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Teaching and learning in higher education : nurturing critical reflection for bridging theory/practice links : a case study in social work education

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TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER

EDUCATION:

NURTURING CRITICAL REFLECTION FOR BRIDGING

THEORY/PRACTICE LINKS:

A CASE STUDY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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Faculty of Health and Human Sciences

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work

to the memory

of

the Gemini twins

Sylvia May Ovington   and   John Ovington

6/6/1908 – 11/3/1999   *5/6/1904 – 7/12/1978*

My first

and greatest teachers

ABSTRACT

The 1990s has witnessed two 'institutions' in 'crisis': higher education and social work. In higher education, government has brandished its quality sword and the long-neglected area of teaching is prominent in the war cry. In social work, major stakeholders have constructed the crisis as the 'theory/practice problematic' and the systemic intervention has been the prima facie increasing power of non-academic bodies to shape social work curriculum. This study is set within this context of quality teaching and theory/practice issues. It is an action research study of the teaching and learning dynamic of a first year social work subject which seeks to 'answer' the question: how do we best teach beginning social work students to grapple with theory/practice issues, or more specifically, how do we best teach them to think theoretically and critically about action?

Examination of both these crises reveals contested conceptual, theoretical and epistemological terrain. What is quality? What is quality teaching? What is theory? What is practice? What is the relationship between them? To answer these questions I re-route the thesis to traverse rugged epistemological and educational terrain. I use Habermas's tripartite classification of knowledge and human interests as a heuristic device to frame the discussion of knowledge, education and methodology and extend his scheme by adding a fourth 'paradigm', poststructuralism.

The key issue to emerge from the historical survey of knowledge is the debate concerning foundationalism 'versus' fragmentation, or relativism. Marshalling the recent work of Falzon (1998), I argue that this debate is based on a flawed dichotomy and that these two positions do not offer genuine alternatives at all, but are part of the same foundational, totalizing metaphysics. The proper alternative to foundationalism is not fragmentation, but dialogue. Adapting Falzon's approach, I reinterpret the work of Foucault in terms of 'dialogue'. A key concept to emerge from the epistemological, educational and methodological discussion is **critical**

reflection and its cognates: reflection, critical thinking and reflective practice. I rework the concept of critical reflection in terms of Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection.

The thesis can then be framed as a study of critically reflective practice at two levels of the teaching/learning interface. First, the critically reflective practice of primarily myself, but also my colleague, in teaching the subject *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience.* Second, the critically reflective practice of students grappling with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice.

Drawing on Braskamp, Brandenburg and Ory's (1984) model of teaching excellence, I emphasize the importance of three sets of measures for evaluating teaching – *input, process* and *outcome.* Data from these sources indicate considerable student success in achieving the subject's objectives. Three major sets of findings emerge. First, the significant role of case-based pedagogy for fostering theory/practice links. Second, the importance of the social context of learning both in terms of personal relationships and the use of self as a pedagogical tool. Third, the key role of assessment as a pedagogical strategy for steering student learning.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i)   incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted

for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii)   contain any material previously published or written by another person

except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii)   contain any defamatory material.

GARY OVINGTON   DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

unpublished theses which were used in the preparation of this thesis and I thank you both.

An 'anonymous' research assistant, whom I never met, was employed by Pauline through our research fund and performed two key tasks: transcribing the four taped group discussions and tabulating the baseline survey data. I don't know who you are, but I thank you for your vital contribution to this thesis.

Special thanks must go to Edith Cowan University, particularly for their financial support in the final preparation of this thesis. I should also mention the various staff at Bunbury campus – administrative, academic and from the computer centre – who provided invaluable assistance during the final frantic days. Fisher Library at Sydney University provided invaluable assistance by extending temporary borrowing rights and this thesis could not have been completed without this assistance.

Finally, and my greatest debt of all, goes to the cohort of students who formed the basis of this research. It was a privilege and a pleasure to share and learn together. Thank you.

PREFACE

This thesis began with the realization that I would never complete a 'normal' research thesis because when it came to the crunch I considered students and their learning more important than writing academic articles. I began my doctorate in a different topic area and with a different supervisor at the beginning of 1993. At the beginning of 1994 I did an about-face when, with the implementation of the revamped curriculum structure in the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare at James Cook University, my current supervisor, colleague and dear friend, Pauline Meemeduma and I, decided to research the teaching and learning of a first semester first year subject which we had jointly designed and were to jointly coordinate and teach.

By the end of 1994 the data collection was complete and by the middle of 1995 the bulk of the analysis had been done. 'Only' the writing remained. In July 1995 I went to Vietnam to work on an Australian Government-funded community development project and that was the effective end of PhD writing for two years. In July 1997 I returned to Australia to write my PhD; which, of course, would be complete by the beginning of the 1998 academic year. I had written a 90,000 word Masters thesis and knew that these things could be done with commitment and focus. I had not bargained on two major obstacles. The first, that by the time I returned from Vietnam my life had moved on and my interests changed. Between July 1997 when I returned to Australia and April 1998 – a period of nine months –

I achieved the grand total of 150 hours of work on my PhD. This was an average of about four hours per week! I actually wrote a tremendous amount in these nine months – a 220 page travel narrative on Vietnam, a swag of short stories and numerous poems. I even began work on a novel. And of course, I had to read at least one novel each week. The PhD sailed gently towards the horizon. I didn't even wave goodbye. From early December 1997 until early April 1998 – four months – the PhD sulked in the background, a forgotten quest.

The second major obstacle surfaced shortly after I commenced writing: the dawning realization that I had launched a frightfully ambitious undertaking. The difficulty and scope of the topic shimmered fiendishly. Digging deep, I was determined to finish what I had begun. I refused to be haunted by echoes from the past. So almost one year ago, on Monday 6 April 1998, I began the serious task of writing this thesis. I experienced three more dents in my resolve. On 17 August 1998 I discovered that my flat, sated with its stable existence, had decided to take up swimming. By the following morning Wollongong's flash flood had left. Unfortunately $5,000 dollars worth of books had not learned to swim nor had numerous articles and data sources for the PhD. The next five weeks was spent persuading PhD accoutrements that a dry existence was the best of all possible worlds. The second dent occurred when the whole of January and bites of October and November were spent doing a rush visit to Laos and helping to write a proposal for a basic education project for ethnic minorities in the Laos People's Democratic Republic. We subsequently won the proposal and I was the nominated

Team Leader so this placed great pressure to finish the PhD before the Laos project started on April 12. The third dent occurred when I was in the throes of completion and madly preparing for my Laos sojourn: the person dearest to me on the planet, the person in whose house I spent the first years of my life, my Nanna, died, and took several days to do it.

I say all this by way of introduction because evidently this was a thesis demanding to be written. I resisted it for months and when my resolve cranked into gear it was tested on numerous occasions.

The thesis itself is an action research study of the teaching and learning dynamic of a first year subject designed to provide students with a scaffold for understanding human interaction and the forces which shape it. It is an unashamedly epistemological subject in which we attempt to provide students with a framework for dealing with theoretical knowledge in a critical way. This involves looking at the role of theories and theory development, and how they are constructed, including the key role of 'self' in this process. We were primarily interested in improving our teaching practice: how could we best teach beginning social work and community welfare students to grapple with the complex relationships between theory and practice?

Chapter one identifies a dual *practical* problem in which two 'institutions', higher education and social work, are seen to be in 'crisis' (to borrow technocratic

discourse); crises triggering systemic interventions. In higher education, government has viewed the crisis in 'quality' terms (of teaching and learning, and management practices) and the systemic intervention has been the Quality Assurance project. In social work, major stakeholders have constructed the crisis as the 'theory/practice problematic' and the systemic intervention has been the prima facie increasing power of non-academic bodies to shape social work curriculum. These practical problems can be viewed within an *ontological* framework: what is the nature of these crises? Chapter one begins the process of answering this question.

Examination of both these crises reveals contested conceptual, theoretical and epistemological terrain – a *theoretical* problem, which I suggest can only be navigated with the assistance of an *epistemological* compass with clearly marked bearings for educational theory. So before we can begin to examine educational paradigms in general and social work education specifically in terms of their views on knowledge and teaching and learning we need to explore the theoretical and paradigmatic bedrock from which these educational paradigms draw their theoretical springs. Initially, this requires an excursion into the realm of epistemology, the domain of traditional philosophy concerned with questions of knowledge. This is the focus of **chapter two.** I begin with knowledge rather than teaching and learning per se since I argue that once we decide what we mean by knowledge, how we frame it and understand it, this will spell out some implications for teaching and learning because knowledge is viewed as the

currency of the teaching/learning exchange. Two further reasons exist why exploration of epistemological issues is vital to this thesis. First, knowledge is fast replacing labour and capital as the critical commodity for economic welfare. Second, the teaching subject at the centre of this research, *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, is essentially, in the wake of the death rattle of philosophy of education subjects, an attempt to slide epistemology into the back door of the teaching and learning enterprise in higher education. The chapter focuses on three related issues: what is knowledge? (How do we justify it?). What is the relationship between what is known and the person who knows? How does knowledge impact on theory/practice issues? I use Habermas's tripartite classification of knowledge and human interests as a heuristic device to frame chapters two to four – knowledge, education and methodology. I extend his scheme by adding a fourth 'paradigm', poststructuralism. Taking a bite out of the 'knowledge apple', I relived Adam's horrors. One could not do the enterprise justice in a handful of pages. A bit of foreplay wasn't going to do the trick. Had I known what I spawned perhaps I might have chosen to remain an intellectual virgin.

Chapter three takes an educational tack, but builds on chapter two by examining how various educational paradigms approach the question – how is *knowledge* framed and understood? – and what is the relationship between teaching and learning? Through the opening chapters the related concepts of critical thinking, reflection, *critical reflection* and *reflective practice* emerge as vital fodder and in

the latter half of the chapter I explore these concepts in detail, again via a paradigmatic course. Having traced the concepts of 'knowledge', 'education' and critical reflection via this paradigmatic course, I then sketch the theoretical framework for the thesis by drawing on Hobson's (1992) adaptation of Moore's (1974) five major components of educational paradigms: *aim* of education; view of *knowledge*; the nature of the *person*; views on *teaching* and *learning*; and *social* and *political* context of education. Four other key issues are subsumed within this framework: the *purpose* of social work, within the *aim* of education; *theory/practice* views, largely within *knowledge* and *person*; *critical reflection* and *reflective practice* fit within the theory/practice discussion as well as *teaching* and *learning*; and the notion of *'quality'* slots mainly within *teaching* and *learning* and *social* and *political* context. By the time I reach the end of chapter three I am weeping for lost innocence.

The thesis can then be framed as a study of critically reflective practice at two levels of the teaching/learning interface. First, the critically reflective practice of primarily myself, but also my colleague, in teaching the subject *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*. Secondly, the critically reflective practice of students, given that the subject is designed, amongst other things, to facilitate beginning tertiary students grappling with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice, or more specifically, thinking theoretically and critically about action.

Having located the study theoretically in the opening three chapters, **chapter four** tackles the *methodological* aspects of the study. I describe and justify action research and demonstrate that it is a methodology congruent with the theoretical and philosophical framework adopted in this study. Again, critical reflection emerges as paramount.

Chapter five sets the study within context by adapting Schwab's (1969) fourfold scheme for understanding educational situations. teachers, students, subject matter and milieu.

Chapter six describes the process of the study showing how the present study, located as a 'slice in time', fits within an action research framework consisting of a reconnaissance phase and four major cycles. I pay particular attention to describing the critical issue of negotiating processes and roles at the beginning of the study and to the equally vital concern of ethical considerations. Finally, I describe in detail the monitoring tools and data sources for all cycles. Drawing on Braskamp, Brandenburg and Ory's (1984) model of teaching excellence, I emphasize the importance of three sets of measures for evaluating teaching – *input, process* and *outcome*. I also stress the central role of the individual teacher across all three types of measures.

Chapters seven to nine deal with the findings from the study. **Chapter seven** explores the role of case-based pedagogy for fostering theory/practice links.

Chapter eight deals with the social context of learning. Two dimensions emerge. The first relates to personal relationships, particularly between staff and students; the second discusses the use of self as a pedagogical tool. This has three parts: the self as a theoretical entity; ethical dilemmas in using self as a pedagogical tool; and student data bearing on the match between outcomes and subject objectives relating to the notion of 'self'.

Chapter nine examines the notion of assessment in its three guises of helping students to learn; reporting on student progress; and making decisions about teaching. I particularly explore assessment as a key pedagogical strategy for steering student learning. Drawing on Ramsden (1992), I offer a set of assessment guidelines for fostering deep learning approaches and evaluate to what extent WS1002 assessment satisfies these guidelines. This paves the way for a detailed examination of how well students actually performed on these tasks.

Chapter ten concludes the study by drawing together the key issues emerging from the previous nine chapters and outlining the study's limitations and potential trajectories for future research.

There is no question this is an extremely ambitious thesis. I did not plan it to be so; I simply followed the paths that beckoned. To provide a cogent and comprehensive analysis of teaching and learning in a higher education subject

when the subject at the focus of the research is epistemological in nature and a key role is attributed to the notion of 'self', is, as I discovered, an undertaking that cannot be completed in anything like 100,000 words. Simply to provide the epistemological, ontological, educational and Quality Assurance moorings to the study takes something of this order. I was faced with an unenviable choice. Do I reduce this theoretical context and risk a superficial analysis? Do I, perhaps, choose to eliminate the analysis entirely and write a purely theoretical thesis? In the end I opted to keep both the theoretical depth and the analysis. With the dearth of studies into teaching and learning in higher education in general and social work in particular, I could not in all conscience eliminate the analysis. The end result is one less tree in the Amazon rainforest. A second possibility is a trio of disgruntled examiners cursing the wind. Curse loudly my friends – the South China Sea has a habit of swallowing the dying groans of thousands of bodies each year. And once I did get into the pulse of writing the blood flowed thick and furiously. If you enjoy reading this thesis half as much as I enjoyed writing it, I shall be more than doubly pleased.

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Questions without answers must be asked very slowly.
(Anne Michaels 1997, p. 159)

CHAPTER ONE

RESPONDING TO THE SQUEALS OF 'QUALITY' CRISES:

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK

INTRODUCTION

> Australia is producing graduates who, all too frequently, are not familiar in any
> disciplined sense with the society in which they are going to practise their
> chosen profession, who are not analytical, creative thinkers, whose education
> does not provide the basis for adequate flexibility, who are not sufficiently
> attuned to the need for 'lifelong' learning, and who are not good
> communicators. In short, Australia is producing highly trained technicians who
> are under-educated in the broader sense of the term.
> (Aulich Committee1990, p. viii)

Such was the finding of the Senate Committee on Employment, Education and

Training in the so-called Aulich Report, the result of a Senate inquiry into higher

education inspired by the changes in the higher education system in the 1980s. It

was a finding that echoed a multitude of previous government reports and

enquiries. Beginning with the Murray Report (1957) and reiterated consistently

over the years (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee [AVCC] 1963;

Commonwealth of Australia 1977; Tertiary Education Commission 1978; the

Williams Report 1979; Aulich Committee 1990), the quality of university teaching

and learning has borne the brunt of sustained attacks. Moses (1995) also notes the

shortcomings levelled at institutional and departmental management.

1

This chapter has three sections. The first explores the contemporary Australian higher education scene in the light of recent developments that have emerged as a result of continued criticism of teaching and learning and institutional management in higher education. This highlights the concept of 'quality' as exemplified in the Quality Assurance reviews. The second section examines the problematic notion of quality and its assessment, both in a broad institutional context, and more specifically, as it relates to teaching. I will argue that teaching is not a unitary phenomenon and that there appears to be both a generic component and a context-specific component related to disciplinary practice. The third section explores how this notion relates to social work education, the disciplinary focus of this thesis. I approach this issue obliquely by examining the perennial theory/practice problematic. I conclude the chapter by outlining the aim and rationale for this thesis.

I.   CONTEMPORARY HIGHER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

The following figure (1.1) summarizes diagrammatically the key variables impacting on teaching and learning in Australian higher education.

To use technocratic discourse, the 1990s has witnessed a 'crisis' in higher education in Australia. It is a crisis for government since, as we shall see below, government fears decreasing competitiveness on the world economic stage. 'Quality Assurance' is the catchcry, emblazoned on all recent government reports and statements. But as the above indicates, it would be remiss to assume that the 'quality sword' has been briskly drawn from government scabbards. Commencing with the Williams report of 1979, the first government yearnings for 'quality' could

be detected (Neumann 1994). And it would be equally remiss to assume that it is

not a double-edged sword, with both the potential to punish and reward (see below,

Sachs 1994).

Figure 1.1:

Summary of some Key Variables impacting on Current Higher Education

Teaching and Learning in Australia

Political/economic/ ➔	**Accountability** ←	**University Lethargy**
social environment		(responding to previous reports,
* Fiscal restraint	↑	enquiries)
* Reducing resources		
* Increasing competition	**Quality**	
(for scarce resources)		
* Globalization		
* Rapid change ↘	↑	
(technology)		
↓		
↑		
Lifelong Learning ←	**Mass Education**	
↑	↓	
Knowledge Obsolescence	**Student Diversity**	← **Internationalization**

↘   ↓   ↙
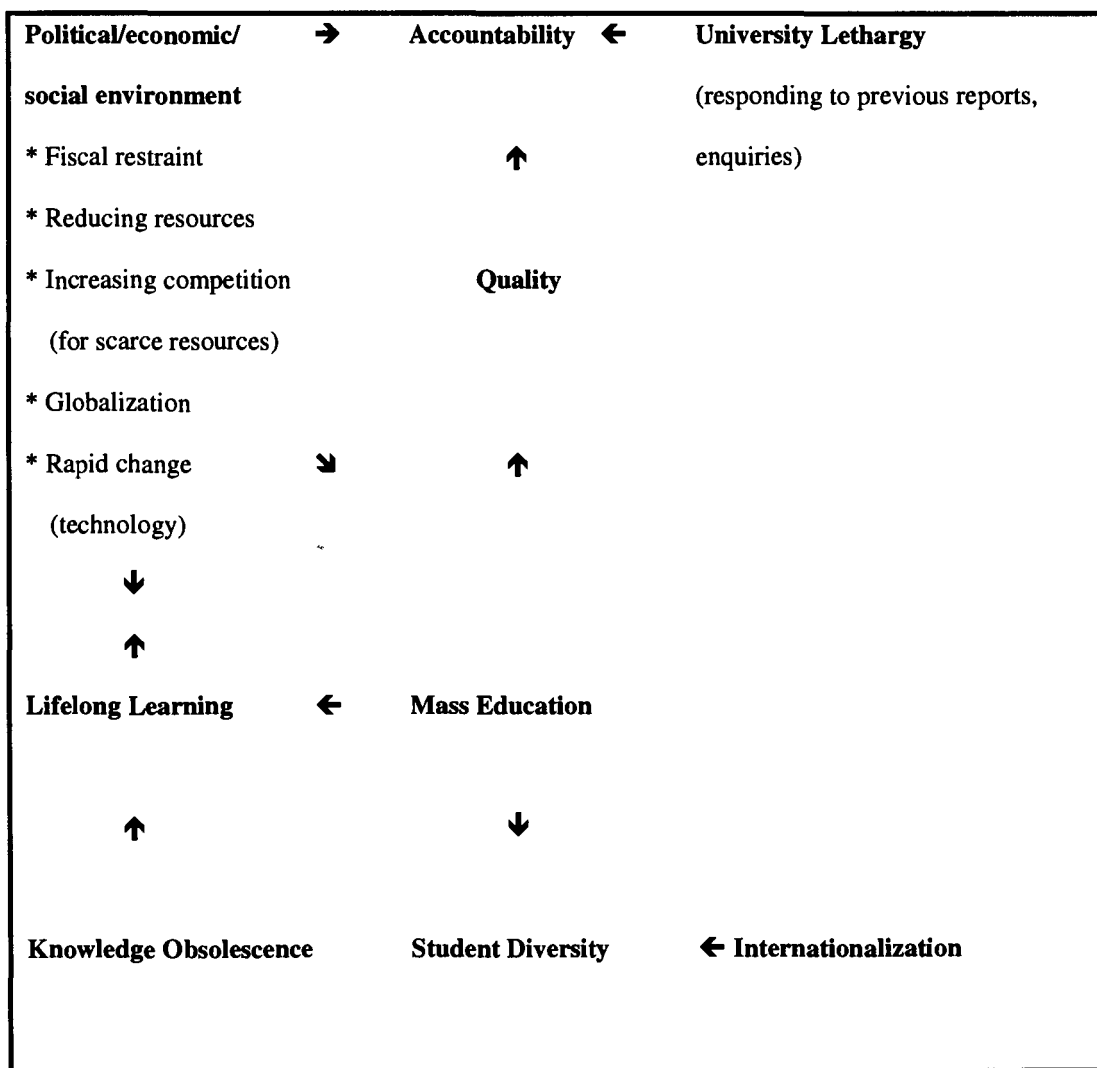
TEACHING

Cannon (1994, p. 26) argues that institutional "lethargy" in responding to criticisms outlined in previous government reports and enquiries combined with "recognition of the social and personal costs of teaching practices through student failure and withdrawal must certainly have contributed in large measure to the Dawkins' reforms." Interestingly, the current Education Minister, David Kemp, in a speech responding to the recently-released West Report (1998), suggests that "universities have been less than fully responsive to the diverse needs of their students and somewhat insular from the real world" (Kemp 22/4/98, p. 43). But the problematic status of graduates and the teaching and learning experiences assumed to be contributing to this status and institutional lethargy in responding to these criticisms need to be seen against the backdrop of the current political, social and economic environment, an environment characterized by globalization, rapid change, increasing technology and a climate of fiscal restraint with increasing competition for scarce resources. This environment has triggered public accountability, which from the early 1980s has been given prominence by government and committees of enquiry. Indeed, "the present focus on the quality of teaching in tertiary institutions...is part of more explicit and stringent accountability procedures required by government funding of institutions and a general concern to focus on excellence rather than adequacy. This focus has been but a single component of a greater emphasis on evaluative processes in education by central government linked to resource allocations" (Lally and Myhill 1994, pp. 1-2) (see Commonwealth of Australia 1988 – White Paper). Peters (1992, p. 127) claims that "underlying the ostensible concern for improved public sector accountability is an instrumental economic rationality exemplified in the now dominant belief in the use of market forces to induce greater efficiency." Sachs (1994, p. 23) echoes this when she

argues that "the drive for significant shifts in the management and conceptualization of Australian universities are following global trends which are driven by economic demands and pressures." Recent higher education literature in Britain, Europe and North America indicates that 'quality' is the key issue on the agenda for university managers (Craft 1992; International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education 1993). However, Dill (1992) cautions that quality assessment is not monolithic, varying in different national contexts. He distinguishes between three successive models of higher education quality control, which he argues are associated with the transition from elite to mass to universal higher education. The first, non-competitive approaches (typical of northern Europe) are typified by collegial (peer) control; the second, simulated market approaches (typical of Australia and Britain) are earmarked by bureaucratic control (relying upon imposition of rules and regulations); the third, market approaches (typified by the United States) are characterized by market control (relying upon open competition amongst institutions for students, staff, resources, and adaptiveness to new programs desired by the public). It is significant to note that in the non-competitive approaches of northern Europe the focus is on ensuring the efficiency of the system as a whole. But it is equally significant that Education Minister Kemp (22/4/98, p. 43) in responding to the West Report (1998) – itself premised on a model three approach – urges that "the challenge for the next decade is the transition from mass to near-universal tertiary education." This is pivotal and I shall return to it below.

The immediate quality catalyst is the former Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services, Peter Baldwin, and his policy statement, *Higher Education:*

Quality and Diversity in the 1990s (Baldwin 1991). This culminated in the Quality

Assurance Project. First, Baldwin commissioned the Higher Education Council to

explore the nature of quality in higher education. After consultation with major

stakeholders, the Higher Education Council (1992) presented advice to the

government in its report, *Achieving Quality*. Second, following the Council's

major recommendations, in November 1992 Baldwin established, within the

auspices of the Higher Education Council, the Committee for Quality Assurance in

Higher Education as a non-statutory ministerial advisory committee to assist the

government in the implementation of its strategy for ensuring the quality,

excellence and international standing of Australia's higher education system. A

distinctive feature of the project is that institutions able to demonstrate a high level

of 'quality' in the context of their mission and goals are to be rewarded with

funding in addition to operating grants. Moses (1995, p. 11) notes that while the

quality movement in Australia is part of a broader international movement, "it is

unique in that it provides rewards to those institutions which can demonstrate both

excellent quality assurance processes and outcomes." In 1993 the first round of

reviews were conducted and the committee had the task of evaluating and

monitoring institutional performance across the major areas of teaching and

learning, research, and community service. The quality reviews focused on both

processes and outcomes. At the time that the present research project was officially

launched in 1994, the second round of quality reviews was conducted, focusing on

the long-neglected area of teaching and learning (Committee for Quality Assurance

in Higher Education 1995). Traditionally, universities have emphasized research

and academics have mostly been appointed on the basis of their research prowess

with scant regard for their teaching abilities. Indeed, one of the key points made by

the Aulich Committee (1990) was this very discrepancy (see also Piper 1992). For the first time in Australian higher education there was widespread, explicit recognition that quality education must emerge from quality teaching. Sachs (1994, p. 23) summarizes the situation well: "the changing economic and political environment has exerted considerable pressure on universities to exhibit greater measures for accountability. This is to be achieved under the rubric of quality."

The government was able to embroider its rhetoric with a small purse and a number of key initiatives were launched. First, the 1992 initiation of the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT), which was set up "to foster and facilitate the development of good teaching practice in higher education and to identify and promote good practice" (Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching 1996, p. iii). CAUT conducts an annual national grants program, the National Teaching Development Grants, in the area of innovation in teaching and learning. This "program has been an important catalyst for developing a culture akin to the research culture associated with competitive grants schemes" (Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 1995, p. 5). Indeed, the Quality Committee noted the significant improvement in quality assurance policies and practices in teaching and learning from the first to the second round of reviews, commenting favourably upon the extent and variety of innovative teaching and learning activities, noting that "while innovation has always been a characteristic of the higher education environment in Australia, ...the level of present activity is high" (Committee for Quality Assurance 1995, p. 5). It attributed this partly to CAUT. This committee has since been replaced by the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD). A

second initiative indicating the burgeoning importance of quality teaching in the 1990s is the development of centres dealing exclusively with higher education teaching, such as the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne and the Griffith Institute for Higher Education (GHIE) at Griffith University (Campus Review January 19-25 1995). A third Baldwin-driven incentive is funding through the National Priority (Reserve) Fund to encourage good teaching practices in institutions (Neumann 1994). A more recent initiative, derived from former Higher Education Minister, Amanda Vanstone, is the Australian University Teaching Awards, inaugurated in November 1997. Vanstone claims the awards valued at 1.5 million dollars to be the world's highest paying government-sponsored prizes for university teaching (Spencer and Richardson 26/11/97, p. 37).

Another important dimension of the entire teaching/learning issue is the rapid rate of 'knowledge obsolescence', with Candy (1995) reporting degree 'half-lives' of three to five years in many academic disciplines. Along with graduate 'deficiencies' identified in the Aulich Report (see above), this has led to emphasis on lifelong learning. Minister Baldwin (1991), also noting the continued flowering of specialist knowledge and institutional responses of squeezing evermore specialist knowledge into curriculum straitjackets, suggests that:

> In many cases, the most appropriate response would be to broaden the undergraduate curriculum, move some current undergraduate course elements into specialist postgraduate offerings and expect employers to meet many of their employees' industry-specific and, especially, firm-specific information and skills requirements.
>
> This would mean that undergraduate study would be seen more explicitly than at present as a rigorous foundation for lifelong learning.
> (Baldwin 1991, p. 43)

The Higher Education Council (1992) is representative of recent thinking, viewing the development of higher order generic skills such as critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, problem solving, logical and independent thought and effective communication as key ingredients of higher education and lifelong learning, equally as important as discipline-specific skills. Moses and Trigwell (1993, p. 6) reporting on a Higher Education Council-commissioned study in 1992 examining employment practices note that "recent exhortations for the development of more generic, more interpersonal and communication skills is validated by actual employment practice." They also point out that "dissatisfaction with the level of generic skills of graduates is not restricted to Australia" (p. 6), citing British initiative, the Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) project which, commencing in 1988, invited higher education institutions to bid for funding to be spent over five years on major changes in curriculum and teaching.

Another crucial factor feeding into the equation stems from two parallel developments. First, significantly increased participation in the final year of secondary education leading to increased demand for higher education from school leavers (Mackay 1994). Second, the government's equity-inspired intention to increase participation rates in higher education (Department of Education, Employment and Training – DEET 1990), leading to increased demand for access to higher education from groups other than school leavers (Mackay 1994). Note that this move to universalizing education and lifelong learning has received a further catalyst with the release of the West Report (1998) – interestingly, titled *Learning for Life* – where mass education is seen as the key to social progress,

prosperity and economic growth, provided this 'mass' is attuned to the need for lifelong learning.

> During the next 20 years, the whirlwind of change that characterizes our lives will increase. The trend to globalization will intensify and the world will be highly competitive. The digital revolution will cut even more deeply into our lives.
> The review committee considers that education and training will enable people to respond to these challenges and opportunities. All Australians must have access to post-secondary education and training opportunities if they are to participate fully in the life of the nation. Participation in lifelong learning is expected to play an increasingly important role in our lives. Therefore we must develop a culture in which learning, even to the most advanced levels, is accepted as part of the social and economic fabric – an environment in which individuals are encouraged to continue to use the skills acquired at school, TAFE or university, in new and recurring formal and informal learning contexts throughout their adult lives. If we accomplish this, we shall have built a 'learning society'.
> (West Report 1998, p. 40)

Note that as long ago as 1971, "UNESCO'S International Commission on the Development of Education recommended that lifelong education should become the 'master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries'. Since then, the concept of lifelong learning has evolved from little more than an appealing slogan to an organizing principle for education and training" (West Report 1998, p. 40).

The West Report's emphases on mass education and lifelong learning, stemming primarily from economic expedients, also maintains recent foci on teaching, though Massaro (29/4/98) claims that quality receives few mentions in the report. Perhaps the most controversial feature of the report concerns the recommendation to deregulate higher education funding with future post-school education provided in a student-centred policy framework in which course and subject offerings will be determined by student ('consumer') choice. It is beyond the scope of the present

thesis to provide an analysis of the merits and the demerits of the West vision for the future of higher education in Australia. Suffice to say that commentators (e.g. Wells 20/5/98, p. 38) point out the myopia in "using student choice to drive education policy and funding", since the needs of the economy "may not be in tune with the students' aspirations and the broader public interest. ... Privileging student choice as a policy driver in part reflects the market-oriented view that empowering consumers will, by virtue of the competition it generates, lead to better quality services." She might also have mentioned the potential problems in allowing economic expedients exclusively to drive an education system. The West Report is, however, relevant to the present context, since, in an interesting argument, West and colleagues argue that the move to student-centred funding will firstly, lead to better quality student learning (at least partly as a result of teaching), and secondly, to lifelong opportunities for all. Much of the debate since the release of the discussion paper – and there has been much – hinges on whether the West recommendations will allow these two things to happen, particularly in the light of the proposed funding models/options, none of which includes the possibility of more funds (Moses 19/11/97).

Ramsden (29/4/98, p. 39) argues that the move to mass higher education has had a marked effect on academic staff, particularly "an obligation to perform better in all aspects of academic work, and to do it, of course, with fewer resources. ... There are more students to teach, and they are no longer a gifted and motivated academic group, capable of surviving the bleakest of bad teaching, but much more like school students in their ability and the demands they place on academics' time and energy." Increased higher education places have resulted – in 1996 twenty one

percent of the labour force was enrolled in higher education or vocational education and training programs (Kemp 22/4/98) and 1993 figures indicate a significant increase of participation rates over the preceding decade from 36 to 50 per thousand of the 17-64 population (DEET 1994). But these increased higher places have occurred within a context of increased demand and in an environment of fiscal restraint, reducing resources and increasing competition for scarce resources (there has been a decline in federal government funding per student since 1976 – FAUSA 1992). Mackay (1994, p. 19) argues that "partly as a result of these resource constraints, and partly also because of the perceived slowness of change in universities, there have been persistent and increasing calls for improved efficiency and public accountability in all aspects of higher education." In addition to increasing the number of overall higher education places, the equity and access-driven aspirations have had the further result of leading to increased diversity within the student body, a diversity also fed by the increasing internationalization of Australian higher education (Candy 1995). And increased diversity inevitably means teachers will require a wider range of teaching skills and strategies to cope with the diversity (see also the West Report 1998). Murphy (1994, p. 15) argues that a further "corollary of 'massifying' higher education is an increased concern for its quality; both over variability within the much enlarged group of institutions which are now called universities, and over the threat to standards which rapid expansion is sometimes thought to pose."

1.1 Summary: Current Higher Education Context in Australia as it relates to Teaching and Learning

Previous institutional lethargy in responding to government reports and enquiries combined with a political, economic and social environment characterized by globalization, rapid change, increasing technology and diminished resources has led to demands for public accountability in the higher education sector, accountability that the government deems can best be realized by quality assurance processes. Government-motivated belief that the key to economic prosperity and social progress in a rapidly changing, technological and increasingly competitive globalized context lies in a well-educated, flexible and adaptable population has led to policies encouraging mass education and lifelong learning. These in turn feed back into the existing political, economic and social environment. Additionally, the changing nature, status and function of knowledge, particularly the issue of knowledge obsolescence, fuels the quest for lifelong learning. The government recognizes the key role of higher education and particularly the pivotal role of teaching in attaining these outcomes of a 'learning society'. Mass education, in its turn, combined with the internationalization of education, has led not only to increased participation rates in higher education, but also to a more diverse student body, and to increased 'quality calls' for maintenance of standards. All these factors spell one simple message for teachers in higher education: do more, do it better, and do it with less.

II. TEACHING QUALITY AND ASSESSMENT

The above discussion indicates the key role of quality and its assessment in recent higher education debates. But what does quality teaching involve? Before

answering this question with specific reference to teaching, I want to contextualize it within the broader ambit of institutional quality in higher education. 'Quality' in higher education is a highly contested and amorphous concept (see Cullen 1992; Lindsay 1992; Petelin 1992; Harvey and Green 1993). Van der Meulen (1992, p. 39) demonstrates that 'quality', far from being an objective characteristic of a group or individual, depends upon goals set by actors. The Higher Education Council (1992) has resisted defining quality, insisting that no single definition is possible for higher education, and the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (1995, p. 12) has similarly refrained from providing a capsule definition, arguing strongly for *relative* rather than absolute standards. "The reviews do not seek to measure or judge institutions by reference to a single, externally imposed 'gold standard'." Their preferred approach has been to allow institutions to develop their own quality implementation processes within the context of their own missions and goals.

> The committee's fundamental assumption is that each institution has the responsibility for ensuring the quality of its own teaching and learning in the context of its own mission and goals.
> (Committee for Quality Assurance 1995, p. 12)

While this is commendable at one level, Sachs' analysis (1994, p. 22), in which she argues that "the issue of quality in higher education is essentially political, and becomes a site for struggle over competing ideological perspectives serving different personal and institutional agendas and interests", indicates that the government's approach may be deceptively simplistic. The most salient feature of this political context, she argues, is that "education in general and higher education in particular act as an instrument for economic restructuring for increased productivity and competitiveness" (p. 23). She also points out that "at a general

level…there are mixed messages within the policy documents themselves" (p. 23). Within this political context, she explores the tensions at the institutional level between two competing models of quality – quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI). These translate as "quality as a measurement for accountability and quality as a means for transformation and improvement" (p. 22). She argues that "current higher education policies are predisposed toward a quality assurance position", but that "quality improvement may be used to transform and generate new practices while at the same time meeting the external pressures of accountability" (p. 22).

How we define 'quality' determines the tools we employ to assess or evaluate the extent to which it is being achieved. (I use the terms 'assess' and 'evaluate' interchangeably for now, but will return to the issue in chapters six and nine.) Technical instruments such as performance indicators are handmaidens of the QA approach. Peer review is the axle of the transformative (QI) model. Its chief goal is the transformation of current practice (Sachs 1994). The present study fits within this tradition. Its prime concern is the transformation and improvement of teaching practice, but the means of achieving and documenting this (see chapter four, methodology) make it conducive to meeting external pressures of accountability.

Equally important is how we define 'teaching'. What is it, precisely, that we are trying to evaluate, or establish the quality of? For the purposes of this study, I follow Annesley, King and Harte (1994) in identifying four key processes of the teaching and learning activity: subject design and content; delivery and assessment; evaluation, monitoring and review; overall management. I define teaching quality

in the broadest sense as those teaching practices which appear to contribute to improved learning processes and outcomes for students. Note that, as with the Quality reviews, the emphasis is on both processes and outcomes. I am aware that this broadbrush definition glosses over a number of key issues, not least of which is the relationship between teaching and learning. However, I want to use the definition only as a provisional starting point. The following section begins the slow process of honing it, a process taken up with a vengeance in chapter three.

2.1   Quality Teaching – What is it and how do we evaluate it?

Campus Review (19-25/1/95, p. 13) reported results of an international survey, one item of which asked respondents if we needed better ways to evaluate teaching performance.   Sixty seven percent of Australian respondents agreed with this statement, England with just over 60% was the lowest, but Germany, Japan, the United States and Hong Kong all rated higher (between 69% and 74%).   In short, there is widespread recognition that teaching performance requires better evaluation methods (see also Ramsden, Margetson, Martin and Clarke 1995; Ramsden and Martin 1996).

As the above broader discussion of institutional quality indicates, definitions of quality specify 'measurement' paths.   We cannot develop 'better' evaluation methods in some neutral, atheoretical way.   Becher (1994, p. 4), resonating previous discussions, argues that "quality is itself a highly elusive concept, giving rise to a range of interpretations and generating a diversity of approaches to its assessment" (see also Sachs 1994). Further, he argues, many approaches to quality assessment of teaching ignore "extrinsic – that is broadly social – considerations"

(Becher 1994, p. 5). He identifies three measures or criteria put forward by the Higher Education Funding Council (England) for rating course provision within departments – ratio of applicants to places; departmental staff-student ratio; graduate employability – and demonstrates their inadequacy. For example, it is highly implausible to posit an unambiguous and isomorphic relationship between quality teaching and student choice of courses and subjects. Are more students pursuing degrees in computing studies now because the standard of teaching has improved? Do engineers and computer scientists have higher employability rates than history and English students because the teaching quality is higher? The answers to both these rhetorical questions spell an important lesson: broader political, social and economic conditions impact upon such measures. In fact, results from the 1998 Graduate Careers Council of Australia's (GCCA) annual survey, the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), for 1997 graduates, indicate that aggregate scores across institutions show history teaching to be rated significantly higher than computer science, yet the same survey reveals significantly higher employment rates for computer science graduates. Indeed, close inspection of this data over the five years of CEQ surveys reveals, hardly surprisingly, random correlations, and in some instances, negative correlations between student perceptions of teaching quality and employment rates (Illing 17/6/98). Addressing this issue, Allan Luke warns of 'reductionist traps' such as:

> (higher employment rate = program success; lower drop out rate = success; high pass rates = teaching success; higher teaching evaluation outcome = good teaching). Many of these might be necessary or related to good teaching, but cannot be said to be sufficient for good teaching. ... unless you're an old style behaviourist, there is no one-to-one relationship between teaching and/or teacher X and outcome Y, there is no 'pipeline' or 'hypodermic' effect, but...these relationships are mediated and influenced by a range of factors, student cultural background and demographics, institutional setting and teaching conditions, etc., etc.
> (Allan Luke 31/5/94, p. 1)

Consequently, Allan Luke emphasizes the importance of a rich array of qualitative and quantitative process and outcome data. Lee Shulman (1988, p. 37) adds to this by arguing that teaching evaluation must "be controlled by pedagogical principles rather than [measurement choices]" and that central to its reliability is that "any system of teacher assessment…must first and foremost be faithful to teaching."

The Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (1995) noted that there was little agreement about effective measures of teaching and learning outcomes. Thirty one different measures were identified by institutions in their portfolios and 1994 review visits. However, the committee noted that some of these related to inputs rather than outputs, some related to process within the institution, and relatively few are direct learning outcomes measures. Given the above discussion of Allan Luke's views, this is not a reassuring statement, implying as it does, that student learning outcomes is the valued option. From 1994, all Australian universities agreed to participate in the GCCA course experience and graduate destination surveys. Again, this is valuable data, but needs to be balanced against a vast array of other qualitative and quantitative data which includes processes as well as outcomes.

Let me stress unequivocally that I am not arguing that teaching practices and student learnings are unmeasurable and non-reducible. I am simply arguing that any attempt to measure teaching quality and student learning outcomes must be multi-faceted, or, in the words of research methodologists, 'triangulated'. Allan Luke (31/5/94, p. 2) argues cogently for a practical approach. He points out that

'progressive' teachers nationally and especially in Victoria argued for years that teaching practices and student learnings were unmeasurable, "only ultimately succumbing to psychometric models pushed by conservative governments." His suggestion, which we might do well to heed, is to "try to influence and control an agenda for evaluation that tries to build in a range of qualitative and quantitative agendas."

Allan Luke (31/5/94, p. 1) captures poignantly the essence of the issue when he argues that "how 'quality' is defined sets out an educational philosophy itself vis a vis the relationship between teacher and student, between teaching and learning, between content and form." Expressed as an abstract philosophical principle: concepts are theoretically embedded. In order to present a clear picture of 'quality', one has to sketch the theoretical and paradigmatic backdrop in which the concept nestles. In short, one has to explicate the educational philosophy undergirding the concept. This is a critical point, and one to which I shall return later in the chapter. In chapter three, I shall explore the notion in some depth. Scrutiny of the literature reveals conceptual sliding between 'quality teaching', 'good teaching', and 'effective teaching'. As Lally and Myhill (1994) ask, are these the same things? The clue, as noted above, resides in the paradigmatic home of concepts, which are always theoretically embedded. For example, Lally and Myhill note that the term 'effective teaching' "has more of a product (outcome) orientation than a process one" (p. 7) and that this assumes a particular relationship between teaching and learning, another theme to be revisited in chapter three, along with the central issue of process, product and input, which I shall take up again in chapter six when discussing the process and specific methods of the study. For

now, I want to note that any adequate notion of 'teaching quality' must address input, process and product variables (compare Braskamp, Brandenburg and Ory 1984 and Biggs 1989).

Mullins and Cannon (1992, p. vii) in a report to DEET titled *Judging the Quality of Teaching*, state unequivocally "that it is not feasible to produce a single unitary measure of a complex activity such as teaching". They distinguish between two broad models of judgement, the *template* and the *iterative*. In the template model a limited set of characteristics of teaching is selected as relevant (these become a set of specific criteria) and standards of performance are then determined for each of these criterion. In an iterative model "the evaluator(s) gradually clarify the relevant characteristics of teaching and the range of performance expected in any given context by moving backwards and forwards between the goals of the evaluation, the criteria and appropriate evidence. The process is a complex and reflective one rather than a simple application of procedures, and its success requires extensive discussion and clarification" (Mullins and Cannon 1992, p. 16). Mullins and Cannon mount a strong case for using the latter model.

Armed with the above caveats, we might take a closer look at the teaching process and some of the contextual variables which frame it. The Higher Education Council (1992) in their report *Achieving Quality* outlined necessary *conditions* for good teaching: clear aims and objectives for courses, subjects and units; curriculum organization and delivery policy which include effective methods of promoting learning and assessing that learning; policies for professional development of teaching staff; means of involving student and employer views in judging the

curriculum, its delivery and outcomes; and a framework for institutional self-evaluation. Much of the Council's research findings were incorporated into the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) and Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) guidelines or codes of practice for effective teaching (AVCC 1993; HERDSA 1992).

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC 1993, p. 1) in their paper titled *Guidelines for Effective University Teaching* emphasize the key role of student learning: "...underlying the Guidelines is the acknowledgement and the expectation that students are active participants in the learning process and are central to the mission of every university." The AVCC identify five key expectations that students have of staff: subject matter competence; effective communication; interest and enthusiasm for their subject; concern and respect for students as persons; and commitment to facilitating learning for each individual student. The AVCC also stress the importance of staff responsibility in preparing students for lifelong learning. This, too, is a key point, to which I shall return. Following from the Higher Education Council (1992) recommendations mentioned above, the AVCC contextualize teaching practice and student learning within a broader departmental and institutional framework. Moses (1995, p. 11) reinforces the crucial nature of this when she argues that "where the ethos of an institution expects, supports and rewards staff who continually strive to improve their teaching, courses and assessment practices we can be sure that the quality of students' learning environments is enhanced" (compare also Ramsden, Margetson, Martin and Clarke 1995). Moses cautions, however (1995, p. 14), that many of the introduced procedures stemming from the quality reviews "will disappear once the

reviews have finished, unless the external agenda has become an internal one, supported by academic staff and administrators alike. Institutions need to hijack external agendas and make them internal ones – change efficiency agendas to educational ones." This also is similar to Allan Luke's (31/5/94) views noted above and Sachs' distinction between quality assurance and quality improvement models.

Let us begin to fine-tune our notions of 'teaching'. I want to do this in two ways. First, by reviewing recent research about higher education teachers' conceptions of teaching; and second, by exploring the issue of the generic and discipline-specific aspects of teaching.

2.1.1 *Conceptions of Teaching*

Kember (1998) located 14 major studies between 1990 and 1996 which focused on conceptions of teaching. He analyzed these in order to yield a two level model for categorizing conceptions of teaching.

Figure 1.2:

A Two Level Model for Categorizing Conceptions of Teaching

Student-centred/ learning-oriented		Teacher-centred/ content-oriented	

Imparting information	Transmitting structured knowledge	Student-teacher interaction/ apprenticeship	Facilitating understanding	Conceptual change/ intellectual development
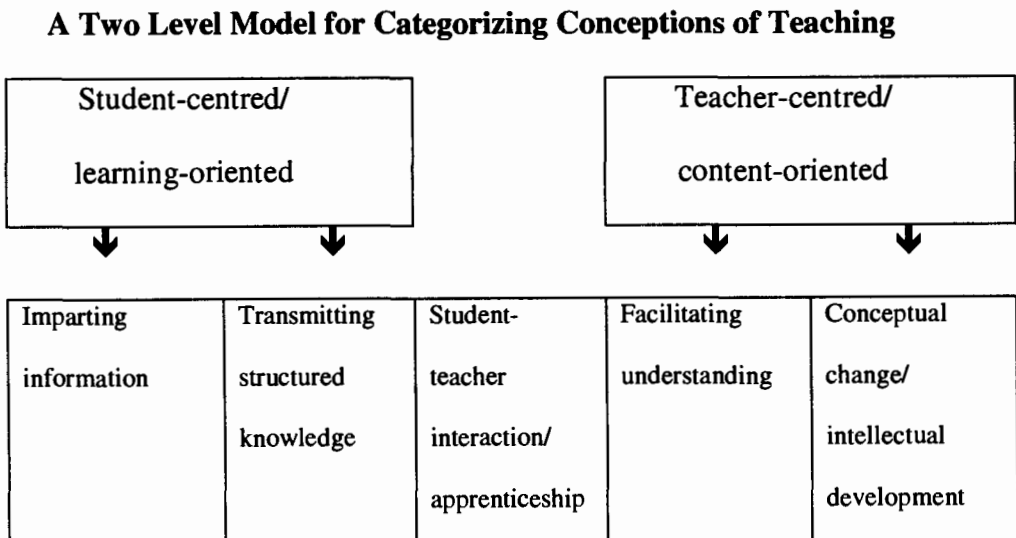
From Kember (1998, p. 16)

The first level of the model posits two broad higher level orientations labelled student-centred/learning-oriented and teacher-centred/content-oriented. Subordinate to each orientation on the second level are two conceptions. Kember posits a fifth intermediate conception "in which teacher-student interaction is first recognized as necessary" and which "is included as a transitionary bridge between the two orientations and their subordinate conceptions" (Kember 1998, p. 16).

Kember's analysis is important because he reviews a number of studies which reveal two important links. First, that between lecturers' conceptions of teaching and the teaching strategies they actually employ (Trigwell, Prosser and Taylor 1994; Trigwell and Prosser 1996). Second, that between lecturers' conceptions of learning (embodied in their conceptions of teaching – see above) and measures for changes in students' approaches to learning (Sheppard and Gilbert 1991; Gow and Kember 1993). Sheppard's and Gilbert's (1991) study is particularly pertinent to the present research and I shall return to it in later chapters. In chapter three we shall see that students' approaches to learning influence their learning outcomes. The chain that Kember traces is summarized in the following figure:

Figure 1.3:

Conceptions of Teaching, Teaching Approaches and Learning Outcomes

Conceptions of teaching		Teaching approaches		Student learning approaches		Learning outcomes
	→		→		→	
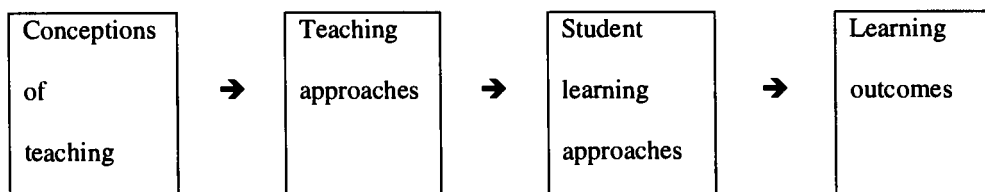
Adapted from Kember (1998, p. 19)

This model places great store in teachers' conceptions of teaching. This is particularly relevant to discussions of quality since "educational development activities and quality assurance mechanisms usually focus upon teaching approaches and take no account of the conceptions of teaching which underpin the approach" (Kember 1998, p. 20) (compare Ramsden's 1992 three theories of teaching in higher education). The major lesson to be gleaned from Kember's work is that if we are serious about improving teaching in higher education and as a consequence, student learning processes and outcomes, we need to devote more energy to teachers' underlying conceptions of teaching (compare again, Ramsden 1992, and see chapter three). Once we begin to speak of conceptions of teaching and learning, we are immersed in the realm of educational theory and its philosophical undergirding. As with the concept of 'quality', these notions carry huge philosophical cargo. It seems that discussion of quality teaching is a very complex philosophical enterprise.

2.1.2 *Generic and Context-Specific Teaching Skills*

Are there discipline-free generic principles with universal applicability? Does it depend on the specific discipline? Or is it a combination of both aspects? Neumann (1994, p. 8) argues that "teaching is a highly complex practice comprising both generic and context-specific skills and expertise. It is the context-specific aspect of teaching that has been largely ignored in the past few decades by researchers and policy makers." Neumann (1994) notes, for instance, that in policy terms, when the Higher Education Council (1992) delivered its report *Achieving Quality*, it approached teaching quality in two ways. First, by adopting five

conditions for good teaching used by the British Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council; second, by listing all the attributes that graduates should possess. "In both these approaches, the characteristics of effective teaching and graduate attributes, the focus is on generic skills and a process-product outlook" (Neumann 1994, p. 10). While conceding that this focus may be the most practical at the system level, Neumann (1994, p. 10) urges that "the argument of this paper is that teaching is far more complex and subtle than listing generic principles of behaviours and attributes." In general, Neumann argues, the scenario is repeated in research, with the focus in recent decades on the *characteristics or attributes of effective teachers*. She reviews major studies conducted in this 'genre' particularly, though not exclusively, in the United States and concludes that "good teachers across disciplines share key attributes of subject knowledge, interest and enthusiasm, clear communication, good organizational skills, and interest in students" (p. 6). These, she argues, are generic teaching skills, "attributes of good teaching" which "form a general set of principles which apply regardless of subject matter, level of teaching and specific context."

Neumann (1994, p. 9) notes that "these generic attributes have been confirmed and reinforced through a second major approach to studying teaching, namely *student evaluations of teaching*, a brand of research dating back to the 1920s" (my emphasis, Wachtel 1998). Cashin (1988) observes that studies of student evaluations of college teaching outstrip all other means combined. Neumann (1994) cites Feldman (1978) as conducting a "classic study", in which he undertook a "meta-analysis of studies on student ratings of teaching examining the consistency of these ratings across different course contexts. Feldman concluded

that class size, course level, the nature of the course (compulsory or elective) and

subject matter influenced ratings, although the combined influence of these and

ratings is difficult to discern."

In an interesting study, Erdle and Murray (1986) compared student evaluations with

classroom observation of 124 teachers in different disciplines in order to determine

if differences exist between disciplines in the frequency of occurrence of specific

classroom behaviour and how such behaviours contribute to overall teaching

effectiveness. They discovered that what comprises effective teaching was similar

across the disciplines but found that certain behaviours were more frequent in

certain disciplines. The behaviours found in humanities subjects were rapport with

students, interest, interaction and expressiveness. That is, behaviours associated

with an interpersonal orientation to teaching. However, behaviours in science

disciplines reflected a task orientation while the social sciences reflected higher

task orientation behaviours than the humanities and higher interpersonal orientation

behaviours than in the sciences. Neumann (1994) reviews a number of other

studies investigating disciplinary differences in student ratings of teaching and

concludes that:

> Findings to date consistently indicate that different disciplines tend to rate
> differently and that this appears to be independent of factors such as class size.
> A key issue is, whether there are differences in the disciplines per se which
> produce these results, or whether preferences for different teaching approaches
> occur across the disciplines without any direct relationship to the characteristics
> of the discipline. To answer this, it is necessary to study more closely what
> occurs in specific disciplines and in specific contexts, in order to better 'get
> inside' the teaching process.
> (Neumann 1994, p. 9)

The present study is a beginning small step in this direction.

Kerridge and Matthews' (1998, p. 71) detailed empirical study suggests "that obtaining course feedback via student questionnaires will provide results, but these may not be particularly helpful in improving course or teaching quality." In analyzing the relationship between student evaluations against a variety of input and outcome parameters, they found that significant correlations were "more an indication of student needs rather than the student perceived value quality of staff output" (p. 81). Again, this simply emphasizes the importance of multiple evaluative instruments at each stage: input, process and product. I shall return to the issue of student ratings of teaching in the methodology and analysis chapters.

A third approach to researching teaching effectiveness in tertiary institutions has focused on *modes of instruction* – lecture method and alternative instructional modes (see Kulik and Kulik 1980). I shall review these findings in chapter seven. Note the different foci of the three lines of enquiry: teacher characteristics (input); modes of instruction (process); student evaluations (ranging across input and process). Braskamp et al. (1984, p. 17) remark that "effective teaching is defined differently depending on the emphasis placed on input, process, or product." I shall revisit in chapter three.

On a related front, there appear to be two distinct epistemological cultures within universities concerning preferred modes for evaluating teaching, with natural and social sciences preferring empirical evidence and the humanities emphasizing peer review (Donald 1990). Lally and Myhill (1994, p. 7), after noting the possible proliferation of epistemological cultures with the emergence of new universities, new disciplines and multi-disciplinary approaches, remark that "such

epistemological differences can have a major influence on the teaching styles and practices that typify these disciplines and make the use of simple assessment instruments problematic, if not invalid and inappropriate." Again, this echoes Allan Luke's (31/5/94) call for a rich array of qualitative and quantitative process and outcome data.

Lee Shulman (1987, p. 9) argues that "good teaching goes beyond principles of teaching or attributes of good teachers and includes detailed subject knowledge which can be communicated and transformed through knowledge of situations and ways of responding to these situations. It is important to comprehend how good teachers transform their knowledge of a subject in ways that leads to student understanding." Lee Shulman argues that because teaching is essentially a private activity, it lacks a history of practice. The future direction of educational research will be to undertake what he terms "wisdom-of-practice" studies which "collect, collate, and interpret the practical knowledge of teachers for the purpose of establishing a case literature and codifying its principles, precedents and parables" (Lee Shulman 1987, p. 12). As will become apparent, the present study can be slotted within this tradition.

The preceding discussion indicates that teaching quality is comprised of both generic and context-specific skills. Of the latter, disciplinary considerations appear as vital. How does this apply in social work? What disciplinary considerations might be central to an understanding of social work education? It is to this question I now turn.

III. SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

"I, I ... I sorry Mummy, I sorry. I promise I never do it again. Never-Ever. Please Mummy, please Mummy."
Her voice is silenced by the rhythmic thud of coiled wire striking bare flesh.

"I ... I can't cope anymore. I'm sorry. It's not that ... it's just ... you wouldn't understand. I've got no choice, I have to do it. It's easy. Just a handful of pills and a long deep sleep. You don't know how much I need that sleep. There's a man inside my skin. He's a stranger. I've tried talking ... he won't listen. I know he wants to hurt me. I don't trust him. I don't ... I'm sorry ..."
The phone clinks down.

"We can no longer tolerate the iniquitous laws that enable Aboriginal children to be forcibly removed from their rightful parents. We will fight this law, we will fight..."
"Higgins, be quiet! Step down from your soap box. The harsh reality is, whether we like it or not, the police are brutalizing those who resist. Do you want the mothers mauled and beaten as well?"

On graduation, social workers will have to understand and make decisions on complex, confused and contentious aspects of human social and personal life – should children be left with or withdrawn from violent parent(s)? Should a person threatening suicide be involuntarily scheduled or left to take voluntary treatment? Should injustices perpetuated by social institutions on individuals, groups and communities be highlighted and challenged when there is a risk such challenges may worsen the experiences of people already oppressed and disadvantaged? As a social worker what, if anything, do you do in each of these cases? What is the basis for your action or inaction? How do you justify this? These are important questions which have no simple solutions. What role should your tertiary studies play in preparing you to deal with such complex issues?

Initially, I want to consider these last two sets of questions. First, assuming that professional social workers are expected to perform some actions at least some of the time, what is the basis for the actions (or inactions) and how can they be

justified? Second, what role should tertiary studies play in preparing students to deal with such complex issues?

I am taking it as a given that on neither moral nor statutory grounds are professionals permitted a *carte blanche* to do as they please. Such a laissez faire and cavalier approach does not fit well with recent global developments in public sector accountability nor does it fit with the Australian Association of Social Work's (AASW 1994a) guidelines for practice as embraced in their code of ethics. Social workers *are* accountable legally and morally for their actions. This presupposes that social workers can defend their actions (or inaction). To express the situation in its most simple form, social work requires you to *act* and I am arguing that this action should be preceded by *thinking*. But on what grounds can and should social workers do this?

I have spoken of *acting* and *thinking*. I might also have spoken of *theory* and *practice*. For now, I want to draw a loose association between these sets of concepts. First, that between theory and thinking (which Leonard and Skipper 1971 equate); second, between acting and practice (drawing on a substantial body of literature, Roberts 1990, demonstrates the equivalence between 'action' and 'practice', and presents an extended analysis of the relationship between 'theory' and 'action'). This is germane in a field like social work and related professions such as nursing and education where 'integration' of theory and practice is viewed as critical to the success of professional education. Traditionally, practice is considered the ultimate arbiter of successful professional education. While prima facie appealing, such claims are hazard-fraught. In the following I want to argue

for a working premise that claims quality teaching in the context of social work education involves partly, at least, an ability to facilitate students' grappling with the theory/practice problematic. To pre-empt answers to the two sets of questions posed above, first, social workers do need to be able to defend their actions and this defence, at least partly, should involve an appeal to theory (though for now I remain reticent about the sources of this theory); and second, one of the key roles of social work education should be to facilitate student learning in being able to think theoretically about their practice and the actions (or inaction) this practice entails. Note that I am not reducing social work practice to mechanical application of theory! My argument is that theorizing is a *necessary*, but not *sufficient* condition for social work practice (see Hardiker and Barker 1991).

I have suggested above that social work practice involves action, that social workers *are* accountable legally and morally for these actions and that this presupposes social workers can defend their actions (or inaction). I have intimated that this defence must be theoretical in nature. But is this necessary? Can we have action without theory? Thyer (1994, p. 148) in a bold argument claims that "social work practitioners need theory like birds need ornithology." Turner (1986, p. 5) notes an historical practitioner aversion for theory: "our origins of service and traditions of individual human worth have influenced us and must partially account for our less than full enthusiasm for theory, especially if theory is thought to be antihuman and mechanistic." Most pundits would argue, however, that atheoretical practice is either or both, mythical and dangerous: "...to practise without theory is to sail an uncharted sea; theory without practice is not to set sail at all" (Susser 1968, p. v; see also, Craib 1992). Howe (1987, p. 1) argues unequivocally that "not

only is theory in social work unavoidably integral to any practice, but also its relegation to implicit, unarticulated status leads to a poor, indeed dishonest practice." Sibeon (1991, p. 7) endorses this view when he argues that "a 'theoryless practice' is a contradiction in terms", noting that cultural common sense and 'practice wisdom' are theory-saturated. The question is not *if* we should use social work theory, but *which* one(s). Both these viewpoints resonate in Lecomte's (1975) seminal work in his doctoral dissertation specifically in the area of analyzing theories for practice in social work.

> We contend that the real issue is not whether practitioners operate from theory, but rather 'what' theory they use and how they should evaluate its usefulness for practice. For it seems evident that those who feel that they can operate entirely without theory are usually basing their behaviour on vaguely defined 'implicit' theory. ...
>
> It is the theory used by a practitioner without knowing he is using it that is dangerous to practitioners and their clients.
> (Lecomte 1975, pp. 208-209)

The above discussion indicates the significance of theory/practice relationships for social work *practice*. For now, I want to defer discussion of the precise nature of this relationship and want to look more closely at the second question noted above: what role should tertiary studies play in facilitating students' grappling with the theory/practice dimension? I will take up the former issue again immediately afterwards.

3.1 A Brief History of Social Work Education as it relates to the Theory/Practice Relationship

I have written until now as if social work and social work education were unitary entities with major stakeholders in the profession sharing a common understanding of what social work is and what its purpose(s) are. Wrong. I shall take up these

issues again in chapter three when I examine social work education in more detail, but some preliminary discussion is necessary in order to frame the present issues. For now, I assume an unproblematic link between social work and social work education in the sense that once we define what we mean by social work and its purposes this will spell out certain implications for social work practice and social work education (compare Tierney 1984; O'Connor 1997) – though the relationship will be far from procrustean. Definitions of both the nature of social work and its purpose are highly contested and have been throughout its entire history in Australia, Great Britain and the United States, the two key influences on Australian social work and social work education (see Lawrence 1965 and Parker 1979 for Australia; Sibeon 1991 for Britain; Dinerman and Geismar 1984 and Huff 1998 for the United States). This has been despite many concerted attempts over the decades to provide definitions by numerous individuals, task forces and organizations, including professional accreditation bodies (Lloyd 1984; Roberts 1990). Roberts (1990, p. 185), commenting on the American scene, notes that the Madison Conference reported in 1977 "set out to define things which are common to social work" but "demonstrated just the opposite." There are a number of aspects to this issue and transatlantic variations, but one recurring motif concerns the relative weighting of 'individual therapy' and 'social reform'; social work's "abiding internal dialectic between individual change and social change or reform" (Lloyd 1984, p. 218). One does not have to dig deep to discover theoretical springs; what Roberts (1990, p. 194) calls approaches based on "social pathology" and on an "analysis of power and social structure" (p. 194). From a disciplinary perspective this is crudely characterized in psychological and sociological approaches. How one conceptualizes this issue, often known as 'person-in-

environment' (see Roberts 1990), will have significant implications for both social work practice and social work education. The "abiding internal dialectic" has translated at various times into a debate about 'methods'. This debate has clear links to the theory/practice question since Roberts, in reviewing the American scene, notes that fundamental problems remain around a number of tasks, two of which are "to commit the *concept* of 'person-in-environment' to a reality which can be operationalized in practice" and "to relate social work purposes and concepts (like person-in-environment) to an institutional context which takes into account access to power and resources" (Roberts 1990, pp. 187-188).

The 'methods debate' has revolved around the relative emphasis of social casework, group work and community organization, the 'Holy Trinity' of social work intervention; though the roles of administration, research and social policy have also figured in this debate (Dinerman 1984) and current conceptions in Australia insist as one of their principles underlying social work education that "the content of specific social work knowledge must include attention to all methods of social work intervention" (AASW 1997, p. 6). Historically, social casework with its emphasis on individual 'treatment' was the dominant method in both practice and social work education in all three countries up until the 1960s and 1970s (Dinerman 1984; Sibeon 1991; Parker 1979; Fook 1993). The 1959 Curriculum Study in the United States appears to have played a vital role in this change, certainly in both the United States (Dinerman 1984; Guzzetta 1996) and Australia (Lawrence 1965). "The use of social casework in particular to help 'adjust' people to present social conditions, no matter how unjust or inequitable, is a powerful force in maintaining the status quo" (Roberts 1990, pp. 193-94); though note

Fook's (1993) reconceptualization of casework in 'radical' terms. In Australia, the 'radical debate' of the 1960s and 1970s "transformed social work by introducing more political and collective forms of practice", yet "had minimal effect on practice with individual people" (p. 1). A related aspect of the methods debate is "the search for a common knowledge base to clearly unite and differentiate social workers from other occupational groups" which "has also been a part of the rhetoric of North American social workers for a long time" (Roberts 1990, p. 187). A similar situation has prevailed in Australia (Lawrence 1965) and Britain (Sibeon 1991). Writing in the British context, Sibeon (1991, p. 135) argues that the structure and forms of social work knowledge and practice are full of "ambiguities and cognitive indeterminacies" and consequently, so is social work education. This is a crucial point and one to which I shall return in much greater detail in chapter three. For now I want to note that social work *knowledge,* social work *practice* and social work *education,* identified by Sibeon as contested terrain, are not alone. The entire gamut of knowledge, practice and education traverses similar landscapes. When I return to these issues in chapters two and three, I want to locate these specific social work issues within the ambit of these broader epistemological, theoretical and educational concerns.

Let me summarize to date the frame developed for viewing the theory/practice issue in social work education. Social work and social work education are highly contested concepts with little agreement about the nature and purpose of social work and consequently social work education. One key theme in this debate concerns the relative emphasis on 'individual therapy' and 'social reform' and this has translated into a debate about methods of social work intervention.

Undergirding the entire enterprise are pivotal questions about the structure and forms of social work knowledge. Armed with this minimal frame, I now proceed to tackle briefly the theory/practice issue in social work education, a theme I shall revisit in subsequent chapters. I shall refer to Australia and both its social work 'parents', Great Britain and the United States (see Lawrence 1965 and Parker 1979 on historical influences), though at times the emphasis on Britain is heavier. This is because critical evaluation of such theoretical issues has historically played a much larger role in the British tradition (compare Roberts 1990).

At the outset it is important to emphasize that "the 'integration of theory and practice' is a powerful organizing concept in social work education" (Pilalis 1986, p. 80). In Australia, as elsewhere, minimum standards for course accreditation usually specify such integration. One of the key principles underlying social work education outlined in the AASW's (1997, p. 6) *Policy and Procedures for Establishing Eligibility for Membership* states: "Social work education must be provided in an integrated manner that ensures the integration of theory and practice with core values and ethical practice."

Social work as a profession evolved from charity work during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Social work education followed hot on its heels with the first program opening in Amsterdam, followed soon by Berlin, London and New York (Guzzetta 1996). Australian social work and social work education emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Two central and related issues emerged from the beginning. The first concerned the locus for social work education – university and/or agency – and the second, stemming from this,

concerned the theory/practice relationship, with the university perceived to be custodian of academic or theoretical knowledge and the agency as locus for practice. Barely lying beneath the surface of these issues was the question of professional control of social work turf.

In the United States social work education sprang from Mary Richmond's 1897 call for "the development of a training school in 'applied philanthropy' that would be university affiliated and yet maintain the freedom to emphasize applied and practical aspects of study" (Dinerman 1984, p. 33). As a result, a six-week training program sponsored by the New York City Charity Organization was mounted the following summer and by 1904 three university-affiliated schools were offering year-long programs in New York, Boston and Chicago. By the end of World War I, 15 schools existed but six of these were independent and agency-related rather than university affiliated. "These developments gave rise to the first in a long series of studies and debates over what the proper content of such programs should be" (Dinerman 1984, p. 3). Initially, teaching of social work method "was largely on apprenticeship lines, learning by doing under supervision" (Parker 1979, p. 14). After the famous Milford Conference of 1929 social casework was recognized as the generic method of social work aided by theoretical developments in psychological and psychoanalytic theory which provided the theoretical upholstery. This impacted on social work education where the teaching of such theory assumed central importance (Parker 1979). The question of professionalism and its implied relationship to education assumed gigantic proportions. "Ever since Flexner had told the assembled National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1915 that social work was not a profession, leaders in social work had repeatedly called for

increasing professionalism through education and other means" (Dinerman 1984, p. 4). Abraham Flexner was a leading educator in the medical profession who "accepted an invitation from social workers to pass judgement on whether they were making the grade as a profession" (Crawford 1994, p. 42). In fact, Flexner had been invited by "aspiring modernist Mary Richmond, locked in a battle for power with Deweyian pragmatist Jane Addams" (Crawford 1997, p. 24). The early debates about the locus of social work education – university or agency-based – were replicated in Australia (Lawrence 1965) and Great Britain (Sibeon 1991) and were inspired by similar notions, part of which concerned the relationship between theory and practice and part of which focused on professional control.

Australian social work education began in Melbourne in 1929 under the influence of British almoners. Independently, similar developments proceeded in Sydney and Perth shortly after, though it was not until 1939 that the University of Sydney took over the Diploma of Social Work course. Melbourne University, then Adelaide University, followed soon after (Parker 1979). Under the direct influence of the United States and the indirect influence of Britain via the United States social work education in Australia began with a concentration on social casework. This was also partly a socio-economic response: Australian social work emerged during the Great Depression of the 1930s "when the needs of individuals were so great" (Parker 1979, p. 19). Lawrence (1965, p. 304), in his pioneering study on the history of Australian social work, observed that in social work education and curriculum "it was American social work which gave the lead."

Guzzetta (1996) describes how the 'American model' of social work education achieved hegemony between 1945 and 1980. This model provides 'generalist' training in the baccalaureate degree and 'specialist' training in graduate programs. Guzzetta also notes that the model, which achieved worldwide hegemony between 1945-1980, is losing favour abroad. However, Dinerman (1984, p. 4) points out that there has been a "long-running argument...as to the proper roles of baccalaureate and graduate social work education" and it was not until 1974 that holders of baccalaureate degrees were accorded professional status to practise as social workers (compare also Lloyd 1984 who remarks that from the time social work education was first lodged in universities it had been primarily at the graduate level). Much of this debate, as in contemporary Australia, centres on the same issues raised in the United States in 1939. "[There is a] growing conviction that the tasks of social work involve the discharge of so heavy and so delicate responsibilities in relation to individual lives and to community well-being, as to require a degree of maturity and self-discipline and a depth of experience beyond that usually acquired within a period of undergraduate study" (Dinerman 1984, p. 4). Lurking beneath such notions are hidden assumptions about 'life experiences'; assumptions which are not unrelated to theory/practice issues. Vestiges of the American model can be seen in two models of social work education in Australia. The first follows the American model and has two variants: that most closely resembling the American model, known as a 'two-by-two' program, requires two years of generalist social science training, then two years of specialist social work training, but all within a single four year undergraduate degree. In the second variant, students undertake an undergraduate degree, usually in social sciences or arts, followed by a two year postgraduate diploma specializing in social work. The

second model of social work education in Australia is different from the American model, consisting of a four year undergraduate degree which integrates generalist social science subjects with specifically social work ones. Australian schools of social work are roughly divided between the two models.

The first British program of social work education was established in 1903 in the Charity Organization Society (COS) School of Sociology at London University (Sibeon 1991). Bosanquet (1973, orig. 1914, pp. 404-405) notes that the program's ethos was based on "a definite attempt to induce people not to shrink from applying theory to practical work." This was in response to existing "prejudice against theory" prior to the establishment of the COS program. Sibeon (1991, p. 8) notes that "these early theory-practice tensions were magnified following the establishment of the COS's School of Sociology in 1903 at London University." Indeed, "senior university academicians...were perplexed as to the *purpose* of locating basic social work training in the university." Sibeon refers to the issue as the " 'timeless' (perennial) dimension of social work's theory-practice problematic." That the issue is still alive and well is noted by Satyamurti (1983, p. 36) who argues that social work students in the 1980s still reject theory "from the contributory disciplines" and also reject theory that is "directly related to social work intervention." She expresses her frustration when she writes that "the students do not...feel that they will get anything that is important to them from a book." These observations concerning social work students' skepticism about the relevance of intellectual learning and the use of academic social science knowledge, are echoed in empirical data reported in studies by Cox (1982), Waterhouse (1987), and Jordan (1988).

The unwavering persistence with which a large number of empirical studies reveal similar findings spanning the best part of a century...indicate that the theory-practice problematic in social work education and training is a truly 'perennial' material that cannot be explained as a 'failure' of social work students to grasp the relevance of academic social science knowledge nor as a 'failure' of social work educators to correctly teach academic knowledge in a way that is directly 'applied' to social work practice. The theory-practice problematic in social work has appeared with such regularity in too many places at too many different times for these types of 'explanation' to have any credence: *any such 'explanations' would have to presuppose a massive perennial incompetence on the part of both teachers and learners and would have to demonstrate why this assumed incompetence has remained unremedied for as long as social work has existed.*
(Sibeon 1991, p. 8)

This accords with Dinerman's (1984, p. 12) historical survey of social work education in the United States when she remarks that despite the 'success' of the 1959 Curriculum Study in fusing some of the fractures, both faculties and the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) "struggled...with the best ways to select and include a wider range of social science theory, psychological and social, and to connect that body of theory to social work practice."

What, then, is the source of social work practice knowledge, if not academic social science knowledge? "Most of the available empirical evidence suggests that social work practice is based almost entirely upon practical 'commonsense' and experientially acquired occupational 'practice-wisdoms' (Carew 1979) that are learned on-the-job rather than in academic institutions" (Sibeon 1991, p. 9).

Contemporary social work's distance from a professionally conjectured academic knowledge base cannot legitimately be 'explained' as a temporary or early stage in the development of a 'new' profession. ... Different types of social work cognitions are drawn upon by practitioners in different historical periods, but their common denominator is that, with very few exceptions, none of them are drawn from academic disciplinary discourses. ...

In sum, there is no reliable historical or recent evidence to suggest that social workers in general have ever, in their practice, drawn upon formal academic disciplinary knowledge. At every stage in the history of social work, including

the present, most of the available evidence shows that social workers do not and never have employed (nor see any useful role for) academic social science knowledge (for example, Bosanquet 1900; Eliot 1924; Karpf 1931; Kadushin 1959; Gordon 1963; Bartlett 1970; Stevenson 1970; Stevenson and Parsloe 1978, pp. 133-35; Carew 1979; and Pratt and Grimshaw 1985).
(Sibeon 1991, pp. 143 -144)

Note that despite its British focus, Sibeon's review includes numerous American studies. Further, Cocozelli's and Constable's (1985) American study confirmed previous British findings and Tsang's (1998) review of literature in both Britain and the United States revealed striking similarities. "Part of the current crisis in professional social work education is that this perennial problem of professionalizing 'credibility' is becoming more difficult to secrete within the social work community" (Sibeon 1991, p. 144). The above analysis is fascinating when one considers the current position of the professional accrediting body for social work courses in Australia: "There should be clear indication of where and how material from the social and behavioural sciences is integrated with social work theory and method subjects" (AASW 1997, p. 17).

The issue is vitally important since by the late 1980s in Britain the major actors in social work education, the CCETSW (the professional accreditation body) and social work employers, had noticed a shift in student opinion and "technical-professional actors perceived that the spectre of intellectualized left-wing student radicalism no longer existed in social work, and that the possibility of enrolling students in the cause of technical-professionalism had become a new strategic option. By the end of the decade, many students were demanding very practical forms of training" (Sibeon 1991, p. 52). Indeed, the issue of consulting students has been institutionalized, since under the new CCETSW regulations "courses will

not be validated by the CCETSW unless evidence is provided of courses' responsiveness to...'feedback from students about what they felt and thought about the programme' (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work [CCETSW] 1989a, p. 5, quoted in Sibeon 1991, p. 52). The Australian scene is similar with the AASW (1997, p. 7) stipulating that "the university must provide a formal structure such as a board of studies to enable teaching staff, field educators, representatives of the profession and students to participate in decision making related to the social work program." The implications have deepened with the current wider debate in Australian higher education, particularly in the light of the recently released West Report (1998) where one of the chief recommendations is that university funding should be tied to student subject choices.

Sibeon (1991, p. 52) makes a trenchant point when he writes "it is worth observing that this recent emphasis towards a consumer-led approach makes no provision for including the voices of social work *clients* as service-users." The irony should not be lost. As Sibeon (p. 52) says, "clients are the 'ultimate customers'!" (though see Roberts 1990 concerning problems in defining 'clients').

The question of the source of social work practitioner's knowledge – 'practice wisdoms' and/or formal academic knowledge – has an obvious impact on the theory/practice issue, but it is equally vital to the second issue mentioned above concerning the locus of social work education – university and/or agency – and the related theme of control of professional turf. Gardiner inadvertently – having claimed that social work is a 'profession' and mourning the potential demise of social work training in higher education – declares that:

It is...not surprising that major studies fail to demonstrate social workers using theory...it is practice wisdom and grounded theory rooted in one's own experience that are the basis of competent professional practice...
(Gardiner 1987, pp. 49-50)

Martin's (1992) analysis of the history of social work in South Australia echoes dominant motifs from Lawrence's (1965) seminal Australian study and is relevant here. Two characteristics of social work which had enormous impact on its development were the female majority of its membership and its dependence on social agencies for employment. Martin also identifies a third key ingredient, 'domain', which refers to continuing battles, as in Great Britain especially, but also the United States, over social work turf; that is competing claims by stakeholders (universities, social agencies, etc.) about power or control over a territory or a field.

The South Australian case study showed that by the 1980s the social work profession had not been able to establish any exclusive or highly secure domain for itself and faced an uncertain future. ... Mediative control by employers had increased, collegial influence by the professional association had declined and the industrial position of the profession was weak. The situation is even more serious in the context of economic and industrial restructuring in the 1990s. The position of social workers in relation to other components of the welfare workforce is in fact stronger in South Australia than in some other Australian states at the present time, but the profession is vulnerable and its future uncertain.
(Martin 1992, p. 342)

Martin notes that all three themes – gender, social agency dependence ('demand') and domain – have been of critical importance in Australia generally, as well as Britain and the United States. It is also significant that gender and demand were influential in shaping the third issue, striking out a domain (Martin 1992). Chamberlain (1988, p. 3), in her edited book, *Change and Continuity in Australian Social Work*, remarks that one of the book's themes is to explore "pragmatic questions about the extent to which curriculum goals should conform to the

requirements of social agencies delivering services in line with federal and state government policies."

While there are key links between theory/practice relationships and issues of professional control, it is important not to reduce the 'theory/practice problematic' simply to a "conflict between social work educators 'versus' field practitioners. Internal theory-practice tensions *within* social work education have a long history" (Sibeon 1991, p. 10).

> It is precisely because there is no internal consensus available for specifying the nature and purposes and methods of social work, and because competitive social work actors have always regarded control of education and training as crucial to the achievement of their attempts to impose their own definition of 'the' social work perspective, that social work education has for almost a century been a key institutional arena through which competitive actors 'route' their formulated interests, perspectives, and objectives.
> (Sibeon 1991, p. 128)

I want to return to the question of the source of social workers' practice knowledge. There is a vital distinction drawn here. Sibeon (1991) argues that *formal academic theory*, however this is construed, has not played a significant role in social work practice. On the other hand, a number of proponents have argued for the merits of 'practice wisdom' and/or 'grounded theory' (theory that emerges from practice). However, the same proponents have argued that practice without theory is no practice at all. The key issue then becomes, not if social workers need to use theory (they already are whether they realize it or not), but firstly, which theory/ies; and secondly, for these implicit, unarticulated theories to surface in the form of explicit theories which can be clearly articulated and rationally defended. It is this second question which is the major focus of this thesis. I have argued that social work practitioners *are* using theory. It may not be drawn from social science academic

discourses, it may be muddled and contradictory, but they are, nonetheless, operating from a set of assumptions and theoretical propositions about human behaviour and are choosing to frame this discourse in particular ways, including choosing to use certain concepts and not others. It behoves us as educators to bring this melange to the surface so students are able to articulate and cogently defend their proposed course of action. Similarly, practice wisdom is not some mystical entity incapable of articulation. Such pretensions, as Sibeon (1991) suggests above, are ploys. Both personal experiences and practice wisdom are informed by a theoretical base, though not necessarily an academic one, nor an entirely consistent one.

I also mentioned above that I wanted to defer discussion of the relationship between theory and practice, which appear to be inextricably linked, despite widespread disagreement about the precise nature of this relationship. This is an important issue if one of the putative goals of social work education is to facilitate students' grappling with this dynamic relationship. Payne (1990, p. 3), arguing along similar lines to Sibeon (1991) and Tsang (1998), suggests that "many conflicts about the application of theory to practice arise as part of the struggles for influence over the definition of the nature of social work." Payne identifies three traditions of theoretical and practice development in social work – the pragmatic, socialist and therapeutic traditions – and demonstrates how these are allied to various interest groups in the struggle for influence. Further, Payne (1990, p. 4) argues, this debate "often neglects real differences in the nature of alternative kinds of theory and the possibility of different kinds of theory/practice relationships." Turner (1986, p. 5) identifies 14 different approaches to theory arising from the

social work literature and Payne (1990; 1991), outlines six possible relationships. Such diversity is not surprising given firstly, the contested epistemological terrain noted previously, and secondly, Payne's argument that these relationships can be viewed as examples of debate resolution between the different interest groups seeking influence in social work, representing stances about the dominance of managerial and political control, practitioner control, or of academic control.

Another part of the problem, related to this, lies in the contested nature of the terms themselves: "It is not the case, either in social work or in other disciplines, that 'theory' has an uncontested meaning. It is this ambiguity which is rarely recognized, and hence causes some of the confusion which students and practitioners face" (Roberts 1990, p. 15). Blyth and Hugman (1982) distinguish six meanings of 'theory' and Pilalis (1986, p. 82), noting that these "are commonly undifferentiated in the social work literature", draws on this work to compare it to the conceptualizations of Leonard, Durkheim and Habermas. Pilalis (1986) notes that social work theories differ with regard to their sources and the purposes for which they are developed. "These differences relate specifically to whether theories are seen to be normative or non-normative and whether they are located within a physical or human sciences paradigm of the social sciences" (Pilalis 1986, p. 85). Again, the question of *source* and *purpose* emerges as vital. Notions of normativity and paradigms are also equally important and I shall return to both notions in chapters two and three.

Though receiving less attention in social work than the term 'theory', Hearn (1982) and Pilalis (1986) observe that definitions of 'practice' are equally problematic.

