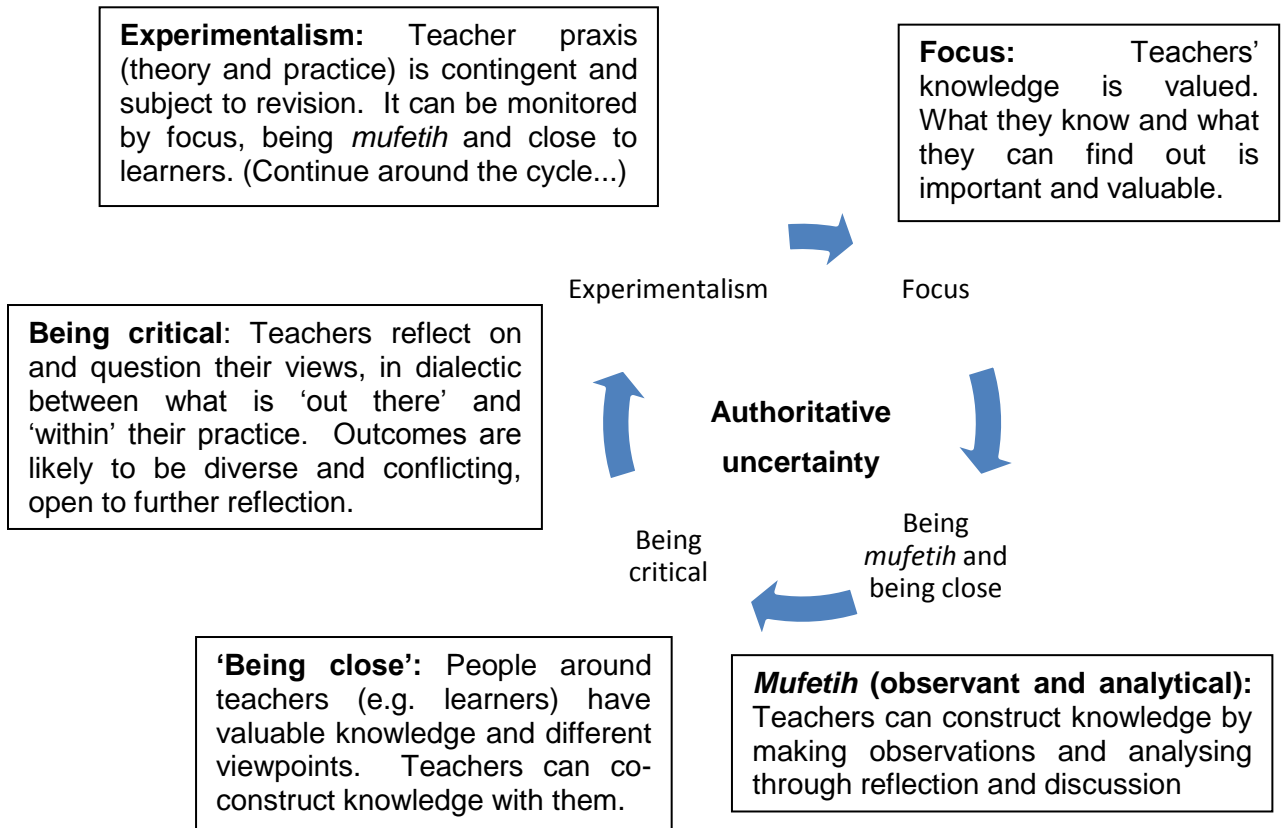
*Rasheed: This new way is better because it makes students confident to read and like talqin [repetition after the teacher]...I think in another month if this not work I'll try another way.*  
*PF: Why try in a month?*  
*Rasheed: When I notice [students not understand] there is many ways I can try to know how the students understand the lesson.*  
 (2 June 2009)

Rasheed's conception of his knowledge is explicitly contingent. At this point he believed that his trial of a new method was effective, but this knowledge was provisional. He intended to "notice" the impact by being *mufetih* and, if necessary, to adopt alternative approaches. This stance was replicated in the outcomes of other teachers, such as in Abdelaziz's project and Nuha's trials of diverse pedagogic approaches. Rather than seeking certainty as a fixed result of being experimental, by the end of the project the teachers expressed openness to further change their practice if they assessed their reformed pedagogy to be ineffective. This disposition signals acceptance and negotiation of uncertainty in ever-changing educational contexts. Furthermore, the fundamental impact of becoming experimental is the change in conception of useful teacher knowledge from abstract and fixed to contextually situated, contingent and open to revision.

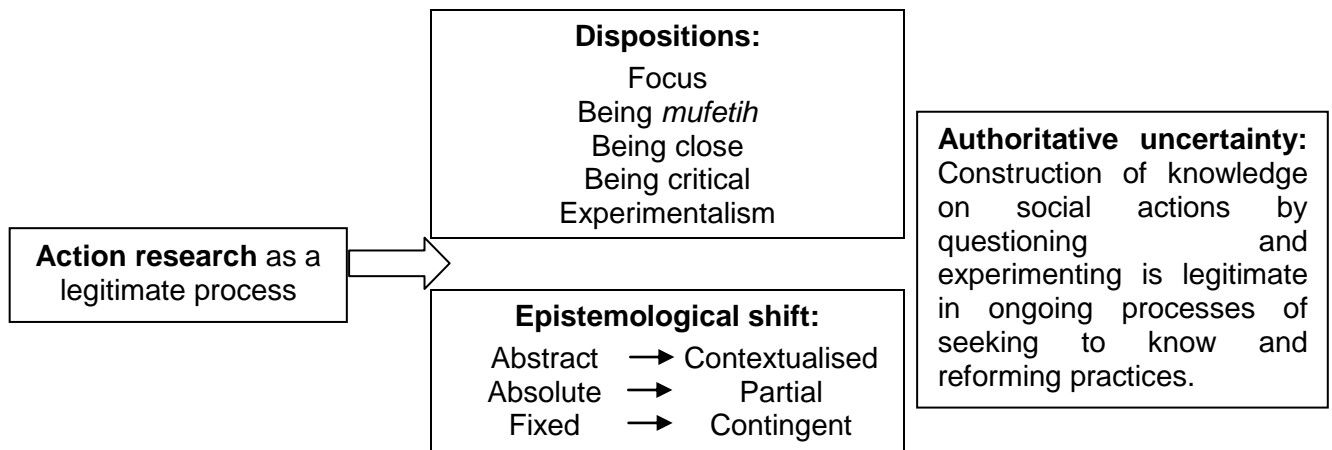
### Conceptualising authoritative uncertainty

The dispositions developed through action research are interrelated and combine to show the shift in teachers' epistemological position. The cycle shown in Figure 2 is illustrative, as the multiple factors would overlap in a non-linear process.

Figure 2: Developing dispositions through action research



Understanding social actions requires being *mufetih* to construct partial, contextualised and contingent knowledge in ongoing processes of coming to know. Critical analysis of the dialectic between one's actions and the social forms a bridge between the constructed knowledge and practice. A disposition of experimentalism, requiring a notion of contingency of understanding, is needed to attempt to re-form practices in the light of constructed knowledge in ever-changing social contexts.



Action research, as an academic mechanism, facilitates participants' enactment of agency to construct authoritative knowledge. The process of questioning creates an epistemological stance of seeking to know by constructing partial, contextualised and contingent knowledge. The resulting position of authoritative uncertainty combines notions of agency and knowledge construction in action research that underlie moves towards being *mufetih* and experimental.

Action research disrupts standard teacher practice, but also standard research practice. The notion of authoritative uncertainty can therefore inform ways of knowing and doing in research. As highlighted in this study, abstract theoretical knowledge is authoritative, a position maintained through a Foucauldian regime of truth. In this study, the symbolic capital of academic practice, physically represented in my identity and by the University of Sussex logo on project handouts and certificates, gave authority to the teachers' construction of knowledge. Academia and policy-makers privilege particular ways of knowing and knowledge production that maintain the authority of certainty over uncertainty. This privileging can also be held by practitioners, as Yahya showed prior to the start of the research,

*Talking to one guy at the Khartoum Evening School (Yahya) he wanted me to visit class to tell him how to improve situation of the students (i.e. English level in Arabic centre). I told him that teachers are experts and should reflect on the issues – that's the point of my research, but he only seemed to want me to tell him my advice. (27 July 2008)*

However, this privileging of academic knowledge can lead to a theory-practice gap, as knowledge-as-certainty, in the form of theories, may be either accepted or rejected as unsuited to the context, as in the case of pedagogy reform in African contexts (Croft, 2002a). Such a conception of privileging theoretical knowledge may exist whether teachers have access to this knowledge or not. For example, the teachers in this study



had limited access to teacher education materials or programmes, yet still perceived abstract academic knowledge as authoritative.

In place of certainty of knowledge, a stance of uncertainty opens up the possibility of ongoing questioning and experimenting in ever-changing education contexts, which is required for non-prescriptive teacher innovations that are contextualised and subject to revision. Contingency of knowledge, an aspect of uncertainty, allows for negotiation in the application of theory to situated practice in a dialectic of abstract-contextualised. Rather than seeking fixed pedagogic solutions to technical teaching problems, the knowledge required for effective practice is situated within a given context and subject to revision through further dialogue and reflection. Taking a stance of authoritative uncertainty facilitates teachers' construction of situated, partial and contingent knowledge about their practice through being *mufetih* and experimental.

### **Re-viewing the literature: coming to know through action research**

This chapter illustrates the process of coming to know the possibilities of developing teacher practice in adult education through action research. In parallel with the reconnaissance chapter, my initial expectations and frames of analysis of action research were technical, yet through observing and analysing the teachers' projects, I have shifted towards recognition of the complexity of the process and outcomes.

#### Re-viewing action research literature: from technical to complexity...to uncertainty

Action research is promoted as an approach to teacher professional development that is not purely technical (Elliott, 1991), but in alignment with the 'reflective practitioner' paradigm (Schön, 1983). However, over-expectation of the empowering outcomes of action research has been reported from research in Africa, for example,

project design reflected an optimistic, even naïve, view of action research, anticipating that through the research process teachers would be 'empowered' and their practice 'transformed'. (Walker, 1994, p.66)

This sentiment reflects my own initial expectations and subsequent changed understanding. The layering of coming to know in this study includes technical developments and reconnaissance into the context, as well as professional dispositions of the educators. By contrasting these findings with literature it is possible to assess the level of resonance with other action research inquiries. It also provides a means to

consider the extent to which I was able to realise my objectives of understanding reform, engaging participation and making a difference.

Action research makes explicit teachers' conceptions and practices, as well as the "theoretical and practical barriers to change" (Guthrie, 1990, p.119) and the opportunities for reform. Maryam, Hadiya and Abdelaziz's trials of new ideas in teaching all shed light on understandings developed through reconnaissance, such as teachers' conceptions on the importance of being close to students, public speaking skills and applying language learning in daily life. Notably, the trials in basic adult education courses remained closely tied to the textbooks, as this was the knowledge to be transmitted to the learners, a view shared by learners and other education stakeholders. Teachers were able to add activities, such as games, but learners' expectations and examinations prohibited omission of parts of the textbook. Therefore the action research assisted coming to know adult education by helping to identify the social, institutional and political structures teachers practise within and, through the integration of innovative practice in the methodology, supported 'pushing' at the constraints within the limits of the practitioners themselves.

Through action research, the complexity of power relations the teachers operate within were clarified. Instead of a simplistic 'top-down' hierarchical model of the school structure, the multidirectional ties of power relations were shown, with teachers' self-disciplining and learners' influence shaping education processes, as well as school management and the Ministry of Education. Empowerment in action research takes place "within the circulations of power in a local context" and can be understood as the possibility of "changed agency in repositioning and reconfiguring those circulations" (Griffiths, 1998, p.122). Empowerment includes the provision of opportunity, as power "may have a synergistic element, such that action by some enables more action by others" (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006, p.74). This opportunity arises from the actions of an agent, who uses power to facilitate opportunities for other agents to change how they operate within existing power relations, which could then change the operations of the power relations more broadly. The value of understanding power relations within education reform has been underscored as "the issue of what is possible and not and what lies within the scope of teacher agency is possibly the most important thing that might be gained from professionally oriented action research" (Pryor and Meke, 2008, p.6). As the outside facilitator of this intervention it was necessary for me to understand these factors, but equally it was necessary for teachers to do this. The process of teachers' articulation of their knowledge was essential in clarifying their

understandings of their practice. Yet this situated understanding was then questioned, challenged and reframed through data collection and analysis and trial of new ideas in teaching.

The outcomes of action research were varied, including forms of teacher practice, interpersonal relationships and professional reflection and creativity. It is necessary to evaluate outcomes of action research in alignment with the local context as,

change has to start somewhere, and if less was achieved than was hoped for, this is not to say that the envisaged change - action research for professional development - should be abandoned. Rather, it needs to be reformulated in the light of local conditions. (Walker, 1994, p.71)

I was initially disappointed with the technical changes in teacher practice, but my understanding later became more nuanced due to analysis of underlying dispositions and shifting conceptions relating to knowledge and sense of authority. On a seemingly simplistic level, action research provided a structure for the teachers to operate in a “more regular and sustained way” and thereby increase their “professional responsibility” (Stuart and Kunje, 1998, pp.387-8). Outcomes of action research have been shown to include “encouraging teachers and teacher educators alike to become more reflective and therefore more effective in their practice” (Wright, 1988). The importance of this ‘focus’ should not be underestimated. Pryor and Meke (2008) showed professional focus could be limited to offering remedial work, but this research was broadened through the prolonged reconnaissance phase and diverse topics selected by the teachers. The changes of greater lasting impact are likely to be the disposition towards constructing knowledge and experimentalism the teachers develop through the structured process of reflection and praxis, as found in research in South Africa,

there is evidence of teachers conceptualising their work as more than just the application of new techniques, but as a flexible process involving continuous learning and teacher judgement (Walker, 1994, p.69)

Similarly to the non-finality of the process inferred by Walker, the dispositions developed through this study, being *mufetih*, being close, experimentalism and authoritative uncertainty, could be integrated in teachers’ ongoing practice.

In contrast to some action research in Africa (e.g. Walker, 1994, O’Sullivan, 2004), this study was not linked to an education project of the Ministry of Education or a development agency. As a self-directed study, I did not have an explicit ‘agenda’, except valorising teachers’ views and the action research approach. There are

debates on the abilities of teachers from non-western backgrounds to engage in formal reflection activities. Teachers in some low-income countries “have not been trained, as have their western counterparts, to use reflection to improve their teaching practices” (O’Sullivan, 2002). However, in this study the teachers exhibited propensity towards discussions and being *mufetih*. My efforts towards ‘holding back-giving space’ acted to restrict my authority as a source of specific models of practice in favour of questioning and reflecting to construct knowledge. Although, at times, my sentiments echoed those of Walker (1994, p.69),

It was often frustrating to stand back in the face of poor practice, while coming to terms with the balance between direction and non-intervention in my own practice as facilitator was an ongoing, intensely experienced dilemma.

Walker (1994) noted the enhanced working relations formed among the participating teachers, as also occurred in this study, which, she suggests, could facilitate sustained change and increased participatory education processes. As observed in Malawi, “the project did encourage peers to work together and share ideas, it did encourage critique and a sense of agency” (Stuart and Kunje, 1998, p.391), in other words, reinforced senses of authority, co-construction of knowledge and being close to colleagues.

Action research “transforms reality in order to investigate it” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.592). Undertaking action research changed teacher practice as data collection was integrated into their professional roles and actively learning from students and colleagues could be conceived as a part of the ‘informed action’ process. Explicit changes in classroom practice occurred during the ‘trial of a new idea in teaching’, through which the project provided a rare arena for experimentation in a supportive environment (Stuart, 1991). Action research was a process of becoming experimental, as the teachers tried different roles, including interviewing and participant observation. The teachers’ disposition towards experimentalism may lead to continuing creativity and introduction and monitoring of innovations.

#### Epistemological shift and authoritative uncertainty

Being *mufetih* and experimental require a notion of constructivist knowledge production, which, in this study, was part of the epistemological shift that the participants underwent. Reports on action research in Africa commonly indicate different conceptions of knowledge held by the external facilitator and those of the participating teachers. Rather than viewing knowledge as constructed through reflection and dialogue, for teachers in Africa,

the common view of knowledge was that it existed to be transmitted, rather than being constructed, and people expected solutions to be somewhere 'out there', in more resources or in government training courses. (Stuart and Kunje, 1998, p.391).

Through co-construction of knowledge, what is articulated through action research is changeable and resulting from the multiple perspectives and experiences of the participants. Consequently action research,

also requires a different view of knowledge, a critical stance which regards propositions as provisional and open to refutation and further development. In this perspective knowledge is socially constructed rather than fixed and given. (Stuart et al, 2000, cited in Pryor and Meke, 2008, p.2)

This movement towards conceiving knowledge as constructed, partial and provisional has been theorised as the epistemological shift of the teachers, which is related to notions of agency.

