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The Empty Centre : Power/Knowledge, Relationships and the Myth of 'Student Centered Teaching' in Teacher Education.

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POWER/KNOWLEDGE, RELATIONSHIPS AND THE MYTH OF 'STUDENT CENTRED TEACHING' IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The notion of 'student centred learning' is a popular and influential one in education at all levels. Questions of exactly how this may be defined, and what it would look like in practice are, however, much more difficult to address. During second semester 1998, I was involved in teaching a Masters-level unit on teacher action research to a group of middle school teachers. I placed a high value on the knowledge, values and experience of these students, and attempted to allow them considerable freedom to construct their own learning activities and assessment procedures. Some students accepted the offered challenges, and after some initial disorientation were able to construct powerful and valuable educative programs for themselves. Others, however, felt threatened by the perceived lack of structure and direction in the course, and felt that their time was being wasted. This paper explores my own experiences and ethical/theoretical commitments through discussion of contemporary reflective texts and narratives. It also addresses some of the complex meanings that may be ascribed to the phrase 'student centred teaching', and suggests that a teacher's withdrawal from an intensive, controlling classroom role must be negotiated with students in ways that avoid the creation of an 'empty centre'.

Introduction

During second semester 1998, I was teaching a Masters degree unit on educational action research for a small group of practising middle school teachers in a Perth school, on behalf of one of Perth's universities. One class session seemed to have gone particularly well – the teachers had seemed energised and interested, and had begun to be willing to share their own knowledge, experience and values with the group in discussion. I went home happy and excited, and wrote some very positive reflections on the session in my reflective journal.

The journal was part of my on-going focus on improving my own teacher education practice, and was completed after each class session (i.e., weekly) throughout the semester. The journal entries were largely impressionistic (Van Maanen, 1988) in nature – that is, they recorded my reactions and impressions to the experience of the unit, and were not guided by a particular research question. Perhaps it is more accurate, though, to say that the journal entries were guided by the question 'How can I improve my practice?' (Whitehead, 1998, 1989)

The entries in the journal formed the basis of a reflective discussion each fortnight with Peter Taylor, a friend and colleague who was also the supervisor of the doctoral studies I was just beginning. In the previous semester, I had attended a teacher education class Peter was teaching and acted as a 'critical friend', supporting his reflection on his teaching through reflective journal entries and discussions, and this working relationship continued during and after the events discussed in this paper. The issue of student centred learning was one with which Peter had explicitly struggled in his own teaching, and to which I was to some extent already sensitised by my prior teaching experiences both as a teacher educator and as a high school teacher.

The following week I arrived early for the class, and the school principal, a strong supporter of the course, invited me to her office for a chat:

Louise[i] (the school principal, who attended some class sessions) said that after last week's session (6 September), about which I had felt so positive, some members of the group had come to her and said they were so frustrated with the course they wanted to leave! Just goes to show..! She said that their perception was that I felt my role was to facilitate discussion among the teachers (referred to by Louise sometimes as 'shooting the breeze', and other times as 'critical discourse'!), and that they were already able to engage in that without my presence, so what was the purpose of coming along to the course? Sarcastically: so this is what I get for valuing their voices! Realistically: OK, I had already been struggling with that issue - to get feedback indicating that I've missed the appropriate balance is a positive thing, because it allows me to strive for a better balance. It's something I probably need to raise explicitly with the group, but also perhaps show a bit more traditional leadership. I was also a little hurt and frustrated that they hadn't felt able to raise these concerns with me (or had they, and I hadn't heard?) My own reaction was that I clearly need to give them more critical voice, but I thought I had: how can it be given if it's not taken? (personal journal, 13 September 1998)

This excerpt from my personal journal captures some of the events and attitudes related to the dilemma I wish to explore in this paper, along with some of my own reactions and commitments. Perhaps it also captures to some extent the shock and injury I felt at the time: I had given my best, and felt that I was succeeding as an educator, only to be told that what counted as success for me was seen as failure – or irrelevance – by my students. The dilemma arose as a result of my own efforts to improve my teaching practice, through more fully embodying certain of my educational and ethical commitments – values related to democratic control and student empowerment. Had I chosen to adopt a more traditional teaching role and approach, it is reasonable to assume that no such dissatisfaction on the part of my students would have arisen. Louise's message forced me to confront these commitments, and to re-evaluate the approach to teaching that I had chosen for this class.