Pilalis (1986) distinguishes three broad meanings of 'practice' in social work: general professional purpose or intention; an ethical deed; and a technical act. Pilalis (1986), in writing of the first meaning concerning general professional purpose or intention, notes that "it is action which represents social work purposes or intentions. But what is the social work purpose or purposes? Who defines this purpose or these purposes? On what basis? For whose benefit?" This highlights two vital issues, both of which I shall revisit in the next two chapters, and the first of which I addressed at the beginning of this section: that the purpose of social work is highly contested and how one defines purpose will have crucial implications for both social work practice and social work education. Second, when practice is conceived in this way, theory and practice are not so easily disentangled. "*All* meanings of 'theory' involve some degree of reflective thought or abstraction and *all* meanings of 'practice' involve some degree of purposeful action (and thus theory)" (Pilalis 1986, p. 89). Pilalis (1986) argues that it is essential to clarify which type of theory and practice is being used if one is to begin to talk meaningfully of theory/practice relationships. Drawing on the work of Rein and White she argues that much of the discussion in social work – and there is much – about the 'gap/s' between theory and practice is founded on the 'technical act' meaning of practice; which she demonstrates to be based on dubious assumptions, not least of which is the notion that technical acts and specialized skills can be divorced from institutional and theoretical contexts. This can lead to a second type of gap in the social work education process when "teachers ignore institutional settings and their part in defining the specific purposes of social work" (Pilalis 1986, p. 91). In re-examining the nature of the 'integration of theory and practice', Pilalis (1986, p. 93) concludes that such a notion is paradoxical because

"we are expecting social workers to join or integrate theory (and practice) with (theory and) practice." Pilalis (1986, p. 93) suggests we reconceptualize the terms: "reflective thought processes (instead of 'theory') and purposeful action (instead of 'practice')."

> *Therefore, 'integration' may more usefully mean an understanding of the processes that result in the gap between reflective thought and purposeful action and an ability to put that understanding into practice, in a way that increases the consistency between their purpose and action.*
> (Pilalis 1986, p. 94; italics in original)

One important implication of this reconceptualization, Pilalis (1986, p. 94) suggests, "is that the requirement that students 'integrate' theory and practice needs to be redefined as a requirement that they develop a more critical stance towards the nature of theory *and* theory in practice." This is vital to the present thesis.

The contested nature of concepts should come as no surprise given my earlier comment about the theoretical embeddedness of concepts. I then spoke of 'quality'. The same applies to any concept; in this instance, 'theory', 'knowledge', 'practice', 'education', and previously, 'social work'. To understand how any particular writer is using a term one has to sketch the theoretical and paradigmatic backdrop in which the concept nestles. Again, these are vital issues to which I shall return in the next chapter. But before I move on, I want to conclude by examining briefly what might be the source of contested positions (and I shall revisit). I want to focus on two. The first has been raised above (Payne 1990) and concerns the interest group to which a 'protagonist' belongs, interest groups seeking influence in social work, representing stances about the dominance of managerial and political control, practitioner control, or of academic control. This suggests that knowledge, far from being 'objective', is 'constructed' from within a particular ideological

framework and that at different historical periods different interest groups are in better positions (have more power) to negotiate and define issues such as, 'what is the nature and purpose of social work?', 'what is the nature and purpose of social work education'? (see also Sibeon 1991). A second factor which appears to feed into contested positions is the role of 'self'. Tsang (1998, p. 173) summarizes both these factors when she argues that "social work theory mediates between ideology and practice" and that the social worker laden with values, ideologies and world view is pivotal. "One should no longer talk about the integration of theory and practice without the actor involved, namely the social worker" (p. 173). And later: "concepts, theories and experiences are chosen to provide a framework in comprehending the social situation at hand. The choice is guided by personal value and ideology" (p. 175). But Tsang stresses that theory/practice integration is to be understood as a dialectical form of praxis, since "in acting upon such personal construction, the social worker receives feedback which shapes and modifies the original construction. In a way, the social worker captures the essence and meaning of these concepts and theories in the process of using them" (p. 175). For Tsang, 'personal knowledge' (here she draws on Eraut 1993, 1994) and "the concept of praxis converge on one common theme – the involvement of social workers as active agents in the theory and practice link" (p. 176). She also stresses the moral dimension of praxis (see chapter two for ancient Greek conceptions of this), noting the central importance of personal virtue and moral character in Chinese philosophy. I shall highlight a key implication of Tsang's analysis for social work education: teachers need to facilitate student awareness of both their 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions) and their ideological and value orientation. This dual exercise is critical when I describe WS1002, the

subject at the centre of this research, in chapters five and six. Tsang also notes –
without concept definition – that 'reflection' plays a central role in both these
educational tasks. This, also, is a vital concept and I shall have much more to say
about it in the next two chapters.

CONCLUSION

I began by discussing the crisis in Australian higher education which has resulted in
the Quality Assurance reviews, particularly as these relate to teaching, itself
identified as a key ingredient in the 'quality' process. I briefly discussed the trend
towards mass education and lifelong learning and the impact these trends have on
teaching quality.

I next examined the problematic notion of quality and its assessment, both in a
broad institutional context, and more specifically, as it relates to teaching. This
discussion revealed that one cannot even begin to discuss sensibly the notion of
'quality' teaching and assessment without first exploring the theoretical and
philosophical foundations of teaching and learning which such notions presuppose,
notions themselves anchored within a broader educational theory. One key finding
to emerge, however, was that teaching is not a unitary phenomenon and there
appears to be both a generic component and a context-specific component related to
disciplinary practice.

In the third major section of this chapter I explored how this finding might relate to
social work education in particular. What might be the discipline-specific
contextual variables of social work education? I approached this issue obliquely by

examining the perennial theory/practice problematic, widely believed to be the kernel of social work education. This revealed something of a crisis in social work education, a disciplinary crisis mirroring the broader institutional crisis of quality. The brief excursion into social work education revealed similar contested terrain – conceptual, theoretical and epistemological – encountered in our discussion of quality teaching and its assessment. Underlying both sets of issues are broader concerns about knowledge, education, teaching and learning.

The issue at the most general level that this thesis attempts to address is how do we best teach social work students (more specifically, beginning social work students) to grapple with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice? Or more specifically, how do we best teach students to think theoretically and critically about action? But as the above discussion indicates, such a question must be navigated by a circuitous route which explores key educational and philosophical terrain. This will be the task of the next two chapters. In chapter two I shall explore the philosophical conceptions of knowledge which bear on the issue and in chapter three the different paradigmatic and philosophical approaches to educational theory in a broad sense, particularly as these relate to teaching and learning issues. An integral part of this discussion will be an analysis of the relationship between how knowledge is framed and understood, and teaching and learning. This paves the way for an examination of social work education in more detail within the light of educational theory. Finally, drawing on the discussion in both chapters, I will to outline and justify the particular theoretical approach I have adopted. As will become clear later, this approach, once adopted, spells out clear implications not only for educational practice, but also for research practice. In

other words, the theoretical framework in this thesis bears an inextricable relationship to the research methodology, itself the subject matter of chapter four.

Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and the amount of the knowing.
(Aldous Huxley 1945, p. vii)

CHAPTER TWO

KNOWLEDGE AND THEORIES

INTRODUCTION

The opening chapter identified a dual *practical* problem in which two 'institutions', higher education and social work, were seen to be in 'crisis' (to borrow technocratic discourse); crises triggering systemic interventions. In higher education, government has viewed the crisis in 'quality' terms (of teaching and learning, and management practices) and the systemic intervention has been the Quality Assurance project. In social work, major stakeholders have constructed the crisis as the 'theory/practice problematic' and the systemic intervention has been the prima facie increasing power of non-academic bodies to shape social work curriculum. These practical problems can be viewed within an **ontological** framework: what is the nature of these crises? Chapter one began the process of answering this question.

Examination of both these crises revealed contested conceptual, theoretical and epistemological terrain – a *theoretical* problem, which I have suggested can only be navigated with the assistance of an **epistemological** compass with clearly marked bearings for educational theory. So before we can begin to examine educational

paradigms in general and social work education specifically in terms of their views on knowledge and teaching and learning we need to explore the theoretical and paradigmatic bedrock from which these educational paradigms draw their theoretical springs. Initially, this requires an excursion into the realm of epistemology, the domain of traditional philosophy concerned with questions of knowledge. I begin with knowledge rather than teaching and learning per se since I will argue that once we decide what we mean by knowledge, how we frame it and understand it, this will spell out some implications for teaching and learning because knowledge is viewed as the currency of the teaching/learning exchange. There are two further reasons why exploration of epistemological issues is vital to this thesis. First, "in the contemporary world, knowledge is increasingly regarded as a, if not the, critical commodity for economic welfare" (Henkel 1995, p. 67). This echoes Lyotard's (1984) notion "that countries (or nation-states) will compete for knowledge in the same way that they once battled for control over territory" (Hatty n.d., p. 58) and Bohme and Stehr's (1986) argument that "the rise of science as a prestigious and potent form of knowledge has seen the retreat of property and labour as the main forces driving and organizing society" (Hatty n.d., p. 61). Second, and this will become clear later, the teaching subject at the centre of this research, *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, while not so named, is essentially, in the wake of the death rattle of philosophy of education subjects, an attempt to slide epistemology into the back door of the teaching and learning enterprise in higher education. This is significant because at James Cook University in North Queensland, the research location, philosophy is not available as a study option.

I have divided this task into two chapters. Chapter two has a more purely epistemological focus, taking up the key philosophical issues raised in chapter one. Chapter three has an educational focus, but builds on chapter two by examining how various educational paradigms approach the question – how is *knowledge* framed and understood? – and what is the relationship between teaching and learning? As we progress, so will the emerging relationship between these two questions.

I.   KNOWLEDGE – THE ISSUES

What is knowledge? How do we know what we know (or think we know what we know?) How does knowledge 'grow', change? Once we begin asking such questions we are launched into a trajectory which encompasses a vast range of related issues concerning knowledge, truth, belief, justification, and the relationship between theory and practice? And once we lift the lid on epistemology we discover that we have opened Pandora's Box, since epistemological issues cannot be divorced from ontological ones; that is, we cannot discuss knowledge in isolation from the knower. We are confronted with another set of questions concerning the relationship between the knower and the known. Once we initiate these inquiries we have entered the traditional realm of ontology, and as we shall see, there exist strong grounds for collapsing the traditional distinction between epistemology and ontology. Craib (1992, p. 18), in an extension of Roy Bhaskar's (1978) work, for instance, demonstrates that "the way we gain knowledge about the world, what comprises an adequate explanation, depends on the sort of beings that exist in the world: to put it another way, the object we are studying determines the knowledge we can have of it." And we need not stop here either, since another set of questions

belonging to the traditional domain of ethics, and social and political philosophy for that matter, raise their heads: what are the ethical issues involved in knowledge use? What are the political and social dimensions of knowledge and how do these impact on what is known and the knower? All these issues have absorbed human beings since the dawn of recorded civilization. They preoccupied not just the ancient Greeks, but also the philosophers of the two other 'cradles of civilization', ancient India and China.

It is both impossible and unnecessary to provide an overview of the whole of Western philosophy since the Greeks with a pinch of Indian and Chinese philosophy thrown in for good measure. But in order to grapple with teaching and learning issues in higher education, particularly when the subject at the interface of the teaching/learning exchange is epistemological in nature, it is evident that one cannot simply ignore these issues. I propose to focus on those philosophical issues which simply cannot be avoided for this thesis to maintain some semblance of credibility. They are threefold:

- What is knowledge? (How do we justify it?)

- What is the relationship between what is known and the person who knows?

- How does knowledge impact on theory/practice issues?

The major focus in this chapter is contemporary twentieth century exposés of these issues. But in order to locate these it is important to examine briefly their historical antecedents. Consequently, the chapter consists of three sections following this introduction. I begin with a very brief examination of the ancient Greeks. Second, I explore these issues, again briefly, within the context of the rise of modern

philosophy, looking at Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant and Hegel. Third, I survey the contemporary scene. This is done by reviewing the major contemporary 'paradigms': positivism/post-positivism; hermeneutics; critical theory and poststructuralism. I sneak in a fifth approach between critical theory and poststructuralism, feminist epistemology, an approach which straddles several paradigms. While not strictly speaking a paradigm in the sense I am using it, it is too significant an approach to be buried. I use the term paradigm in the broad-based sense originally employed by Kuhn (1970) to signify "a basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba 1990, p. 17). Guba acknowledges Masterman's (1970) critique of the notion (Kuhn used the term in 21 different ways), and suggests the heuristic advantages of leaving the term open-ended, but nonetheless recognizes the importance of providing a loose scaffold. Thus, he suggests (Guba 1990, p. 18) that all paradigms, past and emergent, can be characterized by their respective proponents' responses to three basic questions:

Ontological: What is the nature of the 'knowable'? Or, what is the nature of 'reality'?

Epistemological: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?

Methodological: How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?

Guba suggests that "the answers given to these questions may be termed, as sets, the basic belief systems or *paradigms* that might be adopted" (p. 18). Note that this schema bears a close relationship to the original three questions with which I framed this entire chapter. In the discussion on critical theory I shall focus largely on the prime exponent of it in recent times, Jürgen Habermas. I have chosen

Habermas as the exemplar for two reasons. First, because he is the philosopher/theorist most generally recognized as making the largest contribution to bridging the two major and seemingly irreconcilable traditions in contemporary philosophy and social theory, positivism and hermeneutics (Giddens 1985); though in so doing, he has effectively 'mainstreamed' a third tradition. Second, Habermas' tripartite classification between approaches to knowledge and enquiry which effectively categorizes positivism, hermeneutics and critical theory, forms a useful framing device for the entire thesis. As Guba's definition above indicates, paradigms have ontological, epistemological and methodological dimensions. Habermas' triparte schema 'divides' paradigms along each of these dimensions and has been taken up by Carr and Kemmis (1986) to form a similar threefold paradigm classification for education. Consequently, Habermas' scheme frames the epistemological and ontological issues of this chapter, the educational paradigms of chapter three, and the methodological approaches of chapter four. This gives the thesis structural coherence.

I stress, however, that I use Habermas' schema heuristically; precisely because it is a useful frame for examining the issues of concern in this thesis. I do not endorse wholesale his particular theoretical positions. As the discussion unfolds it will become apparent that there are some significant problems with Habermas' position and this will lead me to the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault (though I shall also allude to Jacques Derrida). Many would argue that Foucault is representative of a fourth paradigm, poststructuralism; though Foucault himself would be most unhappy with this conceptual straitjacket. Nonetheless, I consider it useful to include a discussion of poststructuralism as a fourth paradigm, since

epistemologically and ontologically it appears to represent a marked disjunction from the other three paradigms. But a caveat is in order: an over-simplistic marriage between Foucault's epistemological ideas and those of poststructuralism, itself far from a unitary position, has led to some serious confusions concerning the epistemological status of Foucault's position, a status that is often conceptualized in terms of the so-called foundationalism/fragmentation debate.

Marshalling the recent work of Falzon (1998), in the second section, following the historical survey of issues relating to knowledge and its cognates, I shall attempt to demonstrate that this is a flawed dichotomy and that these two positions do not offer genuine alternatives at all, but are in fact part of the same foundational, totalizing metaphysics. The proper alternative to foundationalism is not fragmentation, but dialogue. But that is to tell the story before we have begun... This second section consists of three parts. First, a critique of foundational metaphysics; second, a critique of the fragmentation vision; and finally, an exploration of Foucault's notion of 'dialogue' as interpreted by Falzon.

Having traversed this philosophical terrain, in section three I shall then be in a position to clear conceptual rubble concerning terms such as 'knowledge', 'paradigm', 'model', 'theory', and so on. I have titled this third section *Conceptual and Onomastic Clarification.*

II. 'THE SOLUTIONS' – AN HISTORICAL SWEEP

2.1 Ancient Greece

2.1.1 *Plato* (c. 427-347 BC)

Plato and pupil Aristotle had the most fully developed theories of knowledge and education of the period, theories which, remarkably, survived unchallenged for almost two thousand years! (Bowen and Hobson 1987). The springboard for Plato's epistemology was the observation by sixth century BC Mediterranean 'leisure thinkers' that the world is in a process of constant change. He concluded that in the "twilight world of change and decay" (Plato 1987, p. 247) nothing could be said about sensory phenomena with certainty. However, unwilling to relinquish the quest for certainty, Plato posited his celebrated Theory of the Forms, "the belief that *noumena*, or ideas, are more than mental constructions – they have a real and timeless existence" (Bowen and Hobson 1987, p. 22). Transient sensory phenomena are conceived to be simply imperfect instances of ultimate forms. True knowledge can only be of these timeless and absolute forms. Plato solved the problem of how we come to have knowledge of the forms themselves by suggesting they are innate. Not surprisingly, he is reticent on the mechanisms for such 'test tube' knowledge. The conclusion that Plato draws from this is that 'knowing' is simply 'recollection', or becoming aware of what is already latent within us (Bowen and Hobson 1987).

Plato further argued that despite the fourth century BC version of the micro chip implanted in our brains, we do not easily apprehend this knowledge. This spawned a key notion of teaching and learning where Plato, building on his teacher Socrates, developed the method of dialectic (to be distinguished from Hegelian dialectic –

see below). For Plato, the dialectic method is a process of rational argument for establishing satisfactory statements; it is critical of assumptions; and it has an even deeper meaning as the process whereby we come to know conclusively (Lee in Plato 1987; Bowen and Hobson 1987). Drawing on Socrates' conception of teaching as psychic midwifery, Plato used the analogy of childbirth. Just as the pregnant woman must ultimately manage her own labour, albeit with assistance from the midwife, so too must the learner, constrained by his or her innate capabilities, take responsibility for learning, assisted by Socratic probing in order to produce the best result (Bowen and Hobson 1987). It is interesting to note that the term *maieutic,* referring to the Socratic mode of enquiry, traces its etymology to 'midwife' (Thompson – *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 9th Edition* 1995).

The idea of innate knowledge also allowed Plato to explain individual differences in intelligence. This was his notion of Gold, Silver and Bronze people where, like the earth's elements, we are each born with differing intellectual rations. It also provided rationalization of the existing social order in which slaves and workers supported a small aristocracy! (Plato was born into an aristocratic Athenian family) (Bowen and Hobson 1987). We can also see in Plato's denigration of sensory knowledge the seeds of the mind/body dichotomy taken up so fervently by Descartes in the seventeenth century, a dichotomy which still exerts a potent influence on contemporary epistemological and ontological ideas.

We can summarize Plato's epistemology thus: 'man' (and this was not simply Plato's sexist language – women were not entitled to an education at all) was "endowed, according to a ratio of nature, with pre-existent knowledge that, if

properly activated, enable[d] him to come to an understanding of the world"
(Bowen and Hobson 1987, p. 25).

2.1.2   *Aristotle* (384-323 BC)

The basic philosophical difference between pupil and teacher was that Plato was an

idealist, Aristotle a realist. Aristotle rejected Plato's dichotomy effectively

legislating two worlds of reality by arguing that all our knowledge is of the real

world (perceived through the senses) – all objects are composed of both matter and

form. Plato's Forms belong to material objects. It is unnecessary, Aristotle argued,

to introduce another order of reality to explain the one we perceive directly in

everyday experience (Bowen and Hobson 1987). This explains why the two men

differ in their primary method of reasoning. For Plato, because all knowledge is

derived from innate forms, deduction from general principles (universals) to

particular facts is central. By contrast, Aristotle, believing that knowledge of forms

or essences of objects occurs through experiencing particular instances of the

object, favoured inductive reasoning, which starts with particular facts or instances

and moves towards generalizations based on these (Aristotle 1987). This leads to

'the problem of induction': one can never experience all instances of a class or

general principle, therefore one can never reach certain conclusions. Aristotle

suggested that a final intuitive jump – what he calls 'intuitive reasoning' – is

required and one of the teacher's central tasks is to provide the child with concrete

experiences necessary to make this final reflective judgement, which leads to

definite knowledge (Bowen and Hobson 1987). This comes about because, in stark

contrast to Plato's conception of a child born with innate knowledge, Aristotle's

child is born with a mind like a blank slate, the famous (or infamous!) *tabula rasa*

doctrine. Individual sense impressions are inscribed on the blank slate, then latent reasoning powers mould the general principles or knowledge.

I cannot overstate the powerful influence that this model of how the mind acquires knowledge has had on traditional pedagogy. It has lent support to what Paulo Freire (1970) calls the 'banking' concept of education, where the teacher's central task is to deposit items of knowledge into the child's empty and malleable mind. Aristotle's views also demonstrate the powerful relationships between knowledge, ontology, learning and teaching. Once we adopt a particular viewpoint about one of these issues, it spells out clear implications for the others. (I am not suggesting a relationship of logical necessity, but one in which the options are considerably reduced.) For example, in Aristotle's case, if we perceive knowledge to be the abstraction of general principles from repeated exposure to individual instances requiring a reflective jump to reach 'true' knowledge, all of which is inscribed on an originally blank slate, we are not just making claims about knowledge. We have begun to make ontological claims about the state of the knower (blank slate) and we have implied how learning takes place and what the role of the teacher is (to inscribe the blank slate with the necessary items of knowledge). This is why in certain crucial respects the two areas I posed at the beginning of this chapter – epistemology and teaching/learning – are, in addition to ontology, inextricably related.

One can discern in Plato's and Aristotle's views the origins of the great rationalism/ empiricism debate concerning the source of knowledge – crudely caricatured as the relative roles of innate knowledge versus sensory experience – which has

bedevilled thinkers through the ages and has seen its most poignant expression in the differences between Anglo-American philosophy (largely empiricist) and Continental philosophy (largely rational).

A final issue bearing on the present thesis is the theory/practice question, a distinction which appears to have been spawned by Aristotle in his notion of 'theoretical' and 'practical' life. But the Greek version of the opposition between theory and practice as articulated by Aristotle was quite different to contemporary versions, emphasizing as it did, the distinction between philosophical and political life; the latter, of course, being far more central to the lives of all Greek citizens than it is today (though even here it was recognized that the distinction referred to abstract ideals and that 'theory' and 'practice' were simply two poles of human existence, or ways of life) (Lobkowicz 1967).

> It certainly was not an opposition between abstract knowledge and concrete application; nor was it an opposition between 'theoretical' endeavours, such as science, and 'lived life'. Rather, it was an opposition (and tension) between what was strictly human and what was divine in man.
> (Lobkowicz 1967, pp. 26-27)

Aristotle, probably following Plato, distinguishes three kinds of thinking or knowledge: 'theoretical', 'practical' and 'productive'. Theoretical knowledge pursues 'truth' as an end in itself and has no obvious relationship to either 'doing' or 'making'. Practical knowledge is concerned with human actions, it aims at practical truth, "conclusions whose sole purpose is to guide human actions" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 36). Productive knowledge relates to 'making' in the sense of cultural artifacts. Contemplative thinking is the appropriate form for theoretical activities; *praxis* (informed action) for practical knowledge, and *poietike* ('making action') for productive knowledge. A key feature of *praxis* is that it is guided by

phronesis (a moral disposition to act truly and justly) (Carr and Kemmis 1986; see also Aristotle 1976). Note that Aristotle's distinction is based on *ends*: "theoretical knowledge is an end in itself..., practical knowledge aims at ordering human action and productive knowledge, at producing a material thing" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 127). What is interesting, however, particularly for our later discussion, is that for Aristotle, only theoretical knowledge captures an eternal and unchanging reality. Both practical and productive knowledge are transient and changeable.

> ...in a sense the most significant thing that can be said about the Greek treatment of the relationship between thought relevant to action and action itself is that it cannot truly be subsumed under the heading 'theory and practice'. (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 43)

2.2   Modern Western Philosophy

Medieval philosophy had fused Christian beliefs with those of Plato and Aristotle. It was a period characterized by respect for predecessors (some would say dotage) and acceptance of their methods. "If a new discovery about nature contradicted one of Aristotle's principles, for example, it would probably have been assumed that it was the discovery that was in error" (Stewart 1997, p. 72). Beginning in the sixteenth century there was a general trend away from the authority and dogmatism of the medieval period. Once scientists began to use experimental methods to test their theoretical ideas they were far more reluctant to accept authority, particularly when their experimental findings yielded different results. The calcified 'facts' inherited from the ancient Greeks were slowly dissolving. It is important to note the wide-ranging sweep of this erosion: not just cherished scientific facts and theories, but also justification for the monarchy and doubts about the existence of God (Stewart 1997).

The emergence of so-called modern philosophy cannot be grasped without locating it in the broader rise of modernity and the social, political and economic environment which framed this. The dramatic changes that spawned European modernity were vast and did not arrive gift-wrapped as a changeling on the doorstep of modernity. I shall mention just three; not exhaustive, but enough to set the context of dramatic change: the voyages of discovery beginning in the fifteenth century; the religious ferment leading to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century; and the so-called 'scientific revolution' of the seventeenth century. This was the beginning of a radically different world where the feudalism of the Middle Ages and the Divine Right of Kings yielded, philosophically, to the Divine Right of Reason. Indeed, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the West are often referred to as the 'Age of Reason', with the eighteenth century called the 'Enlightenment'. "This is the legacy of the Enlightenment, the simple, profound, unquestioned conviction that Reason, Freedom, and Progress naturally imply one another" (Cahoone 1996, pp. 27-28). It would be a mistake, however, to conclude, as Cahoone points out, that this legacy was without dissenters from the first. It is both arrogant and ignorant to suppose that it took sophisticated twentieth century thinkers to topple universal, naïve acceptance of Enlightenment rationality. It is also important to recognize that the problems of philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth century were intimately related to the advances of science at the time. "Much work in philosophy was an attempt to find foundations for the new science" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 527). Indeed, it was philosophy's role vis-à-vis science which ultimately led to the split between Anglo-American philosophy and Continental philosophy – a split that still exists – with Continental philosophers emphasizing questions of existence and subjectivity and Anglo-American

philosophers arguing that "philosophy could tell us little or nothing about the human condition, its role was to clarify concepts and be a handmaiden to science" (Stewart 1997, p. 71).

2.2.1 *Descartes* (1596-1650)

It is against this tumultuous background of rapid social and intellectual change that Descartes' views must be considered. In an age of uncertainty, doubt and insecurity, Descartes made it his personal mission to establish secure foundations for knowledge. It must be stated clearly at the outset that Descartes perceived mathematics as the paragon of all knowledge (Lobkowicz 1967). Motivated by this quest for certainty Descartes set out to establish secure foundations for knowledge by employing what has become known as the 'method of doubt'. The basic strategy, originally outlined in his *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 1968a, orig. 1637), is to continue doubting all propositions until one reaches a stage beyond doubt. This led to Descartes' famous dictum: *I think, therefore I am,* a proposition "so certain and so evident that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were not capable of shaking it" (Descartes 1968a, pp. 53-54). It also led to the important conclusion that "this 'I', that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body" (Descartes 1968a, p. 54) and by the end of the second meditation Descartes effectively erases the senses as a source of knowledge (Descartes 1968b, p. 112).

A number of important points arise. First, Descartes revives *à la* Plato the sharp distinction between the rational mind and the fallible senses, lauding the merits of the former (the so-called rationalism/empiricism debate). Descartes' theory of

knowledge is rationalistic: one attains truth or true knowledge by means of unaided reason. For Descartes, knowledge of the world comes not from the concrete sensory world, but from the world of innate ideas. Second, in the hands of Descartes and certain successors this became the vehicle for so-called Cartesian dualism: the sharp mind/body demarcation. Third, Descartes is making an ontological claim about human beings who are in 'essence' conscious, rational thinking beings. "Descartes is not affirming self and thought taken separately as in a subject and verb, but a thinking self as a unity, something whose 'essence' consists in thinking" (Watson 1971, p. 154).

There are a number of problems with Descartes' view. For now, I want to highlight just one. Descartes' epistemology (and ontology – again note the crucial connection between the 'knower' and the 'known' or between knowledge and the mind) opens a huge chasm between the self and the world. "The self has become an obstacle that Descartes has to overcome in order to have knowledge of the world" (Falzon 1998, pp. 21-22). This is sometimes referred to as the 'subjectivist trap', a situation where the self, enclosed within its own circle, desperately seeks to escape and regain access to the world. I shall return to this issue in much greater detail below.

2.2.2 *The British Empiricists – Locke (1632-1704) and Hume (1711-1776)*

The subjectivist trap provided the impetus for British empiricists. How do we escape from the circle of the self? How do we regain access to the world? John Locke and David Hume, rejecting Descartes' innate ideas, "turn[ed] away from the self to the world of concrete experience, and us[ed] this concrete experience to

account for our knowledge of the world" (Falzon 1998, p. 22). This placed them within an Aristotelian tradition rather than a Platonian one. In developing his thesis that all knowledge is derived from experience Locke (1950; orig. 1690) also revived Aristotle's *tabula rasa* doctrine; though in Locke's case the image of the human mind was as an "empty cabinet", a cabinet to be furnished with ideas by experience. Again, note the close marriage between epistemology and ontology: the knower and the known.

> Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself.
> (Locke 1950, p. 42)

This view was the dominant doctrine of science for well over two centuries (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963) – despite attacks by Hegel and Kant on philosophical grounds (see below). Locke solved the problem of how the mind obtains knowledge of its own operations by talking of 'reflection', which was essentially ideas about ideas (Watson 1971). This loosened the empirical straitjacket somewhat, since in important respects Locke's reflection was a form of introspection, methodologically perhaps not so far from Descarte, though Locke was far more systematic and comprehensive in his approach.

Although they shared much in common about the *origins* of knowledge, one of Hume's major contributions and points of departure from Locke, was his view concerning the *justification* of knowledge that *causal* explanations, in the usual sense, are not possible; we must content ourselves with mere *descriptions* of the operations of mental life. Hume noted that all reasoning about factual matters

seems to be based on the relation of cause and effect, but in actuality this reduces to nothing more than the observation of the succession of two phenomena, an observation entitling us only to description, not explanation. "I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other" (Hume 1992, orig. 1748, p. 282).

This relates to the 'problem of induction', raised above in connection with Aristotle. It is Hume who is usually credited with having formulated it in its most explicit form: the notion that because one can never experience all instances of a class or general principle, one can never draw definitive conclusions. Hume notes the traditional assumption derived from two propositions, the second inferred from the first: "*I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect,* and *I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects* (Hume 1992, p. 284). But, Hume cogently argues – so cogently that 250 years later it is yet to be refuted – although this will *probably* be the case, there is no *logical necessity* for it to be so. "If we be, therefore, engaged by arguments to put trust in past experience, and make it the standard of our future judgement, these arguments must be probable only. ... To endeavour, therefore, the proof of this last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question" (Hume 1992, p. 285).

Hume's notions are significant, since "the view that cause and effect are linked by a necessity which transcends our experience" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 527) was held almost universally until that time. Despite the problem of induction – indeed because of it – Hume lent credence to an empiricist account of science rather than a rationalist one. That is because he established that the connection between cause and effect is empirical, not logically necessary. "He had shown that even our most carefully formulated knowledge – that is, even science – is built up empirically. The pattern of experience is not, as mathematics is, held together by logical and necessary relations. Experience has to be lived, it cannot be imagined" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 529).

Given that one of the key motivations of empiricists such as Locke and Hume was to regain access to the world by breaking out of the circle of the self, we must ask how successful were they in achieving this? Falzon (1998, p. 22) argues that the British empiricists, despite their differences from rationalists like Descartes in terms of the sources of knowledge, are no more successful in breaking through the solipsistic barriers. They turn to concrete experience but interpret it subjectivistically in the form of sense-impressions.

> It should be stressed that there is nothing primitive or given about the notion of the sense-impression. It is a sophisticated interpretation of one's experience, which Descartes introduces and which the empiricists continue to embrace. And so, instead of the world, the empiricists find only series of isolated subjective sense-impressions which, as Hume conclusively demonstrates, are insufficient to justify any kind of knowledge of the world. Thus, the empiricists remain caught in the egocentric predicament, and the existence of an external world remains uncertain.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 22)

2.2.3 Kant's (1724-1804) Salvage Operation – Regaining Access to the World

Kant is said to have awoken from his 'dogmatic slumbers' by reading Hume, who had argued that causality was neither self-evident nor capable of logical demonstration. Kant was convinced by Hume's argument and "also realized that this same lack of certainty must be true of all other principles fundamental to philosophy and science" (Watson 1971, pp. 224-225). Kant perceived two options: accept Hume's skepticism, or 'discover' *a priori* principles which could surmount the problem of induction. Kant, as committed rationalist, chose the latter. He argued that there were *some* connections which are logically necessary because they underlie experience; without them experience would be impossible, the mind could not grasp the external world at all (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963). Kant's method was to derive these principles "from careful inquiry into the logical forms of judgement that we make about the world" (Watson 1971, p. 225). Kant referred to these transcendental principles as 'categories'. There were twelve in all. They were *a priori* "to the extent that they are universal, necessary, and independent of sense experience" (Watson 1971, p. 225). Taking Hume's notion of causation, Kant accepted that we cannot verify experientially a statement like *every event has a cause*, yet we accept it as valid. And we must do so, argued Kant, because causality and the other categories "are conditions for the possibility of experience, that is, without causality and the other categories one would have no way for ordering experiences into a phenomenal world of objects. ... We cannot know causality from experience, but we do know it *a priori*" (Watson 1971, p. 225).

While the kinship with Descartes' innate ideas is apparent, there is also a significant difference. Human beings are not born with ideas per se, but with

"principles of ordering that provide the conditions for the possibility of experience" (Watson 1971, p. 226).

A salient feature of Kant's notion of the human mind is that it is an active one. It is not the *tabula rasa* of Aristotle, nor the 'empty cabinet' of Locke. Kant's mind organizes the raw data of the world of experience into meaningful phenomena by use of the transcendental categories and space and time (Watson 1971). This ontological/ epistemological notion also has significant implications for teaching and learning, though interestingly, Kant himself, does not seem to have exercised a direct influence on educational philosophy. A related point can be driven home forcefully if we look at the question which inspired Kant's philosophy: 'Why does the human mind understand so naturally what goes on outside it?' (Bronowski and Mazlish 163, p. 533). Kant's 'solution' was one which removed the wedge between humans and the natural world; the knower and the known had 'shacked up' together.

Kant agreed, with Locke and Hume, "that knowledge comes from sensory perception; but this is perception not of things as they really are, but only as they appear to us (phenomena). We perceive phenomena the way our mind makes us see them. The mind selects, according to the structures arising from the categories, from the welter of impinging sensations and imposes on them the unity inherent in the principles" (Watson 1971, p. 227).

Lobkowicz (1967) notes that Kant had much to say on the theory/practice issue, though strictly speaking, he framed his discussion in terms of theoretical and

practical philosophy. Kant's use of the concept 'practical' is radically different from that of traditional Greek and medieval use. Recall that Aristotle's distinction between theoretical, practical and productive knowledge was based on *ends*, the purposes for which the knowledge was pursued; although he added *subject matter* as a secondary type of distinction. The Arabs and medieval thinkers such as Aquinas demonstrated that the same subject matter can be studied both theoretically and practically. But it did not occur to them to give primacy to the distinction in terms of *subject matter* rather than *ends*. Indeed, "they never felt that one could meaningfully distinguish between theoretical and practical philosophy solely in terms of the subject matter involved" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 127). Kant's distinction, on the other hand, between theoretical and practical philosophy "is based solely upon a distinction between the ontological character of their respective subject matters" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 128). This becomes significant because ultimately Kant invokes different conceptions of causality for them. Having salvaged the concept of causation from Hume's critique with his *a priori* categories of understanding, Kant argues that nature and the natural sciences have to be studied in terms of natural concepts, and dealt with in terms of deterministic natural causality. "Morality, on the contrary, has to be analyzed in terms of the...concept of freedom, and the causality involved is a totally different causality of free will" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 129). This distinction is relevant to contemporary debates about the epistemological status of the natural and social sciences and in it we can see the precursor of the positivist/hermeneutic divide.

This discussion further reinforces the close links between epistemology and ontology. But it also demonstrates another dimension: the potentially intimate

relationship between ethics and knowledge. This becomes important for our later discussion of the contemporary scene, since Kant's emphasis on the concept of freedom and the causality of free will was symptomatic of a new self-confidence, a 'new practical humanism' as the new enlightened 'Man', slowly freeing himself from the apron strings of the medieval God and his hierarchical order, took his first tentative steps towards divine status himself. Prior to Kant, human self-determination applied only to the ethico-political aspects of human existence. Kant added a gnosological self-determination. But in the hands of Hegel and Marx

> ...philosophers began to realize that the same notion could be extended beyond the realm of 'doing' to the realm of 'making', from the realm of ethics and politics to that of economics and technology. ...no one before Hegel, and in a sense no one before Marx, ever claimed that man can transform himself by transforming the *material* world. But as soon as this idea emerges, the role traditionally played by practice, in the sense of ethico-political doing, will decrease until in Marx it completely gives way to the notion of a *homo faber creans seipsum*.
> (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 139)

Kant had recognized the limitations of the empiricist picture, and thus set out to re-establish the possibility of knowing the world. Did he succeed? Falzon (1998, p. 22) thinks not, arguing that "he does not do so by questioning the subjectivistic interpretation of experience as sense-impressions, by questioning the subject. He retains that aspect of empiricism. Rather, he seeks to do so through an explicit reassertion of the foundational subject, only now in a vastly enhanced and expanded role. In other words, the subject itself is now employed to overcome the limitations of the subjectivist picture." Kant achieves this by introducing his notion of the Transcendental Subject. Now "the self actively organizes its sense impressions...in accordance with the universal, *a priori* categories of understanding. As a result we are no longer confined to immediate sense-impressions but regain access to a wider world, a world that goes beyond

immediate subjective experience" (Falzon 1998, p. 22). Falzon argues further that

the problem of solipsism emerges yet again. Kant's Transcendental Subject now

assumes divine status, replacing the authority of the God of the Middle Ages.

> ... in Kant's account the subject is emphatically reinforced in its central position. It becomes no less than the sovereign, God-like creator and source of the world, Solomon's unprecedentedly arrogant transcendental self. With Kant we may have regained access to the world, but the world that we have regained access to is one that is entirely subordinate to the organizing self. Experience is still interpreted from the standpoint of the subject, interpreted now in the extended sense that sense-impressions are shaped and ordered in accordance with the subject's categories of understanding. This is mastery, but at the same time self-enclosure. The only world we can have access to is a world of ordered appearances, the phenomenal world that exists 'for us', and there now emerges the well-known Kantian problem as to whether there exist any noumenal 'things in themselves'.
> (Falzon 1998, pp. 22-23)

Falzon (1998, p. 23) notes a further problem that arises for accounts such as Kant's

which attempt to comprehend the world in its totality. "Because its ruling

categories are supposed to provide the ultimate basis for explanation and

understanding, it is unable to account in any way for these categories themselves.

... In short, it is not possible for a totalizing account to comprehend its ruling

categories in their emergence, to comprehend them *historically*. To speak of our

ruling categories as being 'innate' or 'a priori'...is not a solution to this problem. It

is simply to turn our orienting principles into articles of faith which are not to be

questioned."

The absence of a historical dimension, Falzon (1998, p. 23) notes, is a salient

feature of both Descartes' and Kant's metaphysical subjectivism. "These thinkers

are unable to explain how the subject might have emerged, to give any kind of

developmental or historical account of it, and they have to posit it as ahistorical, pregiven, an absolute origin."

2.2.4 Hegel's (1770-1831) Rescue Operation – Invoke History: "The Impersonal Goddess"

Hegel's philosophy begins from the question which had engaged Kant: what is the relationship between the mind and the outside world? How do we understand the 'other'? Note again, the intimate liaison between epistemological and ontological issues. Hegel also felt that knowledge would be impossible without a profound unity between knower and known (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963). Hegel's conception of this unity – one of opposites – gave rise to his so-called 'dialectic method', which had its harbinger in Socrates. The method of dialectic begins with a *thesis* – for instance, a person who seeks to know. The external world, resisting the knower, presents an *antithesis*. The conflict between thesis and antithesis is resolved by a fusion between the two, a *synthesis*. Knowledge itself is spawned by this fusion between knower and known. Again, epistemology and ontology wed. This notion of dialectic was not new. Earlier thinkers had applied it to the activities of the mind. Now Hegel was suggesting it applied equally to concrete reality (and its relationship with the mind) (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963).

Hegel's notion of dialectic had important implications. The first concerned the *nature of reality*. Recall that empiricist philosophers such as Locke and Hume conceived of two worlds – "the public world outside a man's head, and a private world inside it. For the empiricists, these were loosely connected by the man's senses; but the two were as concrete, and as separate, as a colour film and a black-

and-white copy" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 537). Kant, dissatisfied with this simple picture, recognized that humans were not simply blank sheets of paper who passively received the outside world's stamped impressions. For Kant, there is reciprocal influence between knower and known. The knower is an active, creative agent and it is this creative agency which constitutes Kant's 'self' or 'ego'. But this personal ego is linked to a universal and transcendental ego because it shares the *a priori* concepts, Kant's categories, common to all human beings (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963). Kant, despite the simplistic claims that he was an idealist, also "believed that there is a reality which is independent of men; behind the thing as it is known, there is what Kant called a thing-in-itself" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 538). It was Hegel who retreated to idealism by denying this 'thing-in-itself'. Hegel's dialectic dissolved the distinction between knower and known. If Kant's knower and known had 'shacked up' together, then Hegel's had achieved the ultimate cosmic union: they were one. For Hegel, "there is no reality until we know it. We exist by virtue of knowing the outside world – but the world also exists only by virtue of our knowing it" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 538). Descartes, recall, had said: "I think, therefore I am". Hegel went further: "thinking does more than prove my existence: it creates it – in Hegel's phrase, 'Being is thought' – and it also proves and creates the existence of the outside world. In the dialectic, Hegel claimed, 'the opposition between being and knowing' is ended. The knower and what he knows, thesis and antithesis, are fused in the single synthesis of experience" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 538).

Reification of the subject was complete, its exalted status beyond even that of Kant's Transcendental Subject. And Hegel himself was acutely aware of this:

> I hold it one of the best signs of the times, that humanity has been presented to
> its own eyes as worthy of reverence. It is a proof that the nimbus is vanishing
> from the heads of the oppressors and gods of the earth. Philosophers are now
> proving the dignity of man.
> (Letter to a friend quoted in Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 538)

The second important implication of Hegel's dialectic concerns *history*. And this is
critical. The essence of dialectic is that thesis spawns antithesis and that the
ensuing conflict is resolved only by a synthesis that transcends both. But
remember, Hegel is not simply referring to ideas; the dialectic refers also to the
reality of the concrete world. "If [this] everyday world is subject to a dialectic
process, then it is always in a state of change. But more than this: because the
dialectic process always moves to a higher synthesis, the changes in the world are
for the better – at least, they are changes in the direction of more complexity,
integration, of greater fullness. The dialectic process is not merely a progression;
by its very nature, it is a progress" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 540). From
the perspective of the twentieth century (or at least some of the perspectives) there
is nothing striking about this notion. But contextualized within the intellectual
milieu of the time, it is a startling thesis. Hegel had effectively "elevated the
passing of time to the rank of a creative force" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p.
539).

> In the Middle Ages, it had occurred to no one to think that the future would be
> better than the present; no one thought that it would even be different. To us,
> this is a flat view of the world, but it remained general well into the eighteenth
> century. Aquinas gave no attention to the passage of time, and Descartes and
> Locke gave it little attention. Their systems were static, and the solutions
> which they offered to the problems of man and state seemed to them to be
> permanent.
> (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 540)

Hegel's conception of history is dramatic. For him it is not just the great
transformer, but Hegel suggests "that man *is* his history; and that only an

understanding of history can enable man to understand himself" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 540).

> History is always of great importance for a people; since by means of that it becomes conscious of the path of development taken by its own spirit, which expresses itself in laws, manners, customs, and deeds. History presents a people with their own image in a condition which thereby becomes objective to them.
> (Hegel quoted in Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 540)

Note that for Hegel history is not simply a record of the past; it is also progress, evolution, and in this context, Hegel regarded history as an account of the development of states. History is "the working of a universal spirit. The spirit is reason, and cannot be wrong; and the institution in which this spirit expresses itself is the state" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 542). A sleight-of-hand has occurred. Hegel began by proclaiming a philosophy of history on the grounds that history expresses the dialectic process of change. Now, it seems, change has calcified, "resolved forever in the political state at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as an expression of the spirit of a people. This is no longer a revolutionary but an authoritarian doctrine, and sounds much like the justification by Adolf Hitler of the destiny of Germany" (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963, p. 543). In Bronowski's and Mazlish's (1963, p. 545) terms, Hegel has "elevat[ed]...history to an impersonal goddess."

Although in Hegel there are only a handful of passages explicitly concerned with theory/practice relations, "this very problem is one of the cardinal points on which Hegel's whole philosophy turns" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 143). Hegel, however, deals with the issue under the oppositional rubric between that which ought to be and that which is (Lobkowicz 1967). Hegel claims to have transcended Kant's notion of the

limits of theoretical reason and once he does this, Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy effectively dissolves. It no longer makes sense to speak of studying practical philosophy because Hegel collapses the distinction between knower and known. Now we can study only what is, not what ought to be. "The Kantian *ought* disappears when the noumenal realm becomes accessible; consequently, Hegel's 'practical' philosophy...will be theoretical through and through" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 130).

Closer inspection of the above reveals some interesting corollaries for Hegel's notions of theory and practice relations. First, the aim of all will and action, according to Hegel, is rational knowledge. "In terms of theory and practice this amounts to saying that practice, taken as any action transforming a reality outside thought, is for the sake of theory. It exists for the sake of theory, not only because of it. Practice is for the sake of contemplation" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 153). Second, "the importance of will and action decreases as history progresses. For the more man acts upon reality, the more he succeeds in making it conform to the norms of reason; and the more he makes it conform to reason, the more he transforms it into a world to be contemplated rather than to be acted upon. ... When man succeeds in transforming the universe into a perfect embodiment of reason, will and action lose their function" (Lobkowicz 1967, pp. 153-154). This is a remarkable claim – not to mention an arrogant one – though one should consider the intellectual climate from which this position sprang: for many centuries humans were the helots of the Gods. Once the shackles began to loosen during the rapid and cataclysmic scientific advances beginning in the sixteenth century, humans, slowly released from the harness of subservience, began to wiggle their intellectual toes,

and noting the increasingly absent divine parents, began to sprout wings. New flight is an intoxicating experience and it took until the twentieth century (and large scale destruction of the planet) to begin to rein in the unbridled arrogance.

The third implication, and Lobkowicz (1967) argues, the most important, is that Hegel

> ...implies that there exists a point of time at which the task of philosophy consists in a 'justification' of existing reality and in a 'reconciliation' of man with the given world. History, as Hegel views it, is the process of the embodiment of Reason both in the external world and in man's mind. The whole history of humanity is nothing else than the gradual emergence and the eventual definitive break-through of reason.
> (Lobkowicz 1967, pp. 154-155)

Hegel sees himself as the person "who first saw that history had reached its completion and in whose philosophy this completed history became conscious of itself, thus reaching its ultimate perfection" (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 156). Lobkowicz provides a trenchant summary of what he describes as the 'leitmotif' of original Hegelian thought:

> ...that the subjectivism characteristic of German Idealism can be overcome only by declaring human subjectivity as infinite and therefore objective; that this declaration is credible only if man can reach what up to now was reserved to God, namely, Absolute Knowledge; and that such an Absolute Knowledge, in turn, can be attributed to man only if it is described as the consciousness adequate to a history which, having unfolded all of its potentialities, essentially has completed its course.
> (Lobkowicz 1967, p. 159)

With Kant, human beings had the temerity to begin a 'stairway to heaven', a stairway built on the steps of human rationality. In Hegel's hands there is no longer any need for such a stairway: humans soar heavenwards on the wings of reason. Nothing is now beyond the reach of omniscient human rationality. The

medieval God has been nudged from his throne and arrogant Man (the women were not invited) smirks earthward with his protective armour of reason.

As noted, the absence of a historical dimension in Descartes and Kant (and we can add Locke and Hume as well) was problematic and provided Hegel's impetus for what we might perceive with hindsight as his grand 'overcorrective' view of history, in which he wanted to freeze it at its zenith in the early nineteenth century. But I pre-empt. First, the 'advance' on his predecessors' views. Because Hegel's self was historically situated it became possible to explain the emergence of the self and its categories of understanding. So far so good. The escape from subjectivistic self-enclosure was launched. "Our frameworks of thinking can thus be comprehended historically, as emerging and as being transformed in the course of an ongoing interplay with that which is other" (Falzon 1998, p. 24). But – and here lies the catch – Hegel "cannot bring himself to surrender entirely to historical interplay and transformation. He cannot let go of the idea of an ultimate, timeless standpoint or foundation from which to comprehend the totality of things. He preserves the foundational self, and he does so in the form of that most extravagant expression of modernity's subjectivist metaphysics, the all-embracing Absolute Subject. As such, he falls into a renewed solipsistic self-enclosure" (Falzon 1998, p. 24).

This is a large claim. I want to unpackage it a little. There are two prongs. The first relates to Hegel's dialectic and his treatment of 'other' within this context. The second and related prong concerns Hegel's notion of history. First, *dialectic* and *'other'*. Hegel's inclusion of other – whether it be another person or the other

of the natural world – seems, prima facie, a reputable move towards opening up the space for genuine dialogue, and consequently, genuine reworking of positions, thus guarding against the danger of calcified views. However, as Falzon (1998, p. 24) points out, Hegel's other is always interpreted from the standpoint of the Absolute Subject. "From this standpoint, otherness is construed only in negative, derivative terms, as the alienated self, the pathological sundering of a larger whole. As such, the supremacy of the self is never decisively challenged or subverted by the encounter with that which is other. In the form of the Hegelian dialectic, the interplay between self and other is ultimately a one-sided conversation in which the self takes back what it has lost." This is precisely the kind of criticism levelled at Hegel's notion of dialectic and otherness by French anti-humanist thinkers.

> In actuality, dialectics does not liberate differences; it guarantees, on the contrary, that they can always be recaptured. The dialectical sovereignty of similarity consists of permitting differences to exist, but only under the rule of the negative, as an instance of non-being. They may appear as the successful subversion of the other, but contradiction secretly assists in the salvation of identities.
> (Foucault 1977a, pp. 184-85)

This leads to the second prong concerning *history*. For all his posturing about history, ultimately it shares the same fate as the 'other': Hegel subordinates it to the standpoint of the Absolute Subject. As we have already seen, history freezes at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the all-embracing, omniscient, rational subject reaches its pinnacle. Now we have perhaps the most extravagant example of totalizing metaphysics in the history of the planet, Hegel's Absolute Subject; an ironic landing for such a noble departure. The retreat to Absolute Idealism is complete. Hegel cannot save it because reality in its entirety, history in its entirety, can be understood by this Absolute Subject without recourse to anything beyond this 'noble savage'. But there is a price for such totalization: the fall into self-

enclosure. "History only presents itself as the reassuring unfolding of a metaphysical subject in so far as it is construed in terms of this subject in the first place. This is why Hegelian reason, in comprehending history, inevitably ends up comprehending only itself" (Falzon 1998, p. 25). Foucault, following Nietzsche's criticism, expresses it as "the form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself" (Foucault 1984a, p. 86).

Falzon (1998, p. 25) notes that this very closure re-introduces the problem of history into Hegel's account. "Since the Absolute Subject is the principle by which history is to be explained, because it contains all reality and history within itself, it is itself ahistorical, without a history." This is ironic, since as Falzon also notes, Hegel "is one of the most historically-minded of all philosophers." In Hegel we have both recognition and denial of history.

> ...he presents us with an unhistorical conception of history, in which historical change and transformation are only tolerated to the extent that they are seen as manifesting the 'grand historical plan', and the historicity of events is thereby denied. And the totalizing metaphysical standpoint which governs history cannot itself be comprehended in terms of history, so understood.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 25)

2.3 Contemporary Twentieth Century Philosophy

From this historical backdrop emerges current conceptions concerning the epistemological and ontological issues pursued in this chapter to date. As we saw, the rise of modern philosophy was characterized by an 'epistemological turn' in which previous preoccupation with metaphysical questions surrendered to one whose central concerns were with the possibility and nature of knowledge.

Epistemological concerns were to dominate philosophy for two centuries, "to be replaced in the early part of this century, at least for Anglo-American philosophy, by a 'linguistic turn'" (Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman 1991, p. 1).

2.3.1 Positivism and Postpositivism

In the ensuing discussion I use the following terms interchangeably: logical positivism, positivism, logical empiricism, empiricist accounts of knowledge. Positivism is not, as Carr and Kemmis (1986) point out, a systematically elaborated doctrine. Nor were positivist beliefs new. They had existed since the ancient Greeks and were a salient feature of the thought of Francis Bacon and the British Empiricists. But during the second half of the nineteenth century, positivism was the "general philosophical outlook which emerged as the most powerful intellectual force in western thought" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 61). French writer, August Comte, introduced the term 'positivist philosophy' (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

Science, and increasingly technology, has played a pivotal role in Western culture since the Middle Ages. What was significant about the beginning of the twentieth century was the advent of Einstein's relativity theories and soon after, quantum mechanics. This marked a rupture equal in status to the scientific advances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which ultimately swept aside the medieval world view. By the third decade of the twentieth century the so-called Newtonian world view which had replaced it seemed no longer able to 'explain' the microscopic world of subatomic particles. This 'crisis' precipitated a renewed vigour to explain the 'New Physics'. Again science was at the cutting edge of 'new' notions about knowledge; though as Capra (1983) and Zukav (1979) argue,

there were striking parallels between these notions and those of ancient Eastern philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. One might say that contemporary physics was beginning to provide empirical support for Eastern speculations dating from before the time of Christ.

Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 61) note that "although there are wide variations in the way the term is used, 'positivism' is usually taken to refer to a style of thought that is informed by certain assumptions about the nature of knowledge." The most important of these is 'the rule of phenomenalism': "that valid knowledge can only be established by reference to that which is manifested in experience" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 61). If it is not found in 'reality' as apprehended by the senses, it does not count as knowledge. It seems Hume is exhumed and shows he is far from 'ex'. A major implication to follow is that "value judgements, since they cannot be founded on empirical knowledge, cannot be given the status of valid knowledge" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 62). What is perhaps ironic is that positivism began as a force attempting to counteract the rising star of dogma, metaphysical speculation and theological speculations as contenders for the bedrock of valid knowledge. Positivism was initially a vehicle for 'progress' and 'liberation' and it was this that gave it its original appeal (Carr and Kemmis 1986). This point is not lost on Habermas.

Though positivism has spawned multiple interpretations, within the context of social science it usually implies two closely related claims. First, that the aims, concepts and methods of the natural sciences are also applicable to the social sciences. Second, that the natural science's mostly causal model of explanation

provides the yardstick for social science explanations (Carr and Kemmis 1986). Scientific method and scientific explanation are the order of the day.

Positivist **ontology** is *realist*. Reality is conceived to exist 'out there' and is driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms. Knowledge of these entities, laws, and mechanisms is conventionally summarized in the form of time- and context-free generalizations. Some of these generalizations take the form of cause-effect laws (Guba 1990). Positivist **epistemology** is *dualist/objectivist*. This follows as a consequence of the realist ontology. If a real world operating according to natural laws exists independently of the knower, observer or inquirer, this has two consequences. First, it clearly demarcates the world of knower and known, hence the label 'dualism'. Second, it constrains the knower to discover this real world by asking questions directly to nature and allowing nature to reply directly. To overcome the possibility of inquirer bias and nature's tendency to confound, one must use a manipulative **methodology** "that controls for both, and empirical methods that place the point of decision with nature rather than the inquirer" (Guba 1990, p. 19). *Empirical experimentalism* and its cognates are deemed most appropriate. Prediction and control are the avowed aims.

Perhaps the example par excellence of positivism was the famous – or depending on your perspective, infamous – Vienna Circle, a group of like-minded scientists and logicians known as logical positivists who were active from the mid 1920s until 1936 when German leader Moritz Schlick (1882-1936) was assassinated by a 'deranged' student and increasing Nazi hostility forced dispersal of the group. The Circle was heavily influenced by the analytic philosophy of German Gottlob Frege

and British philosopher Bertrand Russell. Their basic claim was, in the words of Schlick: "the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification" (quoted in Stewart 1997, p. 85). This gave the 'logic' epithet to their philosophy. The 'positivism' tag stemmed from their belief that knowledge must be based on observation or empirical data. The consequence of their philosophical system was to effectively legislate against statements about metaphysics, ethics, art, politics – indeed, any statement other than mathematical propositions and their 'scientific' cognates – which were regarded as errant nonsense. Such extremism must be understood within the *Zeitgeist*: the Circle was reacting to the extreme Idealism that had permeated much of German and Continental philosophy since Hegel, who had proposed that philosophy's task was to delineate the self-awareness of *Geist*, the universal mind or spirit. The Vienna Circle thinkers "saw philosophy as a handmaiden to science, and argued that philosophers should be content simply to clarify concepts" (Stewart 1997, p. 85).

Positivist notions of theory and practice are undergirded by a sharp dichotomy between the two. Crudely characterized, it is an 'applied science' view. That is, the technical expert draws on value-free theories and researches issues empirically, so practitioners can passively apply. In essence, the positivist "conceptions of explanation and prediction imply that theory relates to practice through a process of technical control" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 91). In practice, this means educational decisions are "neatly divided into instrumental questions concerned with means, and value questions concerned with ends" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 76). Carr and Kemmis review the arguments indicating the problems with such views. First, "moral values enter into all educational decisions" undermining the

rigid theory/practice breach. Second, "educational aims...are not the end product to which educational processes are the instrumental means. They are expressions of the values in terms of which some distinctive educational character is bestowed on, or withheld from, whatever 'means' are being employed. ...To say, for example, that 'critical thinking' is a desirable educational end is to express a 'procedural principle' governing the kind of 'educational means' that are permissible" (pp. 77-78). In short, the positivist view of theory and practice assumes a relationship between 'means' and 'ends' which fails to capture the complexity of "how, in education, aims, policies and methods are all intrinsically related" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 78). Third, by treating certain aspects of educational situations as governed by 'general laws' and thus beyond control, "this kind of research will always be biased towards prevailing educational arrangements and its theories will be structured in favour of the 'status quo'" (p. 79).

The tenets of logical positivism have borne the brunt of sustained attack for decades (e.g. Popper 1953; Hanson 1958; Feyerabend 1975) and few, if any, would still subscribe to such a 'crude' positivist position, particularly its core tenet, the 'verifiability criterion of meaning'. I shall mention two of the major criticisms which had led to the widespread discrediting of positivism by the 1960s. First, "if the positivist/operationalist view were to be accepted, it would have a chilling effect on theorizing about unobservable mechanisms such as the subatomic events that have won Nobel prizes for so many physicists" (Phillips 1990, p. 33). This would also have stark implications for the growth and extension of scientific knowledge. We can summarize this first issue by stating that observation and observation statements are not isomorphic (as they are held to be in the strict

logical positivist account). Second, in the positivist account observation plays a crucial role as arbiter between rival scientific claims. Hanson's (1958) highly influential work, *Patterns of Discovery*, challenged the 'theory-neutral' basis of observation, demonstrating powerfully the theory-ladenness of observation. "The theory, hypothesis, or background knowledge held by an observer can influence in a major way what is observed" (p. 7). As Phillips (1990) notes, Hanson was not the first to stake this claim (compare Wittgenstein and Dewey). What Phillips does not note, however, is that physicists themselves (Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle' and Bohr's 'complementarity principle') were staking similar claims in 1927! "According to the uncertainty principle, we cannot measure accurately, at the same time, both the position *and* the momentum of a moving particle" (Zukav 1979, p. 133). Attempts to observe the particle alter the particle. "This is the primary significance of the uncertainty principle. At the subatomic level, *we cannot observe something without changing it*. There is no such thing as the independent observer who can stand on the sidelines watching nature run its course without influencing it" (Zukav 1979, p. 134). Again, we see the vital connection between epistemology and ontology. Complementarity is a fascinating notion which, likewise, has crucial implications for contemporary notions of knowledge. In a classic paradox, light exhibits wave-like characteristics and particle-like characteristics. "Complementarity is the concept developed by Niels Bohr to explain the wave-particle duality of light. ... Wave-like characteristics and particle-like characteristics, the theory goes, are mutually exclusive, or complementary aspects of light. Although one of them always excludes the other, *both* of them are necessary to understand light" (Zukav 1979, p. 116). But "how can mutually exclusive wave-like and particle-like behaviours both be properties of

one and the same light? They are not properties of light? They are properties of our *interaction* with light" (Zukav 1979, p. 116).

Postpositivism is an attempt to overcome the limitations of positivism. As Phillips (1990, p. 44), himself a proponent of a postpositivist view, points out, there is a danger in sketching any paradigm as a monolithic enterprise. "Postpositivism is a broad, complex, and dynamic approach". Nonetheless, there are some key common variables. *Ontologically,* postpositivism makes the transition from 'naïve realism' to 'critical realism'. Essentially, this involves recognition that humans have imperfect sensory and intellectual apparatuses and as a consequence cannot directly perceive the 'real' world. Hence, due to these imperfections, inquirers need to adopt a critical stance. But realism remains central. Ironically, this is perhaps not too far from Kant's position.

Noting the work of Heisenberg and Bohr (see above) which stresses the *interaction* of knower and known, postpositivists acknowledge the impossibility of humans stepping outside the bubble of subjectivity. This does not, however, lead them to abandon objectivity. Rather they adopt a 'modified objectivist' position maintaining objectivity as a 'regulatory ideal' which can be approximated. In this context, the 'critical tradition' (requiring inquiry reports to be consistent with the existing scholarly tradition of the field) and the 'critical community' assume celebrity status as guardians of the *epistemological* shrine. As Guba (1990, p. 21) notes, "the latter two requirements also make it virtually impossible for new paradigms to assert themselves, an advantage not lost on the power brokers who protect and defend the (new) hegemony of postpositivism."

Certainly for positivist philosophers of science and even for most postpositivist philosophers of science up until the 1970s one of the key quests motivating their work was an attempt to demarcate scientific knowledge from non-scientific knowledge. The implication was that the former was superior and that part of the philosopher's task was to achieve this demarcation so science might avoid the tainted brush of non-scientific knowledge, which included magic, ritual, superstition, belief and no end of other 'intellectual' endeavours masquerading as knowledge. The logical positivists from the Vienna Circle and their disciples such as Hempel (who might be more fairly characterized as a 'lapsed' positivist) attempted to do so in terms of the internal logic of scientific statements. Even Popper's (1969) notion of 'falsificationism' functioned primarily as a demarcation agent based on the logical status of statements. Lakatos' (1970) 'methodology of research programs' extended the ambit of these statements to include entire research programs, but again the aspirations were similar: demarcate the paragon of science from intruding hordes. It was not until Kuhn (1970) and Feyerabend (1975) that this rather silly quest was seen by many to be what it was: a silly and pointless exercise. (Though there are still social scientists, particularly psychologists, who are desperately attempting to prove that their venture is 'scientific', seemingly oblivious to the fact that the so-called 'scientific method' and the philosophy of science on which they base their insecure attempts was discarded by physicists, their role models, 70 years ago, and by self-respecting philosophers of science a quarter of a century ago! Light may travel at 186,000 miles per second, but news travels slowly across disciplinary boundaries, especially when you have blinkers on!) What Kuhn did, among other things, with his notion

of paradigms was to introduce a sociological dimension to the scientific enterprise. Science was now viewed as a social practice and not simply a set of logical propositions grappling with an intractable world with the forceps of experimentation. And Feyerabend (1975) sounded the death knell on demarcation-inspired philosophies of science by astutely (and with almost wicked glee) drawing on the history of science to demonstrate that 'anything goes'. This was a deliberate hyperbole, but the major message to be gleaned from his work *Against Method* (1975) is that a whole host of socio-political, economic and technological factors impinge on notions of what constitutes knowledge at any given time in the species' history. Unadulterated knowledge does not exist. Knowledge is a loaded gun. Given this fragile state of affairs, it would seem we need to devote just as much attention to those with their hand on the trigger as the bullets themselves.

2.3.2 Hermeneutics

One reaction, previously noted, to the sustained critique on positivist accounts of knowledge was the development of various forms of postpositivism. Another was the gaining ascendancy of a new paradigm, which, for convenience, I have labelled the hermeneutic paradigm. Later, we shall see the similarities and partial merger between hermeneutics, originally a continental philosophy/methodology, and American pragmatism. The latter will assume particular importance in the following chapter on educational paradigms since, with the possible exception of Swiss-born Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the eighteenth century, John Dewey, emerging from the American pragmatist tradition, offered at the turn of the twentieth century the most comprehensive and systematically developed alternative to the educational theories of the ancient Greeks.

Hermeneutics is basically a theory of interpretation. It has a long history, first arising within the framework of biblical exegesis (Kearney 1994). Its original quest, sometimes referred to as 'Romantic hermeneutics' was primarily methodological in focus. Hermeneutics entered philosophical reflection upon the sciences only with the work of Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey saw hermeneutics as offering "an alternative model of knowledge, one that could challenge the universality increasingly attributed to empiricist theories of knowledge modelled upon physics" (Rouse 1987, p. 42). But Dilthey perceived empiricist accounts to be adequate for the natural sciences. Hermeneutics was to be hijacked for the investigation of human life and culture. The prototype for this alternative model of knowledge was the interpretation of texts. Meaning and language became central.

> Wittgenstein's contention that it is language that constitutes the limits of our understanding and thus the limits of our world has been profoundly influential. Our conceptions of the world are unavoidably informed by presuppositions which we absorb with our language and which we cannot wholly discard. There is no way in which human beings can apprehend the 'true nature' of reality; all learning is mediated through language and the theories embedded in that language.
> (Henkel 1995, p. 71)

Rouse (1987) outlines four critical features of epistemological theories of interpretation, of which Dilthey is one example. First, the central importance of 'meaning', a domain which "has generally been taken to be coextensive with the actions, interactions, and productions of human beings" (p. 45). Second, concern for questions of validity (how is it possible to achieve justified agreement about interpretations?). Third, the importance of social context for interpretation of meaning. Finally, such theories have been posed in self-conscious opposition to empiricist accounts of scientific knowledge.

Before proceeding it is important to clarify the use of three concepts: explanation, understanding, and interpretation. In empiricist accounts of scientific knowledge *explanation* was the avowed aim, in the sense of demonstrating *causal* connections between phenomena (though see Hume's notions above). Hermeneutic accounts originally contrasted their approach by arguing for the central importance of *meaning* in **understanding** human behaviour. Goals, motivation, purposes, beliefs and the meaning that actions have for human actors are taken to be vital. It is not sufficient to posit causal connections. Following German sociologist Max Weber in the early part of this century, many hermeneutic theorists argue that explanations in the human sciences must be both causally and meaningfully adequate (Outhwaite 1985, p. 28). Rouse (1987, p. 45) further distinguishes between 'understanding' and *'interpretation'*. 'Understanding' is the "prior background against which interpretation takes place and 'interpretation' [is] the activity of explication, which takes place against this background, and for the explication that results from this activity." Though, as we shall see below, the concept of understanding has been highly contested terrain for those in the hermeneutic tradition and the traditional explanation/understanding distinction is collapsing.

Dilthey's distinction between the natural and human sciences was a harbinger of the demarcation-inspired philosophies of science mentioned above. But as I pointed out, the eclipse of logical positivism and the rise of postempiricist philosophies of science like Kuhn's and Feyerabend's has led to widespread rejection of the demarcation of the natural and human sciences; at least on the grounds originally posited. In more recent times, Richard Rorty (1980) and Mary

Hesse (1980) have led the vanguard of critique (see Rouse 1987). Hesse has pointed out that such distinctions presuppose a now largely discredited account of the natural sciences. "Logical empiricism and its predecessors once laid claim to sovereignty over the legitimacy of any claim to knowledge. Now, however, they seem fundamentally inadequate even to account for the natural sciences, which they were originally developed to describe" (Rouse 1987, p. 47). This critique has, in Rouse's words (1987, p. xii), "undermined the Diltheyan distinction by suggesting that all knowledge is hermeneutical." The key issue now is, if a distinction is drawn between the natural and human sciences, where should it be drawn and what are the grounds for this distinction: sociological, pragmatic, methodological and/or philosophical? (Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman 1991). Such universalizing of hermeneutics, Rouse argues, though not widely noted, can take two forms.

The first, interpretation as translation of theories or beliefs, Rouse (1987) locates in the work of Quine and Davidson on the one hand, and Kuhn and Feyerabend on the other. The second, with its origins in Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein, sees interpretation to be the "working out of the possibilities open within a situation. Hermeneutics is concerned with how one lives, and how one makes sense of how others live" (p. 48). This is the brand of universal hermeneutics developed by Heidegger's student Gadamer, and later, Ricoeur. Later in his book, Rouse (1987, p. 64) draws this distinction in another way, that between 'theoretical hermeneutics' and 'practical hermeneutics'. "Theoretical hermeneutics takes interpretation to be a concern for what is the case, reflected in the attempt to represent things accurately. Practical hermeneutics takes interpretation to be a concern for what matters, reflected in the attempt to live meaningful lives" (p. 64).

This is consistent with Rouse's reading of the 'two Kuhns' (see Rouse 1987, chapter two), emphasizing science as practice rather than representation. This, Rouse notes, results in some important differences in the understanding of what theories are. We shall return to this later in the chapter since it has an important bearing on the theory/practice relationship.

Rouse (1987) also points out that recognition of the differences between the two brands of hermeneutics has resulted in recent attempts to resurrect the Diltheyan distinction between the two types of inquiry (e.g. Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor). Dreyfus uses different terms yet again: the hermeneutics of translation he refers to as 'theoretical holism' and argues that this is apt for understanding the natural world. 'Practical holism' is his term for Rouse's 'practical hermeneutics' and this is crucial, Dreyfus argues, for understanding the world of the human sciences. "The difference discerned between the study of human beings and the sciences of nature is not that one is interpretive and the other not. The difference is supposed to lie in how they are interpretive and what the point of the interpretation is" (Rouse 1987, p. 49).

Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman (1991) stress that 'universal hermeneutics' has always been an ambiguous term. They also distinguish two elements, each of which, they insist, raises a distinct set of problems for the epistemology of interpretation. The first, 'hermeneutic universalism', claims that "interpretation is a universal and ubiquitous feature of all human activity. ... There can be no appeal to experience, meaning, or evidence that is independent of interpretation or more basic than it" (p. 7). This conception is roughly equivalent to Rouse's

interpretation as translation; or at least overlaps with it. The second, related strand, 'hermeneutic contextualism', claims that "interpretation always takes place within some context or background – such as webs of belief, a complex of social relations, tradition, or the practices of a form of life" (p. 7). This, Bohman and colleagues (1991) note, implies a denial of atomism, "the view that something could be understood by itself independent of such contexts and could somehow be the incorrigible and foundational building blocks for knowledge. Opposing the atomism typical of much modern epistemology, contextualism holds that all justification is circular" (p. 8). "If universalism entails that everything is interpretation, contextualism implies that truth is relative to some interpretive circle or other and that there are no external or outside grounds that would warrant stronger justification and validity for interpretations" (p. 8). This notion is often referred to as the 'hermeneutic circle', highlighting the circular structure of presupposition and interpretation (see also Rouse 1987). Recognition that the human sciences is 'doubly hermeneutic' (interpretations of interpretations) leads Dreyfus and Taylor as well as critical theorist Habermas to conclude that the human sciences "involve a radical reflexivity not found in the natural sciences. For Habermas, however, the double hermeneutic of the human sciences is only a guiding moral and methodological principle. But for Taylor and Dreyfus it is also ontological. It establishes something about who we are as *Dasein* or self-interpreting beings" (Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman 1991, p. 5). Again we see the merging of epistemology and ontology.

The social and political implications of the hermeneutic circle are potent. As Bohman and colleagues (1991, p. 8) point out, once we accept the contextual

element – the background of beliefs and practices – interpretation "is infused with political relations of power and domination. If there is nothing that is not an interpretation against which to judge, choices among competing interpretations – especially interpretations of other people and cultures – raise important moral and political issues about the relationship between interpreters and the subjects of their interpretations." Note that the "inevitability of the hermeneutic circle undermines the positivist conception of inquiry, but it may also undermine any knowledge claim whatsoever" (p. 8). This is vital when we discuss the work of Foucault.

I mentioned earlier the 'merging' of the continental tradition with the American tradition of pragmatism, spawned as a consequence of some interesting developments in the later part of the nineteenth century. Publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 (see Darwin 1975) dethroned human beings from their place at the centre of the universe which they had usurped in the wake of Hegelian idealism, itself highly influential in the United States during the nineteenth century. Malinowski and Fraser in anthropology and G.H. Mead in sociology demonstrated the variety and relativism of human practices. This "growing movement to social relativism needed a general philosophical theory" (Bowen and Hobson 1987, p. 164) and it was provided by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), later to be developed further by John Dewey (1859-1952). As Bowen and Hobson (1987, p. 164) note, pragmatism is complex, "but in general outline it argues that knowledge can only be of the consequences of actions." In Peirce's words:

> Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of our object.
> (Hartshorne and Weiss 1960, p. 1)

This notion immediately eliminates metaphysics and "truth is simply the observation of the consequences of acting" (Bowen and Hobson 1987, p. 164). The term 'pragmatism', coined by Peirce, derives from the Greek work *pragma*, meaning a deed or act (Bowen and Hobson 1987). Pragmatism has developed a number of variants this century. Rouse (1987) notes that Rorty, Bernstein, Putnam, Goodman and Habermas all claim links to the American tradition of pragmatism, though Rorty and Bernstein might be regarded as more prototypical. What all these philosophers have in common is their 'community' response to the philosophical difficulties of post-empiricist philosophies of science. "The pragmatists appeal to the outcome of critical discussion by a community of inquirers as the arbiter of questions about truth and reality. Truth is what would emerge as the result of unconstrained inquiry pursued indefinitely" (Rouse 1987, p. 7). This is rooted in an anti-realist ontology: "the way things show themselves to our ongoing inquiries simply *is* the way they really are" (Rouse 1987, p. 7).

But how does American pragmatism relate to continental hermeneutics? Rouse (1987, p. 41) notes that those philosophers who have most extensively discussed the importance of hermeneutics for the philosophy of science – Rorty, Habermas, Bernstein and Hesse – have also been prominently associated with the revival of pragmatism. "The various versions of pragmatism that have emerged as responses to the collapse of empiricism can usefully be regarded as an attempt to universalize hermeneutics" (p. 41). (Though note Guignon's 1991 discussion in which he draws out important distinctions between Rorty's 'new pragmatism' and Charles Taylor's hermeneutics.)

"Bernstein characterized one of the key changes in philosophy during the twentieth century as a move from the 'spectator theory of philosophy': from (quoting Anscombe) 'an incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge' to 'recognition of the need to understand man as an agent, as an active being engaged in various forms of practice', including the development of knowledge (Bernstein 1972)" (Henkel 1995, p. 69).

> Within the Cartesian paradigm that had dominated the philosophy of knowledge since the seventeenth century, the concern was to establish how the individual knowing subject could apprehend an external reality. The task was to discover the laws governing the natural world, within a correspondence theory of truth (the idea that knowledge reflects or 'corresponds' to the reality it has grasped). For the empiricist successors of Descartes, the key to that discovery was observation. But gradually the idea that it was possible to apprehend or represent reality directly was undermined and correspondence theories of truth gave way to coherence theories of truth (to meet the criterion of truth propositions must be consistent with each other and the theoretical framework in which they are made).
> (Henkel 1995, p. 69)

Henkel (1995, p. 68) draws parallels between hermeneutics and pragmatism and contrasts these with the Cartesian paradigm, characterized by dualistic forms of thought (mind and body; subject and object; theory and practice; knowledge and action) and "the ideal of the individual knowing subject contemplating an external object". Hermeneutics and pragmatism, by contrast,

> ...assert the active and collective nature of knowledge acquisition and development, together with the role of language and disciplinary tradition in shaping knowledge and confounding the clear cut division between subject and object. At the same time, they facilitate a review of the relationship between conceptions of knowledge as a means of control or practical intervention and knowledge as understanding and dialogue.
> (Henkel 1995, p. 68)

Henkel (1995, pp. 68-69), who writes from a social work tradition, argues that the values underpinning these conceptions of knowledge – communitarianism,

interaction and a conception of rationality that is both communicative and rational

– "provide an epistemological framework for the idea of reflective practice and

education and an alternative rationale to that of consumerism for involving service

users and students in these processes." I shall return to the theme of reflective

practice in the next chapter.

> Thus the Cartesian ideal of the individual subject or the individual self as the
> source of reason and knowledge, contemplating the representations of an
> objective reality, can be contrasted with the pragmatist ideal of a community of
> inquirers working within conceptual frameworks formulated, criticized and
> adapted over time to construct new theories and solutions: knowledge as
> individual contemplation of an objective reality as against knowledge as
> continuous, self corrective activity or practice generated in and shaped by a
> community.
> (Henkel 1995, p. 70)

I mentioned above the distinction between two forms of universal hermeneutics

drawn by Rouse (1987) and Bohman and colleagues (1991), albeit in slightly

different ways. This distinction has crucial implications for the discussion of the

relationship between theory and practice. Bohman and colleagues suggest that:

> Philosophy's interpretive turn is...a practical turn, one that insists on the
> philosophical centrality of practice. Gadamer and Rorty make Aristotelian
> *phronesis* (practical wisdom) rather than *theoria* the model for philosophical
> understanding. Dreyfus argues for practical holism over theoretical holism.
> Taylor insists that theory is itself a practice. In the Continental tradition, this
> practico-interpretive turn is identified as philosophical hermeneutics, and in
> Anglo-American philosophy it sees itself as a renewal of pragmatism.
> (Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman 1991, p. 10)

Bohman and colleagues (1991, p. 13) point out, however, that by breaking down

old boundaries between theory and practice, "the interpretive turn raises serious

questions about the status or role of theory. Once we recognize the primacy of

practice and insist on the situated and perspectival character of all understanding,

what remains of theory's claim to guide and transform practice?" Is it simply a

"vestige of transcendental foundationalist thinking"? Bohman and colleagues suggest not.

> Yet the primacy of practice and the rejection of theory's transcendental claims of cognitive privilege do not mean that theory no longer has an instructive role to play with respect to practice. All that follows is that the foundationalist concept of theory has to go, and that 'theory', like 'understanding', 'truth', and 'knowledge', needs to be reinterpreted in the light of the interpretive, postfoundationalist turn. It needs to be understood as critical reflection on practice. ... In this pragmatic sense, theories are instruments for transforming reality, rather than mirroring representations of its putative essential and invariable features. So conceived, theory is not extinguished but encouraged by the interpretive turn.
> (Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman 1991, p. 13)

The significance of this notion of theory as critical reflection for the present thesis cannot be overstated. Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 91) argue that "just as positivistic conceptions of explanation and prediction imply that theory relates to practice through a process of technical control, so interpretive methods of validating knowledge entail that theory affects practice by exposing the theoretical context that defines practice to self-reflection." Noting variation of interpretivist positions, Carr and Kemmis (1986) observe that a stringent test of validity asks that the developed account passes the test of participant confirmation. "It is the relationship of the truth criteria for this sort of theoretical knowledge to the actor's ordinary everyday understanding that constitutes the basis of the 'interpretive' view of the relationship of theory to practice" (p. 92). Theory/practice relationships in interpretive hands is not "one-way traffic of ideas into action; of practice for theoretical principles. The traffic is two-way: practical deliberation is informed not only by ideas but also by the practical exigencies of the situation; it always requires critical appraisal and mediation by the judgement of the actor" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 93). I shall return to the issue of critical reflection and self-reflection within the context of theory/practice relationships in the next chapter. For now, I

want to continue discussion of the theme, but obliquely through the concepts of 'knowledge' and 'action'. This returns us, as promised, to the contested concept of 'understanding', a return which also plunges us into the distinctive strands of universal hermeneutics referred to above.

The traditional hermeneutic conception of understanding developed in the Romantic period required an open-minded and unprejudiced subject, posing it as something which is not automatic. It also, as noted above, emphasized 'understanding' as a *method* alternative to the study of causal connections between phenomena (Outhwaite 1985). Heidegger's use of the concept did two related things. First, it moved the focus from epistemology to ontology. Interpretation is considered "not on the basis of a psychological self-consciousness, but against the historical horizon of a finite being-in-the-world" (Kearney 1994, p. 100). Gadamer and Ricoeur, in contrast to Dilthey, followed him in this. For Gadamer, "understanding is not a matter of trained, methodical, unprejudiced technique, but an encounter in the existential sense, a confrontation with something radically different from ourselves. Understanding involves *engagement* in Jean-Paul Sartre's sense" (Outhwaite 1985, p. 24). And later: "For Gadamer ...preconceptions or prejudices are what make understanding possible in the first place. They are bound up with our awareness of the historical influence or effectivity of the text; and without this awareness we would not understand it. It is impossible to understand the Bible or the Communist Manifesto without a knowledge of the role they have played in our history" (p. 25). This means that "our 'prejudices' are not an obstacle to knowledge so much as a condition of knowledge, since they make up the fundamental structure of our relationship with our historical tradition" (p. 26). So,

for Gadamer, understanding or *Verstehen* is much more than a method: "it is the way in which we get access to social reality in the first place" (p. 29).

The second thing that Heidegger's use of the concept 'understanding' did was to emphasize the practical nature, the 'action' component of 'knowledge'. 'Understanding' in Heidegger's sense, argues Rouse (1987, p. 63) is "not a conceptualization of the world but a performative grasp of how to cope with it" (Rouse 1987, p. 63). And later: "understanding takes the form of a skilful knowing our way about in the world rather than theoretical knowledge of the world" (p. 66).

> ...according to a theoretical hermeneutics, *some* basic beliefs and values must be presupposed in order for others to make sense and to show up as true or false, but *which* beliefs and values these are may be arbitrary. We can in principle recognize them as theoretical presuppositions that we have chosen (however implicitly) and could abandon in favour of others. For Heidegger, by contrast, the configuration of the world (and hence the way things show up for us) is not something we have chosen and not something we can articulate. It is therefore not something we could 'stand back from' and accept or reject. It is what provides us with a hold on the world, allowing us to make sense of ourselves and to encounter significant things around us. To stand back from it would be to lose our grip rather than to make our interpretation of things clear. It is not a set of beliefs or assumptions we have, but a way into the world that 'has' us. Thus it is not accidental or arbitrary, not one 'conceptual scheme' among others. This configuration of things is the manifestation (to us) of what it is to be. Such a configuration may change over time, but not as the result of deliberate choice or action.
> (Rouse 1987, p. 64)

Heidegger's pupil, Gadamer, basically accepted this interpretation: "...interpretation for him, is at the heart of what it means to be a human being. We become who we are in the process of understanding, which is inextricable from interpretation and application and is something in which we are engaged all the time. It is achieved through dialogue or encounters with other people, beliefs,

traditions and cultures, sometimes contemporary but often past, and thus represented by texts and other cultural artefacts" (Henkel 1995, p. 71).