Teachers' senses of agency were developed through conducting research. In Walker's action research in South Africa shortly after the end of apartheid, the teachers "simply have not seen themselves as agents in curriculum development or educational knowledge producers" (Walker, 1995, p.13). This occurrence, which is often framed as an outcome of hierarchical education structures and limited sense of personal agency among practitioners in Africa, has an epistemological dimension. In this study, the conception of the teachers as possessors of contextualised expertise was initially at odds with their conception of my role as a western academic possessing abstract knowledge. Academic knowledge was held in higher esteem than teacher knowledge, even by the teachers themselves. Assumptions of shared epistemological views between teachers and action research facilitators may lead to outcomes assessed as deficient and characterised as lack of teacher self-reliance. The teachers' limited sense of authority in constructing knowledge results from a Foucauldian regime of truth,

Practitioners...deal with issues of everyday significance, but, because practitioners are not viewed as legitimate knowers, either by the high priesthood or by themselves (because 'ordinary people' are systematically taught to devalue their own contributions), their form of theory tends to be regarded as practical problem-solving rather than proper research. (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002, p.20)

This was articulated in seeking to gain my authoritative knowledge due to my location within the "high priesthood" of academia. Research is recognised as an authoritative practice, as observed in Malawi,

the idea of doing research attracted the teachers. They recognized it as something powerful, but in this case the power would be productive for, rather than against them. (Pryor and Meke, 2008, p.5)

Participation in this “powerful” process therefore facilitated a shift in notions of the nature and source of authoritative knowledge. The outcomes of action research in terms of epistemology and agency were shown by Walker (1994, p.69),

teachers’ confidence in their ability to take successful action for change, in their developing practical knowledge, and the recognition of the validity of their personal knowledge, are all developments in the direction of a reworked notion of themselves as professionals.

In addition to growth in confidence, there was a shift in the teachers’ understandings of their knowledge as legitimate. The epistemology of teachers is cited as a challenge to undertaking action research when, in fact, it should be considered as part of the developmental process. The epistemological outcome of this study can be understood in Freirian moves against oppressive monolithic social understandings, as the teachers recognised that “reality is not a permanent, unchangeable fact, but a dynamic process which they can transform” (Blackburn, 2000, p.10). The explicit construction of knowledge which is based on the teachers’ experiences and conceptions, yet is also legitimised through a formal research programme, foregrounds knowledge for teaching as partial, contextualised, contingent and subject to revision.

#### Conclusion: action research and teacher development

Action research is a means of supporting teachers to innovate to resolve issues in their teaching that they have identified and analysis of this project provides insights for the field of teacher development. The experimentalism that arose in these action research projects resulted from greater professional focus, particularly becoming learners-focused, by being *mufetih*, being close and introducing and monitoring innovations.

The reconnaissance of this study has shown the socio-cultural complexity of education, supporting the assertion that contextualised innovations are required as “Educational effectiveness is so dependent on context that sweeping solutions are unusual” (Guthrie, 1990, p.231). To do otherwise is wasteful as,

Expecting teachers to implement teaching strategies that are not context-friendly is a waste of time and resources...A context-focused teaching and learning processes conception of quality also enables a move away from the deficit explanations for poor quality, which tend to excuse it in the light of inadequate inputs, such as large numbers of unqualified teachers, lack of resources, and so on. (O’Sullivan, 2006, p.258)

This requires a means of understanding both context and the nature of quality and teacher practice. This critique is particularly clear in relation to promotion of 'learner-centredness', as assumptions held by an external facilitator that a constructivist notion of knowledge is shared by practitioners may lead to ineffective enactment of socio-constructivist methodologies, which is then misconstrued as a deficit in the teachers' abilities. Such transformation of pedagogy should be recognised as a "paradigm shift required by teachers to move from a formalistic to a constructivist orientation to teaching and learning" (Vavrus, 2009, p.309). Vavrus has called for re-formulation of 'good practice' models of pedagogy as "contingent pedagogy",

what is needed is a contingent pedagogy that adapts to the material conditions of teaching, the local traditions of teaching, and the cultural politics of teaching in Africa, and beyond. (Vavrus, 2009, p.310)

In this study reconnaissance and reform have been complementary processes to show the complexity of teacher practice and underlying conceptual and contextual factors. The socio-constructivist dispositions developed by the teachers, including knowledge construction practices (being *mufetih* and experimental) and an epistemological shift towards valuing teachers' partial, contextualised and provisional knowledge, show that this form of action research offers an authoritative means of developing 'contingent pedagogies' in diverse contexts. The lesson for teacher development and practitioner research is that questioning, experimenting and acceptance of uncertainty are steps towards ongoing attempts to improve teaching, and these are legitimate components of teacher development, which would then re-cast teacher knowledge construction as authoritative.

Teachers do not only require 'know that' or 'know how' but dispositions towards engaged and responsive practice. Being *mufetih* and experimental, and a notion of contingency of knowing, form parts of this disposition towards seeking to know the diverse and changing context of learners, practice and knowledge. Yet what space is there in academic debates on teacher development for notions of 'contingency' and processes of knowledge construction and epistemological shifts by teachers, when the dominant discourses demand certainty of findings and rational practices?

Perhaps there is an epistemology of practice that takes fuller account of the competence practitioners sometimes display in situations of uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and conflict. Perhaps there is a way of looking at problem-setting and intuitive artistry that presents these activities as describable and as susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls outside the boundaries of technical rationality. (Schön, 1995, p.29)

Layering of understanding in this research has shown the limitations of basing education research on assumptions and processes aligned with models of technical rationality. Furthermore, the process of coming to know and the dispositions developed by the teachers have been articulated in the stance of 'authoritative uncertainty', a postmodern position which calls into question absolutist theories. Uncertainty bridges distinctions between theory and practice, and the roles of researcher and practitioner, as research and learning processes are based on questioning and constructing partial and contingent knowledge that enables ongoing coming to know the complexity of education practices and possibilities of reform.



## 8. Re-viewing the research

### Finding my way to 'getting lost'

I began this thesis by introducing myself as your guide on this 'research journey'. Since then I have escorted you through selected highlights of my learning and research. Yet that is only part of the story. It is the sanitised 'tale of the field' (Van Maanen, 1988), as my research journal and other data have been screened and sorted, filtered and formatted into this doctoral thesis. However, the following section arises from the contention that,

Texts that do justice to the complexity of what we try to know and understand include the tales not told, the words not written or transcribed, the words thought but not uttered, the unconscious: all that gets lost in the telling and representing. (Lather, 2007, p.13)

For me to approach achieving my ethical goal of writing an 'honest' account of the research experience, limiting it to re-presentation of the fieldwork process and findings would be deficient, as this implies a sole interpretation as 'the truth'. At this point, your guide enters the process of "getting lost" (Lather, 2007) in the web of shifting epistemologies, methodological constraints and outcomes that both fell short of and exceeded expectations, thereby throwing into jeopardy your coherent and linear journey towards a fixed final destination. Although "a wonderful mess" was originally used as a suitable nomenclature for the field experience, it could now be applied to the ethical, epistemological and methodological contemplations that have followed.

This reflexive analysis forms part of the focus of the inquiry into changes in my understandings of my practice as a postcolonial cross-cultural action researcher, which requires re-visiting the ethical objectives outlined earlier in the thesis. Throughout this inquiry I have reflected on my practice, probed my assumptions and re-cast my understandings as more complex. Similar to the teachers, I have taken a position of 'authoritative uncertainty' towards the process of constructing and representing knowledge through this research. The part of the story of this action research that remains to be told is that of tensions and uncertainties, inconsistencies and contradictions. It is a tale of ethical intentions and theoretical and methodological certainties being tussled and questioned when faced with practical exigencies and disciplinary disciplining. As a reflexive re-view of the research process and re-presentation, it aims to "foreground the textuality of research, and thus the constructed

and constructing nature of research” (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.xv). This re-view acts as a doubled reading towards taking a deconstructive turn in which the limitations of knowledge and its production are made evident. I seek here to create a poststructuralist text exposing the limitations of knowing by re-viewing the research process and its framing. By deconstructing, the way is opened to re-assembling understandings that were closed in the previous attempted, and flawed, mimetic representation. As Derrida has shown, deconstruction displaces binary oppositions of truth/falsity, creating space for new ‘truths’ of multiple re-readings, interpretations and understandings (Hekman, 1990). Such situated deconstruction presents the vigorous epistemological, theoretical and procedural reflexivity which is enacted as the process of validation of the study (Lather, 1991).

This research is founded on a myriad of ethical positions that have gradually been theorised in academic discourse. Even the research focus of education of marginalised learners is the articulation of a desire to support the provision of equity of opportunities. This aspect of my ethical stance was recognised by Yahya, who commented that,

*Most teachers when do research – look down on adult education as they don’t understand. Most teachers don’t like students in adult education ‘because difficult students, very primitive’. (11 May 2009)*

Following postcolonialism, I theorised my propensity as an educator for localised contextually relevant interventions to a researcher position seeking in-depth qualitative knowledge using local concepts and ‘making a difference’ in the site of practice. It is the operationalisation of this belief, or its potential to be operationalised, which is problematised in this section in order to reflexively clarify any tensions between the research experience and methodology, and the philosophical stance underpinning its development. In this chapter I re-view the study by returning to the understandings of research as a field process and research as the production of knowledge. Forming part of the reflexivity process, it unmasks the complex ethics of participatory action research, as well as its practical relevance, through exploration of the relations between my beliefs and my actions. In this process, action research is foregrounded as a cultural and social practice, as all forms of social science, and therefore problematic, particularly as I attempt “research as praxis” in designing, conducting and re-presenting this study (Lather, 1991). In alignment with the overarching research question into knowledge generation, this reflexive analysis re-views the construction and re-presentation of knowledge by drawing on the poststructural strands of postcolonial and feminist theorisation, the paradigms which broadly influenced the

initial design of the study. I begin by returning to my ethical objectives relating to epistemology and ‘making a difference’, which are interrogated through poststructural re-viewing of field research experiences to unpick social science practices and discourses of educational research. This culminates in reflection on the lessons of such analysis for understandings of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. Subsequently, I undermine my ascription of certainty to this text by analysing notions of re-presentation of research. My aim to dismantle my research and then “work the ruin” (Lather, 2007, p.93) is to position myself (and possibly you) as authoritatively uncertain re-viewers of the process and interpretations of this study.

## **Re-viewing the construction of knowledge in the research process**

### **Re-viewing my ethical positions: constructing in-depth knowledge through participation**

In response to my critique of the marginalising impact of research that follows a deficit model of education in low-income countries, such as through the privileging of particular technical pedagogic approaches, I designed this study with the purpose of collaboratively constructing knowledge with teachers about their practice and its reform. Construction of knowledge with the teachers was intended to rebalance power relations and gain local concepts and understandings, rather than imposition of my own concepts of education and views of the social. Action research with the Sudanese teachers was intended to give a strong affirmative to the question “can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak, 1993).

In establishing and facilitating this project, I aspired to develop the professional knowledge of the teachers and practitioner-led innovations. Yet at a foundational level, the research process imposed both interest and responsibility upon the participating teachers. Through the dual-stage recruitment process for the action research, the teachers exhibited interest in and commitment to the project. However, the interest of educators in critically analysing education cannot be assumed, as shown by the irregular participation of some of the teachers. This is also the case for the learners, as shown in discussion of Bashir’s interview with a student,

*Bashir I asked her about the curriculum, and what about the difference between Spine and Oxford [textbooks]? She laughed, just.*

*PF: Why do you think she laughed?*

*Bashir: By Allah, I don’t know. She thought the words don’t concern her. (9 April 2009)*

The expectation that teachers and students have active interests in investigating and improving education must be recognised as an assumption. The introduction of action research constitutes the imposition of responsibility for one's practice and its development. Furthermore, in my role as action research facilitator, I provided an arena for the expression and co-construction of knowledge and scaffolded the teachers' projects by providing guidance on their development. Throughout the action research, I recurrently questioned the extent to which the study could be considered to be genuinely participatory, due to my guiding role,

*My role as researcher – helping to break down the topic and come up with questions to structure the research. But – am I being controlling by giving research questions... But the projects continuously evolve, so questions we write now may evolve, not be used etc. Is this 'collaborative action research' or 'supported action research'. Making research project manageable – bitesized chunks. (16 February 2009)*

These tensions were also exhibited in relation to how I guided the teachers in their individual research projects, as exhibited in my reflective question and response,

*Am I imposing the idea of asking the students? But Abdelaziz mentioned being close to the students" (23 February 2009)*

I had a postcolonial-influenced desire to valorise the views of the teachers without imposing my own upon them. Re-viewing these concerns in the field shows the tensions in the implementation of my ethical stance of privileging teachers' knowledge through this collaborative study. Yet I was the catalyst who constructed space and provided guidance, so both the responsibility for enacting change through action research and the approaches the teachers took were co-constructed.

Knowledge was co-constructed in research workshops and through visiting schools and building relationships with teachers, learners and other members of the school communities. However, I was hesitant to actively participate in the co-construction of knowledge and frequently 'held back' from sharing my views, particularly during the reconnaissance phase and during discussions on teaching methods. Rather, I conceived my role as providing an arena for constructing knowledge, as well as questions and frameworks for discussion and reflection. I recorded tensions I experienced in 'holding back' following a discussion with two teachers about students' motivations for attending school,

*The teachers seemed really impressed by the ideas I'd mentioned – different reasons for going to school. I wonder if I shouldn't have been forthcoming in my views, and should've just elicited from them their ideas. (6 November 2008)*

My concerns about the tensions in imposing my views and holding back were based on my conception of the construction of knowledge, deriving from my concern regarding 'validity', an indication of self-disciplining according to my sense of positivist pressures within the social sciences. This concern now seems naïve, as I have recognised the constructed nature of all knowledge. Echoing, in a sense, the epistemological shift of the teachers, my position has progressed from conceiving of knowledge as naturalistic recording to being postmodern and constructed. Even if I held back from imposing my views, I recognise that questioning, and what questions are asked or omitted, are central to knowledge construction. At a fundamental level, my role in structuring and limiting the construction of knowledge is shown in my unproblematic translation of education as *ta'lim* in handouts and discussions throughout the study. This basic lexical decision reflects common usage in Sudan and across the Arabic-speaking world, but shows the discursive borders implied when seeking construction of knowledge by the participants. I was therefore not simply a 'reflective agent' prompting teachers' reflections and discussions, but the knowledge was co-constructed through the interactions of all participants in the research project, including myself.

Analysis of the co-construction of knowledge leads to questioning the possibility of enacting my ethical intention to access teacher knowledge through action research. Teachers' knowledge is characterised as personal and practical, grounded in their experience, whereas academic knowledge is "abstract, generalized, propositional, and detached from the everyday knowledge of schooling" (Hargreaves, 1996, p.106). The complexity of this issue is obscured by reliance on the binary of teacher/academic knowledge, which mirrors debate on so-called 'indigenous' and 'western' knowledge.

A classification of knowledge into indigenous and western is bound to fail not just because of the heterogeneity among the elements – the knowledges filling the boxes marked indigenous or western. It also founders at another, possibly more fundamental level. It seeks to separate and fix in time and space (separate as independent, and fix as stationary and unchanging) systems that can never be thus separated or so fixed. (Agrawal, 1995, pp.421-2)

'Teacher' and 'academic' knowledge are each heterogeneous, existing on continuums, shifting and interrelated. Even more clearly than sweepingly generalised 'indigenous' knowledge, 'teacher' knowledge in Sudan, as in other formerly colonised countries, is generated through experience within education systems whose functions, structures and content are shaped by their colonial precursors. This reflects the tension underlined by critical theorists of valorising 'subaltern' perspectives yet also questioning

their aspects of social reproduction of oppressive knowledge and structures. In education,

The practitioner knowledge of informal theory is not just a product of personal experience but also of professional socialisation, but whatever its source it has an inherently oppressive and conservative tendency. (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.135)

The Sudanese teachers have been socialised into their profession within a postcolonial education system dominated by the government's ideology, and their views must be analysed accordingly. The complexity, and occasional contradictions, of distinguishing between 'teacher' and 'academic' knowledge is demonstrated in the action research practices of some of the teachers, such as in instances of some participants opting to use traditional research methods<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, to dichotomise academic and teacher knowledge is to fail to recognise the diversity of what teachers know, their location in the postcolonial and the heterogeneity of epistemology and methodology in science, which should not be simplistically homogenised as 'western' or 'academic'. Furthermore, reflection on the nature of the co-construction of the teachers' trials, expected to be 'indigenous' approaches, reveal that they were often explicitly derived from dominant, exogenous discourses on education. For example, Nuha gathered ideas on pedagogy from colleagues, including those from one educator which were taken from teacher education textbooks from the Sudanese Open University (linked with the UK Open University). In another case, Adil sourced some ideas for teaching literacy from our field visit to the *khalwa* and was, therefore, influenced by the dominant discourse of the Islamic education tradition. Such analysis problematises the assertion that action research "does offer possibilities for the development of indigenous approaches" (Pryor and Meke, 2008, p.9). Enactment of postcolonial cross-cultural objectives therefore requires ongoing reflexivity to problematise binary notions of indigenous/western or teacher/academic knowledge in order to open up recognition of the complexity and likely hybridity of education initiatives in the context of postcolonial globalisation.

Tensions I experienced in discussions during cross-cultural fieldwork are indicative of the possibilities of contradiction in producing knowledge collaboratively in postcolonial contexts of imbalanced power relations. My position on knowledge construction gradually shifted from theoretical certainty of the possibility of valorising teachers'

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<sup>28</sup> One of Maryam's suggestions for a 'trial of a new idea' bore the characteristics of a positivist science experiment, in which she would provide some students with biscuits and a drink before a lesson, in order to assess if they were more attentive than their peers who had not been given any refreshments! Maryam did not conduct this experiment and I advised her to introduce an intervention to improve students' in-class attention based on her teaching.

knowledge through research to uncertainty and recognition of the 'co' of collaborative as the basis of knowledge construction in shifting relational processes. The knowledge generated with participants was explicitly co-constructed, thereby disrupting simplistic categories of teacher/academic by showing that such binaries are interrelated and on a continuum as teachers also already located within existing education and academic practices. This foregrounds the role of teacher educators in co-constructing teacher knowledge, not prescribing it, while recognising that the boundaries on knowing they set and their underlying assumptions influence the outcome. The action research provided a process for the teachers to push and traverse these boundaries by questioning assumptions and layering knowledge for greater complexity of understanding, yet within the explicit and implicit limits that were set.