The commitments I was attempting to embody more fully in my educative practices are defined in terms, not of efficiency - achieving pre-specified, unexamined goals more fully and more cheaply - but of a more fully communicative educational relationship (Habermas, 1978; Pusey, 1987), in which students are empowered to take control of their own learning.

The course was focused on teacher action research in classroom contexts. It was conducted within the school in which all the participants taught, rather than on a university campus. I believe that this context was beneficial to students' learning in the course, in that the teachers who were participating knew one another well (they had attended a course in this same grouping during the previous semester), were engaged in the practices of education together, and were able to carry out their own action research projects collaboratively within their school contexts. It also had the practical advantage of allowing tired, busy teachers to avoid the half hour trip each way to the university for evening classes (by putting that responsibility on the lecturer).

The following excerpt from my reflections at the end of the course describes the approach I adopted, and some of the results of this teaching approach:

I had imagined control in the class gradually moving from me to the group, something I think is essential. To this end, the first few sessions were highly structured, including papers to read, reflection questions and a lot of discussion featuring me. As I gradually withdrew from the centre, however, the

members of the group did not corporately rush in to fill the vacuum as I had hoped: instead, they simply left a vacuum, and the course became somewhat rudderless. Fortunately, between my own reflections and some timely intervention from Louise, I was able to reclaim the role of educator, rather than be merely a facilitator of talk sessions. (personal reflections, 14 December 1998)

The central dilemmas posed by this experience are not so much concerned with how to incorporate student centred teaching approaches creatively, but revolves around what is meant by each of three phrases I used - somewhat unreflectively - in the above paragraph from my reflective journal. The metaphors and assumptions which underlie the terms 'highly structured', 'withdrew from the centre' and 'reclaim the role of educator' require further exploration if the 'critical incident' described in the first journal entry above and the events in the rest of the course are to be an occasion for growth and new understandings, rather than simply a retreat to more 'comfortable' teaching practices.

Structure

In the present context - a postgraduate course for teachers - what is meant by the 'structure' of the course? Some students clearly defined this in terms of tasks - "what must I do to succeed in this course?" Others - those who perhaps understood my intentions for the course or, even better, who had themselves arrived at a different definition - seemed to see the structure of the course as something open and negotiable, something which would be most powerful if they chose to construct it for themselves:

Jim, Emma and Cassandra all mentioned that more structure in the activities required of them...or some reflection questions to answer, or SOME task, would have made their semester easier, and got them to be more involved in their work: they felt it was easy to let the action research project slide,

given all the other school and family pressures, if there was no consistent work requirement from me. Derek and May disagreed, however: Derek said it had given him opportunities to be more self-motivated, and May said that, although she had felt a little lost at first, once she got into the swing of things she enjoyed the flexible, self-directed mode of learning. These latter two were, of course, the type of response for which I was aiming: it's perplexing and a little depressing that only a minority reached this level. How could I have better supported those who asked for 'structure', while supporting the self-direction of others? More and more I'm forced toward individual differences as a crucial issue: there's no single best approach. (personal reflections, 14 December 1998)

The metaphor of 'structure' in education is only one of a number that serve to both organise and constrain our practices. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) maintain that unexamined metaphors such as these constitute much of our thinking about complex issues, and that we never escape from the web of metaphor: at best we enrich our perspective by discovering competing metaphorical descriptions.

How does the metaphor of a 'structure', or building, inform what happens in teacher education classrooms? How is a teacher education course 'structured'? As noted above, many students seem to believe that the structure of the course resides in the course notes and sheets and assignments: the structure is what you *do*. This impression is reinforced by the assessment regimes we use: clearly if marks are given for the written assignments, then that is what the instructor values most highly (since marks are the currency of this particular economy), so they must be what the student should also value most highly.