Gadamer "maintained that nothing was in principle incomprehensible, but understanding had to be gained not only through honest and open engagement with the other but also through acknowledging and more fully understanding the presuppositions or prejudices that we bring to such engagement. Learning about something new required understanding one's own context and tradition more deeply. Under these conditions, prejudices are to be seen not as barriers but as gateways to understanding" (Henkel 1995, p. 71). This notion of understanding one's context and tradition has crucial implications for teaching and learning, and especially for the teaching subject under scrutiny in this thesis. Compare it to my chapter one discussion when I drew on Tsang (1998) in speaking of the 'self' as the hinge between theory and practice, a self laden with personal theories, values and ideologies, and the role of critical reflection in unpackaging these notions. We shall revisit.

Perhaps one of the most significant implications of the hermeneutic tradition in the hands of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur is the fusion of the concepts of knowledge and action. Knowledge gained was moral and practical as well as theoretical. "Appropriation of ideas meant that those ideas would influence a person in the conduct of their lives or their praxis" (Henkel 1995, p. 72). Bernstein (1983) argues for the pivotal significance of Aristotle for Gadamer's theory, particularly the concept of phronesis, "a form of reasoning and knowledge that involves a distinctive mediation between the universal and the particular"

(Bernstein 1983 quoted in Henkel 1995, p. 72). For Gadamer, the "greatest danger of the modern world was that it was dominated by technical knowledge that had become separated from human understanding and being. For him the main task of philosophical hermeneutics was 'to defend practical and political reason against the domination of technology based on science' (Bernstein 1983)" (Henkel 1995, p. 72). This echoes Heidegger and is an important theme in the work of Habermas (see below).

This view has profound implications for the teaching and learning interchange of the subject at the centre of this thesis. Particularly, the hermeneutic notion of action embedded in the concept of knowledge is vital to the concept of critically reflective practice, a theme to be revisited in much greater depth in the next chapter.

A number of criticisms have been mounted against the hermeneutic position as it has been articulated by Heidegger and his pupil Gadamer. Henkel (1995) outlines four main grounds of criticism directed at Gadamer: his failure to articulate why understanding is fundamentally problematic; his belief in the authority of tradition and thus the tendency to conservatism in his theory; his failure to take account of the social and political forces that impede understanding; and his dismissal of the role and value of technical knowledge. Outhwaite (1985) stresses particularly Gadamer's handling of the concept of critique: he has trouble dealing with what Habermas calls 'systematically distorted communication'. "This points us beyond hermeneutics to more structuralist and materialist conceptions of social theory – themselves hermeneutically grounded" (p. 36). And later: "The real problem is

that, as Habermas puts it, 'hermeneutic consciousness remains incomplete as long as it does not include a reflection upon the limits of hermeneutic understanding'" (Habermas quoted in Outhwaite 1985, p. 36). And finally:

> The thesis of hermeneutic universality commits...the epistemic fallacy: from the fact that interpretative processes are a significant part of what goes on in the social world, and that our access to the social world is necessarily via our understanding of these interpretative processes (Giddens' double hermeneutic), it does not follow that this is all that exists, or can be known to exist. The production and reproduction of social structures is partly a matter of the interpretations given to them by actors, but also of what Durkheim called 'deeper causes which are opaque to consciousness'.
> (Outhwaite 1985, p. 37)

Neglect of structural and material forces also bears on the theory/practice issue as soon as one wants to maintain that people's interpretations of 'reality' (their actions and social life) are shaped in part by the social conditions framing these interpretations (Carr and Kemmis 1986). Indeed, Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 95) argue that "because it emphasizes the way in which social reality is constructed out of a plurality of 'subjective meanings', the interpretive approach cannot help but neglect questions about the relationships between individuals' interpretations and actions and external factors and circumstances." It is such critiques which have led to more 'structurally-aware' theories such as Habermas'. Indeed, Habermas, cognizant of the weaknesses in Gadamer's position, has developed his own ideas as a conscious attempt to overcome these weaknesses, and it is to the work of Habermas we now turn.

2.3.3 *Critical Theory – Jürgen Habermas* (1929-)

Critical theory, like postmodernism, is not a unitary phenomenon. It refers loosely to at least two branches. The first, often referred to as the Frankfurt School, centred around the Institute of Social Research established in Frankfurt in 1923. The

second, relates to Jürgen Habermas. This was the 'school' of critical theory (Western Marxism) which "caught the imagination of students and intellectuals in the 1960s and early 1970s" (Held 1980, p. 13). Note first, its rise to prominence during a period of political turmoil – compare postmodernism which received a mighty kick start with the May revolutions of 1968 in Paris – and second, that the two 'movements' were coterminous.

When I describe the teaching subject at the centre of this research study in chapters five and six, the social context in which theorists develop their ideas emerges as vital. In this context, it is important to note that Habermas, born in 1929, was brought up in Nazi Germany. This explains his theoretical motivations:

> Habermas conceives of his project as an attempt to develop a theory of society with a practical intention: the self-emancipation of people from domination. Through an assessment of the self-formative processes of the human species, Habermas' critical theory aims to further the self-understanding of social groups capable of transforming society.
> (Held 1980, p. 250)

The links with knowledge and action are immediately obvious; though I shall return to this in much greater detail below. Habermas became increasingly dissatisfied with Frankfurt School critical theory because its theoretical tenets failed to accord with historical evidence (Held 1980). Many difficulties exist in outlining Habermas' project. First, as Held (1980) notes, his views have changed over time and are still in the process of development. Second, as Giddens (1985) notes, some of Habermas' main writings are still unavailable in English. Third, Habermas makes for some very difficult reading. In this section I shall restrict myself, given the vast scope and corpus of Habermas' writings, and to the brief of this thesis, to his ideas about knowledge, as these relate to the three general

questions posed at the chapter's beginning. In addition to Habermas' two major

works relating to knowledge, and hence this thesis, the second edition of

Knowledge and Human Interests (1978, English orig. 1972; German 1968) and

Theory and Practice (1974), I have found Held's (1980) study of critical theory

invaluable. While this book was written before Habermas' two volume study on

communicative action, Giddens (1985, p. 138), himself one of the most

knowledgeable scholars on Habermas, recommends Held's (1980) account as "one

of the most accurate and accessible."

Held summarizes Habermas' epistemological charter in the following way:

> Habermas investigates the way instrumental reason has dominated modern
> thought. He examines the way the significance of the epistemic subject – and
> the capacity for reflection by the subject on his or her activities – has been
> gradually eclipsed. Today, he argues, if emancipation from domination is to
> remain a project of humanity, it is essential to counter this tendency and to
> reaffirm the necessity of self-reflection for understanding. This Habermas tries
> to do by a systematic investigation of the nature of human interests, action and
> knowledge.
> (Held 1980, p. 254)

There are two phases to Habermas' project (Held 1980). The first phase examining

the relationship of knowledge to human activity, explored primarily in the first

edition of *Knowledge and Human Interests* in 1972 (see Habermas 1978) and

Theory and Practice (1974), develops the theory of cognitive interests (or

knowledge-constitutive interests). The second phase, developed in order to justify

the critical enterprise, extends this inquiry in *The Theory of Communicative Action*

(Vol. 1 1984 and Vol. 2 1987a) by attempting to ground critical theory on a

normative standard that is "inherent in the very structure of social action and

language" (Held 1980, p. 345). I shall discuss each briefly in turn.

Knowledge and Human Interests

The theory of cognitive interests sets out to answer the question, *how is knowledge possible*? Its 'answer' also provides a 'definition' to the question, *what is knowledge*? Habermas critiques positivism in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1978), a critique whose major purpose is to retrieve "a *dimension* of the problem of knowledge which [positivism] had...effaced" (Habermas 1978a, p. 352); "namely, the dimension in which it is acknowledged that knowing subjects play an active role in constituting the world they know" (Held 1980, p. 254). In this he accepts the German epistemological tradition initiated by Kant and Hegel, but, following Hegel's critique, he "rejects the Kantian approach of locating such activity in an ahistorical, transcendental subject" (Held 1980, p. 254).

Habermas contends that the human species organizes its experience in terms of *a priori* interests, which he calls cognitive interests or 'knowledge-constitutive' interests. The concept rejects claims of value-free knowledge. All knowledge is guided by the particular interest it serves and these have developed from the species' natural needs and shaped by historical and social conditions.

> As both toolmaking and language-using animals: they must produce from nature what is needed for material existence through the manipulation and control of objects and communicate with others through the use of intersubjectively understood symbols within the context of rule-governed institutions. Thus, humankind has an interest in the creation of knowledge which would enable it to control objectified processes and to maintain communication. There is, however, on his account, a third interest: an interest in the reflective appropriation of human life, without which the interest-bound character of knowledge could not itself be grasped. This is an interest in reason, in the human capacity to be self-reflective and self-determining, to act rationally. As a result of it, knowledge is generated which enhances autonomy and responsibility (Mündigkeit); hence, it is an emancipatory interest. ... Habermas accords to the category of 'cognitive interests' a somewhat problematic status as 'quasi-transcendental'.
> (Held 1980, p. 255)

In summary, Habermas posits three cognitive interests – the *technical*, the *practical*, and the *emancipatory*, which generate three categories of knowledge – the *empirical-analytic*, the *historical-hermeneutic*, and the *critically oriented*. Habermas distinguishes these three categories of knowledge not in terms of their content, but in terms of their "processes of inquiry for which a specific connection between logical-methodological rules and knowledge-constitutive interests can be demonstrated" (Habermas 1978, p. 308). Each is accompanied by different ways of knowing: causal explanation, understanding, and reflection. Finally, each knowledge-constitutive interest takes form in a particular means of social organization or 'medium': work in the technical interest, language in the practical, and power in the emancipatory.

Habermas sees his own epistemology located in the critical sciences (for Habermas, "the critique of knowledge is possible only as social theory" – Habermas 1978, p. vii). Despite Habermas' attack on scientism, a position where "we no longer understand science as *one* form of possible knowledge, but rather identify knowledge with science" (Habermas 1978, p. 4), he does not argue against studying human behaviour with the methods of a causal, nomological science. His claim is simply that "a science that restricted itself to this procedure would – by itself – be incapable of understanding social reality" (Held 1980, p. 307). In other words, scientific knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for emancipation.

The concept of *emancipation* is both a critical distinguishing feature of Habermas' epistemology and vital to it. The *emancipatory* cognitive interest, Habermas (1978) argues, is at the root of traditional theories in the classical Greek sense. He

seems to equate *emancipation* with *freedom*. It bears a close relationship to *learning*, since in Habermas' account human capacity for freedom is dependent on cumulative learning in theoretical and practical activity. "Through such learning, knowledge is generated that makes possible the technical mastery of the natural and social world and the organization and alteration of social relations; that is, the expansion of the sphere of 'sensuous human activity' or praxis" (Held 1980, p. 257). Habermas is not always consistent in his use of the concept of *praxis*, though the major brunt of his work, particularly in his later writings analyzes it "as a complex consisting of two key parts – work (or instrumental action, purposive-rational action) and interaction (or communicative interaction)" (Held 1980, p. 257).

Held (1980) also points out that Habermas' exposé of the emancipatory interest is ambiguous, particularly in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. The emancipatory interest, Held points out, is not simply the guiding interest of critically oriented sciences, but of all systematic reflection, including philosophy. It is crucial because self-reflection is the lynchpin of theory and practice. "Through self-reflection, individuals can become aware of forces which have exerted a hitherto unacknowledged influence over them" (Held 1980, p. 318). This has crucial implications for WS1002, the teaching subject at the centre of this research. I shall return to this issue in later chapters. Indeed, Giddens (1985, p. 124) suggests that "the guiding thread of all Habermas' work, according to his own terstimony, is an endeavour to reunite theory and practice in the twentieth-century world." The model of critical science that Habermas turns to is Freudian psychoanalysis, which in Habermas' view, reveals the logic of a reflective science. It is the attempt to

overcome repression Habermas argues which raises psychoanalysis from a hermeneutical science to that of a critical science. For Habermas, the Freudian quest to "interpret speech and behaviour both on the level of a subject's conscious intentions and on the level of repressed needs and wants" is the feature which endows Freud's "depth hermeneutics" with a causal aspect that traditional hermeneutics lacks. "The meaning can only be adequately understood in terms of the underlying unconscious factors which caused the actor to act as he or she did" (Held 1980, p. 320). We should note in passing that Habermas privileges the unconscious as a causal agent. In a sense, psychoanalysis can be seen as the pivot on which swings Habermas' attempt to bridge the deeply dug moat between positivism with its emphasis on causal explanation and hermeneutics with its emphasis on 'understanding'. Such explanations, Held (1980) notes, can be developed only with reference to a general theory of neurosis, such as provided by Freud. Habermas' project can also be read as "a conscious attempt to connect British and American trends in social science and philosophy with those deriving from German social theory" (Giddens 1985, p. 123).

We can summarize Habermas' epistemological enterprise at the end of the first phase of his project as follows:

> ...it is Habermas' view that there are three knowledge-constitutive interests and three categories of knowledge. Each of the interests is expressed in a distinct methodological approach to the generation of knowledge. Each is rooted in life – in a complex of activities which is basic to the survival and development of the species. It is only in light of these interests that knowledge can be comprehended.
> (Held 1980, pp. 324-325)

Communicative Action

Habermas' more recent work on communicative action is partly a consequence of opponents' critique (see Habermas 1974) and partly an attempt to overcome the weaknesses he perceived in the hermeneutic tradition as exemplified by Gadamer. I shall discuss each briefly. Bernstein, quoted in Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 140) argued that "Habermas seems to be...smuggling in his own normative bias under the guise of an objective analysis of reason as self-reflection ... Critique ... is a substantive normative theory which cannot be justified by an appeal to the formal conditions of reason and knowledge." This type of criticism required Habermas to provide a standard of rationality so that a critical social science could justify its own procedures, and his response was to turn to an analysis of language. "In particular, he argued that the normative foundations which justify critical social science as a viable and rational enterprise can be derived from an analysis of ordinary speech and discourse" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 140).

Habermas' major bone of contention with Gadamer, it seems to me, is that in Gadamer's schema there is no way to step outside the 'hermeneutic merry ground'. For Habermas, given his staunch commitment to a realist ontology, it is desperately important to establish normative criteria in order to access this reality. Related to this is Habermas' concern for the essential conservatism of Gadamer's position, namely his uncritical commitment to the underlying consensus of tradition, leading to Habermas' charge that Gadamer fails to see the fundamental 'opposition between authority and reason' (Held 1980, p. 315). For Habermas, "what is missing in Gadamer is a critical approach to tradition – a critique of ideology – and

an historically orientated analysis of social systems which locates tradition in the social whole" (Held 1980, p. 316).

> The limitations of an approach based solely upon the speakers of natural languages can be transcended, in Habermas' view, by recognizing that human life unfolds in a framework of language, labour and domination, and by developing theoretical and empirical accounts of these domains. The theory of social evolution and the theory of communicative competence are crucial stages in this programme. They represent an attempt to mitigate the context-dependency of understanding by, as one commentator usefully put it, providing 'a theoretically grounded and methodologically secured' account of the 'preunderstanding that functions in any attempt to grasp meanings'.
> (Held 1980, pp. 316-317)

So at one level a central aim of Habermas' work on communicative action has concerned foundations: "the problem of providing a justified normative basis for critical theory in the light of the rejection of the possibility of pure *theoria*" (Held 1980, p. 330). A prime motivator for Habermas in this quest is his fear that if we cannot establish such foundations we are prey to fragmentation, relativism and potential anarchy, arrows he has fired at Derrida and Foucault specifically and postmodernism in general (see, for example, Habermas 1981; 1986). I shall return to the issues of fragmentation and relativism below. For Habermas, such norms arise from consensus, a consensus based on rational criticism. While rejecting the possibility of enduring consensus and the correspondence theory of truth this seems to entail, Habermas believes there are procedures "which generate good reasons to accept or reject competing knowledge claims. These are located in the notion of a discourse. It is Habermas' contention that the presuppositions and procedures of discourse are the basis for establishing both the truth of statements and the correctness of norms" (Held 1980, p. 331). I shall return to this below. For now, the problem arises: how can we justify the norm that is to justify all norms?

"Habermas' solution is that this principle is embedded in the very nature of speech" (Held 1980, p. 331).

For Habermas, language is the key distinguishing feature of human life. But language cannot be understood independently of communication. This leads him to focus on explicit speech actions (though ultimately he hopes to produce a general analysis of action types which includes non-verbalized actions and bodily expressions) (Held 1980). His universal pragmatics (the name given to his theory of communicative competence) has as its initial central aim "the reconstruction of the universal conditions of possible understanding" (Held 1980, p. 332). Habermas pursues this in the first part of his project by investigating "consensual speech" and "speech that is oriented toward reaching an understanding" (p. 332). Building on the work of Chomsky in linguistics and Austin and Searle in the theory of speech acts, Habermas argues that *communicative competence* can be rationally reconstructed (Held 1980). He "assume[s] that communicative competence has just as universal a core as linguistic competence" (Habermas 1979, p. 26).

Because Habermas believes that successful communication is underpinned by a rational foundation, he focuses on the 'validity basis' of speech, a series of four different types of universal validity claims – comprehensibility, truth, rightness/correctness, and truthfulness/sincerity. This analysis of universal pragmatics is pursued in order to comprehend the elements and general conditions of understanding (Held 1980). The analysis leads him to what he refers to as the 'ideal speech situation', a situation where there is "equal opportunity for discussion, free from all domination, whether arising from conscious strategic

behaviour and/or systematically distorted communication (internal and/or external constraints). A consensus attained in this situation, referred to by Habermas as a 'rational consensus', is the ultimate criterion of the truth of a statement or the correctness of norms" (Held 1980, pp. 343-344).

For Habermas, "each time we pursue a theoretical or practical argument with the intention of reaching a rational agreement, we presuppose an ideal speech situation: we assume its reality. It is constitutive of the meaning of discourse" (Held 1980, p. 344). I leave for the moment the potentially dubious nature of this assumption: it has not always been my experience, which suggests as often as not combatants in argument are more concerned with battering their opponent into submission as further evidence of their already ossified views.

Habermas' project is ambitious and complex. Held (1980) provides a superb summary of this second strand of Habermas' work:

> In summary, therefore, it is Habermas' view that the analysis of speech shows it is oriented to the idea of understanding, to the idea of a genuine consensus – which is rarely realized; the analysis of the consensus shows it to be based on four types of validity claim; the analysis of validity claims shows that they can only be established by, among other things, discourse; the analysis of discourse ties it to the idea of a situation in which agreement is reached simply on the basis of 'the better argument' – an ideal speech situation; the analysis of the ideal speech situation shows it to involve assumptions about the institutional context of interaction. The end point of this argument is that the structure of speech is held to involve 'the anticipation of a form of life in which truth, freedom and justice are possible'. Critical theory is, therefore, grounded on a normative standard that is not arbitrary, but 'inherent in the very structure of social action and language'. With this reconceptualization of the basis of critique Habermas seeks to defend the claim that truth and virtue, facts and values, and theory and practice are inseparable. For 'the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life'.
> (Held 1980, p. 345)

Held (1980) also succinctly summarizes the links between the two major strands of Habermas' work – knowledge and human interests, and communicative action – in the following way:

> The theory of cognitive interests specifies the *a priori* of experience – the structure of a given object domain. The theory of communication (which connects directly...to a theory of truth) specifies the *a priori* of argumentative reasoning – the conditions of discourse.
> (Held 1980, p. 340)

Or in Habermas' own words, these theories together combine to define "the limits of... theories (which are built up from accumulated evidence). Theories can only be constructed, and progressively reconstructed, in the context of *conditions* pertaining to the nature of argumentation and within the *limits* of prior objectivation of experiencable occurrences" (Habermas 1978a, p. 366).

Note the unity between the *a priori* of experience and the *a priori* of argumentative reasoning, between action, experience and discourse. This unity, Held (1980) points out, is maintained by the knowledge-constitutive interests themselves. "They preserve the *latent nexus between action and theoretical knowledge*. They are responsible for the transformation of opinions into theorems and for the retransformation of theorems into action-oriented knowledge" (Habermas 1978a, p. 370).

I shall finish this exposition of Habermas' ideas by briefly revisiting the theory/practice question. A key question arises: what is Habermas' conception of the relationship between theory and practice *in* practice? This returns us to Habermas' conception of the model of psychoanalysis as a critical science where self-reflection is the lynchpin of theory and practice. I shall discuss more closely

Habermas' concepts of 'reflection', 'self-reflection' and 'critical reflection' in the

next chapter. For now, I want to raise the difficulties in transferring the

psychoanalytical model of patient/therapist to the level of social and political

interaction. Habermas recognized the problems, which led him to distinguish

between three levels/functions of 'enlightenment' (a term Habermas seems to use

synonymously with 'emancipation'). Held (1980) summarizes Habermas' position

in the following way:

> ...theory cannot dictate and justify action. Theory can be used to create agents
> capable of full participation in decisions concerning actions and it can be used
> to support arguments in favour of certain courses of action. But it cannot be
> used, in any automatic or mechanistic way, to generate strategy or to ensure the
> success of strategic action. For strategic movement contains an irreducible
> element of uncertainty and risk – an element which can only be fully taken
> account of in the context in which it arises.
> (Held 1980, p. 349)

Though I believe there is a crucial footnote to be added. During the 1960s when

Habermas' ideas came to the fore there was much reciprocal influence between the

student movement and Habermas. Indeed, initially he was a leading spokesman for

the movement. By the late 1960s estrangement had set in. Habermas sniffed

authoritarianism on their part and the students were critical of Habermas' failure to

become involved in actual struggles, of "retreating into theoretical reflection, and

for uniting theory and practice in theory only" (Held 1980, p. 251).

Criticisms of Habermas

Many criticisms have been levelled against Habermas, though both Held (1980)

and Giddens (1985) suggest that some of these are based on dubious interpretations

of him. I want to focus on the most important of those more generally agreed upon

criticisms which have a direct bearing on the epistemological issues raised in this

thesis. I shall avoid detailed discussion of philosophical nuances regarding, for example, questions as to whether there are three and only three cognitive interests (see Held 1980, particularly chapters 13 and 14, and Thompson and Held 1982 for detailed and comprehensive critiques). It does not make sense to argue over the colour of the curtains if the foundations are trembling.

First, and most importantly, is the question of Habermas' adherence to transcendental philosophy. This appears in both strands of his work: initially, in the 'quasi-transcendental' status of the cognitive interests; and secondly, in his notion of 'communicative intersubjectivity', also accorded *a priori* status.

> His approach appears to grant primacy simultaneously to the natural conditions of life – the source of interests and the origins of the structure of action – and to the historical world in which nature is socially constructed. The theory of cognitive interests appears to entail both an objectivistic ontology of nature and a conception of nature as a mere abstraction required by thought. Habermas' attempts to unite these perspectives are not convincing.
> (Held 1980, p. 393)

This is critical since one of Habermas' key missions was to move beyond the isolated Cartesian and Kantian subject, beyond the perennial problem of solipsistic self-enclosure which has bedevilled philosophy throughout the ages. Habermas' strategy for doing this was to locate the subject in dialogue with others ('communicative intersubjectivity'), a dialogue immersed in the midst of a wider context of social and historical relations (see Falzon 1998). This latter focus was also his perceived strategy for moving beyond what he considered to be the inherent conservatism of Gadamer's hermeneutics. By positing the *a priori* quasi-transcendental cognitive interests and the *a priori* ideal speech situation "inherent in the very structure of social action and language" (Held 1980, p. 345), Habermas has fallen prey to a common philosopher's trick: when one's cherished ideals are

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threatened by philosophical obstacles, save them by sliding in an *a priori* innate bedrock to bolster sagging foundations. As we have seen, many of the philosophers examined thus far have resorted to such tactics. This is a serious and large claim. I want to unpackage it carefully. But before I do, I want to balance this critique by suggesting that I believe Habermas to be of the most noble intentions. Born into Nazi Germany Habermas was obsessed with overcoming repression and domination, with building a society whose rational foundations could afford equal opportunity to all. My fear is that his ideas may lead to the very totalitarian sorts of domination to which he is so vehemently opposed. This will become clearer as I proceed.

Part of the problem with Habermas' notion of dialogue – and I shall have much more to say about 'dialogue' in the next section on Foucault – is its *totalizing* tendencies. His aim, as Falzon (1998, p. 81) points out, "is to establish, once and for all, a unified form of life based on social norms which are universal, norms which can be agreed to by, and are capable of governing the behaviour of, all its participants. Anything which is not moving in this totalizing, universalizing direction is not real dialogue at all." Rorty (1980, p. 10) describes it as just another attempt to "eternalize the discourse of the day." What, we might ask, happens when there is dissent, difference? Habermas would have us believe that ultimately the better argument, in the sense of the most rational, will prevail. But this ignores the fact, evident from Habermas' own critical social analyses, that not all appear at the dialogue table with an equal array of riches. In a sense – and I shall return to this in greater detail below – knowledge is 'negotiated' through the process of dialogue and there are huge individual differences between stakeholder capacity to

influence this process. Expressed differently, the ideal speech situation is not a

sufficient condition for a fully open discourse. It "fail[s] to cover a range of

phenomena, from the nature (content) of cultural traditions to the distribution of

material resources, which are obviously important determinants of the possibility of

discourse – and, more generally, of a rational, free and just society" (Held 1980, p.

396). One pertinent area inadequately theorized is gender, as feminist critical

theorists have pointed out:

> I am, however, unconvinced that Frankfurt School depth psychology – derived
> as it is from the master theorist of phallocentrism – is an adequate
> psychological and social theory for the explanation of identity formation and
> development in any subjects other than Western (and Westernized) males.
> (Carmen Luke 1992, p. 44)

As such, Habermas can be read, according to his own testimony, as being in the

vanguard of the project of the Enlightenment, the project of modernity, where "the

legacy of the Enlightenment, the simple, profound, unquestioned conviction that

Reason, Freedom, and Progress naturally imply one another" (Cahoone 1996, p.

27-28). There is nothing wrong with pursuing ideals of reason, freedom and

progress. The problem is Habermas assumes rather too glibly that his 'rational'

approach will ensure freedom and progress and to this end he is prepared to

subordinate all. The result is that, ironically, given his departure point in the

critique of Descartes and Kant and the acceptance of the Hegelian and Marxian

insight that the subject must be seen as inherently social and historical, he succeeds

in perpetuating the very subjectivist and self-enclosed metaphysics he criticizes.

How is this so? Falzon summarizes it beautifully:

> He argues that although we have to take society and history into account, we
> also need to preserve something of the universal claims of transcendental
> philosophy. We need to hold on to some conception of the foundational subject
> if we are going to be able to continue to judge, to criticize and change our forms
> of life, and, more broadly, if we are to hold on to the 'project of modernity', the

'Enlightenment project' of the organization of forms of life in accordance with human reason. In order to bring off this preservation of transcendentalism in the midst of history, Habermas resorts, broadly speaking, to the same kind of strategy employed by Hegel. He similarly turns from the self-enclosed Kantian subject to history, but only in so far as history is subordinated to the demands of subjectivist metaphysics.

In this manner, Habermas turns against the historicist side of his own thinking, in order to hold on to the subjectivist vision of rational autonomy, as it has developed via Hegel and humanist Marxism, i.e. the vision of human beings as ideally exercising collective, conscious, rational control over social processes, as making their history with 'will and consciousness'. The notion of rational autonomy or *Mündigkeit* is the fundamental value that orients Habermas' work. (Falzon 1998, p. 80)

The key difference, Falzon (1998) argues, between Habermas' position and the traditional Kantian one is that Habermas makes the move from individual consciousness (Kant's Absolute Subject) to intersubjective communication. Just as Kant's 'transcendental categories' are universal and *a priori*, so too are Habermas' cognitive interests and 'ideal speech situation'. Such a strategy places them beyond critique, a stark irony in the face of Habermas' overall project for a critical science. Critical reflection is allowed, positively encouraged, but the doors of the inner sanctum are closed to critique. This is what gets Habermas into trouble: his view of cumulative progress and the store he places in rationality. History ascends a stairway to heaven if only we can uncover the path. In Habermas' dexterous hands the path of rationality lurks ever-present. What is required is for us consensually and collectively to tackle the task of clearing the underbrush of ideological distortion and continuing our rational march heavenwards.

Another complicating factor in interpreting Habermas' position is that he hijacks theoretical standpoints (e.g. psychoanalysis, linking language with social institutions, and relations of power) which prima facie seem to lend credence to a

socially and historically constituted subject. Closer inspection reveals, however, that these theoretical positions are held hostage to the primacy of Habermas' metaphysical subjectivism (Giddens 1982; Falzon 1998). Falzon (1998, p. 84) notes that Habermas' response to such criticisms has not been "to return to his original historicist intuitions. Rather, he has turned even more markedly away from the concrete and historical, and in an increasingly theoretical and transcendentalist direction." Habermas' later work on universal pragmatics "is only concerned with communicative action in so far as it reveals an essential, universal orientation towards pure, unconstrained discourse, a transcendental ideal that underlies all actual performances. Habermas thus considers language only in so far as it is reducible to a single, unitary model or essence, discourse as oriented towards a general and unforced rational consensus" (Falzon 1998, p. 85).

And this, of course, inevitably leads to a form of self-enclosure, a denial of history which means that Habermas cannot account for the historical emergence of his standpoint.

> The ideal of collective will-formation through constraint-free discussion, which guides his interpretation of discourse and social practices, cannot itself be comprehended or explained socially or historically. It has to be posited *a priori*, as a timeless ideal implicit in all speech acts. Habermas thus opens himself up to the charge that he is absolutizing an ideal of social existence that is in fact a historically recent, and indeed specifically Western, invention. The ideal that Habermas wants to absolutize is the eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideal of rational utopia, of rising above the sway of history and bringing all social practices under the direction of human reason. Where this project was formerly grounded in a rational subject, Habermas seeks to ground it anew in language, in a linguistically reformulated notion of rational subjectivity.
> (Falzon 1998, pp. 85-86)

Held (1980), while expressing the issue differently, sees the relation of critique and history as one of the major unresolved problems that has confronted critical theory since the Frankfurt School.

> 'How can the possibility of critique be sustained, if the historical contextuality of knowledge is recognized?' Or put differently: 'How can critical theory at once acknowledge its historicality and yet be critical? How can critical theory be part of the movement of history and a means of enlightenment?'
> (Held 1980, p. 398)

Falzon also argues that Habermas' utopian vision of human life in addition to being ahistorical and abstract also contains political dangers. This is because, Falzon (1998, p. 86) argues, in Habermas' account the role of *critical reflection* is to overcome the various forms of domination that prevent us from realizing this ideal, utopian vision. But "this account places those who formulate what counts as an ideal dialogue, a properly human life, in a powerful position." The danger is "the possibility of assisting in the establishment of a new regime of totalizing domination, a domination which suppresses otherness and resistance."

Falzon provides a succinct summary of the criticisms that have been directed against Habermas:

> Overall, then, Habermas presents us with a conception of dialogue that is subordinated to an essentialist model of discourse, remote from concrete communicative practices, and participated in by abstract, disembodied speakers, as well as being politically problematic.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 87)

Falzon (1998, p. 87) notes, however, that in the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984) Habermas "acknowledge[s] and [seeks] to mitigate the relatively strong foundationalism of his theory of universal pragmatics, stressing the non-transcendental, empirical character of his account." But despite

these intentions and efforts, Falzon cites Roderick's analysis, which reaches the conclusion that Habermas "is still concerned to find transcendental – in the sense of 'universal and unavoidable' – foundations for thought, action and critique within historical forms of communication. And it remains unclear how he can do so without continuing to come into conflict with the historical, anti-metaphysical side of his account" (Falzon 1998, p. 87).

I want to conclude this section by briefly reviewing criticisms directed against four other key areas in Habermas' account: psychoanalysis, emancipation, truth and theory/practice. First, psychoanalysis. I pointed out above that Habermas' use of psychoanalysis as a model for a critical social science is crucial. It is, as I said, "the pivot on which swings Habermas' attempt to bridge the deeply dug moat between positivism with its emphasis on casual explanation and hermeneutics with its emphasis on 'understanding'". But its deployment is highly problematic.

> In what ways can a dialogue between individuals become a model for the analysis of relations between classes and groups? How can a relationship which is essentially voluntary become the methodological model for understanding and changing social situations characterized by unequal distribution of scarce resources, discrepancies in material interests and power relations?
> (Held 1980, p. 394)

Second, given his commitment to the 'Enlightenment project', the concept of *emancipation* assumes gigantic proportions in Habermas' theory. But as Held points out:

> ...it is necessary for a theory such as Habermas' to identify the subject of emancipation. The questions arise: To whom is critical theory addressed? How, in any concrete situation, can critical theory be applied? Who is to be the instigator or promoter of enlightenment? ... His model of the critical project requires that a catalyst and agent of social transformation be specified. Yet these issues are only discussed at a most abstract level. ... The theory of the

relationship between theory and political and moral life is undeveloped, as are the modes in which this relationship might be enacted.
(Held 1980, p. 395)

This, after all, is what loads the gun for critical theory, what gives knowledge the political edge.

Third, *truth*. This criticism binds together a number of criticisms already raised:

> Since the development of the theory of communicative competence, the relationship between truth claims sustained in discourse and those vindicated in the process of enlightenment has become obscure. It appears now that a 'rational consensus' – a consensus attained in a context that approximates the ideal speech situation – is, for Habermas, the ultimate criterion of truth or correctness of norms. In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, however, the process of assessing problematic truth claims is tied directly to practice. Theory is tested in and through practice – in the struggle to overcome and dissolve barriers to self-reflection. Clearly, our capacity to enter a genuine discourse is conditioned by emancipatory practices of this kind. But while critical self-reflection might be argued to be a necessary condition for discourse...it is not a sufficient condition. For the requirements of a rational consensus involve assumptions not only about the individual's knowledge-states, but also about the relations between individuals. The successful continuation of self-formative processes represents only one condition for the realization of the 'symmetry requirement' and, therefore, of a genuine discourse.
> (Held 1980, pp. 395-96)

Finally, theory/practice, a major concern of this thesis. Ignoring the problem of historical evidence for the tenets of critical theory (alluded to above), there are still major problems. Held (1980, p. 375) argues that Habermas' program "diverts attention away from the analysis of concrete social and political situations (where particular interests weigh rather more heavily than universal species' capacities)." This, we might remember, was the kernel of the criticism directed at Habermas in the late 1960s by the leaders of the student movement.

I want to summarize the criticisms of Habermas under three headings: **totalization, teleology,** and **essentialism.** Katz (1995) argues that these are the commonalities of the diverse theories of 'modernism' (e.g. humanism, Marxism, positivism, feminism, Christianity) to which so-called postmodern theorists have reacted. I shall summarize Katz's definitions of these concepts and the major criticisms. **Totalization** refers to the holistic attempt to explain the whole human condition or the condition of whole societies either philosophically, psychologically or socially. The emphasis is on 'sameness' rather than 'difference'. Postmodernism attacks this tenet, Katz (1995) argues, because of its 'hidden agenda' of terrorism or totalitarianism. For example, Stalinism and Nazism, it is argued, are not aberrations and retreats from modernism. They are the consequences of a world view that can easily move from describing people's similarities to forcing people to be the same.

Teleology is the doctrine that sees societies, individuals and theories progressing towards an ultimate goal such as liberation, emancipation or maturity. It sees individuals and/or society as starting from some form of primitive existence and progressing through stages to a higher level of being. Postmodernists attack this doctrine because of the tendency to totalize. Teleology aims at a future in which human beings will all be the same, and their essence revealed, whether the goal or *telos* is the liberation of 'man', the coming of the Messiah, or the dawning of a new socialist age (Katz 1995).

Essentialism is the belief that people, cultures and society as well as natural phenomena have an 'essence' or true nature that is, in principle, discoverable by

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science. Essentialism is attacked because modernist theories of truth or the essential nature of human beings or societies rely on universal and everlasting truths. But postmodern theorists believe that this version of 'truth' is constructed by Western society and imposed by violence on other cultures or dissenters. In modernist thought the subject is seen as central: biology is seen as prior to and more fundamental than society, the individual over the collective, and the conscious 'self' over the unconscious or the group. Postmodernism decentres the subject, seeing truth and 'human nature' as bound by culture, time and space. Human nature, it is argued, is a product of culture, rather than cultures being different ways of expressing human nature (Katz 1995).

Organizing the criticisms of Habermas in this way allows us to see the similarities in modernist theories and prepares the ground for a discussion of Foucault. But before I tackle this venture I want to present a brief foray into 'feminist epistemology'. I regard this as crucial for at least two reasons. First, women comprise approximately 50% of the planet's inhabitants and feminist epistemologies provide a distinct gender focus often blurred by the traditionally masculinist theories of modernism. Second, social work is a profession dominated by women: clients, practitioners and students. Indeed, approximately 80% of the cohort forming the basis of this thesis are women. Katz (1995) above lumped feminism in the diverse category of modernism. This is to pay a grave disservice to feminist theories of knowledge. I have located my discussion of feminist epistemology here because its historical diversity straddles neatly the concerns of Habermas and Foucault; though, as we shall see, extant variants are far from identical with either position This is ably demonstrated in philosopher of science,

Sandra Harding's (1986), discussion of the development of feminist epistemology from feminist empiricism to feminist standpoint epistemology. Carmen Luke (1992) also makes the point that while feminism may share certain agendas with poststructuralism, or critical theory for that matter, identical agendas cannot be assumed. She also emphasizes the theoretical diversity of feminism.

2.3.4 Feminist Epistemology

In one sense, critical theory, feminisms and poststructuralism share a common platform in their critique of unequivocal acceptance of Enlightenment philosophy (though they may differ in their strategic reactions to such critiques). All are 'critical' theories. Lather (1992) categorizes critical, neo-Marxist and feminist approaches as all belonging to the 'emancipatory' paradigm (though she classifies poststructuralism and postmodernism as part of the 'deconstructive' paradigm). She is aware, however, that feminist research – and her focus is education research – can take place across paradigms. At the most general level, what distinguishes feminist epistemologies is the lens of gender. "To do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry. ... Feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle that profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives" (Lather 1992, p. 91).

From the beginning, feminist approaches to knowledge have focused on the politics of knowing and being known. "Openly ideological, most feminist research assumes that ways of knowing are inherently culture bound and that researcher values permeate inquiry" (Lather 1992, p. 91). In her feminist critique of feminist critiques of science, Harding (1986) argues for an advocacy approach to the inquiry

process, and thus knowledge building, by distinguishing between 'coercive' values such as racism and sexism and 'participatory values' such as anti-racism and anti-sexism. In a later work, Harding (1987) suggests three epistemological positions available to feminism. First, *feminist empiricism.* The attempt is to eliminate sexist bias within the framework of existing approaches. This is not necessarily conservative since "the people who identify and define scientific problems leave their social fingerprints on the problems and their favoured solutions to them" (Harding 1987, p. 184). The second, *feminist standpoint theories of knowledge,* "foregrounds how social positioning shapes and limits what we can know. Male domination results in partial and distorted accounts of social life" (Lather 1992, pp. 92-93). This is not essentialism sneaked in the back door. Multiple feminist standpoints exist relating to the variety and diversity of women's experiences in terms of race, culture, class, sexuality, etc. "Reliable knowledge claims, then, are those that arise out of the struggle against oppression, not in a way that romanticizes women's experiences but rather in a way that moves toward reflection on the conditions that make knowledge possible" (Lather 1992, p. 93). Harding (1987) suggests that both feminist empiricist and feminist standpoint epistemologies are transitional – though tactically strategic at this point of history. The third position, *feminist postmodernism,* shares many of the criticisms outlined above – of totalization, teleology and essentialism (and more to be detailed below), but with the addition of a gender lens. I shall define postmodernism and related terms in the next section.

Feminist postmodernism arose because there was growing recognition that 'add-woman-and-stir' approaches did not challenge the central planks on which

women's issues foundered (Allen 1991). For instance, "in Philosophy, feminists increasingly saw that any approach to the discipline and its central categories, such as 'reason', could not take as its task simply the supplementing of an incomplete or accidentally deficient Philosophy. Rather,...philosophical categories like 'reason' were founded precisely upon the association of unreason with the feminine" (Allen 1991, p. 62).

In fact, as yet, feminist approaches to knowledge, have had little impact on the 'mainstream' academy. Judith Allen (1991, p. 67) in her comprehensive survey of feminist critiques of Western knowledges notes the "minimal impact of feminist perspectives on disciplinary knowledges" resulting in the "marginal position of feminist analysis and research in the Western academy." Spender (1981) explains this by arguing that "feminist perspectives are resisted...because they constitute an attempt to challenge a fundamental power-base in women's subordination – the construction and dissemination of knowledge" (Allen 1991, p. 67). Harding and Hintikka (1983) explain the obstacles in epistemological and metaphysical terms rather than political ones. "Women's experience systematically differs from the male experience upon which knowledge claims have been grounded" (Allen 1991, p. 68). The solution is not political on their account but involves a dual project: deconstructing masculinist conceptions and reconstructing feminist ones.

Carmen Luke (1996, p. 284) notes the fissuring that has taken place in feminism with the advent of poststructuralism. "Feminism's 'first principle' of difference(s) has severely potentially disabling consequences for the transformative politics claimed by feminist pedagogy discourse." In addition to this problem of political

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strategy, Luke underscores a key epistemological issue. "The theoretical turn to and celebration of difference in all feminisms including feminist pedagogy, raise crucial epistemological and political questions about normativity which, in turn, call into question the theoretical validity and political agenda of feminism's 'truth claims'" (Luke 1996, p. 284). In similar vein, Allen (1991, p. 73) cites De Lauretis's warning "that feminists have arguably reached a defensive point of taking the risk of essentialism too seriously, so seriously as to imperil the feminist project." This issue is vital and I shall return to it after the discussion of poststructuralism, to which it is so clearly applicable.

2.3.5 'Poststructuralism'? – Michel Foucault

Poststructuralism and its cognate term postmodernism defy glib conceptualization. As with critical theory – though probably much more so with postmodernism – no single unitary position exists. Most philosophers use the term "to refer to a movement that developed in France in the 1960s, more precisely called 'poststructuralism', along with subsequent and related developments" (Cahoone 1996, p. 2). French philosophy underwent a major change in the 1960s. During the first half of the twentieth century Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology and psychoanalysis emerged in Europe as the key alternatives to the dominant rationalistic, scientifically-oriented paradigm which I have labelled as positivism. Marxism has been referred to in my discussion of Habermas' critical theory, as has psychoanalysis. Space prevents discussion of existentialism and phenomenology specifically, though epistemologically they can be said to fit within the hermeneutic paradigm and Heidegger and Ricoeur (discussed above) are key figures. The new French philosophers of the 1960s (e.g. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-

François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze) also critiqued the political and academic establishment, but they did so from the intellectual heritage of structuralism, developed initially by linguist Ferdinand Saussure and championed after the Second World War by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. "Structuralism rejected the focus on the self and its historical development that had characterized Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis" (Cahoone 1996, p. 5). Riding on the notion that culture creates the self and not the self that creates culture, these thinkers focused on the 'super-individual' structures of language, ritual and kinship that constitute the individual. Structuralism, unlike phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis, promised to offer an escape from subjectivism, retaining objective, scientific methods, while avoiding reduction to the natural sciences (Cahoone 1996). Foucault and 'colleagues' "accepted structuralism's refusal to worship at the altar of the self. But they rejected its scientific pretensions" (Cahoone 1996, p. 5).

I have already provided a brief outline of postmodern attacks on modernist theories in terms of *totalization, teleology* and *essentialism*. In this section I plan to flesh out this skeleton. While I shall focus primarily on Foucault (spinning in his grave in horror at being frocked with a postmodern shroud), I shall refer also to Jacques Derrida. But before I begin, conceptual clarification is in order. Initially, I want to specify how I am using the terms *postmodernism, poststructuralism* and *modernism*. For the purposes of this thesis I am painting the definitions with a philosophical brush.

Modernism stems from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, referring to

> ...a civilization founded on scientific knowledge of the world and rational knowledge of value, which places the highest premium on individual human life and freedom, and believes that such freedom and rationality will lead to social progress through virtuous, self-controlled work, creating a better material, political, and intellectual life for all. This combination of science, reason, individuality, freedom, truth, and social progress has, however, been questioned and criticized by many.
> (Cahoone 1996, p. 12)

Although modernism is usually equated with the Enlightenment, Foucault (1984b, p. 39) prefers to think of modernity "as an attitude than as a period of history."

By restricting postmodernism to a philosophical basis I am blurring a distinction often made between poststructuralism (regarded by some as a subset of postmodernism – e.g. Best and Kellner 1991; Lather 1992) and postmodernism itself. I am, in short, using the terms poststructuralism and postmodernism interchangeably. Some thinkers, while acknowledging the hazards of tightly-drawn distinctions, are at pains to cleave the two concepts. Agger (1992, p. 93), for instance, uses poststructuralism to refer to the theory of knowledge and language associated with the work of Derrida, and postmodernism to refer to "a theory of cultural, intellectual and societal discontinuity that rejects the linearism of Enlightenment notions of progress." Giddens (1990) prefers to use the term 'postmodernity' for this latter domain, but he extends it radically by positing it as a form of life beyond modernity, a possible social future. Smart (1993) wants to distinguish between 'postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' as well as 'poststructuralism'. I adopt Best and Kellner's (1991) portrayal of postmodernism or postmodern theory, which they define in contradistinction to modernism, as the all-purpose brush for both postmodernism and poststructuralism.

...postmodern theory provides a critique of representation and the modern belief that theory mirrors reality, taking instead 'perspectivist' and 'relativist' positions that theories at best provide partial perspectives on their objects, and that all cognitive representations of the world are historically and linguistically mediated. Some postmodern theory accordingly rejects the totalizing macroperspectives on society and history favoured by modern theory in favour of microtheory and micropolitics (Lyotard). Postmodern theory also rejects modern assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminancy. In addition, postmodern theory abandons the rational and unified subject postulated by much modern theory in favour of a socially and linguistically decentred and fragmented subject.
(Best and Kellner 1991, pp. 4-5)

In this schema of the world, foundation (including the foundational self), reason, truth, progress, objectivity, certainty, and system are all highly suspect. This juxtaposition of modernism and postmodernism/poststructuralism is vital to an understanding of the latter.

Poststructuralism is primarily a discourse of and about modernism...[and] we must begin to entertain the notion that rather than offering a *theory of postmodernity* and developing an analysis of contemporary culture, French theory provides us primarily with an *archaeology of modernity*, a theory of modernism at the stage of its exhaustion.
(Huyssen quoted in Smart 1993, p. 21)

Despite significant differences, the French thinkers Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Guattari, Lacan, and sometimes Barthes, are usually grouped together under the banner of poststructuralism. Smart (1993) suggests these thinkers have the following in common (in the sense that they call attention and contribute to these issues): 'crisis of *representation*' evident in epistemological, artistic, and political contexts; reveal the fragile and problematic representational character of *language*, the disarticulation of words and things, and the ways in which *meaning* is increasingly sustained through mechanisms of self-referentiality; and thereby deny us access to an independent *reality*; present the *subject* as fragmented and decentred in the social field undermining, as a result, the notion of

identity as a fixed and unified phenomenon. All these issues have some bearing on the three broad epistemological issues raised at the beginning of this chapter.

A final key concept requires clarification: 'discourse'. Postmodern theory generally follows poststructuralist theory in the primacy given to discourse theory (Best and Kellner 1991). Discourse refers to a "regulated system of statements which can be analyzed not solely in terms of the internal rules of formation, but also as a set of practices within a social milieu. Discourse is the combination of a practice and a mode or structure of speaking" (Marshall 1992, p. 99).

> For Foucault and others, an important concern of discourse theory is to analyze the institutional bases of discourse, the viewpoints and positions from which people speak, and the power relations these allow and presuppose. Discourse theory also interprets discourse as a site and object of struggle where different groups strive for hegemony and the production of meaning and ideology.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 26)

Having cleared some of the conceptual rubble and provided a meagre scaffold, I can now proceed with 'hanging' Foucault. Before launching into the core of Foucault's work, I want to mention key influences on his ideas. I briefly discussed Heidegger in the section on hermeneutics. Space has prevented me from discussing Nietzsche. Both these thinkers were powerfully influential on the development of postmodernism in general and Foucault in particular. They were key figures in providing comprehensive critiques of modernity (Best and Kellner 1991).

> Nietzsche took apart the fundamental categories of Western philosophy in a trenchant philosophical critique, which provided the theoretical premises of many poststructuralist and postmodern critiques. He attacked philosophical conceptions of the subject, representation, causality, truth, value, and system, replacing Western philosophy with a perspectivist orientation for which there are no facts, only interpretations, and no objective truths, only the constructs of various individuals or groups.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 22)

In an epistemological sense we can consider a central feature of poststructuralism to be its critique of foundationalism, that is the attempt to discover secure foundations for knowledge, foundations usually held to be the basis for 'truth' claims. An integral part of this foundational critique concerns the attack on the foundational subject which was seen to be the conduit for truth. Although modern philosophers (and the ancient Greeks) differed in their choice of foundations (for Descartes it was innate ideas, for the British empiricists it was experience derived from observations, themselves a product of sensory experience, for Kant it was his 'transcendental categories', for Hegel it was the Absolute subject, the logical positivists built on the British empiricists, and so on), what bound all these thinkers was a belief in the possibility of secure foundations of knowledge. Derrida (1976) termed this foundationalist approach to language and knowledge a 'metaphysics of presence'. It supposedly guaranteed the subject an unmediated access to reality.

Following the three central questions posed at the chapter's beginning, I shall discuss Foucault in relation to these. Initially, I shall provide the briefest overview of Foucault's overall project, then discuss his work according to the three main phases of his work distinguished by Best and Kellner (1991).

As with most postmodern theorists, Foucault "rejects the equation of reason, emancipation and progress, arguing that an interface between modern forms of power and knowledge has served to create new forms of domination" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 34). In the words of Best and Kellner (1991, p. 35), "Foucault's project has been to write a 'critique of our historical era' (1984b, p. 42) which problematizes modern forms of knowledge, rationality, social institutions, and

subjectivity that seem given and natural but in fact are contingent sociohistorical constructs of power and domination." According to Rabinow (1984, p. 4), for Foucault, "there is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that is beyond history and society." His aim is "to understand the plurality of roles that reason...has taken as a social practice in our civilization not to use it as a yardstick against which these practices can be measured."

Foucault (1984b) is adamant that he is not, as Habermas (1981; 1986) has charged, an 'irrationalist'. Nor has he abandoned critical argument in the critical arena. Towards the end of his career Foucault did have a change of heart about the Enlightenment and the role of reason (see below), but he was at pains to distinguish between the Enlightenment and humanism; the latter, from his perspective had no redeeming features: "the humanistic thematic is in itself too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection" (Foucault 1984b, p. 44). He also refers to the intellectual 'blackmail' of being either for or against the Enlightenment.

But despite Foucault's later change of heart about the value of the Enlightenment project and rationality, Rabinow (1984) notes that philosophical and political questions remain about the exact status of reason in Foucault's work.

> He seems to set himself close to, but apart from, a line of thinkers stretching from Max Weber to Martin Heidegger through Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Each of these men, in different ways, recognized both a centrality and a danger in the processes of increasing rationalization and technological development of the world. Each also differentiated between types of reason or thinking – instrumental, substantive, formal, critical, etc. – and attempted to separate out those dimensions and consequences of rational activity which were pernicious and those in which some form or other could serve as instruments of resisting or overcoming the destructive functioning of reason in Western culture.

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(Rabinow 1984, p. 13)

Following Nietzsche, Foucault viewed knowledge as perspectival in nature, requiring multiple viewpoints to interpret a heterogeneous reality (Best and Kellner 1991). While acknowledging the fruitfulness of global theories such as Marxism and psychoanalysis for 'local research' (Foucault 1980a), "he believes they are reductionistic and coercive in their practical implications and need to be superseded by a plurality of forms of knowledge and microanalyses" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 39).

> Foucault attempts to detotalize history and society as unified wholes governed by a centre, essence or telos, and to decentre the subject as a constituted rather than a constituting consciousness. He analyzes history as a non-evolutionary, fragmented field of disconnected knowledges, while presenting society as a dispersed regularity of unevenly developing levels of discourses, and the modern subject as a humanist fiction integral to the operations of a carceral society that everywhere disciplines and trains its subjects for labour and conformity.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 39)

Foucault's aversion for totalizing discourse also demonstrates a potent Nietzschean legacy: "the philosophical pretension to grasp systematically all of reality within one philosophical system or from one central vantage point" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 39).

It is important to distinguish three key phases in Foucault's work. The first, the *archaeological* focus on systems of knowledge in the 1960s; the second, the *genealogical* focus on modalities of power in the 1970s; and third, the focus on technologies of the self, ethics and freedom in the 1980s (Best and Kellner 1991). Though note that Rabinow (1984) conceptualizes Foucault's work differently, choosing a thematic organization around Foucault's three modes of objectification

of the subject (see below). I shall follow Best and Kellner's chronological arrangement and discuss each in turn.

Archaeology of Knowledge

This first phase of Foucault's work focuses on the analysis of knowledge and theories. Foucault uses the term 'archaeology of knowledge' to distinguish his historical approach from both hermeneutics, "which seeks a deep truth underlying discourse or an elucidation of subjective meaning schemes" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 40), and the "confused, under-structured, and ill-structured domain of the history of ideas" (Foucault 1975, p. 195), exemplified in idealist and humanist modes of writing which "trace a continuous evolution of thought in terms of tradition or the conscious production of subjects" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 40). Foucault rejects "the surface-depth and causal models utilized by modern theory...in favour of a postmodern description of discontinuous surfaces of discourse unconnected by causal linkages" (p. 40). He particularly rejects the following types of totality: massive vertical totalities (history, civilization, epoch); horizontal totalities (society, period); and anthropological or humanist conceptions of a centred subject (Foucault 1980b). In Best and Kellner's words, "archaeology attempts to identify the conditions of possibility of knowledge, the determining rules of formation of discursive rationality that operate beneath the level of intention or thematic content" (p. 40). Compare this with Foucault's own conception:

> It is these rules of formation, which were never formulated in their own right, but are to be found only in widely differing theories, concepts, and objects of study, that I have tried to reveal, by isolating, as their specific locus, a level that I have called...archaeological.
> (Foucault 1970, p. xi)

"Unlike structuralism...these rules are not universal and immutable in character, or grounded in the structure of the mind, but are historically changing and specific to given discursive domains. Such rules constitute the 'historical *a priori*' of all knowledge, perception, and truth. They are the 'fundamental codes of a culture' which construct the *'episteme'*, or configuration of knowledge, that determines the empirical orders and social practices of a particular historical era" (Best and Kellner 1991, pp. 40-41).

Foucault's archaeological approach can be distinguished from Baudrillard, Lyotard and Derrida in two significant ways. First, Foucault does not dissolve all forms of structure, coherence, and intelligibility into an endless flux of signification. "Having cleared the ground, he attempts to grasp what forms of regularities, continuities, and totalities really *do* exist." This means that "the task of archaeology is not just 'to attain a plurality of histories juxtaposed and independent of one another', but also 'to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between...different series [of things]' (1972, p. 10) (Best and Kellner 1991, pp. 43-44). Second, "unlike Baudrillard's apocalyptic trumpeting of postmodernity as a complete break with industrial modernity, political economy, and referential reason, Foucault employs a cautious and qualified use of the discourse of discontinuity" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 44). He employs a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity.

The Archaeology of Knowledge was the last work Foucault explicitly identified as an archaeology and it "marks the end of his focus on the unconscious rules of discourse and the historical shifts within each discursive field" (Best and Kellner

1991, pp. 45). "This perspective has led theorists such as Habermas...to wrongly argue that Foucault's archaeologies grant 'total autonomy' to discourse over social institutions and practices" (p. 45); in other words, to launch a misguided attack on Foucault as an idealist. It is indeed true that during this early phase of Foucault's work "archaeologies privileged analysis of theory and knowledge over practices and institutions" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 45) but "in 1970 Foucault began to make the transition from archaeology to genealogy and thereby to a more adequate theorization of material institutions and forms of power" (p. 45).

Genealogy of Knowledge

Foucault distinguished between archaeology and genealogy in the following way: "If we were to characterize it in two terms, then 'archaeology' would be the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities, and 'genealogy' would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play" (Foucault 1980a, p. 85).

Foucault's work focused on experiences or 'narratives' excluded by Reason: madness, deviance, disease (Hatty n.d.). He speaks of 'subjugated knowledges', which he defines as having two aspects:

> Subjugated knowledges are thus those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory and which criticism – which obviously draws upon scholarship – has been able to reveal.
> (Foucault 1980a, p. 82)

And secondly,

...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 1980a, p. 82)

Here Foucault includes knowledges of the psychiatric patient, of the ill person, the nurse, the doctor, and the delinquent.

Both sets of subjugated knowledges, Foucault suggests, the erudite and the disqualified knowledges, were concerned with a *"historical knowledge of struggles"* (Foucault 1980a, p. 83). Emerging from this is

...a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts. And these genealogies, that are the combined product of an erudite knowledge and a popular knowledge, were not possible and could not even have been attempted except on one condition, namely that the tyranny of globalizing discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges of a theoretical *avant-garde* was eliminated.

Let us give the term *genealogy* to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today.
(Foucault 1980a, p. 83)

Foucault summarizes the aim of the genealogical research activity thus:

What it really does is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects.
(Foucault 1980a, p. 83)

Compare my earlier discussion on philosophy of science which, even as late as Popper, Kuhn and Lakatos, was attempting to find criteria to demarcate science, scientific knowledge from other types of knowledges and activities.

We are concerned...with the insurrection of knowledges that are opposed primarily not to the contents, methods or concepts of a science, but to the

effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the institution and functioning of an organized scientific discourse within a society such as ours. ... it is really against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific that genealogy must wage its struggle.
(Foucault 1980a, p. 84)

Best and Kellner (1991, p. 46) emphasize that "while genealogy signals a new shift in focus, it is not a break in his work, but rather a widening of the scope of analysis." Foucault characterizes both archaeology and genealogy as new modes of historical writing.

> Both methodologies attempt to re-examine the social field from a micrological standpoint that enables one to identify discursive discontinuity and dispersion instead of continuity and identity, and to grasp historical events in their real complexity. Both methodologies, therefore, attempt to undo great chains of historical continuity and their teleological destinations and to historicize what is thought to be immutable.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 46)

Best and Kellner (1991, p. 46) argue that "in the transition to his genealogical stage, however, Foucault places more emphasis on the material conditions of discourse, which he defines in terms of 'institutions, political events, economic practices and processes' (1972, p. 49), and on analyzing the relations between discursive and non-discursive domains." In their terms, this transition "is not then a break between the idealist archaeological Foucault and the materialist genealogical Foucault, but rather marks a more adequate thematization of social practices and power relations that were implicit in his work all along" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 46). "Archaeology and genealogy now combine in the form of theory/practice where theory is immediately practical in character" (p. 46).

Best and Kellner (1991) summarize the differences between archaeology and genealogy in the following way:

Where archaeology attempted to show that the subject is a fictitious construct, genealogy seeks to foreground the material context of subject construction, to draw out the political consequences of 'subjectification', and to help form resistances to subjectifying practices. Where archaeology criticized the human sciences as being grounded in humanist assumptions genealogy links these theories to the operations of power and tries to put historical knowledge to work in local struggles. And where archaeology theorized the birth of the human sciences in the context of the modern *episteme* and the figure 'Man', genealogy highlights the power and effects relations they produced.
(Best and Kellner 1991, p. 47)

The relationship between knowledge and power now assumes a central place in Foucault's work. I shall discuss it briefly in relation to two themes: truth, and the 'subject'. In passing I note that most of Foucault's archaeology work was written prior to the 1968 May revolution, and there is no doubt that this historical event had a profound effect on his theorizing (compare Gordon 1980; Best and Kellner 1991). It also provided fuel for theory/practice links.

Knowledge and Power: Truth

Above the library door where I attended high school stood a small brass plaque with the following inscription:

> *Knowledge is power*
> *Study and gain that power*

I am not certain that our school principal interpreted this aphorism in the same way that Michel Foucault might have. "Against modern theories that see knowledge as neutral and objective (positivism) or emancipatory (Marxism), Foucault emphasizes that knowledge is indissociable from regimes of power. His concept of 'power/knowledge' is symptomatic of the postmodern suspicion of reason and the emancipatory schemes advanced in its name" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 50). In his genealogical analyses of the human sciences Foucault notes the circular

relationship between power and knowledge, a relationship that hijacks knowledge for social control.

It is important to understand how Foucault deals with the concept of power. He referred to his approach as an 'analytics' rather than a 'theory' of power, defining power as,

> '...a multiple and mobile field of force relations where far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced'... Modern power is a 'relational' power that is 'exercised from innumerable points,' is highly indeterminate in character, and is never something 'acquired, seized, or shared'. There is no source or centre of power to contest, nor are there any subjects holding it; power is a purely structural activity for which subjects are anonymous conduits or by-products.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, pp. 51-52)

Foucault is rejecting the macro power spouted by Marxist thinkers. For him emancipation is a glamorous Enlightenment promise reeking with essentialism and suggestive of 'true consciousness', which logically entails a "form of truth constituted outside the field of power" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 56). For Foucault, power is, in the first instance, plural, local. Only later is it taken up by larger structures. Thus, Foucault's model of power is 'ascending' (Foucault 1980a). Another key difference in Foucault's approach to power is that he argues for a 'disciplinary power' which he distinguishes sharply from traditional conceptions which, in his analysis, are based on the theory of sovereignty. The 'new' power, Foucault argues, is

> a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies or obligations distributed over time.
> (Foucault 1980a, p. 104)

This type of power Foucault considers to be "one of the great inventions of bourgeois society" (Foucault 1980a, p. 105).

A related issue concerns Foucault's conception of 'truth', which assumes giant proportions in traditional epistemology, particularly positivism, where truth is seen to be both the rationale for and outcome of knowledge.

> ...I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.
> (Foucault 1980b, p. 118)

In other words, truth lacks ontological depth. It is not the process by which one discovers a reality independent of the knower. Nor is it the outcome of such a process. Truth, in Foucault's own words, is a "political economy" (Foucault 1980b, p. 131), it is a social practice, and like other social practices it is not immutable.

> There is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth' – it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted', but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true', it being understood also that it's not a matter of a battle 'on behalf' of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. It is necessary to think of the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of 'science' and 'ideology', but in terms of 'truth' and 'power'.
> (Foucault 1980b, p. 132)

This has important implications for 'practice'. For Foucault, knowledge and action are cosy bedmates.

> The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses – what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.
>
> It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of

truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.

The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself. Hence the importance of Nietzsche.
(Foucault 1980b, p. 133)

The discussion thus far demonstrates vital links between key concepts such as 'knowledge', 'power', and 'truth'. Concept linkage is a significant aspect both of this thesis and in the pedagogy of WS1002, the subject at the centre of this thesis. Previously I spoke of concepts being 'embedded' in paradigms. Later, we shall discover how important this is: one cannot amputate concepts from their paradigmatic bodies without due loss of blood. Now, I want to look more closely at knowledge and power in relation to the 'subject'.

Knowledge and Power: The 'Subject'

Foucault's work on the power/knowledge nexus owes much to Nietzsche. Indeed, Foucault regards himself as a Nietzschean genealogist (see Cahoone 1996, p. 360).

Foucault rejects the Enlightenment model which links consciousness, self-reflection, and freedom, and instead follows Nietzsche's claim in *The Genealogy of Morals* that self-knowledge, particularly in the form of moral consciousness, is a strategy and effect of power whereby one internalizes social control.

Against modern theories that posit a pregiven, unified subject or an unchanging human essence that precedes all social operations, Foucault calls for the destruction of the subject and sees this as a key political tactic.
(Best and Kellner 1991, pp. 50-51)

This viewpoint has key implications for WS1002, the subject under consideration in this thesis, and I shall return to it in later chapters.

In the hands of Foucault, one sees the traditional epistemology/ontology distinction visibly crumbling. What knowledge is and how it is 'acquired' and justified is inextricably linked with the nature of human beings and their social practices.

> I don't believe the problem can be solved by historicizing the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within an historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history. (Foucault 1980b, p. 117)

"The notion of a constituent subject is a humanist mystification that occludes a critical examination of the various institutional sites where subjects are produced within power relations. ...the subject must be 'stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse' (Foucault 1977b, p. 138). Hence, Foucault rejects the active subject and welcomes the emerging postmodern era as a positive event where the denuding of agency occurs and new forms of thought can emerge" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 51). This notion captures the flavour of most poststructural conceptions of the subject, which is produced through language and systems of meaning and power. Indeed, "both structuralists and poststructuralists abandon the subject, but, beginning with poststructuralism, a major theoretical concern has been to analyze how individuals are constituted as subjects and given unified identities or subject positions" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 24). Best and Kellner (1991, p. 287) perceive this to be the latest expression of a critical tradition extending from Kant to Nietzsche to twentieth-century pragmatism, arguing that the mind is "constitutive, rather than reflective, of reality."

Notions of the subject play a central role in Foucault's work. Indeed, Foucault himself makes the strident claim that "the goal of my work during the last twenty years...has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault 1983, p. 208). Rabinow (1984) summarizes Foucault's schema for the three modes of objectification of the subject. First, 'dividing practices', those that categorize, distribute, and manipulate. They are "modes of manipulation that combine the mediation of a science (or pseudo-science) and the practice of exclusion" (p. 8). For example, the isolation of lepers in the Middle Ages; confinement of the poor, insane and vagabonds in Paris, 1656; the rise of modern psychiatry. Second, 'scientific classification', processes through which we have come to understand ourselves scientifically. Third, 'subjectification', modes we have used to form ourselves into meaning-giving selves. It concerns the "way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (Foucault 1983, p. 208). Dividing practices are largely techniques of domination which fuse with scientific classification. Subjectification is quite different since its focus is on "those processes of self-formation in which the person is active" (Rabinow 1984, p. 11). This aspect of Foucault's work, which represents a significant departure from his earlier work, overlaps chronologically with Best and Kellner's (1991) third phase, technologies of the self. It is symptomatic of a general change in Foucault's attitudes towards Enlightenment, modernity and rationality. While subjecting the concept of 'reason' to critical scrutiny, he is *not* an anti-rationalist, is not anti-

Enlightenment, as some critics have been heard to proclaim (e.g. Habermas 1981; 1986).

> I think that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century has always been, still is, and will, I hope remain the question: *What* is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers.
> (Foucault 1984c, p. 249)

This modified viewpoint also led him (see below, *Technologies of the Self*) "to qualify his position that subjectivity is nothing but a construct of domination" (Best and Kellner 1991, pp.53-54). So, from an initial standpoint in which Foucault wanted to throw the baby out with the bath water, he retracted his claws upon hearing the baby's screams and decided that it might, or some part of it, be worth keeping after all.

After returning to study the ancient Greeks Foucault came to believe that "knowledge can transform us" (1988, p. 4) and in the later part of his work "shifted his emphasis from 'technologies of domination' to 'technologies of the self', from the ways in which individuals are transformed by others to the ways in which they transform themselves" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 55).

Technologies of the Self

This third major phase of Foucault's work, according to Best and Kellner (1991, p. 59), despite demonstrating continuities with his earlier work, is marked by an unequivocal discontinuity: a "new focus on a self-constituting subject and his reconsideration of rationality and autonomy." While "Foucault's concern is still a history of the organization of knowledge and subjectivity,...now the emphasis is on the knowledge relation a self has with itself" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 60).

Foucault defines 'technologies of the self' as practices

> ...which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of
> others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts,
> conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a
> certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.
> (Foucault 1988, p. 18)

This is a marked shift: "subjectivity is no longer characterized only as a reified construct of power; the deterministic view of the subject is rejected; impersonal, functionalist explanations give way to a study of how individuals can transform their own subjectivities through techniques of the self. Discipline, in the form of these techniques, is no longer viewed solely as an instrument of domination" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 61). Foucault is now arguing that a complete genealogy of the subject in Western civilization must include an account of both technologies – technologies of domination and technologies of the self – and the interaction between these two types of self (Best and Kellner 1991).

But Foucault's 'newly-discovered' subject, the screaming baby reclaimed, is not a return to humanist or phenomenological conceptions. He "still rejects essentialist liberation models that assume the self is an inner essence waiting to be liberated from its repression or alienation" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 64). The subject is still a social product situated within power relations.

> ...the difference is that he now sees that individuals also have the power to
> define their own identity, to master their body and desires, and to forge a
> practice of freedom through techniques of the self. What Foucault now
> suggests...is a dialectic between an active and creative agent and a constraining
> social field where freedom is achieved to the extent that one can overcome
> socially imposed limitations and attain self-mastery and a stylized existence.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, pp. 64-65)

In Foucault's own words:

> This means that the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. In fact we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, or another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions.
> (Foucault 1984b, p. 46)

But optimism rather than pessimism is the new *leitmotif.* Foucault (1984b, p. 39) draws on conceptions of brilliant nineteenth-century French poet, Charles Baudelaire, whose "consciousness of modernity is widely recognized as one of the most acute in the nineteenth century", in proclaiming: "Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (Foucault 1984b, p. 42).

Critical Analysis

One of Foucault's most significant contributions is his analysis of the links between knowledge, power and truth, particularly the notion of decentred power (Best and Kellner 1991). His celebration of plurality and difference has almost become a contemporary password into the shrine of political correctness.

Best and Kellner, working in a critical tradition that attempts a merger between critical theory (particularly Habermas and Adorno) and poststructural themes, outline a number of criticisms of Foucault. I shall summarize those which relate to this research thesis. First, they suggest, his critique of modernity is too one-sided, focusing on repressive aspects of rationality and failing to outline progressive

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aspects of modernity. This has been one of Habermas' (1987b) major criticisms. Second, his works, in general, they argue, are one-sided. "His archaeological works privilege discourse over institutions and practices, his genealogical works emphasize domination over resistance and self-formation, and his later works analyze the constitution of the self apart from detailed considerations of social power and domination" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 69).

Third, and expanding this final point related to the subject, they argue that he never adequately theorizes both sides of the structure/agency problem. What they fail to mention is that nor does anyone else, with the possible exception of Bordieu. In Best and Kellner's (1991, p. 283) view, postmodern theory in general lacks a notion of intersubjectivity and "an adequate theory of agency, of an active creative self, mediated by social institutions, discourses, and other people." They argue further that adequate theories of subjectivity and political agency need to meet two conditions. First, they "must be mediated with theories of intersubjectivity which stress the ways that the subject is a social construct and the ways that sociality can constrict or enable individual subjectivity." Second, they "should stress the social construction of the subject, its production in discourses, practices and institutions."

Fourth, Foucault "methodologically brackets the question of who controls and uses power for which interests to focus on the means by which it operates." This, they argue "occludes the extent to which power is still controlled and administered by specific and identifiable agents in positions of economic and political power" (p. 70).

Fifth, and the "most often made criticism of his work is that he fails to define and defend the implicit normative assumptions of his analyses and politics and hence provides no theoretical basis for his vigorous critiques of domination" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 63). This has been one of Habermas' key complaints (Habermas 1986; 1987b). Note that Habermas also powerfully critiques the use of rationality as an instrument of domination and links knowledge to power in his analysis of the knowledge and human interest question. The question of normative grounding is a fascinating one. The argument goes something like this. When positing a point of view (e.g. a Foucauldian point of view) or critiquing another's point of view, one cannot do so from a neutral, atheoretical stance. Such critiques are always informed by both a theoretical and value base. It behoves Foucault to specify what this is. On this argument, it is theoretically impossible to hold a poststructuralist position, since one requires rationality to attack reason, and one requires some values and theoretical positions to attack others. I shall return to the issue in the next section. A related point is that Foucault "utilizes global and totalizing concepts as he simultaneously prohibits them, resulting in a 'performative contradiction' (Habermas)" (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 72).

> To the extent that disciplinary powers assume a 'global functioning', their analysis will require a form of global or systemic analysis. Like other poststructuralists, Foucault fails to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate kinds of totalities and macrotheories. In many ways, Foucault violates his own methodological imperative to 'respect differences'.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 72-73)

I mentioned above that Foucault might wriggle uncomfortably in the straitjacket of poststructuralism, a badge he never pinned on himself. Indeed, Best and Kellner (1991, p. 73) argue that Foucault is a complex, eclectic mix of premodern, modern and postmodern, "with the postmodern elements receding ever further into the

background of his work." What I have attempted to portray above is a general sketch of themes typically associated with poststructuralism and contextualize Foucault within this.

It would be easy to dismiss poststructural thought as the nose-picking antics of a bunch of disgruntled French intellectuals 'spitting the dummy out' in protest at the aftermath of the May 1968 student-led demonstrations in Paris, as the inevitable pseudo-bohemian fin de siècle. But such glib dismissals are ultimately counter-productive. Just as Enlightenment rationality arose as much in response to a particular set of social, political and economic conditions as it did to an intellectual milieu, so too poststructural thought in all its manifold incarnations has sprung from a multi-quilted fabric, and it has done so because the seams of rationality are stretched to breaking point. Previous paradigms, previous world views seem unable to perform the job asked of them. It is not certain that poststructuralism offers a coherent alternative – indeed, this might be the precise point: both 'coherence' and the oppositional framework implied in 'alternative' may be 'barking up the wrong tree'. What is clear, however, is that intellectually, socially, politically, economically, ethically, spiritually, and sexually, we as human beings are in a state of dynamic flux (as the Buddhists always said we were/are and will be). We are currently in the process of redefining all these endeavours, and we do so with the spectre of environmental destruction looming ominously in the rumblings of the earth's crust, in geological terms, that paper-thin drumskin stretched taut over the earth's bowels, yearly shrivelling like an ageing fig. Despite recent (and not so recent) attempts to fuse knowledge and action, it is not remotely clear that any conception of knowledge/action, theory/practice has anything

practical to offer. Knowledge may be a loaded gun, but even machine guns have their limits.

Now that I have reviewed the four major paradigms I want to borrow Patti Lather's (1992) schema of paradigms, a schema she has devised within the context of 'critical frames' for educational research. Actually, I simply want to borrow a single word to describe the major research aim of each paradigm. While this may seem simplistic, it does, I believe, capture the essence of the different approaches. The goal of positivism is to *predict*; hermeneutics to *understand*; critical theory to *emancipate*; and poststructuralism to *deconstruct*.

Having presented this necessarily brief and potted version of the history of knowledge, I am now in a position to synthesize this history in order to outline the approach adopted in this thesis.

III.   FALZON – A RE-READING OF FOUCAULT

3.1   Critique of Metaphysics Revisited

The biggest issue emerging from the above historical sketch is that of foundationalism: the quest for secure and certain foundations for knowledge, a quest traditionally guaranteed by a foundational subject possessed of an enduring and essential human nature whose greatest 'redeeming' quality is reason or rationality. The foundationalist approach is sometimes referred to as 'metaphysical thinking'. Falzon (1998) refers to this modernist form of metaphysics as 'metaphysical subjectivism', or, using the less precise but more common term, 'humanism'. Foundationalism, the bedrock of philosophy, was not seriously

questioned on any scale – there have always been some dissenters commencing with the Greek sceptics and continuing through to Nietzsche – until French poststructural theorists such as Michel Foucault launched a full scale attack on the basic tenets of modernist foundational theories: totalization, teleology and essentialism. Such tenets were said to suppress difference and in their march towards rationally-realized utopia led to potential totalitarianism. Difference became the catchcry of the poststructural song of joy.

One of the significant features of foundational metaphysics is that its normative grounding theoretically provides a yardstick for assessing the merits of competing knowledge claims. Relativism, sometimes equated not entirely accurately with fragmentation, is the doctrine which "denies that there is a universal, ahistorical standard of rationality with respect to which one theory can be judged better than another" (Chalmers 1982, p. 102). Strictly speaking, fragmentation is a consequence of relativism. Once we relinquish our normatively grounded yardsticks, it is argued, we are left with a multiplicity of knowledge claims none of which can be judged to be any better than another, and each of which is context-dependent, applying only in specified situations for specific people or societies at given historical periods. This scenario, rationalists claim, is both theoretically inadequate, and equally important, has dire political implications. If we no longer possess the tools for assessing the relative merits of competing knowledge claims, we are in danger not just of epistemological anarchy, but also political anarchy. Those with power can justify all in the name of knowledge. This scenario offers no better alternative than the potential totalitarianism of modernist theories.

Guba (1990, p. 26) presents a typical formulation of the epistemological debate. *"Ontologically*, if there are always many interpretations that can be made in any inquiry, and if there is no foundational process by which the ultimate truth or falsity of these several constructions can be determined, there is no alternative but to take a position of *relativism."* We seem to be presented with a choice between foundationalism or fragmentation (relativism). This debate which has raged throughout the academy for three decades is sometimes referred to as the Rationality debates. Falzon (1998) argues, however, that the proper alternative to foundationalism is not fragmentation but dialogue, and he explores this dialogic picture in the work of French philosopher, Michel Foucault.

The so-called Rationality debates have not always been conducted in rational vein. If rational thought and critical judgement depart in a cloud of postmodern smoke, the forces of irrationalism and fanaticism will rise amid smouldering ashes like a disguised phoenix bearing sour tidings for those committed to a fair and just world. The 'rational' vanguard, ably led by Jürgen Habermas, faced with the powerful onslaught of this postmodern anti-Leviathan, has sought refuge in a foundational bomb shelter, sneakily lying beneath the 'ground' under the guise of 'rationality'. And when the dust has cleared it is not the phoenix who has risen from the ashes, but 'Man', reincarnated in his transcendental God-like status. The Restoration is complete and divine status reinstated. On the other hand, extreme postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard appear to have been motivated by a quest to be crowned postmodern avant-garde extraordinaire. In a fit of adolescent petulance Baudrillard (1987, orig. 1977) disowns his theoretical parents (e.g. Foucault) in his turn to cynical nihilism from the late 1970s on. Here I attempt to sedate hysteria

and restore rationality to the foreground. Treat this as a pragmatic decision rather than a philosophical one. The discourse of doctoral theses eschews irrationality.

3.2   Critique of Fragmentation

Falzon argues that the phoenix's message can be redeemed by asking firstly if the 'death of Man' necessarily implies the fragmentation of thought and action. His argument is that the alternative to a unitary metaphysical vision is not fragmentation – which he argues is simply a continuation, not an alternative to metaphysics – but dialogue. In an interesting reading he claims that an adequate dialogic picture is found in the work of French intellectual, Michel Foucault. This is a vital approach and requires some unpacking. Falzon (1998) outlines three arguments for why the fragmentation vision is simply a perpetuation of totalizing metaphysics. First:

> ...to see fragmentation as the inevitable consequence of the rejection of metaphysics is to continue to suppose that the *only* possible kind of unity we can have is that which is grounded metaphysically. If we cannot have an absolute grounding to give order and unity to our existence, then there is no unity at all, and 'anything goes'. In other words, the vision of fragmentation actually reflects a nostalgia for vanished metaphysical unities.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 17)

Second:

> ...it is not possible to articulate the fragmentation thesis itself without continuing to employ some conception of unity. The force of the fragmentation thesis lies in the idea that, without an ultimate standpoint or standard, there will be a multiplicity of different, incommensurable forms of life, cultures, world-views, outlooks, and so on. But the very notion of a form of life or cultural outlook still implies some degree of unity and coherence. Strictly speaking, why should the process of fragmentation come to a halt at this level? Why shouldn't fragmentation continue to the point where we are left with discrete, isolated individuals? ... We need to preserve some degree of unity, to see the particular forms of life or cultural outlooks as themselves unified, in order to be able to talk of a multiplicity of these things.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 17)

Third, and most important for Falzon:

> ...not only does the fragmentation thesis continue to depend on a conception of unity in its own articulation, but the unity it relies on is itself ultimately a form of metaphysical unity. ...in the vision of fragmentation, a single, all-embracing metaphysical unity has simply been replaced by a multiplicity of local metaphysical unities, a series of little universes, each governed by their own deep rules or al-embracing principles, each speaking their own language. We end up, in other words, with a kind of metaphysical monadism.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 18)

Falzon's argument concerning the similarities between metaphysics and fragmentation is ably summarized in his own words:

> ...the fragmentation vision simply replaces a single totalizing vision of the world with a plurality of such world-views, each complete and all-embracing, and precisely for this reason closed to and incommensurable with one another. What persists in both totalizing metaphysics and the fragmentation vision is the essentially metaphysical idea that it is possible to have a complete, all-embracing world-view.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 4)

To escape totalizing metaphysics, Falzon (1998, p. 18) argues, we must abandon its ruling principle: "the idea that we can capture the totality of being in a single, global account; the idea that there is an ultimate standpoint or set of categories in terms of which all thought and action can be comprehended and organized." Falzon reviews the main arguments against a totalizing, foundational metaphysics. First, in its quest for dominion, it suppresses otherness and difference (see especially Foucault's early work, *The Order of Things* 1970, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 1972). Second, in positing an all-embracing standpoint or set of universal categories which comprehend and organize all thought and action, we fall prey to a self-enclosed solipsism, since we cannot go beyond these categories. "Because it can only comprehend the world in terms of its own categories, it can only ever comprehend itself" (p. 19). Third:

Because its ruling categories are supposed to provide the ultimate basis for explanation and understanding, it is unable to account in any way for these categories themselves. ... In short, it is not possible for a totalizing account to comprehend its ruling categories in their emergence, to comprehend them *historically*.
(Falzon 1998, p. 23)

Falzon (1998, p. 23) stresses that to ascribe 'innate' or *a priori* status to the ruling categories is not a solution. "It is simply to turn our orienting principles into articles of faith which are not to be questioned." Note this is precisely the strategy, albeit differently realized, used by Kant with his universal, *a priori* categories of understanding, Hegel with his Absolute Subject, followed by Habermas, who ironically, in an attempt to avoid the escape route of his Teutonic predecessors, found himself ascribing a 'quasi transcendental' status to the interests that direct knowledge, contending that the human species organizes its experience in terms of *a priori* cognitive interests. This is doubly ironic since Habermas' chief motivation in circumventing the problems of Hegel's and Kant's work was to avoid the notion of an ahistorical, transcendental subject (precisely the motivation of Hegel in attempting to circumvent the absence of a historical dimension in Kant's work!).

But how do we avoid a world which is simply a function of our categories, a world of catoptric vision in which our starting point is eternally reflected back to us, a vision where a medieval God hovering above the Sunday steeple is replaced by a smiling, omniscient, divine self, an arrogance not remotely matched by our 'primitive' medieval ancestors? Falzon suggests the answer lies in Foucault's notion of dialogue.

3.3 Foucault's 'Dialogue'

Rabinow (1984) claims Foucault's "basic metaphor is one of battle and not conversation." This is the usual interpretation of most commentators (e.g. Gordon 1980). Falzon (1998), however, chooses to reinterpret Foucault in terms of 'dialogue'. I am not interested in pursuing in detail, as Falzon has done, the nuances of whether Foucault's ideas are 'best' interpreted in terms of dialogue. For me, the very 'fact' that Foucault's ideas are open to such a reading is sufficient. My purpose is not to rescue Foucault from the wrath of contemporary criticism. My interest is in establishing an epistemological framework for dealing with educational ventures. I do not much care who the author or authors of such frameworks are provided they can provisionally do the educational job I ask of them. Indeed, Foucault himself would recognize that he is open to emergent readings. If such a reading bears fruit, all the better.