### **Re-viewing my ethical positions: participation of teachers in research**

Postcolonialism's privileging of knowledge of marginalised people led me to design this study as action research. However, my ongoing concern of whether the research could be considered "collaborative" or "participatory" is part of a fundamental question of whether the teachers were really researchers. During the study I questioned the extent to which the teachers acted as researchers, or whether they could more accurately be considered as research assistants in the guise of practitioner-researchers. I noted this in my journal,

*Some teachers [are] like my research assistants, others [are] doing their own research project. (26 April 2009)*

This was implied in how Maryam introduced me to a class of students on one occasion,

*Maryam: I am one of the teachers doing a training course with him. Like you are my students, I am his student. (26 April 2009)*

This issue led to my concern surrounding the "role of teachers' impressions and professional knowledge in research" (26 April 2009). While the overall reconnaissance phase of the study was based on the teachers' views and impressions, in the action research phase my objective changed to one in which the teachers became researchers. I recurrently demanded that the teachers act like researchers,

*Try to think like a researcher. (To Abdelaziz, 2 February 2009)*

*He said if he made notes on this – this is research. I said we will plan data collection for 'scientific research'. (To Abdelaziz, 16 February 2009)*

*I say – this is your view – let's get data on this! (To Maryam, 26 April 2009)*

*I say this is general observation, I want data from specific lesson – hers or someone else's. (To Maryam, 6 May 2009)*

The purpose of the data collection tools was to make the teachers question their assumptions through being *mufetih*, such as by asking students or other teachers. Imposing 'being a researcher' echoes the disciplinary socialisation of my own process of 'becoming a researcher', an identity I initially resisted. Just as my own practice is assessed and regulated by disciplinary norms, I sought to regulate the teachers' activities. Yet research practices are "socially located" and "normatively regulate practice" (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.138), so should be problematised. For example, usually only I took notes during one-to-one discussions with teachers, due to our different roles in the project, particularly as only I had to make a written report, in the form of this thesis. By taking written records as a part of the research process, I was prescribing a particular social practice, writing, as an indicator of research, 'science' and 'truth'. By questioning the validity of the teachers' research and asking 'was it research?' and 'were they really researchers?' I undermine their projects as not fulfilling criteria of legitimate knowledge generation in an academic regime of truth. Understanding my requests for the teachers to think "in a scientific way" as a result of my concern for the 'validity' of the data acts as a reminder that this project remained subject to the constraints of academic study and my self-disciplining perceptions of them.

Despite my postcolonial intentions of valorising the 'subaltern' voices of Sudanese teachers, I am open to accusations of 're-colonising' teacher knowledge through academic mechanisms of legitimisation.

Even teacher research itself is not entirely immune to this irony of being recolonized by the academy, for some versions of it claim legitimacy for teachers' knowledge by urging teachers to use the customary academic tools of systematic inquiry, rather than recognizing that teachers' knowledge has valued and distinctive forms of its own. (Hargreaves, 1996, p.109)

It could be claimed that while the teachers' views were valorised in the reconnaissance phase of the study, they were later deemed deficient for planning educational development, and required remedying through use of scientific tools of data collection in action research. The academic pursuit of reformulating aspects of teacher knowledge as 'scientific' knowledge has been problematised as partial and selective, based on limits of 'scientific' practices,

an irony of some of the work on teachers' knowledge, especially on pedagogical content knowledge, is that it amounts to the academy capturing and reclaiming only those fragments of teachers' knowledge that can be codified and systematized in a scientific way. (Hargreaves, 1996, pp.108-9)

If this research process is "simply a technical means in the quest to subordinate the vernacular culture of teachers to the neo-platonic forms of objective knowledge which



have evolved in academe” (Elliott, 1994, p.136), then it risks neglecting forms of knowing that are not recorded and coded in conventional academic research. The ‘subjugated knowledges’ of the teachers were therefore brought into the ‘regime of truth’ through academic sanctioning (Foucault, 1980). This adherence to scientific practices replicates the undervaluing of practitioner knowledge as ‘untheorised’ and ‘inferior’ to academic knowledge as,

The theorist, on the other hand, tends to regard the practitioner as someone too ready to be influenced by ‘common sense’ and custom and practice, too eager to work with anecdotal or trial-and-error knowledge. Theorists would not deny that practitioners possess expertise, but they would argue that this expertise is unsystematic and of questionable validity. (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.122)

Under the guise of ‘emancipation’, action research attempts to transform and legitimise teacher knowledge through an academic model, thereby reinforcing the dominance of academic practices over teacher practice and ‘common sense’. Action research is promoted as a means of both recording and deepening teacher knowledge by bridging the gap between abstract academic theorisation and contextualised practice. This raises questions about the relation between teachers’ pre-existent professional knowledge and academically legitimated knowledge constructed through research. So, was the action research process, contrary to its stated objectives, a case of co-option of teacher knowledge, which was subjected to the disciplining process of academic knowledge generation? It could be argued that in “giving voice” to the teachers, they were being forced to “speak” in a particular manner which is deemed superior. This would undermine claims that the process of constructing knowledge through action research is inherently empowering, but rather acts to subjugate teacher knowledge to academic discourse, which replicates oppressive forms of power relations.

Analysis of the teachers’ action research with Foucault’s analysis of power in mind casts emancipatory claims into question. Research and development discourse has led to the “growth of ignorance” as,

the postulated growth of knowledge concomitantly entails the possibility of increased ignorance. In development this is manifested practically in local knowledges being devalued or ignored, in favour of western scientific, technical and managerial knowledge. (Hobart, 1993, p.10)

Action research is a mechanism to validate teacher knowledge, which can also, by omission, be invalidated. Just as some of the teachers expressed views that their learners “don’t know anything” before the transformative process of schooling, it could be claimed that academic practices construct teachers’ knowledge as ‘primitive’ until it has been transformed through research. Both claims derive from particular notions of

what constitutes knowledge. Comments by some teachers that their students were “uncultured” can be seen as arising from a specific conception of formal, educated ‘culture’. So, what is being missed if academia only recognises certain forms of knowledge and ways of knowing? If it seems problematic that teachers said their students ‘know nothing’ because their experiential knowledge was not recognised as such, then isn’t it equally problematic that other knowledges are marginalised as not conforming to the regime of truth through disciplinary demands for validity and generalisability? While my occasional technical concern with ‘representativeness’ and ‘validity’, such as through individual, peer and group responses in workshops and triangulation, derived in part from desire to analyse issues from diverse viewpoints, they also arose through my self-disciplining to the constraints of conventional social science research.

In the process of reflexivity I should not only ask ‘was what they did research?’ But also, ‘was what I did research?’ My submission of this thesis for doctoral examination is testament to my belief that that overall collaborative inquiry fulfils the criteria for recognition as research. However, the question of fundamental importance is: why am I asking ‘was it research?’ This discussion re-locates the focus from assessing the teachers and my inquiry onto the constructed nature of knowledge through the social practice of research, arising from power relations and cultural and historical conventions. Through a poststructural lens, concerns regarding validity are not issues of constructing ‘truth’, but rather appeals for legitimacy within academic disciplinary mechanisms (Lather, 1994). In the power relations of action research I shaped the teachers’ projects towards conforming to academic criteria, both as a framework for the learning process and for my overall study to be ‘legitimate’, as an act of self-disciplining in a regime of truth. Similar to teaching, research is a situated social practice in which academic works are intertextual, located within social and historical traditions (Usher *et al.*, 1997). The knowledge in this study was constructed according to the norms of the social practice of social science research. As this thesis has shown, my own practice as a researcher is located within historical traditions and discourses, and my specific ethical, epistemological and methodological positions, but then negotiated within social constraints in ‘the field’ of Sudanese education, as well as ‘the field’ of academia.

Re-viewing my postcolonial intentions to collaboratively construct knowledge through action research shows the naivety of attempting to follow problematic notions of privileging marginalised knowledge and disrupting the power relations of conventional inquiry. This poststructural analysis has shown that action research is not inherently

liberating, but is a disciplinary mechanism open to accusations of co-opting teacher knowledge through application of criteria of what is or is not legitimate knowledge. This shift in my understanding on the construction of knowledge through participatory research is matched by reflexive recognition of my own self-disciplining.

### **Re-viewing my ethical positions: 'making a difference' in practice**

By conducting collaborative action research I intended to 'make a difference' in Sudanese education through participatory learning and teacher-led pedagogy reforms. I viewed academia, the site of my own practice, as a stable but diverse vantage point from which to examine Sudanese education and plan, conduct and analyse an intervention which would support teacher development in adult schools.

I related participation and mutual benefits from action research with 'empowerment'. However, terms such as "empowerment" and "giving voice" have been critiqued as "repressive myths" of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1992). Even some proponents of action research have accepted that its potential to bring about 'empowerment' has been exaggerated,

A question remains as to whether this was an adequate conceptualization of "empowerment," the way in which to achieve it, or indeed who or what empowerment was for. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, p.569)

Importantly, 'empowerment' is a powerful term as it can provide legitimation to the practice it accompanies (Rahnema, 1992) and has also become a dominant discourse,

The language of empowerment has undoubtedly penetrated mainstream educational discourse and practice...In response to this, emancipatory educators have rightly identified the obvious danger of reductionism, whereby social and critical empowerment has often been reduced to an unproblematic matter of method or technique (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.195)

Such reductionism can be seen in my initial expectations of action research outcomes that were observable, technical teaching methods, indicative of a dominant technicist discourse in teacher education. Through undertaking this study I have questioned the reduction of empowerment to being self-evident within action research projects and come to appreciate the complexity of process and outcomes of such endeavours.

Foregrounded in this question of empowerment is the binary othering of development discourse in which 'they' are the subjects that require development, whereas 'we' are the change-making agents (Escobar, 1995).

As a given in any relation which aims at empowerment, the agent becomes problematic when the us/them relationship is conceived as requiring a focus only on “them”. When the agent of empowerment assumes to be already empowered, and so apart from those who are empowered, arrogance can underlie claims of “what we can do for you”. (Gore, 1992, p.61)

This critique can be levelled at the mainly outward orientation of my conception of the research outcomes, as not only was my focus on the developmental impact specifically related to the field research process, it was also primarily externalised as an effect on the participants, rather than myself. Despite my exploration of participatory approaches and discourses of reflexivity, this omission indicates a self-other binary existing in planning the research design. Restricting focus on impact on the teachers would perpetuate a fallacy of an objective observer and the paternalistic assumption that only the educators are ‘deficient’ requiring remedial action upon them. Rather than the objective ‘scientific eye’ of a neutral observer, in this reflexive re-view it is my ‘I’ as an embedded and actively participating researcher which is also affected and affects in research processes. Mirroring my desire to turn Yahya’s reflection from ‘out there’ to inward, I have also taken a reflective turn.

When re-viewing my research journal, I was surprised by reading a comment written in the first entry shortly after my arrival in Khartoum. I had recorded a conversation with a Sudanese friend in which I asked “*why teachers do not innovate.*” He responded,

- 1) *Teachers think everything from the Ministry is correct*
- 2) *Teachers aren’t trained to innovate/be creative*
- 3) *Teachers were taught in the same way that they teach.* (7 July 2008)

The response of my friend names issues raised in action research and African pedagogy literature going back as far as Beeby (1966). The most interesting point from this dialogue, however, is that I asked the question: ‘why do teachers not innovate?’ A question which reinforces a concept of change being needed for ‘them’ and contrasts with the researcher position to which this thesis testifies. It is an intellectual transformation from a position of asking such a question to the views represented in this thesis that constitutes the outcome of this process ‘making a difference’ on me.

When initiating this research, I started with a position of theoretical certainty in terms of my ethical intentions, methodology and practical interest, and was in pursuit of certain findings. However, through the research process and particularly during post-fieldwork reflections, I gradually experienced “getting lost” (Lather, 2007) in the complexity of the

process which raised tensions and inconsistencies. Mirroring the teachers' journeys towards uncertainty through experimentalism and constructing and critiquing knowledge, I have moved towards acceptance of uncertainty. This disrupts the self-other binary as both me and the teachers experienced common processes of learning, albeit in different forms and contexts. "Getting lost" could be considered a form of conscientisation, not humanist liberation through knowledge, rather liberation through recognising the partiality of knowledge and reflexivity (Lather, 2007). I have proffered a definition of liberation through research resulting from this study as,

a process of understanding your actions (by being *mufetih*) in relation with the social (by being critical) in order to form and re-form your practices (by being experimental) (Fean, 2011a, p.2).

This could equally be applied to my experience of this study or that of the participating teachers. Even Yahya's research indicated moving beyond the dualism of conscientised/false consciousness to trouble binaries, such as educated/uneducated. Similarly, poststructuralists demand that binaries of empowered/disempowered are replaced with complex understandings of context and relationality,

More attention to contexts would help shift the problem of empowerment from dualisms of power/powerlessness, and dominant/subordinate, that is, from purely oppositional stances, to a problem of multiplicity and contradiction. It may be helpful to think of social actors negotiating actions within particular contexts...I would argue that context must be conceived as filled with social actors whose personal *and* group histories position them as subjects immersed in social patterns. (Gore, 1992, p.61)

Focus on contexts, rather than binary opposition, foregrounds the diversity of factors influencing the actions of individuals in historical, material and relational complexity, creating space for (apparent) contradiction and multiplicity. Such an approach might assist in breaking down the self-other binary of development initiatives which masks the mutuality of social actions to foreground the 'out there-ness' of constructed deficiency and necessity for remedial intervention.

Re-viewing the ethical desire to 'make a difference' in the field of practice illustrates the growing complexity of understanding of the notion. The analysis has unpicked the self-other divide to show research and knowledge construction as processes of mutual learning. Applying this position in teacher education would lead teacher educators to take a stance of authoritative uncertainty, combining 'empowered' agentic action with the 'disempowerment' of not knowing, to construct relational and contextualised knowledge.

### Re-viewing the research process: “a wonderful mess”

This re-view of the research process has caused me to problematise the application of the ethical objectives through which I have chosen to present my researcher identity. In doing so, I have called into question my construction of a professional niche fitting for my sense of self. The affective motivation behind such aspiration could mean I followed others whose,

collaborative research with teachers was not unrelated to the need of academics to construct research identities they could live with. It was a road to salvation, to romance, to community. (Elliott, 1994, p.135)

However, poststructural analysis has shown the journey along this “road to salvation” to be a problematic path in which postcolonial objectives of privileging marginalised knowledge and ‘making a difference’ becomes mutual and uncertain through the operation of power and our collaborative roles.

This notion of mutuality and uncertainty can be applied to the theory and practice dualism. Reviewing literature on research into teaching and pedagogy reform found the division of theory and practice problematic, as it led to technical interventions that failed to engage with the underlying reasoning of teachers. The portmanteau nature of action research is intended to bridge theory and practice as,

Participatory action research thus aims to transform *both* practitioners’ theories and their practices *and* the theories and practices of others whose perspectives and practices may help to shape conditions of life and work in particular local settings. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.598)

However, retaining the constructions of theory and practice, even if they are enhanced through action research, maintains oppositional positioning that results in disciplinary practices, such as training or demands to “*think like a researcher.*” Equally, this dualism masks the complexity of theory, practice and their interrelations. Other dualisms of academic/practitioner, researcher/researched and imposing/holding back are constructed in action research analyses. The term ‘action research’ is open to critiques for reinforcing the neutrality of theory by suggesting that practice requires action, which research is not. In this model, while action research may ‘contribute’ to knowledge, as neutral and rational, it is aimed at ‘transforming’ practice.

The foundation for separation of theory and practice is premised on a notion of their difference, but,

This dichotomy [of theory and practice] is misleading, both in the postulated hierarchical relation of theory and practice, and in the failure to consider theorizing itself as a practice with its own history of usage, closure and consequences. (Hobart, 1993, p.17)

I have revealed the messiness of the research process and explicitly situated this study temporally, spatially and within contested discourses of education development and research, in order to emphasise the social nature of theorising. Academia is thus constructed as a social practice, with the inference that

Research is not just a highly moral and civilized search for knowledge; it is a set of very human activities that reproduce particular social relations in power. (Smith, 2005, p.88)

Poststructural critique of knowledge production can assist in unpicking the superiority of knowing through science by foregrounding it as a social practice which is messy and, at times, contradictory, and the result of the operation of power and discourses. Initially resistant to aspects of academic practice, my subsequent critical engagement with the academy derives from realisation that it also provides a site of application for my ethical desire to 'make a difference'. In essence, the site of practice was identified as being both the academy and Sudanese education. Recognising the academy as a social practice emphasises the social construction of theories, as well as, for example, the socio-cultural embeddedness of pedagogic theories. This then disrupts the notion of abstract theory being in hierarchical opposition to practice. Rather than using action research as an academic mechanism to inform practice, the two sites of practice became mutually informing. This, in turn, disrupted the binary definitions of theory/practice.

Just as orientalist Europe/Other binaries have been deconstructed as simplistic, oppositional and hierarchical. The binaries of theoretical/practical and academic/practitioner which impacted on my sense of researcher identity were brought together through reconceptualisation of the field. This shift in my perception was facilitated by undertaking action research, which is a "boundary dweller" (Stronach and MacLure, 1997, p.128) that can be analysed and function as a tool for unpicking,

the oppositional dilemmas that are rehearsed in action research: between theory and practice; between the personal and the professional; between the organizational cultures of the school and the academy; between 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives; between the sacred languages of science, scholarship or research, and the mundane dialects of practice and everyday experience. (Stronach and MacLure, 1997, pp.116-7)

Recognition of these analytical frames of Enlightenment academic practices as dualistic implies the constraints placed on research and theorisation.