For other students, the structure is more tightly tied to what they *know* and what they *learn*: in other words, the course is structured by the new understandings

developed over its duration, and even beyond, as new insights are developed, reflected upon and implemented in practice. Constructivist perspectives on knowledge resonate with this metaphor (indeed, cognitive/social 'structure' is the key metaphor of constructivism): under that perspective, the structures that really count in an educational experience reside not on paper, but in the minds of the students, and all other structural elements of the course are intended to serve the construction of new mental schemas and ways of understanding. It is this second metaphorical meaning of 'structure' that I had hoped to move toward in my teaching in this unit, and that Derek and May had come to own for themselves, but it is only now as I sit down to write this paper that I really make this distinction explicit for myself, so of course I was unable at the time to make it explicit for my students.

Like many other issues in education, it is easy to give verbal assent to the necessity for the adoption of different approaches for different learners in order to support each student's individual learning style, but this is much more difficult to implement in practice. I had uniquely easy conditions in this group, with a group of only six students, whom I already knew quite well. If using a variety of approaches was difficult in this context, how would it be with a student group of 30 or more strangers?

But this question arises out of a 'technical' interest in the sheer manageability of a task – an examination of means toward an end that remains unexamined. A more powerful question for reflection is whether it would have been better, had I been able to, to make explicit 'my' metaphor of 'structure as what you know' rather than 'structure as what you do', and try to move all of the students toward valuing that? Or is it both more ethically defensible and more educationally practical to recognise our students' different epistemological commitments and metaphorical descriptions, and attempt to organise our courses so that there remains a level of plurality? In other words, the

diversity for which we must teach goes beyond ability, motivation and background, to different definitions of what it is to know and learn. Which of these can we, should we, 'restructure', and which should we accommodate in our teaching?

The Spatial Metaphor of 'The Centre'

The metaphor of 'the centre' is an intriguing one, and is 'central' to exploring 'student centred' educational approaches. (When 'scare quotes' are used to draw attention to the spatial metaphors in our thinking, it becomes clear just how pervasive they really are!) It's important, however, to discuss what we mean when we talk about 'teacher-centred' and 'student centred' classrooms.

Is the centre:

the position of *authoritarian power* and control?
the focus of *knowledge* and *authoritative* speech, from which wisdom is diffused to the periphery?
the point of greatest activity and energy, the focus of *relationships*, around which others revolve?

I believe that when most educators speak of 'student centred' learning they imagine 'the centre' as some amalgam of these qualities (and more). The oft-prescribed move away from 'teacher centred' and toward 'student centred' classrooms is, I suspect, largely related to issues of power and control, and the language used is that of 'empowerment', and of learners 'taking control of their own learning'.

I think that during the events described, I imagined the centre in more authoritative terms, related to knowledge: when I spoke of my own movement out of the centre and the students' movement inward, what I meant was that they would begin to accept the authority of their own knowledge, experience and values. In this way, my central role as the knowledgeable figure of authority would be diffused among the

group, so that I would become simply one member of a collaborative group, rather than its focus. I now believe that this approach was flawed, for two reasons.

First, the 'technical interest' (Habermas, 1971) implicit in my role as a university teacher educator, with responsibility for assigning a grade to the work of each student, meant that any pose of being 'just one of the guys' was to some extent fraudulent. I had, and needed to acknowledge in order to be honest and fair, forms of institutional power which were inescapable. Although assessment was negotiable and as open as possible, I retained the final responsibility for assigning a grade. This meant that egalitarian poses were frustrating and, ultimately, *dis*empowering for the students: if I had *owned* my institutional power it could perhaps have been negotiated, but because I disowned it in rhetoric while retaining it in practice, it was off the agenda for negotiation, and therefore unassailable.

Second, I am no longer sure that the metaphor of 'the centre' is even a useful way to think about the things that happen in classrooms. It introduces a degree of ambiguity about which of the many models of what constitutes 'the centre' (authoritarian control, authoritative knowledge, educative relationship) we mean. Classrooms are very complex places: overly simplistic spatial metaphors can serve to mask inequities which other, richer metaphors (since we can never escape from metaphor), might enable us to address. If we are to talk about 'centres', it is important to be careful to say which kind we mean.

Given this skepticism toward the whole metaphor of 'the centre' – and its child concepts 'teacher centred' and 'student centred' classrooms – what other forms of analysis can usefully be brought to my experiences with this class, and by extension to the experience of other educators attempting to transform their practices?