Falzon (1998, p. 33) argues that what is fundamental is our *"encounter with the other"*. In his own words, he uses the term 'dialogue' in a 'thin' sense. "That is, it involves a reciprocity, a two-way, back and forth movement or interplay between ourselves and the world" (p. 5). Falzon is adamant that:

> Social dialogue, so understood, does not preclude the possibility of overarching forms of social unity or organization. A dialogical account need not deny that we live in a world characterized by various forms of order and hierarchy. ...these forms of order need to be understood as emerging out of the play of social dialogue, to the precise extent that one party is able to domesticate the other, to the extent that otherness is overcome, and the movement of dialogue is arrested.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 5)

Falzon (1998, p. 6) also stresses that he is not proposing dialogue as a normative notion, an ideal to be realized (this is redolent of a traditional totalizing

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metaphysics); rather, "it is a fact of life. We are inevitably, caught up in dialogue."

For Falzon, his thin notion of dialogue is a "non-normative notion of reciprocal interaction" (p. 8). Falzon recognizes that Habermas was not an uncritical advocate of foundationalism. Indeed, he was acutely aware, like Hegel before him, of the problematic nature of the philosophy of the subject and devised his own escape routes, a significant part of which entailed his own turn to dialogue, labelled as 'communicative intersubjectivity'. However, Falzon presents a convincing case for supposing that Habermas' dialogic quest is motivated by his search for the Holy Grail in the form of a reincarnated subjectivist metaphysics. Falzon's (1998, p. 7) reading of Foucault's notion of dialogue is intended "to formulate a genuinely non-metaphysical conception of dialogue." Falzon is aware that his discussion is perhaps a somewhat unorthodox reading of Foucault, but insists that his "dialogical interpretation of Foucault illuminates a good deal of what he is saying; and, moreover, that it makes possible a reading of Foucault which captures the spirit, the driving force, behind his work, his overriding concern to help challenge states of deadening imprisonment and to foster the emergence of new forms of thought and action" (Falzon 1998, p. 15).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present an extended analysis of Falzon's reading of Foucault's notions. However, a number of points are in order. These are some of the claimed advantages of adopting a Falzonian approach. First, Falzon argues, the turn to dialogue enables us to do justice to history. As Falzon so cogently argues:

> As long as we have a standpoint in terms of which everything can be explained
> and comprehended, we are unable to account for the emergence of this
> standpoint itself. We are unable to see it as having developed out of any kind
> of process. Instead, we have dogmatically to assert it, to see it as existing *a*

priori. It is only if we reject metaphysics in favour of dialogue that we can account for the standpoint in terms of which we proceed, as having emerged out of historical dialogue.
(Falzon 1998, p. 8)

Note that this is precisely the corner Habermas backs himself into, being forced to ascribe 'quasi transcendental' status to the interests that direct knowledge and the ideal speech situation.

Second, the turn to historical dialogue makes it possible for us to do justice to our humanness:

> It involves a turn to the concrete, embodied human being, involved in dialogue with others, existing in the midst of history. In the face of humanist metaphysics, the turn to dialogue is a rejection of every kind of 'transcendental narcissism', every attempt to see ourselves as having a privileged position above history, above time, a God-like standpoint from which we can exercise mastery over the world. This arrogant vision of the human being as 'Man', the sovereign, all-powerful author or source of its world, comes at the cost of a great blindness about ourselves, an inability to accept or acknowledge the *finitude* that is integral to our very humanity, the concrete historicity and embodiment that makes us recognizably human. It is in fact, ironically enough, an inhuman conception of human being. By the same token, to reject humanism and turn to historical dialogue is also to restore a human conception of human being as finite and embodied, as inescapably in the midst of history and subject to historical influence, change and transformation.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 8)

Falzon's view of dialogue, however, is a corporeal notion inextricably linked to 'action'. "Cognition is driven by concrete drives to impose order on the world; and this organizational activity is bound up with the whole range of our organizational and manipulative activities, inseparable from practice. To know the world is thus for us to be inescapably carried forward into the world, to be unavoidably involved in corporeal activities" (p. 39). Hence, knowledge and action are fused. But – and this is vital – how does this sketch account for the emergence of the organizing categories themselves? Falzon's answer is particularly revealing and demonstrates

the clear link between the two questions I posed earlier about, firstly, the nature of

knowledge, and secondly, the nature of teaching and learning.

> In order to account for this, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of
> another like us, a knowing, interpreting being who knows or interprets us, and
> who can give shape and form to our organizing activity. In other words, it is
> necessary to acknowledge that we are dependent on, and the products of, a
> process of education or acculturation through which our activities are given
> shape and direction. Only in this way can our ordering activity itself acquire a
> determinate form.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 40)

Falzon is at pains to emphasize that this acculturation process is *not* a form of

social determinism. Cultural forms emerge from this social dialogue, but are also

transformed by it. "We are thus involved, right from the start and throughout our

existence, in an open-ended social dialogue, a dialogue that is constitutive of

history itself. And in the last analysis it is only because individuals can transgress

the forms imposed on them by others and enter into a dialogue with their culture

that it is possible for particular cultural forms to emerge, and for there to be

historical change. Creative transgression is fundamental to the movement of

historical dialogue" (p. 41).

Briefly, I now want to do two things. First, examine Falzon's notion of

'encountering the other', and second, explore in more detail Foucault's work as it

relates to 'dialogue'. The key aspect for Falzon (1998, p. 36) in encountering the

other is "that which does not simply yield to us, which does not simply fall into line

with our beliefs and fancies, but which has an independence from us, resists us, and

is able to affect us in turn." This is not to imply, as Falzon stresses, that we are

"completely passive, impotent, completely at the mercy of the other" (p. 36). Such

self-negation, Falzon argues, is equally as problematic as attempting to reduce the

other to a function of our standpoint. This is the line taken by the later Heidegger, "a key figure in the rise of postmodern scepticism regarding the humanist subject", who breaks from humanism and metaphysics by negating oneself "in favour of a deferential attentiveness to the other" (Falzon 1998, p. 37). It is problematic because "if the claim to a total knowledge of the world…means that we cannot account for how our organizing categories come to be, the claim that we have to be entirely passive in order to apprehend the other means that we cannot explain how we can say anything at all about the other, how we can have any kind of access to the other at all. … There can be no access to the other without our actively organizing the other in terms of our categories" (Falzon 1998, p. 37). This is a crucial idea which will assume key significance when I examine the data for this research thesis. John Locke's *tabula rasa* and the empiricist tradition it spawned, is, upon closer inspection, finely carved with an intricate network of conceptual filters through which all knowledge of the world passes.

This view of knowledge, Falzon (1998, p. 38) stresses, "is neither idealism nor naïve realism, neither subjectivism nor objectivism. In knowing, we both interpret the world and are guided by it."

> In other words, there is interpretative activity on our part, through which we actively shape the world, positively constitute it, but the world is not simply passive, a mere product of our organizing activities. It is not simply whatever we interpret it to be, but also goes beyond our interpretations, resists them, and affects us in turn, forcing us to revise our understandings of it.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 38)

Falzon attempts to formulate this dialogical alternative, the alternative to totalizing metaphysics and the fragmentation vision, in connection with relativism.

> The fragmentation vision envisages a plurality of incommensurable, uncommunicating world-views, in which we are only able to speak

relativistically of 'our' standards and 'their' standards. In the dialogical account, we can comprehend and judge the other in terms of our standpoint or framework of thinking. Indeed, we do so all the time. At the same time, however, on this view our orienting framework is not absolute. It has emerged out of a long dialogue with the other, and it is susceptible to transformation by the other in the course of ongoing dialogue.
(Falzon 1998, p. 42)

In Falzon's account the self-enclosure of totalizing views is "understood as a secondary, derivative state. It arises when the other is temporarily overcome and dialogue is halted; and it is destined to be overcome in the ongoing play of dialogue" (Falzon 1998, p. 42). Falzon also unequivocally distinguishes his notion of 'dialogue' from the Hegelian 'dialectic', which, he argues, is a totalizing conception since "the other is conceived in essentially negative and derivative terms relative to the self, and the interplay between self and other leads inexorably to the subsumption of the other to the self. Hegel's is a dialogue, a historical interplay with the other, which does not challenge totalization, but remains subordinated to the standpoint of metaphysical subjectivism. This standpoint itself remains beyond dialogue, abstractly ahistorical" (p. 42).

This is to be contrasted with Falzon's conception:

Dialogue as I am presenting it gives due weight to the otherness of the other, as that which absolutely exceeds the categories the self imposes on it, and is able to affect the self in turn. There is no position which stands above the movement of dialogue, and one side can only ever achieve a temporary victory over the other. In the end, both sides are subject to endless transformation. This is a non-totalizing, open-ended dialogue or interplay, with no pre-ordained path, no predetermined moves, where moves never come to an end.
(Falzon 1998, pp. 42-43)

On Falzon's reading we can dispense with the inhuman humanist subject and "along with it the totalizing and unhistorical Hegelian vision of history as the progressive unfolding of the Absolute subject. Foucault's dialogical conception of

history is the very opposite of Hegel's closed vision. History becomes the mobile, contingent and open-ended dialogue or interplay of forces" (Falzon 1998, p. 46).

Falzon notes that we do live within a normative framework, that our practices do have unity, but that "it is not a metaphysically prescribed, grounded or necessitated unity" (p. 46). The unity, the specific social arrangements emerge from the practices themselves. "Thus Foucault does not abandon the notion of social unity, but understands it non-metaphysically, as arising derivatively and contingently out of the dialogue of forces, the multiplicity of force relations. It both emerges from dialogue and, at least to some extent, arrests it" (pp. 46-47). Foucault also avoids, Falzon argues, "replacing humanism with another kind of metaphysical totalization, the hard-line structuralism that seeks to reduce all social phenomena to a function of impersonal social structures or forms" (p. 47).

Falzon demonstrates how Foucault's account of domination can be read as "a relation of forces in which dialogue is arrested, in which reversal and transformation are precluded" (p. 51). He also stresses, however, that what is fundamental in Foucault's picture (e.g. in *Discipline and Punish* 1979 and *The History of Sexuality* 1985) "is not domination but rather the dialogical interplay of forces, of human powers and capacities. ... As such, forms of social unity, organizations of forces in which some are able to exercise relatively constant power over others, remain essentially derivative and secondary, emerging as they do out of the historical dialogue of forces" (p. 51).

In his later work Foucault turned to what he called 'practices of the self'. In exploring social dialogue we considered human beings as creatures seeking "to order, to impose forms on and to establish control over the other" (Falzon 1998, p. 64). Practices of the self refer to a second dimension of this organizing activity, "the imposition of forms upon oneself, the activity of forming and shaping oneself as a certain kind of subject" (p. 64). This leads me to the concept of **critical reflection**, a pivotal concept in this thesis. I shall discuss the concept in more detail in the next chapter within an educational context. I defer offering a precise definition until then. For now, I want to briefly review Foucault's notions and contrast these with Habermas'. Foucault argued that, traditionally, self reflection, motivated as it was by the quest to discover our 'true selves', ably assisted where necessary by 'experts' from the human sciences, has been instrumental in engaging us as active participants in our own subordination. To resist this modern form of power, Foucault argues, we need to question our attachment to our self-created norms (see Falzon 1998, p. 67). Given this, the vital question becomes: "what kind of specifically philosophical reflection or critical activity will assist or promote this process of self-creation?" (p. 67) This leads to Foucault's conception of ethico-critical reflection, "his own understanding of philosophy" (Falzon 1998, p. 67).

For Foucault, this requires strident rejection of the foundational self: "…we do not reflect on ourselves in order to establish a standpoint for organizing and dominating the world, and for subduing otherness. Rather, we reflect on ourselves in order to open a space for the other and thereby to assist resistance to the prevailing forms of social organization" (Falzon 1998, p. 68). This form of critical reflection Foucault labels "genealogy" (1984a) and later, the "historical ontology of ourselves"

(Foucault 1984b). Now, reflection becomes "a turn to history in order to comprehend ourselves, the principles we live by, our ways of acting, in their finitude, their historical emergence and specificity. It thereby strips our forms of life of any sense of necessity or inevitability" (Falzon 1998, p. 69). In a sense, critical reflection becomes "historical interrogation of the present" (Falzon 1998, p. 70).

Note the sharp difference between Habermas' notion of dialogue as espoused in his theory of 'communicative intersubjectivity' and Foucault's, a dialogue "characterized by an ongoing, open-ended encounter with the other, in which difference constantly manifests itself and through which forms of life continually emerge and are transformed" (Falzon 1998, p. 81). Habermas' dialogue is

> ...characterized by the overcoming of difference and the other, the overcoming of all partial standpoints and forms of life, a totalizing kind of dialogue. The aim of Habermas' dialogue is to establish, once and for all, a unified form of life based on social norms which are universal, norms which can be agreed to by, and are capable of governing the behaviour of, all its participants. Anything which is not moving in this totalizing, universalizing direction is not real dialogue at all.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 81)

The key difference, Falzon points out, between Habermas' position and the traditional Kantian one is that Habermas makes the move from individual consciousness to intersubjective communication.

Habermas' options are not open-ended in the way that Foucault's might be. For Habermas, there is an ideal end point for social existence. Not only is this the ideal, but for Habermas it is ultimately the only acceptable position. This is the normatively grounded vision of "an organization of social relations according to

the principle that the validity of every norm of political consequence be made dependent on a consensus arrived at in communication free from domination" (Habermas 1978, p. 284). This is Habermas' conception of "collective rational self-determination through open, unconstrained dialogue" (Falzon 1998, p. 82).

Both Foucault and Habermas see dialogue as opposed to domination, but their accounts differ strikingly. Falzon provides a succinct summary:

> Foucault is able to conceptualize domination without invoking a subjectivist and totalizing conception of dialogue as a normative ideal. Social domination for Foucault is not something essentially external to dialogue, the corruption of an ideal discourse which prevents us from coming to a genuine agreement, a unified consensus. Instead, domination is something which emerges historically out of concrete, everyday dialogue itself, out of the interplay and combat of forces in everyday life, and something which is characterized precisely by the establishment of unities, the overcoming of the other. Similarly, resistance to domination does not presuppose the normative ideal of a true discourse, in which difference and conflict will be overcome and we will formulate our organizing principles in a collective, consensual voice. It is rather the expression of other voices, new voices which have been buried under the historically and dialogically emergent forms of domination, and hence represents the reawakening of a dialogue, of the dialogical interplay and transformation, that was temporarily immobilized.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 88)

Note the key role of resistance in this formulation.

> Resistance is fundamental to this dialogue, its driving force. Without it, dialogue and history would be impossible. Forms of social order, and in particular forms of domination, are themselves only possible in so far as they emerge from this dialogue, through the arresting of this dialogue, and they are destined to be overcome through ongoing resistance and dialogue. So understood, resistance does not stand in need of any normative justification. It is a fundamental feature of our dialogical existence, something that constantly emerges to contest forms of closure and domination. Ethics and critical reflection in this context are instruments for facilitating this resistance and promoting ongoing dialogue. The aim of critical reflection here is not to help overcome the domination which prevents us from attaining an ideal form of life, consciously organizing and unifying the social realm in accordance with universal norms. It is rather to comprehend unitary forms of social organization in their historical emergence, to problematize existing forms, and thereby to open up a space for that which resists, that which is other or different.
> (Falzon 1998, pp. 88-89)

It is vital to get this theoretical framework right for social work and consequently social work education. It is simply not good enough to suggest that as long as we are dialoguing/communicating with clients (in the case of social work) and students (in the case of social work education), the theoretical nuances are not important for our actual practice, whether this be social work practice or educational practice. Because as we have seen, the so-called theoretical nuances spell out some clear implications for both kinds of practice. If we accept a foundational, metaphysical subject, we are left at times with a fait accompli. An essential, enduring 'human nature' freed from the constraints of historical contingency implies distinct shackles on the possibility for personal and social change, the avowed aim of social work (see chapter one).

The term, 'human nature' is particularly problematic in the context of social work (see also Rojek, Peacock and Collins 1988). It is one of those expressions like 'Man' that instantly sends currents of skepticism rippling through me. Particularly anathema is when the term is invoked as an all-purpose explanation to account for all varieties of human behaviour. It is the sort of concept which kills intellectual inquiry. Look no further, there we have it, omnipresent human nature skulks at the bottom of all our explanatory vessels. When we strip the cream, the detritus of human nature rises to the surface with an all-knowing smirk and wink.

Falzon (1998, p. 89) counters the possible objection concerning the ethical attitude of openness to the other – how do we know we are being genuinely open to the other, that we are promoting dialogue? – by suggesting firstly, that on his account

of Foucault's work, as a matter of general principle, "we cannot avoid being involved in dialogue, as I have defined the term," and secondly, that it is possible to know these things:

> We find our prevailing categories being challenged and called into question. And this is why the attitude of openness to the other is difficult to achieve. It is not because we cannot tell when we are being genuinely open to the other, but because we know well enough that, in being open to the other and entering into a dialogue, we have to forsake security and stability and expose ourselves to risk and uncertainty. Being open to the other is a task which requires courage and maturity to undertake. In other words, the difficulty here is not an epistemological but a moral one.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 90)

Note in the dialogical picture for which Falzon (1998, p. 93) argues that "to imagine...we can completely purify ourselves of the tendency to order or categorize others, that we can practise (sic) a 'pure tolerance', is always self-deceptive. It obscures the reality of our dialogical existence. ... This failure to acknowledge our existence in the midst of dialogical relations with others is the essential problem with both liberal tolerance and the notion of postmodern tolerance..." (Falzon 1998, pp. 93-94).

Falzon (1998) describes the epistemological position for which he is arguing as a form of **perspectivalism**, rather than relativism. In the relativism of postmodern fragmentation "we can no longer make moral judgements concerning the other" (p. 94). But in this brand of perspectivalism,

> we always come to the world from a certain perspective, a certain standpoint from which we can organize and interpret it, but at the same time we also encounter other perspectives and can be transformed in line with them. There is an ongoing dialogical combat of interpretations, of competing ways of interpreting and organizing one another. Rather than there being no truth, for this position there are many truths, in competition with one another.
> (Falzon 1998, p. 95)

The term *perspectivalism* is important. I shall elaborate on it. Best and Kellner (1991) argue that a

> ...perspective suggests that one's optic or analytic frame never mirrors reality exactly as it is, that it is always selective and unavoidably mediated by one's pregiven assumptions, theories, values, and interests. The notion of perspective also implies that no one optic can ever fully illuminate the richness and complexity of any single phenomenon, let alone the infinite connections and aspects of all social reality. Thus, as Nietzsche, Weber, and others have argued, all knowledge of reality stems from a particular point of view, all 'facts' are constituted interpretations, and all perspectives are finite and incomplete. A perspective thus involves a specific standpoint, focus, position, or even sets of positions that interpret particular phenomena. A perspective is a specific point of entry to interpret social phenomena, processes, and relations. Perspectives are thus specific optics informed by theoretical positions.
> (Best and Kellner 1991, pp. 265-266)

Best and Kellner, arguing for a multi-dimensional and multi-perspective approach, attempt to rework critical theory in the light of the postmodern critique. I agree with their claim that to provide comprehensive perspectives we need to view events, institutions, or practices from different subject positions. I stress, however, that I do not endorse their realist ontology ("reality exactly as it is"). I am not convinced, despite their examples, that it is always so easy to decide which perspective/s are to be privileged in any given specific analysis (p. 270). They warn against the dangers of eclecticism which might contain contradictory assumptions, suggesting that "multiperspectivalism has to judge in specific cases which aspects of competing theories are or are not useful" (p. 271). This is a peculiar statement to say the least. It seems they anthropomorphize multiperspectivalism as the 'choosing beast'. In short, they provide slim advice on who judges, how, and why? Ultimately Best and Kellner leave us with a huge normative issue which they do not theorize adequately. The notion of perspectivalism for which I am arguing does not ground any one perspective as 'ontologically superior'.

I pre-empt by citing one of the learning goals of *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*:

> *To develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment.*

By reiterating my earlier comments by Bohman and colleagues (1991) in the discussion of hermeneutics, I can link perspectivalism, theory and practice, and critical reflection. They suggested that the 'interpretive turn' raised serious questions about the status and role of theory by breaking down old boundaries between theory and practice. This came about due to the primacy of practice and the situated and perspectival nature of understanding.

> Yet the primacy of practice and the rejection of theory's transcendental claims of cognitive privilege do not mean that theory no longer has an instructive role to play with respect to practice. All that follows is that the foundationalist concept of theory has to go, and that 'theory', like 'understanding', 'truth', and 'knowledge', needs to be reinterpreted in the light of the interpretive, postfoundationalist turn. It needs to be understood as critical reflection on practice. ... In this pragmatic sense, theories are instruments for transforming reality, rather than mirroring representations of its putative essential and invariable features. So conceived, theory is not extinguished but encouraged by the interpretive turn.
> (Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman 1991, p. 13)

This is the position taken in this thesis. I shall revisit in the next chapter.

I now summarize in his own words, Falzon's reading of Foucault:

> ...postmodernity is not an overcoming of modernity, but rather its continuation and radicalization, in which modernity brings into question its own forms of domination. For postmodernity so understood, the ethical and critical issue is not how we, existing in a fragmented world, can avoid imposing ourselves on the other, how we can avoid interpreting and shaping the other in our own terms. It is not a matter of protecting the other from all contact with us. The issue is rather, given that such encounters go on all the time, given that we exist in the realm of dialogue, how the emergence of one-sided states of domination

can be avoided, and how the possibility of a two-sided relation, a continuation of dialogue, can be promoted.

This ethical and critical position does not imply that we have to reject all forms of order, unity or community, as oppressive, which would be the case for a postmodernism of fragmentation. On the dialogical view there may not be one ideal, transcendentally grounded form of life, but there are still forms of social order and unity. ... Given this dialogical account, the ethical and critical task is not to avoid all principles and all forms of social order but rather to avoid the absolutization of particular forms of order, the establishment of forms of social and political closure.
(Falzon 1998, pp. 95-96)

In some respects, Falzon's project might be seen as a salvage operation rescuing Foucault's ideas from the quagmire of contemporary critique. But this is not a problem – and Foucault almost certainly would not consider it a problem – since Foucault's ideas are historically and socially located and dialogue with his ideas always presents emergent possibilities for new forms, new ideas.

It is interesting to reflect on the notion of 'turns'. Greek philosophy was characterized by a 'metaphysical turn', the rise of modern philosophy was attended by an 'epistemological turn', the beginning of the century was said to be characterized by a 'linguistic turn'; later it was the 'interpretive turn', and more recently the 'postmodern turn'. Now Falzon – and he is not alone – is advocating a 'dialogic turn'. One wonders: whose turn will it be next?

IV.   CONCEPTUAL AND ONOMASTIC CLARIFICATION

Roberts (1990, p. 15), drawing on the work of Lecomte, notes that the term *theory* is "full of ambiguity." He also notes (p. 19) "that a *particular* relationship between 'knowledge' and 'theory' is not accepted universally and so needs to be clarified each time the terms are used." I have noted already (see chapter one) the key

debate in social work concerning theory/practice links and the multiple approaches to theory in social work. I will return to these issues in a specifically social work context in the next chapter. Now, I want to deal with general epistemological terms before relating them to key educational paradigms. Particularly, I want to examine the following concepts: what is 'knowledge'? How does it relate to other terms such as 'theory', 'framework', 'model', 'paradigm'? I want to explicate clearly my use of these terms and thus avoid the confusion that arises from unclear and inconsistent nomenclature. Having dealt with these broad epistemological concepts I will then be in a position to examine how major educational approaches deal with them. I shall deal with the terms in a sequence which indicates their broadening ambit. Each term is contested and often used inconsistently.

4.1 Theory

It will become clear once the subject under scrutiny in this thesis, WS1002, is discussed, that the term *theory* is critical. Roberts (1990, p. 33) notes that "theories are constructed in different ways, that the importance of the role of the theorist in theory construction is viewed differently by different writers, and that both a theory's construction and its 'career' depend upon both the explicit and background assumptions forming the paradigm in which it is developed. A recognition of the influence of differently constructed paradigms on a theory is fundamental." At a general philosophical level, I have already defined theory as *critical reflection on practice*. I shall flesh out this definition in terms of *features* of theories and *structure* of theories, an approach taken with WS1002 students (see Ovington 1993a). First, features. A theory is not a 'real' thing, it is 'socially constructed'. Usually, it is constructed with a particular focal range. This means that theories

deal with only *part* of an experience. They 'explain best' those events etc., which fall nearest this range. Theories can be likened to a stone breaking the surface of water. There is a ripple effect. As you move further away from where the stone breaks the surface the ripples become increasingly weaker. A second implication of the partial nature of theories is that they can *change*. Finally, *theory* and *practice* are not really two separate things. Second, structure of theories. For pedagogical purposes we suggest that theories consist of three elements: concepts, assumptions and propositions. I shall define these terms in the appropriate section of chapter five, the context of the study. Now, I emphasize Roberts' earlier comment about the importance of 'background' assumptions. These form a major focus of the teaching/learning enterprise under scrutiny.

4.2   Model

The term model does not play a big part in either the teaching subject WS1002, or consequently this thesis. Nonetheless, I shall briefly review key definitions. The term, as with all major concepts discussed in this section is contested. Roberts (1990) identifies two common elements across a range of definitions: a model's pictorial capacity, and its providing directives for practice. He also notes (p. 25) that models "are usually given a more tentative status than 'theory'." The relationship between models and theories is viewed differently by different theorists. Roberts (1990) distinguishes two poles of a continuum. The first sees models as "sophisticated description", with explanatory power reserved for theories. Pincus and Minahan, however, conceptualize models as cutting across theories, "interact[ing] with a range of theoretical perspectives, and...not fashioned by any *one* theory" (Roberts 1990, p. 26).

4.3   Framework

This concept is usually shorthand for 'theoretical framework' or 'conceptual framework'. As such, it usually embraces theories and models. Compare Siporin's (1975) definition: "a structure of concepts, propositions, theories, facts and models used as an orienting and ordering perspective with regard to some problem or set of problems" (quoted in Roberts 1990, p. 27).

4.4   Paradigm

I have already provided Guba's (1990, p. 17) adapatation of Kuhn's (1970) notion of paradigms (or one of his 21!). A paradigm is in "its most common or generic sense: a basic set of beliefs that guides action", consisting of ontological, epistemological and methodological elements. Roberts (1990, p. 27) interprets Kuhn's notion in similar vein: "underlying intellectual assumptions" and fundamental world view (*Weltanschauung*). If I were a good logician – in the Aristotelian sense – I would define paradigms in terms of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. However, I prefer to adopt the approach of the later Wittgenstein and offer a definition in terms of 'family resembances'. Such is the above. Paradigms in the sense I am using the term refers to the assumptive bedrock from which theories spring. And because I fuse the theory/practice, knowledge/action dichotomies, paradigms guide and direct both thought and behaviour.

4.5   Knowledge

Along with 'theory' and 'paradigm', *knowledge* is a central concept in this thesis. To provide a glib one sentence definition would make a mockery of this entire chapter which has examined the concept of knowledge, largely in the context of Western philosophy, for the last two thousand years. However, in the conclusion immediately following, I shall attempt to sketch and summarize some of the key findings from the chapter. In a very broad sense, knowledge can be conceived of as a social practice constituted and negotiated through power relations. I can think of no better definition than Foucault's:

> Knowledge is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice, and which is specified by that fact: the domain constituted by the different objects that will or will not acquire a scientific status (the knowledge of psychiatry in the nineteenth century is not the sum of what was thought to be true, but the whole set of practices, singularities, and deviations of which one could speak in psychiatric discourse); knowledge is also the space in which the subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which he deals in his discourse (in this sense, the knowledge of clinical medicine is the whole group of functions of observation, interrogation, decipherment, recording, and decision that may be exercised by the subject of medical discourse); knowledge is also the field of coordination and subordination in which concepts appear, and are defined, applied and transformed (at this level, the knowledge of Natural History, in the eighteenth century, is not the sum of what was said, but the whole set of modes and sites in accordance with which one can integrate each new statement with the already said); lastly, knowledge is defined by the possibilities of use and appropriation offered by discourse (thus the knowledge of political economy, in the Classical period, is not the thesis of the different theses sustained, but the totality of its points of articulation on other discourses or on other practices that are not discursive). There are bodies of knowledge that are independent of the sciences...but there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms.
> (Foucault 1972, pp. 182-183)

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sketched the history of how knowledge has been framed and understood in Western philosophy from the ancient Greeks to the present. It has particularly looked at three related issues: What is knowledge? (How do we justify

it?) What is the relationship between what is known and the person who knows? How does knowledge impact on theory/practice issues? Until recently, the dominant paradigm in Western philosophy from the time of the ancient Greeks had been concerned to establish "how the individual knowing subject could apprehend an external reality" (Henkel 1995, p. 69). Rationalists such as Plato and Descartes stressed the primacy of *reason*. Empiricists such as Aristotle, Locke and Hume and their positivist successors, emphasized the role of observation. In this schema, dualism prevailed (of mind and body; subject and object; theory and practice; knowledge and action), the mind was conceived as a passive recipient of the external world and both knower and known were largely ahistorical. Kant, through his transcendental categories, stressed the active nature of the human mind and the subject/object dichotomy began to dissolve. Hegel completed the dissolution by privileging the subject side of the equation with his Absolute Subject and added a further dimension by locating knowledge in a firmly historical context; albeit one calcified at the middle of the nineteenth-century and held hostage to a foundational subject. Drawing on this Germanic tradition, towards the turn of the twentieth-century, pragmatism and hermeneutics mounted a concerted attack on dualism and individualist conceptions of knowledge acquisition and development, which were beginning to flourish under the banner of logical positivism. In Bernstein's (1972) words (quoting Anscombe), the 'spectator theory of philosophy' was challenged by a conception which stressed knowledge acquisition and development as an active enterprise, a social practice mediated by language. Habermas developed these ideas in his theory of communicative intersubjectivity, but previously extended the analysis of hermeneuticists such as Gadamer by carving a thick slice of materialism: knowledge and power were inextricably linked. The intellectual

heritage that positivism, hermeneutics and critical theory all shared was foundationalism: the quest for secure and certain foundations for knowledge and an enduring and essential human nature (the foundational subject) whose rationality was the conduit for guaranteeing 'knowledge security'.

Poststructuralism also stresses knowledge as a linguistically-mediated social practice imbued with power relations. But it ruptures the intellectual tradition by attacking three fundamental tenets of modernist theories: totalization, teleology and essentialism, eschewing attempts to explain the whole human condition or the condition of whole societies, conceptualized as having an essence or true nature, as heading towards some ultimate utopian goal (e.g. emancipation). Poststructuralism decentres the subject, seeing 'truth' and 'human nature' as bound by culture, time and space. The subject is produced through language and systems of meaning and power. Human nature, it is argued, is a product of culture, rather than cultures being different ways of expressing human nature.

I have also included a brief, but important discussion of feminist epistemology, which cuts across all paradigms. The unifying feature of feminist epistemologies is their focus on viewing knowledge production through the lens of gender.

The key issue to emerge from the historical survey is the debate concerning foundationalism 'versus' fragmentation, or relativism. Marshalling the recent work of Falzon (1998), I argued that this debate is based on a flawed dichotomy and that these two positions do not offer genuine alternatives at all, but in fact are part of the same foundational, totalizing metaphysics. The proper alternative to

foundationalism is not fragmentation, but dialogue. Adapting Falzon's approach, I reinterpreted the work of Michel Foucault in terms of 'dialogue'.

Finally, I reviewed and clarified the key concepts and terms for this thesis which relate to the discussion of knowledge, including the notion of *theory*, which is 'defined' philosophically as *critical reflection* on practice. This paved the way for the heart of the thesis, which is essentially a study examining critically reflective practice at two levels of the teaching/learning interface. First, the critically reflective practice of primarily myself, but also my colleague, in teaching the subject, *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*. Secondly, the critically reflective practice of students, given that the subject is designed, amongst other things, to facilitate beginning tertiary students grappling with the highly complex relationship between theory and practice, or more specifically, thinking theoretically and critically about action. Having located this work epistemologically and ontologically, it is now time to turn to the educational context in which the study is framed.

Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.
(Arthur Schopenhauer 1987, no page numbers)

CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS AND CRITICAL REFLECTION: LESSONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

In chapter one I examined the so-called 'crisis' in higher education which has led to the Quality Assurance reviews, particularly as these relate to teaching, itself identified as a key ingredient in the 'quality' process. I briefly discussed the trend towards mass education and lifelong learning and the impact these trends have on teaching quality, itself a highly loaded and contested concept. I discovered that one could not even begin to discuss *teaching quality* and its assessment sensibly without first exploring the theoretical and philosophical foundations of teaching and learning which such notions presuppose, notions themselves anchored within a broader educational theory. I discovered that teaching is not a unitary phenomenon and there appears to be both a generic component and a context-specific component related to disciplinary practice. Exploring this notion in the context of social work education via the 'theory/practice problematic', revealed something of a crisis in social work and social work education, a disciplinary crisis mirroring the broader institutional crisis of quality. The brief excursion into social work education revealed similar contested terrain – conceptual, theoretical and epistemological – encountered in our discussion of quality teaching and its assessment. Underlying

both sets of issues are broader concerns about knowledge, education, teaching and learning. So before I could embark on the thesis's core – how do we best teach beginning social work students to grapple with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice? (Or more specifically, how do we best teach students to think critically about action?) – I had to re-route the thesis to navigate key educational and philosophical terrain. I broke this task into two sections. The first, chapter two, focused on issues relating to knowledge. One cannot assess the impact of the teaching/learning exchange in such ventures without a clear understanding of what we mean by theory and practice, knowledge and action. The second task, which is the focus of the present chapter, tackles the educational terrain.

Before I launch this venture I want to summarize briefly some key themes that emerged from the discussion in the opening two chapters. This will set the scene. Extending Tsang's (1998) analysis of social work indicates that an important ingredient which feeds into contested positions is the role of 'self'. The social worker is an active agent in theory/practice links. The implications for social work education are that one of the central tasks of the social work educator is to facilitate student awareness of 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions) and of ideological and value orientation. She also notes that 'reflection' plays a key role in both these educational tasks and stresses the moral dimension of praxis (compare Aristotle's *phronesis*).

This is significant given that the major concern of this thesis is how do we best teach beginning social work students to grapple with the highly complex

relationships between theory and practice? A preliminary map is provided by the above: we need to facilitate student awareness of personal knowledge and ideological and value orientation, and we need to do so in a way that places 'reflection' in a central role and attends to the moral dimension of education. How does this compare with key themes emerging from chapter two on knowledge?

There is remarkable consistency. Reviewing the history of knowledge in Western civilization revealed that dualist conceptions of thought (of mind and body; subject and object; self and world; theory and practice; knowledge and action), where the mind was conceived as a passive recipient of the external world and both knower and known were largely ahistorical, were inadequate. Knowledge acquisition and development was seen to be an active enterprise, an historically-grounded social practice mediated by language and imbued with power relations. The key contemporary dispute concerns 'foundationalism': the existence of secure foundations for knowledge and an enduring and essential human nature (the foundational subject) whose rationality is the conduit for guaranteeing 'knowledge security'. Two of the major protagonists in this debate, Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault, both stress the central role of 'critical reflection'. And while they disagree about the nature of the 'subject' (the 'self'), both agree that this plays a major role in knowledge. For Habermas, critical reflection is important to counter 'ideological distortions' and attain 'rational consensus', the 'ideal speech situation'. For Foucault, critical reflection is important to challenge, resist and question attachment to self-created norms stemming from modern forms of power inherent in 'expert' knowledge from the human sciences, an attachment that has been instrumental in engaging us as active participants in our own subordination. In

both accounts, 'personal knowledge', ideology and values, ethics and reflection, play pivotal roles. For both Habermas and Foucault, the question of critically reflecting on action is paramount. This acknowledges at least two aspects: theory/practice relationships and the role of 'self' in this process. Indeed, "the guiding thread of all Habermas' work, according to his own testimony, is an endeavour to reunite theory and practice in the twentieth-century world" (Giddens 1985, p. 124). And Foucault makes the strident claim that "the goal of my work during the last twenty years…has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault 1983, p. 208).

Drawing on the work of Falzon (1998), I argued that when the contemporary debate is cast in terms of foundationalism 'versus' fragmentation, or relativism, it is based on a flawed dichotomy – these two positions do not offer genuine alternatives at all, but are in fact part of the same foundational, totalizing metaphysics. The proper alternative to foundationalism is not fragmentation, but dialogue. Adapting Falzon's approach, I reinterpreted the work of Michel Foucault in terms of 'dialogue'. This, too, has important implications for education as soon as we begin to focus on issues of 'opening up the space' when we 'encounter the other'.

Armed with this conceptual ammunition, I can now proceed with tackling educational terrain. Following this introduction the chapter has two major sections. The first, presents an analytic overview of major approaches to social work education, or, to use the terminology developed in the previous chapter, educational paradigms. I draw on Hobson (1992), who has adapted Moore (1974), and both of whom use the term 'educational theory', for the major components of educational

paradigms: *aim* of education; view of *knowledge*; the nature of the *person*; views on *teaching* and *learning*; and *social* and *political* context of education. While knowledge and teaching and learning are the key emphases, already we have discovered that both these notions are embedded in the other dimensions. In order to contextualize this analysis I shall weave two strands throughout the discussion. First, paradigms of social work education will be framed within education paradigms in general. Second, I will locate the analysis within a specifically higher education framework, again focusing on the two key issues of knowledge, and teaching and learning. The second section will zoom in on the nub of the thesis: how do we best shape the teaching/learning exchange when teaching beginning social work students to think critically about action or practice? I have previously raised the issue of theory/practice relationships (in both chapters one and two), and this has led to the concept of **critical reflection** (as a starting point, I defined theory as critical reflection on practice). Dealing with the theory/practice problematic has been identified as a 'crisis' in social work education. A second theme linking into this discussion, from chapter one, concerns the broader institutional 'crisis' (tertiary education) in which this is located; that is, 'quality teaching' and its assessment. Part of this crisis was said to be graduate outcomes, particularly given increasing knowledge obsolescence in the wake of the 'information explosion'. The West Report (1998), following earlier government recommendations (e.g. Higher Education Council 1992), is adamant that a vital key lies in lifelong learning, which is thought to be comprised of higher order generic skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and effective communication. Ramsden (1992) also reports an account of two studies at Monash University in Australia and the University of Alberta in Canada which indicate that lecturers view as primary educational goals

teaching students to analyze ideas or issues critically and developing students' intellectual/thinking skills. But what exactly is critical thinking? How does it relate to critical reflection? Until now I have treated this concept in a relatively unproblematic way; which is far from the case. In fact, there are a number of ambiguous and contested terms that are related: *critical thinking, reflection, critical reflection, reflective practice*. I propose to present a broad overview of these concepts and the often widely disparate approaches that they hide, approaches that I will link specifically to the various paradigms of social work education raised in section one.

Having completed this discussion, I will then be in a position to outline and justify the theoretical approach adopted in this thesis – epistemologically, ontologically, and educationally. As will become clear later, this approach, once adopted, spells out clear implications not only for educational practice, but also for research practice. In other words, the theoretical framework in this thesis bears an inextricable relationship to the research methodology, the subject matter of the next chapter.

I.   SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Introduction

I have defined the term paradigm. The concept of *education* is highly contested and, like all concepts, assumes its meaning from the paradigm in which it nestles. Consequently, I will offer a 'definition' of education for each paradigm and synthesize my own working definition in the final section. Mostly, the definition is encapsulated in how protagonists see the *aim* of education. As discussion of the

major educational paradigms proceeds, overlap with paradigms of knowledge will become evident. This is not surprising since views on knowledge are a vital component of education and because I have chosen to ground the overall discussion of educational paradigms in Carr and Kemmis' (1986) tripartite division based on Habermas' classification of knowledge and human interests: positivism, interpretivism and critical education science. These correspond to the first three paradigms of knowledge discussed in chapter two: positivism/post-positivism; hermeneutics; and critical theory. I shall insert conceptions of social work education within this tripartite frame drawing on Solas' (1994) framework for social work education. Solas distinguishes between 'classical constructions' of classroom practice (positivist) and two contemporary variants, 'neoclassical constructions' (postpositivist and interpretive), and 'radical constructions' (largely critical). His distinction is partly grounded in historical periods. Finally, as with chapter two, I shall explore a fourth paradigm of education, poststructuralism, particularly the notion of 'dialogue'.

1.1   Positivism ('Traditional' Approaches)

1.1.1   Introduction

This brand of education is sometimes referred to as 'traditional' or 'conservative' (Aronowitz and Giroux 1985). Education tends to be narrowly equated with formal schooling (including higher education institutions). The purported aim of education is to prepare and select students for participation in society. In this notion there is a fixed and ordered body of knowledge (dualist/objectivist epistemology) corresponding to an objective and ordered world (realist ontology), which is to be mastered by students. Memorization is pivotal. The pedagogical

emphasis tends to be on the teacher whose task it is to impart this accepted corpus. Recall Plato's conceit of the teacher as a psychic midwife helping the student give birth to latent, pre-existent knowledge and Aristotle's notion of *tabula rasa*. Freire (1970) referred to this approach as the 'banking concept' of education. This accords with Ramsden's (1992) theory 1 of teaching in higher education, *Teaching as telling or transmission*. Ontologically, dualism usually prevails (between knower and known, mind and body, or mind and emotions, with mind given primacy). Since educational institutions are conceived of as 'vocational sieves', it is taken for granted that the social, economic and political structures which give rise to our vocational structures are worth maintaining. Hence, the conservative label. This traditional paradigm is alive and well, as any first year university student will testify.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) observe that when education emerged as an academic discipline at the turn of the century it was essentially philosophic in character with an emphasis on both reflection and wisdom (though they are quick to point out that the practice did not match the rhetoric). With the emergence of analytic philosophy (one of the major influences on logical positivism) educational theory was "stripped of its traditional concern with substantive moral problems" and "emerged as a value-neutral analytical activity concerned with clarifying the meaning of concepts" (pp. 54-55). This approach rests on twin assumptions. First, that "only a scientific approach to education can ensure a rational solution to educational questions"; and second, "that only instrumental questions about educational means are amenable to scientific solution" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 83). Shorn of its critical import, 'scientific knowledge' became the aspired source of educational

theory. The 'applied science' view took hold: "educational theory sought to improve practice not by improving the thinking of practitioners, but by providing a body of scientific knowledge in terms of which existing educational practices could be assessed and new, more effective practices devised" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 56). This had two variants: an engineering model (e.g. behaviourist psychology, particularly Skinner's operant conditioning); and a medical model exemplified in a functionalist approach to educational sociology where the aim was to identify the body of scientific laws. In practice, this leads to educational aims of socialization and stratification (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

The applied science view, a hallmark of positivism, explains the positivist conception of theory and practice, which also has a distinct relationship with research. The technical expert draws on value-free theories and researches the issues empirically so teachers can passively apply. "The positivist approach to the problem of theory and practice rests on the conviction that it is possible to produce scientific explanations of educational situations which can be employed to make objective decisions about possible courses of action" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 76). I have noted in the previous chapter the problems with positivist conceptions in general and this understanding of theory, practice and research in particular. In short, the positivist view of theory and practice assumes a relationship between 'means' and 'ends' which fails to capture the complexity of "how, in education, aims, policies and methods are all intrinsically related" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 78), and by treating certain aspects of educational situations as governed by 'general laws' and thus beyond control, "this kind of research will always be biased

towards prevailing educational arrangements and its theories will be structured in favour of the 'status quo'" (p. 79).

The bedrock of positivist notions of knowledge, theory, practice and research consists of two closely related fault lines, usually couched as claims. First, that the aims, concepts and methods of the natural sciences are also applicable to the social sciences. Second, that the natural sciences' mostly causal model of explanation provides the yardstick for social science explanations (Carr and Kemmis 1986). But, in the wake of the poison darts thrown at these positivist assumptions over the last three decades, there has been growing recognition that positivist research cannot deliver the goods. As a result, the search for new epistemologies has yielded alternatives, the most popular of which are those deriving from the 'interpretive' tradition of social enquiry (Carr and Kemmis 1986). Before discussing the interpretive paradigm I want to examine traditional approaches to social work education.

Table 3.1: Positivist Conceptions of Education

Aim of Education	Prepare and select students for participation in society
Views on Knowledge	Fixed and ordered body of knowledge (dualist/objectivist epistemology) corresponding to an objective and ordered world (realist ontology) Causal explanations drawn from natural sciences favoured
Theory/Practice	'Applied science' view – sharp splits between theory, practice and research Emphasis on technical control
Nature of Person	Dualism – knower and known, mind and body, or mind and emotions, with mind given primacy (the knowing rational subject)
Teaching & Learning	'Banking concept' – teacher deposits knowledge into an empty cabinet. I.e. teacher-directed Curriculum is vocationally-driven
Social & Political Context	Educational institutions are 'vocational sieves'; social, economic and political structures which give rise to our vocational structures are worth maintaining

1.1.2 Positivism and Social Work Education

"During most of its history, social work...has embraced the positivist tradition" (Reamer 1993, p. 127). Reamer refers primarily to research, but as the following discussion reveals, the impact of positivism has not stopped there. As noted in chapter one, both the United States and Great Britain have influenced Australian social work, though the United States had the larger impact on social work education (Lawrence 1965). Solas (1994, p. 5) confirms this when he writes "a review of the literature over the last fifty years reveals the lasting influence which the pedagogical prescriptions of Bertha Reynolds and Charlotte Towle have had on social work education." The key texts are *Learning and Teaching in Social Work*

(Reynolds 1942) and *The Learner in Education for the Professions: As seen in Education for Social Work* (Towle 1954). Towle's text was particularly important because of her emphasis on education for practice, in her case, social casework, which, it was noted, was the dominant method of social work intervention up until the late 1960s and this was reflected in social work education.

The two closely related fault lines that usually underlie positivism concerning the natural sciences and causal explanations are one step removed in social work. During the time of Reynolds and Towle social work was not considered to have a unique 'body of knowledge' from which it could draw. It drew from the social sciences and both Reynolds and Towle were explicit in seeking to harness Freudian psychoanalytic psychology to social work and social work education (this was consonant with the *Zeitgeist*). Freudian psychology, along with psychology in general, was desperately trying to prove to the world that it was scientific, both in its method and causal model of explanation. This had clear implications for theory and practice: learn the scientific theory of Freudian psychoanalysis and apply. The notion of 'critical reflection' had no currency: "...if the student is rigid in defending his point of view when instructor and colleagues take issue with him, serious questions as to his educability arises" (Towle 1954, p. 397). Reynolds is explicit about the applied science view of theory and practice.

> With a professional body of knowledge to be taught, modern schools of social work have to face the responsibility of so selecting specific field experiences that a student will gain from them not just the skills needed to get a job in that agency, but a broad base of professional equipment usable in a wide variety of social work practice.
> (Reynolds 1942, p. 46)

One aspect of social work education is quite different from traditional positivist conceptions. That is, since inception, social work education has tended to include an affective component (Solas 1994). Even today, some schools of social work attempt to build in student personality characteristics as an entry criteria for social work programs. A second difference is a result of the nature of professional education; that is, due to the importance of practice, education is not equated solely with formal classroom instruction; field experience is integral (though the positivist hegemony of theory is maintained). Interestingly, Solas (1994, p. 61) remarks that critical scrutiny of the literature of the 'classical period' (up until the end of the 1960s) indicates "little direct reporting of what actually occurs in a classroom."

Solas summarizes the major features of the classical approach under ten points. Examination of these reveals close links with positivism. I shall adapt Solas' points under the headings of knowledge and teaching and learning. First, knowledge. There is a fixed and ordered body of knowledge (dualist/objectivist epistemology) corresponding to an objective and ordered world (realist ontology), which is to be mastered by students. This body of knowledge is supplemented by sets of skills, a code of conduct, and ideology, all of which are to be learned in university and applied in practice. Ontologically, dualism also prevails (between knower and known, mind and emotions). Second, teaching and learning, which are assumed to be rational processes. The pedagogical emphasis is on the teacher whose task it is to impart this accepted corpus. Aristotle's *tabula rasa*, given new life by John Locke's *empty cabinet*, sums up well how the student is viewed and the role of the teacher. Somers (1969, p. 63), in her comprehensive review, despite her rhetoric about learning as a process and even quoting Jerome Bruner to support her views,

captures the notion poignantly when she makes the following assumption about learning, "learning begins with not knowing", and the following assumption about teaching, "social work teachers must define...the nature, direction, aims, and specific goals of professional education for social work." This assumes a hierarchical relationship between a naïve, inexperienced student and an experienced, expert educator. The hierarchy is reinforced by construing educational problems as deficiencies in individual growth and development. Further, student learning has "specific, pre-defined arrival points and paths of discovery" (Solas 1994, p. 61), with the "emphasis on the authority of the discipline itself, and what is taught, rather than how each student learns" (p. 62). This masks individual differences, particularly those of gender, class and race among both teachers and learners. As with the teaching and learning enterprise in general, assessment is teacher-directed.

Two final similarities between the views of educators such as Reynolds and Towle, not taken up by Solas, but filling out my earlier components of educational paradigms, concern the aim of education and the social and political context of education. They are closely related. Towle (1954, p. 4) captures the issue poignantly: "The function of a profession in society and the demands implicit in its practice determine the objectives of education for that profession." This echoes the discussion in chapter one about social work's 'abiding internal dialectic' between individual change and social reform. Social work education at this time is conceived as a 'vocational sieve'. It is taken for granted that the social, economic and political structures which give rise to our vocational structures are worth maintaining.

1.2 Interpretivism (Hermeneutics – 'Progressive' Approaches)

1.2.1 Introduction

This paradigm is also referred to as the 'liberal' paradigm (Aronowitz and Giroux 1985) or the 'liberal/progressive' paradigm (Kemmis, Cole and Suggett 1983). Eighteenth century Swiss-born Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and American John Dewey (1859-1952) are generally recognized as the 'forefathers' of this approach (Bowen and Hobson 1987). Progressive thinkers have a much broader concept of education. They usually begin by thinking that society needs improvement and that educational institutions have a key role to play in facilitating social reconstruction. The aim of education is to prepare students to participate in this process of reconstruction. The 'best' students will ascend the social pyramid and become the leaders of the 'new order'. Because progressive thinkers see education as an agent of social change, curriculum content cannot be tied solely to vocational demands. Individuals are to be liberated and this requires a 'liberal' education where knowledge and learning is pursued for its intrinsic value, not merely for its instrumental value in attaining desired occupations. This, argue progressive educators, is socialization, not education. Before social change can come about individuals must experience personal changes. This assumption finds curricular embodiment in the stress on personal development, as opposed to purely cognitive development. Epistemologically, this amounts to a focus on personal knowledge and subjectivity. Indeed, the epistemology/ontology distinction begins to blur. What is 'out there' is a function not just of an individual's environment, but his or her *perception* and *interpretation* of that environment. In keeping with the hermeneutic paradigm, interpretive methodologies "seek to replace the

scientific notions of explanation, prediction and control, with the interpretive notions of understanding, meaning and action" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 83). This type of assumption lends itself to student-centred curricula and learning where student interests are pursued by a variety of methods (discovery learning, activity-based learning, problem solving and other experiential learning approaches). Rousseau (1956, orig. 1762) stresses that we learn from nature and experience, not from being taught. Dewey (1965, orig.1899) saw the classroom as a 'social laboratory' for simulating real-life processes. In a higher education context, this is roughly equivalent with Ramsden's (1992) theory 2 of teaching, *Teaching as organizing student activity*, though Ramsden's notion differs because in his theory 2, despite the student-centred focus, there is a emphasis on teaching as acquiring an increasing repertoire of skills and methods which can be duly applied without an accompanying focus on changing teacher understanding of his or her practice. In this sense, teaching as organizing student activity has positivist undertones: learn the techniques and apply. Ramsden's (1992) theory 3, *Teaching as making learning possible*, with its emphasis on teaching as a reflexive practice which has as its aim changed practitioner understanding, (see below) is in some ways a more accurate portrayal of an interpretive theory of teaching and learning in higher education. But as we shall see, Ramsden's theory 3 can be equally co-opted to the critical paradigm.

Some of the better known 'interpretive' approaches in *higher* education in the last two decades have been Malcolm Knowles' (1970; 1972; 1978; 1984) notion of 'andragogy', David Kolb's (1984) 'experiential learning cycle' and the phenomenographic research pioneered by Ference Marton and colleagues in

Sweden (Marton and Säljö 1976; Marton 1981; Marton and Säljö 1984; Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle 1984; Marton 1986; Marton and Ramsden 1988). I shall discuss Knowles and Kolb in more detail below, since they have been somewhat influential in social work education. Now, I shall pause briefly to outline the phenomenographic approach. The thrust of the approach is that educational researchers study the world of the learner from the learner's own perspective. Note the emphasis on key concepts such as *meaning, understanding, interpretation* – all drawn from the hermeneutic tradition. Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle's (1984) text, *The Experience of Learning*, is seminal. It is a collection of studies in higher education investigating how learning occurs from the student's point of view. Much of the data stems from intensive interviews of learners. Conceptual frameworks are derived from the data itself in grounded theory fashion (see Glaser and Strauss 1967 and Strauss and Corbin 1990; refer also to chapters four and seven). I consider the approach to have been a refreshing antidote to the positivist-inspired psychological research which had dominated the study of learning in higher education until this time. But by privileging the learner's perspective without necessarily grounding it in a socio-historical matrix, leaves the approach open to the same sorts of criticisms that Habermas directed against Gadamer (see chapter two).

Perhaps the most significant legacy of the approach is the birth of the concept of *approach to learning*, "one of the most influential concepts to have emerged from research into teaching and learning in higher education in the last 15 years" (Ramsden 1992, p. 39). One key distinction which emerged from this literature was that between 'deep-level' and 'surface-level' learning, terms first used by

Ference Marton and Roger Säljö in 1976. The concept has since broadened and is mostly referred to as 'surface approach' and 'deep approach' to learning (Ramsden 1992). Ramsden (1992, p. 44) distinguishes then as follows: deep learning involves "actively trying to understand", while surface learning entails "passively trying to reproduce – a focus on the signs or the words of the text versus what is signified by it." More recent research has finetuned these notions (see Entwistle 1998). I shall return to these concepts in the data analysis chapters, particularly in chapter nine on assessment.

Positivist approaches to education enjoyed virtually unrivalled hegemony until the 1970s. Even in the sociology of education 'functionalism' with its positivist underpinnings was still the dominant explanatory framework (Carr and Kemmis 1986). The major challenge emerged with the publication of Michael F. D.Young's edited collection *Knowledge and Control* in 1971, which launched a new interpretive direction. It was inspired by the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (1967) and Berger and Luckman's (1967) sociology of knowledge (Carr and Kemmis 1986). Carr and Kemmis conceive of it as a move from functionalism to phenomenology. One of the upshots of this New Sociology was a focus on treating " 'what counts as knowledge' as 'problematic', so as to facilitate research into the ways in which knowledge is socially organized, transmitted and assessed in schools" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 85).

Interpretive approaches, as we saw in chapter two, deal quite differently with the theory/practice relationship. "Just as positivist conceptions of explanation and prediction imply that theory relates to practice through a process of technical

control, so interpretive methods of validating knowledge entail that theory affects

practice by exposing the theoretical context that defines practice to self-reflection"

(Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 91). In other words, "practices are changed by

changing the ways in which they are understood" (p. 91) (compare Ramsden 1992).

Carr and Kemmis (1986) note that a significant number of interpretive researchers

require a stringent test of validity: participant confirmation of their accounts. This

scenario implies,

> ...that the interpretive theory does not reinterpret the actions and experiences of individuals for its own purposes and in terms of its own conceptual frameworks, but rather provides a deeper, more extensive and systematized knowledge and understanding of the actor's own interpretations of what they are doing. It is the relationship of the truth criteria for this sort of theoretical knowledge to the actor's ordinary everyday understanding that constitutes the basis of the 'interpretive' view of the relationship of theory to practice.
> (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 92)

I have previously noted the problems with such a view, a view which privileges

actors' understandings while neglecting larger structural issues and material

conditions which frame and shape actor understandings. Indeed, this was one of

Habermas' major 'beefs' with Gadamer and ultimately led to Habermas developing

his theory of cognitive interests in an attempt to preserve both the causal

explanatory framework of positivism and the hermeneutic emphasis on actors'

understandings, goals and intentions. But before I deal with critical pedagogies, I

turn to a brief examination of interpretive approaches to social work education.

Table 3.2: Interpretivist Conceptions of Education

Aim of Education	Prepare students to participate in 'reconstructing' society
Views on Knowledge	Subjective epistemology which privileges actors' understandings, meanings, goals and intentions over causal explanations
Theory/Practice	Practices are changed by changing the ways in which they are understood; role of self-reflection
Nature of Person	Holistic – cognitive, affective and physical all important
Teaching & Learning	Student-centred

Liberal education curriculum using a variety of methods |
| **Social & Political Context** | Social, economic and political structures need changing, but this can be done within the existing arrangements |

1.2.2   Interpretivism and Social Work Education

Social work, and social work education, too, began to change in the 1970s under the influence of broader social changes and social theories. In the United States, during the 1960s and 1970s programs of social work education expanded almost exponentially.   This growth was impelled by social changes and enormous amounts of federal monies to conquer poverty (Lloyd 1984).   These changes combined with the influence of the 1959 Curriculum Study to produce a scenario where social casework was gradually challenged as the almost exclusive method of social work intervention and hence, social work education. This was a reflection of social work's 'abiding internal dialectic' between individual therapy and social change. It is important to emphasize the close links between social conditions, social theories, education in general, social work's purpose and social work education. During the 'dynamic 60s' new social theories began to emerge to 'explain' the situation. Dawe (1970) coined the phrase 'the two sociologies'. The first assumed that "sociology is basically concerned with the problem of order and

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for society to exist at all social order must be imposed on individuals" (Jarvis 1985, p. 5). The second, according to Dawe, springs from the Enlightenment which "produced an intellectual realization that social institutions were man-made rather than divinely created. Hence, the key issue...[is] that of autonomous man seeking to gain control over essentially man-made institutions" (Jarvis 1985, p. 6). The two sociologies were the theoretical springs from which social work drank in articulating its stated purposes: individual change or social reform. These in turn impacted on the nature of social work education, which itself was located within a broader notion of educational theorizing. This is captured in the present discussion of the positivist and the interpretive paradigms, which, among other things, as we have seen, had radically different views about the purpose of education and the political and social context in which education takes place. This is also reflected in Jarvis's (1985) two models of education: 'education from above' and 'education of equals'. The former sees education as "functional to the social system so that the individual is moulded to fit his niche in society", while the latter "assumes that the individual is free, able to develop and fulfil his own potential and able to create a truly human social order" (p. 45).

Both Humphries (1988) and Solas (1994) remark that one of the larger theoretical influences on social work education of the 1970s stemmed from a series of works by Knowles (1970; 1972; 1978), the second of which was a paper written for the *Journal of Education for Social Work*. Knowles used the concept of 'andragogy' to distinguish the science of adult education from 'pedagogy', the science of child learning. Interestingly, as the 1970s progressed, liberal/progressive educators, drawing on the seminal work of John Dewey, succeeded in challenging and

ultimately supplanting traditional classroom pedagogies for children in what many came to label an 'active learning' approach. And Knowles himself shifted ground over time (see, for instance, Knowles 1984). Knowles argued that social work needed to shift its previously pedagogical orientation to one which embraced andragogical principles. This would, he argued, revise social work educational practice along four dimensions: the learner, his or her learning experience, readiness and orientation. Basically, this involved, respectively, a focus on the self-directed learner; acknowledging the learner as a rich learning resource; people learn what they need to know so education should be organized around life application; and people learn for a purpose (e.g. to perform a task), therefore learning experiences should be based around problems (Knowles 1972). In passing we might note that this tradition has spawned a large contemporary literature in the area of experiential learning (e.g. Kolb 1984), self-directed learning (e.g. Boud 1981) and problem-based learning (e.g. Barrows 1986), though surprisingly, the problem-based literature, which I shall examine in more detail in chapter seven, has remained a relatively distinct area of enquiry. Jarvis (1985) notes that although andragogy appeared in the 1960s, Knowles (1978) himself was aware that attempts to create a unified framework for adult education began as early as 1949 and that Knowles' form of 'progressive' education can be traced to Dewey. One could also suggest that it has its intellectual roots in Rousseau's *Emile* (1956, orig. 1762). Jarvis (1985, p. 55) argues that the reason that andragogy and 'progressive' education in general emerged during the 1960s was because the *Zeitgeist* was ripe. "Andragogy emerged at a time when the structures of society were conducive to the philosophy underlying the theory and that its own structures reflected the structures of the wider society" (see previous paragraph).

Solas summarizes three major problems for those wishing to apply Knowles' approach:

> ...a confusion between whether he is presenting a theory of teaching, one of learning or, indeed, any theory at all; a similar confusion over the relationship which he posits between adult and child learning; and a considerable degree of ambiguity as to whether he is dealing with theory or practice.
> (Solas 1994, p. 66)

This leads him to conclude that, "at best andragogy offers an incomplete curriculum theory for adult education which requires much more scrutiny than (sic) it has hitherto received" (p. 66). Solas notes that Knowles himself "came to recognize the need to check out which educational assumptions were realistic in a given situation", but that "social work educators who have incorporated his approach in their work, have not" (p. 67).

I shall mention just three recent and representative hermeneutic approaches. First, Coulshed (1993) explicitly develops an approach based on andragogy and in so doing makes the standard globalizing assumption that it is appropriate for *all* learners. Second, Papell and Skolnik (1992) build on Donald Schön's (1983; 1987) concept of the 'reflective practitioner', a notion that Schön self-consciously proposes in opposition to the 'technical-rational' model typical of positivist approaches. I shall have much more to say about reflective practice in general and Schön's work in particular in the second major part of this chapter. Two recent social work education books have appeared on this notion, Yelloly and Henkel (1995) on *reflective practice*, and Gould and Taylor (1996) on *reflective learning*, a book which claims Schönian heritage, and in which Papell contributes a chapter. Third, Vayda and Bogo (1991, p. 273) adapt David Kolb's experiential learning

cycle to propose their "Integration of Theory and Practice (ITP) Loop." I shall also discuss Kolb briefly in the second part of the chapter. The Action and Enquiry Learning (EAL) approach developed for social work at Bristol University which is based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Burgess 1992), I shall discuss in chapter seven, since its major focus is problem-based learning rather than reflection per se.

What all these adaptations have in common (Knowles, Schön and Kolb) and the criticism I want to highlight at this juncture is similar to the criticism that Habermas levelled at Gadamer's development of hermeneutic theory: in their putative quest to privilege student-centredness and student experience they fail to account for the material and structural conditions (including gender, race and class) which shape student perceptions, and thus they have an inbuilt conservatism which tends to preserve existing educational and social arrangements. This is borne out in the fact that despite the cries of egalitarianism, they embody a hierarchical relationship between student and teacher. Carmen Luke's feminist critique summarizes the situation aptly: "Privileging experience as foundational to knowledge, or as a transparent window to the 'real', denies its situatedness in discourses that constitute subjectivities in the first place, and that enable articulation of experience from discursively constructed subject positions" (Carmen Luke 1992, p. 37). I want to make it clear that I am not criticizing these approaches because of the hierarchical relationships per se – it could well be that this is the best we can currently offer under existing higher education arrangements. I criticize them on the grounds that there is a mismatch between their educational rhetoric and educational practice (compare Carmen Luke's 1996 later admission about such mismatches). I now turn

to critical educational science, which takes seriously the notion of material and structural conditions.

1.3   Critical Approaches

1.3.1   Introduction

The critical paradigm is broad indeed, ranging across Paulo Freire's (1970) 'conscientization', Ivan Illich's (1971) 'deschooling' and Carr and Kemmis' (1986) 'critical education science'.   In higher education it embraces Mezirow and associates' (1990) 'transformative and emancipatory learning' and it also includes feminist pedagogies (Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore 1992).   First, I shall provide the briefest of overviews.   Then I will focus on Carr and Kemmis' (1986) neo-Habermasian approach before addressing specific critical pedagogy in social work education.   Problems with this approach will lead me to another variant of critical pedagogy, feminist poststructural pedagogy.   It is vital to include the latter for two reasons.   First, due to the previously noted female majority in social work in general and in the WS1002 cohort in particular.   Second, because it is the pedagogy most consonant with the epistemological approach concerning 'dialogue' that I outlined in chapter two.   I shall have occasion to return to Mezirow's approach in section two of this chapter and Paulo Freire's notions emerge in the discussion of radical social work education.   Although I follow the literature in using the 'radical' label often appropriated to these approaches (e.g. Aronowitz and Giroux 1985; and Fook 1993 in social work), I do so with reservations, since I do not consider anything radical at all about critically reflecting on our position in the world in the hope of changing it.   It may be a misguided venture, but from my standpoint it is

quite a conservative position to adopt. It simply indicates humanness as opposed to automaton.

A politically-minded critical approach, like the progressive approach, conceives of education in a broad sense with educational institutions important agents of social change. But there are two major differences. First, a 'critical' educator would argue that "education must engage society and social structures *immediately*, not merely prepare students for later participation" (Kemmis et al. 1983, p. 9). Second, they would argue that the means for social reconstruction are not readily available; in fact, these means (political, economic, social structures) are major instruments in perpetuating existing social-economic inequalities (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Apple 1979; Giroux 1981). By far the largest volume of politically-minded critical analyses appearing in the 1970s were classical Marxist or neo-Marxist in origin with much attention paid to class and schooling. Analyses of feminist pedagogy, while stuttering into existence in the 1970s, have only begun in earnest in the last decade (see Luke and Gore 1992). Deconstructive or poststructural analyses of education are even more recent (see Kanpol 1992; Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997).

1.3.2   Critical Education Science

Unless otherwise stated, the source for the following information on critical education science is Carr and Kemmis (1986). The major aim of critical education science is to *transform* education. Positivist explanation and hermeneutic understanding are simply staging posts or means to this ultimate aim. This 'emancipatory' aim applies equally to social, political and economic conditions

which might constrain such transformation. There is a conceived endpoint (teleological conception) which is the ultimate attainment of a just and rational society and just and rational educational practices. Epistemologically, there is a rejection of positivist conceptions of rationality, objectivity and truth in favour of a dialectical view of rationality. Positivist thinkers adopt an objectivist epistemology (postpositivists a modified objectivist position) in that knowledge is perceived to have an objective status independent of the observer. Interpretivists privilege actor's subjective understandings (a subjective epistemology). Critical education scientists recognize 'objective' aspects of social situations *and* people's 'subjective' understandings as valid sources of knowledge. It is this interplay that constitutes the dialectic. Truth and action are viewed as socially-constructed and historically-embedded. This is similar to the interpretivist position, but what distinguishes critical education science is that they adopt "a more activist view of their role; unlike interpretive researchers who aim to understand the significance of the past to the present, action researchers aim to transform the present to produce a different future" (p. 183). This impacts on the theory/practice issue where the positivist conception of the applied science technical view is rejected, as is the interpretivist notion that "transformations of consciousness are sufficient to produce transformations of social reality" (p. 181). Note the constant reference to 'reality', indicating a realist ontology, albeit a critical realist position. Distorted understandings can be overcome by teachers analyzing their own practices and understandings as these are shaped by broader ideological conditions. By linking reflection to action (*praxis*), teachers and others can become aware of how to overcome those aspects of the social order which frustrate rational change. Self-critical communities of action researchers can enact a form of social organization in

which truth is determined by the way it relates to practice. Note that in this conception both teaching and learning is about change or transformation. Learners critically reflect on both their theories and practices in order to transform their practice. The teacher's role is to 'facilitate' this process, but also to critically reflect on their own theories and practices. Compare this with Ramsden's (1992) theory 3 of teaching in higher education, *Teaching as making learning possible*, with its emphasis on teaching as a reflexive practice which has as its aim changed practitioner understanding.

Because Carr and Kemmis' (1986) approach is premised explicitly on Habermas' critical social science (see Carr and Kemmis chapter five), the criticisms directed previously at Habermas, organized under the rubrics of totalization, teleology and essentialism, are equally valid. Despite all the rhetoric about 'ideology critique' and subjecting one's theoretical presuppositions to critical scrutiny, Carr and Kemmis, like Habermas, are unwilling to relinquish their attachment to an idealized utopia in which all operate according to rational and just processes, in which all other political forms and viewpoints are suppressed. Carmen Luke's feminist critique summarizes it aptly. "Nor can we claim to know what the politically correct end points are for liberation for others" (Carmen Luke 1992, p. 48). Carr and Kemmis are equally unwilling to surrender the cherished notion that there exists an 'essential' human being whose 'true' nature is rational and just. The bedrock of the paradigm is immune from such critical ventures. There is little recognition that the transcendental weight that rationality is asked to carry is itself an historically-produced and socially-constructed notion from the Enlightenment.

Table 3.3: Critical Education Science

Aim of Education	Transform education and society (in a teleological sense)
Views on Knowledge	Dialectical view of knowledge, truth and rationality – objective and subjective aspects to reality (critical realism)
Theory/Practice	'Ideology critique' of factors shaping distorted understandings ('false consciousness') Praxis (link reflection to action) leading to change
Nature of Person	Emphasis on rational being capable of transforming situations
Teaching & Learning	About change – learners critically reflect on both their theories and practices in order to transform their practice. Teacher's role is to 'facilitate' this process, but also to critically reflect on their own theories and practices.
Social & Political Context	Social, political and economic structures need changing, but the means, far from being readily available, are agents in reproducing social-economic inequalities Education must engage learners in this process immediately

1.3.3 'Radical' Social Work Education

Critical approaches to social work education in a fit of self-consciousness have tended to label their approaches as 'radical' (e.g. Galper 1980 in the American context; Humphries 1988 in the British context and De Maria 1992, 1993 in the Australian context). Critical pedagogy, like the interpretive approaches discussed previously, emerged in social work education during the 1970s. De Maria (1993) argues that by the 1980s it had been swamped as social work rediscovered its conservative clinical roots.

A number of approaches (e.g. Brigham 1977; Davies 1982; Burstow 1991) are based on Paulo Freire's (1970; 1972) work which Solas (1994, p. 70) summarizes aptly as a pedagogy "grounded in a cultural theory of action which binds Marxist dialectic to existential analysis of the nature of humanity and which stresses the centrality of language as the system for creating and transforming meaning." In 1991 I completed a Masters thesis by research which explored community-based indigenous teacher education programs in Australia, Alaska and Canada. I concluded that one of the most effective of these programs was Batchelor College's Teacher Education Program premised on a Freirean-style approach (Ovington 1991). I had initially been exposed to Freirean thought in 1987 while studying for my Diploma of Education and in 1992 when I designed an elective in the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare at James Cook University, I included Freire as mandatory. At that time Freire was my 'hero'. My first doubts began to surface at the end of 1993 when I attended a four day international conference in Penang, Malaysia, entitled *Communication and Development in a Postmodern Era: Re-evaluating the Freirean Legacy*. While I still acknowledge Freire's great contribution, I recognize that until then I was locked into a teleological, utopian mentality, and I thought I had discovered the utopian educational theory in Freire. One of the keynote speakers at this conference (Criticos 1993a, p. 21) captures my current thinking: "Freire and others have given us the language to challenge borders; postmodern and feminist critiques, however, reveal borders as more complex and varied." Perhaps the most poignant moment in the entire conference came on the final day when an 'ethnic minority' man from Sarawak, who had been silent until then, rose and spoke. He said that he had come a long way from his community and had listened very carefully for four days. But

he was still unclear how the approaches discussed might help him and his people. Could someone 'enlighten' him? His small and simple speech was greeted with a deafening and uncomfortable silence. I am not suggesting that there have not been significant successes with programs modelled on Freirean approaches (though I am unaware of any social work programs modelled in their entirety on Freirean philosophy in Australia, Great Britain or the United States). Indeed, the Batchelor program referred to above is perhaps one such success story. What I do suggest is that Freire's approach, like any educational theory, rides on particular assumptions which have been formulated within specific historical and cultural periods: Freire's educational philosophy and methodologies were originally designed in the 1960s to teach illiterates in Brazil in an environment where, traditionally, formal education was available to only a select few. Whether the assumptions and contextual variables framing Freire's approach are applicable to other times, other places and other cultures, is an empirical matter. It cannot be decided *a priori*. Brigham, Davies and Burstow, as Solas (1994) points out, overlook the vast cultural differences. Further, there is no sense in any of their work that they have subjected Freire's assumptions to critical scrutiny. This is ironic, since such a procedure is pivotal to a Freirean approach. Some of Freire's most fundamental assumptions can be extracted from two notions: his concept of 'conscientization' and his notion of 'dialogic pedagogy'. "Conscientization refers to the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality (Freire 1972, p. 51). 'Dialogic pedagogy' is captured in the following: "Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can

then act critically to transform reality" (Freire and Shor 1987, p. 99). And a little

later:

> What is dialogue in this way of knowing? Precisely this connection, this
> epistemological relation. The object to be known in one place links the two
> cognitive subjects, leading them to reflect together on the object. Dialogue is
> the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing
> and re-knowing the object of study.
> (Freire and Shor 1987, p. 99)

Conscientization implies a 'false consciousness' (compare Habermas, and Carr and

Kemmis). Through the dialogic method this situation is rectified. Both these

notions are anchored in a realist ontology and they presuppose that teachers and all

students will unmask an identical reality. This assumption is open to all the

criticisms discussed previously under the rubrics of totalization, teleology and

essentialism. Indeed, there are significant similarities between Freire's and

Habermas' underlying theoretical positions. Carr and Kemmis (1986) point out the

similarities between Freire's notion of 'conscientization' and their Habermasian-

derived concept of 'ideology critique'. This is not surprising since both Freire and

Habermas took on board the Marxist reworking of the ancient Greek concept of

praxis as a fundamental tenet of their position. This means they had similar ideas

about critical reflection. And fundamentally, they are both 'emancipatory' forms of

education in a teleological sense.

Solas summarizes the critique against social work's Freirean-derived educators:

> ...educators and students are not abstract; they are men and women of
> particular ages, classes, physical abilities, races, sexes and so on. They will be
> seen and heard by each other not as an abstraction, but as a particular person
> with a certain defined history and relationship to each other and the world.
> Brigham, Burstow and Davies leave these troublesome abstractions and
> universalizations untheorized.
> (Solas 1994, p. 71)

Other critical social work education approaches adopt a socialist view of educational practice (e.g. Hunter and Saleeby 1977; Galper 1980; De Maria 1992; 1993). De Maria (1993), for instance, adopts critical pedagogy theorist's Henry Giroux's (1989) reworking of Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony'. De Maria (1993) also notes the resurgence of radical social work from the late 1980s – the 'second outbreak' (e.g. Dominelli's 1989 anti-racist social work in Britain and Fook's 1993 feminist approach), but remarks that the focus is on practice and not social work education. Solas (1994) notes that despite differences, the above noted critical social work *education* writers share fundamental similarities. This also applies to the Freirean approaches. Indeed, De Maria implicitly acknowledges the overlap between Freirean approaches and his own by sourcing the work of both Freire and Ira Shor. This leaves such approaches liable to the criticisms directed previously at other critical positions in social work education. Effectively, Solas perceives that all the critical approaches suffer from similar shortcomings to both the interpretivist and positivist paradigms. First, is their "relentless drive towards a seamless, unified, totalizing [educational] practice" (p. 76). We can term this *totalization*. Second, is their embeddedness in humanism, "the philosophy that *man* possesses common, innate capacities, needs and wants, an essential humanity whose progressive potential can be consciously and rationally developed" (p. 76). This embraces both the concepts of *essentialism* and *teleology*.

1.4   Where do we Stand?

Where does this leave us? The three positions I have discussed so far can all be lumped together under the 'modernist' rubric. Following on from the epistemological position adopted in chapter two concerning perspectivalism and

Falzon's (1998) reworking of Foucault in terms of 'dialogue', I now want to move into poststructural ideas about education in general and social work in particular. I want to begin with poststructural feminisms and later zoom in on social work education by looking at the work of Solas (1994).

1.4.1 Poststructural Feminist Pedagogy – A Starting Standing Point

One of the most significant contributions to critical feminist pedagogy in recent times has been the edited collection by Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (1992). These writers deliberately label their book *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy,* highlighting that there is no monolithic feminist pedagogy within the critical tradition. What they do have in common is that:

> As feminist educators, we all attempt on a daily basis to create pedagogical situations which 'empower' students, demystify canonical knowledges, and clarify how relations of domination subordinate subjects marked by gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and many other markers of difference.
> (Luke and Gore 1992, p. 1)

Luke and Gore's project arose because they experienced "theoretical, political and pedagogical 'dissonance' with what the 'founding fathers' had conceptualized as a pedagogy for self- and social empowerment and for freedom from oppression" (p. 1). They label their standpoint 'poststructural feminisms'. "A poststructural feminist position takes issue with the technology of control, the silent regulation, deployed by signifiers such as 'power', 'voice', 'democratic freedoms' and the 'class, race, gender' triplet" (p. 4). There is much explicit and implied criticism of the track record of critical theories in their quest for 'enlightenment' and 'emancipation'. However, Luke and Gore are unequivocal that the feminist political project of constructing a pedagogy is the driving force; poststructuralist or postmodern theoretical tenets have been harnessed where helpful. "We refuse to

align with, or pay homage to, what others totalize as 'postmodern [or poststructural] feminism', a feminism that 'rejects all forms of essentialism'" (p. 5).

Epistemologically, they locate themselves within the tradition of standpoint epistemology, which they define as "fronting up with one's position" (Luke and Gore 1992, p. 4). Luke (1992, p. 25), in a separate paper in the same volume, distinguishes the work of feminist educational theorists with their focus on "critiques of patriarchal assumptions and practices in efforts to document the politics and institutionalization of gendered differences in educational settings and discourses" from the wider poststructural 'project', noting that "explicitly deconstructive work on educational theoretical metanarratives has not been a visible project." While noting variations between the deconstructive project in the United States compared to Australia, Britain and Canada (which they equate with differences between postmodernism and poststructuralism respectively), Luke and Gore urge that

> ...both poststructuralism and postmodernism take issue with the centuries-long rule of Enlightenment epistemology and the fictions of the individual that it spawned. Both reject the self-certain subject, the truth of science and fixity of language, and the functionalist order imputed to the social and to theories of the social.
> (Luke and Gore 1992, p. 5)

Luke and Gore are at pains to distance themselves from the postmodernist 'vanishing act', a reference to the 'fragmentation vision' I critiqued in the last chapter.

> ...a poststructuralist feminism acknowledges its own position in discourse and in history, and therefore remains critical of its own complicity in writing gender and writing others. Contrary to the anti-foundationalism espoused by poststructuralist and postmodern theorists, a poststructuralist feminism does not give up its theoretical foundations. ... Instead, they ground their epistemology on the foundation of difference. A construct of difference that extends the

sociological trinity of class, race, gender (usually in that order), and makes
conceptual space for difference in subject location, identity and knowledges,
renders such a foundation anti-essentialist and indeterminate. This kind of
indeterminancy is not the same as the postmodernist deferment. Rather, it is an
indeterminancy that lies in its rejection of certainty promised by modernist
discourses, a rejection of a self-certain and singular subject, and a rejection of
knowledges that promise answers which lead to closure.
(Luke and Gore 1992, p. 7)

This is consistent with the epistemological position I labelled perspectivalism and

for which I argued in chapter two. Indeed, Luke (1992, p. 48) argues for

contradictory standpoints which "are not the same as positions that float

uncommitted on a sea of postmodernist theoretical indeterminancy." Note that she

is not advocating 'anything goes'. She acknowledges that feminists of similar ilk

do take positions, but "that position, in my estimation, can only be emancipatory if

our attention to the politics of the local (of struggles, of identities) are tied to

dedicated engagement with and teachings of the politics of global structures and

justifying narratives of oppression. In other words, the feminist (and

postmodernist) risk of slippage into endless difference and local narrative can

easily obscure attention from historical structures of domination and exploitation"

(Luke 1992, p. 49). And later: "We cannot afford to privilege experience at the

expense of theory, the local at the expense of the global" (p. 49).

This epistemology has clear implications for the teaching and learning interchange.

"A poststructuralist feminist position suggests that we cannot lay claim to single-

strategy pedagogies of empowerment, emancipation, and liberation" (Luke and

Gore 1992, p. 7). And later, Luke (1992, p. 48) in her separate paper argues that "a

feminist pedagogy does not claim foundation; instead, it grounds its epistemology

on a foundation of difference" which "takes as its starting and end points 'the

responsibility to historicize, to examine each deployment of essence, each appeal to experience, each claim to identity in the complicated contextual frame in which it is made'" (Luke 1992, p. 48 citing Dianne Fuss).

Two issues require clarification. First, the notion of foundations, and second, the concept of 'emancipation'. How can an epistemology be non-foundational, yet "ground its epistemology on a foundation of difference"? Carmen Luke draws on the ideas of Elizabeth Grosz (1989) who "explains that a situational, perspectival theory of knowledge is by definition a relational theory of knowledge which is not the same as relativism. Social subjects, social theories and research are always located in specific historical, cultural and political trajectories which are always in historical relation to other trajectories, other relations of domination. As such, persons, practices, knowledges are 'neither neutral nor indifferent to individual particularities (as the objectivist or absolutist maintains), nor purely free-floating, a position any subject can occupy at will (as the subjectivist or relativist maintains)' (p. 100)" (Luke 1992, p. 47).

This resonates with the epistemological position adopted in this thesis and argued for in chapter two. The key lies in Falzon's (1998) interpretation of Foucault's 'dialogue'. Unlike the immutable foundations of Habermasian approaches (of both secure knowledge and enduring subject, linked by rationality), foundations expected to survive intellectual earthquakes recording 10 on the Richter Scale, a 'foundation of difference' is a makeshift structure of competing and contradictory positions which are in a state of dynamic flux, in constant dialogue. All such positions are socially-constructed and historically-embedded and as such are open

to constant change. At certain times and in certain places positions may gain ascendancy, even total dominance, but they will always be subject to the influence of 'other'. The pedagogical challenge is to open up the space for competing positions to breathe in such environments, to enable difference to emerge, to enable, in Foucault's terms, 'subjugated knowledges' to surface. In short, it is a foundation which resembles a kaleidoscope. This deals with the oft-made criticism of poststructural approaches (e.g. Seyla Benhabib 1984, p. 111 in discussing Lyotard's work) that they lack a normative ground, an epistemological standpoint from which to critique other positions. "The choice is still between an uncritical polytheism and a self-conscious recognition of the need for criteria of validity, and the attempt to reflexively ground them." Benhabib reaches this conclusion because she universally and mistakenly equates poststructuralism with the 'fragmentation vision' I critiqued in chapter two. The perspectival epistemological position taken in this thesis acknowledges standpoints and it behoves the theorist to 'come clean' with their respective positions, but it is not an immutable standpoint; through a process of critical reflection and dialogue standpoints can and do change (in all fairness to Benhabib, she shifts ground – see chapter eight for a discussion of Benhabib 1992). The difficulty, of course, is how one can ever escape the straitjackets of rationalism. It appears that critical reflection is the most rational of activities. Are we kidding ourselves when we pretend that we are critiquing rationality using the tools of rationality? Is this the millennium version of solipsistic self-enclosure?