The very desire for control, and the difficulties encountered in trying to document it, can cloud our vision against the very complexities we seek to capture, trapped as we are in social derived constructions of the world we experience. (Brown and Jones, 2001, p.6)

Action research is located 'in the hyphen' and supports reflections on the possibilities of "in-between-ness" (Stronach and MacLure, 1997, p.128), thereby offering an opportunity to tease out some of the complexities masked in traditional approaches to research *on* practice. Shifting from binaries to dialectics offers a possibility of gaining greater complexity of understanding.

The move from thinking in terms of dichotomies to thinking in dialectical terms might be characterised as a move from 'either or' thinking to 'both and' (or from 'not only...' to 'but also...', or from 'while on the one hand'..., to 'also, on the other hand...') thinking. (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998, p.28)

Action research therefore provides a means of deconstructing the theory and practice binary and re-conceptualising a theory-practice dialectic, just as Yahya unpicked his educated/uneducated binary to recognise the multifaceted processes of 'becoming educated'.

Poststructural analysis offers a means to "move beyond the notion of the 'reflective practitioner'" to interrogate the more fundamental research concern of "the way in which we construct reality" (Brown and Jones, 2001, p.5). Research as a knowledge-power complex constructs and re-constructs ways of knowing and doing in a regime of truth. In discussion of binary constructions of knowledge and ignorance,

the proponents of one 'system' attempt to eliminate other knowledges, to portray them and those who use them as not just wrong, but as benighted and bad. What is excluded in such confrontations is the existence of doubt. (Hobart, 1993, p.21)

Poststructural analysis, which welcomes ambiguity, complexity and fluidity could offer a way of opening up understandings. Theory and practice must be in dialogue in order to be mutually informing. A postmodern conception of knowledge assists in achieving this by problematising metanarratives and recognising all knowledge – abstract or experiential – as partial, provisional and contingent. Authoritative uncertainty would foreground doubt as a constructive constituent of coming to know partially and contingently, leaving space for other ways of knowing and doing. Once the theory-practice divide is unpicked, certitude of theory or methodology and the messiness of practice become blurred and the hierarchical opposition that places theory in



dominance over practice becomes disrupted. In its place, authoritative uncertainty offers a way forward for theory-practice.

## **Re-viewing the re-presentation of knowledge in the research**

In designing this research I aimed to follow postcolonial calls to re-present the knowledge of the Sudanese teachers in alignment with their concepts and ways of knowing, rather than my own views of what adult education is and should be. My shift towards 'authoritative uncertainty' and re-centring of focus on academic processes has led me to critique representation as a fundamental aspect of knowledge generation. Reflectively juxtaposing my ethical intentions with representation of this study probes the process of knowledge generation to clarify the epistemological nature of the 'outcome' (in a narrow sense) of this research. Reflection on this inquiry and the possibility of opening up understanding has led me to ponder the notion of the textuality of knowledge, an overtly postmodern epistemological stance,

Postmodernism argues that all knowledge of the real is textual, i.e., always already signified, interpreted or 'written' and, therefore, a 'reading' which can be 'rewritten' and 'reread'. Hence, there is neither an originary point of knowledge nor a final interpretation. However,...some readings are more powerful than others. (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.207)

Analysis of representation in this thesis begins by considering how this research can be interpreted if the data is viewed as representation. Embodied representation of the self in data collection is further unpicked by analysing the representation of the research, particularly in the textual form of this thesis. I begin by exploring attempts to adapt conventional writing styles in the academic genre to represent teachers' views and experiences in a dialogic text and the limitations of such an approach, as well as participatory representation of the teachers' research in Khartoum. I conclude by applying a poststructural analysis to this representation of research to draw out the epistemological nature of its claims of knowing.

## **Re-presentation of our selves**

Throughout the action research I accepted teachers' expressed views as their knowledge, without problematising its construction as a 'text'. Following poststructuralist conceptions of all representations as 'textual' constructions,

Representations of the self, instead of being seen as 'truth', need to be seen more useful as stories, often very powerful stories, which perform a variety of

social functions, including the construction of selves with appropriate characteristics. (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.103)

This thesis, therefore, should not be seen as representative of a 'truth', but rather as a representation of teachers' representations of themselves, as well as representations of my observations. The teachers' voices, as those of others, should be recognised as partial, in both senses of being incomplete and being from one side (Ellsworth, 1992). Crucially, identity is shaped not only by our experience, but also how we view it, as "the self consists not of a person's life-history, but of the *interpretation* they are currently putting on their life history" (Ivanic, 1997, p.16, original emphasis). Collaborative processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation were mediated through our sense of self and identity (Somekh, 2006). Rather than dwell on constraining binary divisions, such as insider/outsider, and given the plurality of contexts and impact of biography and perspectives on identity construction, it is preferable to consider our positioning "in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (Narayan, 1993, cited in Bishop, 2005, p.113). Our identity is co-constructed "through webs of interpersonal and professional relationships" (Somekh, 2006, p.7). My identity can be defined using an endless list of essentialising adjectives: white, British, middle class, researcher, religious skeptic, which seem to confirm my identity as an 'outsider'. However, my Arabic language abilities, in particular, affected how I was perceived by those less directly involved in the research, such as the learners and others I met in schools and public places. The close relation between Arabic and Islam led many people I met to believe, at first, that I am a Muslim<sup>29</sup>. In fact, when asked my religion, the expression used was often, "You're a Muslim, aren't you?" rather than, "What is your religion?" indicating the questioner's assumption. The almost integral relationship between Arabic and Islam was emphasised by a young female passerby who had interrupted me during a discussion with a group of students,

*when I spoke to her in Arabic, she was surprised...She asked if I'm a Muslim, I said "I'm a Christian." She said, "Why does a Christian speak Arabic?" I said, "Why do these [students] study English?" She said, "Arabic is our language." I asked what she meant by 'our' – Sudanese, Muslims? I didn't really get an answer to this. (6 April 2009)*

Some learners, such as those in the predominantly southern, Christian school, might have perceived me differently if they thought I was a Muslim, thereby culturally linked

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<sup>29</sup> The impression resulting from my use of Arabic is likely to have been reinforced by my use of Islamic expressions, such as, "*In sha Allah*" and "*Il hamdul Allah*," which have become integral parts of my Arabic speech.

with their views of the oppressive northern Islamic government. As one Christian student in this school, who I spoke with several times, commented,

*I didn't believe you're Christian last time, because you speak Arabic. But your name makes you known you're Christian. (28 April 2009)*

In such discussions religion was a marker of cultural identity, but the underlying assumptions are likely to have varied. For example, my self-description as a Christian was intended only as a reference point to my historic British cultural identity, but might have been understood in relation to the beliefs and practices of committed Christians in Sudan.

These cases raise the question: what other assumptions existed that affected what was disclosed or left unsaid? This is not to privilege a particular assumption of identity as leading to a superior 'truth', but rather to recognise the relationality of knowing and knowledge construction. Discussion of 'true'/'untrue' assumptions are not intended to imply a corollary of construction of data that is more or less true. Indeed, assumptions that I was a Muslim might have enhanced relations with members of the schools at times. Rather, it is to foreground the constructed and relational nature of fluid identities that research is built on. This contradicts the tendency to assume the 'authentic experience' of voices which makes claims of authority.

by continuing to see experience as the 'raw material' of knowledge, we are unable to create situations where we can examine how, as selves, we move back and forth between our own particular stories through which we construct our identities and the social production that is knowledge. In the process, we fail to challenge dominant knowledge taxonomies and the relations of power in which they are implicated. (Usher *et al.*, 1997)

Re-viewing data with this in mind emphasises its nature as the re-presentation of situated and constructed 'truths'. The knowledge generated in this thesis is therefore the articulation of the layering of these representations.

Representation of the self in research is not purely an act of 'the other', but knowledge is co-constructed through the researcher's identity, which is also fluid and relational. Further insight into the construction of knowledge as representation and partial can be derived from the extent to which I was open with the participants. On certain issues I did not use my personal circumstances to open up and question particular assumptions, including some related to forms of social oppression. These include not questioning, and even encouraging, assumptions based on heteronormativity and a

Christian religious affiliation. This can be clearly illustrated by the several occasions when Yahya raised the issue of 'gay' students,

*Yahya: we have got two or three gays in the school, they behave like women, unmanly....I told him this is not school behaviour, I told him frankly. He must behave as a man, not unmanly...He was like a woman...And when I brought him to this office and said to him, "This is not a place of this, such men like you. It's a place of people that study." He said, "Ok, this is my behaviour, I was born in the middle of girls." I said, "This does not concern me."*

*PF: You know, in my culture that's fine.*

*Yahya: ...In Sudanese society they rejecting someone like this completely, because they say this man is...loti<sup>30</sup>. They dislike him too much, completely.*

*(25 May 2009)*

This interaction initially troubled my ethical position and researcher role. Should I have been more active in arguing against Yahya's articulation of society's homophobia and the role of education in normalising a particular form of masculinity? In this quotation and other comments, my questioning of Yahya's stance was couched in culturally relativist terms (*"in my country that's fine"*), without making claim to comment on Sudanese society. Did this simply arise from my self-disciplining as a researcher in order to hold back and value the participants' views? Or is this my excuse for avoiding expressing my critical, contextually controversial position? However, re-viewing the encounter with poststructural understanding has led to its interpretation as emphasising our fluid and relational identities in construction of knowledge. This example corresponds with recognition of the situational and relational understanding of expressions of critical views as,

*What they/we say, to whom, in what context, depending on the energy they/we have for the struggle on a particular day, is the result of conscious and unconscious assessments of power relations and safety of the situation. (Ellsworth, 1992, p.105)*

The situational and contextual complexity of expressing critical views is illustrated in my discussion of my theological views and other personal issues with numerous longstanding Sudanese friends from outside the research project. Situational self-disciplining of expression has continued in the writing process. For example, discovery that this thesis will be published online by my university, so there is a larger potential readership, caused a re-appraisal of the extent of my personal disclosure in this thesis. In writing research, just as in co-constructing knowledge in the field, changing issues of identity, trust, courage and context open up and close down possibilities of making truth claims and emphasise the role of power relations and self-disciplining on self-

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<sup>30</sup> Derogatory Arabic term for 'passive' man who has sex with men.

representation. While it is true that “researchers must recognise and deal with the messiness of their subjects’ lives” (Troyna, 1994, p.13), we must also deal with the messiness of our own identities. Greater complexity of understanding reveals that knowledge into issues of power and society is partial, multiple and contradictory, expressed in different levels of self-revelation based on the situation and relationships.

### **Participatory representation**

Emancipatory research includes participation in representation of the research as,

Empowerment in this context requires that people are a) able to access *all* of the text which discursively constructs their experiences and b) have the opportunity to rewrite them. (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.224)

The participating teachers ultimately had limited opportunity to do this. Taking a role as an interpreter, as well as facilitator, of the research is critiqued as a distortion of democratic values and respect for others (McNiff, 2002). However, geography, technology and time limited the meaningful participation of the teachers in the written re-presentation of the project. Furthermore, the teachers would have been less interested in the laborious writing process than in the field project. Decolonising research requires that “research findings be freed from the bonds of the specialized journals, the university libraries or the limbo of government files” to be used by the participants themselves (Stavenhagen, 1993, p.56). Therefore, the abstract of this thesis will be translated into Arabic and shared with participants, I will also discuss my analysis with them when I next visit Sudan.

Following participatory research ethos, I attempted to create spaces for the teachers to present their research experiences and findings, primarily through presentations to colleagues in Khartoum. Abdelaziz also co-presented a paper with me in an ELT conference and participated as a guest speaker at subsequent action research workshops I facilitated. However, by ‘giving voice’ directly to the teachers, I cannot assume that facilitating their presentations of their research is unproblematically positive or ‘empowering’ (Ellsworth, 1992). The presentation seminar at the end of the project was held in the British Council in Khartoum, perceived to be a prestigious venue. Location of the presentations in this colonial and post-colonial institution is a metaphor for re-locating the teachers’ practice in the academic discipline. In the seminar it could be claimed that the teachers were co-opted into academic processes which disciplined the teachers in selecting the content and format of their presentations. Just as the teachers were asked to think “*in a scientific way*,” they also

represented their research in formal, constructed environments. Despite attempting to bridge academic and practitioner fields, the outcomes are located within hierarchies of knowledge in which academia is privileged. Different value is placed on various forms of reports on action research, with academic reports given a higher status than those by practitioners (Somekh, 2006). However, the teachers also speak in different contexts, not just this constructed academic arena. Rather than taking the teachers' presentations as self-evidently empowering processes of 'giving voice', the power structures in which their speech is located within must be highlighted. The concept of 'voice',

provides a critical referent for analysing how people are made voiceless in particular settings by not being allowed to speak, or being allowed to say what has already been spoken, and how they learn to silence themselves... (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1990, p.101)

Claims that subaltern voices exist in a "culture of silence" (Mayo, 1995, p.374) are, in fact, a statement about the dominant discourses of research which create subaltern subjects, rather than their voices. Constructing academic presentations as arenas for teachers' expression of their research experiences replicates the dominance of academic practices over their professional and experiential knowledge.

### **Re-presentation in this text**

After the completion of the field data collection stage, I have been faced with dilemmas surrounding textual representation of the research and the participants. The re-presentation of the research forms the final critical element of the process as "Representation is important as a concept because it gives the impression of 'the truth'" (Smith, 1999, p.35). Qualitative research is postulated as a means for marginalised groups to "wage the battle of *representation*" (Fine et al, 2000, p.120, original emphasis), yet, if I abide by research writing conventions, the collaborative, dialogic processes of the fieldwork would be followed by my unilateral production of a text which "ends up reinforcing the perspective and voice of the lone, introspective fieldworker" (Marcus, 1998, cited in Dunne *et al.*, 2005, p.88). I have aimed to re-present the research in this doctoral thesis in a way which shows the situated and contingent nature of the knowledge constructed. Composition of a text according to my aims in re-presenting the research, which were influenced by postcolonial discourse, is not simple, particularly when the work is limited by the constraints of the academic genre and subject to doctoral assessment (Dunne *et al.*, 2005). Ultimately, I am the sole primary author of this text, which is based on my reflections before, during and

after the fieldwork, although I have been located within communities of practice among the teachers in Sudan and in my academic institution. I was selective in deciding what to present and, fundamentally, what was omitted from the thesis. Despite all discussion of teacher knowledge in this thesis, its purpose is for doctoral assessment and an academic audience. I wrote this thesis with a particular “authorial audience” in mind (Rabinowitz, 1997, quoted in Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p.74), not as a particular individual, but at least as a western academic, with particular views and interests. This has led to the “intertextual” inclusion of references to academic works on issues in education research (Ivanic, 1997), as well as adaptation of my interests to the requirements of doctoral assessment and the format of the academic genre.

My research journal was the main ‘raw material’ of research data, including notes on my school observations and discussions with teachers about their practice and research projects, and acted as the basis of this thesis, which is a compressed and polished version of the research story to be shared with peers, but what has been omitted? The reflective scribbles of personal issues that pepper my journals have not been represented in this thesis. This acts as a reminder that even in a study based largely on personal interactions and shared insights, there is a complexity of public and private, and professional and personal, which leads to different levels of sharing in various contexts of,

such personal factors as tolerance for ambiguity/uncertainty, enthusiasm and energy, anticipation, frustration, etc. These are aspects of the researcher’s self which are frequently acknowledged in private as important, but which are rarely documented. They may occasionally be alluded to in methodology texts, but are almost never publicly acknowledged in formal research reports. (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.220)

Of greater relevance to the field of education and development is the omission of in-depth detail on action research projects conducted by many of the teachers, as space has allowed inclusion of only two case studies, relating to Yahya and Abdelaziz. I had expected to include case studies of teachers’ action research projects which exhibited ‘success’ (as I assessed according to my criteria), as I believed my thesis should be based on examples of ‘good practice’ in action research. This could have led to an overly positive portrayal of the project. In addition, I was hesitant to present Yahya’s case study, as it is not a clear ‘success story’, but it was included due to its rich insights into the complexities and contradictions of adult education and research. So, how much could be learnt from the ‘unsuccess stories’ of action research, and are these being reported? For example, in their discussion of action research as a “half full or half empty” glass Stuart and Kunje (1998, p.383) reported that journals kept by the

Malawian teacher-researchers were a “considerable achievement” given the context, although only a few recorded clear examples of action research cycles with distinct stages. Education research reports are frequently “victory narratives” (Lather, 1994), yet changing this requires disrupting the power-knowledge complex.

Within the constraints of academic writing I attempted to open up, rather than close down, dialogue within the text. One route towards achieving this was through inclusion in the text of the different voices of the research within a highly contextualised setting (Griffiths, 1998). Both differences and commonalities in experience and interpretation were conveyed through the incorporation of the different voices of those involved in reflective inquiry and collaborative interpretation: I, the external researcher; we, the research group in consensus; he and she, individual research participants; and they, some or all of the research participants. The aspired resultant ‘polyphonous’ text being,

a quilt of stories and a cacophony of voices speaking to each other in dispute, dissonance, support, dialogue, contention, and/or contradiction. (Fine *et al.*, 2000, p.119)

The text, therefore, attempts to re-present dialogically the diverse voices of the teachers, which are sometimes contradictory, at other points in agreement, as well as to show transformations in individual participants’ viewpoints. As constructed and contingent knowledge, located within the geographic and temporal context of contemporary Khartoum, such re-presentation was aimed to reverse colonial discourse of ‘the Orient’ being timeless, strange and homogeneous (Said, 1978), by showing that it is diverse, complex and changing. Just as through action research the teachers moved towards replacing a substantive certainty in pedagogic theory with an exploratory approach to a contextualised and partial epistemological view, this thesis is intended to be an uncertain text which is deliberately multi-voiced and contingent.