Since the 'centre' metaphor can be seen as relating respectively to power, knowledge and relationships, perhaps looking in more detail at the teaching situation and events through each of these 'lenses' will yield a richer understanding. These perspectives are not intended to be brought together into a unitary synthesis – they may not even be fully commensurable with one another – but to enrich our understandings by being held in a dialectical tension with one another. I have written elsewhere (Geelan, in press):

One example of the power of a dialectical approach to understanding is to think about the contributions to education of the disciplines of psychology and sociology. It is of little value to decide that psychology's emphasis on the cognition of an individual student is *wrong*, and that sociology's focus on the social relations within the classroom is *right*, or vice versa. Neither is it particularly valuable to try to subsume both perspectives into a single one - richness and complexity that may be crucial to a productive framing of the problem would be lost. Instead, by first looking at a particular educational problem through the 'lens' (to use an almost cliched metaphor) provided by psychology - the effects and influences and perspectives of the individual - and then looking at the same problem (although it cannot be exactly the same problem) through the lens of sociology, a richer blend of descriptions is available than through either discipline alone. To think dialectically in a research situation, then, is to metaphorically put on the 'spectacles' provided by one theoretical perspective, learn what we can of the situations, contexts and events in which we are interested, then remove those spectacles and replace them with a different pair (in some ways, the more different the better), and see how the view changes - what is visible now that was hidden before, and vice versa?

The following three portrayals, then – through the 'spectacles' of power, knowledge and role theory – should be held in a dialectical tension to help provide a

richer description of our teaching theories and practices in order to transform them.

Power

Michel Foucault (1980) has analysed the nature of power in a number of contexts, including prisons (1979), asylums (1976) and the social construction of sexuality (1988). One of his central contentions is that power, by analogy with mass-energy in physics, can be neither created nor destroyed, but only transformed and transferred. Further, power is intimately tied to knowledge, to the discourses of education and learning, and to the 'production of truth'.

Speaking of power and knowledge, he writes:

…in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking…of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. (1980, p. 39)

…in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. … We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. … Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit. (1980, p. 93)

As I have noted elsewhere in this discussion, I chose to attempt to empower my students by disempowering myself – or at least making a sham of doing so. In fact, because of my institutional role as a university lecturer, intimately involved in the on-going processes of the 'institutionalisation' and 'professionalisation' of knowledge, these forms of power – control of the discourse, of the 'means of production' of knowledge – remained in force; I simply refused to acknowledge publicly my power, taking it beyond the reach of negotiation. In attempting to empower the students, the irony is that I disempowered them. It would have been both more honest and more *practical* (in both the usual sense of the term and Habermas' special sense), to have 'owned' (and 'owned up to') the existence of these and other power relations, and to have found better, more equitable ways of meeting the goals and needs of the students within the institutional and social constraints we faced.

Knowledge and Human Interests

I have described my own conception of 'the centre' at the time of the teaching events discussed in this paper as being related to knowledge – to the ability to speak authoritatively on the topic at hand, rather than on the power to compel, coerce and control. (Foucault's perspective above provides an alternative construction.) Jurgen Habermas (1971; Pusey, 1987; Mezirow, 1981) describes a scheme for understanding 'knowledge and human interests'. It is a mistake, he suggests, to think of human knowledge as unitary, and to try to subsume all forms of knowledge to one way of knowing (as has been tried in the past with both science and sociology). Habermas describes a scheme of three 'human interests', which he calls the 'technical', 'practical' and 'emancipatory' (sometimes also called 'critical') interests. He maintains that these are to some extent incommensurable – the knowledge claims and justification frameworks appropriate to one will not work effectively in another. Much of the following characterisation of the interests is taken from Jack Mezirow (1981) and from Jennifer Gore and Kenneth Zeichner (1991), who applied them more directly to educational contexts.

The *technical* mode is "based on empirical knowledge, and is governed by technical rules" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 144). Technical rationality is concerned with "the discovery of predictable, generalisable relationships of cause and effect, with cost-benefit ratios, and with...the efficiency and effectiveness of the means used to attain ends which themselves remain unexamined." (Gore & Zeichner, 1991, pp. 122-123)

Habermas' *practical* interest is concerned with human relationships and communication, with the building of consensus and mutual understanding.