The second issue requiring clarification is the concept of 'emancipation' and it is closely related to the discussion in the previous paragraph. On a number of

occasions Luke and Gore (1992) in their joint introduction to the volume and Luke (1992) in her separate paper use the term 'emancipation' (Gore 1992 in her separate paper prefers the term 'empowerment'), a term I have previously criticized in the context of Habermas' critical theory. While neither Luke nor Gore define the term 'emancipation', I can only assume, given the epistemological and ontological position they outline, that they do not mean it in a teleological sense. That is, one does not expect to throw off the yoke of oppression in order to reach some ideal end-point, the 'rational utopia' of Habermas. There may be goals, and these may even be grounded normatively, but they are open to a continual process of renegotiation. They are, in the words of chapter two, inescapably bound up in 'dialogue'. This is consistent with their claim that "the early poststructuralist educational work points out that modernist and structuralist discourses, including some feminist discourses, have failed to achieve their goals, in part because of their dogmatic insistence on global and unitary projects and subjects" (Luke and Gore 1992, p. 9). Further, the central argument of Gore's (1992) paper is that the popular language of 'empowerment' should be used more cautiously and reflexively. Drawing on Foucault's analyses of power-knowledge, she illustrates how even these liberatory discourses can function as regimes of truth.

On a related front, Carmen Luke (1992, p. 47) is aware that with her position the "risk of essentialism should be seen as a genuine theoretical and actual danger", but suggests that "the postmodernist intellectual and cultural moment allows for a strategic essentialism that characterizes 'all others', and that provides the space for what Donna Haraway names cyborg politics" (p. 47). This is an important point. It highlights the close relationship between politics, ethics and knowledge. Undue

emphasis on theoretical coherence may not be politically and ethically strategic at particular times. Now may be one such time. This was a point I made in the last chapter when citing another of Carmen Luke's papers where she warned of the dangers of theoretical fissuring that has taken place in feminism with the advent of poststructuralism. "Feminism's 'first principle' of difference(s) has severely potentially disabling consequences for the transformative politics claimed by feminist pedagogy discourse" (1996, p. 284). I also noted, in similar vein, Judith Allen (1991, p. 73) citing De Lauretis's warning "that feminists have arguably reached a defensive point of taking the risk of essentialism too seriously, so seriously as to imperil the feminist project." Such warnings suggest that rationally-grounded theoretical approaches are not always (seldom?) a necessary condition for social justice. They may not even be a sufficient condition at certain times.

Table 3.4: Poststructural Feminist Conceptions of Education

(Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore)

Aim of Education	Transform education and society (in a non-teleological sense)
Views on Knowledge	Standpoint/perspectival epistemology – fronting up with one's position Foundation of difference
Theory/Practice	Praxis (link reflection to action) leading to change But rejection of concept of 'false consciousness'
Nature of Person	The 'subject' or 'self' is produced through language and systems of meaning and power 'The self' (or selves) is not simply a cognitive/rational being
Teaching & Learning	No single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment But underpinning quest – 'open up the space for other' All claims to be located in complicated contextual frames
Social & Political Context	As with critical theory, social, political and economic structures need changing, and education must engage learners in this process immediately But non-teleogical – no ideal end-point

1.4.2 Poststructural Social Work Education

John Solas (1994) within an Australian context has attempted to deconstruct social work educational practice and map out broad outlines for a poststructural pedagogy for social work. His approach is anchored within a Derridean framework. Using Derrida's concept of the 'metaphysics of presence', he argues against approaches which attempt to "describe some ontological region, such as social work education, as a whole system" (p. 78); in other words, totalizing approaches. His other major criticisms are similar to the ones I have outlined already in my critique of modernist theories: teleology and essentialism. The common denominator of these three

doctrines is *humanism,* and Solas is particularly critical of humanist constructions of the essentialist subject with its enduring 'human nature' and its suppression of difference, the 'other'. In this we are agreed. Solas outlines a "poststructuralist trajectory" with four features. The first emphasizes safeguarding *difference,* "recognizing that the myths embodied in the ideal of the fully conscious, rational, Androcentric and Eurocentric person are oppressive to those who are less than ideal" (p. 81). The second concerns "a refusal of the terms and assumptions associated with the educator/student and knower/known dualisms" (p. 81). In concrete practical terms, this appears to involve educators and students "recogniz[ing] and nam[ing] the assumptions, conditions and practices they take for granted" (p. 82). The third is "a need to problematize such powerful structuring practices as expertise, homogenization, instrumentalism, linearity and reason and ask 'which interpretations and sense making do these practices facilitate, which do they silence and marginalize and what interests do they appear to serve?'" (p. 82). Finally, there is "the need to politicize social work education, that is, to construct practices in ways that make education and political coalition across differences possible and viable – without...assimilating to a historically or contextually dominant norm" (p. 83). I have few problems with any of these notions from a theoretical perspective. But I do have four potential concerns with Solas' position.

The first is an epistemological quibble. It is difficult to tell if Solas endorses the 'fragmentation vision' of poststructuralism outlined in chapter two. I suspect he does given his Derridean commitments, and if so he is liable to the criticisms of this position outlined previously. Second, and related to this, is 'coming clean' on his implicit norms for criticizing the 'metanarratives' of 'structuralist' social work

education. If he does endorse a fragmentation position he is in trouble, because as we have already seen he lacks a standpoint from which to criticize anything at all. If he does not endorse such a position, but champions a perspectivalist stance similar to the one I have outlined in chapter two or to the one offered by poststructuralist feminist theorists such as Carmen Luke and others, then it behoves him to explicate what his norms are. He does not do this. This is further evidenced by his choice of theoretical framework. It appears as an act of whimsy. There is no sense of how he arrives at the position he does, no sense of how Derrida's position emerged within the context of a specific time and place. Contrast this with Carr and Kemmis (1986) where their position emerges clearly from a critique and the shortcomings of the positivist and interpretive paradigms. Solas presents his framework in a socio-historical vacuum. This is extremely ironic since he argues that "discussions of pedagogical practice by both radical and neo/classical social work educators were consistently stripped of historical context and political position" (p. 75).

Third, his formulations are extremely abstract. I cite one example, from the third feature of a "poststructural trajectory": "The task, therefore, is one of constructing classroom practices that engage with the discursive and material spaces left by the politicization of differences in equality, power and dialogue" (p. 83). What does one do with such a statement in concrete, practical classroom terms? What does Mr Solas do when confronted with a class of living breathing 'others'? What would have been more interesting and revealing would have been some concrete 'narrative' and deconstructive analysis of what actually happens in his classroom practices. Ironically, he laments the dearth of research into teaching and learning in

social work education (p. 2) and stresses the "need for a study of school-based social work education" (p. 2). Later, he argues that the major problem with "the small body of literature on classroom teaching and learning in social work education" is that it is "premised on structuralist assumptions" with the result that the salient characteristics "have not been derived from what social work educators and students actually think, say or do, but from relationships among what educators and students think, say and do" (p. 5). I hear no student voices in his account, I hear no educators' voices other than his own. In short, I hear nothing of what students and educators "actually think, say or do". This is disappointing. Finally, despite the criticisms of rationality, all four features seem to indicate a heavy cognitive emphasis. This accords with the previous criticism of abstractness. Social workers and social work students do not engage solely from the 'neck up'. What space is there for the development of other aspects of the 'subject'? I am not suggesting that, theoretically, his position excludes this possibility in principle – far from it – but it behoves him to explicate how this might happen.

I have reviewed major approaches to education and social work education, particularly in terms of teaching and learning and views on knowledge, but also located within a broader social and political context. It is now time to synthesize my own conceptions about social work education.

1.5   Social Work Education – What is it? What is it for?

To answer this question one must answer two logically prior questions. First, what is social work (what is its purpose?). Second, what is education (what is its purpose?)

1.5.1 Social Work

In 'defining' social work I distinguish between two sets of concepts. First, 'means' and 'ends', and second, 'description' and 'prescription'. These concepts are often confused in the literature (see Roberts 1990). Ends are linked to purposes, in this case, the purpose(s) of social work. Means are the methods that social workers use to achieve their stated purposes. I have argued previously that social workers need to be able to justify their actions. This presupposes a connection between means and ends; that social workers specify their purposes and the means for attaining them and that they can defend both notions. "For the professional social worker, unless there is an explicitly stated purpose or purposes, the use of any technique of intervention cannot be justified, because the social worker will not know why such a technique is being employed" (Roberts 1990: 58). Note that the specification of ends or purposes implies teleology, which I have criticized in the context of modernist theories. I want to distinguish carefully the sense in which my view is teleological. In modernist terms teleology is the doctrine that sees societies, individuals and theories progressing towards an ultimate goal such as liberation, emancipation or maturity. It sees individuals and/or society as starting from some form of primitive existence and progressing through stages to a higher level of being. Postmodernists attack this doctrine because of the tendency to totalize. Teleology aims at a future in which human beings will all be the same, and their essence revealed, whether the goal or *telos* is the liberation of 'man', the coming of the Messiah, or the dawning of a new socialist age (Katz 1995). My sense of the term suggests that there is no *ultimate*, utopian endpoint and there is no *essential* human nature. Purposes must be specified, but they are in a constant state of

renegotiation and change, they are in continual 'dialogue'. They can vary across time and place. In other words, social work is a socially constructed activity which "is part of a complex theoretical, occupational and service network" (Payne 1991, p. 7). This is not a normative notion which *prescribes* how things *ought* to be. Rather, it is a sociological *description* of how things appear to me through my conceptual lenses. My use of the concept of teleology also highlights *ad nauseum* my argument that concepts assume their meaning from the paradigm in which they are embedded. However, when I claim that social workers *ought* to be able to defend their actions, I am making a *prescriptive* statement. Indeed, if I were making a *descriptive* statement I might be inclined to say that this is much less often the case than desirable. To summarize: I *describe* social work as a socially constructed, contested activity. I *prescribe* that social workers *ought* to be able to defend their practice.

Roberts (1990) remarks on the confusion that results when prescriptive statements are couched in descriptive language. The Australian Association of Social Workers defines social work as "the profession committed to the pursuit of social justice, to the enhancement of the quality of life, and the development of the full potential of each individual, group and community in society" (AASW 1997, p. 5). This is a descriptive statement, but the most cursory glance at the history of the social work profession (see chapter one) reveals that it cannot possibly be an accurate description of social work in either Australia, Great Britain or the United States. It is, in other words, a masked prescriptive statement which emerges as part of the continuing wrestle for control of social work turf. Compare this with the Mission Statement of the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare at James

Cook University at the time the present research was conducted. "The Department of Social Work and Community Welfare is committed to education which addresses structural inequalities in pursuit of social justice" (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare, JCU 1993a, p. 1). This is clearly a prescriptive statement. But note the sleight of hand: it refers not to social work practice explicitly, but social work education. This statement is repeated in the *Bachelor of Social Work Re-Accreditation Submission* and later there is another statement under the *Philosophy of the Department* which defines social work in almost identical terms to the AASW one. Again, it is a prescriptive statement couched in descriptive language. "Social work is a professional activity primarily concerned with the wellbeing and helping of individuals, groups, organizations and communities both to enhance and restore their capacity for social functioning, and to improve the quality of life for everybody by working towards redressing social inequalities and pursuing social justice for all" (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare, JCU 1993b, p. 12).

The concept of social justice figures prominently in both documents, though in neither is it defined precisely. It can be viewed as another chapter in the continuing saga of social work's 'abiding internal dialectic' between individual change and social reform. The confusion between prescription and description is important, since, as Roberts (1990) points out, prescriptive statements, including disguised ones, require justification; a justification that is not forthcoming in either document. It is assumed that 'we' all share this common understanding of the nature and purposes of social work. Lack of definition of social justice presents a second major problem. Despite their noble intentions, both statements are roomy, with

rhetoric holding sway (I think this is common to most policy statements). This can be seen by observing that there is an inexcusable assumption that we can "improve the quality of life for everybody by working towards redressing social inequalities and pursuing social justice for all." This statement, which is an assumption masquerading as description, glosses over the fact of limited resources which are unequally distributed and that those having more may not necessarily want to relinquish their share in the cause of social justice (whatever that might mean). In short, there appears to be inbuilt conflict. A key question is, 'whose interests are being served?' Roberts (1990) raises the interesting issue of defining 'clients', particularly where there is a conflict of interests. One example he offers (p. 58) concerns a doctor who seeks a social worker's assistance in making more beds available for acute patients by removing rehabilitation-type patients to another facility. What happens if the 'person in the bed' does not want to be removed?

Given my stated commitment to difference and my acknowledgement of the kaleidoscopic nature of social 'reality', it would be inconsistent for me to impose a unifying, totalizing description of what social work is and what its purposes are. What social work is and what its purposes are vary in time and place according to 'who' has the power to define and negotiate these issues. In the current climate in Australia, Great Britain and the United States, employers, particularly government bureaucracies, are exerting increased pressure to wrestle control of social work's professional turf and consequently in defining the nature and purposes of social work and social work education (see chapter one). This is taking place in a climate of reduced resources and fiscal restraint. As O'Connor (1997, p. 2) says: "The futures of social work and social work education are inextricably linked" and they

"are at a critical juncture." That is because "the restructuring of the economy and the reduction in government expenditure has directly contributed to increased levels of poverty and social marginalization. Within social and community service organizations this has resulted in increased demand, but a reduced capacity to respond."

However, it would be a 'cop-out', and inconsistent with my stated views of personal knowledge and everybody operating according to a set of theoretical and ideological presuppositions which guide behaviour, if I were not to 'come clean' with my position, theoretically, ethically and ideologically, and make some effort to 'explain' the genesis of these positions. I emphasize, however, that these views are not fossilized. They are provisional – my best 'guesses' at the current time – and are thus open to change. I might also add that living up to one's ideals is difficult. As individuals we may experience at different times significant hiatus between the *descriptive* and *prescriptive* elements of our practice. My personal theoretical and ideological position is:

> That social work in Australia at this time *should* be about assisting those most disadvantaged, whether through gender, race, class, disability, sexual preference, or any other 'structural' or personal consideration, to access a greater share of resources, both material and psychological, to enable them to live, as far as possible, given a world of limited resources and competing interests, a life which *they* find personally satisfying.

The ethical grounds for such a position stem from my assumption:

> That all are entitled to basic rights such as food, clean water and air, basic housing and education, in addition to an emotionally fulfilling environment in which people in general, and children in particular, are free, as far as possible, from physical, emotional and psychological harm, and that as long as some are lacking in any one of these 'resources', I have a commitment to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources.

I acknowledge there are competing interests and my position is that in such scenarios I choose the interests of the disadvantaged. In concrete and simplistic terms this means I believe that someone who is hungry should be fed before I buy my second car or television (actually I do not have a first car). I do not accept individualistic arguments rooted in psychologistic 'explanations' that the person has no excuse for being hungry since they spent all their dole cheque on alcohol. As a social worker I would want to enquire into the 'reasons' that this occurred and I would expect to find a combination of individual and structural factors in dialectical relationship with each other. I would want to know about the structural conditions creating unemployment and the 'types' of people who are most vulnerable to these material and structural conditions. I am aware that such choices may not necessarily be good for the 'whole'. For example, investors may lose incentive, withdraw their funds and thus slow economic 'growth'. But I am also aware that no-one is ever in a position even if values were universally agreed upon to 'calculate' what is good for the whole, and that in the day to day cut and thrust a social worker deals with individuals, individuals who are hurting. Abstract notions of the 'common good' tend to lose their force at such times. Note that I am not advocating political arrangements along socialist lines as previously found in Eastern Europe or still currently found in Cuba or certain southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and Laos. I am also aware that if one were to explore the trajectories of all the above notions we may reach points of conflict, incoherence even. While I strive for cognitive assonance I recognize that this is only part of a striving for total harmony within all the manifold aspects that go to constitute me as a 'person' (cognitive/rational, affective, physical, sexual, spiritual, social, ethical) and for a

broader harmony rippling outwards towards my total social and physical environment. My life is a constant juggling of inconsistencies.

Idealistic? Perhaps, but it is the fuel that sustains some meaning on this planet rapidly spinning towards its grave. I shall return to the issue of 'self' factors in shaping our views of the world in chapter five. For now, I shall provide the briefest of summaries for the factors which have shaped these views. I understand as a child what it is to be cold, hungry and beaten, especially for stealing food. I understand from living in India, Vietnam and remote Aboriginal communities what it is for others to be cold and hungry, have no shelter, access to clean and safe water, or basic education. I understand from travelling in Mexico City what it means to choke on air. I know the feeling of skin hunger and how those who care can soften the blows. It is these experiences which lead me to proclaim the social work I do.

1.5.2 *Education and Social Work Education*

This conception of social work has implications for social work education, but the options are far from constraining. Since I acknowledge difference, particularly ideological difference as a fundamental human right, it would be equally remiss for me to outline a global conception of the nature and purposes of education in general and social work education in particular. As with social work, what education and social work education is and what its purposes are vary in time and place according to 'who' has the power to define and negotiate these issues. And this includes recognition that within certain limits I have considerable scope to define educational practice in the classroom. As noted above by O'Connor there is an

inextricable link between social work and social work education. At the most simple level, the purpose of social work education *should* be to prepare social workers to practise effectively within the limits of their understanding of the purposes of social work. And this, I have already noted, involves ability to 'juggle' theory/practice relationships.

How does one reconcile the apparent difference between my conception of social work and 'disadvantage' and the implications that this would seem to spell out for social work education with the notion that difference is a fundamental right and that others, including students, may not share my view of social work? If they do not share my view of social work, what about my views of social work education? The key for me is 'dialogue' and 'opening up the space for the other'. How do I, within the institutional constraints of higher education in general and the more specific institutional constraints impinging on my educational practice at the university and departmental level, engage students in dialogue? This is a broad question which engages key theoretical, epistemological and ethical issues. To answer it I shall revisit the central themes which have emerged from the discussion in the first three chapters.

The relationships between theory and practice assume mammoth proportions in social work and hence, social work education. Social workers need to act (practice) and this requires reasoned justifications (thinking), which can be termed theoretical in nature. *Praxis*, which combines action and reflection in a continual feedback motion, is vital to these dynamic theory/practice relationships, since, as Pilalis (1986) and others (e.g. Carr and Kemmis 1986) observe, theory and practice are not

really two separate entities. But there are different types of theories and different types of practice which are in a dialectical relationship with each other (Pilalis 1986). The different types of practice are equally entangled in the question of the nature and purposes of social work. Related to this, the literature casts doubt on how much of this theory stems from formal academic knowledge. It seems that a substantial part of it is grounded in 'personal knowledge' and 'practice wisdoms' (see chapter one). This is consistent with Tsang's (1998) analysis where she argues that the social worker is an active agent in theory/practice links which are to be tackled as a form of *praxis*. This implies that one of the central tasks of the social work educator is to facilitate student awareness of 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions) and of ideological and value orientation. *'Reflection'* plays a key role in both these educational tasks and so does the moral dimension of praxis. The following figure summarizes these relationships:

Figure 3.1:
Some Key Theory/Practice Variables in Social Work Education

PRAXIS

↗   ↖

↙   ↘

Theory   Practice

↖   ↗

↘   ↙

Critical reflection
SELF

↗   ↘

↖   ↘

Personal knowledge   *Ideology & Values*
(theories, concepts,
assumptions)
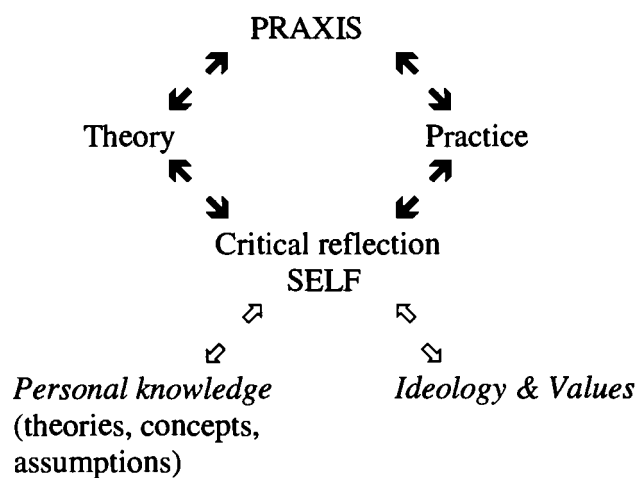
Note:

• This is a simplified version of theory/practice variables. It does not include other significant contextual variables such as the broader social and institutional

context, curriculum, teacher, etc. All these factors feed into all parts of the figure.

- 'Self' is not simply reduced to the rational/cognitive dimension. Holding particular theories, assumptions, values and ideologies, and so on, involves substantial input from other dimensions of self: the affective, the physical, the sexual, the social, the ethical, the spiritual. In other words, I am arguing for a holistic conception of self/selves. This implies a holistic view of education. This is both a *descriptive* claim and a *prescriptive* one. That is, I am suggesting that one *should* not educate from the neck up, nor can one.

   I shall have much more to say about this in the next section.

Let me summarize my position on social work education: the key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with the theory/practice nexus (or more accurately, theory/practice relationship*s*). This entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. Note that this is a *prescriptive* statement about how I think social work education *should* occur.

Given this as my broad goal for social work education, three salient issues arise. First, critical reflection is central, but I have not really 'defined' how I use the term in any significant sense. This is the task of the next section. Second, how does one operationalize into practice such a broad-based goal? That is, how does one develop a subject, for instance, to satisfy the general aim? This is set out partly in chapter five, the context of the study, and partly in chapter six, the process of the

study. Third, how does one evaluate and research the 'effectiveness' of one's broad educational goal? This is the task of the next chapter, methodology, and of chapter six, the process of the study. We can summarize all that has been said under the central aim of this study:

How do we best teach beginning social work students to grapple with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice?

II.   CRITICAL REFLECTION & REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Introduction

The position I have argued for to date places great store in the concept of *critical reflection*. This also appears to resonate with recent and not so recent calls in higher education for critical thinking, which has been identified as a fundamental element of lifelong learning. Already we have seen that Habermas and Foucault do not mean exactly the same thing by critical reflection. This is not surprising since I have laboured the point throughout the thesis that concepts assume their meaning from their paradigmatic homes. Scrutiny of 'related' concepts such as critical thinking and critically reflective practice are likely to yield similar differences. I have refused until now to be pinned down on these concepts. Good reasons account for this. Accepting my basic argument about the embeddedness of concepts it was critical for me to sketch the paradigmatic foundations before attempting to provide glib single line definitions. I think I am now ready.

The major concepts which appear most frequently in the literature, and therefore the ones I shall discuss, are *critical thinking, reflection, critical reflection* and *reflective practice*. I shall do so under two related headings: first, critical thinking;

and second, reflection, critical reflection and reflective practice. The rationale for this dichotomy is two largely separate literatures.

2.1 Critical Thinking

Critical thinking skills are perceived to be vital in the current age. Bailey (1994) remarks that many writers attribute their burgeoning importance to the 'knowledge explosion' and "to the fact that since 1960 the world's store of information has been doubling every five years or less." This places an immense burden on students who "will be called upon to face problems unimaginable at this time and to reach decisions based on evidence that does not yet exist" (p. 130).

> To deal with this fast-emerging clash of new values, technologies, geopolitical relationships, lifestyles, and modes of communication, we will need a means of critical thinking to arrive at reasoned decisions on the complex, urgent and unprecedented issues that will confront us.
> (Freeley 1990, p. viii)

Such recognition has partly spawned the so-called 'critical thinking movement' which has swept the United States in recent years, crossed the Atlantic to Britain and now infiltrates Australian shores. It is not new. Meyers (1987) notes its roots in Plato's academy, as does Seelig (1991), specifically mentioning Socratic dialectic, Bacon's scientific problem-solving, and Dewey's reflective thinking techniques. Brell (1990) notes that the modern movement stems from Ennis' (1962) landmark paper, "A Concept of Critical Thinking", which builds on the work of John Dewey, *How We Think* (1933, orig. 1910), Max Black, *Critical Thinking* (1952), and B. Othanel Smith, "The Improvement of Critical Thinking" (1953); though the movement received impetus with the release of an American report in 1983 from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which "described our nation as 'at risk' and in the process of 'unthinking unilateral

disarmament'" (Seelig 1991, p. 24). In Australia, the recently released West Report (1998) also makes a similar plea. It would be a mistake to assume that the current movement owes its existence solely to a demand for graduates who can think critically. Kaplan (1991) describes a second factor: declining enrolments in philosophy courses. It is significant that the current movement began in *philosophy* departments in the United States. This has had a major impact on the types of courses, where one of the defining features of the movement has been the simple translation of critical thinking as logical thinking and associated argument analysis. A typical course, Kaplan (1991) notes, teaches two skills: identification of arguments; and argument evaluation. Meyers (1987) suggests a slightly broader ambit, which includes logic and problem-solving skills. Bailey (1994, p. 128) reveals that the approach is alive and well in Australia. "By teaching students to argue and reason more effectively their overall critical thinking skills will improve and society will benefit."

This pre-empts significant questions such as: what is critical thinking, what skills are involved and how can they be 'taught'? De Bono (1994, p. 50) reminds us that 'critical' comes from the Greek word *kritikos*, which means judgement, in his plea to restore the "true value of critical as 'judgement thinking'." Ennis identified 12 general 'aspects' of critical thinking "which he claimed were both teachable and transferable and, in so doing, laid the groundwork for the present critical thinking movement" (Brell 1990: 53). The list has been revised and added to by many, including Ennis, and has acquired the status of a taxonomy, further broken down into composite sets of 'dispositions' and 'abilities' (see Facione 1990a; 1990b; 1991; 1995; Facione, Facione and Sanchez 1994; Facione, Sanchez, Facione and

Gainen 1995 for a particularly comprehensive two year study conducted on behalf of the American Philosophical Association which has resulted in both an inventory and a critical thinking skills test). "The basic premise behind such inventories is that identifying the general components of critical thinking constitutes a major step toward teaching people to be critical thinkers" (Brell 1990, p. 53). Once learned, transfer is assumed to take place, given adequate knowledge of subject area. Ennis' paper – and he remains one of the key players – has spawned the key questions framing the movement. Since the 1980s debate has raged in the literature (Hager 1994), triggered by John McPeck's (1981) *Critical Thinking and Education*. An entire issue of the Australian-based *Educational Philosophy and Theory* was devoted to this debate in 1991. In his editorial introduction Hager (1991) outlined the three major issues in dispute: what is critical thinking? Is critical thinking largely general across disciplines or is it largely discipline-specific? How might critical thinking best be taught? Clearly, the answer to each question shapes the answer to each succeeding question. Much of the debate has centred on the second question (see, for instance, Ennis 1989; 1990; McPeck 1990).

I shall focus briefly on all three issues. First, the discipline-specific/generalizability issue. Second, the cognitive/affective dimension of critical thinking captured in the argument about the relative importance of 'dispositions' and 'abilities'. This concerns the question, *what is critical thinking?* Both these issues have clear implications for the third point of contention: teaching critical thinking.

2.1.1 Critical Thinking – Generalizable Skill or Discipline-Specific?

McPeck (1981; 1990), along with Robin Barrow (1990; 1991), is one of the few remaining stalwarts supporting the discipline-specific position (compare also Meyers 1987). From this position McPeck (1981) draws the corollary that most contemporary critical thinking courses are misconceived and ineffectual. His chief foes have been Ennis (1989; 1990), Richard Paul (1990), Norris (1990, orig. 1985) and Siegel (1991). Hager (1994) observes that there is no sign of consensus emerging but there is a trend which Hager believes is important for ultimate resolution: the "asymmetry between how the two sides view the nature of the main questions in dispute. According to McPeck and Barrow, it is a matter of conceptual truth that critical thinking is largely subject-specific. Whereas their opponents hold that the issue is not one that can be settled by conceptual analysis alone, allowing instead that the exact extent to which critical thinking is general is, in important respects, an empirical matter" (Hager 1994, p. 57).

Brell (1990), however, is willing to concede that "although McPeck's denial of the existence and teachability of general thinking skills is overstated, it should not obscure his otherwise legitimate point that thinking can neither occur nor be taught independently of the epistemological norms of some frame of reference or knowledge domain" (Brell 1990, p. 54). This sounds promising given my chapter two analysis of knowledge. A cursory glance at McPeck's position might convince the careless reader that he is acutely aware of the vital social, cultural, political and historical contextual elements framing critical thinking. "Critical thinking always manifests itself in connection with some identifiable activity or subject areas and never in isolation" (McPeck 1981, p. 5). Far from such a position, however,

McPeck adopts a stance which is overly narrow and conservative, opting for a broad-based 'neck up' style of critical thinking anchored in the discipline of informal logic and linked to a 'liberal education' which claims political autonomy, but in fact wholeheartedly supports existing social arrangements. Haynes (1991, p. 122), adopting a Foucaultian analysis, also takes issue with McPeck's position on similar grounds remarking that his approach to the concept of critical thinking through conceptual analysis is not helpful from an educational point of view since "truth and meaning are linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain them, and the subject disciplines which provide some of the criteria for applying the notion of critical thinking are themselves part of a broader power structure."

I do not want to pursue the nuances of this debate for very good reasons: *they are largely irrelevant.* Only one paper in the special issue on critical thinking, the last (Haynes 1991), contextualizes her discussion of critical thinking within a socio-cultural and historical context. The rest treat critical thinking as an ahistorical and universal notion. As my lengthy discussion of knowledge indicates, this mode of approaching critical thinking suffers from all the criticisms I directed at modernist theories. It is a totalizing notion that assumes an essential 'subject' part of whose essential nature is to develop the global and abstract notion of critical thinking in the teleological quest for a 'better' society. Barnett (1997) trenchantly points out that both sets of protagonists in this long-running feud have cast the debate in narrow terms and consequently are missing the main issue: what is critical thinking for?

This simple question eludes those in the context-dependent/context-independent debate because they take it for granted that critical thinking is conducted by

individuals and that it has a necessary relationship with disciplines: their dispute is over the character of that relationship.
(Barnett 1997, p. 64)

Barnett (1997) notes that the issue is construed in technical terms. It "has to be seen in the context of the ever-closer relationship between higher education and the world of work, especially in relation to the exponential rates of change" (p. 65). Basically, the world of work needs critical thinking skills, universities can provide them, so all we have to decide is the character of critical thinking skills. Barnett also poignantly observes that "the sociology of the situation encourages a particular philosophical line"; that is, "if we can show that there are general rules of critical thinking and that there are critical thinking skills that are independent of knowing contexts, then all kinds of new academic labour open up" (p. 65). These criticisms dovetail with Haynes'. As the previous section of this chapter revealed, ignoring such issues results in an apolitical, ahistorical, acultural notion which denies what we know about knowledge as an historically-grounded social practice mediated by language and imbued with power relations.

Walkerdine also captures the notion poignantly when she describes the kind of thinking embodied in abstract reasoning as

> ...destroying our planet and perpetuating domination and oppression. It is not a universal truth, the pinnacle of civilization, but an enormous and dangerous fantasy.

> Thinking for a post-modern age needs to dismantle such fantasies and recognize that thinking is produced in practices, replete with meaning and complex emotions, that thinking about thinking is deeply connected to the way that power and regulation work in our present social order.
> (Walkerdine 1994, pp. 125-126)

Kaplan (1991, p. 362) distinguishes two dissimilar movements: critical thinking and critical pedagogy. "The critical thinking movement teaches students to provide criticisms of arguments, while the critical pedagogy movement teaches students to provide critique as a foundation for criticism of the world around them." Critical pedagogy borrows the term 'critical' from critical theory (see above, especially Freire – the political autonomy movement, which has come to be known as the 'critical pedagogy movement', identifies its roots in his work). The basic principle states that "education aiming at the creation of autonomous political actors must constitute its students as such throughout the learning process" (Kaplan 1991, p. 363). The 'informal logic model', Kaplan remarks, is largely successful in teaching students valuable skills in logical analysis. However, it does not succeed in its purported aim of preparing students for the intellectual autonomy required for political autonomy. Indeed, Kaplan (1991, p. 367) claims that "the critical thinking model now in use is a step in the creation of well-behaved white collar workers." Brookfield (1987, p. 4) also notes "there is no clear evidence that any of the skills of critical thinking learned in schools and colleges have much transferability to the contexts of adult life." Even worse, Kaplan (1991, p. 361) argues, "against the expressed intention of teachers and textbook authors, critical thinking courses may encourage students to accept without question certain political perspectives and discourage students from asking questions about the genesis of these perspectives." She offers two broad sets of reasons for her thesis. "First, the raising of certain critical questions may escape the net of strict logical analysis. Second, recognizing who is being educated in a college critical thinking course, and why, help explain why certain critical questions fail to be raised" (Kaplan 1991, pp. 369-370).

At another level the transferable/subject-specific debate is not crucial to our research. Nobody has ever suggested that you cannot teach critical thinking within the framework of a specific subject (as we do). The debate has been, rather, whether it can be done in generalized non-subject-specific courses. Though in what sense we are 'teaching' and in what sense it is 'critical thinking' is yet to be determined.

2.1.2   Critical Thinking – Cognitive and Affective?

The second aspect of the debate I will examine briefly concerns the cognitive/affective question. Richard Paul (1987; 1990) and Brell (1990) emphasize the importance of the affective dimension.

> The foremost task in the teaching of critical thinking is less the transmission of any particular knowledge and/or skills than it is the fostering in students of those habits of reflective and reconstructive inquiry which ultimately lead to an ongoing disposition to seek intellectual, moral, and social integrity, or what is sometimes referred to as the 'critical spirit'.
> (Brell 1990, p. 54)

Brell argues that apart from Paul's work, most theorists merely pay lip service to this notion. They are "obligatory concluding statements" (p. 66). Part of the confusion in the debate springs from equating 'thinking' and 'thinking skills' (Brell 1990). For Brell, "the guiding criterion against which all thinking can or should be measured is as much moral as it is rational, the two terms being highly complementary" (p. 65). Brell conceptualizes critical thinking as the "ongoing construction, reconstruction, and integration of a person's world view" (p. 67). This echoes Paul (1987, p. 143): "The process of gaining knowledge is at its roots dialogical. Our minds are never empty of beliefs and never without a point of

view. They cannot function framelessly." This is a marked improvement on the narrowly conceived logical argument approach.

2.1.3   Teaching Critical Thinking

This leads to the third issue in contention: how to teach critical thinking? If one argues that critical thinking is discipline-specific, it can only be taught as part of a particular subject. If one argues for generalizability, then it can be taught as a separate subject labelled 'critical thinking' or a similar title. Relating the issue to the second question just examined, if one adopts a 'critical spirit' position such as Brell (1990), it has clear pedagogical implications. For proponents of Brell's position specific knowledge and skills take a backseat to fostering the 'critical spirit'.

Brell (1990) outlines educational guidelines for fostering a critical disposition. Two are germane: *teacher modelling*; and aim to get students to consider *alternatives*. Meyers (1987) also suggests nurturing the attitudinal aspects of critical thinking in addition to three other key elements: teach explicit skills; teach analytical frameworks; and create supportive classroom environments. The issue of analytic frameworks is important. It relates to my notion of 'paradigms' and Foucault's notion of 'discourse'. Drawing on cognitive science research on memory, Meyers (1987, p. 16) notes that "people tended to interpret information in terms of previously acquired knowledge and concepts", a finding he takes to provide strong grounds for teachers providing students with "the conceptual tools to develop a basic framework for analysis of materials in that discipline" (p. 8), otherwise students will provide their own, and it may not be helpful. The

difficulty, he stresses, is in making explicit what is usually an implicit framework. I shall return to this issue in chapter five when I describe WS1002.

I now want to examine the impact of the critical thinking movement on social work. I shall also refer to nursing education due to the close parallels: professional education for the 'helping professions'.

2.1.4   Critical Thinking and Social Work

Critical thinking has had surprisingly little impact on social work education (Seelig 1991). In the context of the present higher education 'crisis' which calls for the development of such higher order skills, Seelig (1991, p. 24) views this as especially problematic for social work, since "social workers are trained and expected to be problem-solvers", yet, "neither in prominent texts, nor in professional periodicals, is 'thinking' highlighted as a specific skill to be developed within the professional training of a social worker." Seelig argues for developing critical thinking as a separate skill component (p. 29) on the grounds that we cannot assume "that sophisticated thought processes are being developed in social work students as they learn other skills required for effective practice" (p. 32). Note how the debate is framed in relatively narrow, technical terms.

Mumm and Kersting (1997, p. 75) also note the importance of critical thinking for social workers in direct practice who "rely on critical thinking to apply theories, make informed decisions, and explain their assessments and decisions" (compare Alter and Egan 1997). On the basis of this Mumm and Kersting argue that "critical thinking skills are an important component of social work education because they

are essential to good decision making, the foundation of ethical and effective clinical practice (Gambrill 1990). This sentiment is echoed by the Council on Social Work Education" (Mumm and Kersting 1997, p. 75), the professional accrediting body of the United States. It is also echoed by Australia's professional accrediting body, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), which in its principles underlying social work education explicitly states that "the complexities of practice within a constantly changing society demands well developed skills in critical thinking, structural analysis and reflective practice" (AASW 1997, p. 6). Mumm and Kersting see a particular link between critical thinking and the theory/practice issue: "...understanding how theory can be applied to practice requires critical judgement" (p. 75); though note that this is a problematic way of framing the issue, resting as it does on a dichotomy and the 'application model' of theory which stems from the positivist paradigm. This becomes clearer in the following quote. "In social work practice, theories describe the reasons for behaviours and prescribe interventions for practitioners. Specifically, descriptive theories explain human behaviour and lay the groundwork for prescriptive theories, which inform the practitioner's choice of approaches and methods to use" (p. 76). Two issues emerge. First, this is a most peculiar, and possibly contradictory understanding of theories, which are limited to descriptive status, yet despite the cranking down of gear, are still imbued with explanatory significance. It is difficult to see how a description of any sort could possibly hope to fulfil the function of an explanation. Second, there is a huge issue about WHAT, precisely, social work practice entails. Social work is a highly contested profession and even the traditional holy trinity of casework, group work and community work is questioned. Despite these problems, Mumm and Kersting do focus on one

'critical thinking skill' relevant to this thesis: the ability to divide a theory into its components (assumptions, concepts, propositions, hypotheses, etc.). I shall return to this issue. Note that Mumm and Kersting are locked into the 'logic-style' course of critical thinking. For example, "students are subsequently shown how good decisions are based on logical reasoning, and poor decisions on faulty reasoning, using the 'Reasoning in Practice' games developed by Gibbs and Gambrill (1996, specifically Game B)" (p. 78).

Alter and Egan (1997) are even more caught up in the legacies of positivism. After implicitly equating logic and reasoning with critical thinking, they make the following startling claim. "To put it rather negatively, social work educators should strive to prevent their students from committing the mistakes of paraprofessionals unacquainted with the principles of the scientific method" (p. 85). It is hard to believe that any self-respecting editor would allow such an elitist and outrageous claim to be made in 1997! Although they partly redeem themselves with a more explicit – and reasonable – explanation in the following sentences, they can never quite break away from their positivist underpinnings. They repeat Seelig's claim about assuming that thinking skills develop automatically and argue, citing a variety of sources, that "learning transfer requires that educators see critical thinking as a discrete skill that must be taught in the classroom" (p. 86). Again, their detailed explanation of what they mean by critical thinking in this context reveals a cerebrum-heavy focus. In a follow up article, Alter and Murty (1997) confirm this exclusive focus in describing their method of *logic modelling*, which has evolved from systems analysis. I do not discredit their approach per se, which I think is potentially a very useful tool for teaching particular logical skills, and

logical skills that have applied practice benefits for social work 'intervention'. What I take exception to is their implicit claim that the technique is both a necessary and sufficient condition for social work practitioners, and as a consequence, social work education. This is precisely the narrow focus which Barnett (1997) lampoons. In short, the limited impact of the critical thinking movement in social work has been construed in narrow, technical and positivist terms. As such it is inadequate.

2.1.5   Critical Thinking and Nursing

Social work shares with nursing some important commonalities, exemplified in the following: "It is important that nurses be able to define problems accurately, make the best choice among an array of possible alternative solutions, safely implement a plan of care, and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions" (Miller and Malcolm 1990, p. 67). This is also quite similar to teaching. As with social work (Miller and Malcolm 1990), note that nursing's professional accrediting bodies in the United States are beginning to include critical thinking as a specific criterion for the accreditation of baccalaureate programs by the National League for Nursing (NLN 1989). White, Beardslee, Peters and Supples (1990) restrict the definition of critical thinking to a cognitive domain and Miller and Malcolm (1990, p. 67) make the following very common, mostly unexamined assertion about the value of critical thinking. "The ability to think critically is essential to being a fully functioning individual in our complex society; it is fundamental for maintaining our democratic way of life (Glaser 1985)". Miller and Malcolm observe the paucity of research assessing the impact of nursing education on the development of critical thinking skills. Interestingly, these authors suggest that critical thinking and

clinical judgement are related terms arguing that "critical thinking is inherent in making sound clinical judgements" (p. 69).

Brookfield (1993a) takes a different position to many of the authors reviewed so far in both social work and nursing, arguing that critical thinking has an affective component as well as a cognitive one, and that "it carries considerable political dangers for its protagonists" (p. 197). I shall discuss Brookfield's position in more detail in the section on critically reflective practice. Note the similarity with Paul's (1987; 1990) and Brell's (1990) views on the development of the 'critical spirit'.

2.1.6   Critical Thinking: a Summary

With few exceptions the critical thinking movement is construed within a narrow, cognitive frame which is technical in orientation and positivist in its underpinnings. In short, critical thinking emerges as an apolitical, ahistorical, acultural notion which denies what we know about knowledge as an historically-grounded social practice mediated by language and imbued with power relations. Donald Schön (1983) in his highly influential book *The Reflective Practitioner* mounts a strong assault on the 'technical rational' model of professional education. While there are similarities between the types of arrows we fire against this positivist-style model, there are fundamental differences. One thing we do share is the pivotal issue in this thesis: a fundamental concern to tackle theory/practice relationships in a manner which eschews the 'applied science' view of positivism. Schön's ideas have spawned a burgeoning literature which is linked by concepts such as *reflection, critical reflection, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, reflective practice*. It is to this literature and its cognates that I now turn.

2.2   (Critical) Reflection and (Critically) Reflective Practice

The traditional use of the term 'reflection' goes back to German Idealism (Habermas 1975), though Newell (1994, p. 79) remarks that reflection as the "human ability to introspect about activities and modulate these activities as a result is as old as religion or the idea of personhood." Note the link between reflection and action. Habermas reworks the concept for his critical social science. I shall discuss this in more detail below. Habermas' ideas have been taken up and in some cases adapted by a range of writers. Mezirow (1990b) is one example. Noting the multiplicity of meanings and consequent ambiguity of the term 'critical thinking', he attempts to sharpen the term by using the concept of 'reflection' and analyzing it into its three functions: to guide action; to give coherence to the unfamiliar; and to reassess the justification for what is already known. Mezirow argues that while all three functions may be involved in critical thinking, it is the last function – reassessing the justification for what is already known – that is central to critical reflection. Mezirow distinguishes between *reflection, critical reflection* and *critical self-reflection*. His distinction between reflection and critical reflection is vital and I shall expand on it.

> Whereas reflection involves the assessment of the assumptions implicit in beliefs about how to solve problems, there is a special class of assumptions with which reflection has to deal that are quite different from these procedural considerations. While all reflection implies an element of critique, the term *critical reflection* will here be reserved to refer to challenging the validity of *presuppositions* in prior learning. ... Critical reflection addresses the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are posed or defined in the first place.
> (Mezirow 1990b, p. 12)

Critical self-reflection, in Mezirow's terms, is the "assessment of the way one has posed problems and of one's *own* meaning perspectives" (*my emphasis,* Mezirow

1990a, p. xvi). He stresses that this process is much more than simply a cognitive one. "To question the validity of a long-taken-for-granted meaning perspective predicated on a presupposition about oneself can involve the negation of values that have been very close to the centre of one's self-concept" (Mezirow 1990b, p. 12).

Apart from the Habermasian trajectory, reflection and its sibling, critical reflection, have taken two other related paths in recent times: experiential learning and reflective practice. Experiential learning in modern times stems from the work of John Dewey (1933) (its heritage can be traced as far back as Aristotle). Dewey defined reflection as the

> ...active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.
> (Dewey 1933, p. 9)

But, as James and Clarke (1994) ask, what does 'active', 'persistent', 'careful', or even 'consideration' and so on mean? This leaves us with a conceptual infinite regress. Most thinkers in this tradition view reflection as one element in experiential learning. "One of the key ideas and features of all aspects of learning from experience is that of reflection" (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 191). The most notable examples of this approach are David Boud and colleagues (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985; Boud and Walker 1991; Boud, Cohen and Walker 1993; Boud and Walker 1998) and David Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning. I shall discuss both approaches below.

The second path occurs in the work of Donald Schön (1983; 1987) who views reflection, central to his notion of the 'reflective practitioner', as an 'epistemology

of practice'. Note also Dewey's influence here – Schön's PhD was on Dewey's enquiry learning (Argyris and Schön 1974). In fact, there are close connections between experiential learning and reflective practice. Usher (1985) observes that the link comes by positing the key role of reflecting on experience. "When we talk of 'learning from experience' what we really mean is learning from reflection on experience. ... experience may be the raw material but it has to be processed through reflection before it can emerge as learning" (Usher 1985, pp. 60-61).

In summary, the concept of *reflection* has assumed much vigour in recent times, taking three major flight paths: Habermasian; experiential learning; and reflective practice. But the concept "has been used differently depending on the tradition from which the writer or practitioner comes" (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 191). This is consistent with my notion of embedded concepts which take on their meaning from their paradigmatic homes. The insertion of the 'critical' before 'reflection' has tended to align the approach with critical theory (e.g. Mezirow 1981; 1990a; 1990b; 1990c; Brookfield 1995).

Both Boud and Walker (1998) and Morrison (1996) note the burgeoning popularity of *reflective practice* in educational programs, particularly in teaching, nursing and social work, where field experience and academic study need to be closely integrated. There have been at least two consequences of this trend. First, that "reflective practice has become a conceptual and methodological portmanteau, catch-all term" (Morrison 1996, p. 317), a "fog-like monster" (Hunt 1998, p. 26). Boud and Knights (1996) urge there is real need for critical debate about the nature of reflection, its role in learning and its inclusion in university courses. Second,

"there are now many examples of poor educational practice being implemented under the guise and rhetoric of reflection" (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 192). "The literature on the subject is growing rapidly, but a lot more systematic work is required before we can be really confident that the particular practices currently being adopted are having the influences we desire" (Boud and Knights 1996, p. 32).

Morrison (1996) summarizes the vastly different approaches that shelter under the umbrella term of 'reflective practice': action research; professional development; the linking of theory and practice; teacher empowerment; and personal, social and political emancipation. He attempts to bottle these rampant notions of reflective practice in two 'ideal type' models. The first, 'reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action', which is an apolitical model and springs from the work of Schön. The second, 'reflection, development and empowerment' is highly politicized and has its theoretical origins in Habermas. Morrison notes that the two models are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. The former is hermeneutic, pragmatic and apolitical, the latter highly politicized. Morrison's schema provides a useful framework which dovetails with the overall framework for this thesis, a framework conceptualized in terms of 'paradigms' (positivist, hermeneutic, critical, poststructural) and stemming from Habermas' tripartite classification of knowledge and human interests. As noted above, most of the critical thinking literature is underpinned by positivist notions. Schön's 'reflective practitioner' arose as a counter to this 'technical-rational' model and as we shall see is firmly entrenched in the hermeneutic paradigm. Habermasian-inspired notions of reflective practice are anchored in the critical theory paradigm. Foucault's reinterpreted notion of 'dialogue' and his concept of 'ethico-critical reflection', which Morrison does not

discuss, spring from poststructural motivations. Consequently, I shall structure my discussion along these paradigmatic lines.

2.2.1 Hermeneutic Reflection and Reflective Practice

Schön has been the major catalyst for notions of 'reflective practice', so I shall focus primarily on him. Next, I shall refer briefly to David Kolb's experiential learning model. Third, I shall raise the issue of the relationship between cognition and affect as it relates to reflective practice. Fourth, I shall explore briefly the ethical dimension of reflective practice. Fifth, I shall examine hermeneutic-style reflection in social work. Finally, I will briefly look at hermeneutic reflection in relation to nursing.

Donald Schön's 'Reflective Practitioner'

Schön's major aim in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) is to articulate a coherent epistemology of practice, 'reflection-in-action', on the grounds that the dominant epistemology of practice, technical rationality, has demonstrated increasing inability to solve technologically-induced social problems leading to a 'crisis in professional education'. His later work, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987), has as its focus the "kind of professional education ...appropriate to an epistemology of practice based on reflection-in-action" (p. xii). Schön's notions (1983, p. 23) are particularly relevant to social work since he argues that the practice situation of the 'minor' professions such as education and social work are characterized by "shifting, ambiguous ends and...unstable institutional contexts of practice." For Schön, 'reflection-in-action' is the appropriate epistemology of practice for dealing with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value

conflict. But what does this concept mean in Schön's terms? Expressed most simply it is thinking about what you are doing while you are doing it. It is immediate, short term, concerned with technical efficiency (improved practice), and restructuring a specific situation in terms of a new frame ('reframing') in order to devise a new strategy for approaching the situation. Morrison (1996) refers to it as a short-term, formative model. Like 'knowing-in-action', it draws upon tacit, spontaneous knowledge (compare Polanyi 1958). Schön (1983, p. 268) also describes it as "reflective conversation."

Reflection-in-action has been criticized on at least three grounds: conceptual, methodological and theoretical. First, many have questioned the practical utility of the *concept* (van Manen n.d.; Eraut 1985; Court 1988; Beckett 1996). Is there really time for reflection in the "hot action" of the classroom? (Eraut 1985, p. 128). Is not all reflection 'reflection-*on*-action'? Beckett (1996, p. 149) also emphasizes that reflection itself is an action and argues that rather than a 'reflective conversation', "an *anticipative* conversation with our practices is closer to what goes on in 'hot action'" (*my emphasis*). Kemmis (1985) argues that construing reflection as a process that goes on 'in the head' results in the splitting of thought and action. Second, the unreflexive nature of Schon's account of his ideas lends doubts to his *methodology* as it applies to practice (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997). Greenwood (1993) in a series of trenchant criticisms accuses Argyris and Schön (1974) of failing to follow their own recommendations by relying too heavily on verbal accounts of situations after the event, despite their claim that practitioners are unaware of many of their theories-in-use. This, Greenwood argues, leads to practitioners simply reporting espoused theories. Third,

theoretically, reflection-in-action is an incomplete explanation of reflective practice "for its concern is too short term, neglecting questioning of the principles of or theories that underpin the practice" (Morrison 1996, p. 318). For example, Greenwood (1993) argues that it neglects the importance of reflection *before* action and Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997, p. 170) stress the importance of 'reflection-*outside*-action': "If one's actions always take place within a mainstreamed practice, then reflection-in-action is little more than accommodative and loses its critical edge." This is similar to Mezirow (1990b, p. 13) who argues that "critical reflection...requires a hiatus in which to reassess one's meaning perspectives and, if necessary, to transform them. Critical reflection is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and consequences of what we do." Morrison (1996, p. 318) summarizes the criticisms: "The lens that it uses to examine practice produces social, political and cultural myopia in reflective practitioners." Schön himself recognized some of these limitations in his initial book and so introduced the concept of 'reflection-on-action', which involves reflecting on reflections-in-action. He notes that the distinction is at least partially dependent on how we define 'action', whether as a discrete event or a series of events. He also notes the infinite regress we introduce with such definitional problems: how do we define an event? (Schön 1983, p. 278.)

Two concepts are central to Schön's notion of reflection-on-action: 'frames' and 'theories of action'. The role frame and the interpersonal theory of practice result in a system Schön (1983, pp. 234-235) labels 'knowing-in practice'. This "has consequences both for the practitioner's ability to detect crucial errors and for the scope and direction of his reflection-in-action." In fact, one of the biggest

stumbling blocks to reflection-in-action, Schön argues, is the way in which practitioners frame their role, a framing interdependent with an interpersonal theory of action (see Argyris and Schön 1974). Frames "determine strategies of attention and thereby set the directions in which they will try to change the situation, the values which will shape their practice. ... When practitioners are unaware of their frames for roles or problems, they do not experience the need to choose among them. They do not attend to the ways in which they *construct* the reality in which they function; for them, it is simply the given reality" (Schön 1983, p. 309-310). Awareness of frames, Schön argues, is also more likely to lead to alternative ways of framing. Note the similarity between 'frames' and 'world views'. Schön (1983, p. 312) notes that even where literatures expose students to discussion of alternative frames, values and practice approaches, they often do so in ideological terms. "The protagonists of the various points of view do not reflect *on* their frames but *act* from them."

The second key concept of reflection-on-action stems from Schön's earlier work with Chris Argyris (Argyris and Schön 1974) where they distinguish between two types of 'theories of action': *espoused theories* (used to justify and explain behaviour); and tacit *theories-in-use*, implicit in our patterns of spontaneous interactions with others. This latter is the theory that actually governs actions. Argyris and Schön's key insight was that these two types of theories may not be (often are not) congruent with each other. Following George Kelly, they conceptualize theory-building as a form of learning. "Behavioural learning involves the experience-based modification of some elements of theories-in-use – governing variables, action, strategies, or assumptions" (p. 18). They then draw on

Ashby's distinction between 'single-loop' and 'double-loop' learning (further developed by Bateson). "In single-loop learning, we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing variables. In double-loop learning, we learn to change the field of constancy itself" (p. 19). Strict adherence to single-loop learning means the "theory-builder becomes a prisoner" (p. 19). In both types of learning feedback is used, but in single-loop learning it is a narrow pragmatic frame of reference. Double-loop learning incorporates reflection and readiness to engage with the wider normative context of the situation. Double loop learners are more willing to examine their assumptions about the world (Gould 1989). Note the importance of 'reflection' in Schön's notions of learning.

One can see the hermeneutic 'bent' of Schön's position. He wants to move away from the 'applied science' view of positivism and focus on the phenomenology of the practitioner: their understandings, meanings and intentions. But like the hermeneutics of Gadamer and those of similar ilk, Schön is liable to the same sorts of criticisms. He ignores the broader structural and material issues that impinge on practititioner phenomenology; their 'frames' and 'theories of action' that constitute their 'knowing-in-action'. This is despite the introduction of the concept of 'reflection-on-action' to buttress the potentially ailing concept of 'reflection-in-action'. Indeed, Barnett (1997) argues that the major problem with the reflective practitioner model is that it underplays the theoretical components, ascribing prominence to 'practice'. Schön has been strongly criticized for neglecting the political context of practice (Smyth 1989; 1991; Kincheloe 1991) and the historical dimension: "Schon writes context and history out of practice. ... Practitioners are

not just bounded by an 'action present', but are historical actors" (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997, p. 169). In short, Schön "neglect[s] the situatedness of practitioner experience" (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997, p. 168). Usher and colleagues (1997, p. 168) note the danger and the irony of reflective practice becoming "accommodated to a technicist implementation of adult education" (compare Finger 1995 and Barnett 1997). As Morrison (1996, p. 319) expresses it, "the espoused theories upon which reflective practitioners reflect are still constrained by adopting a cultural-pedagogical focus rather than a socio-political focus." Approaches that Morrison calls 'model two: reflection, development and empowerment', seek to grapple with these issues. But before I address critical theory approaches to reflection and reflective practice, I want to briefly explore four more avenues: first, Kolb's brand of experiential learning; second, the cognitive and affective components of reflective practice; third, the ethical dimension of reflective practice; and fnally, to examine the impact of Schön's work and related approaches such as Kolb's on social work education. As with critical thinking I will also look briefly at nursing education where reflective practice has assumed particular importance in recent years.

David Kolb's Experiential Learning

David Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning weaves together theoretical strands from Dewey, Lewin and Piaget. I shall reproduce Kolb's basic model, which is an adaptation of Lewin's 'experiential learning cycle'. Interested readers are referred to chapter two and the beginning of chapter three of Kolb (1984) for the various permutations and linkages to related conceptualizations.

Figure 3.2: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Concrete
experience

↗   ↘

Active   Reflective
experimentation   observation

↖   ↙

Abstract
conceptualization
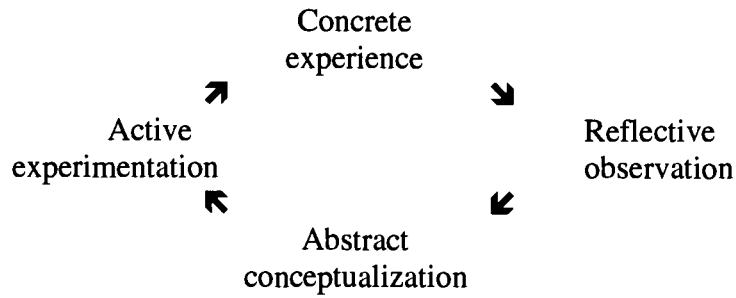
Kolb's model highlights two aspects relevant to the present discussion: the role of experience in learning and the key role of reflection in transforming experience into learning. In fact, Kolb's (1984, p. 38) working definition of learning is that it *"is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."*

Usher (1985) observes that although Kolb's experiential learning cycle illustrates the link between concrete experience and reflection, Kolb's notions have a "misleading inevitability. ... In my view, the progression is impossible without a considerable degree of guidance from teachers" (p. 61). Mezirow (1985) also notes two related problems with models like Kolb's. First, experiential models of learning do not discuss reflection in much detail nor do they uncover elements of reflection itself. Second, reflection is the skill of experiential learning in which people tend to be most deficient. In fact, Usher doubts the possibility of teaching students to reflect in any direct sense, likening it to Gibbs' (1981) argument that one cannot really teach study skills in a generalized way. Note the echoes of the discipline-specific/generalizability debate from the critical thinking literature. Usher does not claim (and nor does Gibbs) that there are no skills to be learnt and that teachers cannot facilitate the development of student reflection. What he

criticizes, along with Gibbs, is the 'deficiency in skills' model which assumes that deficiencies can be remedied by appropriate training. I shall revisit these important issues later.

Adapting Kolb's model, David Thompson (1994) distinguishes between three types of reflection – diagnostic, reflection on action and evaluative – arguing that they each serve different purposes and that 'deep learning' "is strengthened if reflection does not occur at only one point in the learning cycle" (p. 401). The salient aspect of Thompson's work for the present thesis is his exploration of the consequences of these different forms of reflection for theory. Drawing on Eraut's (1985) reworking of Oakeshott's distinction between technical knowledge, which can be coded as in a text book, and practical knowledge, which can only be experienced in practice, he argues that "diagnostic reflection in the first stage uses theory less as codified knowledge but more to expand horizons and open opportunities, and as models of good practice for personal comparison" (p. 413). In the third stage, by contrast, "evaluative reflection aims for a dynamic evaluation of theory in light of experience, and experience in light of theory. The dynamic forms a dialogue or conversation" (p. 413). The dynamic, he suggests, is helped through interaction with others. Van Manen (1977) also distinguishes between three levels of reflection: techniques needed to reach given objectives; clarifying assumptions and assessing the consequences of different actions; and principles such as justice, equity and human concerns.

Writing in nursing education Lauder (1994) argues that unlike Schön, who recognizes the inherent difficulties of dualism, Kolb does separate theory and

practice. "By claiming that students should participate and then reflect on their experiences Kolb has perpetuated the thinking and doing dichotomy" (p. 92). But, similar to Schön, his model ignores the broader structural and material issues that impinge on both the experiences and reflections of learners.

Cognitive and Affective Components of Reflective Practice

The relationship between the cognitive and affective dimensions of practice is a perplexing one. Usher and colleagues (1997, p. 169) criticize Schön on the grounds that he reduces the affective domain to cognitive problems and "(ironically) thereby as candidates for technical solutions." Yelloly and Henkel (1995a, p. 8) remark that experiential learning models "are congruent with the aims and objectives of social work practice", but they too seem unhappy with the narrow cognitive focus and expand Schön's notions of 'thought' and 'reflective practice' by drawing on Bion (1967) whose work on thinking refers to "the unconscious and often primitive and unverbalized feelings aroused in the worker by the impact of work which is often intense, intimate, conflictual, and may have resonances within the worker's own internal world" (Yelloly and Henkel 1995a, p. 8). Writing in nursing education, Lauder (1994, p. 92) argues that although Schön avoids dualism, his epistemology "does not distinguish between practitioners who deal with inanimate objects such as architects and engineers, and practitioners who directly deal with human needs" (p. 92). The consequence is that the value system underpinning the latter is not explicated. He argues for thinking about care and actually caring as the missing link in the reflective concept. However, Hunt's (1998) work in Britain leads her to conclude that while acknowledging concerns for affective and behavioural domains, their role must be primarily to support students in the

cognitive domain. "It is not our job to offer therapy" (p. 29). This echoes Boud and Walker's (1998, p. 195) concerns about "going beyond the expertise of the teacher."

I want to make two points for now. First, the proper role of the cognitive and affective dimensions of education is part of a long-running debate in the history of education with thinkers such as A. S. Neill (1968, orig. 1926; 1944) and humanistic educators (see for instance the collection in Brown's 1977 introduction to 'confluent education') strongly supporting much greater emphasis on the role of the affective domain in education, and analytic philosophers of education such as R. S. Peters (1965; 1972; 1973; 1974) and Hepburn (1972) attempting to reduce the affective domain to a cognitive one. I have already made it clear that I support a holistic conception in which the affective dimension assumes significance. My second point refers specifically to social work and social work education. Practising social workers do not have the luxury of ignoring the affective domain either in clients or in their own sometimes highly-charged responses to practice demands (perhaps teachers and nurses do not either). As a result, it would be an abdication of responsibility were a social work educator not to focus on the affective dimensions of practice. Boud and Walker's (1998) problem is muted somewhat with social work educators since, although it is questionable whether their role is to provide student therapy, it should certainly not be beyond their expertise should the need arise. I shall discuss this in more detail in chapter eight. Yelloly and Henkel (1995a, p. 9), citing Woodhouse and Pengelly, mount an argument that reflective practice in the caring professions may assume a qualitatively different aspect since it is difficult "for professionals in such anxiety-

producing work to remain open and responsive (rather than reactive)." This lends

further support for social work educators focusing on the affective dimension and

even the unconscious.

The Ethical Dimension of Reflective Practice

Related to the cognitive/affective issue is that concerning ethics. Barnett (1997)

argues that Schön, while focusing on the aesthetic dimension of professional

practice ('artistry'), neglects the ethical dimension. Beckett (1995; 1996) stresses

both the epistemological and ethical dimensions of professional practice. Drawing

on Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* (the pursuit of goodness), he argues that

practical wisdom cannot exist independently of virtue, it has an end beyond itself.

He perceives both critical thinking and reflective practice as "attempts to unpack

practical wisdom" (Beckett 1996, p. 139). "Both these attempt to make explicit the

processes people undergo in acting as they do, in the expectation that

improvements can be made henceforth" (p. 138). Beckett acknowledges the

problematic conceptual status of 'reflection-in-action', but argues that "no amount

of such elaborately outlined reflection need improve anyone's circumstances, least

of all the practitioner's own circumstances, if there is no context of judgement

within which creative responses are made" (Beckett 1996, p. 140). Using an

anticipative approach (see above) he argues against *reactive* ethics and

epistemologies (such as Schön's reflection-in-action). De Castell (1989, p. 46),

arguing along similar lines, writes that "the process of practical-discursive

reflection on problems does not tell us how to reach decisions on practice, but is

itself a process of deciding what should be done in practice; it does not tell us how

to decide." These ideas are particularly important for the present thesis given my

previous discussion about the *purpose* of social work and social work education and their contested nature. Deciding on purpose, particularly in such a sensitive area as social work which intervenes in people's lives, cannot be simply a cognitive task, however well theorized. 'Practical knowledge' has to join with ethics if it is to become *practical wisdom* (see Lauder 1994 below).

Hermeneutic Reflective Practice and Social Work

Echoing Solas (1994), Gould (1996a) remarks that social work education literature in general reveals little of description and analysis of the actual classroom teaching process. Alma Harris (1996) notes three lacunae in the research literature: the process and practice of experiential learning in social work education; the experience of beginning practice; and the relationship between practice and social work education. She also observes that despite the burgeoning theoretical literature on experiential learning, it is still difficult to be precise about the nature of the process involved in reflection. Yelloly (1995, p. 62) also notes how the "paucity of educational evaluation" has led to unresolved questions about how best to promote reflective practice. Gould (1989) laments the fact that Schön's work has been "largely ignored in the social work literature" (p. 10), arguing that the 'applied science' view "protects some sectional – particularly academic – interests, mystifies the actual nature of social work practice, and should be regarded as a form of ideology" (p. 9). Boud and Knights (1996, p. 32) suggest that despite the paucity of research in social work education, research in related areas indicates that "it is prudent to structure courses around the idea that students are being prepared to become reflective practitioners and that opportunities for students to develop

reflective skills and sensibilities should be embedded as a normal part of all professional courses."

Gould (1989) was one of the earliest social work educators to draw on Schön. He also draws on Dewey's ideas and Kolb's (who himself had drawn on Dewey) to argue that "models of experiential learning suggest that reflection is the critical variable in learning from practice" (Gould 1989, p. 10). He links Schön's approach to George Kelly's (1955) 'personal construct theory' arguing that both "are drawing attention to...the process of 'successive triangulation' by which new understandings and actions emerge from engagement with the problem" (Gould 1989, p. 15). Papell and Skolnik (1992) writing in an American context go to great lengths to argue that Schön's ancestors existed in early social work educators Virginia Robinson (1936), Bertha Reynolds (1942) and Charlotte Towle (1954). Not content with trumpeting social work's atavistic glories they then seek to demonstrate that Schön's "essential concepts" (Papell and Skolnik 1992, p. 21) are to be found in a whole range of more contemporary social work theorists ranging from Perlman's (1957) problem-solving model to Goldstein's (1973; 1981; 1988) unitary model. Their biggest gripe with Schön seems to be his emphasis on cognition and action "without extensive conceptual integration of the feeling component of social work's knowledge/values/skills triumvirate" (Papell and Skolnik 1992, p. 24), and his failure to examine ethical considerations. I have no dispute with this. My criticism of Papell and Skolnik's approach is that they fail to grant similar privileges to broader structural issues. Most recently, Alter and Murty (1997, p. 103) claim that their *logic modelling* approach is similar to Schön's

notions in that it "enables students to see the theoretical connections between their unconscious 'theories of action' and their proposed interventions."

But there is no doubt 'reflective contagion' is spreading. As noted previously, two recent edited volumes in social work have appeared on this notion, Yelloly and Henkel (1995) on *reflective practice* within continuing professional education, and Gould and Taylor (1996) on *reflective learning*, a book which claims explicit Schönian heritage (see Gould 1996a). Gould and Taylor's (1996) edited collection includes British, American, Canadian and Australian perspectives. In his opening chapter Gould (1996a, p. 1) grants reflective learning the status of a 'paradigm', which "starts from an attempt to understand how social workers make judgements and decisions in domains which are uncertain and complex." Reflective learning is *not* a paradigm in the sense that I have used the term. Despite its stated links to Schön's work (p. 2), close scrutiny of the papers comprising the volume indicate that they cannot be lumped globally under the hermeneutic paradigm. Indeed, they straddle hermeneutic, critical and poststructural approaches with some attempting interesting amalgams and others difficult to 'pin down'. Thus, I shall discuss relevant papers individually at the appropriate juncture. Gould (1996a, p. 3) notes the "crisis of social work education", recognizing the importance of the reflective learning debates for theory/practice debates, including debates over the disciplinary knowledge base for social work.

Papell (1996), as in her earlier paper with Skolnik (1992) is still entrenched in the hermeneutic paradigm. Indeed, she frames her 'new' paper by revisiting the earlier one. Again, she stresses the centrality of experiential learning for practice

knowledge and concludes by suggesting that the key issue is not so much styles of curriculum designers and teachers, but teaching students to reflect about key issues in relation to their human interactions. I have no problem with many of Papell's suggestions. My only criticism is, as with most hermeneutic positions, she seems to underplay the crucial role of broader structural issues in shaping 'reflective practitioners'; or at least she does not discuss these. My other quibble with Papell is epistemological. It is captured in the following sort of claim: "After years of struggle to define terms and to weigh the multi-method notion, a generalist practice now appears to stand as a legitimate educational outcome for social work education" (p. 16). This is to take a zoom lens view of the history of social work and social work education. If one is willing to swing the wide angle lens into view a more likely scenario indicates that social work and social work education will continue to be highly contested terrain, now more than ever as major players continue to wrestle for control of social work turf. Her views imply a static conception which betrays a teleological undercurrent: "after years of struggle" we have finally reached our ideal end point. This perhaps says more about Papell's ideological position and her *prescriptive* ambitions for social work and social work education. Another modernist style criticism, totalization, can be laid at her door. "The wholeness of the complex professional domain that is social work does not readily stay in place in our curricular designs. We have not solved the educational challenge that social work practice calls for. ... Why is it so difficult for this profession and its educators to hold to the wholeness in social work practice?" (Papell 1996, p. 16). She might have answered, as Sibeon (1991, p. 135) does, because no such wholeness exists in social work practice, that the structure and forms of social work knowledge and practice are full of "ambiguities and cognitive

indeterminacies" and consequently, so is social work education. But instead she prefers to answer in terms which imply incompetence on the part of students. "The generic knowledge of the helping process...is neither easily learned nor readily integrated into skill in the helping role" (Papell 1996, p. 17). And just in case you are doubting her commitment to modernist discourse she leaves little room for manoeuvre when she claims that North American social work education is deserting the "ideology, humanism and wholeness of the social work mission" (p. 17).

Alma Harris (1996, p. 36) advocates a combination of experiential learning theory and Schön's concept of the 'reflective practitioner', suggesting that "the solution to the problem of fusing theory and practice using this model is essentially a procedural one" (p. 36). Vestiges of the 'technical-rational' model? She buttresses her theoretical position by subscribing to the phenomenographic approach in the work of Säljö, Marton and Ramsden (see above). Next she hauls in "modern cognitivism" (p. 37), specifically Kelly's repertory grid technique and schema theory, adds experiential learning theory in the form of Kolb and Boud and colleagues and completes the potpouri by throwing in Mezirow. And all in little more than a page! I suspect that one would not have to trace her theoretical trajectories very far to witness conflicting flight paths.

Again, I do not have major problems with what Harris has to say. My central concern is with what she does *not* say. I heartily endorse a form of education that gives access to student world views and asks educators to engage with learners "in the process of articulating and examining those assumptions, or constructs, which

bear on their practice" (Harris 1996, p. 44). But again, as with all theorists wedded to a hermeneutic view, she pays scant attention to the broader structural and material conditions that frame student world views.

Schön himself has written specifically for social work with some 'empirical' work informing his paper. The empirical aspect consists of *reported* practice at a specially-organized three day seminar. Hardly a methodologically rigorous approach. Theoretically, the paper has not moved from his earlier work and appears to take little account of recent and not so recent criticisms. "A principal finding was that leaders of more successful projects *seemed* to adopt an approach to social work practice that differed markedly from the primarily clinical models of practice in which they had been trained" (*my emphasis*) (Schön 1995, p. 44).

In McCart Hess' (1995, p. 59) empirical study she interviewed four social workers described by colleagues as "experienced, reflective practitioners" and asked each to describe a case she found puzzling. Her conclusion is that "the reflections of the practitioners...illustrate the *compatibility* of Schon's framework with social work practice and the usefulness of applying a framework to structure and enhance the reflective process" (*my emphasis*, pp. 80-81). While these types of studies are useful and much in need, one is left with the impression that the researcher's critically reflective faculties have deserted her when she decides *a priori* to analyze her data within a Schönian theoretical framework, then concludes that the data is compatible with his ideas.

Jones and Joss (1995) contrast the 'reflective practitioner' with three other models of professionalism: practical professional; technical expert; and managerial. They argue that current emphases on competency-based approaches are politically inspired by 'value for money' notions and that they are underpinned by behaviourism (positivism par excellence) with its output emphasis (compare Yelloly 1995). Further, the focus is directed at the individual practitioner. I do not disagree. I simply wonder that they do not see how Schön's ideas also are open to similar 'abuse' (see above). They offer a holistic approach to competence emphasizing "that all participants are whole persons who each bring their own background, values and culture to the specific context of professional practice. Professional competence involves forming judgements through a process of negotiating shared meanings" (p. 29). I cannot agree more. But I dispute their claim that this holistic model is embodied in the reflective practitioner model. In order for this to be so, they need to expend greater energy in theoretically sharpening the "process of negotiating shared meanings." Their discussion does not explicate the key linguistic and discursive features of this process. Nor does it have anything to say about power and the broader structural and material conditions shaping power relations and discursive formations. Rather, they turn to an extension of Kolb's experiential learning cycle by detailing input, process and output competences at each stage of the cycle. As such, their approach is open to all the previously made criticisms of hermeneutically-grounded approaches. The problem is not so much what they say, but what they leave out.

Pietroni (1995, p. 34) adopts an almost poststructural analysis of social work. She argues that the very term 'social work' is, in Derridean terms, "under erasure", with

the "corporate languages of management, evaluation and cost-effectiveness…already superseding the former languages of the social care professions." She sources Smart's (1993) book on postmodernism. She argues further that "social work education has to respond to the fundamental contradictions which exist in both the content and context of practice" (p. 36). She recognizes the crucial contextual factors framing social work practice which is "fundamentally determined by statutory frameworks…filtered through local bureaucracies" (p. 38). Her response to this "turbulence", however, is to turn to the work of Schön, whom we have seen has been strongly criticized by many for his ahistorical, apolitical, decontextualized position.

The above analysis indicates that 'reflective contagion' is spreading in social work and that it has spawned some potentially fruitful educational avenues. The major problem with these approaches is that they largely neglect the broader material and structural conditions which shape the reflective practitioner as both person and professional.

Hermeneutic Reflective Practice and Nursing

Minghella and Benson (1995) remark on the proliferation of literature in recent years concerning the use of reflection in the development of expert nursing practice. Most of it, they suggest, draws on Argyris and Schön (1974), Schön (1987) and Benner (1984). Lauder (1994), however, claims two strands in the nursing literature on reflective practice, that of Schön and Kolb. Not surprisingly, given these theoretical roots, there are remarkable parallels between the social work

and nursing reflective practice literature. First, similar conceptual problems bedevil the enterprise. What is reflection? (Atkins and Murphy 1993; Newell 1994). "Descriptions of reflective practice suffer from the apple pie effect. This is, anything good and vaguely appropriate is included" (James and Clarke 1994, p. 84). This leads to two related problems, a theoretical one and a methodological one. First, theoretical difficulties in seeing what proponents of reflection really claim it will do, and "no clarity about the process by which reflection in any of its 'guises' is able to achieve the things it is claimed to" (Newell 1994, p. 79). Lauder (1994) argues that the term reflection is used in ways "which obfuscate rather than clarify the nature of reflection and the implications it has for the theory-practice debate" (p. 92). Second, is the practical problem of evaluation, a methodological issue. "There are currently almost no accounts which describe the effect of reflection upon professional practice *as it affects clients*" (Newell 1994, p. 79). This scenario is replicated in social work. Note that in the present study the focus is on the reflective practice of social work teachers, myself and my colleague. We examine the effect of reflection on teaching practice. To this end, we examine, among other things, 'client'/student outcomes and satisfaction. I shall discuss this in detail in later chapters. We are *not* focusing on the impact of reflection on social work practice. This would require us to follow students into the field upon graduation. While this is a fruitful study in its own right, it is way beyond the scope of the present thesis. This is not to say we ignore student reflective practice if we define practice in the sense of student reflective behaviour.

Comparing the status of reflection with psychoanalysis in its heyday, Newell (1994) notes particularly the use of inappropriate methodology, obscure use of

language and post hoc skewing of results. Minghella and Benson (1995) cite Kottkamp's scathing indictment: "Reflection and reflective practice may become only the latest in the casualty list of ideas with great potential that have been reduced to the level of tinkling jargon through uninformed use." Methodologically, Greenwood (1993) has demonstrated the unreflexive nature of Schon's account of his ideas, thus lending doubts to his methodology as it applies to practice (see above).

Given similar conceptual, theoretical and methodological difficulties, it is not surprising that nursing education reveals similar pedagogical issues. "While the desirability of nurses being reflective practitioners is strongly supported in the literature, the teaching and assessment of reflective practice is poorly understood, documented and actioned" (Owens 1995, p. 1; compare James and Clark 1994).

Lauder (1994), noting that the relationship between thinking and doing is one of the most important debates in the nursing profession argues that:

> It has been assumed that the thinking that precedes and follows nursing actions has been described within the reflective practitioner doctrine. It is suggested that this is not so, as the reflective doctrine has not only failed to explicate the link between theory and practice but some reflective theorists have perpetuated the theory-practice gap by separating thought and action.
> (Lauder 1994, p. 91)

Lauder draws on Aristotle's conceptions of 'practical wisdom' and the 'practical syllogism' to provide a framework in which the link between thinking and doing is described. "At the heart of his [Aristotle's] conception of practical wisdom lies the imperative of taking action. The actions taken by nurses who profess to possess practical wisdom differ from actions taken by architects and engineers as they are

actions taken in the pursuit of human good" (Lauder 1994, p. 93). For Lauder, it is the 'good', both the universal (humans in general) and the particular (each unique individual) which is the key end or purpose of nursing practice. He notes that Schön is critical of the view that practice professions should be organized around some unambiguous end. Lauder's ideas are germane to social work due to the link implied by the 'caring professions'. My previous discussion argued that one cannot escape ends. But this does not have to imply a bedrock of teleology. Ends are contested, they are continually negotiated and renegotiated. Power differentials exist between those at the bargaining table. These power differentials themselves are in constant flux. What results is a provisionally negotiated purpose or purposes within the institutional and theoretical constraints existing at a particular moment in time and place. But unless one has some notion of ends, one cannot begin to sensibly tackle the means. Note again the distinction between *description* and *prescription*. The 'dialogue', the negotiation over ends or purposes is a *description* of what appears to occur. This does not mean to say that the dialogue takes verbal form. Sometimes silence is powerful. Sometimes dialogue appears to be arrested. But this is not a teleological necessity. Recent events in communist Europe testify to this. Attempts to permanently silence dialogue are doomed to failure because of the nature of the dialectical interplay between human beings and their social 'reality'. Former Romanian dictator Ceaucescu can vouch for this. As Gorbachev so poignantly remarked on Ceaucescu's death: "History punishes those who come late." But my argument that one should be clear about the ends or purposes in order to pursue rational means is a *prescriptive* statement about how I think social work and social work education should be conducted.

Lauder (1994) argues that in an attempt to guide its caring actions, nursing has substituted 'health' for the 'good' as a metaphysic. While important, he argues, health is not an adequate end for humans. In fact, it is not an end in itself but a means towards some greater end. This is demonstrated when nurses attempt to use this end to describe the aims of care in people with terminal illness or with chronic conditions.

Lauder argues that Aristotle's concept of *eudemonia* has been mistranslated as health when "it is more properly translated as meaning 'human flourishing'" (p. 95). This concept, he argues, should be the 'major premise', the purpose of nursing. He summarizes his argument thus:

> ...the reflective practitioner movement has failed to bridge the theory-practice divide. The outcome of the reflective process remains within the cognitive domain. The dual notions of practical wisdom and the practical syllogism provide such a link as the end result of both is the taking of some form of action designed to produce good for people. ...the syllogism and the wider notion of practical wisdom provide a theoretical and conceptual framework in which thinking and doing can be linked within an explicit value-base.
> (Lauder 1994, p. 97)

While I agree with much of Lauder's analysis and applaud his attention to the ethical dimension, we part ways when he attempts to posit a timeless end. Although his notion of 'human flourishing' is not elaborated in detail, it clearly springs from the humanistic tradition and as such suffers from the previous criticisms directed against this tradition: an essential, enduring human nature whose ultimate teleology is to attain the utopian state of 'human flourishing'. It ignores the basic consideration that we live on a fast shrinking planet of limited resources and the stark reality may be that there are not enough resources for us all to flourish. Again, it is not a question of what Lauder argues for, but what he leaves

out. It is these structural and material omissions which are taken up by Habermasian-inspired conceptions of reflection and reflective practice.

2.2.2 'Critical Theory' Reflection and Reflective Practice

Morrison's (1996) model two ideal type – 'reflection, development and empowerment' springs from a Habermasian tradition. "In this model the reflective practitioner becomes empowered through reflective practice, ideological critique and 'rational reconstruction'…of possible courses of action in the future" (p. 319). The model has two elements: "a professional agenda of improving practice and a political agenda of developing in practitioners autonomy, informed professional judgement, decision-making and existential self-realization – individually and collectively, contributing to an egalitarian democracy" (p. 319). I have already discussed Habermas in some detail (see chapter two); though I shall have more to say about his notion of 'critical reflection'. Further, I have also discussed key approaches such as Carr and Kemmis' (1986) 'critical educational science' and Freire and Shor's (1987) 'dialogic method'. Both these approaches have tended to focus on education at school. I do not want to labour old ground. Consequently, I shall reserve discussion in this section to approaches that are geared more specifically towards adult and higher education. This falls into three groups. First, the 'transformative and emancipatory learning' orientation of Mezirow (1981) and colleagues (1990), including Brookfield's (1987; 1990; 1995) work and the 'reflective judgement model' of Kitchener and King (1990). Second, I shall discuss the work of Boud and colleagues (Boud et al. 1985; Boud and Walker 1991; Boud et al. 1993; Boud and Walker 1994; Boud and Walker 1998), particularly their three stage model of reflective learning and their most recent work (Boud and

Walker 1998). Third, I shall discuss Barnett's (1997) concept of 'critical being'.

Having discussed these general approaches to Habermasian-style critical reflection

in higher education, I shall then examine the impact of such approaches in social

work education. Again, I shall allude briefly to nursing education.

Before launching discussion of Mezirow and colleagues, I want to briefly revisit

Habermas' notion of critical reflection.