Production of a dialogic text should also be reflexively critiqued as a rhetorical device to reinforce the authenticity of the writer’s message. Quotes are used to authorise, both in the sense of “I, the researcher was there, in the field,” and to say, “Someone really said this exactly this way and this can be documented” (Lather, 1991, p.134). In representation of participants’ quotations in research reports the concept of voice should be critiqued, as rather than being ‘real’, the process is of “inscribing voice” by the writer (Lather, 2007, p.143). In particular, commandeering extracts of the participants’ voices to illustrate my own interpretations is open to accusations of acts of “ventriloquism” (Fine, 1994). This problematic approach to supposedly “giving voice”



has double disempowering outcomes, both by reproducing stereotypes which are conferred 'authenticity' and by making unequal power relations in research (Troyna, 1994). The problematic nature of attempting to produce a dialogic text is compounded by issues of translation. Not only did I commandeer the voices of teachers and learners through quotations, in many cases I chose how the voices were articulated, through my role in translating their comments and observations from Sudanese Colloquial Arabic to English. The nuances of my role as 'cultural translator' can be exemplified in deliberations on translating the meaning of the process of '*tawsil*' of curriculum knowledge to the learners, a term which many teachers included in their definitions of teaching, for which I chose 'to pass on' to give a more interpersonal connotation than the technical-sounding term 'to transmit'<sup>31</sup>. The inclusion of a large proportion of quotations from the participants in this thesis which were originally made in Arabic underlines my role in linguistically interpreting their speech, in addition to selecting which of their speech is represented. It could be claimed, therefore, that my role is of a bilingual ventriloquist who devises the English sub-titles (after Fine, 1994). The power of the translator to influence interpretation of the text is analogous to that of the cross-cultural researcher in re-presenting the research context and process. In this case, I act as a translator of the teachers' views and experience into academic discourse.

### Deconstructing re-presentation

If this work is, as I claim, founded on my ethical stance, then I must re-view the ethics of knowledge production, in the form of research re-presentation. My ethical objective in re-presenting this work was that it should be an 'honest' account, which I initially conceived as being highly descriptive. However, I subsequently realised that to do so, I must foreground the problematic process of narrative textual representation of research by following the,

poststructuralist argument that we must abandon efforts to represent the object of our investigation as it "really" is, independent of our representational apparatus, for a reflexive focus on how we construct that which we are investigating. (Lather, 1991, p.108)

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<sup>31</sup> As the translator, I initially used the term 'transmit' as this fits closely with *tawsil*, which can be used in technical contexts, such as electrical connectivity, as well as relating to social interactions. I later revised my translation to 'pass on' to give a less technical, more interpersonal connotation through use of a phrasal verb. This translation represents the teachers' self-views as conduits between the curriculum and the learners, but it reduces the implication that they are technical automaton 'transmitters'.

In this section of my thesis, I have aimed to exhibit greater humility and reflexivity in constructing claims by showing the positions and processes underpinning the knowledge produced in this research.

deconstruction, by focusing on research as inscription, as a written text in both the narrow and wide sense, foregrounds the enactment of the social relations of the research process as they are written or inscribed in the text and this in turn enables issues of mastery manifested in questions of scientificity, power relations and researcher subjectivity to be more readily foregrounded. (Usher, 2000b, p.170)

Attempts to achieve this have required a move away from production of an 'authoritative' text which focuses on the practices of the participating teachers and their action research projects and onto production of an 'interrogative' text which is framed upon the questioning of knowledge construction. Such a text places research as a social practice in the foreground and locates knowledge production within power relations. In undermining my own position as "an author who is also an 'authority'" (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.211), I have aimed to recast it as grounded in the explicit analysis of the process of textual construction

Re-presentation of the research process situates and contextualises the 'scientific eye' that explicitly constructed the knowledge, rather than simply 'recording' or 'discovering' it in a positivist paradigmatic form (Usher *et al.*, 1997). In this manner, I have sought to interrogate the knowledge production process in defiance of,

a "will to knowledge", characteristic of much intellectual work, that is so strong that the need, desire or willingness to question one's own work is lost in the desire to believe that one has found "truth", that one is "right". (Gore, 1992, p.66)

The explicit contingency of coming to know through this research is one aspect of defying a "will to knowledge" that claims fixed findings. Time and narrative are mutually constitutive (Ricoeur, 2000) and re-viewing has functioned in this thesis to question the linear development of research and understanding, as knowledge is provisional and can be re-constructed. Yet more fundamentally, re-viewing of experiences is, in fact, the interrogation and re-construction of partial re-presentations of these experiences.

Through the reflexive analysis of this chapter, I aimed to provide a situated study of postcolonial attempts to foreground exclusions and elisions that confirm the privileges of western knowledge systems (Gandhi, 1998), by showing the inconsistencies between these aspirations and the constraints I operate within. In reflecting on the research, I have used this part of the research report to,

foreground the limits and necessary misfiring of a project, problematizing the researcher as “the one who knows.” Placed outside of mastery and victory narratives, inquiry becomes a kind of self-wounding laboratory for discovering the rules by which truth is produced. (Lather, 2007, p.11)

I have attempted to move towards disrupting my place in a regime of truth through the grounded unpicking of the research and representation process. Even critical pedagogy can operate as a regime of truth if it acts to authorise fixed knowledge (Ellsworth, 1992), instead coming to know in this research recognises ‘knowing through not knowing’ that foregrounds the partiality, changeability and uncertainty of knowledge, in which authority can be claimed through reflexive deconstruction (Lather, 2007). Through deconstructing and disrupting education and research practices, the way is opened to considering alternatives, a form of ‘making a difference’ in education and the academy.

### Conclusion

This discussion has shown the transformation in my understanding of my researcher role in representing knowledge from postcolonial intentions of privileging marginal voices to poststructural analysis of the construction of such representation. These reflections on knowledge production can be summarised through analysis of a note written by a participant during a discussion on ‘does education in your school reflect the culture of your students?’

*An observation – through the interventions of my colleagues I think that the point of difference is understanding of culture itself...Also, there is a tribal conflict in this discussion and that reduces the value of the conversation. (15 November 2008)*

Knowledge has been explicitly constructed through this study arising from what has been said and what has been asked. This note was unsolicited and written on the back of the handout, therefore located outside of the boundaries of my questioning, emphasising the partiality and constructed limits of knowledge production. The perceived lack of shared understanding of ‘culture’ shows the ways our concepts shape our questions and understandings and the limitations of language, such as in assumptions of the meaning and purpose of ‘education’. The quotation was written in Arabic and raises issues of translation, my use of the connotations-laden term “*tribal conflict*”, rather than alternatives such as ‘ethnic disagreement’, shows my role as both researcher and translator and my power to shape the nuances of how the quotations are represented. Co-construction of knowledge is shaped by relational, shifting identities, as shown in the perception of tensions that arose in discussion of the

controversial issue of culture, although the participants generally built friendly interpersonal relations and these tensions were not observed when discussing other topics, such as pedagogy. Data from discussions with teachers can thus be seen as representations of temporally situated relational identities. Writing research then becomes the representation of representations that requires reflexivity and remaining open to re-readings.

My initial reflections on the participant's note focused on relations between the participants, indicating that my primary concern as a researcher was fieldwork practice. However, through poststructural analysis of research, I came to recognise that the quotation raised issues relating to the work of 'the field' of academia, namely representation and production of knowledge. This example illustrates the process of coming to know my practice as a cross-cultural researcher as my postcolonial stance has been re-articulated to include focus on the process of generating knowledge through the operations of power and my role within the academy.

### **Re-viewing the research: conclusion**

In this chapter I have re-presented a re-view of the action research process to show the tensions and contradictions between my ethical vision and practice, both in terms of the field research and its re-presentation. This "troubling text" (Lather, 2007) has foregrounded research as a social practice, problematising my attempts to access 'teacher knowledge' and 'make a difference'. This reflexive analysis acts as a reminder that personal, social and professional change is complex, messy and contradictory, and implicated in power relations. I have endeavoured to "map the ambiguities and uncertainties which characterize the production of knowledge about people's lives" (Usher, 2000a, p.34) by making explicit the layering, questioning and re-construction of knowledge throughout this study. The tensions and contradictions of undertaking this research have been laid bare and opened up to re-readings. In rejecting "the dangers of vanguardism inherent in any idea of 'correct readings'" (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.44), this opening up emphasises the partial, situated and provisional forms of this knowledge, as,

To avoid the "master's position" of formulating a totalizing discourse requires more self-consciousness about the particularity and provisionality of our sense-making efforts, more awareness of the multiplicity and fluidity of the objects of our knowing. (Lather, 1991, p.142)

Re-presentation of knowing through this thesis resonates with the knowledge constructed by the teachers by being *mufetih* and experimental and reflects the epistemology of action research,

Knowledge is never static or complete; it is in constant process of development as new understandings emerge. This view of knowledge regards reality as a process of evolution, surprising and unpredictable. There are no fixed answers.” (McNiff, 2002, p.18)

A research report might give the impression of outcomes of action research that are as fixed as the ink on the paper. Yet, through this reflexive analysis, I have expressed the situated, constructed and provisional process of coming to know which supports a claim of the authoritative uncertainty of this account. Offering an end point is rejected as leading to enclosure of understandings and provision of a false sense of certainty. The palimpsest structure of this thesis that incorporates multiple layered readings of teacher practice through diverse aspects of action research and re-viewings of understandings has aimed to build a text showing the process of coming to know about teaching, its development and research practice.

## Chapter postscript: a write of passage

Echoing the 'post' of the postcolonial, this postscript is both located after much of the scripted re-presentation of this study and intended to disrupt the operation of power inherent in research that seeks to construct coherence in ways of knowing.

In this section I have explored the complexity of research when navigating ethical intentions, methodological practices and academic constraints. I have attempted to deconstruct both the research process and its re-presentation, which has included problematising my role and position in the act of representation, and highlighting the inadequacies and discrepancies of the research process (Stronach and MacLure, 1997), in order to unmask the partiality of the text. As "research can be viewed as the practice of writing and rewriting selves and the world" (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.212), this account of the project comprises my perceptions, reflections and aspects of my biography, as well as clarification of the ethical intentions of the study throughout the thesis. Yet even having exhibited this reflexivity, this text is formed of narrative in which I have inscribed my identity, using it as "something one asserts and deploys rather than discovers" (Brown and Jones, 2001, p.62). The reflexive conclusion you are currently reading does not lend itself to forming the victorious ending of a hero narrative. Rather, this tale of coming to know epitomises a 'coming of age' story following the protagonist's 'write of passage' through doctoral studies, marking the journey from apprentice to academic.

Yet, the fictional nature of narrative leads to troubling the coherence of this constructed text of part of my life story, as it is based on several assumptions that become disturbed in deconstruction. 'Coming of age' stories are founded on a myriad of Enlightenment assumptions, including,

that a life story will be linear, directional, cumulative, coherent and developmental; that the past will help to explain the present (and not vice versa); that transitions are resolutions of boundary problems, and contradictions can be transcended; that the self is singular, discoverable through reflection, sits at the centre of our story (Stronach and MacLure, 1997, pp.127-8)

Here this 'coming of age' narrative could prove obfuscating, as the term contains a notion of the linear temporal development of a whole being into a state of maturity that is unsuited to postmodern understandings. Poststructural deconstruction of coming of age narratives might open up alternative understandings of research that compete with the implied 'happily ever after' (for example, in an existence of stable knowing of fixed,

absolutist knowledge) of the unseen remainder of the protagonist's life. The life story metaphor emphasises the assumed directionality of research framed by a time narrative and in doing so identifies temporality as an unstated structuring device that conspires to create coherence. This fits with the traditional representation of qualitative research as a linear, or possibly circular, process (Flick, 2006) and the time meta-narrative in which 'development' is located. Both are obscuring and constraining. The use of time in the coming of age genre also offers an opening to unmask the limitations of representation, as the tales are explicitly temporally bounded and partial. The start and end of the stories, like those of this thesis, are overtly constructed boundaries, in which a story of change is presented. Fictional genres place limits on what can be said, as do research report formats. Questioning how knowledge is bordered by seemingly unquestionable concepts or prescribed formats acts to problematise meta-narratives while also probing for alternatives. Pondering narrative as fiction offers an escape from certainty of truth claims as 'fact', thereby leaving space for greater dialogue and learning. This unpicking is intended to undermine the researcher-as-knower in order to show that claims of certainty of theory are constructions and that lying beneath claims of certainty there exists uncertainty.

Appropriately for a coming of age tale, the lessons from this thesis are not fully formed, mature educational theories or teaching practices. By way of main 'findings', this tale does not offer the product of knowledge in noun-form. Instead it offers the nascent processes of coming to know, being *mufetih* and experimental, emergent research and educational practices that are inherently situated, partial and provisional. It offers a critical reflexive analysis to inform the messy ongoing process of learning and transforming in both practice and theorising from a position of authoritative uncertainty. The protagonist, and others, might draw upon these dispositions and evolving practices beyond the closure of this 'coming of age' episode.

## **9. So what?: Implications for teacher development and education research**

### **Taking responsibility/giving conclusions**

This research was founded on a personal ethical stance towards making a difference in the site of practice and theorised in accordance with postcolonial positioning. The analysis of the preceding chapter has troubled conceptions of participation, 'making a difference' and representing the teachers' knowledge, which could obscure the potential practical implications of this study. To engage purely in deconstruction and critique could culminate in my abstention from participation in policy debate, however, my position is to recognise that,

all forms of knowledge construction have limitations and to acknowledge that the academy itself is a source of intellectual contamination, but at the same time to accept some responsibility to inform political processes. (Humes and Bryce, 2003, p.186)

The unsettling of knowledge and certainty does not mean that the research process and outcomes have become pointless (Lather, 2007). Indeed, as a researcher, I have an ethical responsibility to channel my efforts to improve education, as a means of enhancing social justice, such as by informing policy. What, then, is the contribution to knowledge of this inquiry? How can its implications inform practitioners and researchers in international education and development?

### **Poststructuralism and 'the practical'**

In introducing this thesis I constructed my identity as an education and development practitioner with a propensity for 'the practical'. It should therefore be expected that insights from this thesis have potential implications for broader issues in international education and cross-cultural research. In approaching the end of this study I have discussed "How is it possible to apply beliefs, theorisation and processes developed through academia in the education and development sector?" as I transition from "library to logframe" (Fean, 2011b, p.1). Attempting to imagine a role for action research within the dominant rational management approach of the development sector (Wallace *et al.*, 2007) arises from a perceived disjuncture in terms of objectives, process and outcomes.



This teacher development project was long-term, small-scale and resulted in implicit outcomes, contrasting with the external priorities, large-scale and results-driven focus of policy-making and programming which dominate the education and development sector. (Fean, 2011b, p.1)

This harks back, yet again, to the technical view of action research as a tool for teacher education within existing discourses of development. Such a narrow view of 'the practical' in relation to this research seems lacking.

It is timely to return to the ethical objectives and the visions of results of participatory action research, which guided the design of this study,

We believe that the outcome of good research is not just books and academic papers, but is also the creative action of people to address matters that are important to them. Of course, it is concerned too with revisioning our understanding of our world, as well as transforming practice within it. (Heron and Reason, 2006, p.145)

My initial technical expectations of the outcomes of action research have been replaced by complex and implicit notions, while my own practice within the field of academia has also been the object of transformation. "Revisioning our understanding of the world" though the minutiae of a small-scale action research study brings to the fore the relationship between the local and the global. The dialectic of local-global is such that "it is not a question of the global fragmenting into the local but rather of the global and the local being repositioned in relation to each other" (Tikly, 1999, p.609), thereby linking the dusty classrooms of Khartoum with the agenda-setting debates of international conferences.

Locating this study within a local-global dialectic makes possible articulation of implications for global structures of knowledge production and ways of knowing. Postmodern critiques of metanarratives provide a means of questioning dominant models of education and development, from rational management to absolutist epistemologies and pedagogies. "The world is too complex to be changed purely by rationalistic projects, 'disinterested' research and the one big idea" (Usher, 2000b, p.180), and therefore openness towards alternative ways of knowing is required. The purpose of such poststructural analysis in development is "to contribute to the liberation of the discursive field so that the task of imagining alternatives can be commenced" (Escobar, 1995, p.14) . Poststructuralist analysis has assisted the unpacking of this study and, equally, it presents opportunities for alternative implications for aspiring for and moving towards education quality.

An initial step in opening up possibilities of learning from this research to achieve practical impact is to question the very notion of 'the practical'. Between education and development practitioners and poststructuralist academic analysts there may exist "common concern for the material conditions of people both identify as poor," yet their notions of 'the practical' differ (Tamas, 2004, p.650). To poststructuralist thought practicality is a discourse to be probed, questioned and revealed as a manifestation of particular knowledge-power interactions. Researchers who conclude analysis of action research from within the broad discursive field of education and development risk remaining "blind both to the specificity of their formation within discourse and to the specificity of that discourse to a particular history – in this case that of the powerful" (Tamas, 2004, p.650). Yet as a result,

When taken to the level of the field this makes it difficult for developers to recognise interventions as legitimate unless they respond to the terms of their discourse. This limitation may undermine the possibility of the sort of authentic partnership that figures so prominently in the rhetoric of development. (Tamas, 2004, p.650)

How, then, can I offer the findings of this research in a way which realises my ethical objective of making a difference yet also avoids unreflective adherence to and reinforcement of dominant discourses of 'practical impact' through 'development'?