This understanding and mode of inquiry has as its aim not technical control and manipulation but rather the clarification of conditions for communication and intersubjectivity. It is not the methods of the empirical analytic sciences which are appropriate to this task but systematic inquiry which seeks the understanding of meaning rather than to establish causality. (Mezirow, 1981, p. 144)

Practical actions, therefore, are those which extend communication and understanding, and allow for the improved construction of shared meanings. Learning to operate 'practically', in Habermas' sense of the word, involves trying to understand what others are saying on their own terms, to give them a voice, and to use persuasion rather than coercion in negotiation and discussion.

...in practical reflection, the task is one of explicating and clarifying the assumptions and predispositions underlying teaching activity and in assessing the adequacy of the educational goals toward which the activity leads. (Gore & Zeichner, 1991, pp. 122-123)

The *critical* or *emancipatory* interest involves self knowledge and reflection on the effects of one's own life, and a commitment to questioning normally unquestioned power structures and societal expectations.

...critical reflection incorporates moral and ethical criteria into the discourse about practical action. Here the major concern is with whether educational goals, activities and experiences lead toward forms of life that are characterised by justice, equity, caring and compassion. (Gore & Zeichner, 1991, pp. 122-123)

Rather than thinking in terms only of my 'technical' role in 'the centre' of the course activities – as deliverer of information, tasks and judgements – Habermas' scheme emphasises the importance of the 'practical' knowledge required in developing rich, communicative relationships between lecturer and students and within the class group. It also provides a reminder of the 'critical' or 'emancipatory' need to reflect on taken-for-granted assumptions – my own 'progressive' assumptions about student centredness as well as their more 'traditional' expectations. Questions arise such as: Which knowledges are most important in this context? On what basis can we make that decision? How should their balance be moderated? What are some creative ways of reimagining the technical pressures of my role as a lecturer for a fee-charging, degree-granting, profession-gatekeeping university? Once again, the rich complexity of educational contexts confounds a simple centre-periphery spatial metaphor and requires more powerful, layered and nuanced descriptions.

Relationships, Roles and Expectations

In a similar way, what I meant by 'reclaim[ing] the role of educator' remains problematic. This role, too, may be defined in authoritarian, authoritative or relationship terms, and may imply a variety of expectations and responsibilities. When I said in my reflections that I had been able to "reclaim the role of educator, rather than be merely a facilitator of talk sessions" (personal reflections, 14 December 1998), what did I mean by this? (Particularly as I continue to believe that one of the more important roles of educators is precisely to be a "facilitator of talk sessions".)

I believe that I was acknowledging my new understanding that, in attempting to withdraw from some of the more negative and authoritarian connotations of a traditional educator's role, I had in fact abdicated completely. Rather than redefining and reconstructing a new set of expectations and responsibilities for myself as an educator, in both my own mind and those of the students, I had simply attempted to slough my teaching responsibilities onto the class members. On the other hand they, unsurprisingly, had chosen not to accept them: they could see no value in doing what they perceived as 'my job'.

Once again, it is important to emphasize the rich complexity of educational contexts: using the plural 'roles of the educator' might be one way of reminding ourselves that the web of expectations, rights and responsibilities cannot be simply cut away, but must be rewoven in a shape which is more empowering for both students and teacher.

Berger (1966) provides the following characterisation of role theory in sociology:

From the view point of the individual participant this means that each situation he enters confronts him with specific expectations and demands from him specific responses to these expectations… A role, then, may be defined as a typified response to a typified expectation. … The role provides the pattern according to which the individual is to act in the particular situation. (pp. 111-113)

The conflicts that arose in the course, and that led to the frustration and near withdrawal of the students, arose largely because of the students' perception that I had failed to enact my role properly. My actions and epistemological commitments in the course had contravened the constellation of expectations that, for them, defined 'the role of educator'. In other words, I had attempted unilaterally to change the social

structures and interactions of the classroom, and had been 'snapped back into position' by the web of student expectations.

We can take this metaphor of a spider's web a little further. Say a spider in my garden has spun a web in such a way that its centre lets the spider sit in the sun during the early afternoon. As the season changes from spring to summer, the sun moves further south, and the position no longer catches the sun at the right time. If the spider simply moves to a different spot on the web, it is no longer at the centre. This might seem desirable, except that the edges are less strong and will not take its weight, and the lines it held with its legs telling it when a fly hit the web are out of reach and… If the centre is to be changed, laborious reweaving of the whole web is required. Similarly, my move 'out of the centre' damaged the web of expectations and made it dysfunctional. For a functional move, I should have rewoven the web, in collaboration with the group.