> It occurred to me only after completing the book [*Knowledge and Human
> Interests*] that the traditional use of the term 'reflection' which goes back to
> German Idealism, covers (and confuses) two things: on the one hand, it denotes
> the reflection upon the conditions of potential abilities of a knowing, speaking
> and acting subject as such; on the other hand, it denotes the reflection upon
> unconsciously produced constraints to which a determinate subject (or a
> determinate group of subjects, or a determinate species subject) succumbs in its
> process of self-reflection.
> (Habermas 1978a, p. 377)

Habermas now distinguishes between these two types of reflection. The first he

calls 'rational reconstruction', the second, 'self-reflection' (or self-criticism). The

distinction is central to his work on communicative action. *Rational*

reconstructions are not limited to a particular subject; they "deal with anonymous

rule systems, which any subjects whatsoever can comply with, insofar as they have

acquired the corresponding competence" (Habermas 1974, p. 22). Examples of

such rule systems are linguistics and cognitive development. *Self-reflection*, on the

other hand, "brings to consciousness those determinants of a self-formative process

of cultivation and spiritual formation [*Bildung*] which ideologically determine a

contemporary praxis of action and the conception of the world" (Habermas 1974, p.

22). It is self-reflection that is ideology critique. "Criticism [self-reflection]

changes the determinants of *false* consciousness, whereas reconstructions explicate

correct know-how, i.e. the intuitive knowledge we acquire when we possess rule-

competence" (Habermas 1978a, p. 378). This distinction, while subtle, is crucial

for an understanding of reflective practice and has not always been understood.

> Self-reflection leads to insight due to the fact that what has previously been unconscious is made conscious in a manner *rich in practical consequences*: analytic insights intervene in life, if I may borrow this dramatic phrase from Wittgenstein. A successful reconstruction also raises an 'unconsciously' functioning rule system to consciousness in a certain manner; it renders explicit the intuitive knowledge that is given with competence with respect to the rules in the form of 'know how'. But this theoretical knowledge has *no practical consequences*. By learning logic or linguistics I acquire theoretical knowledge, but in general I do not thereby change my previous practice of reasoning or speaking.
> (*my emphasis*, Habermas 1974, p. 23)

This indicates that for reflective practice it is self-reflection rather than rational

reconstructions which are important. This is true, but needs qualification, since the

self-knowledge in self-reflection is enhanced by rational reconstructions. "It is

only reliance upon reconstruction which permits the theoretical development of

self-reflection. In this way reconstructions therefore attain an *indirect* relation to

the emancipatory interest of knowledge, which enters directly only into the capacity

for self-reflection" (Habermas 1974, p. 24). In a sense, one can distinguish the two,

as Habermas himself does (1974, p. 22; 1978a, p. 378) in terms of 'subjectivity'

and 'objectivity': "reconstructions are based on 'objective' data like sentences,

actions, cognitive insights, etc." (Habermas 1978a, p. 378). To summarize: for

reflective practice, Habermas' self-reflection is the key *direct* form of reflection.

But it is shaped and enhanced by rational reconstruction. Habermas' concept of

self-reflection is 'critical'. We can see this when he uses the term 'criticism' as a

synonym for 'self-reflection' (Habermas 1978a, p. 378).

For the purposes of later critique, I want to highlight two further points. First, that

rational reconstruction highlights *a priori* conditions for the possibility of

knowledge and interaction. But it has an empirical component: it explains the development and acquisition of empirical competencies by empirical subjects (Held 1980). Second, that Habermas (1978a) seems to indicate that reconstructions are a 'pure form of knowledge'. Though they are linked indirectly to the cognitive emancipatory interest via self-reflection, in an important sense they appear to rupture the theory/practice link. Rather than surrendering his claim for the existence of such a link, he reconceptualizes it in the process of rational reconstruction itself: his theory of communicative competence (Held 1980).

'Transformative and Emancipatory Learning'

Jack Mezirow

Mezirow (1981; 1990a; 1990b; 1990c) outlines explicitly the Habermasian theoretical framework undergirding his 'transformative and emancipatory learning' approach. His 1981 work draws largely on the first edition of Habermas' (1978) work on knowledge and human interests. His 1990 work supplements this with Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action. Mezirow defines transformative learning as "the process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience. Learning includes acting on these insights" (Mezirow 1990a, p. xvi). A 'meaning perspective' is "the structure of assumptions that constitutes a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience" (p. xvi) (see above for Mezirow's definitions of reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection). Mezirow (1981, p. 7) likens "the resulting transformation in perspective or personal paradigm" to Freire's 'conscientization' and Habermas' 'emancipatory action'.

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Note the importance of self-knowledge, self-reflection. Emancipatory education is distinguished as "an organized effort to precipitate or to facilitate transformative learning in others" (Mezirow 1990a, p. xvi). The latter appears to be the domain of the teacher.

Adapting Habermas, Mezirow (1981, p. 4) identifies "three distinct but interrelated learning domains" which correspond with Habermas' three primary cognitive interests – the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. Each domain has its own learning goal – learning for task-related competence, learning for interpersonal understanding and learning for perspective transformation. This provides a clear link between knowledge and learning. In a later paper Mezirow (1990b) elaborates further on the distinction between instrumental and communicative learning stressing the importance of a critique of the "relevant social norms and of cultural codes that determine the allocation of influence and power over whose interpretations are acceptable" (Mezirow 1990b, p. 8). Following Habermas, he emphasizes that "learning is not a desirable outcome or a goal; it is the activity of making an interpretation that subsequently guides decision and action. Learning is grounded in the very nature of human communication" (Mezirow 1990c, p. 375).

Habermas suggests that the three interests "mandate fundamentally different methodologies of systematic objective inquiry" (Mezirow 1990b, p. 4). Mezirow explains his use of the concept 'emancipatory': "Insights gained through critical self-awareness are emancipatory in the sense that at least one can recognize the *correct reasons* for his or her problems" (*my emphasis*, p. 5). And for Mezirow, this is the aim of education. "Helping adults construe experience in a way in which

they may more clearly understand the reasons for their problems and understand the options open to them so that they may assume responsibility for decision making is the essence of education" (Mezirow 1981, p. 20). This sounds fine until one unpackages the paternalism inherent in a teacher (you can call them a facilitator, it does not change the essential point) who supposedly has access to a social reality that the learner does not. Mezirow makes his position even more explicit when he invokes Habermas' conception of self-reflection.

> The methodological framework that determines the meaning of the validity of critical propositions of this category is established by the concept of *self-reflection*. The latter releases the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers. Self reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest. (Habermas 1978, p. 310)

We are trekking over familiar terrain; terrain signposted by a realist ontology with the usual implications of 'reality distortion' and 'false consciousness'. The concept of false consciousness comes from Hegel and Marx's reworking of Hegel and assumed particular prominence in the work of both Freire and Habermas. I will not repeat the poststructural and feminist criticisms of this position detailed in both the previous chapter and above. But compare these notions with Mezirow's definition of critical reflection cited earlier. "Critical reflection addresses the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are posed or defined in the first place" (Mezirow 1990b, p. 12). This makes for an interesting juxtaposition. And it cannot be taken seriously as long as the bedrock of the critical theory paradigm, the "very premises on which problems are posed and defined in the first place", is exempt from critical reflection. This is made even more poignant when Mezirow (1990b, p. 15) argues that "sociocultural distortions involve taking for granted belief systems that pertain to power and social relationships, especially those currently prevailing and legitimized and enforced by institutions."

The transcendental metaphysical picture is completed by Mezirow's essentialism and teleology, rendered explicit in the following sorts of claims. "Our *natural* tendency to move toward new perspectives...may be explained as a quest for meaning. Carl Rogers has hypothesized a teleological explanation" (*my emphasis*, Mezirow 1981, p. 7). Mezirow's (1990c, p. 354) discussion in which he argues for the central role of 'dialogue' in adult education does not save him. It is predicated on the Habermasian concept of dialogue. "Consequently, education for adults may be understood as centrally involved in creating and facilitating dialogic communities to enable learners to engage in rational discourse and action. ... Rational thought and action are the cardinal goals of adult education." Drawing on Falzon (1998), I mounted a strong critique on Habermas' concept of dialogue in chapter two. It is a transcendental notion which holds all hostage to the foundational self, the enduring, essential, rational human being. In short, Mezirow yokes his theory of adult learning to a Habermasian cart. This results in a bumpy ride, as Habermas' conceptual bandwagon jolts its way through the ruts of contemporary critique.

What is interesting for me, as will become apparent when I describe WS1002, the subject under scrutiny in this thesis, is that in many respects, and certainly in terms of pedagogy, what we are doing does not seem very different from Mezirow and other contributors in his 1990 volume (see especially Brookfield 1990). The key difference concerns how we *theorize* what we are doing. If one were a vintage positivist, a Skinnerian even, one would construe this (if we could admit of a Skinnerian 'construing') as being irrelevant. Behaviourally and technically,

pedagogical equivalence reigns. However, I am not a positivist nor a behaviourist, hence I cannot dismiss this difference as mere theoretical nuance. My position indicates that theory and practice, knowledge and action fuse in poignant ways. I shall return to how I perceive these differences towards the chapter's end.

But Mezirow and I are not universally at theoretical loggerheads. In fact, when Mezirow (1990c, p. 360) writes "our tasks as educators are to encourage the multiple readings of 'texts', to make a wider range of symbol systems or meaning perspectives available to learners", I sense the talons of poststructuralism slowly inching their way beneath his flesh. I also fully subscribe to many of his tenets of adult education. I particularly endorse his goal and method of self-directed learning.

> A self-directed learner must be understood as one who is aware of the constraints on his efforts to learn, including the psycho-cultural assumptions involving reified power relationships embedded in institutionalized ideologies which influence one's habits of perception, thought and behaviour as one attempts to learn. A self-directed learner has access to alternative perspectives for understanding his or her situation and for giving meaning and direction to his or her life, has acquired sensitivity and competence in social interaction and has the skills and competencies required to master the productive tasks associated with controlling and manipulating the environment.
> (Mezirow 1981, p. 21)

Indeed, if I take my own theoretical position seriously – and I presently do (which is not the same as being immutably attached to it) – one would seldom expect global, totalizing theoretical discrepancies with anyone. Historical, cultural and social context are critical for theory development. Mezirow's ideas arose in the 1970s at a time when positivist conceptions of adult education held sway in court. Knowles' work was beginning to mount a small challenge and indeed, in his 1981 paper, Mezirow harnessed Knowles' ideas on andragogy, particularly the concept

of *self-directedness*, to a Habermasian approach. Mezirow argued that a comprehensive theory of adult education required both Habermas' ideas and Knowles'. At the time this was a commendable venture. And it may still be as we face the new onslaught of technical-rationality at the turn of the millenium in its present incarnation as competency-based education construed in a narrow, technical sense. I consider Mezirovian-style approaches to be incomparably more useful than positivist ones in the present climate (and certainly more useful than hermeneutic approaches); though it pays to remember that the 'ogre of positivism' itself arose in response to a particular set of political, social, cultural and intellectual conditions and at the turn of the century was perceived by most thinkers to be a marked improvement on metaphysical speculation run rampant. But as a reflective practitioner, it behoves me to subject *all* ideas to critical reflection. None are exempt. This has the unfortunate consequence that by the time I reach the end of this thesis I may have to start again. Already since beginning I have ditched Habermas in favour of Foucault. How fickle are the vagaries of 'intellectual life'.

Stephen Brookfield

I do not want to retread my path, so in this section I will not focus on excavating the Habermasian bedrock of Brookfield's position. Nor shall I repeat my criticisms. Rather, I want to focus on two salient aspects of Brookfield's work which are germane to the present thesis. The first concerns assumptions, the second, the affective component of critical reflection. Finally, I shall clarify Brookfield's use of key concepts. A central component of Mezirow's (1981; 1990a; 1990b; 1990c) 'transformative and emancipatory leaning' is the identification and challenging of assumptions. This can be seen by exploring the

links between meaning perspectives, which are the "structure of assumptions", critical self-reflection, which involves assessment of meaning perspectives, and transformative learning, which entails "reformulation of a meaning perspective" (1990a, p. xvi). For Brookfield (1987; 1990; 1995), "central to the process of critical reflection...is the recognition and analysis of assumptions" (1990, p. 177). He defines assumptions

> ...as comprising those taken-for-granted ideas, commonsense beliefs, and self-evident rules of thumb that inform our thoughts and actions. They are the heuristic mechanisms through which we account for events in our lives. As explanatory devices, they both confirm and shape our perceptions.
> (Brookfield 1990, p. 179)

Brookfield has taken this enterprise very seriously. In fact, he states that "making explicit the constituent elements of our assumptive worlds is a central task of critical education" (Brookfield 1990, p. 178). Indeed, two of his most important books in recent years, *Developing Critical Thinkers* (1987) and *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (1995), have devoted substantial portions to the task of detailing and analyzing exercises and approaches designed to promote critical reflection. For now, I simply want to highlight a key feature of his approach. While he is referring specifically to Flanagan's (1954) 'critical incident technique', his point applies generally. "In helping people recognize and analyze their assumptions, the scrutiny of critical incidents from learners' biographies is an accessible and personalized approach. Learners are not intimidated by being asked to talk about events in their own lives, a topic about which...they have more knowledge than anyone else" (Brookfield 1990, p. 192). The salient aspect is the use of 'knowledge' from learners' lives. It is accessible and relevant. This is pertinent to WS1002. I shall return.

The second feature of Brookfield's work I wish to draw attention to is the affective component of critical reflection. Already, I have criticized overly-rational approaches and argued for the importance of affective and ethical dimensions of critical reflection. Brookfield is adamant about the affective dimension. Mezirow talks about it in his 1981 paper, distinguishing between a variety of forms of reflectivity, including affective reflectivity, but emphasizes that "theoretical reflectivity is the...process central to perspective transformation" (p. 13). And as noted above, he is unequivocal that "rational thought and action are the cardinal goals of adult education" (Mezirow 1990c, p. 354). Brookfield draws more attention to the affective dimension. "Emotions are central to the critical thinking process. ... Asking critical questions about our previously accepted values, ideas, and behaviours is anxiety-producing" (Brookfield 1987, p. 7).

Finally, I want to clarify Brookfield's use of key concepts. Initially, Brookfield (1987) used the term 'critical thinking'. After reviewing the manifold ways in which this term has been construed, he noted that most empirical studies of the phenomenon have focused on young adults or college students. Brookfield was keen to extend this to other settings more relevant to adult life, such as workplace, politics, media and personal relationships. He stated his intention to move beyond these traditional conceptions of critical thinking and proposed an alternative interpretation of the concept, *emancipatory learning*. He explicitly acknowledges Habermas as his source. Although Brookfield continues to use the term critical thinking throughout this 1987 work – indeed, it is called *Developing Critical Thinkers* – by 1990 he seems to prefer the concept of critical reflection. This is a natural progression once he explicitly adopts a Habermasian position, which

contrasts strongly with the traditionally positivistic connotations of the concept of 'critical thinking'. Note, however, that there is nothing intrinsic to the concept of 'critical thinking'. Indeed, concepts, intrinsically, do not assume independent meanings. They assume their meanings from their paradigmatic homes. It would be quite possible to define critical thinking in a way that was Habermasian.

Brookfield (1987) also discusses two related concepts, 'dialectical thinking' and 'reflective learning'. "Dialectical thinking is viewed as a particular form of critical thinking that focuses on the understanding and resolution of contradictions" (Brookfield 1987, p. 12-13). Reflective learning becomes important, Brookfield argues, because of activities like assumption identification, justification for our beliefs and behaviour, and judging the rationality of these justifications. He draws on Boyd and Fales' (1983) who define reflective learning as "the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective" (Brookfield 1987, p. 14).

Kitchener and King's 'Reflective Judgement Model'

Kitchener and King claim explicit heritage from Dewey (1933), who identified reflective thinking as a goal of education. They define a reflective thinker as

> ...someone who is aware that a problematic situation exists and is able to bring critical judgement to bear on the problem. In other words, a reflective thinker understands that there is a real uncertainty about how a problem may best be solved, yet is still able to offer a judgement about the problem that brings some kind of closure to it.
> (Kitchener and King 1990, p.160)

Their reflective judgement model

> ...describes changes in assumptions about sources and certainty of knowledge and how decisions are justified in light of those assumptions. In other words, the model focuses on describing the development of epistemic assumptions and how these assumptions act as meaning perspectives...that radically affect the way individuals understand and subsequently solve problems.
> (Kitchener and King 1990, p. 160)

The model consists of seven incremental stages, beginning with stage one where knowing is characterized by a concrete, single-category belief system (so beliefs do not need to be justified), which in its purest form is probably only found in young children, through to stage seven where "although individuals...believe that knowing is uncertain and subject to interpretation, they also argue that epistemically justifiable claims can be made about the better or best solution to the problem under consideration" (Kitchener and King 1990, p. 165). This stage is rare, we are told, "even in graduate students, although it is found in some educated adults as they mature into their thirties and beyond" (p. 166). Between these two extremes lie the other five stages. I shall highlight stages three, five and six to give the flavour of the model. In stage three, knowledge is absolutely certain in some areas and temporarily uncertain in others. Conclusions are justified via authorities in areas of certainty and via intuition in areas of uncertainty. Evidence does not play a role in reasoning to a conclusion since there is no certain way to evaluate it. This is said to be typical of students in the last two years of high school or first year of college. In stage five, no knowledge is certain because interpretation is inherent in all understanding. Beliefs may be justified only within a given context. Within particular contexts, some evidence can be evaluated qualitatively as stronger or more relevant than other evidence. "These individuals also have difficulty endorsing one view as better than another, as if doing so would deny the legitimacy of other perspectives" (p.170). This is typical of graduate students. Basically,

stage five describes a relativist position. In stage six, "some perspectives, arguments or points or view may be evaluated as better than others" (p. 165). This is said to be typical of advanced graduate students. Note that the key transition from stage five through to seven involves, in a situation of uncertainty, being able to make "claims that can be evaluated as having greater 'truth value' or being more 'warranted' than others" (p. 165 – the terms are Dewey's).

A little digging unearths a hierarchical, culture-biased model which is positively dangerous in its globalizing, essentialist and teleological pretensions. To see how this is so and how potentially silly the model could be, reflect for a moment where Foucault might fit. Then reflect where Habermas might slot in. Habermas of course would ascend the pyramid and be given seven star rating. Foucault, whom many regard as one of the finest thinkers on knowledge this century has produced, would almost certainly not make it to stage seven!!! Stage six at a pinch, but only stage five on a bad day. A relativist, however 'clever' they might be in other areas, could never move beyond stage five. But there is hope, or there would be if Foucault were alive, since according to Kitchener and King, we are moving inexorably forwards along the path chanting our mantra rationality, and stage seven awaits those of us who are patient, and no doubt, Ms Kitchener and Ms King as guardians of this teleological shrine will be smiling to greet us with open arms. This model is an example par excellence of Enlightenment rationality at its *uncritical* best.

I should perhaps temper my vitriol by stating that I think Kitchener and King present some fine strategies for promoting critical reflection in adult learners. They

are also pursuing some interesting research; though there are question marks about the representativeness of their sample of college students. But their model demonstrates the potentially dangerous influence of modernist conceptions of totalization, essentialism and teleology. It is noteworthy that both received their doctorates in psychology. For years, culture-biased and class-biased IQ tests (the domain of psychologists) were used to siphon off and label hundreds of thousands of school students as intellectually inferior. In the wrong hands – and there are many jostling in powerful positions in the contemporary world – a model like the reflective judgement one could be seriously abused. We could even use it to start screening tertiary students and Foucault might not make it into the honours program.

Their research on the model suggests that biology creates a ceiling on the development of reflective thinking of the Dewey kind. Education can make a difference, but it is constrained by 'natural' maturational processes. While I take their point that "reflective thinking develops slowly and students need more than a single-semester course to make major changes in their meaning perspectives" (p. 173), particularly in the complex area of critical reflection, this is further demonstration of essentialism; in this case, biological essentialism. Their research findings are filtered through their preconceived notions of what 'good' reflective thinking is about. I acknowledge that we all have notions of what constitutes 'good' reflective thinking – I certainly do – but the key difference is in how willing we are to budge from our notions. Like true Habermasians, Kitchener and King exempt their notion of reflective thinking from critical reflection. In such a scenario of course they will 'discover' nothing that does not fit in with these

preconceived notions. If we are serious about critical reflection there should be no taboo areas.

David Boud and Colleagues

It may seem a little unusual to place Boud and colleagues in the critical paradigm rather than the hermeneutic one. This is because Boud springs from an experiential learning tradition which conventionally has been a hermeneutic enterprise. Two points arise. First, Boud has been one of the few writers in the field who has expressed tolerance for a range of theoretical perspectives. Writers as diverse as Kemmis (1985), Brookfield (1993b), Criticos (1993b) and Usher (1993) have appeared in his and colleagues' edited collections. Additionally, he and Knights (1996) have appeared in an edited collection of social work papers claiming a Schönian heritage. This range is interesting when one considers the hermeneutics of Schön, that Kemmis is a diehard critical theorist of Habermasian descent, Brookfield is a 'gentle' emancipatory educator and Usher in his most recent work is pursuing a postmodern trajectory (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997). What all these approaches do share is their sustained critique of positivism and the technical-rational model. The second point is that Boud's work has always had an emancipatory undercurrent (e.g. Habermas appears in Boud and Walker 1991; Boud and Walker 1992 appear in an edited collection titled *Empowerment Through Experiential Learning*) and his more recent work appears to have taken a 'Habermasian turn' (Boud and Walker 1998). This can be demonstrated in the following: "Consideration of the context in which reflective action is engaged is a seriously underdeveloped aspect of discussion of reflection. The context to which we are referring is the total cultural, social and political environment in which

reflection takes place" (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 196). This style of comment

brings Boud firmly out of the hermeneutic tradition and potentially into a

poststructural trajectory. In fact, Boud and Walker (1998, pp. 196-197)

acknowledge explicitly that "any view of context now must take account of the

considerable theoretical contributions in recent years of...critical social science,

post-structuralism and postmodernism, which have drawn attention to the ways in

which our constructions of what we accept as reality are constituted." What makes

Boud and Walker's (1998) approach so interesting is that they attempt to account

for the recent (and not so recent) contributions of poststructural and postmodern

'macro-theorizing' while retaining the focus on the micro-practice and micro-

politics of classroom practice. I shall return to this below. Initially, I want to trace

briefly the development of their ideas.

Originally, Boud and colleagues define reflection in the context of learning as:

> ...a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which
> individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new
> understandings and appreciations. It may take place in isolation or in
> association with others.
> (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985, p. 19)

Note their emphasis on the affective dimension. This assumes a central role in their

model of reflective learning, comprised of three elements. First, return to the

experience to capture as much detail as possible. Second, attend to feelings

attached to the experience and review them. Third, re-evaluate the experience.

They note that this often parallels the first two stages rather than following

sequentially. This initial model was designed to focus primarily on reflective

activities that occur after an event (compare Schön's 'reflection-on-action'). Later,

Boud and Walker (1991, p. 11) extend their focus in two ways. First, to "what

needs to be done to promote reflection throughout the experience" (compare

Schön's 'reflection-in-action'); and second, "to include an overview of the process

of learning from experience" and to consider "the role of preparation for experience

and reflection within and after it" (p. 11). Compare the criticisms noted above in

connection with Schön's initially narrow focus and note Boud and colleagues'

focus on all three temporal aspects: before, during and after. Note the emphasis is

firmly on how reflection can be harnessed to experiential learning. In other words,

their primary commitment is experiential learning. Reflection is a central means in

this process.

In Boud and Walker (1991) they argue for two salient aspects which impact on the

learner. The first, the 'personal foundation of experience'; the second, intent.

"Learners possess a personal foundation of experience, a way of being present in

the world, which profoundly influences the way in which that world is

experienced..." (Boud and Walker 1991, p. 13). And later: "It is partly acquired

from the social and cultural environment, and partly forged by the learner's own

awareness and effort. It contains the presuppositions and assumptions which

learners have developed in the past and predisposes learners to any future

experience. It is not something about which a learner can readily (if at all) give an

account" (p. 14). This notion is important for WS1002 and hence this thesis. The

second key element that learners bring to an experience is intent. This, argue Boud

and Walker, influences the way we experience events. It is also crucial for learner

engagement.

Boud, Cohen and Walker in *Using Experience for Learning* (1993) still focus primarily on experiential learning – indeed they sharpen this focus – although Boud and Walker's (1993) individual contribution to this volume indicates the central role they attribute to reflection. Boud and colleagues' (1993) book was partly inspired as a counterpunch to the hijacking of experiential learning for instrumental purposes. Their previous work (Boud and Walker 1991) emphasized the 'personal foundation of experience'. In their 1993 work they extend this notion to refer to the attempt by the editors and other contributors to contextualize their contributions by 'writing in their own autiobiographies'. They recognized "the critical role our different backgrounds and our own experience played in how we named the issues" (Boud, Cohen and Walker 1993, p. 4). This notion of the role of 'self' in shaping our 'theories' of the world, our world views, is pivotal to WS1002, and thus to this thesis. In chapter five when I describe the subject in more detail, I shall also 'write in' the biographies of co-researcher, Pauline Meemeduma, and myself, as vital sources of information. **This sense of the personal assumes vital proportions in this thesis.** Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993, p. 4) "believe that processing and reflecting on the personal experience is clearly a major factor for developing higher-level learning."

I mentioned above that Boud and colleagues (1993) sharpen their experiential learning focus in this book. They do this by outlining five key propositions about learning from experience. I shall summarize them briefly. First, experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning. This leads to an interesting conception of the relationship between teaching and learning. "While we commonly assume that teaching leads to learning, it is the experiences which

teaching helped create that prompt learning, not primarily the acts of the teacher" (p. 9) (though note Usher and colleagues' 1997 critique of 'foundational' conceptions). Further, they suggest that experience is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for learning. Active engagement with experience is crucial. This leads to the second proposition: learners actively construct their experience. Third, learning is a holistic process. This emphasizes the close connections between cognitive, affective and conative aspects of learning. Compare this with my holistic conception above where I have included some other dimensions as well (ethical, spiritual, sexual, social, etc.). Boud and colleagues (1993, p. 12) suggest that "the balance between aspects may vary across contexts, purposes and time; none can ever be ignored." I shall return to the issue of context below. Fourth, learning is socially and culturally constructed. They stress language as the most powerful factor mediating the social and cultural context on our learning. Note how this dovetails with my previous argument about the socially- and culturally-constructed nature of knowledge, which is linguistically-mediated. They note that "we have an extraordinarily well-developed set of concepts for technical and scientific phenomena, but our language for personal and emotional experience has hardly changed in modern times. ... Naming...is important for...being" (p. 14). This is redolent of Freire (1970). Boud and colleagues emphasize the importance of critical reflection for examining our values and culture. Like Mezirow and Brookfield, Boud and colleagues have stressed the key role of assumption identification and challenge (Boud and Walker 1994). Fifth, learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs. Again, they emphasize the key role of emotions as both spurs and barriers to learning.

In 1994 Boud and Walker define reflection slightly differently:

> Reflection is essentially a dialogue in which learners enter into a creative interaction with a particular aspect of their experience. The diversity of reflection, and the consequent diversity of facilitating it, can stem from the aspect of the experience to which the focus is directed.
> (Boud and Walker 1994, p. 1)

This definition attempts to account for the diversity of reflection which has so clearly emerged in the literature. They also explicitly use the term 'critical reflection' which "involves becoming aware of the assumptions which have shaped, and continue to shape, our personal foundation of experience. This awareness leads us to dialogue with the result of these assumptions, and make judgements about whether or not their influence on us has really been in our interest" (Boud and Walker 1994, p. 1). Critical reflection is regarded as vital to effective learning since "assumptions of the learner can have profound effects on the learning process. ... Unless learners become aware of these inhibiting assumptions their learning can be either limited or totally undermined" (Boud and Walker 1994, p. 1). They note, however, that "critical reflection is both difficult and risky because it questions the assumptions which hold our world, and indeed ourselves, together" (p. 1). (compare Brookfield 1987; and Mezirow 1990b). In order to cope with the potentially debilitating impact of our personal scaffolding tumbling around us, we need to create a suitable context (Boud and Walker 1994).

In their most recent work, Boud and Walker (1998, p. 191) specifically address the "challenge of context" for promoting reflective practice. The central argument of their paper is "that reflection needs to be flexibly deployed, that it is highly context-specific and that the social and cultural context in which reflection takes place has a

powerful influence over what kinds of reflection it is possible to foster and the ways in which this might be done" (p. 191). The impetus for this paper springs from some disturbing trends in the 'practice' of reflection in professional courses. They identify a number of reasons for the problems: misinterpretations of the literature; equating reflection with thinking; some teachers pursuing personal agendas at learner expense. I have already referred to some of these issues and I shall address further ones in the relevant analysis chapters. Now, I simply want to direct attention to two points. First, concerns about the ethics of reflection. This will become important later when I discuss Foucault's brand of 'ethico-critical reflection'. Second, Boud and Walker point out that not all planned reflective processes lead to learning. It is important to frame reflective activities within the learning context in which they are taking place. I want to briefly discuss the issue of context, which "is perhaps the single most important influence on reflection and learning. It can permit or inhibit working with learners' experience" (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 196).

As noted above, they define context as "the total cultural, social and political environment in which reflection takes place" (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 196). They remark that "some exponents of reflection...adopting a politically oriented model, encourage students to focus on their own context and settings and change them. However, it is far less common to extend such reflection to an analysis by learners of the context in which the reflective activity itself is taking place" (p. 196). In a poststructural twist they argue that "context is subject to rereading and multiple readings: while it may be experienced as 'given', it is always available for reinterpretation" (p. 197). What makes their work interesting, however, is their

practical bent which speaks of the importance of developing "micro-contexts which operate as enclaves which have features separate from dominant cultural influences and which are conducive to particular kinds of reflective activity" (p. 197). They argue that it is important that we do not let "the power of context...be used as an excuse to do nothing or to reinforce the *status quo*. Aspects of context change and can be changed" (p. 197). They acknowledge that context is so embedded, that one can never set it aside. But it can be foregrounded. This is a highly political approach and it is easy to see why one cannot slot Boud and Walker's work into a hermeneutic paradigm where many experiential learning approaches happily reside. Boud and Walker's (1998) work is clear evidence that there is nothing logically contingent about experiential learning adopting an individualist, apolitical stance such as Schön. Indeed, there is nothing about experiential learning which prevents it *a priori* from being hitched to any paradigmatic cart. Boud and Walker even suggest a poststructural trajectory for their work. Drawing on Usher and Edward's use of Derrida's notion of 'nothing outside the text', they suggest that "this idea could be developed for reflection as a way of prompting learners to explore not only experiences which are apparently of significance, but also their context, pretext and subtext" (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 198).

Close scrutiny of this paper reveals that the 'turn' that Boud and Walker are taking is compatible with the neo-Foucauldian framework I outlined previously. In this framework nothing is exempt from critical reflection, not even the very notion of critical reflection itself, which they note is "steeped in particular cultural practices" (p. 197). The following quotation illustrates their affinity with my previous critiques against the totalization inherent in modernist discourse:

...if reflection is regarded as universal it more easily lends itself to abuse than if it is construed as a cultural practice located in a particular time and place. Reflection might therefore take on a variety of forms or processes, dependent on a wide range of factors. Factors to be considered might include class, race, gender, and so on as well as many local forms of difference.
(Boud and Walker 1998, p. 198)

Boud and Walker (1998) outline a number of conditions for promoting reflection and the implications these have for those facilitating reflection in terms of focus on context, learner and processes. I shall revisit some of these issues in the analysis chapters. In many respects, Boud and Walker's (1998) approach offers a neat bridge between critical theory notions of reflection and reflective practice and poststructural notions. Before I move to poststructuralism and reflective practice I want to address two more areas. First, Barnett's (1997) notion of 'critical being'; and second, the impact of critical theory variants of reflective practice on social work and social work education. I shall also refer briefly to nursing education.

Ronald Barnett's 'Critical Being'

At the outset I want to state that I do not entirely endorse Barnett's (1997) theoretical position, which might be described as neo-Habermasian. Barnett himself does not entirely support Habermas' theoretical position and as we shall see, his Habermasian-style criticisms of postmodernism seem to refer to the fragmentation vision (see Barnett 1997, pp. 25-26). I suspect his perspectival epistemology is not so far from mine, though I think that Barnett wavers in his position, never being quite able to surrender a form of foundationalism. What I do want to co-opt for this thesis is his notion of 'critical being'. Secondly, I want to explore his concept of critical reflection, which is a subset, albeit an essential one,

of critical being. Finally, I want to explore the implications of his position for teaching and learning.

Critical Being

Barnet (1997) argues that we need to displace the concept of critical thinking as a core concept of higher education with a more comprehensive concept, 'critical being', which consists of three components: critical thinking, critical action and critical self-reflection. This embraces cognitive, conative and social/personal aspects, including the affective dimension. In short, it denotes a whole person. This dovetails with his view that "we need a new conception of higher education itself" on the grounds that the "whole idea of a higher education founded on a view of critical thought is now inadequate for the modern age, if higher education is to play its part in enabling graduates effectively to be able to take on the world" (p. 2). "Nothing less than the future of society is at stake" (p. 7). He argues that recent voices singing the praises of critical thinking (competences for economic regeneration and self-development in professional life) are an illusory rescue since they are driven by an instrumental agenda. They take for granted two things. First, that the goals of economic competitiveness and organizational change are worthwhile. Second, "that critical thought is an instrument for achieving those goals" (p. 82). "Rather than being a vehicle for combating ideology, critical thinking now takes on an ideological character of its own" (p. 3). The key problem, he argues, is that in all these redefinitions of critical thinking, the wider purpose of higher education is forgotten. One of the key tasks, he argues, of a critical higher education is "to take on knowledge itself. We cannot leave our students sensing

that there is a givenness to the knowledge structures that they are encountering or that those structures are socially neutral" (p. 5).

Barnett attempts to restore this sense of purpose by distinguishing criticality along two axes: levels and domains. Levels are concerned with epistemological standing, domains with purposes. There are four **levels of criticality**: critical skills; reflexivity; refashioning of traditions; and transformatory critique. These traverse from critical thinking skills through critical thought to critique. "Each succeeding level offers ever higher forms of alternative possibilities of understanding. Critical thinking skills confine the thinker to given standards of reasoning within specific disciplines, whereas critique opens the possibility of entirely different and even contrasting modes of understanding" (p. 7). Barnett defines *critical thinking* as "cognitive acts undertaken by individuals" (p. 16). It is critical thinking "without a critical edge" (p. 17). Note the similarity to my previous discussion on critical thinking with its positivist undertones. With *critical thought* the critical edge begins to be supplied, the focus widens. Thought is now collective, social. "Whereas critical thinking is a capacity of students as persons, critical thought is an attribute of a body of thought" (p. 71). He suggests that a body of thought can be critical in two senses: an intellectual field with a high degree of openness; and one which illuminates social practices. In both these senses, he argues, critical thought is a sociological rather than a psychological concept. At this level I accept Barnett's distinction, but at another level it draws on Popper's (1972) concept of 'objective knowledge', which I think is highly problematic, rooted as it is in a critical realist ontology which privileges a single perspective over all others for time immemorial. Barnett (1997, p. 72) himself notes that "awkward questions

arise about the epistemic basis for such a critical theory. How can a body of thought both describe and evaluate the world?" (p. 72), but by his own admission "sidesteps those questions here" (p. 72). Critical thought is "criticism within the discipline, conducted according to its values and procedures" (p. 18). *Critique* moves beyond the discipline: it is metacriticism, a form of criticism about the discipline itself. He distinguishes this from metacognitive skills located in the field of student learning and concerned with student's self-interrogation of their learning styles. Metacritique takes two forms. The first is philosophical in character: the capacity of a form of thought "to interrogate and reflect on its fundamental categories, concepts, tests of truth and presuppositions" (p. 72). Barnett notes that this need not be a transcendental critique. "There need be no presumption that the categories, concepts, rules and even tests of truth to be laid bare are timeless and immutable" (p. 72). With one exception. Barnett, despite his criticisms of Habermas, is not willing to relinquish his cherished commitment to the yardstick of rationality itself. He also does not seem entirely willing at this stage to surrender the foundational self. Noting that with postmodernism the self fragments, he argues that "a durable self can only be sustained, if at all, through critical self-reflection and authentic – and, thereby, critical – action" (p. 63). The second form that metacritique takes is largely sociological in character, though the discipline's ethical basis may also be important. It is evaluative, seeking "to place the form of thought, to understand its origin, its current social functions, its inner ideologies, the way it acts to form human beings and the power it wields in society" (p. 73). It is in discussing this second form that Barnett reveals an essential commitment to foundationalism. "Whereas its epistemological basis is largely given (but still

worthy of being revealed through metacritique), its sociological base is positively up for grabs" (p. 73).

Each of these levels of criticality can be exercised in three **domains**: knowledge, the self and the world. Barnett urges that while no clear boundaries can be drawn between the domains, particularly the first and the third (theory and action), the distinction is worth upholding in order "to highlight the varying objects that critical thinking can take *and the purposes it can fulfil. ...* To take up a stance against the world, to evaluate a proposition and to attempt to understand oneself...are fundamentally different purposes of critical thinking.   Each is worthwhile but none is reducible to either of the others" (Barnett 1997, p. 66). Conceptually, this is consistent with my notion of social work education outlined above where I spoke of 'the self' as the hinge between theory and practice which are related to each other in a form of praxis where critical reflection assumes the pivotal role. This is seen when examining Barnett's schema, where each domain is accompanied by three **forms** of critical being: critical reason, which is applicable to knowledge; critical self-reflection, applicable to the self; and critical action, which is applicable to the domain of the world. Barnett places the student in a central relationship to each of these three forms. In the Western university, Barnett argues, critical thinking has been defined narrowly, usually in terms of formal knowledge with little emphasis on the domains of self and the world. Further, there has been little emphasis on critical self-reflection and critical action.   Although higher education is now broadening to include self and the world, it is a limited, instrumental interpretation. The emancipatory potential of critical being is being sapped.   "The full potential of critical being will only be achieved, therefore,

through the integration of its expression in the three domains of knowledge, self and world, and in being lived out at the highest levels of critique in each domain" (p. 8).

Barnett attempts to straddle the Habermas/postmodern divide exemplified in Habermas' quest for a global solution compared to the postmodern emphasis on the local, by arguing that we can be both 'locals' and 'cosmopolitans'. That is, critical thought can be understood as both applicable to particular frameworks and as transcending the particular. Despite the postmodern critique, he suggests, there is a global epistemological village. But Barnett is aware of the problems with Habermas' views (see especially chapter two), particularly that "transcendentalism has no practical lessons for us" (p. 32); it lacks critical edge, since by running philosophy and sociology together, his account is both descriptive and critical, "the critical element being universal and, therefore, outside criticism itself" (p. 32). While exhorting us not to read too much into Habermas, Barnett also warns about reading too little. Barnett is also cautious not to desert local frameworks. "We can both operate with the critical standards of our own local framework of thinking and come at the framework itself from an external vantage point" (p. 33). Popper provides the tools, so Barnett argues, for adopting critique within local frameworks, and Habermas for transcending frameworks. Although "the Habermasian perspective offers us the prospect of leaping out of our immediate critical frameworks,...it is unduly abstract, is overly rule-based and sees individuals only from the neck up" (p. 34).

This is where Barnett and I part company. I am not convinced he can offer any such transcendental framework, any more than Habermas can (and it is Habermas' dual frameworks – cognitive interests and communicative action – he draws upon, albeit with critical intent). On Barnett's view, if we cannot provide such a framework, critical thought is dead. I cannot disagree more. In fact, I think if we posit a timeless, universal yardstick for critical thought we spell out an ultimate death warrant, since we have reified a set of transcendental categories that are immune to both criticism and a cogent explanation of their genesis. How did these universal categories come into being? Rather, we have seen in the previous chapter that a rereading of Foucault in terms of 'dialogue' does much to overcome the sorts of problems raised by Habermas and others about the incommensurability of frameworks. Note Barnett's inconsistency here. He claims he wants to move beyond transcendental critique. Like all critical theorists he is only too willing to tell us that knowledge is socially constructed and historically embedded, but he stops short of pulling the rug from under our feet: he is not prepared to concede that rationality, critique, etc., are equally liable to social construction and historical embeddedness. These notions exist *a priori*, they are transcendental, or at least quasi-transcendental in Habermasian terms when Habermas slips into his Houdini role. I think Barnett hits the nail on the head without quite realizing what he is saying when he writes: "If one seeks security, and if one hankers after a sense of humankind (as distinct from lots of kinds of human being), then one will give the Habermasian approach fair wind. If instead, one recoils at any suggestion of universal rules and wishes to work things out in more local domains, then one will resist the Habermasian framework" (Barnett 1997, p. 31). Precisely. But such a position, as we have seen, does not logically entail acceptance of the fragmentation

vision, which is simply a closet global vision. Barnett's criticism – and it is perfectly valid – applies to the fragmentation vision. This can be demonstrated by his following typical comment: "Postmodernism...refuses to accept that there are *any* secure frameworks or critical standards on which we can agree and from which criticism can get going" (p. 24). This position captures the essence of Baudrillard's, Lyotard's and even Derrida's approach. But it does not apply to a Falzonian reworking of Foucault. Barnett is right: critique cannot take place without normative standards. And I would add that critics of Foucault are right in saying that he was tardy in specifying what his were. Non-normative criticism is not possible. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones, unless they do not object, as Baudrillard and Derrida seem not to, to living in shards of glass. I think the key point concerns the claims we want to make about normative standards. If we want to claim timeless and universal standards for sustaining criticism, rationality, or indeed, any other concept, then I think we are in trouble. What we can say is this: if all parties at the dialogue table are prepared to make their norms explicit we are at least in a position to begin dialogue in a 'thick' sense, in an effort to open up the space for conflicting, possibly even incommensurable perspectives. There will be multiple frames, multiple perspectives, and despite the claims of postmodernists such as Lyotard and Baudrillard, each of these will be informed by a set of norms. Otherwise, how could we sensibly talk about holding a position at all? Even to make a claim – a universal one mind you – that there are no 'grand narratives' is to hold a position which is informed by implicit norms.

Reflection and Critical Reflection

I want to examine in more detail Barnett's notions about reflection and critical reflection. This will slide naturally into discussion about their role in higher education. He argues that reflection is found in all three forms of critical being – critical thought, critical action and critical self-reflection – but comes into its own in the third of these. Critical reflection is a necessary but not sufficient condition of critical being. The contemporary interest in reflection, he suggests, is "an educational response to the reflexivity that later modernity is calling for" (p. 90).

> The immediacy with which events in one part of the globe can have an impact on quite distant parts, the loss of the authority of traditions, and the generation of risk through human knowledge and technologies: these phenomena generate a questioning of fundamental categories of knowing and action. This questioning is radically reflexive: one's own categories and assumptions inevitably fall under the microscope – *one's own microscope.*
> (Barnett 1997, pp. 90-91)

He argues, however, that it is not purely reactive reflexivity; it has a major formative function. "The appearance, therefore, of the idea of reflection in educational discourse can be seen as a means of embodying and furthering this social reflexivity" (p. 91). Barnett's reflection on reflection has two elements. First, it stresses that "reflexivity is a necessary condition of personal survival in late modernity. A higher education designed to further reflexivity becomes, therefore, critical to that project of personal survival" (p. 91). Second, it is a reflexivity that "speaks to the external world. It provides society with resources for coping with a world characterized by radical uncertainty and, thereby, for social survival" (p. 91).

Drawing on Giddens (1990), Barnett develops an interesting argument to explain the development of reflexivity in modernity. He notes contemporary fragmentation, which is not just epistemological, but also cultural, economic and

corporate (all of which are linked). The result of this fragmentation is a "double uncertainty", theoretical and practical. "We are uncertain of the character of the change we see, both in describing and accounting for it, and in experiencing it and determining the options in front of us" (p. 38). This double uncertainty, argues Barnett, has important implications for higher education, particularly one in which critical thought is central. There are three responses to this change-generated uncertainty. The first response, argues Barnett, is sociological: ontological uncertainty leads to the 'reflective practitioner'. The second, is to seek stability in notions such as transferable skills. The third, involves problem-solving curricular strategies. He notes that all three are resistant to critique. I want to expand upon the first. Barnett argues that uncertainty is written into modern society, not just culturally, economically and intellectually, but ontologically.

> An important manifestation of this ontological uncertainty is that of reflexivity which, as Giddens (1990) has observed, is a defining characteristic of late modernity. 'The reflective practitioner' may have the ring of a worthwhile set of educational and professional aims about it: this is how things *ought* to be. But on Giddens' analysis, this is a brute description of late modern society. It is how we are – how educated professional people are, at any rate. And this is to be understood not as a particularly praiseworthy feature of professionalism as such, but as a natural response to the predicaments that modern society faces us with. Schön (1983) thinks that he is describing how the skilled professional functions; in fact, he is telling us about the character of modern society as such. We are all reflective practitioners now. Critical thought, as reflective practice, is a constitutive element of the working life of the highly educated. In taking on, therefore, the idea of 'the reflective practitioner', all higher education is doing is reflecting back to society both its embedded and its contemporary idea of what it is to be a fully participant member of this society. ...In that sense, the idea of the reflective practitioner may be 'reflective', but it is thoroughly uncritical.
> (Barnett 1997, pp. 38-39)

According to Barnett, reflexivity arises as a constituent of our age through two features. First, a psychological response. We live in a world of change where uncertainty is generated. Reflexivity is a coping strategy. Second, a sociological

explanation where "reflexivity supplies a general resource for responding to change" (p. 42). Thus, it provides a means of generating knowledge, including self-knowledge. "Reflexivity then, is both an epistemological concept (containing a theory of knowing) and an ontological concept (to be a person in modernity is to take on powers of self-reflection)" (p. 43). I think this a useful distinction for analytic purposes, but it should not blind us to the fact that because a 'theory of knowing' requires the active participation of an ontological subject, in practice the epistemology/ontology boundaries blur.

This analysis provides justification for Barnett's claim that "...a full account of critical thought in a mass higher education system has to be placed in the context of late modernity itself. Critical thought has to be central to higher education because critical thought, in certain senses, has to be central to the kind of society we have to live in" (p. 43).

> Reflexivity is necessary if we are to gain critical control over our world and critical thought is a necessary element of reflexivity. Through such critical self-reflection, we become more fully human: we realize the personal potential for reflexivity that lies in language. And through critical self-reflection, we come to a fuller insight into our knowledge frameworks and their ideological underpinnings, which we might otherwise take for granted.
> (Barnett 1997, p. 45)

And later: "To adapt effectively to – and even to bring about – a world of unknowable change requires self-referential capacities of a high order" (p. 91). I shall return to these issues in chapter eight.

But Barnett believes that opportunities for critical thought are narrowing because of the changing structures and communicative processes that characterize the modern university. As an initial generalization he argues that,

...we are seeing in the university the supplanting of a hermeneutic mode of communication by an instrumental mode of communication. These changing processes are supported by the shift towards the university as an organization...

In a situation in which departments feel themselves in competition for scarce resources within universities, and in which they also compete across universities, 'the other party' becomes less a partner in an open conversation than a rival attempting to seize the main chance.
(Barnett 1997, p. 55)

Barnett argues that there are three conditions necessary for the critical life. First, critical reason calls for a framework. "A challenge for our pedagogies in higher education...is that of imparting frameworks to students that enable them to view their studies in a genuinely critical way. A genuinely higher education has to be an education of multiple frames" (p. 22). This is not simply multidisciplinarity. "It is to understand that slice of the world in which the student is interested from different points of view, and to understand that they may be incommensurable" (pp. 167-168). Secondly, critical reason calls for a critical social space which has to be "sustained collaboratively, and cannot be secured in the presence of power" (p. 22). Finally, critical reason calls for a disposition on the part of the individual to be critical. "Higher education...cannot be seen as purely cognitive, but has to be seen as experiential: the development of critical reason calls for whole persons" (p. 22).

Barnett goes to some length to explain precisely what he means by self-reflection and critical self-reflection. "The term 'critical' indicates that the self-reflection is accompanied by a range of alternatives" (p. 94).

If the student's self is being pulled in new ways, operationally in the world and epistemologically through a wider range of knowing activities, self-reflection becomes not just a curious effete add-on, marginal to the main enterprise. It becomes a crucial component in stabilizing the educational, personal and cognitive disturbances that the student faces. Self-reflection takes on a central role in an education for the modern age.
(Barnett 1997, p. 95)

He distinguishes between eight forms of self-reflection, noting there is no abstract self on which to reflect:

1. *Self-reflection on the student's own disciplinary competence*

   Self-reflection "is a means of forming a disciplinary person who comes to see the world through a particular set of cognitive spectacles" (p. 96).

2. *Educational reflection*

   This is captured in the liberal education notion of tolerance of perspective, etc. Reason is valued, but it is not the only value.

3. *Critical reflection*

   This is captured in concepts like 'transformation', 'emancipation', 'liberation'. Critical Theory provides the theoretical underpinning. Barnett observes that this is painful for students and educators must address students' self-concept if this idea of self-reflection is to take off (compare the above discussions of Mezirow and Brookfield, for instance).

4. *Reflection as metacompetence*

   This is a competence, skills approach which is steered by an instrumental agenda. "In a sense, this role amounts to abandonment of reflection" (p. 97).

5. *The reflective practitioner*

   Self-reflection is seen as residing in the concrete practices of professional life. Barnett emphasizes the double aspect: evaluation and execution, which appear indistinguishable, but are formally separable. "To go beyond Schon, this is reflection-*for*-action" (p. 98).

6. *Reflection as self-realization*

This is individualistic in character. Barnett notes its affinities with critical reflection (3) and the reflective practitioner (5) and adds that action research and qualitative research in the social sciences sometimes take on this form.

7. *Reflection as social formation*

"Here it is recognized that the reflective self alone cannot bring about self-realization but has to draw on others" (p. 98). Barnett suggests clear links with disciplinary reflection (1), since disciplines are local communities with their own rules. But to come into its own this reflection would anchor in communication.

8. *Societal reflection*

This, Barnett suggests, is recent. Its starting point is that the world is susceptible to purposive interventions. "What is at issue here is the development of strategic thinking oriented to a class of identified problems" (p. 99). He argues that though specific and transferable skills are usually presented as dichotomous, they belong together in this instance. "They are both redolent of an attempt to drive higher education towards reflective capacities oriented towards control in and on the world. A pragmatic epistemology is at work. The test of truth here is: does it work?" (p. 99).

Note that Barnett slides between the terms 'reflection' and 'self-reflection'. He maps these eight forms of reflection onto his three domains.

Table 3.5: Eight Forms of Reflection in the Three Domains of Critical Being

Knowledge	*Self*	*World*
1. Disciplinary	2. Educational	4. Metacompetence
	3. Critical reflection	5.Reflective practitioner
	6. Self-realization	7. Social formation
		8. Societal reflection

Barnett's purpose in analyzing reflection in this way is to demonstrate that "higher education – in taking on self-reflection as a key theme – has taken on a large idea but is giving it short shrift. Significant connotations of the term are underplayed or even neglected" (p. 100). This is because the eight forms do not "find equal favour" in higher education (p. 99). The dominant modes of reflection are those in the world. Self-reflection on the student's more personal self is largely neglected. "Instrumental forms of self-reflection...do not just marginalize the more personal forms, oriented towards the individual's own hopes and sense of self. They bring about a restructuring of the student's self" (p. 100). Further, he argues, the levels of self-reflection being encouraged engender relatively low *levels* of criticality. For Barnett, it is the concept of the student as person...that supplies the conceptual and practical glue in a higher education for critical being" (p. 104). This is very similar to the position I have outlined above in connection with social work education (compare Tsang 1998). I shall repeat my model from figure 3.1 and use bold type to map onto it Barnett's three domains.

Figure 3.3:
Some Key Theory/Practice Variables in Social Work Education

PRAXIS

(**Knowledge**) Theory   Practice (**World**)

Critical reflection
SELF (**Self**)

Personal knowledge   *Ideology & Values*
(theories, concepts,
assumptions)
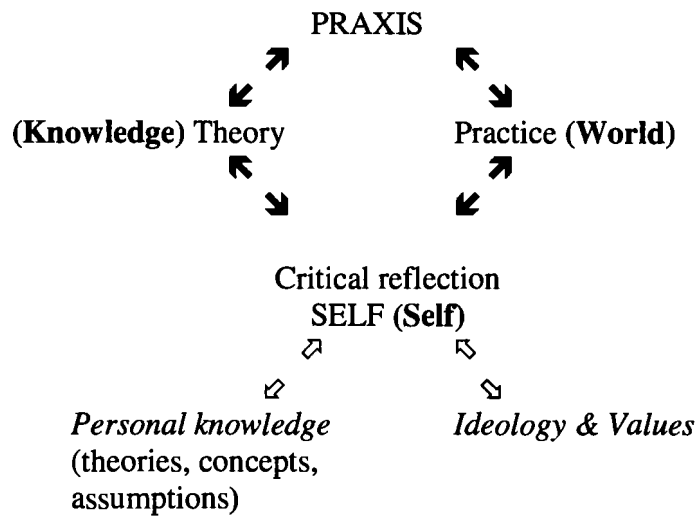
Barnett argues that a conception of higher education "which seeks to integrate the three domains of critical thought, runs counter to the three dominant contemporary models of higher education" (p. 105): the academic model which over-emphasizes critical thinking towards formalized knowledge (CT1); the competence model "so focused on effective performance in the world (CT3) that it does not warrant the title critical action" (p. 105); and the reflective practice model which "seeks to unite action and self-reflection (CT2), but often downplays formalized knowledge, surrendering itself to an over-localized and operational view of professional action" (p. 105). "Students as persons don't get a look in on any of these accounts" (p. 105). In the approach I have argued for the student as person is pivotal. It is only through the student as person that knowledge and the world are distilled. Recall Aldous Huxley's comment which opened chapter two:

> Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and the amount of the knowing.
> (Aldous Huxley 1945, p. vii)

This links with Barnett's earlier analysis of modernity. Drawing on Giddens (1991) again, he argues that,

> ...paradoxically, late modernity poses problems not essentially of knowledge, since the world is unknowable both substantively and in terms of the tests of validity by which we come to know the world. Instead, amidst discursive challenge and even discursive contradiction, late modernity poses problems of *being* and of the constitution of the self.
> (Barnett 1997, p. 106)

In chapter two I reflected on the notion of 'turns', tracing the axle from the 'metaphysical turn' of the ancient Greeks, to the 'epistemological turn' of the rise of modern philosophy, to the 'linguistic turn' at the beginning of the century, to the 'interpretive turn' in the latter half of the present century, to the 'postmodern turn' of the last three decades, and most recently, the 'dialogic turn'. Perhaps the wheel has turned full circle and we are entering the metaphysical spokes of our Greek forbears where questions of being and self predominate once again. Metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell will smile through three centuries as he slowly turns his "Ode to a Grecian Urn".

Teaching and Learning

How can higher education face such a challenge? Barnett's answer is revealing.

> The simplicity, therefore, of getting students embarked on the road to a critical consciousness lies in academics avoiding concepts of teaching and learning as such, and setting aside the thought that there are institutionalized roles and relationships captured by conventional terms, such as teacher and student, which do justice to higher education. To put it another way, rather than hypothesizing a conceptual distinction between research and teaching (which then have to be brought together in some way), teaching may be seen as an insertion into the processes of research and not into its outcomes. What is required is not that students become masters of bodies of thought, but that they are enabled to begin to experience the space and challenge of open, critical inquiry (in all its personal and interpersonal aspects).

> What is being suggested here is the abandonment of teaching as such...

An uncertain world requires an uncertain education.
(Barnett 1997, p. 110)

When Barnett writes in this vein he is moving very close to a poststructural position like the Falzonian reworking of Foucault. In fact, in many respects his epistemology is perspectival. He endorses multiple discourses, multiple frames. As such, he is not very far from the position taken in this thesis. Indeed, Barnett argues that "the key challenge of modern professionalism is...trying to make sense of disparate discourses... It may be that, on occasions, the discourses collide such that one cannot act under them coherently. ...The challenge, then, that faces the modern professional is the management of incoherence" (p. 141). The major difference is that Barnett is unwilling to surrender entirely foundational notions, even if these foundations consist solely of rational critique. He cannot – unashamedly it must be said – escape from foundational notions of emancipation, truth and the whole kit and caboodle of rationality cargo.

Next, I want to discuss briefly Barnett's notion of 'the learning society'. This assumes significance in the light of my first chapter discussion of lifelong learning, particularly as it relates to the West Report (1998). Barnett (1997, p. 158) argues that "a learning society is necessarily a critical society. It is a society that has developed capacities for reflexivity at the societal level." For him, the 'learning society' is a sociological category in the sense that certain conditions need to be met if a learning society can come into being. "Society has to have available to it a range of perspectives such that its dominant perspectives or ideologies can be placed and kept under critical surveillance" (p. 159). Again, restricting his lens to the fragmentation vision of postmodernism, he argues that if the perspectives are

incommensurable, they cannot engage with each other, and therefore there can be no societal learning. "A learning society, is therefore, necessarily a critical society. It is a society in which alternative frames of knowing and acting are made available and in which those discourses come – often uncomfortably – into collision with one another" (p. 160). This is entirely compatible with the framework of 'dialogue' and 'opening up the space' that I outlined in the previous chapter. In fact, it is very similar to Foucault's arguments about excavating 'subjugated knowledges'. Barnett distinguishes between the learning society as a sociological concept and a philosophical concept. "Sociologically, it suggests conditions for the discursive structure of society and its maintenance" (p. 160). Philosophically, he defines it as a normative concept. "It offers us a set of concepts around society – learning, openness, communication and progress – which together supply a normative standard against which societies can be evaluated" (p. 160). And later: "Critique is evaluative as well as liberating. It says that this framework is not just an alternative to that but that it is *better*. ... But a sense of there being better alternative – and not just different – frameworks is built into the notion of critique. We can improve on this partiality; the option is not just that of adopting yet another form of partiality" (p. 161). It is on this second point that I take issue with Barnett. It is not a question of positing norms. I happen at this very point in time to agree with his norms (well, maybe not 'progress'). Rather, it is a question of the *status* we attribute to these norms. Barnett implies that they are universal, timeless, and hence beyond critique. It also leaves him unable to explain how they emerged, historically. It is a conception anchored in Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' where norms are posited as *a priori*. My norms are provisional, open to change,

open to critique. They may stand the test of time. They may not. We cannot pre-empt.

Interestingly, Barnett mentions Marx's version of better: "a function of serving a wider and less partial set of class interests" (p. 161). But despite implying that this is no longer enough – there are other interests in late modernity not founded on class – he offers no guidelines or criteria for making this massive normative decision.

Finally, I want to examine Barnett's notion of 'critical space'. Barnett emphasizes the importance of critical *energy*, the basis, the fuel for criticality. "For all their talk – old and new – about critical thinking, we hear precious little talk about energy, excitement and commitment. Indeed, we hear little about the emotional aspects of learning" (p. 172). Barnett argues for the need for critical space – epistemological, personal and practical – for fostering critical reason, critical self-reflection and critical action. But it must be an active space, not simply permissive. This, he concedes, is an enormous task, noting the difficulties most educators have in providing epistemological space "in which students can *risk* developing and proffering their own thinking" (p. 173).

Barnett argues that critical perspectives need critical frameworks. "The framework is not purely cognitive; it is not even mainly cognitive. It is invested with values, emotion, commitment, and professional and social identity" (p. 174). But frameworks must be susceptible to challenge. "A higher education, therefore, will promote uncertainty: it will render questionable every aspect of a student's being.

... Putting this differently, a higher education will enable students to live as postmoderns. The postmodern world, in its refusal of absolute principles and categories, does not lie out there to be experienced but is a matter of student's developing experience" (p. 174). The uncertainty for Barnett is not just an epistemological one; it is also ontological, personal, and practical.

> In a world, in an epistemological, ontological and practical world in which there are no enduring categories of being and knowing, one can no longer act with assuredness. The critical dialogue, whether internal or intersubjective, can go on for ever. The basis for an assured sense of oneself, of one's ideas or of one's action can never be reached. Or so it might seem.
> (Barnett 1997, p. 175)

At times like these I find reading Barnett's highly stimulating work like volunteering to be a wind gauge during a cyclone. His conceptual framework is a strange hybrid: freighted with Critical Theory he wants Habermas to ride in a first class seat, but he also wants the postmodernists to ride on the train, sitting on Habermas' lap.

Critical Theory Reflective Practice and Social Work

Given social work's 'abiding internal dialectic' between personal and social change there have been, as noted above, a number of approaches derived from critical theory and its variants. Few of these, however, have addressed explicitly the issue of reflective practice. I shall reserve discussion in this section to a few salient examples. Gould (1996a), in his introduction to his and Taylor's edited collection, *Reflective Learning for Social Work*, refers to the "functionalist argument that the problems of social work education are a product of organizational expansion and transformations of social work bureaucracies" (Gould 1996a, p. 4). Within British social work these tensions have produced two effects. First, a concerted attempt by

employers to gain control over qualifying social work education; second, and related, the ascendancy of competency-based approaches to learning. The effect in British social work education in the 1990s has been a "downgrading of critical analysis as an educational objective and a short-term view of practice to suit the supposed labour force requirements of agencies" (Gould 1996a, p. 5). While acknowledging the problems with Schön's model of reflective practice, especially its individualistic nature, he suggests that Schön's model is not set in concrete, the theory itself has to be reflexive and transformed by the processes of educators. He sees the present volume as part of this process. "The creation of personal knowledge is a very social process. This inevitably brings into the conceptual frame issues of power relationships, both in the professional setting and the classroom. A potent aspect of those power relationships is gender" (p. 5). It is significant to note how Gould has buttressed his original Schönian commitment with critical intent.

Writing in a Canadian context, Moffatt (1996) offers both a conceptual framework and description of his experience of teaching social work practice as a reflective process to final year undergraduates. His is an interesting theoretical synthesis: feminist writing on caring, social work literature on interpretive methods and Bordieu's work on the concept of social fields, in order to characterize the position of social work practitioners within bureaucratic welfare institutions. At times Moffatt seems to don a poststructural gown. "There is a risk that the social work student will impose his/her knowledge as a type of master narrative which subjugates the story of the client and undervalues the knowledge from which the client draws to understand his/her circumstances" (p. 53). Both written and oral

student evaluations of his course were in favour of learning social work practice as a reflective process. It allowed them to draw from knowledge they thought of as 'soft' knowledge in the past. Moffatt argues that "teaching which focuses on reflection in practice provides the students with a sense of agency" (p. 59).

Gould (1996b) uses an interesting combination of action research, repertory grid technique and the use of art in social work education. He suggests that

> ...the concept of 'imaginative thought' provides an important – if still contested and evolving – approach to understanding the epistemology of practice. If this is so then a key role for educators is to help student practitioners to articulate and review the images that underpin their assumptive world. The premise which underlies this argument is that linguistic and pictorial images are media through which our individual and collective senses of reality are constructed. (Gould 1996b, p. 64)

Note the similarity in aim with Mezirow, Brookfield and Boud's efforts to identify and challenge assumptions. Despite recognizing the potential for studying the role of imagery in practitioner knowledge, Gould warns of the "danger of reflective learning becoming a populist bandwagon which legitimates the abandonment of intellectual rigour. We may be critical of the recipe books for practice but there is a corresponding danger of descending into the relativist quagmire... rather than rejecting the sphere of the intellect, the reflective paradigm actually requires an engagement with some of the particularly difficult debates within social theory" (Gould 1996b, p. 74). Though rejecting relativism – as I do myself – Gould hints at an approach which is at least compatible with the one advocated in this thesis. "One approach then to conceptualizing the contribution of theory to practice is to follow this path of seeing formal texts as a discursive repertoire to be deconstructed by students alongside more personal, experientially derived images of practice" (p. 75). Following Usher and Bryant (1989), Gould suggests that "formal knowledge

is not ontologically privileged over personal knowledge gained through personal reflection and introspection" (p. 75). Each make distinct contributions without either being 'foundational'.

I have referred already to Henkel's (1995) work in the previous chapter. She contextualizes her analysis in the wider corporate world of rapid change. Henkel explores two major theories of knowledge: pragmatism from the North American philosophical tradition, and hermeneutics from the continental European tradition, suggesting they have much in common, particularly in their challenge of the Cartesian paradigm and its empiricist offshoots. Note that Henkel draws the boundary lines at a different point from me. She includes Habermas under the hermeneutic/pragmatism banner, though duly noting that Habermas, while springing from this tradition, was able to take account of the criticisms (e.g. failure to take account of the social and political forces that impede understanding) directed against Gadamer in formulating his own theory. She also emphasizes the importance of the moral and practical dimensions of knowledge in addition to the theoretical. She uses the term 'dialogue' – "the development of knowledge is a matter of continuing dialogue between and within communities. But more than that, the concept of knowledge as action is embedded in it. The idea of communicative action means that it is not necessary to set action and communication against one another" (p. 78) – but she does so in a Habermasian way. As such, she is open to previous criticisms.

Critical Theory Reflective Practice and Nursing

James and Clarke (1994) use Habermas' cognitive interests, providing examples of what would constitute a nursing activity within each interest. They use van Manen's (1977) corresponding schema of three domains of reflection, and add James' (1992) fourth domain to come up with a model of reflection involving four dimensions: technical; practical; moral-ethical; and personal. James' fourth dimension also serves the cognitive interest of emancipation and liberation. The distinction between the third and fourth domains is that the moral-ethical considers the social, political and economic constraints of practice; the personal has an individual focus (professional development). "Nurses who are reflective practitioners and, perhaps more importantly, genuinely critical of their own practice would operate at all four levels" (p. 86). They leave open the question of the relationship between domains, the existence of a hierarchy and the question of developmental sequence. They critically review the reasons for the appeal of reflective practice and draw out an interesting implication for nurse educators: "If reflective practice has the acclaimed and important benefits for patient/client care, nurse students could be asked to leave a nursing course by virtue of their inability to reflect" (p. 88). Noting the advent of Project 2000 courses where colleges of nursing have undertaken to produce reflective practitioners, they argue that recommended teaching strategies such as reflective journals and group reflect sessions, while commendable for learning, have "no evidence to suggest that these strategies develop and promote reflective skills amongst the students" (p. 88). They also remark that "nurse educators at present have no means by which they can measure reflection or indeed assess that reflection has taken or is taking place" (p. 89).

Brookfield (1993a) has also written in the area of nursing education. He particularly notes the political dangers of reflective practice, particularly if one admits lack of control over the messy variables of nursing practice. He also remarks that the "critical process is slow and incremental rather than sudden and apocalyptic" (p. 203).

Critical Theory Reflection and Reflective Practice: a Summary

While not as prevalent as hermeneutic approaches, critical theory reflective practice is on the march, albeit in *largo* tempo. The major advance of such approaches is that they locate the 'reflective practitioner' in a socio-political, historical and cultural context. This potentially thwarts hijacking reflection for narrow, technicist and instrumental ends. The major problem, I have argued, with these approaches is their commitment to modernist discourse, particularly to totalizing, essentialist and teleological conceptions, conceptions anchored in a Western male Enlightenment model. Some of the approaches referred to above already wriggle uncomfortably in the noose of critical theory and show signs of sloughing their critical skins. They may not be prepared to go naked like Baudrillard, but donning the loose-flowing robes of poststructuralism might be a viable option. It is to these garments I now turn.

2.2.3 Poststructural Reflection and Reflective Practice

I want to draw together much of the discussion by examining Foucault's notion of 'ethico-critical reflection'. I will then look briefly at the very limited extent to which reflective practice in social work has been harnessed to poststructuralism.

Foucault's Ethico-Critical Reflection

Implied in all the discussion henceforth re critical reflection is the role of 'self'.
One cannot discuss reflection, critical reflection, self-reflection and so on without
some notion of a 'self' or 'subject' who is the conduit for these processes, which, as
we have already discovered, are not simply cognitive processes. All the major
writers discussed so far have a relatively clear sense of the type of subject they
want to create and critical reflection is seen to be a central ingredient in the creation
of this subject. For Foucault this is vital. I have already noted Foucault's disdain
for the 'hermeneutic confessional' as a modern form of power whose norms are to
be questioned and if necessary, resisted. This is because underlying this notion is
the foundational, essentialist subject, the aim of such practice being to discover our
'true selves'. For Foucault, the aim "is not to discover what we are, but to refuse
what we are" (Foucault 1983, p. 216). We require self-creation. But, "what kind of
specifically philosophical reflection or critical activity will assist or promote this
process of cultural self-creation?" (Falzon 1998, p. 67).

Clearly, it cannot be anchored in a foundational metaphysics, "the kind of
modernist philosophical reflection which turns to the self, to a foundational subject,
in order to formulate ultimate principles for thought and action" (Falzon 1998, p.
67). I have spoken *ad nauseum* of the dangers of this. The alternative is
intrinsically ethical because it is motivated by 'opening up the space for the other'.
But it is an ethical attitude of openness taken up in reflective form (Falzon 1998).
"We reflect on ourselves in order to open a space for the other and thereby to assist
resistance to the prevailing forms of social organization" (Falzon 1998, p. 68). This

requires "recognition of our finitude to become explicit; and in its extended form this becomes the apprehension that the forms and principles we live by have emerged historically, out of a whole series of encounters with the other, out of a long process of dialogue" (pp. 68-69). Initially, Foucault calls his form of reflection 'genealogy' (Foucault 1984a); later, the 'historical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault 1984b). It is essentially a historical form of reflection, one in which the critical question is: "in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression" (Foucault 1984b, p. 45). Such an exercise reveals the contingency of our existing forms of life and social practices. While this might appear unsettling, disturbing even, for those hankering after certainty and security, it also acts as a funnel of possibilities, potentially opening up the space for the other in a quest for change, for re-creation. There is a dual process at work here. Re-creation at both an individual and cultural level.

Falzon (1998, p. 70) points out that "Foucault's comments on the nature of critical reflection, understood as a historical interrogation of the present, are scattered throughout his writings, but it is only in his late works, especially in the essay 'What is Enlightenment?', that he makes explicit the ethical spirit that informs his critical activity." Falzon's reworking of Foucault through the concept of 'dialogue' embraces the notion of 'ethico-critical' reflection. It is ethical because its primary motivating force is opening up the space for other. It is critical because it is reflection mobilized in the task of excavating subjugated knowledges, for re-

creating both self and culture. Note that this critical task is not the same as the

critical theory task motivated by its quest to overcome 'domination' which prevents

us from realizing an idealized form of life which operates according to universal

norms. In Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection all universals and norms are

problematized, historically interrogated.

> This ethical and critical position does not imply that we have to reject all forms
> of order, unity or community, as oppressive, which would be the case for a
> postmodernism of fragmentation. On the dialogical view there may not be one
> ideal, transcendentally grounded form of life, but there are still forms of social
> order and unity. ... Given this dialogical account, the ethical and critical task
> is not to avoid all principles and all forms of social order but rather to avoid the
> absolutization of particular forms of order, the establishment of forms of social
> and political closure.
> (Falzon 1998, pp. 95-96)

Poststructural Reflective Practice and Social Work

Dean and Fenby (1989) provide an interesting analysis of social work action as a

reflection of differing epistemologies. They draw on Schaefer's term of 'fiction'

which basically corresponds to my term of 'paradigm' to argue that throughout its

history social work practice has been guided by a number of fictions. They remark

that Schaefer "indicated that when fictions crystallized into unchangeable

assertions about the reality of the world they became myths" (p. 47). These they

describe as the *empiricist* fiction, the *existential* fiction, *critical theory* and

deconstruction. Broadly, these correspond to my four paradigms. They suggest

that the two most recent fictions – critical theory and deconstruction – are yet to

make their full impact on social work, but offer considerable potential. Critical

theory they argue has a natural affinity to social work because of its emphasis on

the dialectic of personal and social change. And deconstruction, likewise, has

similar affinities due to social work commitment to helping the oppressed and

celebrating difference. Ten years later how has deconstruction fared in social work education?

Rossiter (1996) presents a theoretical analysis of social work and social work education based on feminist and poststructural critiques, including Haraway on 'situated knowledges' and Foucault on the knowledge/power nexus. She remarks that "postmodernism has brought about a revision of epistemology that social work cannot escape. ... Our background assumptions, the cultural paradigms in which our vision is shaped are active in the production of knowledge" (p. 142). The result of all this, she suggests, is

> ...a crisis for social work. Historically, social work allied itself with positivism in a desperate search for credibility in relation to the elite knowledges of psychiatry and psychology. ... Now, it is impossible to escape postmodernism's discovery that our knowledge is deeply dependent on our social location, on the places from which we learned to see. Further, some of those locations are invested with the power to define the world in terms favourable to maintaining existing power relations. Under this condition, social work can no longer claim 'a knowledge base', but must ask instead how, by whom, and for whom social work knowledge constructs the world.
> (Rossiter 1996, pp. 142-143)

She also contextualizes this 'epistemological revolution' within the massive shifts in global power and notes the tightening fiscal environment for health, education and welfare and social work's increasing submission to the corporate agenda. Closer scrutiny of Rossiter's paper indicates some key similarities with the notion of dialogue. She draws on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the 'contact zone', the 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power' (Rossiter 1996, p. 145, quoting Pratt).

> We know we need to speak to each other not from altruism but out of the need for self-completion, because we are missing something which is terrible to miss

if whole classes of people are shut out of our consciousness because asymmetrical power makes it possible to make people up as extensions of ourselves. When we are unable to recognize difference, we lose the possibility of being recognized ourselves.
(Rossiter 1996, p. 145)

Given this context she says she finds it difficult to speak about goals for social

work education:

...the goal for my classes is that we learn to recognize ourselves as people created by history who have the opportunity and responsibility to create the future. And that action towards that goal consists in having important conversations in which questions and difference are privileged over answers and similarity.
(Rossiter 1996, pp. 145-146)

This is 'dialogue' par excellence in the form for which I have been arguing. And

finally she summarizes her vision for social work:

I believe we are in a transition from social work as an apologetic, hierarchical state function, armed with techniques garnered from theories rife with denied power to a new possibility, yet not clear, but tinged with global citizenship, with historical accountability, with self-reflexiveness and dialogue.
(Rossiter 1996, pp. 149-150)

Taylor (1996), in the final chapter of *Reflective Learning for Social Work*,

highlights key themes from the book and explicitly addresses the issue of

postmodernity in social work and social work education. He remarks how

casework traditionally played a unifying role in both social work and social work

education, but that "in postmodern society social work does not have a core, or an

underlying knowledge base and legitimacy" (p. 156). In an interesting sociological

argument he suggests that lack of such unity and certainty drives the "new

discourse of management which upholds monitoring, evaluation and assessment as

central mechanisms of control" (p. 157). This links back to the chapter one

discussion of the rabid quest for 'quality'. And similar to Allan Luke's argument in

chapter one he suggests that given the corporate agenda we must learn to be practical and marshal this agenda to serve our own purposes. "In a world of uncertainty and rapid change, reflective learning offers the potential for learning how to learn and how to practise in a self-determined way in situations where the unknown and unpredictable are being faced. Reflective learning fits with the market requirement for self-appraisal and lifelong learning" (p. 159).

I have already drawn on the work of Katz (1995), who presents a succinct summary of the commonalities of the diverse theories of 'modernism' and the postmodern critique in terms of the three doctrines of totalization, teleology and essentialism. Similarly, I have already discussed Solas' (1994) conception of poststructural social work education, though critically reflective practice is not an issue which he addresses specifically. I want to conclude this chapter by weaving together the different strands of argument and summarizing the theoretical position taken in this thesis. I shall do this by summarizing the argument under Hobson's (1992) adaptation of Moore's (1974) five major components of educational paradigms: *aim* of education; view of *knowledge*; the nature of the *person*; views on *teaching* and *learning*; and *social* and *political* context of education. Four other key issues will be subsumed within this framework: the *purpose* of social work, within the *aim* of education; *theory/practice* views, largely within *knowledge* and *person*; *critical reflection* and *reflective practice* fit within the theory/practice discussion as well as *teaching* and *learning*; the notion of '*quality*' mainly within *teaching* and *learning* and *social* and *political* context. The five components are, however, merely a conceptual cupboard for tidying an intricate skein. Hence, discussion will bulge across boundaries.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A SUMMARY

3.1 Aim of Social Work Education

One cannot decide what the aim of social work education is until one is clear about the purposes of social work. Throughout its history in Australia, Great Britain and the United States, there has been vast disagreement about the purposes of social work and hence, social work education. The contested positions can be crudely characterized in terms of social work's 'abiding internal dialectic' between personal and social change. My personal theoretical and ideological position is:

> That social work in Australia at this time *should* be about assisting those most disadvantaged, whether through gender, race, class, disability, sexual preference, or any other 'structural' or personal consideration, to access a greater share of resources, both material and psychological, to enable them to live, as far as possible, given a world of limited resources and competing interests, a life which *they* find personally satisfying.

This is a *prescriptive* statement about what I think the purpose of social work *should* be. Some of the confusion about contested positions has been engendered by couching *prescriptive* statements in *descriptive* language.

Although this is my personal view about the purposes of social work my commitment to difference, particularly ideological difference as a fundamental human right, does not enable me to colonize students and impose this definition on them (as if one could!). (This is despite the exhortations of the AASW.) Certainly, I believe that students should be made aware of issues relating to structural disadvantage, but my major *prescriptive* statement for social work education relates to the distinction between means and ends. Ends are linked to purposes, in this case, the purpose(s) of social work. Means are the methods that social workers use

to achieve their stated purposes. Social workers *should* be able to specify their purposes (whatever these might be at the time) and the means for attaining them. They should also be able to defend both notions. This leads to an obvious corollary for social work education: the major task of the social work educator should be to facilitate students articulating their purposes, their means for attaining them and being able to justify both purposes and means. This can be expressed in terms of theory and practice or knowledge and action. In other words, the key task of the social work educator should be to facilitate students grappling with theory/practice relationships. This explains the aim of this thesis: to explore how we might 'best' teach or facilitate this process.

Once we speak of theory/practice we are inevitably immersed in issues relating to knowledge.

3.2   View of Knowledge

I conceive knowledge acquisition and development to be an active enterprise, an historically-grounded social practice mediated by language and imbued with power relations. I reject a foundationalist epistemology which posits the existence of secure foundations for knowledge and an enduring and essential human nature (the foundational subject) whose rationality is the conduit for guaranteeing 'knowledge security'. Specifically, I reject three fundamental tenets of modernist theories: totalization, teleology and essentialism, eschewing attempts to explain the *whole* human condition or the condition of whole societies, conceptualized as having an *essence* or true nature, as heading towards some *ultimate utopian goal.* I see 'truth' and 'human nature' as bound by culture, time and space. I also reject the relativist

position adopted by postmodernists subscribing to a fragmentation vision, which I argue is simply a form of closet foundational, totalizing metaphysics. The key difference is that an overarching totalization is replaced by a plurality of such world views. Rather, I posit a perspectival or relational form of epistemology in which there are numerous competing perspectives, numerous standpoints, for organizing and intepreting the world. Each perspective has its set of norms, which may or may not overlap with others. We encounter other perspectives and as we do so we may be transformed by them. This constitutes an "ongoing dialogical combat of interpretations, of competing ways of interpreting and organizing one another. Rather than there being no truth, for this position there are many truths, in competition with one another" (Falzon 1998, p. 95). Each perspective is socially-constructed and historically-embedded and therefore open to change. This perspectival stance does not surrender foundations, but it attributes an anti-essentialist, provisional, indeterminate status to them. It is a foundation grounded in difference. Such a foundation "takes as its starting and end points 'the responsibility to historicize, to examine each deployment of essence, each appeal to experience, each claim to identity in the complicated contextual frame in which it is made'" (Luke 1992, p. 48 citing Dianne Fuss). Closure is rejected at all levels: theoretical, social and political. There is no *a priori* bedrock. Rather, there are constantly moving tectonic plates which sometimes collide to produce intellectual earthquakes. But mostly, there is gentle jostling with the wax and wane of the tides. Because the ground that moves beneath our feet is composed of difference, the onus is on all of us to come clean with our norms and our positions in order to facilitate dialogue, to open up the space for the other. Dialogue has two senses, a 'thin' sense and a 'thick' sense. Dialogue in the thin sense is not a prescriptive,

normative notion. "It involves a reciprocity, a two-way, back and forth movement or interplay between ourselves and the world" (Falzon 1998, p. 5). In other words, it is descriptive of social 'reality' as I see it filtered through my conceptual lenses. I acknowledge that this position itself is a product of a particular time and place and is liable to change under different circumstances. Dialogue in the thick sense is a prescriptive notion used to refer to social work education. I argue that if we are serious about opening up the space for other we need to come clean with our positions. Note that the thick sense is not logically necessary for dialogue to occur. Dialogue will still occur in a thin sense because we as humans are located in a physical and social environment. This still holds even if the dialogue consists in ignoring another person.

Praxis, which combines action and reflection in a continual feedback motion, is vital to these dynamic theory/practice relationships, since theory and practice are not really two separate entities. But there are different types of theories and different types of practice which are in a dialectical relationship with each other. The different types of practice are equally entangled in the question of the nature and purposes of social work. In social work, theory that is grounded in 'personal knowledge' and 'practice wisdoms' plays a significant role. The social worker is an active agent in any theory/practice link which is to be tackled as a form of *praxis*. This implies that one of the central tasks of the social work educator is to facilitate student awareness of 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions) and of ideological and value orientation. Reflection plays a key role in both these educational tasks and so does the moral dimension of praxis.

I adopt Falzon's interpretation of Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection. For Foucault, critical reflection is important to challenge, resist and question attachment to self-created norms stemming from modern forms of power inherent in 'expert' knowledge from the human sciences, an attachment that has been instrumental in engaging us as active participants in our own subordination. The ethical dimension consists in us utilizing critical reflection for the purpose of opening up the space for the other, of finding ways to make the existing dialogue more roomy.

Now I can sharpen my conception of the aim of social work education. The key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with theory/practice links. This entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. The latter reflection involves a necessarily ethical perspective. This is a *prescriptive* statement about how I think social work education *should* occur. Should social work education be conducted along these lines at least three purposes will be served. First, it will assist students in coming clean with their perspectives. Second, it will assist them in articulating the purposes of social work, their means for attaining them and their justification for purposes and means. Third, it will engage them in the ethico-critical process of dialogue.

3.3   Nature of the Person

'The self' plays a central role in critical reflection in particular and knowledge production in general. In an important sense, one cannot separate the nature of the

person from knowledge. Epistemology and ontology blur. "The way we gain knowledge about the world, what comprises an adequate explanation, depends on the sort of beings that exist in the world: to put it another way, the object we are studying determines the knowledge we can have of it" Craib (1992, p. 18). I have already made it clear that I reject the foundational subject of modernist theories which presuppose an enduring, essential human nature. Rather, the 'subject' or the 'self' is produced through language and systems of meaning and power. Human nature is a product of culture, rather than cultures being different ways of expressing human nature. Human beings both create and recreate their social conditions and are in turn shaped and reshaped by these social conditions. 'The self' (or selves) is not simply a cognitive/rational being. Holding particular theories, assumptions, values and ideologies, and so on, involves substantial input from other dimensions of self: the affective, the physical, the sexual, the social, the ethical, the spiritual. In other words, I am arguing for a holistic conception of self/selves. This implies a holistic view of education. This is both a *descriptive* claim and a *prescriptive* one. That is, I am suggesting that one *should* not educate from the neck up, nor can one.