Poststructuralists "refuse to replace one universal explanatory model with another" (Eyben, 2000, p.10) and instead foreground complex processes, fluid and multiple identities, relationships and contexts. I have endeavoured to highlight the complexities and contradictions inherent in collaborative education action research by overtly picking apart the study's limitations, tensions and inconsistencies, as,

This is the greatest gift of deconstruction: to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility. (Spivak, 1996, p.210)

Such a position opens the way for questioning and coming to know. Through deconstruction, I have aimed to reinforce the "the defetishization of the concrete" (Spivak, 1993, p.91) by undermining the implicit absolutes of certainty of this research process. Similarly, in this research the teachers' epistemological shifts towards constructing contingent, partial and contextualised knowledge match my own problematisation of knowledge construction and re-presentation processes. After the discussion of academic procedures of action research and the culture, experiences and practices of the teachers have been stripped back, what remains is recognition of the value of uncertainty as a guiding concept for learning. The condition of uncertainty "is

not a passing state of puzzlement but an acceptance of the provisional and contingent in what we believe and do" (Usher *et al.*, 1997, p.25). Such a notion of authoritative uncertainty "need not produce the paralysing fatalism post-structuralists are accused of purveying". Rather, it removes "the certitude that authorises and naturalises the oft-noted arrogance of subjects of a dominant discourse" (Tamas, 2004, p.654), thereby opening up possibilities of dialogue, reflection and formation and re-formation of practices and discourses.

Contrary to discourses of practicality, in which fixed solutions are sought to material conditions, uncertainty emphasises the complexity of the human situation, fluidity of identity, mutuality of relations and uniqueness of historical actions. In contrast to an idea of uncertainty as paralysing lack of clarity, a disposition of authoritative uncertainty invokes a sense of seeking to know, agency and legitimacy in constructing knowledge. In the international development sector, uncertainty and messiness, and values and emotions, are unacceptable in the rational management approaches and organisational structures that dominate (Eyben, 2000), so the potential implications of such a notion in the education field must be explicitly put forward. The little that remains of this thesis is therefore allocated to returning to the tripartite central themes of this inquiry, teaching, its development and researcher practice, to consider the implications of the contribution to knowledge for teacher education and research.

### **My claims of *coming to know* and their implications**

This claim of *coming to know* is offered in place of a 'claim to knowledge' in order to underscore the fluid nature of the knowledge that has been constructed, which is open to re-viewing and re-interpretation through re-construction of knowledge with others and diverse experiences. Grounded analysis of this study responds to the question 'what knowledge can be generated through action research?' The discussion in this thesis is a testament to the domains and forms of knowledge that can be generated about teaching, its development and researcher practice through undertaking collaborative action research. This knowledge is not of a purely propositional nature, but incorporates procedural knowledge, constructed layering of the complexity of understanding of teacher and action research practice and analysis of shifts in epistemological positioning through the study. In this section I explore the claims of coming to know and implications of each of the research elements, before returning to the overarching question of knowledge generation through this study.

**1. Teachers and teaching: What did I learn about teachers' pedagogic practice and school context through action research?**

This inquiry into teaching in adult education in Sudan has shown that pedagogy is a socio-cultural practice embedded in the structural and material environment of schools and society. While this is explicitly embraced in some literature on pedagogy in Africa (Tabulawa, 1997, Vavrus, 2009), technicist concepts of teaching dominate. This results in the promulgation of deficit models of teachers and technical interventions in attempts to transform their practice. In response, this study has not been limited to investigating teacher practice, but has incorporated teacher reasoning as central to the inquiry, which has included their conceptions, perceptions and environmental and structural context.

Knowledge on teachers' pedagogic practice and adult education was collaboratively constructed through reconnaissance and the teachers' action research. Through my initial focus on education as *ta'lim*, the teachers' formulaic, textbook-based and didactic lessons were found to derive from their conceptions and perceptions, including the abilities of their learners and the roles of the educator, textbooks and examinations. This analysis became layered with insights from the teachers' action research to also understand education as *turbiya*, a process of 'becoming educated' that relates to socialisation into behavioural norms, as well as cognitive and linguistic development. My claim of coming to know derives from the layering of knowledge through action research reconnaissance and collaborative inquiries, and the resulting complexity of the understanding of teacher practice. This has enabled construction of knowledge of teacher practice based on their reasoning and conceptions, such as *turbiya* and *ta'lim*, that both question assumptions, such as the purpose of education and the role of educators, and emphasise the socio-cultural nature of pedagogy.

Although this research took place in Sudanese adult education, the implications for understanding pedagogy are broader. The focus on the situated and partial nature of teachers' knowledge emphasises an implication of this research as being the approach to constructing knowledge on pedagogy in a manner that seeks to understand reasoning and practice, yet is always *coming to know* through diversity of understandings and the dynamic school context. This claim of coming to know is intended to be used as a resource in research into teacher practice to understand the reasoning and complexity of pedagogy through local concepts, which could guide the

development of contextually relevant reforms and open up debates and imaginings of alternative pedagogies and approaches to education.

This research has shown the teachers' practice to be based on their concepts and perceptions of adult education, and the pedagogy reforms they introduced negotiated complex factors including examinations structures and learners' expectations. These findings also have implications for teacher development, as understanding educators' reasoning is a precursor to implementing effective teacher education as,

Teacher educators have to be aware of their students' views concerning the role of teachers. These views are not static but are apt to change as the teaching contexts of student teachers change. (Ben-Peretz, 2001, p.53)

By being *mufetih*, teacher educators can understand the specificities of teachers' contexts and their perceptions and conceptions that underpin their practice. For example, in the case of Sudanese adult education, the process of socialisation through *turbiya* would require focus in teacher education on the transformative role of schooling, teachers as role-models and how they envision 'becoming educated'. Teacher education should therefore provide space for teachers to articulate, question, clarify and transform the perceptions and conceptions of their practice. Furthermore, pedagogy reform efforts require engagement with perceptual and structural factors, such as through participation of teachers. Action research provides a tool to do this collaboratively, while also uncovering possibilities of change by questioning concepts and assumptions and pushing boundaries of power relations. Combining action research with teacher development facilitates the construction of teachers' views of their practice in collaboration with others, which supports the development of understanding of their pedagogy and schools, as well as providing broader insights that reveal possibilities of reform in diverse, ever-changing contexts.

## ***2. Teacher development and pedagogy reform: How did the adult education teachers' practice and understandings of adult education change through undertaking action research?***

The action research design of this study arose from a sense of dissatisfaction with extractive approaches to data collection and top-down imposition of pedagogy reform through teacher education. These form two sides of the same coin in which theory and practice are divided and positioned in hierarchical opposition. Following postcolonial demands for participation and valorisation of local knowledge and practices, I aspired to facilitate teachers' learning and practitioner-led innovations as an alternative to

conventional teacher development and pedagogy reform. I anticipated deepening my ethnographic insights through the participation of the teachers and outcomes in terms of changed technical pedagogic practice. However, teacher participation increased the complexity of my understanding by problematising my assumptions, while the outcomes were more implicit, relating to dispositions and epistemological positioning.

My claim of coming to know derives from the increasing complexity of the teachers' understanding of their practice, and an epistemological shift and the development of dispositions towards constructing knowledge by conducting action research. Teachers' practice was based on their complex and situated understandings of pedagogy, which were re-cast with greater complexity through action research. The process of developing through action research centred on changed epistemological positions which facilitated the construction of authoritative knowledge by teachers and its use in praxis. By being *mufetih*, the teachers took an epistemological stance towards constructing partial and contextualised knowledge about their practice. Practitioner-led changes in teaching arose from experimentalism, which required conceptualisation of praxis as contingent. The central outcome of the action research was an epistemic shift from abstract, fixed and absolute knowledge to that which is contextualised, contingent and partial, through the relocation of authority in the construction of knowledge from external to internal. This transition was from certainty and seeking certainty to acceptance of uncertainty, and also created potential for ongoing change as knowledge and practice could be re-constructed.

The fundamental question debated by teacher educators is: what knowledge is required for teaching? This generally follows a constructed binary division between theory and practice, with the former applied to the latter and resulting pedagogy reform assumed. An essential first step of reforming teacher education is to re-consider the nature and relationship of the constructed binaries of theory and practice. The dominance of academic theories, which are conceived as fixed and universal in post-Enlightenment epistemologies, and the absence of a space to adapt or experiment lead teachers to "implement as they can, ignore the reforms, or find something else to blame for their lack of implementation" (Croft, 2002a, p.220). Modernist models of pedagogic theories take a monolithic role in teacher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet are frequently rejected as being inappropriate to the material environment or educational culture. This constructed division of theory-practice and the inapplicability of the findings of applied research results in theories of certainty which become

emasculated as *kalam fadi* ('empty speech') that have no possibility of application to the very field they are intended for.

To offer an alternative monolithic theory would be to replicate the failings of the past. Rather than repeat critiques of teachers as deficient if they do not apply externally developed theories, poststructural analysis re-casts the oppositional hierarchical binary of theory-practice as the locus of questioning. In discussion of teacher training in Malawi, Croft (2002a, p.220) offers an explanation for the limited impact of pedagogy reform efforts,

Advisors who come with an attitude that the pedagogy they bring might be tried, tested, adapted, and *perhaps* incorporated into some people's teaching, face a view of schooling as part of the modern, rational world in which knowledge about how to teach is absolute.

This shows that there are differing epistemological assumptions that lead to mismatching approaches to cross-cultural development practices: on one hand there exists an absolutist sense of "just tell them what to do" of advisers or "just tell us what to do" by teachers, on the other hand there is a socio-constructivist notion that recognises diversity and complexity of contexts and actions. To bridge this impasse it is necessary to "open up discussions of contextual relevance, both physical and socio-cultural and challenge an absolute view of pedagogical knowledge as being right or wrong, modern or outdated" (Croft, 2002a, p.224). In essence, postmodern theorisation of epistemology and pedagogy is called for, rather than all-or-nothing metanarratives. Re-conceptualising effective pedagogy as that which both responds to and includes the expression of the socio-cultural and material context, such as "contingent constructivism" (Vavrus, 2009), acts to limit absolutist pedagogic theories while also demanding a space for continuous imagining, debating and trialling of the possibilities of teacher practice. The transformation of teachers' epistemological stances and dispositions in this research illustrates how research and teacher development could develop the hyphen of the theory-practice dialectic and recognise the contingency of teacher practice.

Teaching is a complex social activity in ever-changing contexts and therefore "teacher education is a nearly impossible endeavor because what one is supposed to be doing as a teacher is vague, ambiguous, and fraught with uncertainties" (Ben-Peretz, 2001, p.48). Studying the teachers' practice as based on their reasoning and responsive to their perceptions of their context has clear implications for teacher education as,

preservice teacher education programs should be preparing teachers for problem solving with knowledge that can be transformed in the school situation in response to perceived well- and ill-defined problems. (Yarbrough, 1995, p.52)

As shown in this inquiry, action research can be used to identify, analyse and respond to problems. The epistemological stance of 'authoritative uncertainty', in which the partiality, contingency and contextuality of knowledge is recognised, is required for pedagogy to be conceived by teachers as responsive and problem solving. This epistemological position facilitates development of a professional stance which embraces being *mufetih* and experimentalism as means to improve the quality of education in the changing micro-context of their classrooms. This offers a way forward for teacher educators, who face challenges in preparing teachers for the uncertainties of their practice,

Their hard-won reliance on their own approaches to teaching allows teachers to maintain control over the inherent uncertainties of their profession. This situation might serve to make teachers and student teachers feel comfortable in their classrooms, but it does not necessarily make them effective practitioners who are reflective about their practice and sensitive to the needs of their students. (Ben-Peretz, 2001, p.53)

Action research facilitates facing the uncertainties of teaching by probing and questioning practices and assumptions, thereby making the teachers reflective and "sensitive to the needs of their students," which could be conceived as being 'learners-focused'.

The basis of teachers' practice in their reasoning and the possibilities of its re-construction re-cast teacher education as a process of dialogue, reflection and inquiry. Dispositions and stances developed through this action research, including being *mufetih*, experimentalism and authoritative uncertainty, offer potential routes for teacher education. Reformulating authoritative knowledge as experiential and contextualised, but also partial and contingent, supports development of the teachers' disposition to experiment, rather than a stance of already knowing or seeking absolutist abstract theories. Legitimising teacher knowledge through academic mechanisms does not in itself fundamentally disrupt power relations of knowledge production, but it acts to adapt the power-knowledge nexus to support articulation of diverse practices. A possible critique of uncertainty is that without authority it would not open up possibilities of diverse pedagogic practices, as it does not offer alternatives to the dominance of particular theoretically validated ways of doing. Indeed, it is more likely to result in paralysis or stagnation than in reform. However, action research operates within the regime of truth of academic processes in order to legitimise teacher



knowledge, providing an opportunity for joining authoritativeness with uncertainty. Development of authoritative uncertainty requires agentic action on the part of teachers to construct their own knowledge, however, privileging of academic knowledge through regimes of truth is deeply embedded. 'Holding back-giving space' in teacher education could facilitate re-locating teachers' epistemic authority to their situated knowledge, promoting responsive teaching and contextually relevant pedagogic renewal. In essence, questioning, experimenting and acceptance of uncertainty are legitimate components of teacher development, leading to authoritative teacher knowledge construction that centres the agency to imagine and implement reform on the educator.

***3. Reflexive analysis of action research: How did my understandings of my practice as a postcolonial cross-cultural action researcher change through the study?***

This thesis has been framed around my doctoral journey, which has provided insights for the development of theoretical and methodological positions in education research, a site of contested worldviews and practices. This narrative has supported the interrogation of research into pedagogy and its reform in low-income countries, as well as the academic practices and discourses used to produce such knowledge, through the lens of a cross-cultural research experience. Selection of an action research methodology was based on my postcolonial ethical stance with propensity towards participation and engagement with local knowledge and concepts, although subsequent poststructural analysis has problematised these knowledge production processes.

Coming to know arose through the postcolonial and poststructural analysis of tensions in enacting ethical research intentions and the unsettling of my researcher position. Layering of knowledge in this study increased the complexity of understandings and led to a shift in focus from notions of participation and 'making a difference' in field practice to questioning fundamental assumptions underpinning my expectations of the knowledge to be constructed. It was the reflexive analysis of the research process which led to "getting lost" (Lather, 2007) in epistemological, methodological and ethical concerns with regards to both constructing and re-presenting knowledge, thereby disrupting the potential claims of certainty and linearity in developing understanding through social science. The certainty of intentions gradually gave way to recognition of the uncertainties of knowledge construction which opens up possibilities of further construction of knowledge through multiple interpretations and critiques. This claim of

coming to know is articulated in the phrase *coming to know*, which shows how knowledge in research was re-conceived as a contingent process of becoming, not a fixed end product. This echoes the epistemological shift of the teachers, although the transformation in my position has been more extreme as poststructural analysis has shown the bounded co-construction of partial, situated and provisional knowledge through 'textual' representations in encounters between shifting, relational identities. The resulting position of authoritative uncertainty questions the certainty ascribed to knowledge generated through research.

Emphasising the constructed and situated nature of pedagogic theories through poststructural analysis could lead teacher educators and researchers to re-conceive the constructed binary of theory and practice, thereby facilitating dialogic approaches to teacher development and research that recognise that practice is fluid and contextually embedded. The implications involve re-focusing the issue of 'what knowledge for teacher development?' from content and procedural knowledge to consider epistemological positions and knowledge construction and re-construction through dialogue, inquiry and practice from a position of 'authoritative uncertainty'. Such a notion of 'authoritative uncertainty' poses challenges to the academy, which is primarily sought to offer authoritative certainty by undertaking research, such as through generalised proclamations that signal to policy-makers that education is a rational activity requiring technical solutions, and messiness and complexity can be brushed aside. While it can be claimed that a stance of uncertainty is the foundation of scientific practice, some education research is based on certainty of assumptions and methodology, as shown in the dominance of certain research approaches and theories of pedagogy, such as the 'learner-centred' model. The challenges of operating within the constraints of academic regimes of truth have been put forward by Schön (1995, p.28) in relation to action research,

The dilemma depends, I believe, upon a particular epistemology built into the modern research university, and, along with this, on our discovery of the increasing salience of certain "indeterminate zones" of practice – uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, conflict – which fall outside the categories of that epistemology.

Explicit acknowledgement by the academy of poststructural offerings of the partiality and contingency of knowing and postmodern epistemology of contextualised, fluid knowledge would allow academics to take a stance of uncertainty, the basis of ongoing efforts of coming to know. In this way, poststructuralist re-presentations of research emphasise the partiality and provisionality of knowledge, allowing researchers,

educators and policy-makers to make alternative interpretations that are situated in diverse and dynamic contexts.