To go beyond the 'roles' description represented by this simple two dimensional spatial metaphor, it would be possible to imagine a third dimension for the 'power' description, then get really mind-bending and imagine a fourth for the 'knowledge' description. Now if we were to attempt to imagine that for each of those webs we want to weave *many* centres, rather than one, the complexity of the webs of meaning woven in classroom interactions becomes quickly apparent.

Berger maintains that:

The transformation of identity…is a social process. …any reinterpretation of the past, any 'alternation' from one self-image to another, requires the presence of a group that conspires to bring about the metamorphosis. (1966, p. 121)

One explanation that can be given to the conflicts experienced in this course is that one social group of which I was a member (my university colleagues) was 'conspiring'

with my transformation from teacher centred to student centred roles and expectations, while another group in which I was attempting to enact a role (the class) was not in on this conspiracy, and indeed strongly expected me to fulfil a social contract by enacting the role of teacher as *they* understood it.

Negotiation

How can these incredibly complex 'reweavings' be conducted in our classroom practices? The following excerpt from my reflections after the completion of the course describes my chagrin at recognising perhaps my most damaging 'sin' - unilateral action:

I fell in the same old trap of initiating change without consulting those effected. …how do I initiate change in my own practice, but allow the members of the class to have a real voice and become partners in the change? Emma suggested it, and I agree: negotiate! My response to her, relating to this course, was "But I don't think I knew myself well enough to be *able* to 'put my cards on the table' - I was in a personal transition". May's portfolio wrestles with this exact issue, and I think it will become more and more important in education. If educational reform is to work, it must be 'with, not for' students (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). But how do we do this in practice? (personal reflections, 14 December 1998)

This remains a challenging issue: added to all the complex considerations of power, knowledge and relationships (think about that four-dimensional, multi-centred spider web) there remains one other issue: this course was about classroom action research for practising middle school teachers, not about this course. In other words, perhaps the level of meta-discourse, discussion and negotiation, learning and perspective transformation (Geelan, 1994), required in order to achieve the kinds of changes in my teaching practice that I hoped to achieve, are simply too time consuming and

inappropriate in a short (one semester, one session per week) course of this nature.

Conclusion

If so, what is the way forward? How can I more fully embody my educational values in my practice (Whitehead, 1989, 1998), without swallowing my practice in the process? The (tentative, provisional) answer I have come up with so far, is to move in small steps, to use just enough meta-discourse – talking about talking and learning about learning – in the classes I teach to move some of the distance from where we are, as a group, to where we want to be. That involves some humble listening on my part. Rather than a rush to move toward *my* 'place in the sun', we need to find the crucial point of that other dialectical tension: between what the students *want* and my perception, humbly arrived at and thoughtfully reflected (Van Manen, 1991) upon, of what they *need*.

Additionally, it is important to pull back the focus a little: rather than look at just this one small class in one semester, can we look at the whole culture of teaching and learning, and begin collaboratively to re-weave those webs of expectations everywhere they occur? This is, of course, a process that is constantly going on in all of society and at all educational levels anyway, but making it explicit for ourselves and making a commitment to moving these roles and expectations in particular directions is a powerful way of working toward the embodiment of our values in our teaching practices.

It is both deeply ironic and strangely seductive for a committed educator to attempt to make the classroom more student centred through unilateral teacher change! Explicit negotiation, which takes into account the needs and ideas of all stakeholders and which uses language richly to address the complex web of relationships and expectations which make up an educative context, is a difficult but irreplaceable approach for implementing

educational change 'with, not for' students (Corbett & Wilson, 1995).

Different language sets, descriptions and metaphors - the 'human interests' of Habermas (1971), notions of roles and expectations drawn from sociology (Berger, 1966), the study of constraining myths and traditional structures (Taylor, 1996) and the 'power' perspective of Foucault (1980) - each have the potential to add to our understanding of both the complex relationships and the hidden assumptions of educational environments. In this way the dialectical tension of a number of descriptions can support genuine, meaningful negotiation of the roles, interests and practices within which learning and teaching take place.

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