3.4   Teaching and Learning

Scrutiny of the literature reveals conceptual sliding between 'quality teaching', 'good teaching', 'teaching excellence' and 'effective teaching'. Clearly, teaching is a contested concept. So is learning, and consequently, so is the relationship between them. As with all major concepts discussed so far, they take on their meaning from the role they play in a larger theoretical or paradigmatic structure. For example, the term 'effective teaching' has more of a product (outcome)

orientation than a process one (Lally and Myhill 1994). This implies a particular relationship between teaching and learning, viz., that 'what the teacher does' is the crucial ingredient in 'what the student learns'. Teacher behaviour *may* be a necessary condition for student learning, but it is certainly not a sufficient condition. There is no 'pipeline' effect (Allan Luke 31/5/94). This is vital since the primary concern of this thesis is teaching. But despite the fact that 'mainlining teaching' is no guarantee of a 'learning high', teaching cannot be considered in isolation from learning. A range of complex variables feed into student learning processes and outcomes. Perhaps one useful way to view the matter is to adopt an approach similar to Braskamp, Brandenburg and Ory (1984), who suggest a practical guide to defining excellence in teaching: an input-process-product model. *Inputs* are what teachers and students bring into the classroom (student characteristics; teacher characteristics; course characteristics). *Process* refers to what teachers and students do in the course (classroom atmosphere; teacher behaviours; student learning activities; course organization; evaluation procedures). *Product* refers to outcomes attributable to teaching (end-of-course learning, attitude change and skill acquisition; long-term learning, attitude change and skill acquisition). Focusing solely on 'product' leads to a student learning view of teaching evaluation and is inadequate since two other factors need to be taken into account in linking student learning to effective teachers: accurate measurement and results; and input factors, since these may strongly influence student learning (Lally and Myhill 1994). Consequently, a rich array of qualitative and quantitative input, process and outcome data is essential, bearing in mind that teaching evaluation must "be controlled by pedagogical principles rather than [measurement choices]"

and that central to its reliability is that "any system of teacher assessment...must first and foremost be faithful to teaching" (Shulman 1988, p. 37).

This gives some indication of relevant measurement variables – and I shall have more to say about this in ensuing chapters – but if concepts are theoretically embedded, what does this mean in terms of the views I have outlined about the aim of social work education, views on knowledge and the nature of the person? At the broadest level I have argued that the key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with theory/practice links and that this entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. The latter reflection involves a necessarily ethical perspective. This position logically implies that the student is not a *tabula rasa*. Indeed, it suggests that the student comes equipped with heavy theoretical and experiential cargo and that the primary task of the educator is to assist students in excavating this cargo. There are three educational purposes. First, assisting students in coming clean with their perspectives. Second, assisting them in articulating the purposes of social work, their means for attaining them and their justification for purposes and means. Third, engaging them in the ethico-critical process of dialogue. Such an educational process has as an underlying aim to produce *self-directed* learners.

> A self-directed learner must be understood as one who is aware of the constraints on his efforts to learn, including the psycho-cultural assumptions involving reified power relationships embedded in institutionalized ideologies which influence one's habits of perception, thought and behaviour as one attempts to learn. A self-directed learner has access to alternative perspectives for understanding his or her situation and for giving meaning and direction to his or her life, has acquired sensitivity and competence in social interaction and

has the skills and competencies required to master the productive tasks associated with controlling and manipulating the environment.
(Mezirow 1981, p. 21)

Some writers would call this lifelong learning.

One of the central components of such an educational process is 'dialogue', the critical and ethical enterprise which has as its ultimate aim 'opening up the space for other'. This is the pedagogical challenge: to open up the space for competing positions to breathe in classroom environments, to enable difference to emerge, to enable, in Foucault's terms, 'subjugated knowledges' to surface. Dialogue is a meta-strategy, a guiding underlying principle. It is not a methodological straitjacket. Methodological fiats are out of order since they represent closure, a potential curtailing of pedagogical trajectories. Single-strategy pedagogies are likely to be inappropriate for individual students let alone an entire diverse class. Not only are there individual differences in learning, but there are intra-individual differences. What strategies we employ at any given time will depend, amongst other things, on the nature of the learning task, motivation, purpose and assessment. The latter shall be the subject of chapter nine.

3.5   Social and Political Context of Social Work Education

I have already mapped the broad grid lines for the social and political context of education in general in discussing the socially-constructed and historically-embedded nature of knowledge which is a linguistically-mediated social practice imbued with power relations, and in the parallel 'construction' processes of human subjects. These general outlines are traced over in social work education by two

related issues: the wrestle for control of social work turf, including social work education; and the corporate agenda, including the 'quality drive'.

There are three major interest groups seeking influence in social work, representing stances about the dominance of managerial and political control, practitioner control, or of academic control. The former group, which is assuming greater power to define the nature and purposes of social work and social work education, are pursuing a corporate agenda which is exemplified in processes such as the 'quality drive' and competency-based education. The wrestle for control of social work's professional turf has a significant bearing on the theory/practice issue. "Many conflicts about the application of theory to practice arise as part of the struggles for influence over the definition of the nature of social work" (Payne 1990, p. 3). Further, Payne (1990, p. 4) argues, this debate "often neglects real differences in the nature of alternative kinds of theory and the possibility of different kinds of theory/practice relationships." The position taken in this thesis is that one cannot realistically avoid the burgeoning corporate agenda. It is part of a general trend towards public accountability which barely conceals an "instrumental economic rationality exemplified in the now dominant belief in the use of market forces to induce greater efficiency" (Peters 1992, p. 127). But one can harness the agenda so that quality assurance strategies and measures are geared towards a "quality improvement model" which can "be used to transform and generate new practices while at the same time meeting the external pressures of accountability" (Sachs 1994, p.22).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the educational context for this thesis. First, I reviewed the broad outlines of the major educational paradigms and examined social work education within this frame. This analysis yielded a crop of significant concepts – critical thinking, reflection, critical reflection and reflective practice – so the second major section explored these concepts in some detail. This analysis also proceeded along paradigmatic lines and dealt with both general issues and specifically social work ones. Third, I outlined the theoretical framework for this thesis emerging from the first three chapters. This was done in terms of five components of educational paradigms: aim of social work education; views on knowledge; the nature of the person; teaching and learning; and the social and political context of social work education. Traversing this epistemological, ontological and educational terrain has allowed me to contextualize the present study which asks how do we best teach beginning social work students to grapple with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice? (Or more specifically, how do we best teach students to think theoretically and critically about action?). But a significant methodological issue still remains: how do we best set out to 'answer' such questions? This is the task of chapter four.

After a time of decay comes the turning point. The powerful light that has been banished returns. There is movement, but it is not brought about by force. ... The old is discarded and the new is introduced. Both measures accord with the time; therefore no harm results.
(*I Ching*, Richard Wilhelm translation 1989, p. 97)

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY – ACTION RESEARCH:

A MÉNAGE À TROIS BETWEEN THEORY, PRACTICE AND

RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This chapter has two primary tasks. First, to describe the broad methodology of the study. Second, to justify the choice of methodology. Drawing on Guba's (1990) work, I have already indicated that paradigms can be characterized by three dimensions: *ontological, epistemological* and *methodological.* The ontological dimension concerns the nature of the 'knowable', or the nature of 'reality'. Epistemological issues consider the nature of the relationship between the knower (inquirer) and the known (or knowable). Chapter two, and to a lesser extent, chapter three, addressed these issues in some detail. The methodological dimension asks the question: "How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?" Previous discussion has stressed the intimate links between ontology and epistemology; a significant blurring of boundaries even. The most cursory examination should indicate that methodology shares a similar intimate status. As soon as we ask a question such as, "How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?", we are immersed in ontological and epistemological issues

concerning the nature of the inquirer, the nature of knowledge, the nature of 'reality', and the relationships between these.

> ...every research method is embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world (an ontology) and ways of knowing that world (an epistemology) implicitly held by the researcher. No method is self-validating, no method is separable from an epistemology and an ontology.
> (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997, p. 176)

The problem is that the epistemology underlying specific research projects is often assumed and not made explicit (Usher et al. 1997). Both Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Usher and colleagues (1997) provide trenchant criticisms of positivist attempts to amputate methodology and research from its ontological and epistemological lifeblood. Part of the confusion arises from use of the terms 'method' and 'methodology', terms which positivist researchers tend to conflate. I follow feminist philosopher of science, Sandra Harding (1987), in distinguishing clearly the two terms. *Method* applies to techniques for gathering empirical evidence. *Methodology* is the theory of knowledge and the interpretive framework that guides specific research projects. Viewed in this way, methodology is an intrinsically epistemological and ontological activity. This chapter is reserved largely for methodological issues, so defined. After contextualizing the study within its various milieux in chapter five, chapter six, detailing the process of the study, will be devoted to more specific issues of method. While it might seem logical to present specific methods immediately after the methodology chapter, I have sandwiched the context chapter between them because in order to understand the specific methods and techniques used in this study one must know something about salient contextual variables such as the details of the subject, WS1002, which is the focus of the present research, and characteristics of both teachers and students.

I. ACTION RESEARCH – AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

The methodological approach adopted in this study is action research. Action research is not a single methodology. The concept itself is contested, meaning different things to different people, and its use has changed over time; though within education it has tended to be affiliated, especially since the 1980s, with the critical theory paradigm. I shall not attempt a review of all approaches. Instead, I shall review the key ingredients and commonalities of major approaches with a particular focus on the approach or blend of approaches I have chosen. I reserve justification for this until the second part of this chapter, and chapter six, describing the process of the study.

My argument that epistemology, ontology and methodology are siblings raises an intriguing question. Because of its theoretical heritage – at least in education – within critical theory, action research has been tied traditionally to this theoretical approach like an umbilical cord (e.g. the term 'emancipatory action research', as used by Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Zuber-Skerritt 1992, and so on). Yet I have outlined numerous concerns with critical theory in the previous two chapters. Will severing the methodology of action research from its traditional theoretical life force inevitably lead to death by malnourishment? Can we sufficiently nourish action research with other theoretical nutrients, and, if so, what might these be? As the chapter unfolds we shall discover that *critical reflection* is a central plank of action research as it has been defined by both critically oriented theorists and others. One aim of this chapter is to demonstrate

how critical reflection can be reframed theoretically, as I have done so at considerable length in the previous chapter, to harness it to an action research approach without subscribing to a foundational metaphysics (compare also Usher et al. 1997).

The major sources I have drawn upon in writing this section and my justification for their use are as follows. Building on the pioneering work of social psychologist, Kurt Lewin (1946), who actually coined the term 'action research', Stenhouse (1975) and colleagues at the University of East Anglia, and the Frankfurt School in critical social science (particularly Habermas' dialectical approach), Kemmis and colleagues at Deakin University (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988) have developed a form of action research often known as 'critical education science' (see chapters two and three). Some of this work has been developed in conjunction with Wilfred Carr from the University College of North Wales (Carr and Kemmis 1986). Critical education science has evolved primarily within an Australian educational context and is probably the best known approach in this context. No discussion of action research would be complete without reference to this work.

Zuber-Skerritt (1992), in a highly ambitious work which attempts to provide a theoretical framework for action research, has developed further the approach of Kemmis and colleagues, but specifically for professional development in higher education. Given the higher education focus of the present study, Zuber-Skerritt's work assumes significant dimensions.

Both sets of authors have also been pivotal in two important events shaping the history and development of action research as a significant methodological and theoretical force. The first was an international symposium on action research in higher education, government and industry held in Brisbane during March, 1989 (Zuber-Skerritt 1991). The second was the First World Congress on Action Research and Process Management also held in Brisbane the following year during July, 1990 (Colins and Chippendale 1991a; 1991b). While Kemmis and colleagues did not actually present at this second event, their influence is evident from perusal of submitted papers. Again, no discussion of action research could be complete without reference to these significant historical events.

A final source reflects personal preference. During 1995 Bob Dick, then from the University of Queensland, ran an on-line action research course as part of the Action Research List on the Internet. Dick *is* well known in action research circles within Australia, both within a higher education and management consultant context, but my prime reason for including Dick as a key source is twofold. First, unlike many other action research proponents, Dick appears relatively immune from the dogma disease (see, for example, Swepson 8/5/95). Second, in my view, Dick presents the most concise and comprehensible account of action research that I have encountered.

Note that much of this literature is a product of the last decade. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) points out that after Lewin there was a decline of action research in the 1950s and 1960s. The resurgence of recent interest in education action research is not an historical accident and is an important issue to which I shall return.

Before delving too deeply into action research I would like, ever so briefly, to contextualize it within the framework of paradigms – this is precisely what Carr and Kemmis (1986) do and amounts to one of the significant strengths of their book. Positivism, you might recall, evolving as it has from a scientific orientation, stresses generalization, objectivity, prediction and control. The hermeneutic paradigm, in self-conscious reaction, stresses interpretation, meaning and illumination. Hermeneutics still retains the bipolar objective/subjective distinction, but privileges the subjective side of the equation. The critical theory paradigm, in Habermas' hands, attempts to bridge the positivist/hermeneutic divide by positing a dialectic which draws upon both the objective and subjective aspects. Here the guiding principle is emancipation: eliminate 'false consciousness' and energize and facilitate transformation or 'enlightenment' (Guba 1990). Action research is perceived to be the appropriate methodology for emancipation.

1.1 'Defining' Action Research: Preliminary Brush Strokes

One of the most poignant discussions on defining action research emerges in Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerritt (1991). Reflecting on the foundations of action research at the previously mentioned international symposium, Altrichter and colleagues, while acknowledging the importance of definitions for communicative purposes, outline why it has proven difficult to formulate a generally accepted definition of action research, and suggest that the concept must be open for development. The authors argue that in traditional philosophy definitions are a form of post-Platonian essentialism and that it is far

more fruitful to examine the purposes of definitions, which they suggest have

pragmatic, descriptive and normative functions.

> They are *pragmatic* in that they help communication in cases where the participants do not have a shared experienced meaning of an object; they are *descriptive* in that they record a usual (culturally and historically located) usage of language; and they are *normative* in that they attempt to include some phenomena into the meaning of a communicated term and exclude other ones. (Altrichter et al.1991, p. 4)

These authors argue that often the normative function is used in a culturally

imperialist or disenfranchising way to exclude certain brands of research as action

research and that the development orientation is at the heart of action research.

Thus, they argue, we should not defend the normative function of definitions too

closely if the pragmatic function is to fulfil its potential. This is germane, since

Swepson notes that

> ...my own research into the variety of action research models seems to show that over time, say 20 years or so, there has been a shift of emphasis from a variety of action research models, each aimed to suit a wide variety of situations, to a much narrower range of action research models which have a tendency to claim that only they are 'true' action research.
> Swepson (8/5/95, p. 1)

What Altrichter and colleagues do not mention, however, is that action research

may be defined in different ways because the concept, 'action research', is

embedded in theoretically different ways; that is, action research is harnessed to

different paradigms. This becomes evident from Holly's (1991, p. 36) historical

analysis of action research within the British educational context in the same

volume. He identifies three developmental phases: the first, from the 1960s to

1984, which he describes as the 'teaching level' in which action research is

individualized and conducted with the help of outside experts "to make individual

teachers more effective"; the second, from 1984 to 1988, the 'learning level 1',

with an emphasis on excellence of learning. i.e. *participative, cooperative* learning; and finally, since 1988, 'learning level 2', where the *collaborative* school has become a community school. These three development phases Holly links to paradigm shifts: moving from the bureaucratic/positivist, through the interpretive or phenomenological, to the radical humanist position. The latter can be broadly equated with the critical paradigm. If Holly's analysis is accurate, we might expect, given the ascendance of poststructuralism, that action research will move into yet another development phase where the methodology is hitched to a poststructural paradigm (note the deliberate use of the *indefinite* article). This is precisely what Usher and colleagues (1997) attempt to do in their discussion of 'emancipatory research'. I shall return to the issue towards the end of this section.

Having warned of the dangers of tightly latched definitions, I shall borrow, initially, Zuber-Skerritt's broad-brush operational definition of action research:

> *...research by higher education teachers themselves into their own teaching practice and into student learning* (with the aim of improving their practice or changing their social environment).
> (Zuber-Skerritt 1992, p. 88)

Zuber-Skerritt (1992) draws links with Stenhouse's (1975) notion of 'the teacher as researcher', Kelly's (1955) 'personal scientist' and Schön's (1983) 'reflective practitioner' (though note my previously argued concerns with Schön's approach). She also consciously includes both Batchler and Maxwell's (1987) 'action evaluation' approach, and Argyris and Schön's (1989) 'action science' approach. This paves the way for her adoption of a global definition which equates action research with action evaluation as

> ...a process in which the 'practitioners' are included as evaluators, which features collaborative planning and data-gathering, self-reflection and

responsiveness, and which embodies a substantial element of professional development. 'Ownership' of the evaluation is vested in the 'practitioners'.
(Batchler and Maxwell 1987, p. 70)

These notions capture the flavour of the present study, which is essentially the story of two higher education teachers confronted with a set of educational dilemmas attempting to research their own teaching practice and student learning with a view to improving this teaching practice. Broad brush strokes indeed – a few dots splashed on the wall. Now I shall attempt to join the dots.

1.2   Sketching Action Research: Joining the Dots

At the most general level, and this is a point on which all action researchers would agree, Dick (1993a) suggests that action research consists of a family of research methodologies which pursue action and research outcomes at the same time. Action research varies along a continuum depending on whether the action or the research component is emphasized. In some instances, the research component mostly takes the form of understanding on the part of those involved. Action is primary. In others, the research is primary and action is almost a fringe benefit (Dick 11/4/95). This latter use is the primary one for the present study. The current project began with an action emphasis but evolved towards a strong research orientation. However, it is my contention that the two aspects cannot be separated in a meaningful practical sense, though we may attempt to do so in order to facilitate conceptual analysis. Indeed, this issue of linking action and research is crucial to all versions of action research. Kemmis and McTaggart in describing this linkage suggest that:

> The linking of the terms 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential feature of the approach: trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching, and learning.

The result is improvement in what happens in the classroom and school, and better articulation and justification of the educational rationale for what goes on. Action research provides a way of working which links theory and practice into the one whole: ideas-in-action.
(Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p. 6)

Dick notes (1993a) that his 'definition' – pursuing action and research outcomes at the same time – is sufficiently broad to embrace a variety of research and intervention methods, including some major action research approaches: the critical action research approach of Carr and Kemmis (1986), the soft systems methodology of Checkland (1981) and the evaluation of Guba and Lincoln (1989). Again, we see that action research has wings which can be clipped to contain the bird in various paradigmatic pens. We must be suspicious of the weaning habits of those who squeal umbilical cords.

One commonly raised question is, "how is action research different from normal professional practice?" (Dick 1994a, p. 5; compare also Usher et al. 1997). Dick notes that less formal approaches to action research may be very similar to some forms of practice, but that most forms of action research, and this includes the present study, are more deliberate and systematic in their pursuit of understanding. "Most importantly, frequent critical reflection is a formal and central part of action research. Most practice, if it does use reflection, is neither as deliberate nor as critical in its use" (Dick 1994a, p. 5). I shall return to the notion of critical reflection below.

While acknowledging the merits of conventional research, Dick (1993a) also suggests that it can inhibit effective change. "To achieve action, action research is responsive. It has to be able to respond to the emerging needs of the situation. It

must be flexible in a way that some research methods cannot be" (p. 2). Consequently, action research has had to develop a different set of principles. Avoiding blanket claims, Dick portrays action research as *tending* towards the following features:

- Cyclic – similar steps tend to recur in a similar sequence.

- Participative – clients and informants are involved as partners, or at least as active participants, in the research process.

- Qualitative – deals more with language than with numbers.

- Reflective – critical reflection upon the process and outcomes are important parts of each cycle.

The *cyclic* process is crucial to increasing *rigour*. I shall discuss rigour in more detail below. Dick (1993a) suggests that understandings developed from early cycles are used to help design later cycles. In the later cycles, the interpretations developed in the early cycles can be tested and challenged and refined. These understandings and interpretations are arrived at by a process of critical reflection, a key ingredient of each cycle (see below). For Dick, responsiveness is primary. "Whatever action research is, I suspect it is mostly or always responsive. In fact, I think that the choices made about its cyclic and qualitative nature or about the extent of participation are to be justified in terms of the responsiveness which they allow" (p. 4). The cyclic process mostly enhances responsiveness since it allows one to revisit nagging concerns. A cyclic process also increases opportunities for learning from experience, contingent upon adequate reflection on process and outcomes, both intended and unintended.

Participation is a complex term. While it is more concerned with action than research, it is important in the present context for two reasons. First, from an ethical perspective, participative methods are to be preferred (see chapter six). Second, interpretation of information is mostly richer with greater involvement. The extent of participation may vary greatly ranging from those who are co-researchers to those involved simply as informants. This issue is addressed in chapter six.

The issue of *quantitative* versus *qualitative* research is one to which I shall return in the next section. Suffice to say now, that as Dick suggests (1993a), qualitative information increases responsiveness. Most informants find it easier to work in natural language. Further, a quantitative measurement developed may have to be abandoned later if it does not fit the emerging situation.

Critical reflection is "one of the important defining features of action research" (Dick 9/5/95, p. 2). I agree with Dick (and it is also the opinion of Kemmis and colleagues and Zuber-Skerritt; indeed, I know of no reputable action researcher who would disagree) that critical reflection is a *sine qua non* of action research. It is a lynchpin of the present study, both theoretically and methodologically. First, it is methodologically essential for ensuring the quality of data collected and its subsequent interpretations. Critical reflection is the spotlight beamed on all data and interpretations. Its wattage is increased in proportion to the additional number of co-researchers and participants who partake in the exercise. Second, in theoretical terms, the study itself is concerned with the teaching and learning of a variant of critical reflection. I shall discuss this in some detail in the next chapter.

For Dick (1993a; 9/5/95), critical reflection serves two purposes. First, by enabling researchers and others to recall and critique what has happened, it draws understanding from the experience of the action. Second, as noted above, it then allows the development of plans to turn understanding into action in subsequent cycles. But as my extended analysis of the concept of critical reflection in the previous chapter demonstrated, critical reflection is a wild beast which runs rampant on the paradigmatic plains despite the best intentions and endeavours of rough-riding intellectual cowboys (and cowgirls). Before I delve more deeply into the issue, I shall briefly summarize the action research cycle developed by Kemmis and colleagues (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). I have a threefold rationale for doing this. First, they have formulated what is perhaps the best known action research cycle in Australia: *Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect.* Second, I have loosely adapted their cycle for the present study. Third, critical reflection plays a central role in their cycle.

1.3   The Deakin Action Research Cycle

Although I shall outline the four 'steps' sequentially, the cycle is not to be understood as a linear approach. Rather, it is a cyclic spiral and reflection provides the basis for the next cycle of planning, which is not a separate and prior step; "it is embedded in the action and reflection" (Dick 1993a, p. 2).

1.3.1   Plan

Develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening. Kemmis and McTaggart note that most action research groups will need to begin

with an initial stage of reflection (reconnaissance or situation analysis) in order to formulate an effective action plan.

1.3.2 Act

Act to implement the plan. Action is distinguished from usual practice in that it is deliberate and controlled, "it is a careful and thoughtful variation of practice, and is critically informed" (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p. 12).

1.3.3 Observe

Observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs. Kemmis and McTaggart note that like action itself, observation plans must be flexible and open to record the unexpected. They suggest always maintaining a journal to record observations additional to those collected in planned observation categories.

1.3.4 Reflect

Reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles. Reflection recalls action as it has been recorded in observation, but it is also active. It is usually aided by discussion among participants (compare Dick's similar approach). Kemmis and McTaggart suggest there are two aspects to reflection: first, an evaluative component, which "asks action researchers to weigh their experience – to judge whether effects (and issues which arose) were desirable, and suggest ways of proceeding" (p. 13); second, a descriptive aspect, which "allows reconnaissance, building a more vivid picture of life and work in the situation, constraints on action

and more importantly, of what might now be possible" (p. 14). They further claim that "learning what you need to learn is one of the most important outcomes of the reflection stage" (p. 87). An obvious question arises: what guides the reflection process? What shapes the specific 'objects' of reflection? We can answer this simply by saying it is the paradigms held by participants in the process of reflection. I shall return to this issue below, first in the discussion of critical reflection, second, in the discussion of paradigms in the justification section of the chapter.

The authors stress that "action research is a dynamic process in which these four moments are to be understood not as static steps, complete in themselves, but rather as moments in the action research *spiral* of planning, observing, acting and reflecting" (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p. 5). The authors further suggest that in looking for changes in practice, it is useful (to be strictly correct, Kemmis and McTaggart imply it is *mandatory;* I think it is *useful*) to look for changes in three different aspects of individual work and the culture of groups: first, changes in the use of *language and discourses* – the actual ways that people identify and describe their world and their work; second, changes in *activities and practices* – what people are actually doing in their work and learning; third, changes in *social relationships and organization* – the ways people interrelate in the process of education, and the ways their relationships are structured and organized in educational institutions to achieve consistency between the principles and practices of educational administration and teaching and learning. They also highlight the *socially constructed* nature of language, activities and social relationships. This

also is the slant of the present study and displays again the tight congruence between the methodological and theoretical aspects of this thesis.

This brief introduction to the action research approaches of Bob Dick and Kemmis and colleagues leaves unanswered one major concern usually raised by positivist-trained researchers (most of us): the question of rigour. How can we ensure that action research is not simply a smokescreen for sloppy and shoddy research?

1.4   Rigour in Action Research

Note that, above all, action research is *empirical*. It consists, among other things, of collecting evidence, much of which is based on close observation. Those unfamiliar with action research may be tempted to claim that the quality of evidence collected is suspect, stained with the bias of subjectivity. This is a typical positivist taunt. All major proponents of action research understand it to be a process of considerable rigour. "Action research as I understand it must meet the standards of appropriate rigour without sacrificing relevance" (Zuber-Skerritt 1992, p. 89). In fact, Zuber-Skerritt (1992) devotes an entire chapter (chapter seven) to discussing the issue of rigour in educational research methodology. Similarly, much of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) *Action Research Planner* outlines a 'blow by blow' account of the necessary steps to ensure adequate rigour. One aspect they are insistent on, and I agree, is the maintenance of records and analyzing them. They suggest keeping a personal journal which records two parallel sets of learning: first, learnings about the practices we are studying (how our practices are developing); second, learnings about the process (the practice) of studying them (how our action research is going). Dick (1994b) amplifies this

discussion on documentation in a paper written specifically to discuss action research theses. For thesis purposes, he stresses the importance of ongoing documentation, suggesting that we need records of four sets of data. First, emerging *interpretations*, and any changes in these. Second, changing *methods*, any refinements in them, and any conclusions you can therefore draw about them. Third, *literature* you access, and any confirming or disconfirming information you obtain from it. Finally, *quotes* from raw information which capture well the interpretations you are developing. Perusal of chapter six and later analysis chapters reveal this to be the process I have followed.

Dick (1994b) also notes that Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992) suggest a further cycle if you are doing the research for thesis purposes. They raise a potential objection: if you are using a participative approach, you may be challenged on the grounds that the thesis is not your own work. They offer a way around this problem. Each cycle of your research, which may be participative, becomes the 'act' component of an individual reflection. In other words, after each cycle, you critique the planning, the action, and the reflection. This may be done as you check the ongoing documentation. As you do this, it is useful to keep a record of learning, for example, a diary. Dick (1994b, p. 5) adds that "increasingly in qualitative research, it is being regarded as appropriate to discuss yourself and your learning as part of the thesis." Given the subject content and process being studied – for instance, student identification and analysis of 'self factors' (see chapter five) – it would be more than surprising if this were not the case here; it would be an egregious omission, severely corroding the theoretical and methodological congruence of the study.

Dick (1993a), in a very concise and readable account, outlines a number of strategies for enhancing quality, and thus rigour. First, use *multiple cycles,* with *planning* before action and *critical reflection* after it. Second, within each cycle, use *multiple data sources,* and try to *disprove* the interpretations arising from earlier cycles. He extends this discussion (Dick 9/5/95) by noting that more cycles allow more challenges to the data, thus increasing validity. If we do use few cycles, he suggests trying to build smaller cycles into the larger ones. Within each cycle we should carry out three steps:

- Intend (reflect before action)

  This serves the following functions: decide what you want the next step to achieve; think about what actions might achieve the desired outcomes, and why; work out how you can most strenuously test the data and emerging interpretations from previous cycles.

- Act (reflect during action)

  This allows you to check that actions match intentions, and to monitor achievement of outcomes.

- Review (reflect after action)

  There are two parts to this stage. First, you recollect your actions, and those of others. You need to reflect critically on the assumptions that underpinned your intentions and try to make sense of the experience. Dick further suggests a useful checklist of review items: goals; data collected; interpretations; methodology and methods, and how well they are working; and participants/informants. At each cycle, methods used can be critiqued and refined. The second part of the reflection session consists of deciding

intentions for the next cycle. Planned changes which emerge from the program are derived from the data and the interpretation. That change, Dick (1993b) suggests, offers a further opportunity for disconfirmation.

Note the pivotal role of critical reflection in attaining rigour. In fact, Dick (25/4/95) effectively suggests that one could characterize the action research cycle simply as:

Intend → Act → Review →

claiming that most versions could be related to this (in addition to other cycles such as experiential learning). Comparing Kemmis and McTaggart's *Plan*, *Act*, *Observe*, *Reflect* approach (previously cited), Dick further suggests "you might think of this as reflection before the act, action, reflection during the act, and reflection after the act." (Though see chapter three for arguments against the possibilities of reflecting *during* action.) The important feature is alternating action and reflection in an ongoing cycle. Dick suggests a further simplification:

Action → Reflection

It is theory and practice integrated. Action and understanding integrated. In the Deakin cycle, planning is reflection before action. Observation is reflection during action. Reflection is reflection after action.
(Dick 25/4/95, p. 5)

Before discussing critical reflection in more detail, I want to relate action research to more 'mainstream' research approaches, by briefly raising the notion of 'triangulation' or 'dialectic' as rigour-enhancing tools.

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1.4.1 Triangulation or Dialectic

Cohen and Manion (1985, p. 254) in their classic text on research methods in education define triangulation as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour." The rationale behind such an approach is that if more than one method, particularly highly contrasting methods, yields similar results, we can be more confident in our interpretations and conclusions. This view of triangulation has been extended, initially by Denzin (1970), who refers to the multimethod approach as 'methodological triangulation'. Dick (9/5/95), working within the action research tradition, prefers the term 'dialectic' to triangulation on the grounds that the latter is coming to be used more often simply to mean use of multiple methods. He outlines other strategies for increasing confidence in data and interpretations, preferring to speak of multiple *sources of information* rather than simply multiple methods, emphasizing the importance, if possible, of using these sources *within* each cycle.

> You can better assure your data and interpretations if you used varied informants, several different methods, different ways of asking the same question, and so on. Comparison between them provides part of the check on their accuracy.
> (Dick 1994b, p. 4)

Perusal of chapter six indicates a wide variety of data sources informing the present study. Dick (1994b) also notes that you need carry forward only your interpretations from each cycle, highlighting this as an economy of action research compared to most other forms of qualitative research. Carrying forward interpretations allows these to be challenged in later cycles. But how do we know which interpretations to carry forward? This decision is the result of the *reflect* phase of the cycle, a jointly negotiated decision.

Dick (9/5/95) outlines 11 key strategies for 'good' action research. Some of these have been discussed above; others will be discussed in chapter six. However, Dick urges (1993b; 9/5/95), that these can be summarized very simply in two steps. First, use *multiple cycles*, with *planning* before action and *critical analysis* after it; second, within every cycle, vigorously seek out *disconfirming* evidence from as *many sources* as possible.

1.5   Critical Reflection

I have highlighted that both Dick and Kemmis and colleagues emphasize the pivotal role of critical reflection as a defining feature of action research and this emphasis tends to be shared by most action researchers. But despite similar surface gloss, particularly in how one goes about it and why we are doing it, there are significant differences at an underlying paradigmatic level. I shall not repeat the arguments of chapters two and three. I will, however, briefly summarize the position for which I argued. A central element in the notion of critical reflection is the role of 'self'. One cannot discuss reflection, critical reflection, self-reflection and so on without some notion of a 'self' or 'subject' who is the channel for these processes, which, as we have already discovered, are not simply cognitive processes. Most theorists have a relatively clear sense of the type of subject they want to create and critical reflection is seen to be a central ingredient in the creation of this subject. For Foucault this is vital. I have already noted Foucault's disdain for the 'hermeneutic confessional' as a modern form of power whose norms are to be questioned and if necessary, resisted. This is because underlying this notion is the foundational, essentialist subject, the aim of such practice being to discover our 'true selves'. For Foucault the aim "is not to discover what we are,

but to refuse what we are" (Foucault 1983, p. 216). We require self-creation at both an individual and a cultural level.

I have offered Falzon's (1998) interpretation of Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection as the anti-foundational critical activity to promote this process of cultural and individual self-creation. Initially, Foucault calls his form of reflection 'genealogy' (Foucault 1984a); later, the 'historical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault 1984b). It is essentially a historical form of reflection, one in which the critical question is: "in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression" (Foucault 1984b, p. 45). Such an exercise reveals the contingency of our existing forms of life and social practices. While this might appear unsettling, disturbing even, for those hankering after certainty and security, it also acts as a funnel of possibilities, potentially opening up the space for the other in a quest for change, for re-creation. Foucault's approach is ethical because its primary motivating force is opening up the space for other. It is critical because it is reflection mobilized in the task of excavating subjugated knowledges, for re-creating both self and culture. Note that this critical task is not the same as the critical theory task motivated by its quest to overcome 'domination' which prevents us from realizing an idealized form of life which operates according to universal norms. In Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection all universals and norms are problematized, historically interrogated.

I can summarize this discussion in another way. From a strict technical point of view, we all appear to be rowing the same boat. All action researchers acknowledge critical reflection as the rudder which steers us through the rapids of research. It allows us to recall and critique what has happened, including data collected and interpretations made, and it enables us to learn and understand; crucial for planning later cycles of the action research process. From a broad theoretical perspective, there also appears to be much agreement: change or transformation is the guiding lantern. We might even say that we are committed to 'emancipation'. We differ, however, as soon as we dissect this concept. For critical theorists such as Kemmis, emancipation happens because through 'ideology critique', we remove the veil of 'false consciousness', and there is an ultimate endpoint to which they aspire: the rational society where all operate according to the 'ideal speech situation'. In short, it is a teleological view of emancipation. The type of change or emancipation for which I argue is neither foundational nor teleological. That is, one does not expect to throw off the yoke of oppression in order to reach some ideal end-point, the 'rational utopia' of Habermas. There may be goals, and these will be grounded normatively, but they are open to a continual process of renegotiation. They are, in the words of chapter two, inescapably bound up in 'dialogue'.

This resonates with Usher and colleagues' (1997) discussion of the similarities and differences between 'emancipatory research' (of which they consider action research to be a prime exponent) and postmodern research. According to their analysis both recognize and celebrate difference, both oppose the defining power of research traditions and oppressive structures, and both stress alternative

emancipatory goals and directions for research. The key difference, they argue, concerns attitudes to oppression: "A postmodern approach is suspicious of all kinds of totalizing discourses, whether deemed 'emancipatory' or not, and sees oppression as existing at both an external and internal level" (Usher et al. 1997, p. 203).

This brief revisit to the themes of chapters two and three indicates that action research and its lynchpin of critical reflection can be easily unhitched from a critical theory cart. We can practise action research without yoking ourselves to a foundational metaphysics. Indeed, if we are serious about the notion of critical reflection, the very practice of critical reflection should lead us to critique the norms on which it is based, foundational or otherwise. This includes, as I pointed out in chapter three, critiquing the cultural and historical baggage of the notion of critical reflection itself.

Until now I have focused primarily on the 'conduct' of research. But research only becomes publicly available when it is written. The writing aspect of research is a sadly neglected one and it is an aspect to which I wish to devote some attention. In doing so, we shall discover some interesting links with previous discussions about 'the self' and 'critical reflection'.

1.6   Writing Research – Storytelling

Usher and colleagues (1997) argue cogently from a postmodern frame that research is an inscription of the 'real', not a discovery of it. This is a logical corollary of the perspectival, relational epistemology for which I have argued. If

we have numerous competing positions ('voices'), each normatively grounded, then writing research cannot possibly be a discovery of some single 'real' voice. At best it can foreground certain voice(s) and it becomes a hugely political question as to which voices are privileged. This introduces the concept of research as narrative. "In providing an account of some aspect of the world, research is telling a story which to be convincing has to follow certain conventions of storytelling acceptable to a particular readership" (Usher et al. 1997, p. 223). In this sense, the account I offer in this thesis cannot possibly be a totalizing one, for either theoretical or logistical reasons. It is clearly my story, to a much lesser extent, Pauline's story, and even less, the story of WS1002 students; though both Pauline and the students contributed significantly to *my* story. The device of direct quotation, which I use extensively in the later analysis chapters, is not to be confused with giving 'voice' to students. It is a "(re)presentation within an overall text that is unavailable for critical scrutiny by those who are quoted. ...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. 225). In chapter six we shall see that students had access to all transcripts and had the opportunity to 'rewrite' these, but they did not have access to this doctoral dissertation. It was planned – at least with a small reference group – but my leaving James Cook University in the middle of 1995 to take up a post in the backwaters of Vietnam put paid to that noble aspiration. By the time I began 'serious' writing, most students had completed their degrees and were beginning to spread their wings over the Australian landscape.

This means that despite the collaborative action research approach – more of the specifics of this in chapter six – the present piece of research is essentially my multi-sourced story. This gives research an autobiographical slant and in chapter five I shall outline the salient biographical details which I perceive to be relevant to this thesis (see Crawford's 1994 social work doctoral thesis for an example of an 'autoethnographical study' written from a feminist poststructural framework). Usher and colleagues (1997) provide another interesting slant on this dimension of the research process. I have written at some length about the notion of teaching as 'critically reflective practice'. Usher and colleagues adopt the notion of "research as a practice in which the self is engaged as a reflective practitioner" (p. 212). In their words, "research can be viewed as the practice of writing and rewriting selves and the world" (p. 212). This provides an interesting link for the present thesis. I adopt the cloak of reflective practitioner – in the sense that I have conceptualized this in chapter three – in two related, but conceptually distinct roles: as teacher and as researcher. This buttresses the notion of practitioner-researcher which is a hallmark of action research methodologies.

This opens up some interesting possibilities which link back to my earlier discussion about the importance of the affective dimension in constructing 'self'. Usher and colleagues summarize the situation well:

> Our analysis extends the idea of the 'self' as a researcher who is culturally and historically configured and is situated within a nexus of relationships which have to be negotiated, to include the idea of an experiential 'trajectory' as a dynamic component in the conduct of enquiry. In such a trajectory, there is an important affective dimension. How the self is disposed as an engaged enquirer is a neglected dimension of reflective research practice, one which can influence the conduct of research as either impediment or resource.
> (Usher et al. 1997, p. 213)

When I address my 'self factors' in chapter five, I shall take up this theme.

A final point relates more specifically to the theoretical and textual difficulties involved in writing up an *action research* thesis. Swepson (25/5/95) remarks that the major problem in writing up action research is the inherent linearity of text, which has a beginning, middle and end. This makes it difficult to adapt cyclic processes or any other non-linear process to the conventional structure of text. I am not satisfied that I have dealt with this problem in a satisfactory way. Largely, I have opted for a conventional linear text, though at times the text refuses to be contained by linear categories and bulges across my chosen boundaries. I confess that this decision was dictated by the perennial problem of audience; in this case the three obligatory examiners. Had I the freedom to produce a non-examinable text, I suspect my chosen format might have been considerably different. Take this as yet another example of the powerful impact of the social and political context of education!

1.7   Clearing the Conceptual Rubble

Before moving on to the second major section of this chapter, justifying action research, it may be timely to clarify certain key concepts which appear in the literature. I shall focus on four: 'action research'; 'action learning'; 'action science'; and 'action theory'. I have already discussed major variants of action research, so will restrict myself in this section to highlighting differences between the other three concepts and action research. Note again, how I reverse the usual order of dealing with these matters. Neo-Platonians like their definitions served as

entrees before tackling the main fare. My argument is that definitional entrees are indigestible unless one understands the key ingredients of the recipe.

1.7.1 Action Learning

Sankaran (8/5/95) notes that he has not found any 'guru' talking about the difference between action learning and action research because most action learning gurus seem to_be management consultants or managers while most action research gurus seem to be teachers, social researchers and academics. He then reviews the major definitions of action learning, including Revans' original formulation (see Revans 1982; 1991). In addition to differences resulting from appropriation by different target groups, another difference concerns their theoretical focus (also partly a product of the concept's historical origins). Action learning, as its name suggests, has as its primary focus_'learning', while action research focuses more on 'research'. I don't think one should make too much of this difference, since there is a clear overlap. Sankaran (8/5/95, p. 1) attempts a distinction based on the 'action' part of the two concepts. "In action research the action seems to emphasize change while in action learning the action is usually used to solve real problems in real time. Of course the process of solving the problem itself can create change." He further suggests that "the research outcome in action research consists of increased understanding. I think in action learning the learning leads to better understanding." I confess confusion as to the nuances of his distinction. A final difference he cites (p. 2) is his perception that "action research usually takes longer, has more than one cycle, and the pressure of time is not there."

Swepson, anticipating disagreement from Ron Passfield and others from the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association, suggests that action research is the umbrella which can include action learning under it. She perceives the difference to be as follows:

> Action learning sets are usually composed of individuals who are working on individual projects but who gain support, critique, advice, etc., from others in the group. Individuals apply an action research paradigm to those individual problems. Action research groups are usually groups of people who have come together to solve a common problem and again use an action research paradigm. They can all be action learners with respect to how they work successfully in the problem solving team.
> Swepson (9/5/95, p. 1)

Dick (14/4/95, p. 2) echoes these sentiments in suggesting that action learning is an experiential learning methodology which fits well with action research. "In its more common form, action learning brings together people from different situations to help each other learn. Here, the different situations might consist of the action research projects you have chosen, or your normal work practice."

Given that the present project, at the very minimum, is comprised of two practitioner/ researchers, this discussion indicates that it falls clearly under the action research rather than the action learning rubric; though there is no doubt that the project embraces many qualities of action learning (from my perspective the action research rubric is broader and captures more accurately the essence of the project).

1.7.2   Action Science

Action science is an approach developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1974; 1989). Sankaran (8/5/95, p. 2) suggests that it "is a form of action research

that, although it shares the values and strategy described above, places a central emphasis on the spontaneous, tacit theories-in-use that participants bring to practice and research, especially whenever feelings of embarrassment or threat come into play." I have discussed this approach in theoretical terms in chapter three. While I would not classify the present *research* project specifically as 'action science', perusal of WS1002 subject details in the next chapter indicate that tacit theories-in-use are an important element of the *content* of the subject.

1.7.3   Action Theory

Theories of action have evolved as a critical reaction to behaviourist and empiricist explanations of human behaviour and learning, which have tended, traditionally, to emphasize responses to stimuli at the expense of conscious planning, action and decision-making. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) distinguishes between cognitive and materialistic theories of action. Action theory has emerged from critical psychology in Germany and Russia. Perhaps the most famous exponent of action theory is the Russian, Leontiev. Leontiev, Zuber-Skerritt (1992, p. 71) argues (note that very little of his work has been translated into English and that Zuber-Skerritt herself has been one of the key translators), "emphasises even more strongly than Western cognitive psychologists that human action is determined by social conditions." This circumstance, it might be noted, is not surprising given the social conditions of communist Russia when Leontiev developed his theories. It is also further confirmation of the significance of the thrust in the subject being investigated in the present project of the social construction of knowledge and the importance of 'self' factors in shaping theory development. For the present, it is sufficient to note that action theory is different from action research in the

historical development and focus of the theory. Action theory is a theory of activity, consciousness and personality which arose as a reaction to the dominant psychological theories of the time. However, action theory is certainly compatible with action research as Zuber-Skerritt (1992) has shown in her admirable efforts to use the theory to develop a model for the analysis of student learning, teaching and evaluating staff development programs in higher education (following Heger's work in Germany).

Having completed this broad overview of action research, it is now time to direct attention more closely to justifying its choice as the adopted methodology for this research thesis.

II.   WHY ACTION RESEARCH? – A JUSTIFICATION

In many respects, my justification for action research is implied in the epistemological, ontological and educational discussion contained largely in chapters two and three, and to a lesser extent, in the opening section of this chapter. However, I believe it important to crystallize this discussion and I shall do so under four headings: paradigms; change – flexibility and responsiveness in times of rapid change; complexity/ambiguity; and theory/practice/research.

2.1   Paradigms

How does one choose an appropriate research approach? Dick (25/4/95, p. 2) suggests that the significant questions are: what do you want to achieve? Which paradigm will best achieve it? Action research is designed to deal with change.

But, as Dick points out, other aspects try to assure the quality of data and interpretations. The initial impetus for the present study was an unsatisfactory educational situation which we desired to change. But in doing so, we wanted to ensure that the changes were 'for the better', in the sense that they facilitated student learning of thinking critically about action and theory construction. Within this context, action research emerged as a leading methodological contender.

Dick uses the word 'paradigm'. I think this significant. As much of my previous discussion reveals, in important respects the distinction between methodology and theory is an artifactual one. Every methodological approach rides on a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions. Further, previous discussions (see chapters two and three) also warn that naïve eclecticism is not the answer. One cannot simply treat the situation as a theoretical and methodological smorgasbord from which one is free to sample the pickings of one's choice. Such 'grazing' ignores the philosophical and theoretical ingredients which cannot be divorced from the recipe. It is important, therefore, that one's chosen research methodology is consistent with its underlying ontology and epistemology.

Swepson (1994, p. 1), in an interesting paper on the philosophy of action research, argues that a "criterion for rigorous research is the link between the philosophy and the methods of a paradigm. The philosophy of a paradigm sets the parameters for the type and use of methods." She then goes on to explain the critical distinction between the *values* and *logic* of a paradigm, suggesting that,

> ...a paradigm of enquiry, like any other intellectual construct, is based on logically unprovable assumptions, i.e. they are value choices. The role of logic, then, is to dictate the statements or actions that must follow from those assumptions...

The best that we can do is to maintain an appreciation of a number of paradigms of inquiry in terms of their assumptions, and the strengths and weaknesses of their methods. We will then be in a position to choose the paradigm of inquiry best suited to give the desired results in a given problem situation.

The argument for the best paradigm is largely a pragmatic rather than a logical argument and demonstrates THE FITNESS FOR FUNCTION of the chosen paradigm.
(Swepson 1994, p. 2)

None of this should surprise the reader. It is the essential theoretical basis of both this research study (see chapter two) and the subject, WS1002, which is the 'object' of enquiry. Swepson (1994) then reviews assumptions behind action research and what she calls, scientific method (I have problems with this label. See Chalmers 1982 for a wide ranging discussion on the issue of 'scientific method'). What she means by scientific method is a positivist approach to enquiry. I want to discuss two of these assumptions. She highlights, as does Dick, the fundamental question of, *"what is the aim of the enquiry?"* She notes (Swepson 1994, p. 2) that answers to such questions are value choices in the sense that "assumptions behind paradigms of inquiry are not logically defendable." The value choice answer, she argues (p. 4), of scientific method is "to improve the human condition by *adding to the body of knowledge*" (my emphasis), adding that "this is underpinned by the further assumption that *knowledge is truth*" (my emphasis). She then spells out two logical consequences for scientific method of this assumption: first, gain a thorough understanding of the body of knowledge before starting further research; second, separate research from implementation. Next, she contrasts this with the value choice answer of action research: "to improve the human condition by changing the situation" (p. 4), noting that this is underpinned by the assumption that "truth is what works" (p. 4). I do not want to

become embroiled in a lengthy discussion about the merits and demerits of what philosophers label respectively, 'correspondence' and 'pragmatic' theories of truth, which are inseparable in practice from theories of perception and theories concerning the philosophy of the mind (I have alluded to the issue in chapter two). What is important in the present context is the salient point that a research paradigm is much more than a set of tools for approaching a line of inquiry. Research paradigms carry conceptual baggage, baggage which is enmeshed in particular world views, which in turn, ride on assumptions which are not logically defendable. The logical consequences of the action research value choice are, Swepson suggests: first, continual testing in the problem situation to find what works in practice; second, implementation is an integral part of the research design.

A second key question Swepson (1994, pp. 5-6) raises is, *"what is the relationship of the researcher to the world?"* Swepson argues that the value choice answer of the scientific paradigm (note her slight change in terminology) is "the 'real' world is as we perceive it, OR, we do not have direct access to the 'real' world, only our perceptions of it, therefore aim to achieve objectivity by EXCLUDING the perceptions of the researcher" (p. 5). The logical consequences for scientific method of these assumptions are twofold. First, "the researcher reduces their own extraneous perceptions by assuming a disinterested position and using statistics for analysis" (p. 6). Second, we "control for the irrelevant perceptions of human 'objects'" (p. 6). She contrasts this with the action research paradigm, where the value choice answer is: "We do not have access to the 'real' world, only our perceptions of it, therefore aim to achieve objectivity by INCLUDING the

perceptions of all researchers" (p. 6). The logical consequences of this, she suggests, are twofold. First, "include ALL relevant perceptions of ALL relevant co-researchers." Second, "use techniques to find common and idiosyncratic perceptions" (p. 6).

It would be tempting to leave the situation at that, gloating on one's philosophical finesse in effectively sidestepping the empirical issues by suggesting that at a conceptual level, as soon as one makes certain value choices such as, 'the aim of the inquiry is change', that action research is therefore the most appropriate methodology. But I believe we can mount an even stronger case for using action research in the present study, an argument at least partly anchored in the empirical context of educational research in general and higher education research specifically, and partly anchored in the burgeoning use of action research during the 1990s, itself an empirical phenomenon.

Before proceeding with this argument, however, I must reiterate that I am *not* suggesting that action research is the best or most appropriate methodology for all occasions. One of the clearest and most succinct summaries of this idea is contained in Swepson:

> Action research is simply a process for researching and changing a complex situation, either physical or social. It is a process for when the variables are so many and their interconnections are so complex that it is not possible to choose (sic) appropriate ones for testing in a conventional experimental sense. If you ARE in a situation when the variables seem pretty clear cut, it would be silly to (sic) do anything other than an experiment...

> The research aspect of action research is based on an epistemology which aims not to describe the world as it presents itself, but to look for the underlying dynamics that allow it to hang together as it does. Taking an action in the world in an attempt to change it will get some reactions which is data that was

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not there if you simply observed. This then gives (sic) better data for making successful changes in the world, hence Action Research.
(Swepson 9/5/95, p.1)

Dick (1993b; 1994a) endorses this view. He emphasizes that action research is *not* intended as a substitute for experimental or quasi-experimental research, stating that different research paradigms serve different purposes. He acknowledges the merits of conventional research, suggesting it is the most appropriate methodology when you want to find out about a few known variables and the causal relationships between them. But, he argues, action research is most valuable when you must be responsive to the changing demands of a situation. He also notes that it is useful for evaluation of an ongoing program. Action research, he continues, allows research to be done in situations where other research methods may be difficult to use, being useful if you: must remain *flexible;* want to *involve* people in the system being researched; wish to bring about *change* at the same time; and the situation is too *ambiguous* to frame a precise research question. The issue of *change* is crucial and is closely related to flexibility. Recall Dick's (1993a, p. 2) previously cited comments when he suggests that conventional research can inhibit effective change. "To achieve action, action research is responsive. It has to be able to respond to the emerging needs of the situation. It must be flexible in a way that some research methods cannot be." I want to unpackage some of these ideas by arguing that, in addition to the rationale already provided concerning theoretical/methodological congruence, action research is the most appropriate and effective methodology for educational research in general, and research into higher education specifically, when the focus is on the complex and dynamic interface between teaching and learning, which has as its primary goal, professional development in the sense of improving teaching practice. I shall address three

related sets of concerns: issues of flexibility and responsiveness in a world characterized by rapid change; the complexity and ambiguity of the teaching/learning environment; and the theory/practice/research link.

2.2 Change: Flexibility and Responsiveness in Times of Rapid Change

The primary impetus and rationale for the present study was to change an unsatisfactory situation. Specifically, my colleague and co-researcher, Pauline Meemeduma, in teaching 3rd year social work students at the Townsville campus of James Cook University, was confronted with the dilemma that these students lacked basic knowledge of what theories are and how they are constructed. This became even more apparent when they were dealing with knowledge of major social work theories. As a result, Pauline built such notions into SW3001, the core third year social work theory subject, but mindful that this material would be better addressed in first year. She was surprised it was not (Pauline did not at this stage teach first year social work students). Assuming that final year community welfare students would be in a similar predicament, Pauline designed an original version of the subject being researched in the present study for first year community welfare students, whom she did teach, in order to remedy these deficiencies. Later, with the advent of the revamped curriculum structure in 1994, Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Bachelor of Community Welfare (BCW) students pursued a common first two years and Pauline and I working together were able to rework the original subject to deal with these issues across all first year students (see chapter five). Once the original subject was designed, it became clear, as in all educational ventures, that some ways are 'better' or more effective than others, for facilitating student learning and understanding. The subject evolved over time in an attempt

to improve the teaching/learning dynamic, reaching a culmination with the launching of the revamped BSW and BCW degree programs. The entire process was dynamic, characterized by constant change in an attempt to improve the teaching/learning environment.

But there are two levels to consider change in the present context: first, as a major aim of our practice and the research of this practice; but, second, and equally importantly, the context in which we attempt to operationalize this change; a context of rapid social, economic and technological change. Limerick, in the Foreword to the proceedings from the "International Symposium on Action Research in Higher Education, Government and Industry", held in Brisbane on 20-23 March 1989, made the following striking claim:

> Action research as a concept, a philosophy and a methodology of learning has arrived. That fundamentally, is the message symbolised by the Brisbane Symposium, on which this book is based. In 1984, when Bert Cunnington, Brian Trevor Roberts and I advised the Australian Institute of Management that it should support a move towards action learning and action research as a dominant paradigm of management education we were met by a deafening silence – not on the part of management, who thought the point was self-evident, but on the part of academia.
> (Limerick 1991, p. ix)

Interestingly, this professional/community and academic divide characterizes much professional education and is an important element of the present study. Limerick then goes on to question reasons for the increasing legitimacy of action research in just six years, suggesting that the answer lies in the very nature of change – a gradual change of world view resulting from crisis. But what is this crisis? Limerick suggests that the crisis is a consequence of the "rapidly widening gap between the conventional paradigm of corporatist institutionalized education and the condition of post-modern society" (p. x).

The new operation of collaborative individuals capable of bringing down the Berlin Wall was hardly likely to tolerate the implacable imperatives of institutionalised education. As they placed demands on educational institutions for programs which are more relevant to the processes of their working lives, and as the institutions became more dependent on meeting client needs for their own survival, so they too were forced to look more carefully at the alternatives offered by action research.
(Limerick 1991, p. x)

To some, these claims may appear startling. What they do reinforce, however, is the intimate connection between educational processes and the historical, cultural, political and social milieux from which these emerge (see chapters two and three). Peters and Waterman (1982) and Limerick, Cunnington and Trevor-Roberts (1984) point to the appropriateness of action research for developing managerial skills and professional competencies in times of *rapid change*. Rapid change is critical in this context. Traditional research methodologies evolved within the context of a different world view, when the world itself was perceived to be a more predictable and ordered place. We are living in an age of rapid social, political and economic change. It is crucial that we adopt methodologies, values and philosophies which enable us to deal with these rapid changes. Zuber-Skerritt (1991, p. xii) notes that the "shift of focus from content to process is of increasing importance in a world that is fast changing in technological, political, economic and socio-demographic terms." She further argues that "the theory and practice of action research is developing fast, as it is a useful framework in which to develop new strategies and competencies for complex tasks in an uncertain environment of rapid social and technological change."

If our primary aim is change within a social, economic and technological environment characterized by rapid change, it is evident that responsiveness and flexibility are paramount. Dick claims:

> I think that the major justification for action research methods is that they can be responsive to the situation in a way that many other research methods can not, at least in the short term. On these grounds I think action research will usually, though perhaps not always, be cyclic in nature. In the interests of rigour, each cycle will include critical reflection. In most instances it will also be qualitative and participative to some extent.
> (Dick 1993a, p. 7)

I have already discussed why action research is so responsive, particularly the notion of multiple cycles which also increase rigour and flexibility. But responsiveness is also at least partly a function of *involvement*. This refers to two aspects in the present context. First, involvement of the practitioners; in this case, the two lecturers, Pauline and myself. Second, involvement of the students. The rationale for the former involvement (practitioners) is that if higher education teachers are to be committed to improving their own practice, they must, as a logical prerequisite, understand this practice. Understanding of this practice will be most heightened when the practitioners themselves take responsibility for researching their own teaching practice, not when outside researchers take on this task (see Ramsden 1992). Note also that the evolution of this subject and its research came about due to a meeting of two practitioners with different professional backgrounds, social work and education. In our case, I was the 'outside' educational researcher moving to an 'inside' position. This made the use of outside educational researchers even less necessary. The logic for involving students in the research process will be discussed further in chapter six, process. In educational terms, we also considered it vital, since it would empower students by giving them greater insight into their own meta learning processes. We

perceived this to be critical for reasons already discussed relating to a rapid

changing world in which process learning was assuming increasing importance.

2.3   Complexity/ambiguity

Dick's experience suggests that

> ...in the very early stages of a change project, you often don't understand
> enough to know where to start. So you may not start at the best starting place.
> (When I say this to practitioners I often get immediate agreement.   This
> accords with their experience. Many of them, especially the less experienced,
> think that this will change as their experience increases. The more experienced
> practitioners realize that this is because of the nature of people and change. It
> has surprisingly little to do with experience and inexperience.) In other words
> you have to be able to start at the wrong place and still get where you want to
> go.
> (Dick 11/4/95, p. 3)

Two related issues impacting on the question of ambiguous and complex

situations, *causality* and *generalizability*, cast further light on some key differences

between action research and more conventional methodologies (e.g. experimental

science) and the attendant issue of appropriate methodology. I shall discuss each

briefly.

2.3.1   Causality

One strength of experimental studies is that they enable us to isolate a limited

number of specific variables and to explore the causal relationship between them

by proposing a hypothesis which can be tested experimentally, and on which

statistical analyses can be performed, to determine the likelihood of the

hypothesis' veracity.   (Strictly speaking, a null hypothesis is proposed, and

attempts made to *falsify* it. If the null hypothesis, H_0, is falsified, researchers tend

to accept H_1, the alternative hypothesis.) Action research can lay no such claims to

causal explanations, in the sense of 'explaining' causal relationships between discrete variables. Dick (1994a, p. 5) points out, however, that "a causal connection between variables may on occasion be the most plausible interpretation of data collected and interpreted using action research methods." The question immediately arises: "How can action research justify its conclusions when it cannot give causal explanations." Dick (1994a, p. 6) provides a cogent answer. "When there are many variables, and they interact (often bi-directionally) in complex ways, causal explanations are themselves likely to be very complex. To put it differently, when almost everything has an effect on everything else, it doesn't help much to know that 'a' influences 'b'." It is also worth bearing in mind that the issue of causality is not as clearcut and straightforward as some proponents of experimental science would have us believe. Recall our discussion from chapter two where Hume alerted us to the problematic nature of causality, arguing that most putative causal claims were, in fact, little more than thinly disguised correlations. The debate continues into the modern age with the advent of quantum mechanics in which the notion of causality has been largely replaced by statistical probability (see, for instance, Zukav 1979; Capra 1983; Suzuki 1997; Deutsch 1997; Smolin 1997).

2.3.2 Generalizability

The second issue is *generalizability*. As Dick (1994a, p. 6) notes, with action research you can often only make claims about the people and/or systems that are actually part of the research study. "It may not be safe to assume that other people or other systems are the same." But, as we shall see, this may be an advantage, and there are ways to redress the generalizability 'problem'. Swepson (1994, p. 7)

argues that action research "makes the value choice of pursuing *situation specific* knowledge rather than *generalizable* knowledge, i.e. it will trade off external validity for internal validity, if necessary" (my italics). In the present study, this meant that we were interested in how to teach most effectively critical thinking about action and theory construction to a specific cohort of students studying a particular degree course, operating in a particular place and time. Our concern was not, for instance, how the same content and process could be taught to engineering students studying in the Congo in 1973. Dick (1994a, p. 6) expresses the same point slightly differently when he suggests that action research "pursues local relevance, if necessary, at the expense of global relevance."

I want to take up, briefly, two points emerging from the above. First, the generalization which experimental science provides is often difficult to relate to social situations. As Dick (1994a, p. 7) points out, "the generalizability of experimental research, when done within social systems, is a very narrow form of generalizability. Knowing that it is true that 'a' causes 'b' may not be much help when 'a' and 'b' are immersed in a system of many other, interconnected variables." Second, Dick (1994a, pp. 6-7) suggests that "some generalizability can be claimed for the findings of action research. If several studies in diverse settings give similar findings, this allows greater generalizability than a single study typically does."

The number of variables impacting on the present study and the complexity of their interconnections were far too great to consider an experimental study. For example, we were dealing with the immensely complex area of human learning

and cognitive functioning and development. We knew we had to teach the material identified above, but the literature (educational and psychological) was singularly unhelpful in suggesting how this might be done. It was essential for us to adopt a problem-posing/problem-solving, trial and error approach with inbuilt self-corrective mechanisms. Action research fitted this agenda admirably.

2.4   Theory/Practice/Research

In higher education, indeed, in professional education in general, as we have already noted, one major problem has been the hiatus between theory and practice, educational research and classroom teaching (see, for example, Zuber-Skerritt 1991 for the higher education context, and Carr and Kemmis 1986 for education in general). Originally trained as a primary classroom teacher, particularly within a second language learning context, I have always been struck by the irony that during the last quarter century we have seen a major shift in focus from teacher-centred to learner-centred primary classrooms, based at least in part on a sound knowledge of how children 'naturally' learn, while tertiary institutions have clung stoically, at least within the humanities and social sciences, to largely teacher-centred approaches, epitomized by the traditional lecture (which, incidentally, in the hands of skilful practitioners, need not be entirely teacher-centred). It is as if higher education pedagogy is premised on the assumption that a major restructuring of the brain occurs some time during adolescence which eliminates the rationale for learner-centred approaches.

Zuber-Skerritt (1992, p. 128) declares that "it has been repeatedly pointed out in recent years (Elton and Laurillard 1979; Rudduck 1985; Becher 1980; Stenhouse,

1975) that educational research has been irrelevant to and aloof from educational practice." This leads her to conclude (Zuber-Skerritt 1992, p. 26) that "the criterion by which to assess research into higher education is not theoretical sophistication (e.g. grand theory, as in other sciences), but its ability to improve practice and its success in doing so." For Pauline and I, this seemed self-evident. It did so because ultimately we were educating students to cope with the rigorous demands of complex social work practice. In a world where the answers are not clearcut, but the consequences of ill-informed decisions of the gravest order, including potential death, it was paramount that we provided students with at least some of the skills for dealing with this complex situation.

Glaser and Straus (1967, p. 32) in their pioneering work on grounded theory, draw a distinction between two kinds of grounded theory: substantive theory and formal theory. Substantive theory, they argue, is theory developed for a substantive or empirical area of enquiry such as professional education. They further argue that "substantive theory faithful to the empirical situation cannot...be formulated merely by applying a few ideas from an established formal theory to the substantive area." Zuber-Skerritt uses this distinction to justify action research, drawing three key implications from their work for research into learning and teaching in higher education.

> First, adequate substantive theories in higher education cannot be produced by merely importing formal theories from other sciences; they must be grounded in, and generated from, the reality of learning-teaching situations. Second, the value and scientific status of research in higher education is determined by practice and its improvement (rather than practice being determined by theory). This means that research in higher education is scientific and useful only when it suggests improvements and when these suggestions are tested and confirmed by practical experiences. Third, the success of research in higher education is dependent on the active participation of practitioners in the research process

and on the extent to which they develop an understanding of their own problems and practices.
(Zuber-Skerritt 1992, pp. 27-28)

Again, the question of methodological rigour raises its head, this time in connection with relevance. Note that at times a tradeoff relationship exists between rigour and relevance. One of the most stunning examples of this in the twentieth century can be seen in the history of psychology, where, under the influence of American Behaviourism, from the 1920s to the 1950s, a methodological decision was taken to exclude the 'black box' of the human mind as the appropriate domain of psychological study. Psychology was conceived to be the science of *observable* behaviour as revealed by the measurable (quantifiable), observable responses to measurable stimuli. It was not the place of psychology to enquire into what happened inside the 'black box' of the mind between these two intervening events. This methodological fiat had startling implications for the study of learning, which for the best part of half a century consisted of rewarding rats or pigeons with pellets of food for performing tricks such as running down alleys or pressing bars (see Koestler 1967). A major impetus for this methodological cartel in the academic discipline of psychology was the desire to instil rigour (psychology was suffering adolescent identity crisis, and, like most adolescents, was attempting to shake off the fetters of parentage, in this case, the philosophical roots that spawned the discipline in the late nineteenth century). Rigour was certainly attained, but as history so poignantly demonstrates, at the expense of relevance. For almost half a century psychology refused to associate with the human mind. This brief digression into the history of psychology is instructive in the present context. Do we, higher education researchers, want to be the American behaviourists of the twenty first century and

abandon relevance for the sake of rigour? Particularly when I have already provided evidence that action research does provide effective tools to ensure rigour. This will become even more evident when I describe the process of the study in chapter six.

CONCLUSION

The first section of this chapter provides a broad overview of action research. Within the context of this study, I have suggested that at the broadest level, action research is research by higher education teachers themselves into their own teaching practice and into student learning. It consists of two components: action (change) and research (understanding) outcomes. It tends to be cyclic, participative, qualitative and critically reflective. Rigour is attained first, by using multiple cycles, with planning before action and critical analysis after it; and second, by vigorously seeking out disconfirming evidence from as many sources as possible within each cycle. Critical reflection is paramount. I have also highlighted the key aspect of writing research by introducing the postmodern notion of research as narrative. Next, I distinguish action research from related concepts such as action learning, action science and action theory.

In the second section of the chapter I justify action research with four arguments:

1. Action research as a methodology and a concept is congruent with the theoretical and philosophical framework adopted in this study. Indeed, the methodology is a logical corollary of the conceptual framework.

2. Action research is the most flexible and responsive methodology for dealing with both short term and long term change in a world characterized increasingly by rapid technological, social and economic change.

3. Action research is the most appropriate methodology to use in complex and, at times, ambiguous situations such as the teaching/learning dynamic where the variables are so many and their interconnections so complex as to defy simple identification of a clearcut research question.

4. Action research, because of the focus on linking 'ideas-in-action', is the methodology best equipped to deal with the theory/practice/research link; a crucial concern in the context of professional education in general and the present study in particular.

I have attempted to justify action research in general terms as the most appropriate research paradigm for the present study. After discussing the overall context of the study in chapter five, in chapter six, process, I shall justify my specific brand of action research where it might appear to differ from the general overview I have provided in this chapter.

Wrapped in time and place we wriggle like larvae aspiring to fly.
(Gary Ovington, 1999)

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTEXT:

WHO, WHERE, WHAT AND WHEN

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe the context of the study. In a

sense, the previous four chapters have all been contextual chapters, locating the

thesis theoretically, epistemologically, ontologically, educationally and

methodologically. In this chapter I mean something different. Adapting Schwab's

(1969) schema, I shall explain what I mean by context. Schwab's work is

interesting because his book, *College Curricula and Student Protest,* was an

analysis of the student revolt against college curricula in the United States during

the 1960s. Schwab argues that there are four key 'commonplaces' necessary for

understanding any educational situation: teachers, students, subject matter, and

milieu. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) extend Schwab's (1969) use of the term

'milieu' by suggesting that any educational situation involves a variety of different

milieux. I will follow their definition of milieu:

> The milieu is the context of teaching and learning, creating certain kinds of
> opportunities and potentials for education, and imposing certain constraints and
> limitations upon it. It consists of things (resources, structures and facilities) and
> people (like parents, employers and others). And it is historically-formed,
> containing in its structures certain patterns which have been socially and
> historically constructed. It is also a product of – even a hostage to – its
> times…and broad contemporary political currents.
> (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p. 92)

It should be evident that a number of issues raised in this quotation have been discussed already in the first three chapters, including those concerning the broader canvas of higher education in the 1990s. Consequently, I shall reserve this chapter to address those aspects of Schwab's four part schema not previously discussed, particularly teachers, students and subject matter. Compare this with the input-process-outcome model I outlined previously. *Inputs* are what teachers and students bring into the classroom (student characteristics; teacher characteristics; course characteristics). *Process* refers to what teachers and students do in the course (classroom atmosphere; teacher behaviours; student learning activities; course organization; evaluation procedures). *Product* refers to outcomes attributable to teaching (end-of-course learning, attitude change and skill acquisition; long-term learning, attitude change and skill acquisition). This chapter will provide information on input and process variables. I shall divide the chapter into six sections. The first three will correspond to the above definition of milieu and will proceed from the wide angle lens to the zoom. I shall begin with a brief discussion of the North Queensland context in the opening section, then progressively narrow the lens to focus on James Cook University in the second section, followed by a brief foray into the history of the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare. The final three sections will be identical with Schwab's nomenclature: the teachers; the students; the subject.

I.   NORTH QUEENSLAND

During the first semester of 1992 I was commissioned by the then Head of Department of Social Work and Community Welfare to conduct a research project

and write a subsequent monograph, which was effectively an environmental assessment detailing issues impacting on the department's quest to provide effective social work and community welfare education in the region (Ovington 1992). I shall draw extensively on this paper in the following section on North Queensland, particularly since it draws together many of the major surveys, needs analyses and related public documents published in the region during the 1980s and early 1990s. Note that my sketch of the environment stops during 1994, the time of the present study. It does not, for instance, include most recent developments such as the Wik legislation. While these events were simmering beneath the surface, as will be evident from discussion below, they were *not* part of the environment at the time the study was conducted.

I use the term 'North Queensland' to refer to the area lying from Mackay, at approximately the 21st parallel, to the tip of the state, Cape York. I do not include the Fitzroy region of central Queensland since this area is serviced by the University of Central Queensland at Rockhampton. Adapting the structure of my monograph (Ovington 1992), I shall divide the discussion in this section into four parts: geography, political environment, socio-demographic patterns, and economic environment. I shall not attempt an exhaustive survey; it is unnecessary for present purposes. Readers are referred to my monograph for greater detail. What I shall attempt is a broad brush backdrop enabling the reader to capture the flavour of the North Queensland context in which the study is located, particularly those brush strokes impinging on curriculum development and educational delivery.

1.1   Geography

North Queensland is a vast and diverse region containing the rapidly-expanding cosmopolitan centre of Cairns, the lush tropical rainforests of the Daintree, numerous islands dotting the turquoise waters of the Great Barrier Reef, drought-prone outback cattle stations the size of small European countries, numerous remote indigenous communities, diverse in themselves, and the city of Townsville, including the rapidly-growing Thuringowa Shire.

1.2   Political Environment

In the light of recent developments in Queensland politics (e.g. the emergence of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party; the Wik legislation), both of which have transcended the purely regional to dominate national politics in recent times, it is worth quoting in full my conclusions about the North Queensland political environment in 1992.

> Two issues have begun to assume increasing importance in North Queensland and can be expected to dominate the political stage in the coming years: indigenous affairs and sustainable development. Both issues are related and can be placed within a global context. The 1987 World Heritage Listing of the Queensland Wet Tropical Rainforests and the recent High Court Mabo lands right decision are strong indicators of these trends.
> (Ovington 1992, p. 2)

For the record, I should mention that they are two issues close to my own heart. I was a founding member of the Townsville Green Party and spent a number of years working on remote Aboriginal communities in north-western Australia (see below). It is also my perception that North Queensland is a bastion for political conservatism and racism; though as recent Australian political history demonstrates, the region does not have a mortgage on this claim. During research

for my monograph (Ovington 1992) a number of departmental staff expressed concern about the extent and nature of racism and widespread political conservatism within the region. The general perception was that this influenced service delivery in community agencies, which in turn, had a significant impact on innovative curriculum development. The significance of this will become evident below, since the subject forming the research basis of the present study was part of the revamped degree structure and curriculum.

1.3 Socio-demographic Patterns

The region's population is just over half a million, comprising 16% of Australia's area, but only 4% of its population. Most people in the region live in a string of cities and towns clinging to the eastern seaboard. The two major cities and their immediate environs alone, Townsville/Thuringowa (approximately 130,000) and Cairns/Mulgrave (approximately 100,000), contain almost half the region's population. This means there are vast areas of the region largely uninhabited (Harris 1991). In general, North Queensland is a growing region (though this growth is focused largely in the two city shires referred to above), which has a high proportion of very young (0-4). Both the Townsville and Cairns regions are areas of high residential mobility. In Cairns, this is related primarily to tourist-related growth, and in Townsville, James Cook University and one of the country's largest army bases are significant contributors. Both Townsville and Cairns have a significantly higher proportion of single parent families than the national average. An estimated 2,500 Townsville families live below the poverty line (Hornby 1989; Cilento and Sproats 1991).

North Queensland has a significant indigenous presence. Approximately 20% of all Australia's indigenous peoples live in the region. This represents 6% of the region's population. Most of the indigenous peoples in the Northern Region, as distinct from Cairns and the Far North, live in Townsville, which recorded the largest concentration of indigenous peoples in Australia in absolute terms (7,204) in the 1986 census. Many of the indigenous peoples in Townsville are young (0-14 years). Because the indigenous population is increasing at a much faster rate than the non-indigenous population (22.5% compared to 11% from 1981-1986), indigenous peoples are likely to assume an increasingly important role in the region (Hornby 1989).

1.4   Economic Environment

The most obvious feature of the economy of North Queensland has been its dependence on industries which either exploit natural resources or process the outputs of these natural resource activities. Mining, agriculture and transport are of significantly greater relative importance in North Queensland than they are in the rest of the country. Tourism is a significant growth area in the region, particularly in the Cairns area. Manufacturing is relatively insignificant. Townsville has a much more diverse economic base than the rest of the region with a high proportion of the workforce employed in public administration, education, defence and transport (Harris 1991). The community service sector has been an area of significant growth in recent years. Projections are for continued steady economic growth (Hornby 1989). Unemployment has increased steadily in Australia over the last decade with North Queensland experiencing a higher rate than the rest of the country, particularly in the Cairns area (Cilento and Sproats 1991). Youth

unemployment is significant, particularly in the 20-24 age bracket (approximately 20% in all regions of North Queensland) (Hornby 1989).

1.5   Summary of Key Implications for Social Work Education

I shall highlight two key implications. First, there is a significant need and demand for community human services in the region, and, by implication, for trained personnel to staff these services. Hence, the strong continuing need for social work education in North Queensland. Second, the form of this education (content, process and delivery modes) should take account of salient regional features such as significant indigenous presence and locational disadavantage. This raises access and equity issues.

II.   JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY OF NORTH QUEENSLAND

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (1993, p. 7) emphasizes that "institutional ethos and climate influence the status of teaching within the institution and the quality of the students' learning environments." Hence, the importance of the following background.

2.1   Background

The James Cook University *Quality Portfolio*, Volumes One and Two, 1994 (JCU 1994a; JCU 1994b), published as part of the DEET-inspired Quality Assurance Project referred to in chapter one, is the key source in this section. Unless otherwise specified, all information can be sourced to these references. Volume Two (JCU 1994b) is a book of appendices to accompany the main text of Volume One. James Cook University of North Queensland was established in 1970,

Australia's first tropical university, with a view to servicing distinct northern, tropical and Pacific Rim environmental, economic and cultural needs in addition to a wide range of general and professional programs at undergraduate and graduate levels. In 1982 the university was one of the first to amalgamate with a college of advanced education, Townsville College of Advanced Education (TCAE). This resulted in rapid growth. However, the period of most rapid growth occurred in the period immediately prior to the present study, between 1989 and 1992, when undergraduate student numbers rose from 3,600 to 6,000; academic staff from 294 to 472; and postgraduate student numbers rose from 668 to 1,041. It was during this time that the main Townsville campus, known as the Douglas Campus, was augmented by the Vincent Campus in Townsville for Art and Design and for Music, and by the establishment and expansion of the Cairns campus and facilities in Mackay, Mt Isa, and the Aboriginal community of Yarrabah. At the beginning of 1994 the university had stabilized with 6,737 undergraduates, 1,330 postgraduates and 547 full- and part-time academic staff. The 1993-94 period, overlapping with the present study, was the time when the Quality Assurance focus was on teaching and learning issues.

2.2   Staff

Interestingly, 22% of staff at this time had formal teacher training or certification, although School of Education staff comprised only 8% of total academic staff. Three percent of staff were Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders. Only 28% were female.

2.3   Students

Of the university's 8,067 students (undergraduate and postgraduate), 76% were from Townsville, Cairns and adjoining North Queensland areas, with 11% from the rest of Queensland, 8% from interstate and 4% from overseas. Not surprisingly, the university's undergraduate teaching is focused on students from the north. There is a high percentage of mature age students, with an average student age of 24.2 years in 1994. Female students comprised 58% of all students, the seventh highest proportion nationally. Forty- four percent of all students were from rural and remote communities, over double the national average and the seventh highest complement nationally. The university has the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the country, 4.5% of the student body, totalling 347 in 1994. Of these students, nearly half are over 26 years old. A significant proportion, 65%, are from remote and country communities and the Torres Strait Islands. It is significant to note in passing, that given these circumstances, the university's title, James Cook, is an unfortunate one. In summary, the university's undergraduate enrolment profile in relative terms has a high level of equity input (women, indigenous, mature age, locationally disadvantaged), with significant local participation rates. The university enrols a culturally and socially diverse group of students, many of whom are the first generation in their families to have access to tertiary education, and many of whom leave country and remote communities to undertake tertiary study.

2.4   Policy and Procedures

The quality of teaching and learning at the university is the responsibility of heads of departments, deans, faculties and the Teaching Committee, all reporting to the

Vice- Chancellor through Academic Board.   In many departments, these responsibilities are delegated to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching coordinators and committees. These academic activities were supported in 1990 by the implementation of systematic strategic planning at all levels of the university, and the establishment of the Staff Development Unit (now Development and Training Unit or DATU), responsible for professional development and evaluation of teaching. In 1993, the Vice-Chancellor's Working Party on Quality Assurance (now Strategic Planning Advisory Committee) was established. A Professorial Fellowship and a Higher Education Office were established in 1994 to coordinate the university's approach to quality assurance. The Professorial Fellowship was taken up by Dr. Allan Luke, previously a Reader in the School of Education, who in 1993 was sole supervisor for my doctoral project (then an entirely different topic) and who, in 1994 and 1995 was co-supervisor with Dr Pauline Meemeduma from the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare, after which time Professor Luke left James Cook University and I continued my doctoral enrolment under the supervision of Pauline Meemeduma. This connection explains my close link with the university's Quality Assurance Project for teaching and learning.

Quality Assurance for teaching and learning has been developed in six key stages as follows:

- The *Teaching and Learning Development Strategy, 1992-94* identified 14 key strategies for the development of quality assurance systems.

- The *Internal Audit Report on the Management of Educational Programs* (Harker and Jackson 1993) recommended expanded procedures for course and program evaluation and for student evaluation of subjects.

- A $149,000 study, *Quality Assurance in Teaching at James Cook University of North Queensland* (Annesley, King and Harte 1994), audited instruction, assessment and teaching administration and made recommendations for quality assurance.

- The third *Equity Plan 1994-96* established updated student targets and strategies for access for disadvantaged groups.

- To guide the operation and expansion of the Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation, Research and Development (CATSIPRD), strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education were developed by the university and senior representatives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Key aims are to develop courses, research and community development projects, to enhance access to mainstream programs, and to ensure successful participation of indigenous peoples in tertiary studies (*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 1992-94, 1994-96*).

- An updated and revised Teaching and Learning Development Strategy for 1994-96 was being debated by the Teaching Committee during the period of this study.

The current approach to quality assurance in teaching and learning begins from Council adoption of the AVCC *Guidelines for Effective University Teaching* (1993), and goes on to define a broad agenda for excellence. In recognition of the variation in size and history of departments and the field-specific nature of pedagogy, the university required departments to develop and implement appropriate systems for quality assurance in teaching and learning. These operate under the umbrella of university-wide standards including postgraduate supervision

rules, compulsory teaching evaluation and the Subject Template system introduced in 1995. I drafted a subject outline proforma for the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare in my role as Staff/Student Liaison Officer during 1994, which the university subsequently adapted as part of the campus-wide Subject Template system.

James Cook University received $637,000 in quality reward funding in 1994. One hundred and eighty six thousand dollars was used to establish the Professorial Fellowship and Higher Education Office, leading to the following:

- *Quality Assurance Meetings* with academic staff, academic services staff, administration, Staff Association, and Student Union representatives to debate issues in teaching, and in equity and access, and to raise awareness of key systems for excellence in teaching.

- An *Independent Analysis of Teaching/Learning Systems* undertaken by external consultants.

- A *Compulsory Subject and Teaching Evaluation System* to be piloted in 1994 and implemented for all subjects in 1995.

- *Quality Assurance Working Parties* to examine current systems and make policy recommendations in specific areas, including Practicum Supervision.

- *Performance Reviews of Departments* to be undertaken on a regular cycle with internal and external reviewers.

Two other initiatives supported by 1994 quality reward funds relate to teaching and learning:

- *The Graduate Certificate in Education (Tertiary Teaching)* – offered by DATU and the School of Education with a 1994 enrolment of 19 academic staff, including Dr Pauline Meemeduma; and with university commitment to fund a further 20 places for each of the next five years.

- *The Merit Teaching Allocation* – approximately $80,000 in 1995 and planned to expand to approximately $200,000 per annum over a three year implementation period, to assess performance indicators of individual departments annually, and to encourage those demonstrating innovative and excellent teaching.

2.5   Undergraduate Teaching Goal and Strategies

The Quality Assurance Project identified the following goal for undergraduate teaching:

> To produce graduates of distinction with the motivation, skills, knowledge, and ethical awareness to address local, regional and national needs.
> (JCU 1994a, p. 1)

Sixteen strategies were identified to achieve this goal. For the sake of brevity, I shall detail briefly only those having a significant bearing on the present study; though for ease of reference, I shall retain the numbering system of the original document. The italics are my emphases.

3.1.   To establish teaching/learning environments that promote *quality interaction.*

3.2.   To establish systems to assist and unify curriculum planning and development.

The Academic Board now requires uniform subject outlines which make explicit: curriculum content; objectives; instructional modes; assessment requirements; and grievance and appeal mechanisms.

3.4. To monitor the effectiveness and fairness of assessment procedures throughout the university.

3.6. To establish compulsory student evaluation of subjects as a component of curriculum development, course planning and subject appraisal.

3.8. To establish explicit and accessible procedures for grade appeals and academic grievances.

3.9. To establish systems of student representation to increase student input into teaching/learning processes.

3.14. To encourage research into disciplinary and professional teaching and learning.

3.16. To encourage collaborative and interdisciplinary teaching.

Perusal of this and subsequent chapters indicates that Pauline and I have been trailblazers in many of these areas.