### **Conclusion: what knowledge have I generated?**

This account of the research set off from the position of a newly arrived volunteer teacher in Sudan to arrive at a conclusion by contributing to the knowledge of the international academic community. As companions on this journey, you have traversed educational, methodological and theoretical fields that were formative in the design and implementation of this study and meandered along interconnected paths of pedagogy, its development and cross-cultural researcher practice. The implications of these three co-constituting elements mark the arrival at the textual terminus, which acts as a vantage point to look onwards, beyond this research experience. To conclude my response to the question ‘So what?’ that is asked by those, like myself, who seek practical outcomes of research, I return to the overarching research question:

### ***What knowledge can I generate about teaching, its development and my researcher practice through collaborative action research with teachers in Sudanese youth and adult education schools?***

Construction of knowledge through reconnaissance into pedagogy emphasised the teachers’ reasoning, which related to their conceptions and perceptions of education structures and the school environment, as the basis of their practice. This has implications for cross-cultural education research and teacher development initiatives far beyond the classrooms of Khartoum and the specific concepts of *ta’lim* and *turbiya*. Taking teachers’ reasoning about their practice as a foundation, the action research process showed the possibilities of educators constructing and re-constructing knowledge by layering perspectives in dynamic contexts to transform their teaching. This was conceptualised as an epistemological shift in notions of authoritative knowledge from abstract, fixed and given to situated, partial and constructed. Coming to know about teacher practice and its reform through this research was explicitly constructed and layered to show the provisionality of knowing. Learning about my own practice as a researcher through this process has progressed from certainty of intentions, through grappling with methodological and ethical tensions, to taking a stance of uncertainty towards constructing knowledge, an outcome which calls into question the linearity of knowledge production and blurs the theory-practice binary. As shown in discussion of the interrelated claims of coming to know about teaching, its

development and researcher practice, the fundamental response to the overarching question ‘what knowledge can I generate?’ is not the ‘findings’ of the research, in the form of propositional knowledge, rather, it is the epistemology of the response which is explicitly constructed, situated, partial and contingent.

It would not be fitting to close by giving suggestions for further research to fill the gaps of the knowledge generated about teacher practice and pedagogy reform. Instead, I leave fundamental recommendations for ways of implementing such research, conducting teacher education and conceiving of the knowledge in these processes. Ultimately, knowledge for teaching is constructed by teachers and embedded in their socio-cultural contexts and teacher development requires the construction and re-construction of knowledge that is provisional, contextualised and partial. Similarly, as shown in this study, knowing through education and research is contingent and situated in social practices and discourses, an assertion that bridges theory and practice. This supports a contingent position on envisioning, developing and analysing pedagogy as “We cannot have *the* answer to education quality because it is complex, situated and can never once and for all be answered” (Barrett, 2011a, p.146). In concluding this thesis I reject a neat closure as teaching, its development and researcher practice are also issues that “can never once and for all be answered.” It is this stance, enacted in the ongoing process of coming to know, which opens up this research to further questioning, analysis and re-interpretation.

## An opening at the (en)closure

“the closure that is necessary can only be *imposed* – it is not something that exists naturally in the real and is simply reflected in the form of predictive generalizations. It is not that closure is impossible but since it can only be imposed then the very status of this knowledge becomes questionable.”

(Usher, 1997, p.32, original italics)

I hereby impose the narrative end of this thesis. This work embodies a moment in my analysis of this doctoral study at the time of submission, within the limits of this format of representation. At this arbitrary point, this text is bequeathed as a source for the intertextual conversation of the academy.

In place of fixed ‘findings’ that might be expected in a doctoral thesis at this juncture, I leave notions of coming to know by being *mufetih*, experimental and taking a position of authoritative uncertainty, and processes of designing, conducting and critiquing cross-cultural action research. These act as reflective points of reference, not prescriptive maps or pre-conceived instructions, for education researchers whose ethical objectives or professional interests find some connection with those articulated through this study.

To end, I recall my anecdote in the re-view of the introductory chapter which showed my contingent interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences through new knowledge. I invite you to re-view and re-interpret this work through your own lens, informed by your own knowledge and experiences, as I intend to, in our own ongoing processes of coming to know.

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## Appendix

### 1. Access

Materials were usually prepared in both Arabic and English, only the English sections are included in the appendix.



Youth Education Centre  
Omdurman Locality  
Khartoum

20 July 2008

Dear Headteacher and Teachers,

#### **Subject: PhD Research in Youth Education Centres**

I hope you are well.

I am Paul Fean (British), a student in the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex in the UK. I came to Sudan to do field research for a PhD in Education.

The research focuses on teachers from Youth Education Centres and will examine the role of teachers' views on their teaching. The research aims to support the development of the professional skills of the participating teachers, in addition to gathering the data of the study.

I would be grateful if you would agree for your centre to participate in this project and for three teachers from this centre to join the study.

The attached document includes an overview of the aims and methodology of the research.

I would be grateful if you agree for teachers from this centre to participate in this research project, and hope that we can continue to cooperate into the future.

Best wishes,

Paul Fean  
PhD Student, University of Sussex



## **Overview of PhD Research**

**Paul Fean**  
**University of Sussex**

### **The Researcher**

I am Paul Fean (British), a student in the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex in the UK. I came to Sudan, where I lived from 2003 to 2006, to do field research for a PhD in Education.

I have strong professional relations with teachers in the Adult Education Division in Omdurman Locality, which I developed through a workshop I facilitated at the British Council in 2005, as well as through 'Sudanese SAFE Organisation', which I established in 2005 and places volunteer teachers in some of the Youth Education Centres.

I have a range of experience in the field of education, and have facilitated courses, principally English language and teacher development programmes, in different universities and educational institutions in Khartoum and across Sudan.

Before working in the education, I studied B.A. Arabic and French at the University of Manchester, so I can communicate with participants and students in both English and Arabic.

### **Research Permission**

The Director of the Adult Education Division at Omdurman Locality has given permission for this research to take place and for the participation of a group of teachers from Youth Education Centres, as well as for the researcher to visit the centres during the study.

### **Research Topic**

The research focuses on teachers from Youth Education Centres and will examine the role of teachers' views on their teaching.

This study follows an innovative research methodology, 'action research', so the PhD thesis could explore the research process or the research findings.

### **Aims of the Research**

The study has two objectives:

1. Gather data for a PhD
2. Support the professional development of the participating teachers.



## **Methodology of the Research**

This study follows an ‘action research’ approach, which is distinguished by the role of the teacher in the research, as well as by its aim. Action research is the structured study of teachers’ practice with the aim of improving teaching, and is, therefore, a method of professional development. In order to achieve this objective, the duration of this project is longer than most traditional research, and is expected to last about nine months.

In addition to the action research approach, the researcher will use participatory research methods. The methods used will include discussions, writing, drawing and video recording. The researcher will organise the discussions between the teachers and record teaching (such as by making notes or by video recording) in order to facilitate meaningful discussion and reflection.

## **Research Participants**

About 15 teachers from five Youth Education Centres in Omdurman will participate in this research. The participants will include both teachers of English and teachers of other subjects, and so communication will be by both English and Arabic throughout the project.

## **Role of the Participating Teachers**

The participating teachers will meet weekly to engage in discussions relating to their work and the research process. The meetings will usually be held in Omdurman, at a time convenient for the participating teachers.

In addition to the group discussions, participants will complete activities (such as teaching logs) to reflect on their teaching to prepare for the weekly discussions. Furthermore, the researcher will visit each centre every week to watch the participants teach, and subsequently discuss their teaching with them.

## **Selection of the Research Participants**

In total, there are 15 teachers from five centres participating in the research. The selected teachers should specialise in teaching either English language or other subjects, and the group of participants from each centre should include both male and female teachers. In addition to this, the participants should agree to do both group and individual activities during the research, which will last about nine months.

## **Research Data**

Research data will be gathered at stages of the project, such as during informal meetings with participants and visits to schools, as well as during the weekly discussions.

The PhD thesis will include analysis of the research process or research findings. A copy of the thesis in English, as well as a summary in Arabic, will be provided to the participating teachers and the Adult Education Division of Omdurman Locality. The researcher may also write articles for academic journals or deliver presentations at conferences about the research.

## **2. Reconnaissance phase activities**

Handouts were given to the participants during each discussion session and research workshop, a sample are included in the appendix.



### **Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres Research Discussion Session 1**

#### **1. Timeline**

Make a timeline to illustrate your professional experience. The following questions will help you:

1. Think about your life, studies and experience – how did you become a teacher in a Youth Education Centre?
2. What were the educational and professional decisions that you made that led you to this role?
3. What is your role in the Youth Education Centre now?

#### **2. Expectations, Hopes and Fears**

1. What do you expect to do in this research?
2. What do you expect the researcher, Paul, to do in this research?
3. What do you hope to achieve through participation in this research?
4. Do you have any anxieties or do you anticipate any problems due to your participation in this research?

#### **3. Teachers and their Activities**

1. Describe a good teacher.

#### **4. Reflections to Prepare for the Next Research Discussion Session**

One day after teaching this week, think about everything you've done in the Youth Education Centre.

1. Select one thing you've done which is an example of being a good teacher.
2. Describe the situation – what did you do? When? With who? Why?
3. Why did you choose this example?

## **Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres**

### **Research Discussion Session 2**

#### **1. Discussion: Description of a Good Teacher**

1. With a partner, write the key words from your description of a good teacher on post-it notes.
2. Present your key words to the group.
3. Rank the words presented by the group according to their importance, in your opinion, to being a good teacher.
4. Discussion on the ranking of the words.

#### **2. Discussion: Examples of Good Teaching**

Presentation of the answers to the reflective questions which Paul asked last week:

One day after teaching this week, think about everything you've done in the Youth Education Centre.

1. Select one thing you've done which is an example of being a good teacher.
2. Describe the situation – what did you do? When? With who? Why?
3. Why did you choose this example?

#### **Additional Question**

What are the qualities of a good teacher that were discussed in Discussion 1 that are shown in each example?

#### **3. Expectations, Hopes and Fears**

Response by Paul on some of the points raised by participants last week.

#### **4. Reflections to Prepare for the Next Research Discussion Session**

1. Think about your activities and your students' activities in your lessons.
2. After two lessons this week, complete the two forms.

## **Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres**

### **Research Discussion Session 3**

#### **1. Discussion: What is teaching?**

1. Write a definition of teaching.
2. Present your ideas to the group for discussion.

#### **2. Discussion: Teachers' Activities**

1. Using the forms you completed during the last week, write each of your activities on post-it notes.
2. Present your activities to the group and put the post-it notes on the board.
3. After all of the group have presented their activities, discuss whether any activities are missing.
4. Rank each of the activities according to:
  - a. How important is each activity to being a successful teacher?
  - b. How much time do you spend doing each activity?
5. Write your rankings on the sheet.
6. Discuss your rankings and try to reach a consensus with the group.

#### **3. Expectations, Hopes and Fears**

Response by Paul on some of the points raised by participants last week.

#### **4. Reflections to Prepare for the Next Research Discussion Session**

1. Think about these questions:
  - a. What is learning?
  - b. How do we learn?  
Think of examples from education and other parts of people's lives.
2. Complete the forms about two of your lessons this week.

## Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres

### Research Discussion Session 4

#### 1. Discussion: What is learning?

1. Write a definition of learning.
2. Present your ideas to the group for discussion.
3. Discuss 'how do we learn?' and write examples from education and other parts of people's lives on flipchart paper.
4. Present your ideas to the group.

#### Additional Question:

Are there any differences between learning in schools and in other parts of people's lives?

#### 2. Discussion: A Person Learns When...

1. Write real examples next to each way of learning.
2. Rank each way of learning according to how well a person learns by doing it.
3. Discuss your rankings and try to reach a consensus with the group.

#### 3. Reflections to Prepare for the Next Research Discussion Session

Think about these questions:

- 1a. Describe a typical male and a typical female student in your school.
- 1b. Are there any differences between students in different classes? What are they?
- 1c. Are there other differences between students? What are they and why?
2. What is distinct about your school, in comparison with other schools, which makes it suitable for the education of the students that study there?  
Think about:
  - a. school system
  - b. teaching
  - c. curriculum
  - d. other issues...

## Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres

### Research Discussion Session 4

#### 2. Discussion: A Person Learns When...

#### 2. مناقشة: الشخص يتعلم عندما...

	الشخص يتعلم عندما هو/هي... A person learns when he/she...	أمثلة حقيقية Real Examples	الترتيب Ranking
1	... يطرح الأسئلة ... asks questions		
2	... يكتب نسخة النص على الأوراق ... copies text onto paper		
3	... يحل المشاكل بنفسه ... solves problems by him/herself		
4	... يجاب على الأسئلة بنفسه ... answers questions by him/herself		
5	... يجد المساعدة ليقوم بشئ لا يمكن أن يعمل به بنفسه ... gets help to do things he/she would be unable to do by him/herself		
6	... يطرح رايه ... gives his/her own opinion		
7	... يفهم أكثر الأشياء التي يعملها ... develops greater understanding of things he/she does		
8	... يفهم أكثر الأشياء التي يعرفها ... develops greater understanding of things he/she knows		
9	... يحفظ حقائق المعلومات ... memorises facts		
10	... يمارس الشئ حتي يجوده ... practises until perfect		
11	... يكرّر حقائق المعلومات ... repeats facts		
12	... يحاول وضع أفكار جديدة ... tries out new ideas		
13	... يستمع إلى جواب الآخرين على الأسئلة ... listens to others answer questions		
14	... يناقش مع الآخرين ... discusses with others		
15			
16			
17			
18			

## **Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres**

### **Research Discussion Session 8**

#### **1. Discussion: Problems that You Face in Education and Teaching**

1. Discuss problems that you face in education and teaching with colleagues.
2. Write the main ideas on a flipchart paper.
3. Present your ideas to the group.

#### **2. Discussion: An Example of a Problem in Teaching and How it was Resolved**

1. Think of an example of a problem you faced in teaching and how you resolved it.
2. Answer the questions to show the stages of the problem-solving process.
  - a. What did you see as a problem?
  - b. What did you notice (e.g. about the pupils, the textbook etc)?
  - c. What did you decide to do?
  - d. What actually happened?
  - e. What did you notice as a result?
  - f. What conclusion can you draw?
3. Present your answers to the group.

## Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres

### Research Discussion Session 9

#### Action Research

Action research focuses on teachers and their professional practice.	What is the focus?
<p>Action research in education is done by teachers who do research about their own practice.</p> <p>Teachers can do action research individually or with colleagues, or with the support of an external researcher.</p>	Who is the researcher?
<p>In action research, the research participants are the researchers. Their roles are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Select a focus</li> <li>2. Clarify theories</li> <li>3. Identify research questions</li> <li>4. Collect data</li> <li>5. Analyse and interpret data</li> <li>6. Act according to the new understanding gained through the research process.</li> </ol>	What is the role of research participants?
<p>Action research aims to bring about positive educational change through the increased understanding and informed actions of the teachers who carry out the research.</p> <p>Action research can also be reported and published to share knowledge with education specialists and academics.</p>	What is the aim of the research?
<p>In action research, teachers reflect on their professional practice. Research data can be collected in a number of ways, including both qualitative and quantitative methods.</p> <p>Data collection methods will be discussed when this stage begins, in January 2009.</p>	How is the data collected?





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## Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres Research Discussion Session 14

### 1. Discussion: The Curriculum

1. Write your answers to the following questions:
  - a. In your opinion, what is the most effective curriculum/textbook that you use? Why?
  - b. In your opinion, what is the least effective curriculum/textbook that you use? Why?
2. Present your ideas to the group.

### 2. Discussion: Textbooks

Discuss a textbook you use with a colleague and complete the form:

Support your answers with examples from the textbook.

1. What aspects of the book are useful or interesting to the students or the teacher?  
Think about:
  - a. Activities and exercises
  - b. Knowledge and information
2. What aspects of the book are a little or not useful or interesting to the students or the teacher?  
Think about:
  - a. Activities and exercises
  - b. Knowledge
3. How is the book suitable for the education of the students in your school?
4. How could the book be changed to be more suitable for the students in your school?

### 3. Discussion: Additional Activities and Information

1. Write your answers to the following questions:
  - a. Do you add additional activities in your teaching?
  - b. Support your answers with examples. From where do you take your ideas for these activities?
  - c. Do you add additional information in your teaching?
  - d. Support your answers with examples. From where do you take your ideas for this information?
2. Present your answers to the group.

## Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Centres

### Questionnaire on your Opinion of the Research Project

<b>Think about the discussion sessions</b>	<b>فكر في جلسات النقاش</b>
1. What was interesting or useful?	1. ما الذي كان ممتعاً أو مفيداً؟
2. What was not so interesting or useful?	2. ما الذي كان غير ممتعاً أو مفيداً؟
3. What are the subjects that you would like to discuss in future discussion sessions?	3. ما هي المواضيع التي تريد أن تناقشها في جلسات النقاش التالية؟
<b>Think about the researcher's visits to your school</b>	<b>فكر في زيارات الباحث للمدرسة</b>
4. What was interesting or useful?	4. ما الذي كان ممتعاً أو مفيداً؟
5. What was not so interesting or useful?	5. ما الذي كان غير ممتعاً أو مفيداً؟
<b>Think about the whole research project</b>	<b>فكر في مشروع البحث الشامل بشكل عام</b>
6. What have you learnt through your participation in this research?	6. ماذا تعلمت من خلال مشاركتك في هذا البحث؟
7. How could the research project be more useful to you?	7. كيف يمكن أن يكون مشروع البحث أكثر فائدة لك؟
8. Any comments or suggestions	8. أي تعليقات أو اقتراحات؟

### 3. Action research activities

Phase 2	Workshop Objectives	Workshop Activities
RW1 17 January	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction to teacher's reflection</li> <li>2. Explain plans for action research phase</li> <li>3. Brainstorm possible areas of research – finding a starting point</li> <li>4. My role as researcher and ground rules</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: Bingo with Pictures</li> <li>2. How do you Reflect on your Teaching?</li> <li>3. Presentation on Action Research</li> <li>4. Finding Starting Points</li> <li>5. Paul's Role and Ground Rules</li> </ol>
RW2 24 January	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify five potential starting points for action research projects</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: I Went to the Market</li> <li>2. Feedback on Reflective Activities</li> <li>3. Incomplete Sentences – Identifying the Key Themes</li> </ol>
RW3 31 January	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify five potential starting points for action research projects</li> <li>2. Write starting points as research questions</li> <li>3. Describing the starting points</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: Ring a Word</li> <li>2. Reflective Notes – Identifying the Key Themes</li> <li>3. Research Questions</li> <li>4. Describing the Starting Points</li> </ol>
RW4 7 February	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selecting a research area</li> <li>2. Describe first impressions or assumptions relating to the research question</li> <li>3. Identifying additional information which is required to further understand the situation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: Downwords</li> <li>2. Suitability of Topics as Action Research Projects</li> <li>3. Selecting a Research Topic</li> <li>4. What More do you Need to Know about the Situation?</li> </ol>
RW5 14 February	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop more reflective writing of notes</li> <li>2. Define terms used in research projects</li> <li>3. Write sub-questions for each topic</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: Chainwords</li> <li>2. Assessment of Reflective Notes</li> <li>3. Definitions of Terms</li> <li>4. Sub-research Questions (use Mind Maps to help?)</li> <li>5. [Share Mind Maps (or just use in school visits)]</li> </ol>
RW6 21 February	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify elements of your research topic</li> <li>2. Introduction to the reconnaissance stage</li> <li>3. Planning the reconnaissance stage</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: 20 Questions</li> <li>2. Share Research Sub-questions</li> <li>3. Elements of Your Research Topic</li> <li>4. Introduction to the Reconnaissance Stage</li> <li>5. Planning the Reconnaissance Stage (Sub-topics and how find out)</li> </ol>
RW7 28 February	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify your research sample</li> <li>2. Consider various different data collection methods</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: Word Association</li> <li>2. Brainstorm How Find Out Information</li> <li>3. Planning the Reconnaissance Phase: Sample</li> <li>4. Brainstorm Data Collection Methods</li> <li>5. Planning the Reconnaissance Phase: Methods of Data Collection</li> </ol>
RW8 7 March	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarify some points relating to the research topics</li> <li>2. Identify in-depth research points relating to your students</li> <li>3. Discuss how to write detailed reflective notes</li> <li>4. Select data collection methods you will</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm-up: Pictionary</li> <li>2. Questions about Phase 1 Data – Your Students</li> <li>3. Questions about Reflective Activities – Critical Incidents</li> <li>4. Select Data Collection Methods</li> <li>5. Plans for Your Research During this</li> </ol>

	<p>use in your research</p> <p>5. Plan your data collection activities for this week</p>	Week
RW9 14 March	1. Share data you collected in the last week	<p>1. Warm-up: Categories</p> <p>2. Open Discussion of Data Collected</p>
RW10 21 March	1. Share the data you collected in the last week (Yahya, Adil and Hadiya)	<p>1. Warm-up: Rhythm Lists</p> <p>2. Asking Questions about your Data (Open discussion of data)</p>
RW11 28 March	<p>1. Share data you collected in the last week</p> <p>2. Question the data to indicate further data collection requirements</p> <p>3. Discuss your problems or questions relating to data collection methods</p> <p>4. Plan your data collection activities for this week</p>	<p>1. Warm-up: Rhythm Lists</p> <p>2. Discussion of Your and Your Colleagues' Data</p> <p>3. Your Problems or Questions about Data Collection Methods</p> <p>4. Plans for Your Research This Week</p>
RW12 4 April	<p>1. Share data you collected in the last week</p> <p>2. Discuss various data collection methods</p> <p>3. Plan your data collection activities for the next two months</p>	<p>1. Warm-up: The Sun Shines on...</p> <p>2. Discussion of Your and Your Colleagues' Data</p> <p>3. Data Collection Methods you have Used</p> <p>4. Ideas for Other Data Collection Methods</p> <p>5. Plans for your Research during the Next Two Months</p>
RW13 11 April	<p>1. Share data you collected in the last week</p> <p>2. Discuss 'reflexivity' in your research</p>	<p>1. Warm-up: Join the Dots Challenge</p> <p>2. Discussion of Your and Your Colleagues' Data</p> <p>3. Your Identity and Your Interviews</p> <p>4. The Identity of Researchers – Insider/Outsider</p>
RW14 18 April	1. Share data	1. Share data
RW15 25 April	<p>1. Textbooks and research topics</p> <p>2. Textbooks and representation of Sudanese cultures and men and women</p> <p>3. Identify ways of gathering data – Johari Window</p>	<p>1. Textbooks discussion – questions relating to each topic</p> <p>2. Textbooks and culture/gender questions</p> <p>3. Johari window</p>
RW16 2 May	<p>1. Share data</p> <p>2. Review data on current situation</p> <p>3. Plan data collection for the developmental phase</p> <p>4. Ideas for seminar presentations</p>	<p>1. Share data and discussion questions</p> <p>2. Johari window and sub-topics</p> <p>3. Ways to collect data for developmental phase</p> <p>4. Discuss seminar plans</p>
RW17	1. Share data collected in the week	1. Discussion of data – what issues

16 May	2. Discuss methods of teaching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> <li>• Writing skills</li> <li>• Reading skills</li> <li>• Making students concentrate</li> </ul>	arise? 2. Discussion of teaching methods (see aims)
RW 18 23 May	1. Share ideas about trials of a new idea in teaching 2. Ways of developing students' 'bravery' and teaching dictation 3. Differences between male and female students	1. Share ideas for developing the new ideas in teaching 2. Discuss methods to use to develop 'bravery' and teaching dictation 3. Discuss questions about differences between male and female students
RW 19 30 May	1. Discuss data about trial of a new idea 2. Discuss data about co-education from Salam school	1. Present data 2. Discuss students' data and questions
RW 20 6 June	1. Share data about the trial of a new idea 2. How to gather data about the trial 3. Plan presentations and certificate ceremony	1. Discuss data about trial 2. Discuss questions about gathering data 3. Discuss plans for presentations and the ceremony
RW 21 13 June	1. Share data about the results of the trial	1. Discussion of trials of new ideas 2. Mind map preparation
RW 22 20 June	1. Share mind maps (summaries of research) 2. Discuss continuation of action research 3. Feedback on the research project	1. Discuss mind maps 2. Discuss continuation questions 3. Views on the research project



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## **Action Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Research Workshop 1**

### **Objectives of the Research Workshop**

1. Introduction to teacher's reflection
2. Explanation of plans for action research phase
3. Brainstorm possible areas of research – finding a starting point
4. The role of the researcher and ground rules

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Activity 1: How do you Reflect on your Teaching?**

1. Think about the question 'how do you reflect on your teaching'?
2. Discuss your answers to the following questions with a colleague:
  - a. Do you ever reflect on your teaching? When?
  - b. Do you do this alone or with other people? Who?
  - c. What do you do and how long does this process last?
  - d. Do you have a systematic way of reviewing your lessons? Describe it.

(Questions based on Wallace, 1998)

#### **Activity 2: Presentation on Action Research**

Main points of the presentation:

1. Action research cycle
2. Stages of the research process January to June 2009
3. Starting points of the research projects

#### **Activity 3: Strengths and Weaknesses in Teaching**

1. Discuss with a colleague 'what are your strengths in teaching?'
2. Write your answer on the sheet.
3. Present your answer to the group.
4. Write your answer to the question 'what are your weaknesses in teaching?' on the sheet.

#### **Activity 4: Finding Starting Points**

1. Choose 5 topics from the list of elements of teaching.
2. Discuss with a colleague each of the topics that you selected.
3. Think about how each of the topics could be a starting point for your research.
4. During the activity, your partner should make notes about your points.

5. Exchange roles with your partner.
6. Present your ideas to the group.

### **Activity 5: Role of the Researcher and Ground Rules**

Group discussion on some of the points raised by the teachers participating in the research in 'Questionnaire on Your Opinion of the Research Project' from Discussion Session 14 (December 2008)

### **Teacher Reflection during Week**

#### **Reflection Activity 1: Incomplete Sentences**

Overall question: 'What is problematic about your practice?'

(You can write several answers for some or all of the sentences, if you wish).

1. I'd like to improve or develop...
2. I'm frustrated by...
3. I'm confused by...
4. My pupils are unhappy about...
5. My pupils' parents are unhappy about...
6. My colleagues are unhappy about...
7. I have an idea I'd like to try out in my class, which is...
8. How can the experience of .... (e.g. a colleague or from a book about teaching techniques) be applied to...?

(From Altichter, Posch and Somekh, 1993)

#### **Reflection Activity 2: Reflective Notes on Interesting, Difficult and Unclear Situations**

##### **Every day after teaching this week:**

Write notes on interesting, difficult and unclear events and situations that you noticed during lessons or in school.

Write the notes immediately after teaching each day so that you remember the events and situations clearly.

(If you need help with this activity – think about the incomplete sentences from Reflection Activity 1).



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## **Action Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Research Workshop 2**

### **Objectives of the Research Workshop**

Identify five potential starting points for action research projects

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Activity 1: Feedback on Reflective Activities**

Discuss the following questions with a colleague and write your answers on the form.

- a. When did you write your answers to the reflective activities?
- b. Where did you write your answers?
- c. How long did you spend writing your answers?
- d. In your opinion, were these activities useful? Why?
- e. Did you face any problems in completing these activities?

#### **Activity 2: Incomplete Sentences – Identifying the Key Themes**

1. Discuss two or three of your answers with a partner.

Think about the following questions:

- a. Why is this issue important to you or your students?
- b. What happens in this situation?
- c. What further information do you require for greater understanding of the situation?

2. Identify the key themes raised in the answers to the activity and the discussion.
3. Present the key themes to the group.

#### **Activity 3: Reflective Notes – Identifying the Key Themes**

1. In small groups, present your reflective notes to your colleagues.
2. Identify the key themes of each teacher's notes.

#### **Activity 4: Your Potential Starting Points**

Write your potential starting points, based on the key themes from the reflective activities.



**Teacher Reflection during Week****Reflection Activity 1: Describing the Starting Points**

Answer the following questions for each of your starting points:

1. What happens in this situation?
2. What do you do? What do your students do? (All or some of your students?)  
What do others do?
3. What additional information do you require for greater understanding of the situation?

**Reflection Activity 2: Reflective Notes on the Five Starting Points or Interesting, Difficult and Unclear Situations**

Every day after teaching this week:

1. Make notes on your five starting points based on your observations in school each day.

**Or**

2. Write notes on interesting, difficult and unclear events and situations that you noticed during lessons or in school.

Write the notes immediately after teaching each day so that you remember the events and situations clearly.

## **Action Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Research Workshop 4**

### **Objectives**

1. Selecting a research area
2. Describe first impressions or assumptions relating to the research question
3. Identifying additional information which is required to further understand the situation

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Activity 1: Suitability of Topics as Action Research Projects**

Share your notes from last week's reflective activities with a colleague.

Think about these questions for each topic:

1. Is the topic about your work – your teaching, your students or your school?
2. Is the topic about something under your control?
3. Is the topic about a problem you would like to solve or a situation you would like to improve?
4. Is the topic wide or deep enough for a research project?
5. Could you collect data on the subject (e.g. through observations, interviews, questionnaires, discussions etc)?

#### **Activity 2: Selecting a Research Topic**

Complete the chart to identify which research area is the more important and interesting to you.

Research Area:	Reasons for Choice:	Priority (Ranking):	
		Importance:	Interest:

#### **Activity 3: Share Research Questions**

Present your research question to the group.

#### **Activity 4: What More do you Need to Know about this Situation?**

1. Discuss with colleagues who have selected similar research topics.
2. Make a list of the additional information you need to know about the situation.

### **Activity 5: Clarifying First Impressions – Mind Map**

#### **Stage 1:**

Make a mind map showing the issues relating to the topic of your research.

#### **Stage 2:**

Consider the following questions to help you to evaluate your first impressions and think more deeply about the topic of your research:

1. Do the first impressions neglect any existing information?
2. Do the first impressions contain any vague, ambiguous concepts?
3. Do the first impressions only include superficial elements of the situation?
4. Have you accepted the first impressions without considering other interpretations?

(Questions from Altrichter, Posche and Somekh, 1993)

### **Teacher Reflection during Week**

#### **Reflection Activity 1: Clarifying First Impressions – Mind Map**

##### **Stage 1:**

Make a mind map showing the issues relating to the topic of your research.

##### **Stage 2:**

Consider the following questions to help you to evaluate your first impressions and think more deeply about the topic of your research:

1. Do the first impressions neglect any existing information?
2. Do the first impressions contain any vague, ambiguous concepts?
3. Do the first impressions only include superficial elements of the situation?
4. Have you accepted the first impressions without considering other interpretations?

(Questions from Altrichter, Posche and Somekh, 1993)

#### **Reflection Activity 2: Daily Reflective Notes on Situations and Events Relating to the Research**

Every day after teaching this week:

Make notes on situations and events that you observe in school which are related to the topic of your research.

Write the notes immediately after teaching each day so that you remember the events and situations clearly.



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## **Action Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Research Workshop 6**

### **Objectives**

1. Identify elements of your research topic
2. Introduction to the reconnaissance stage
3. Planning the reconnaissance stage

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Activity 1: Elements of Your Research Topic**

In groups, answer the questions on the form to outline the elements of each of the research topics.

#### **Activity 2: Introduction to the Reconnaissance Stage**

Paul introduces the reconnaissance stage.

#### **Activity 3: Planning the Reconnaissance Stage**

1. Using your mind map and the research sub-questions, identify the key topics of your research project.
2. On the form, write the title of each topic in a box.
3. In each box, write the key question (or key questions)
4. In each box, make notes on how you could find out this information

### **Teacher Reflection during Week**

#### **Reflection Activity 1: Critical Incidents relating to Research Sub-topics**

On the form, make notes on situations and events that you observe in school which are related to the topic of your research.

You should write a description of ONE situation or event for each sub-topic.

**Think about your research sub-questions to help you to think about all aspects of the subject.**

## **Action Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Research Workshop 8**

### **Objectives**

1. Clarify some points relating to the research topics
2. Identify in-depth research points relating to your students
3. Discuss how to write detailed reflective notes
4. Select data collection methods you will use in your research
5. Plan your data collection activities for this week

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Activity 1: Help Your Colleagues – Clarification of Elements of Research**

Discuss with colleagues the following questions:

##### **‘Paying Attention’**

1. What is the difference between ‘paying attention’ and ‘understanding’?
2. How can you measure the level of ‘paying attention’?

##### **‘Reading’**

1. How can you assess a students’ ability to read silently? (As different factors may affect how a student reads aloud).

#### **Activity 2: Questions about Phase 1 Data – Your Students**

1. Read the data about students in your school from discussions in Phase 1 of the research project.
2. Write questions you can ask to find out more details and in-depth information.

#### **Activity 3: Questions about Reflective Activities – Critical Incidents**

1. Read the descriptions of critical incidents written by your colleagues.
2. Write questions you could ask to find out more details and in-depth information.

#### **Activity 4: Select Data Collection Methods**

1. Select the data collection methods you will use for each of your research sub-topics.
2. Present your ideas to the group.

**Activity 5: Plans for Your Research during this Week**

Answer the following questions about your plans for this week:

1. What will you do for your research this week?
2. What do you want Paul to do during his visit this week?
3. Are there any additional materials you require for the reconnaissance stage of the research?

**Teacher Reflection during Week****Reflection Activity: Starting the Reconnaissance Stage**

Start collecting data for your research project.

**Bring the data you collect to the next Research Workshop for discussion with your colleagues.**

## **Action Research with Teachers from Omdurman Youth Education Research Workshop 11**

### **Objectives**

1. Share data you collected in the last week
2. Question the data to indicate further data collection requirements
3. Discuss your problems or questions relating to data collection methods
4. Plan your data collection activities for this week

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Activity 1: Discussion of Your and Your Colleagues' Data**

Discuss the data that you and your colleagues collected last week.

When presenting your data, think about the following questions:

1. What data confirmed what you already thought? How?
2. What data contradicted what you previously thought? How?

#### **Activity 2: Your Problems or Questions about Data Collection Methods**

1. In groups, discuss any problems you faced or questions you have relating to data collection methods.
2. Present your ideas to the group for discussion.

#### **Activity 3: Plans for Your Research during this Week**

Answer the following questions about your plans for your research:

1. What will you do for your research this week?
2. What do you want Paul to do during his visits in the coming weeks?



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## **Action Research with Teachers from Omdurman Adult Education Research Workshop 21**

### **Objectives**

1. Share data about the effects of your trial
2. Think about what you have learnt through your research project (answers to your research questions)
3. Plan how you can continue using research and discussion activities after the end of the project

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Activity 1: Discussion of Your and Your Colleagues' Data**

Discuss your trial of a new teaching method:

1. What have you done?
2. What did you notice about the trial?
3. What has the effect of the trial been on the students? How do you know?
4. What are the students' views of the trial? How do you know?
5. How can you continue the trial?
6. How will you use what you have learnt through the trial in the future?

#### **Activity 2: Mind Map – Answers to your Research Questions**

1. Review all your data and complete the mind maps about:
  - a. The research question on the current situation
  - b. The developmental research question
2. Write all the points relating to the answers to your question on the mind map
3. Support your answers with data – include in each point a reference to some of your data (e.g. an interview with a certain student, observation notes from a certain lesson...etc...)

#### **Activity 3: Continuation of Research and Discussion Activities after the Project**

Discuss how you could continue research and discussion activities after the project.

Think about:

1. Activities you will do alone
2. Activities you will do with your colleagues from the research project
3. Activities you will do with your colleagues in your school
4. Activities with others (who?)
5. How can Paul help to prepare for continuing the activities before travelling to the UK?