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND COMMUNITY WELFARE

The AVCC (1993, p. 5) stresses that students are just as influenced by the ethos of departments as they are by individual teachers and for this reason it is vital that departments and departmental heads "establish an ethos where academics feel free and are encouraged and supported to teach and assess in innovative ways, and where all students ... feel valued as partners in learning." To what extent did the

Department of Social Work and Community Welfare at James Cook University foster such a climate?

The history of social work and community welfare course offerings in North Queensland is a complex one spanning almost two decades up until the time of the present study, across two different institutions, involving numerous special intakes, several campuses, a number of different diploma and degree offerings and patterns, and a variety of learning modes. But it is important to briefly trace this history, since the historical complexity has a significant bearing on the present research (see below). For ease of reference, initially, I shall trace the history in two parts: social work offerings, and community welfare offerings. My rationale for doing so is based on the historical fact that the initial programs were launched entirely separately in two different institutions. For similar historical reasons, I shall merge the discussion of both offerings from July 1991 when the department that existed at the time of this study came into being. To facilitate presentation of this historically complex material, I shall initially summarize key features in the following table.

Table 5.1:

A History of Social Work and Community Welfare Education Offerings

in North Queensland

	SOCIAL WORK	COMMUNITY WELFARE
1976	BA (Social Work) introduced – 3 years JCU – Townsville	
1977		ADCW introduced - 2 years TCAE
1978	AASW accredited degree – course name changed to BSW; extended to 4 yrs	
1979	~	Accreditation Off-campus intake – Mackay and Cairns
1981		Off-campus → external mode
1982	TCAE almagamates with JCU	TCAE amalgamates with JCU ADCW offered through JCU, Department of Behavioural Sciences
1983		AICWEP introduced
1987	BSW introduced in Cairns (4th year in Townsville)	ADCW offered at Cairns
1990	Department of Behavioural Sciences → School of Behavioral Sciences Division of Social Work and Community Welfare created	BCW introduced (3 years) ADCW (2 years) to be phased out
1991	Department of Social Work and Community Welfare created	

3.1 Social Work

In "response to persistent requests from social workers living in Northern Queensland" (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993b, p. 6), in 1976 James Cook University introduced a three year Bachelor of Arts (Social Work) degree. During that year proposals were drawn up for a four year Bachelor of Social Work program located within the Department of Behavioural Sciences and moves initiated to have the degree accredited by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) (Scott 1976; Grichting 1976). Following AASW accreditation in 1978, the course name was changed to Bachelor of Social Work before the first graduates emerged from the originally planned three year BA (Social Work) degree (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a; Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993b). In 1987 the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) was introduced in Cairns. However, due to logistical issues related chiefly to staffing, the fourth and final year had to be completed in Townsville (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a).

3.2 Community Welfare

Community welfare offerings had their birth when Townsville College of Advanced Education (TCAE) launched the two year Associate Diploma in Community Welfare (ADCW) in the first semester of 1977. Accreditation was granted at the beginning of 1979. The same year, in response to long-standing community aspirations, an off-campus intake was initiated in Mackay and Cairns. Tuition of this intake was converted to an external mode in 1981, and with the amalgamation of TCAE and JCU in 1982 the off-campus program was extended to include all areas of the state through distance education in Open Learning mode

(Store 1982), though there was a delay in offering the course in this mode until July 1983 (JCU 1984). With amalgamation, the ADCW was incorporated into programs offered by the Department of Behavioural Sciences (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a). Again, in response to community requests, the Aboriginal and Islander Community Welfare Education Program (AICWEP) was finally launched as a pilot project in 1983 (JCU 1984; Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993c). In 1987, the same year BSW offerings commenced in Cairns, the ADCW was also offered internally at the Cairns campus (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993c). Finally, in 1990 the two year ADCW began a phasing out process (still not complete by the beginning of this study due to part-time and Open Learning modes), to be replaced by a three year Bachelor of Community Welfare (BCW) degree.

3.3   The Birth of a Department

Throughout all these developments, social work and community welfare course offerings remained part of the Department of Behavioural Sciences. Due to steady growth, followed by a rapid surge beginning in 1989 (see above), the department became the School of Behavioural Sciences in 1990, housing the three Divisions of Social Work and Community Welfare, Psychology and Sociology, and Anthropology and Archaeology. The moves of these other divisions "towards autonomy within the School of Behavioural Sciences, greatly influenced the development of the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare, as did the increasing need for trained welfare personnel in North Queensland" (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993b, p. 6). As a result, in July, 1991, the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare was established with the

appointment of a foundation professor. The department remained an integral part of the School of Behavioural Sciences (and this extended to physical location), located within the Faculty of Arts.

3.4   Summary of Key Themes

The briefest perusal of the above history reveals a department with startlingly complex program offerings. In 1993, the year immediately prior to this study, it was calculated that the department offered 11 different programs at undergraduate level alone. Given that full time staff totalled only 18 on both campuses, this was less than two staff per program. How could such a circumstance arise? First, at the time of this study, the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare was the sole provider of tertiary studies and qualifications in social work and community welfare studies in North Queensland. Indeed, in 1982 when James Cook University began offering the ADCW in fully external mode, it was the only institution in the country to be offering accredited community welfare studies in external mode (Putt 1986). Thus, the department had a special responsibility to respond to the human service education needs of the region. *Access* and *equity* were paramount. Issues of locational disadvantage were responsible for the growth of decentralized delivery in Cairns, the establishment of an off-campus centre in Mackay and access through the BCW Open Learning Program. The significant *indigenous* presence in the region accounted for the growth of specially tailored programs (AICWEP).

Departmental responsiveness to students and community played a central role in program proliferation. Part of this was due to professional accreditation requirements which stipulated the provision of formal structures to enable key

stakeholders, including students, though interestingly, not clients, to participate in decision-making related to the social work program (AASW 1994b). I referred to this issue in chapter one in relation to the wrestle for control of social work turf. In practical terms, this had two consequences. First, as part of the department's ongoing curriculum development processes it utilized feedback from students, graduates and employers (see Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993b; Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993c). Second, it meant student representation of at least one member from each year of both degree programs on all permanent departmental committees. Significantly, the Committee for Quality Assurance (1995) praised and encouraged both types of strategies. The situation was compounded by historical factors. I shall mention two. First, the institutional amalgamation in 1982 resulted in two types of social welfare course offerings: social work, and community welfare. Second, three factors led to the decision to adopt a degree program, rather than a diploma one, for community welfare. These reasons were: the continuing preference and increasing prestige attached to degrees for welfare studies in Australia; increased employment prospects for degree graduates, particularly in the Queensland Public Sector; and demands from current students and graduates for a higher level of award (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1993c). Due to the department's commitment to access and equity, and consequent flexible attitude to modes of delivery (part-time and full-time, internal and Open Learning), this situation resulted in a variety of upgrading programs and an overlap of some years while students still currently enrolled in non-extant programs continued their old degree program. The end result of the above historical, regional and institutional

factors, was a plethora of program offerings which had grown organically in response to regional needs and community demands.

The upshot was that the department in its various guises over the years had demonstrated astonishing responsiveness to key stakeholders and commitment to ensuring that as many students as possible could access a social work or community welfare education program irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age, location or employment commitments. But this very commitment was a thorn in its side, since it was unable to match resources to handle the diversity of program offerings and staff were continually under pressure to fulfil basic teaching requirements. Freedom to "teach and assess in innovative ways" (AVCC 1993, p. 5) appeared as the demented ravings of a shell-shocked academic. This applied particularly to the Open Learning program where burgeoning student rumblings over the years led to a major program review (see Ovington 1994).

3.5   Strategic Planning and Curriculum Review

The multiplicity of program offerings, given staffing and other resources, was clearly an absurdly complex and untenable organizational situation.   This circumstance was particularly evident to the foundation professor for the newly-formed Department of Social Work and Community Welfare who perceived one of his key early tasks to review the situation with a view to streamlining. This also dovetailed with the university-wide quest for a strategic plan (see above). A two day departmental review and strategic planning workshop in November, 1991 was one of the first steps in the process. From this a number of task forces were established, which resulted in an environmental assessment of factors impinging on

the department's work (see above, Ovington 1992), and an internal assessment of the department's current status. Both these assessments combined to produce a departmental *Position Paper* in June 1992 (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a), which served as the basis for the *Departmental Strategic Plan 1992-96* (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992b). One of the key task forces formed in 1992, the Educational Programs Task Force, evolved into the Curriculum Review Committee, of which both Pauline Meemeduma and I were members. This parent committee also spawned two Curriculum Review Subcommittees, one each for Social Work and Community Welfare.

Much of this debate in the early stages concerned the structure of the two degree programs and their relationship to each other, with the touted possibility of streamlining to offer a common first two years for both programs. It would be intellectually dishonest of me to gloss over this debate, which was at times highly-charged and emotional. Indeed, it is worth quoting in detail some aspects of the conclusion to my environmental assessment.

> ...there is no doubt that the processes involved in this debate have a significant impact on the environment in which the Department operates. In fact, these processes represent one of the Department's most significant environmental threats. My observations thus far lead me to the sad conclusion that at times the BSW/BCW debate is used as a tool by some of the protagonists in the debate for furthering their own political ends; ends which bear little relation to the progressive social welfare practice espoused by these same protagonists. I conclude with a plea for all of us to scrutinize closely our motivations in respect of this debate. We do not have to like everyone in the Department. But we have chosen to be part of a team which claims commitment to social justice and change. If we are to have any credibility in the eyes of our students and the world at large, let us work on getting our own house in order.
> (Ovington 1992, pp. 61-62)

The chief protagonists for continuing the separate degree structure did so on the grounds that by offering a common first two years, the three year BCW would first, become an inferior version of the BSW, and second, lose its distinctive identity. After more than a year of discussing and debating the issue, the matter was finally put to the vote at another two day departmental review and strategic planning workshop held in November, 1992. The verdict was resounding with all but three staff from a total of 18 opting for the common first two years. Significantly, I was one of the three staff members who voted against the proposal. Pauline voted in favour. Pauline's social work background explained her position; my penchant for 'underdog' status helped explain mine. The issue of separate or common first two years was vital for the present study, since the subject being researched, *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, had evolved most immediately from another subject, *CW1002: Human Interaction*, previously available only to BCW students. With the advent of a common first two years, the subject was now compulsory for all first year BSW and BCW students (see below, *The Subject*, for more detail). The next 12 months was spent developing in detail subject outlines for the new degree structures.

IV.   THE TEACHERS

At the commencement of the present study in 1994, the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare had 13 full-time staff (eight men and five women) and four part-time staff (three women and one man) at the Townsville Campus, and five full-time staff (four women and one man) and one part-time staff (a woman) at the Cairns Campus.   The 13 full-time staff in Townsville were employed at the following levels: One Professor (male); one Associate Professor (female); three

Senior Lecturers (two men and one woman); six Lecturers (four men and two women); and two Associate Lecturers (one man and one woman). The four part-time staff in Townsville were all Associate Lecturers. In Cairns, the male was a Senior Lecturer, four women were Lecturers and one was an Associate Lecturer. This information is summarized in the following table. For visual ease, I have collapsed the cells for full-time and part-time staff, noting that 18 of the 23 staff were full-time and only five were part-time.

Table 5.2:

Department of Social Work & Community Welfare Staff – 1994

	TOWNSVILLE		CAIRNS		
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Professor	1				1
Assoc. Prof.		1			1
Senior Lect.	2	1	1		4
Lecturer	4	2		4	10
Assoc. Lect.	2	4		1	7
Gender Totals	*9*	*8*	*1*	*5*	*23*
Campus Totals	*17*		*6*		**23**

Three staff members (13% – compare the university total above of 22%), including myself, had formal teacher training or certification, and one, Pauline, was pursuing the inaugural Graduate Certificate in Education (Tertiary Teaching). Recalibrating for part-time staff, 53.7% of staff were female (considerably higher than the university average of 28% – see above; though considering the gender breakup of the student body – see below – hardly excessive). There were no indigenous staff at

the time of this study. There had been three Associate Lecturers as part of AICWEP until the beginning of 1992; at which time these staff members relocated to the newly-established Centre for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Participation, Research and Development (CATSIPRD).

There were two co-researchers in our study: Dr Pauline Meemeduma, whom I usually refer to as Pauline, a Lecturer; and myself, Gary Ovington, one of the two full-time Associate Lecturers in Townsville. Note that I was the most junior full-time male staff member. Significantly, at the end of 1994, Pauline was promoted to Senior Lecturer, and myself to Lecturer, a position in which I had been de facto operating since the beginning of 1992. Despite the prima facie lack of official rank in the Department, both Pauline and I had achieved status due to our recognized teaching abilities. Pauline had been awarded one of three James Cook University Teaching Excellence Awards in 1992, the inaugural year of the awards, and I had followed up with a similar award in 1993; both achievements prior to the present study. Pauline repeated the performance in 1994, the only staff member ever to win two such awards. Likewise, 1994, the year of this study, was also the year we submitted an ultimately successful application for a National Teaching Development Grant through the then Commission for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT). Equally significant, was the fact that both Pauline and I were key members during 1992-93 of the six member Curriculum Review Committee, responsible for reviewing, overhauling, streamlining and coordinating implementation of the new curriculum structure for both degree programs. The following 'biographies' concern only Pauline and me, the two sole teacher/researchers in the study. The biographies do not claim completeness; only

information perceived to have a bearing on the present study has been included. I asked Pauline to write her own biography. I have left this story in Pauline's own words, apart from editing to make spelling and punctuation more consistent and the names and codes of subjects which might have been confusing to the reader. The biographies, by their very nature, must be personal. The section below, *The Subject*, reveals that for Pauline and I to remain consistent with the subject's theoretical framework, ideals and ethos, we cannot escape providing an account of key factors which have influenced the educational philosophies and world views informing this study. It is also consistent with my discussion of writing texts in the methodology chapter. Recall Usher and colleagues' (1997) discussion on the "idea of the 'self' as a researcher who is culturally and historically configured and is situated within a nexus of relationships which have to be negotiated" (p. 213), in addition to the self as researcher equipped with an "experiential 'trajectory' as a dynamic component in the conduct of enquiry. In such a trajectory, there is an important affective dimension. How the self is disposed as an engaged enquirer is a neglected dimension of reflective research practice, one which can influence the conduct of research as either impediment or resource" (p. 213).

4.1   Pauline's Story

As an undergraduate, I had little sense of the link between theory and social work practice. I dutifully went to my social work classes, did my assessments, passed my exams, but at the end of the day was never taught, and never learnt, the process/structure of applying this knowledge in a practice setting. I went out to practice knowing I did 'know' something, and knowing I was not applying it in my practice settings, yet not quite knowing how and why.

Then I did my Masters and a process began which continued through into my PhD work of discovery of the 'intellectual' competency and depth of what social work theoretical knowledge had to offer. For the first time, I began to realize that knowledge production was a product of a process of intellectual effort, not a fixed state. It was a function itself of the process of social work.

In 1988, my first year as an academic, I was asked to teach a third year social work unit called *SW3001: Social Work Theory and Practice*. I was given a relatively free hand in relation to its content and teaching strategy. I wanted to teach theories of social work practice. However, I didn't want to teach them as static knowledge, but rather as the 'alive' products of ongoing intellectual questions and efforts of the profession.

For the first year I referenced the intellectual process with social work itself. Soon I began to realize that although the students in the unit were in their third year of university, they had little understanding of theoretical development per se. The students could not understand the nature of the intellectual process social work theorists were engaged in, if they had no grasp of the overall process itself.

In 1989, as a consequence of the 1988 experience, the unit SW3001 was designed with the first four weeks of the 17 week unit being accorded to teaching students the basic components of theoretical development, before going on to the unit's earlier predetermined social work theoretical content.

In the same year, I took over the teaching of a first year community welfare unit, *Social Literature*. It was renamed *Human Interaction* in 1990. This unit had been designed to give students an understanding of human social/personal issues through the reading of literature (novels). This unit as it had been designed firmly located the 'self' as a central component of understanding and development of theory. Although I did not agree with how the self was constructed in this unit (i.e. objectified, detached), this unit made me realize that the four week pre-emptive teaching in SW3001 was not enough either in time allowed or content covered. The amalgam of the ideas of theory and ideas of self continued to circle around in my head and in my teaching through 1990-1992.

With the curriculum review and Gary joining me in the teaching of the first year subject *Human Interaction* in 1993, a chance came to transform our thinking into a coherent teaching unit, more appropriately located in the first year of a university course, not the third year (which I was realized was too late to show how theory/knowledge was developed). The unit WS1002 had evolved out of the third year unit and the Social Literature unit. It allowed us to bring together the need to show students:

- How knowledge develops through the process of theoretical construction, particularly in social work.

- How self is an active, subjective participant in this process.

- How action is guided by thinking.

- How thinking (theoretical) is 'applied' in practice.

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I suppose all of the above has been directed/energized by my firm, maybe obsessional, belief that social work practice must be informed by the provisional knowledge currently available in the discipline. Social workers need to know what they are doing and why they are doing it. The unit therefore enabled me in the first semester of the first year of the social work degree to establish both key principles of good social work practice as well as frameworks and content to achieve the enactment of these principles.

I was also driven by experiences of my own social work learning – which I felt was lacking in so many areas. I so poorly understood why I was learning things, or how I could use these in practice.

4.2 Gary's Story

I shall attempt to make the section as brief as possible, while remaining true to my intention of uncovering the perceived critical 'self factors'. I shall write of five sets of experiences, the first concerning childhood, the next four, adult experiences. All sets of experiences chosen have exerted a profound influence, both as a person and an educator. I shall draw explicit links between the experiences and resulting theoretical beliefs. Note that one set of adult experiences occurred after the study; but it is vital, since the process of writing occurred throughout and after this set of experiences.

4.2.1 Childhood (1956-1968?)

I grew up in an era and a family where the primary motifs of childrearing were: 'children should be seen and not heard'; strong discipline, and if necessary, physical

punishment were essential resources in a parent's childrearing kit. The second motif was also integral to the school environment. The links with my later theoretical views were as follows:

- 'Truth' and its derivative, 'knowledge', was not a given reality that somehow existed out there independent of the 'guardians' of this truth and knowledge. Truth had its basis (mostly!) in a perceived reality, but it could change to suit circumstances.

- Some people had greater power than others to define and change the 'truth' (and this had rich consequences for both the physical and emotional well-being of people).

These two 'working truths' had a significant corollary for the subject which forms the basis of the present study:

- Never believe outright what anyone tells you, particularly if it is a matter of importance to you. Always accept it as a tentative working hypothesis, recognizing that people have their own personal and political agendas of which they may, or may not, be aware.

Only now as an adult do I recognize the full significance of our high school motto:

Knowledge is power; study and gain that power

(Though I am not certain that the school principal then, and I, now, understand the power relationship in the same way – again striking testimony to the multiplicities of meaning and truth embedded in even a simple three word phrase!)

4.2.2 *India* (1979; 1983-84)

My interest in India was first aroused in 1973-74 when I began studying Indian history in senior high school. I first visited India in 1979 for two weeks as part of a three month overland trip from Kathmandu to London. I also happened to be one of the last tourists to be stranded in Kabul, Afghanistan in March, so it was with some amusement that I read of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in December of that year; not an outright lie, but a loose rendition of the truth sorely afflicted with chronological inexactitudes. This experience provided further support for the three 'working truths' I had derived from childhood experiences (see above). During my time in India I was fascinated, appalled, intrigued, exasperated, charmed and repulsed. I marvelled that anyone could actually live there and despite the positives, was relieved to leave. By the time I had reached London two months later I was toying with the idea of returning home via India. For a variety of personal reasons this was not possible, but it was the beginning of an obsession which so consumed me that by the end of 1982 I was wracked with 'India cancer'. At the end of this year I was prepared to sacrifice postgraduate study in New Zealand and my career in Psychology (much to the surprise of my lecturers since I had been awarded one of the 120 prestigious Senior Scholarships across the country); and a failing marriage. I also spent my period of 'Indian exile' reading avidly about the subcontinent's history and philosophy, including formally studying a first year Indian History course and a third year Indian Philosophy course. During this period I also developed a passion for the History and Philosophy of Science, studying it formally for two years; a passion that coincided in the most extraordinary way with Indian Philosophy as I discovered that contemporary physics (e.g. quantum mechanics) provided empirical support for Hindu and

Buddhist speculations of 2,000 years ago. Even the 'Big Bang' theory had its parallel in Hindu mythology with the notion of the 'pullulating' universe and Siva's cosmic dance (see Capra 1983 for a detailed discussion of the parallels between various Eastern philosophies and quantum mechanics). My studies in the History and Philosophy of Science 'taught' me that today's facts could be tomorrow's dump pile and illustrated powerfully the role of politics and social processes in knowledge construction as the Church, in the face of 'scientific' opposition, clung desperately to the bastions of power and knowledge (see, for example, Kuhn 1957; Koestler 1959; Hall 1970; Feyerabend 1975).

I returned to India to live and work in 1983-84. My period in India, ironically, paralleled a significant chapter of Indian history: from the buildup and storming of the Sikh's Golden Temple in Amritsar, until the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 31 October, 1984. To 'add' to the experience, I became extremely ill; almost died in Varanasi – the holiest of all Indian cities, located on the banks of the Ganges. The irony was not lost upon me that I was surrounded by Hindu devotees, some of whom had saved for their entire lives in order to make the pilgrimmage to die in sacred Varanasi. I became convinced that my physical deterioration was symptomatic of a much deeper spiritual malaise. This was heightened by an intense mystical experience during my period of teaching at an Indian school, an experience that seemed to accord with Maslow's (1968) descriptions of 'peak experiences'. Thus began an intensive exploration of my deepest inner self and a growing *experiential* awareness that rational knowledge and experience were not the sole forms of knowing and understanding on the planet.

Links with my later theoretical views should be evident from above:

- We are not split into 'bodies' and 'minds'. We are *whole* people consisting of multiple aspects, which we might, for conceptual convenience (but convenience only!) classify into physical, sexual, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual dimensions (other classifications are possible, of course).

- If we are to realize our full potential as human beings, each of these aspects requires nurturing and effective integration. If we allow any aspect to atrophy, it will have profound ramifications on other 'parts' of our 'whole system'.

These two 'working truths' when buttressed with my understanding of the philosophy of quantum mechanics (e.g the Heisenberg Principle) can be expressed differently from an epistemological perspective, especially as this bears on the present study:

- 'I' do not exist as an objective observer distinct from the world I am observing. I am part and parcel of this world and any observations I make are 'coloured' by the forces that have combined to constitute me as a person.

Additionally, my previously derived 'working truth' from childhood experiences, *Some people had greater power than others to define and change the 'truth' (and this had rich consequences for both the physical and emotional well-being of people)*, broadened in ambit from parents and teachers to include large social and political processes and institutions.

4.2.3 *Aboriginal Australia* (1988-1990)

The second major set of adult experiences was the three years I spent living and working on two remote Aboriginal communities, Noonkanbah and Strelley, in the

Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia from 1988 to 1990. I occupied

different roles during each of these three years: junior primary teacher, on-site

lecturer for a remote teacher education program, and teacher/linguist. At the end of

1991 I also submitted a very substantial masters research thesis examining

indigenous community-based teacher education programs in Australia, Canada and

Alaska. During my time there I also read extensively and heard first hand accounts

of two significant historical events. The first, the Noonkanbah dispute of 1980 in

which Western Australian Premier, Charles Court, in an awesome display of

symbolic power and mean-spiritedness, allowed the Amex Mining Company to

begin mining operations on a sacred site less than a year after the people of

Noonkanbah had been 'given back their land', and despite advice that the mining

venture was no longer tenable or desired by the company itself – operations were

abandoned after several days (Kolig 1987; Hawke 1989). The second, concerned a

similar political battle known as the 1946 Pilbara mining strike when, essentially,

the 'Strelley Mob', led by white activist, Don McCleod, walked off the site of their

employment at various mining locations in protest against grossly low wages

(Brown 1976). On both occasions the existing government of Western Australia

used techniques of lies and deceit (Hawke 1989). Again, I was poignantly

reminded of a key 'truth' derived from early childhood experiences: some people

had greater power than others to define and change the 'truth' (and this had rich

consequences for both the physical and emotional well-being of people). The time I

spent on remote Aboriginal communities was also pivotal in refining and extending

other theoretical views. First, I began to understand more clearly the relationship

between 'self' and other aspects of one's immediate social environment. Second, I

began to understand more clearly the crucial relationship between the social and

physical environments. Rather than confusing me, my experiences on Aboriginal communities made further sense of my Indian experiences, bringing together into a unified whole three seemingly disparate world views: the Aboriginal; Eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism; and contemporary Western physics, particularly quantum mechanics. The link can be summarized in concepts like 'wholeness', 'harmony', 'balance'. My perceived explicit theoretical links are:

- The key notions of holism, harmony and balance apply not only to the individual self, but also to the immediate and total social and physical environments. What happens in one part of the system has profound, even life-threatening consequences for other parts of the system.

  Indeed, in important respects, I began to question the very notion of 'self'. In both India and the Aboriginal communities on which I lived, 'self' seemed to be subsumed within a larger social self.

- In order to begin the process of 'healing' a largely hostile and unjust planet, one must begin with one's own 'self'.

- Education was a holistic enterprise. It was not simply an activity that occurred from the neck up.

- Effective personal relationships were integral to the teaching/learning dynamic.

4.2.4   James Cook University (1991-95)

At the beginning of 1991 I arrived at James Cook University to take up a position as senior tutor in the Aboriginal and Islander Community Welfare Education Program (AICWEP), previously part of the Division of Social Work and Community Welfare in the Department of Behavioural Sciences, and poised to become a branch of the newly formed Department of Social Work and Community

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Welfare. I had been appointed largely on the basis of my experiences in Aboriginal education. In 1992 I made the transition over to teaching in the mainstream of the department. I had missed the departmental meeting at the end of this year in which teaching subjects were allocated to staff members for the following year. When I returned in 1993 I discovered I had been assigned to co-teach in a subject entitled, *CW1002: Human Interaction*, with Pauline and a female lecturer. The latter subsequently withdrew. I knew nothing of the subject's content or approach until the three of us met in early 1993 to discuss allocation of roles and duties, subject content and assessment. Pauline presented us with a copy of the previous year's subject outline to serve as a springboard for discussion. Drawing on my educational training, the first thing I did was to glance quickly at the assessment, for me, the single best indicator of a subject's ethos. I was instantly enchanted and pleasantly surprised at the apparent similarity in our epistemological views. Later I compared the subject outline with one I had devised the previous year for an elective subject dealing with work on Aboriginal communities. Again, I was struck by the similarity in some of the views. Particularly noteworthy was our emphasis on social construction of knowledge, 'role of self' in this process, and a commitment to 'unpackaging self' as a key to understanding.

One other experience of a more personal nature was significant for this study. For many years I had experienced a profound fear of driving cars. I was in the unique position of having passed the theoretical exam in three different states over a 20 year period, yet never having had the courage to sit the practical exam. It was a rare male in their late thirties, as I was at the time of the study, who did not have a driving licence. After several years' hiatus, I renewed my attempts during the

period of this study. This led to a powerful theoretical position related to some of those derived from my Indian experiences:

- Emotions can play a powerful role in learning.

A final point relates to Usher and colleagues' above comment about the role of affect in shaping research. I began my doctorate in 1993 under the supervision of Allan Luke. My topic was a case study of language and education in the Solomon Islands. As the year progressed I realized that I would never finish. Why? Because the research was far removed from my present job, I devoted much of my time to students and I was growing increasingly passionate about the subject that Pauline and I were co-teaching. During the end of year break Pauline and I decided we wanted to research the revamped WS1002 subject in its liftoff phase – implementation of the new curriculum. I suffered from the initial delusion that this was an 'extra' piece of research on top of the PhD. It never occurred to me that this could be my doctoral research – after all, it wasn't real research, was it? After we began the research I became so engrossed in it that the original PhD was shelved – temporarily, of course; permanence always has its origins in the transient. Some weeks into the research it suddenly struck Pauline and I that the WS1002 research could be and would be my doctoral work. How wonderful: the things I did as a matter of course – teaching, student consultations, marking assignments, etc. – had suddenly assumed the revered status of PhD data.

4.2.5 Vietnam (1995-97)

Though taking place after the study, these experiences were vital, I believe, for the writing phase. At the end of Semester One, 1995, I left James Cook University to

take up a position as an education specialist with Save the Children Australia (SCA) working as part of an integrated community development project in the south of Vietnam. Again the magic of the East had lured me from the safety of a budding academic career in the West. Professionally and personally the sacrifices seemed great. I was poised to begin writing my PhD, which would now have to be put on hold; Pauline and I were in the throes of a National Teaching Development Grant; I was due for nine months study leave, which would enable me to make significant headway on writing the doctorate; and I had planned a three month overseas trip to some exotic destinations. I was also relinquishing a tenured lectureship in a time of uncertainty in the tertiary sector for a fixed three year contract; not to mention the perks of the national university superannuation scheme. Somehow these things did not seem important. More difficult were the personal sacrifices, including leaving a previously rich, but rapidly deteriorating intimate relationship; without a doubt the most difficult and painful thing I have had to do. I relied once again on the sustaining power of intuition and faith.

I was based in the provincial capital of Phan Thiet in Binh Thuan Province, 200 kilometres northeast of Saigon, but at times my work took me to 10 remote communes, half of which contained indigenous ethnic minority groups in the beautiful mountainous regions of the province. This was an experience beyond description: without doubt, the most harrowing and gruelling personal and professional experience of adult life; yet also the most absorbing, rich, rewarding and fascinating. My negotiation skills were taxed to unimaginable limits and the bounds of sanity constantly pushed to new domains. Reality testing was limited,

since there was originally only one other known foreigner in the town, the project manager, present only 50% of the time, and never during weekends.

My Vietnam experiences were significant in writing up the present study for a number of reasons. Some of these lent strength and conviction to previous experiences and 'working truths'. For instance, I was again poignantly reminded of the awesome power of political forces and structures in creating and defining knowledge – "Truth is as I say it is, if I have a gun pointed at your head". Sociology of education theorists write of the social production of knowledge and the clear link of political and social processes in curriculum development (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1976; Giroux 1981). Their links refer chiefly to capitalist United States. In Vietnam you would need to be myopic in the extreme not to perceive the link between the Stalinist-influenced National Curriculum and political and social processes. Second, and related to this, working in the highly volatile and shifting political and social context of a country re-emerging into the twentieth century after two decades of repressive totalitarianism, I was poignantly reminded of the power of social construction of knowledge: the shifting sands of truth, belief and certainty. Third, I continually questioned the concept of individual self as, again, the notion of social self seemed pre-eminent. Interestingly, in the Vietnamese context, this is derived via the Chinese from Confucian ideals. This was poignant because three different environments (India, remote Aboriginal Australia and Vietnam) through quite different influences and philosophies, had spawned the notion of 'social selves'. Other notions, which I eventually rejected, revealed the shifting foundations of some of my own cherished 'working truths'. First, I noticed that children were 'learning' and achieving very well in classrooms

where the teacher/pupil relationship was, through my Eurocentric eyes, based on authoritarianism with almost no emotional warmth. As time wore on, however, I realized that this intellectual growth was not matched by emotional and social growth and that it applied largely to mainstream first language learners, not ethnic minority children learning in a second language. Second, I began to question my liberal, middle class Western ideals of children's growth and development. Confucianism demands total obedience and respect to elders and when I considered the deplorable attitude of Australian high school students towards their teachers and the equally deplorable lack of respect accorded older people in our society by younger people, I began to think that maybe a few Confucian ideals might not go astray even if it meant a return to Victorian-style classrooms. It was hard to believe that it was me thinking these thoughts! These experiences and thoughts jelled to form the following perceived explicit theoretical links not already listed. Note that none of these theoretical beliefs were new. But now they carried heave duty *experiential* cargo:

- Education is a highly political activity closely linked to social structures and processes.

- The politicized nature of educational practice is nowhere more pronounced than in curriculum, which, far from being a fixed body of 'factual' knowledge, is, in certain respects, an arbitrary choice made by powerful individuals or groups located within a particular historical, political and social context.

- While the 'self' might be a useful device for organizing and analyzing my own experiences, and possibly others with shared cultural experiences, its utility at both empirical and conceptual levels, may deteriorate as a function of culture,

particularly in non-Western cultures. This can be expressed at a higher level of generalization and abstraction in the following way:

The empirical and conceptual significance of the individual 'self' is not necessarily a cultural universal.

4.2.6 Summary

Like all individuals, I am a product of my history, both my personal and my cultural history. This circumstance has a critical bearing on my role as both teacher and researcher in the present study. Rather than mask these features in efforts to feign an objective stance (from my perspective an impossible exercise, logically and empirically), I have tried to make as explicit as possible my understanding of how they have shaped this study. India, Aboriginal Australia and Vietnam have been the three key themes of my adult life. These three 'events' have had a profound impact on my life in general and my educational philosophy in particular. Each set of experiences has shaken my fundamental value system and world view to its core; each has been accompanied by extraordinary pain, and later, growth; which I have discovered is not always linear, but often cyclic. If I had to summarize their influence on my educational philosophy I would say they have taught me that the pursuit of knowledge and learning is a venture which involves every aspect of our being: intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical, and social. There are many in our academic institutions who would reduce it to the former. I believe that not only is this misguided; it is dangerous. Living in a fragile world of environmental degradation and social dislocation we cannot expect the Western intellectual tools which have partly landed us in this mess to retrieve us single-handedly. The faint hope glimmers that if we can combine all that is rich in Western culture,

particularly its impressive technological achievements, with the richness and wisdom of Eastern cultures and indigenous philosophies, we can create a planet that is worth inhabiting for all creatures great and small.

V.   THE STUDENTS

Introduction

In the section above on *James Cook University, The Students,* certain key features were noted. I shall reiterate four relating to *location, age, gender, culture,* since they contextualize the cohort in the present study. In 1994 most James Cook University students were from north Queensland (76%), there was a high percentage of mature age students (average = 24.2 years), female students comprised a majority (58%) and the university had the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the country, 4.5% of the student body, totalling 347 in 1994, almost half of whom were over 26 years old, and 65% of whom were from remote and country communities and the Torres Strait Islands. As a further contextualizing device, I shall refer also, where appropriate, to available departmental data from previous years.

The information on the present cohort is drawn primarily from a baseline survey, which I shall describe below. Sixty seven students initially enrolled in the subject, of which 56 completed. Chapter nine, assessment, provides details as to the 'fate' of these students. For now, I shall summarize this information briefly. Two students withdrew from this and all other subjects before the penalty date and neither submitted any work. Both saw me prior to withdrawal. One suffered the death of a close family member, the other experienced personal problems unrelated

to university studies. Of the other nine students, one was never sighted in this or any other subject at any stage. The other eight students 'dropped out' at various stages – though none formally – with one submitting all three assignments, three submitting assignments 1 and 2, and three students submitting assignment 1. Only one of these eight students failed to submit any work whatsoever. Most were afflicted with a variety of personal and financial problems and in no cases was this the only 'affected' subject indicating that the problems were generic and not peculiar to this subject.

In order to glean accurate baseline data a questionnaire was handed out in the first lecture and students urged to complete it as soon as possible. No pilot was done. This was not perceived to be problematic since we had contact with students for three formal hours each week and any ambiguities or potential misunderstandings could be discussed. A few minor queries arose and we used these to clarify issues for the whole group in the second lecture session. The questionnaire was anonymous if students so desired and consisted of two parts (see appendix 1). The first provided basic socio-demographic data; the second sought information on previous teaching and learning experiences. Perhaps the major weakness of the instrument was its length – 21 questions in section 1 and 20 questions in section 2, totalling 15 pages. This was an obvious deterrent to completion rate. Gentle persuasion by Pauline and I urging the importance of the information in particular and the study in general resulted in 45 completed questionnaires (67% of original enrolment and 79% of those completing the subject). While not exhaustive, completion rates were sufficient to provide a broad brush of the cohort with which

we were dealing. Additionally, data which could be cross-checked from other sources (e.g. sex, degree), indicated no obvious biases.

5.1 Socio-demographics

Basic demographic information relating gender and age to degree program is outlined in the following table and explained below, along with other demographic variables.

Table 5.3:

Basic Socio-demographics of the 1994 BSW/BCW Cohort:

Degree Program, Gender and Age[1]

	BSW			BCW		Other			
Age	Female	Male	N/R	Female	Male	Female	Male	N/R	TOTAL
17-19	7	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	10
20-29	7	2	0	1	3	2	0	0	15
30-39	3	1	0	2	1	1	0	1	9
40-50	4	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	8
N/R	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	23	3	2	8	4	4	0	1	45
	28			12		5			

[1] From the Baseline Questionnaire

Twenty eight respondents were enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work degree, 12 in the Bachelor of Community Welfare, three in a Bachelor of Arts and two in the Bachelor of Psychology. This was consistent with overall enrolments, suggesting no bias on the basis of degree. Eighty three percent of respondents were female and

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17% were male (this accorded well with our official enrolment figures – 78% and 22% – and gave us some confidence that respondents provided a fair sample; though male BSW students were slightly under-represented). Note that this gender ratio is considerably higher than the overall university one of 58% female. It is consistent, however, with student data from previous years (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a) and with comparable impressionistic data for social work students in other Australian universities (no 'official' data exists). Ages ranged from 17 to 50 with significant numbers in each age bracket. Of particular note is that 44% were aged 30 and above and almost 18% were 40 or above. Again, this is consistent with overall university data, only more pronounced; a finding again consistent with previous departmental data (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a). Differences existed between the two degree programs with BSW students, particularly females, over-represented in the 17-19 age bracket, and BCW students, again females, proportionally over-represented in the 40+ age bracket. Again, this is consistent with previous departmental data. Only a handful of students were living on campus (six). Most respondents (67%) cited Townsville as their home location. North Queensland and other Queensland accounted for almost all the rest with only one respondent each citing interstate and overseas as their home location. Twenty-five percent indicated that they had lived in Townsville for the last 10 years while another 30% had lived in a combination of Townsville and other places. Half the respondents had never lived outside Queensland. This data, likewise, is consistent with overall university data and previous departmental data (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a), indicating a strong regional emphasis.

Four of the 67 original enrolments claimed indigenous ancestry (6%), higher than the university average (4.5%), but considerably lower than previous years (see Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a). Note that indigenous student enrolment in previous years was heavily weighted towards the BCW degree at Townsville campus. This was due to AICWEP, the Aboriginal support program launched in 1983. For example, in 1992, 25% of all BCW students were indigenous and in 1993 the figure was 35.7% (10 of 28 students). Very few indigenous students pursued the BSW and in 1992 there was only one indigenous student on the Cairns campus (where only the BSW was available). Lower numbers in the BSW reflect the later introduction (1991) of AISWEP (Aboriginal and Islander Social Work Education Program), the support program equivalent to AICWEP. Similarly, no support programs existed at Cairns until 1992 (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1992a). However, this cannot explain why in 1994, the year of this study, there was a significant reduction in the number of indigenous students, a reduction also applicable to 1995, my final year at James Cook University. This circumstance was a positive one in many respects and can be attributed to the role of the newly-formed (1992) Centre for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Participation, Research and Development (CATSIPRD), which subsumed previous support programs in the university (AITEP for teaching, AINEP for nursing and AICWEP for community welfare). The traditional focus of indigenous support programs across the country had been in education (see, for instance, Sherwood, Davies, Froyland and Moore 1980; Hughes and Wilmot 1982; House of Representatives 1985). Later this extended to include other 'caring professions' such as social work and nursing. Under the leadership of Associate Professor Errol West (later to become Professor West), the Centre began a

proactive campaign to draw intending indigenous students away from these traditional lower-salaried and lower-prestiged occupations towards the more powerful professions such as Medicine and Law, as well as Engineering (personal communication Erich Barkmeyer).

Table 5.4:

Socio-demographics of the 1994 BSW/BCW Cohort:

Degree Program and Previous Study[1]

Where	BSW	Complete Yes	Complete No	BCW	Complete Yes	Complete No	OTHER	Complete Yes	Complete No	TOTAL
No Response	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	5
University	8	1	7	2	2	0	3	1	2	13
College	2	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	5
TAFE, Nursing, Adult Education	14	9	5	5	3	2	0	0	0	19
School[2]	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Employment-related	0	0	0	1	1		0	0	0	1
Total	28	12	14[3]	12	7	3	5	2	2	45

[1] From the Baseline Questionnaire

[2] E.g. Grade 12; overseas exchange

[3] The Yes/No figures in this row do not sum to the totals due to the No Responses

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Most respondents had first applied to enter the degree either in the year of acceptance (1994) or the year immediately prior. Only two respondents had entered the degree program immediately from school. The last year of school attendance ranged from 1993 to 1959 with significant numbers spread across all categories. Twenty-five per cent had last attended school in Townsville, 50% in other parts of Queensland and 25% interstate and overseas. Many respondents indicated additional post-school study, 18 at university or college (6 completed) with four students having attained a degree, and 19 at TAFE, nursing or adult education (12 completed). This is significant for part two of the questionnaire since most students responding (37/45) had post-secondary teaching and learning experiences, with 40% having completed this study. Interestingly, BCW students (7/10) were more likely to have completed this study than BSW (12/26). This applied particularly at tertiary level (university or college) where only one of 10 BSW students completed, while three of four BCW students did so.

Sixteen students were single, 17 were living with partners, another six had partners they were not living with and five were separated or divorced. Almost half the respondents had children. Many had two children (10 of 21) and one had each of four, five and six children. These children ranged from pre-school age to over 21 with significant numbers spread across all categories. This statistic is significant insofar as it indicates that many students had considerable domestic commitments. Theoretically, this impacts on both retention rates and quality of work. Interestingly, however, of the 11 students 'dropping out' almost none had children living with them.

Table 5.5:

Socio-demographics of the 1994 BSW/BCW Cohort:

Degree Program and Parents' Education[1]

	BSW		BCW		OTHER		TOTAL		
Category	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Total
No Response Don't Know	4	3	5	3	0	1	*9*	*7*	16
Did not complete school	4	2	0	1	1	1	*5*	*4*	9
Grade 8 Junior	7	4	1	4	1	0	*9*	*8*	17
Grade 10 School Cert.	8	11	2	0	1	1	*11*	*12*	23
Grade 12 Senior	3	2	2	2	0	0	*5*	*4*	9
College Education	1	2	1	1	0	0	*2*	*3*	5
University Education	1	4	1	1	2	2	*4*	*7*	11
Total	28	28	12	12	5	5	**45**	**45**	90

[1] From the Baseline Questionnaire

Parents' education revealed the biggest response category to be Grade 10 for both

sexes with almost 25% of fathers having completed Grade 12 or higher. Mothers

revealed similar trends (over 30% with Grade 12 or higher) with the exception that seven mothers had completed a degree compared to four fathers. In fact, 10 of 45 mothers had completed tertiary education compared to 6 of 45 fathers. Four of the 11 university graduates were students from other degree programs (BA; B.Psych.) Sixteen people indicated sibling attendance at university (current or previous), but almost half the people (21) did not respond to this question. Of these 16 siblings, eight had completed their studies. Fourteen indicated that although their siblings did not attend university, they did pursue further studies.

Table 5.6:

Socio-demographics of the 1994 BSW/BCW Cohort:

Degree Program and Parents' Employment[1]

	BSW		BCW		OTHER		TOTAL		
Category	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Total
No Response Don't Know	0	1	1	1	0	0	*1*	*2*	3
School or University	0	1	0	0	0	1	*0*	*2*	2
Unemployed 'Domestic duties' Unpaid	0	9	0	3	0	2	*0*	*14*	14
Cleaner, Domestic Labour	0	5	1	0	0	0	*1*	*5*	6
Labourer, Shop Assistant	11	3	2	1	1	0	*14*	*4*	18
Office/Clerical Police, Fireman, Armed Forces	8	1	3	5	2	0	*13*	*6*	19
Self-Employed, Manager, Farmer	7	2	3	1	0	0	*10*	*3*	13
Teacher, Librarian, Nurse, Accountant	2	5	2	1	1	2	*5*	*8*	13
Doctor, Lawyer, University Lecturer	0	1	0	0	1	0	*1*	*1*	2
Does not Work e.g. Disability	0	0	0	0	0	0	*0*	*0*	0
Total	28	28	12	12	5	5	**45**	**45**	90

[1] From the Baseline Questionnaire

Parents' paid employment since 1989 indicated that most fathers fitted into the middle of the socioeconomic range (14 were labourers, shop assistants; 13 did office or clerical work, police, fireman, armed forces; and 10 were self employed, managers, farmers). Interestingly, none were unemployed nor were any prevented from working by a disability. Only one father was a doctor, lawyer or university lecturer. The only significant difference between degree programs was that the fathers of BSW students were far more likely to be labourers or shop assistants. Mothers showed a different pattern with 14 doing unpaid domestic duties and the second biggest response category being teacher, librarian, nurse, accountant (8). Again, only one indicated doctor, lawyer or university lecturer. There were some differences between degree programs. The mothers of BSW students were more likely to be cleaners or involved in domestic labour, but at the other end of the scale were also more likely to be teachers, librarians, nurses, or accountants. On the other hand, mothers of BCW students were more likely to be involved in office or clerical work, or employed in the police, fire or armed forces. Sibling employment revealed similar trends with the exception that over 20% were still at school.

Twenty six of 45 indicated rented accommodation. Only four were home owners. Income was derived from a variety of sources with 25% receiving full Austudy. Income revealed that two thirds of all individuals received less than $9,999. Most of the rest received less than $19,999. Combined income trends (including partners) revealed that only two respondents received more than $39,999, and only six more than $29,999.

5.1.1 *Summary*

Most of the cohort were females ranging in ages from 17 to 50 with significant numbers of mature age students. Only two students had entered university direct from school. Many students were or had been cohabiting with a partner. Half the cohort had children ranging in age from infants to adults. Most were from Townsville and a significant number had pursued post-secondary education (including university), half of them to completion. Most lived in rented accommodation and derived typically low incomes from a variety of sources. Parent and sibling employment and education revealed most of the cohort fitted into the middle of the socioeconomic range.

5.2   Previous Teaching and Learning Experiences

In answer to the question *what was school like for you?*, there was huge variability equally divided between positive and negative experiences. The reasons for these experiences were also equally varied. For instance, negative experiences were attributed to personal inadequacies, curriculum, peers, teachers and home environment.

When asked to identify *what type of person did you consider was a good teacher when you went to school (what types of things did they do, how did they act or feel towards teaching)?*, again there was a rich and varied set of responses. Some common themes emerged. The most significant cluster of responses identified the quality of the <u>personal relationship</u> citing aspects such as "treated as an individual", "individual attention", "concern", "treated as an adult", "treated as an equal". Another significant cluster identified <u>listening skills</u>, specifically openness to

feedback and other opinions. A third set mentioned "encouragement" and "support", particularly encouraging participation, discussion and interaction. A fourth cluster identified personal qualities: "open", "approachable"; "sense of humour"; "patience"; while a fifth group referred to "enjoyment in teaching" and teacher ability to make learning "interesting", "fun", "enjoyable". Interestingly, only small numbers specifically identified technical pedagogical aspects.

Question three was the converse of the above asking *what type of person did you consider was a poor teacher when you went to school?* As with most responses to this section, variability was huge, yielding rich data. Not surprisingly, a significant number of respondents answered in binary opposition to the preceding question, so for instance, one cluster identified lack of "concern" and "interest" for students, including failure to treat them as individuals, and another set referred to lack of communication skills ("openness to student ideas" and "interaction", including "talking down" to or "putting down" students. Disconcertingly, a number of respondents cited "verbal" and "physical abuse". Related to this, a small cluster identified "authoritarian" or "domineering" behaviour.). Many personal qualities were identified, including ones which related to communication skills: "cold", "distant', "unapproachable". A significant number mentioned lack of professional commitment, teachers who "treated it as a job", "didn't want to be there". A significant cluster referred to "inconsistent discipline" and lack of control, while a final set of responses identified pedagogical issues such as "too much use of notes", "too much lecturing", "lack of variety in presentation".

The fourth question tapped into *attitudes to learning*. With qualifications, (e.g. "on subjects that interested me") just over half the respondents identified positive learning attitudes, approximately one third identified negative attitudes, and the remainder did not belong clearly to either category (e.g. "mildly enthusiastic", "depended on teacher"). This indicates a significant proportion of students who have negative attitudes towards learning. Even many of those with positive attitudes stressed the importance of subject interest. This baseline statistic is significant when comparing later student data both throughout and at the end of the subject.

Study habits revealed an even more pronounced trend with two thirds of respondents identifying negative traits and only one third positive traits. About 20% described their study habits as "shocking", "very bad", "terrible", "very poor". Again, this potentially has a significant impact on student outcomes. It also has profound implications for teacher effort and ability to direct the learning process.

In answer to the question *since you have left school has your attitude to learning changed or stayed the same?*, 36 indicated a change, while only eight suggested they had remained the same. Reasons for the change were many and varied, though some small clusters emerged: "subject interest" and "relevance"; "curiosity" and "desire to learn"; and "clearer direction" and "aims". Related responses referred to "maturity" and "self motivation/responsibility" factors.

Reasons for applying to study Social Work or Community Welfare were again amazingly varied but two were prominent: "interest in", "liking for people"; and a

"desire to help". Only a handful of people referred specifically to "self growth" and understanding.

When asked *what did you think and feel when you were accepted into the Social Work or Community Welfare programme?*, a huge number of people expressed their joy, but a significant number referred to their "fears" and "apprehension".

Question 9 asked *what do you want to learn when you are at University?* Significant responses included a cluster citing specific self growth factors (e.g. "how to react more thinkingly") and related issues of broadening views and perspectives. A second group answered how to be a good or effective social worker. A related cluster identified "how to help". A significant set of responses replied more generally ("as much as possible", "what it takes", "everything I can"). A small group identified thinking.

What do you think you will learn in the subject, Dimensions of Human Experience? yielded a diverse range of responses with three themes emerging as prominent: "understanding human interaction"; "thinking" (including a number who specifically referred to "thinking before doing"); and the "self". Responses to this question were biased, no doubt, by the fact that despite our best intentions to have all questionnaires returned within one week, they floated in for the first four weeks of the subject; at which time no more were accepted. One positive aspect was that even at this early stage a number of students were clearly 'getting the message'.

Question 10b asked more generally *what do you think you will learn in the BSW or BCW?* From the vast array of responses some clusters emerged: "helping skills", thinking skills, communication skills, theory/knowledge, and a whole range of responses which can be loosely classified as understanding human behaviour.

Some interesting responses emerged from the question *how do you think you learn best (what has to happen for you to understand and remember a topic area)?* A large number of people identified "interaction" and "discussion". An even larger cluster cited "practical examples" from the teacher's "experience" (including stories) which were "related back to the self". The third large cluster referred to the interest value of the material with some specifically identifying its "thought provoking" nature.

Question 12 asked *what subjects do you find easy or difficult to learn?* Respondents answered this at two levels: specific identification of discrete subjects, and general descriptions of content and skills which could apply equally across a range of subject areas. The latter responses were extremely varied with no common themes emerging. The former was clearcut with two thirds of the cohort singling out mathematics and science subjects as difficult (almost half specifically identified mathematics subjects, including statistics), and about 25% of people identifying each of the following as easy: English and drama subjects; social science style subjects.

A wide variety of responses were elicited to the question *what circumstance, or factors make it difficult or easy for you to learn?* In terms of **difficulty**, the largest

number identified <u>noisy</u> physical distractions while a significant number mentioned outside influences/<u>personal problems</u> relating mainly to children and family, and "financial pressures". This tallies with the socio-demographic data from section 1 which indicated that almost half the cohort had children and most had limited incomes. But given the strong retention rates of those with children, it also indicates considerable student commitment by mature age students. A third cluster cited physical and <u>health</u> problems and a fourth mentioned a range of issues which can be loosely described as <u>self esteem</u> factors (e.g. "feelings of inadequacy", "worried people are going to be critical or judgemental"). Three major sets of clusters were identified for the **easy** factors. The first referred to subject "<u>interest</u>" and "enjoyment" with a related smaller cluster specifically identifying "interesting presentation". A second set referred to "<u>group discussions</u>" and "class interaction" while the third cluster cited a "<u>friendly and supportive atmosphere</u>".

Question 14a asked *what, if anything, do you think might stop you completing your degree?* Clearly the largest cluster felt that "nothing" could stop them while a related significant set of responses were willing to acknowledge "death" as a serious obstacle. Three smaller clusters identified "family commitments", finances and illness. The second part of the question asked *what, if anything, do you think might stop you doing well in your studies?* Replies were many and varied with a number of small clusters emerging: health, personal problems, family commitments, and two relating specifically to academic issues, "lack of understanding" and "lack of study".

A vast array of responses occurred in answer to the question *what do you think/or know about how teaching occurs at University?* One cluster was dominant: "no idea", "not much at all", "not very familiar". This was a surprising response given that 13 of 45 respondents had previously been to university with four of these completing their degree. Part of this can be attributed to some genuine confusion from students who had previously been to university and were finding the experience different this time. This is typified in comments such as: "- was very different from here. There you were just lectured at."

A similarly disparate range of responses emerged to the question *what way do you think or know about how your work will be assessed at University?* This time there were three small clusters: "on subject understanding"; on "effort" and/or "research"; and "fairly".

Only two clusters emerged in answer to the question *what do you think of people who study at University?* The first referred to achievement, goals and motivation (e.g. "doing courses to achieve them"), the second indicated that university attracted a diverse range of people.

Question 18 asked *what do people close/important to you think about you being at University?* Most indicated positive responses such as "proud", "pleased", "supportive", "excited". A small cluster indicated mixed feelings or a variety of views depending on the individual. This suggests that most students have the requisite personal and emotional support for their studies.

The next question asked *what do you hope to do once you finish your degree?* This yielded responses covering the entire gamut of the welfare field. All clusters were small, though a set of responses referring to child and youth welfare was slightly larger.

The final question asked for *any other comments you might have on coming to study at University?* Again the yield was rich with a significant number expressing approval with their choice and a smaller cluster referring to misapprehension ("I feel like a little guppy in a tank of piranas").

5.2.1   Summary

It is difficult to summarize such disparate and varied data. However, a few salient points emerge that are significant for the study, particularly concerning teaching and learning. Most of these can be reduced to two related issues which the cohort as a whole perceives to be vital:

- The social context of learning

- Active learning

In identifying good and bad **teaching**, two related themes recur: personal qualities of teachers and the nature of the personal relationships developed with students. These findings are consonant with student reasons for applying to study for their respective degrees. Interestingly, very few people identified either general or specific pedagogical techniques. Evidently, the personal was more important than the technical.

In terms of **learning** environment, questions relating to student perceptions of how they best learn and what subjects are easy to learn, indicate the importance of active learning techniques (group discussions and interaction), social context variables (friendly and supportive atmosphere) and subject content (interest and enjoyment). Interestingly, practical teacher examples, including stories, is identified as a significant facilitator of student learning. Obstacles to learning and degree completion were not perceived to be academic, but more personal and social in nature (children and family; health; finances; self esteem).

It is perhaps not surprising that social welfare students identify the social context of learning as crucial. This might also be expected to apply to other of the 'caring' professions, such as nursing and teaching. How far it applies to other groups of students cannot be determined from this study; for instance, male-dominated science and engineering subjects. I shall return to the social context of learning in chapter eight.

VI.   THE SUBJECT

The Higher Education Council in their report *Achieving Quality* (1992) outlined necessary *conditions* for good teaching: clear aims and objectives for courses, subjects and units; curriculum organization and delivery policy which include effective methods of promoting learning and assessing that learning; policies for professional development of teaching staff; means of involving student and employer views in judging the curriculum, its delivery and outcomes; and a framework for institutional self-evaluation. The last three issues referring to institutional and departmental concerns have been addressed above.   In the

following I shall tackle the first two issues in addition to other concerns perceived to be relevant.

6.1   A Brief History

Much of the information in this section up until my arrival in the department in 1991 is based on personal communication with Pauline Meemeduma. Departmental documents are sourced where relevant. The present subject had its roots in two previous subjects. The first, *CW128: Social Literature*, a one semester first year subject in the two year Associate Diploma of Community Welfare (ADCW) degree. The subject was designed, coordinated and largely taught by Ms J, though various tutors assisted over the years. Towards the end of 1988 Ms J resigned quickly and unexpectedly. The then Head of the Department of Behavioural Sciences called a staff meeting and suggested that the unit be axed due to lack of staff resources. Pauline offered to take over the subject in 1989 as subject coordinator and responsible for conducting the lecture program. Ms R conducted all tutorials and Pauline was responsible for all assessment. The politics were not straightforward since Ms R, a former student of Ms J's in this very subject, had wanted to take over the subject, but was not allowed because she was still a tutor. In the subject Pauline inherited, the role of 'self' was important. On the grounds that "literature documents for every culture the richness of the interpersonal life of that culture", thematically organized literature was used so students "will encounter the lived-experience of others through the liveliness of fine art and begin the practice of five tasks that together constitute a set of basic building blocks upon which an holistic approach to self and others may be developed" (Department of Behavioural Sciences 1989, p. 29). No rationale was

given in the subject outline, though the aim was to "introduce students to an holistic approach for understanding human interaction", an approach, it was suggested, that required "both understanding and operationalising" certain "generic concepts and processes" (Department of Behavioural Sciences 1989, p. 29). Philosophically, the subject was a strange amalgam. A cursory glance indicated a heavy hermeneutic veneer with splashes from the humanistic tradition of Psychology and strong traces of both Phenomenology and Gestalt Psychology. The linkage between these two is evident in examining one of the five "generic concepts and processes": "the uniqueness of personal reality: the perceiving-feeling-thinking-acting complex" (Department of Behavioural Sciences 1989, p. 29). However, epistemologically, the subject seemed to be underpinned by positivist notions – dualist separation of subject and object, of knower and known, encapsulated in the notion (and the assessment exercises) that one could objectively observe oneself, by suspending all preconceptions. This is far removed from the hermeneutics of Gadamer (1982, orig. 1975). Pauline followed Ms J's model faithfully during this year, though she changed the assessment requirements. Pauline especially liked the social literature focus, but she had grave misgivings about the epistemological assumptions of the subject, particularly its strange dualist slant.

In 1990, the ADCW was supplanted by the three year BCW, and the subject was renamed *CW1002: Human Interaction*. This is the second subject from which the present one was derived. It was still a one semester first year subject available only to BCW students; not BSW. In this year Pauline slowly began to shift the subject away from Ms J's model. This was partly a result of having taught in the major third year social work theory subject and discovering that these students lacked

basic knowledge of what theories are and how they are constructed. Assuming that third year BCW students were facing a similar predicament (Pauline did not teach 3rd year BCW; it was heavily guarded terrain and off-limits for social workers), Pauline decided to try and build these issues into first year BCW. She removed approximately 50% of the content, particularly in the early part of the subject, which required students to perform various 'detached' observation exercises. Previously, literature was the sole form of assessment. That is, students were expected to use specific pieces of literature in order to complete assessment requirements. Now Pauline offered students a choice of media, including 'real life'. She retained the perceiving/thinking/feeling/acting complex chiefly because she had wanted to retain the 'public face' of the subject. But there was a fundamental epistemological shift from the subject/object dualism with its positivist underpinnings to a subjective view of learning and self. Again Ms R attempted to wrest control of the subject but the Head of Behavioural Sciences Professor refused to allow this, so she withdrew from tutoring in the subject. Her replacement was Ms S, another devotee of Ms J, having previously tutored in the subject for her. I never met Ms J, but feedback from numerous staff members and students portrayed her as a woman of immense charisma, so I use the word devotee in a quite literal sense. Ms J developed something akin to a cult following during her time within the department and the Social Literature subject she originated was the hub of this cult following. Ms S complained to Ms P, the BCW/ADCW Coordinator, on the grounds that the subject had moved from its original intent and its stated perspective as outlined in the departmental handbook. Pauline had made a conscious political decision to retain the Ms J spiel in the subject outline contained in the departmental handbook because she feared that staff pressure

would force her to teach a subject which she considered philosophically untenable despite its ritzy 'touchy-feelie' glitter. This is why for a number of years the official documentation contained in the departmental handbook was not consistent with the actual subject outlines provided for students at the first lecture session. Ms S requested to coordinate and take primary teaching responsibility for the subject. A meeting was called between Ms P, Ms S and Pauline. Again, because Ms S was a senior tutor, she was not allowed to take primary responsibility for the subject. Pauline retained control but Ms S was confirmed in her role as subject tutor. As previously, Ms S conducted all tutorials and Pauline did all the marking. Further meetings with Ms P and Ms S were necessary as Ms S continued to 'sabotage' Pauline's approach.

In 1991, the year I arrived at James Cook University, Pauline took sabbatical for a year. Ms S took over the subject in her absence and quickly reverted the subject to the Ms J model. Tragically, Ms S was killed in late April midway through the semester in which the subject was taught. She was returning home from teaching commitments at the Cairns campus. Mr L took over the subject for the remainder of the semester.

Pauline returned in 1992 and much to her surprise she was 'given' back the subject. For the first time the subject outline took on an explicit epistemological flavour, though still linked to literature: "Using examples from literature of the student's choice, the subject examines how what we 'know' is shaped by the culture we live in, our gender, socio-economic status, age and other factors" (School of Behavioural Sciences 1992, p. 75). Ms G was allocated the role of tutor.

During all this time the same subject was being taught at both Cairns and as an Open Learning subject under a Ms J model. The Open Learning subject was not changed to be consistent with the internal one until Pauline and I took over the teaching of it with the advent of the 'new' curriculum in 1994, the year of the present study.

In 1993, I joined Pauline in the teaching of the subject (see above, *Gary's Story*). We shared the lectures and co-taught the single tutorial group. We also shared the marking. This was the first time since Pauline had taken over the subject that it was genuinely co-taught, despite the fact that I was officially only of Associate Lecturer rank. The rationale for this, of course, was anchored in the politics of the situation: I was the first person assigned to teach the subject with Pauline who was not determined to return it to its 'rightful' Ms J roots. 1993 was also the year when the department was redesigning first year subjects for the introduction of the new curriculum the following year. Ms H and Ms R were initially assigned responsibility for preliminary subject design for the newly labelled WS1002, later titled *Dimensions of Human Experience*; which, not surprisingly, was heading in a Ms J clone direction. Up until this time Pauline had never had a 'foot in the door' with Open Learning and the subject, which was offered in alternate years, was due to be offered again in Open Learning mode in 1994 – the first time for the 'new' subject; which was looking dangerously like it was not going to be new at all. I happened to be BCW Open Learning Coordinator at the time; a fortuitous event, to say the least. After consulting with Pauline, I approached the Head of Department and 'arranged' for me to write up the 'new' curriculum Open Learning materials for

the WS1002 subject (Ovington 1993a; 1993b). Part of the Head's 'master plan' was that delivery on both campuses plus Open Learning should be integrated; that is, the same course. In the meantime, we were told that some indigenous funding had been made available to develop interactive multi media (IMM) materials for the Indigenous Education Workers' (IEW) program, a joint venture between the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare and the School of Education. After meeting with Ms W from the Centre for Interactive Multi Media (CIMM) it became clear that there was money for me to have time release to do the IEW IMM materials and Ms W suggested that I might try and integrate the two tasks of writing the IEW IMM materials as well as the text materials for the regular Open Learning materials. This I attempted to do, though it was not as simple as it sounded – print and media materials don't mix. The IMM materials also became the seeds of a later CAUT Project. In the meantime, our political purposes were being realized, since all this investment of time, money and energy had gone into developing the Open Learning materials for the new curriculum, and it would have been highly inefficient to rewrite another set for internal students. The solution of least resistance (and expense) was to use the Open Learning materials as the basis for the internal ones; which was ensured when Pauline and I were allocated the internal subject, WS1002, for 1994.

6.2   WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience – 1994

For the first time the subject which had evolved originally from *CW128: Social Literature*, then later from *CW1002: Human Interaction*, was being offered to both BSW and BCW students. Indeed, it was now a compulsory first year subject with an unashamedly epistemological flavour. In the revamped combined degree

curriculum structure, WS1002 was one of four subjects taught in the first semester. Three of these subjects were compulsory, including an introductory sociology subject. This meant that WS1002 was one of two compulsory first year subjects offered by the Department of Social Welfare and Community Welfare for both degree programs taught in the opening semester of the degree. The subject was offered over a 13 week semester with a total of 37 official contact hours, comprising a one hour lecture for each of the 13 weeks and two hour weekly tutorials conducted from weeks 2 to 13 inclusive. Students were divided between four tutorial groups. Pauline and I were joint coordinators responsible for subject design. We shared all administrative, teaching and assessment responsibilities (see below for more detail). Due to other workload commitments, I took three of the tutorial groups and Pauline the fourth. I shall draw extensively on the subject outline for two reasons (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1994). First, because it is a public document provided to students. Second, in the later analysis chapters it will be an important comparative tool for examining changes made to the 1995 subject outline on the basis of subject teaching and learning experiences in 1994.

6.2.1 Rationale

The essence of social welfare work is the world of human interaction. To practise sensitively and effectively as a social worker and community welfare worker we need to understand the forces which generate and shape the way people interact. The subject uses the study of human communication to help us to examine the dynamics of human interaction. Through examination of written and spoken communication, students will be able to critically analyze the forces shaping our

interaction. The subject will focus upon how our knowledge of human interaction shapes our work as social workers and community welfare workers.

Particular attention is paid in the subject to how such factors as race, culture, class, gender, age, sexuality, etc., shape our understanding of human interaction.

6.2.2 Objectives

The learning goals of the subject are:

1. To develop an awareness and understanding of the social construction of knowledge.

2. To develop an awareness of the role of 'self' in shaping how we perceive, interpret and act upon our environment.

3. To utilize the various mediums of communication to develop understanding of human interaction.

4. To develop a critical awareness of 'self'.

5. To develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment.

6. To have an enjoyable thinking/learning experience.

6.2.3 Content

The 13 week content outline fell into four broad thematic groupings. Pauline delivered the first group (lectures 1-4), *Theories and Theory Development*, which introduced students to the role of theories in social welfare practice, how theories are constructed, both in terms of 'social constructionism' and the components of theories (concepts, assumptions and propositions), and illustrated this with a brief

examination of two theories that have been influential for social work, Symbolic Interaction Theory and General Systems Theory. I was responsible for the second thematic group (lectures 5-6), *Communication*, looking at the role of both language and non-verbal communication in human interaction. The third set (lectures 7-8), *Groups*, delivered by Pauline, examined the powerful influence of groups on human behaviour and interaction. The final set (lectures 9-12), *The Whole Person*, delivered by me, explored the complex relationships and bases of perception, thinking, feeling and behaviour. Pauline gave the final review lecture, making a total of seven lectures for Pauline and six for me.

Before outlining the teaching process it is necessary to detail assessment requirements; otherwise the description of teaching process will not be intelligible.

6.2.4 Assessment

In 1994 there were three pieces of assessment.

Assessment 1

Choose a selected piece of interaction between two people, either from a book, magazine, TV or radio programme, or an interaction you have observed.

Part 1. Provide a 250-500 word descriptive summary of the people, the context and content of the interaction (non-assessable).

Part 2. Provide your 'theory' for what is happening in the interaction, both in relation to the individuals and in relation to the interaction between the individuals. In your theory, pay particular attention to identifying the *concepts* you have chosen to use, the *assumptions* underpinning your theory and the *propositions* made.

Part 3. What factors about you (background, culture, gender, age, beliefs, ideas, experiences) have led you to develop the theory you have?

1,000-1,500 words   30%   Due end of Week 7.

Assessment 2 was identical with the following significant difference: interaction choice was no longer a dyad, but a group of three or more people. This enabled students to build on their learning from assessment 1, and extend it, since a group dynamic introduced new theoretical ideas concerning group behaviour. This assessment was due at the end of Week 10.

Assessment 3

Select a person either from the interaction described in Assessment 1 or 2.

Part 1. Take one event or phase in that person's life which is a problem to them. Describe the person and the event. In your description indicate why you have chosen to present the details you have about the person and the event (500-750 words).

Part 2. What kind of assistance do you think the person would feel to be beneficial for them? Give reasons for your choice (500-750 words).

1,000-1,500 words   40%   Due at the end of Week 14 (Student Study Vacation).

Again note that the final assessment builds on the previous two by having students take one character from their earlier theoretical analyses and extend this to providing a theoretically justified course of action (practice). Additionally, a detailed breakdown of assessment criteria was provided (see chapter nine).

We allocated marking in the following way. Pauline marked all students' work from her tutorial group for all three assignments. For assignment 3, I marked the work of all three of my tutorial groups (with one chance exception whose assignment Pauline had marked before she realized). But in assignments 1 and 2 we shared the load a little more equally with Pauline marking some of my students' work as well. For assignment 1, I marked 37 pieces, Pauline 26, of which 16 were Pauline's students and 10 mine, and for assignment 2, I marked 33 pieces and Pauline 27, of which 16 were Pauline's students and 11 mine. The process for deciding which of my students' work Pauline marked was a random one. Quality control measures to ensure equity across markers is explained in detail in chapter nine on assessment.

Before proceeding to the teaching process of the subject, I want to briefly link the description of the subject thus far, especially assessment, with some of the theoretical concerns raised in the opening chapters. Mezirow suggests that

> ...implicit throughout this book is the finding that theory building may derive from encounter and challenge in either the context of social action or in an educational setting with significant learning experiences as points of departure. When, in response to a dilemma, analysis of incidents from different perspectives leads to critical assessment, this leads to interpretation, which, in turn, leads to explanation and the formulation of theory, which is subsequently modified by reflection of feedback on action undertaken.
> (Mezirow 1990c, p. 360)

This provides a partial rationale for the adopted approach in WS1002. But only partial. Mezirow's quotation draws attention to *alternative perspectives*. This was also central to our approach. Compare our learning goal number five: *"To develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment."* Further, the entire issue of alternative perspectives and frames is

integral to Falzon's reworking of Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection where 'dialogue' and 'opening up the space' are central to excavating 'subjugated knowledges'. But, equally important from our point of view, was *teaching explicit frameworks*. I shall discuss these two notions seriatim. A number of writers cutting across paradigms (with the exception of positivism) draw attention to the importance of alternative perspectives. The notion of 'meaning perspectives' and 'transformation' is vital to the approach of Mezirow, Brookfield and other colleagues committed to 'transformative and emancipatory learning'. Barnett (1997) similarly, speaks of the importance of "alternative frames of knowing and acting" (p. 160). Boud and colleagues (e.g. Boud and Walker 1994), echoing the transformative and emancipatory educators, stress assumption identification and challenge. Mumm and Kersting (1997), writing in a specific social work context, while not drawing attention to this aspect, refer to the importance of developing the ability to divide a theory into its component parts.

Other writers link these notions to the teaching of explicit skills or frameworks. Sheppard and Gilbert (1991), for instance, found that lecturers' theories of teaching were a key ingredient in the development of student epistemology. They conducted case studies of four departments and found that *explicit* consideration of alternative conceptions of knowledge correlated strongly with meaningful learning outcomes. Brell (1990) also highlighted the importance of teacher modelling and getting students to consider alternatives. Meyer (1987), recall, stressed the importance of teaching explicit skills and particularly teaching analytical frameworks. Usher (1985), then writing from an experiential learning tradition, argued that the link

between concrete experience and reflection is not inevitable and "the progression is impossible without a considerable degree of guidance from teachers" (p. 61).

Thus, in WS1002, we were not content to allow theories to possibly surface. The theories are in existence already. Our policy was to unearth them, spotlight them, break them in to their component parts, then reassemble them by highlighting the role of self in their construction. Compare this with Argyris and Schön's (1974) *tacit theories-in-use*. In an important sense we were trying to get students to tap into these tacit theories-in-use which are implicit in our patterns of spontaneous interactions with others. Argyris and Schön argue that it is these implicit theories that are the dominant theory of action in contradistinction to *espoused theories* which are used to justify and explain behaviour. But unlike Argyris and Schön, we wanted to locate these implicit theories in their social, political and historical context (compare Boud and Walker 1998). Ours is an epistemology grounded on a foundation of difference which "takes as its starting and end points 'the responsibility to historicize, to examine each deployment of essence, each appeal to experience, each claim to identity in the complicated contextual frame in which it is made'" (Luke 1992, p. 48 citing Dianne Fuss).

6.2.5 Process

<u>Introduction</u>

Lectures were used to introduce students to the key concepts and ideas, which were then explored 'experientially' in the two hour tutorials. The cohort was divided into four roughly equivalent groups for tutorials. I was responsible for three groups and Pauline for one. Additionally, we were both available for consultation, periods

in which students could discuss both personal and academic issues. Officially, I was available for four hours each week. Two hours were immediately following the lecture (experience had taught me this was an effective time for students who, if they did not have another class, would often want to take up issues raised in lectures). I was also willing to take appointments at other times (see chapter six on process and the later analysis chapters for further discussion). Pauline was officially available for four hours each week, also including a two hour slot immediately after the lecture. Pauline also took additional appointments and gave students her home phone number, a service used extensively in the evenings, particularly as assignment due dates loomed.

Lectures

Cases adapted from the 'real world' were used as the organizational and pedagogical devices for lectures. We tried to ensure balance across the three commonly touted variants of social work practice – individual casework, groupwork, and community work (though see chapter one for a discussion of the 'Holy Trinity'). Pauline used casework examples for *Theories and Theory Development*, and groupwork examples for *Groups*. I drew on *Community Work* examples for my lectures. The CD-Rom package designed for the National Teaching Development Grant ultimately used this case-based approach as the organizational framework (see chapter seven for detailed discussion on case-based pedagogy). One example should be sufficient to illustrate the pedagogical process used in this subject. It is drawn from lecture 3, delivered by Pauline – Symbolic Interaction Theory (see Mead 1962, orig. 1934; Cooley 1964, orig. 1902). I have chosen this example because it is the first time in the subject that students are

introduced to a major specific theory that is important for social work, and thus provides a fine illustration of how we attempted to integrate theory and practice in our teaching.

Pauline begins by writing the following on the board. Note that she effectively divides the huge *whiteboard* into three parts (though see chapter seven – as the semester moves on Pauline increases this to four parts by including a column containing relevant factual derails which usually sits between the first and second columns below). The left side is used to write a brief synopsis of the case; the right side to write the key concepts and ideas to be addressed in the lecture. These remain for the entire lecture. The much larger middle section of the board is used for 'rotating' information, which is scribed and removed as required. She does not use overhead transparencies for the 'fixed' information, since she wants *both* the case study details and key concepts to be available for students at all times, unlike overhead transparencies, which are teacher-provided and partially dependent on the teacher's juggling skills.

The overall board arrangement is as follows:

Case Synopsis	'Rotating' Information	Key Concepts

Specific details follow:

CASE: (Written on left)

Peter

Adopted 3 months old

Natural mum 16 years old

Had care first 8 weeks

Adopted by dentist and wife

Had 3 natural children after adoption

Application to place in care at 9 years

- due to severe behavioural problems

Why the behavioural problems?

The following is written on the right:

	Ecological	Empowerment	Marxist	Feminist	
Major Practice Theories	Psycho-Social	Functional	Problem Solving (Crisis; Task-Centred)	Systems	
Foundation Theories (Psychology & Sociology)	General Systems	Symbolic Interaction	Freudian	Rankian	Behaviourism

Pauline can then begin the lecture by contextualizing the particular theory she wants to discuss. She has two strategies for doing this. First, by classifying all theories

which attempt to explain human behaviour into three broad types: those focusing primarily on individuals; those whose chief focus is society; and those who focus primarily on explaining the interaction between the two. Students are reminded, of course, that this is simply a conceptual device to facilitate analysis. The second strategy that Pauline has to contextualize Symbolic Interaction Theory, is the tiered model above. Having placed the focus theory in context, Pauline is then in a position to deal with the theory itself. She does this by following through the work to which students have been introduced in the two earlier lectures on the role of theory in social work and theory construction. i.e. by outlining the key questions the theory was designed to answer; the key concepts it uses; underlying assumptions; and concludes with the main theoretical proposition, which shows the relationship between the key concepts. But throughout the entire lecture she cleverly weaves back and forth between the case study (which she expands upon as necessary) and the key ideas she is trying to explain.

Tutorials

Students were divided into four approximately equal groups of 16-17 students. By the semester's end there was one group of 12 and three other groups of approximately 15. One vital pedagogical approach we used was an attempt to integrate lectures and tutorials. We did this in a number of ways. Basically, from a pedagogical perspective, tutorials fell into three groupings. First, weeks 2-5, where we used assessment as a key integrating device. Second, weeks 6-9 where we used a variety of 'experientials' (e.g. role plays) as the integrative tool. Finally, weeks 10-12 where we used a single, but long video to draw the links.

Before describing these approaches, I should mention one pedagogical strategy used in the opening tutorial session (week 2), since this was crucial for all later work. Many students have an aversion for theory (see chapter one). In fact, it is not uncommon for some students to say something like the following: "I don't use theories. I want to help people who've got real life practical problems. I don't see how all that book stuff can help them that much." I therefore see it as one of my primary teaching tasks in this subject to demonstrate that all 'observations' and resulting ideas and behaviour are theory-driven, whether implicit, muddled or both. Indeed, it is my contention that practitioners must make every effort to make explicit and coherent their theoretical thinking if their practice is not to suffer. This is the very rationale and basis of the subject and the theoretical approach outlined and justified in the opening chapters (see Howe 1987 in relation to social work; and Chalmers 1982 in relation to science).

I begin by giving a very simple and common example of an interaction:

> A mother is at the supermarket with her three year old child. They reach the checkout and the child is insisting that the mother buys him/her (I vary it from year to year) some confectionery. The mother refuses and the child begins a screaming tantrum.

> What is your immediate reaction?

Most students every year say something like: "Spoilt brat. Needs a good smack". I then begin an intensive period of probing and interrogation, continually asking 'why?' I shall summarize very briefly a typical sort of 'inquisition':

- Why does the child need a good smack?

- Because it's being naughty?

- But why do naughty children need a smack?

- Because it will help them learn.

- Help them learn what?

- That they can't do whatever they want?

- But why can't they do whatever they want?

- Because people won't like them when they grow up?

- I see. But couldn't you just tell them not to do it? Why smack?

- But the child's only three.

- Why should that matter?

- Kids that age don't understand reason.

- But they understand smacks?

- Right.

- What do you think would happen if she didn't smack the child?

- It'd turn out a little arsehole.

- Is that such a bad thing?

- Sure. We can't have everybody running round doing what they like. The world would be chaos.

- Let me get this right. You seem to be suggesting that there's a link between what the mother does now – smack the kid – and how it turns out as an adult.

- Course there is.

And so on...

After completing the 'machine gun' probe, I then summarize the key points and draw out the theoretical connections explicitly, recording them on the board as I go. For example, it's not such a big jump to move from the link between the mother's smacking the child now and its relationship to adult personality, to demonstrate that this idea masks, at the very least, a theory of child development (note that this theory is premised on the fundamental assumption that childhood experiences shape adult personality. This is useful later on when we deal with assumptions and alternative explanations). It's not difficult to see that by successful probing and drawing out, one can soon uncover an entire host of significant theories, many of which have provided the occasion for hundreds of metres of library space. Let me summarize some of the major theories: learning theory; a related theory of discipline and punishment; a theory of communication; a theory of social values; a theory of ethics; a theory of parenting; a theory of child development.

And this all derives from a seemingly simple everyday observation consisting of six words! This is usually a remarkable revelation for students whose widening eyes provide ample testimony to the effectiveness of the teaching strategy. If necessary, I challenge students to provide any scenario for which one has a verbalized reaction which they believe to be theory-free. I am pleased to say that no student has yet been able to do this.

Assessment as an Integrative Device

Both Pauline and I often felt from our own undergraduate experiences that assessment, even when continuous, was something separate from lectures – it was where you did the things for which there was insufficient time in lectures. We also

believed that assessment was a powerful tool for directing student learning (see Ramsden 1992 – this is a theme I take up at length in chapter nine). This was borne out by student performance and feedback, both in 1993 and at the beginning of 1994, which indicated that at least for assignment 1 we needed to use assessment as a key pedagogical tool, we needed to frame the first part of the tutorial program (tutorials 1-4 in weeks 2-5) around assessment requirements. Consequently, we used assessment as an integrating device. We also wanted students to learn habits of tackling assessment tasks gradually over a period of time; not leaving them till the 'night before'. Indeed, some 'wayward' students quickly discovered that these were not the kind of assignments that could be 'whipped up' with a quick visit to the library the day before the due date, then, armed with a metre of books launch into an all night caffeine and RSI session. In the opening tutorial session (Week 2) we set students the task (to be completed prior to the next tutorial) of selecting their assessment interaction, attempting to write a brief description and choosing a question about the interaction that they wanted to explain. Having students work in a variety of situations (individually, pairs, small groups, and whole class) we used these descriptions and subsequent assessment tasks building on these as the basis for tutorial work from Weeks 3 to 5 inclusive. We had learnt the importance of doing this from previous teaching years. In fact, in 1995, we extended this to include up to Week 6. Each week we set a task which ensured that students gradually built up their assignment. For example, for Week 4, having dealt with descriptions and key questions, they needed to write a simple one paragraph theory to explain this question and identify key concepts, assumptions and propositions. Week 5 was used to deal with two issues. First, the 'self factors' leading students

to their respective theories; and second, linking the literature with their personal theories.

Experientials as an Integrative Device

By 'experiential' I mean giving students a structured experience in the teaching session which can be used to explore in more depth the key concepts, ideas and issues raised in lectures. One example shall suffice. I have chosen the very first tutorial session after completing the 'student theory' tutorials. The first of the two lectures on *Communication*, was on language. There were two parts to this lecture. The first concerned the complex, but crucial relationships between language, thought, culture and 'reality'. The second related to language and power. For the tutorial session I wrote a role play simulating a counselling session involving six characters: the counsellor, and a family consisting of husband and wife and three teenage children (two males and one female). The 'presenting problem' is that the daughter is consistently refusing to eat properly and is beginning to lose a lot of weight. Both parents suspect that this is the beginning of something quite serious. I provide one paragraph character sketches for each person. Six class members are asked to volunteer for the role play. They are given some time to discuss strategies. The role of other students is to observe the language used in the interactions. To direct student focus and learning (we can't observe everything at once, and often we don't know what to look for), this is structured by providing an observational framework consisting of nine general categories and 11 key priming questions. For example, in the general category *Language and Age,* the priming question is simply, "How is the language used shaped by the age of the characters?" Similar questions exist for thought, reality, culture, gender, etc. You might notice the

parallels with the factors identified in the rationale of the subject outline, and the 'self' factors forming part 3 of assessments 1 and 2. The observational exercise is then used as the basis for small groupwork and whole class discussion.

Audiovisuals as an Integrative Device

We used a 90 minute video, "Joe Leahy's Neighbours", a documentary on a classic case of cultural misunderstanding, set in the New Guinea Highlands, to integrate the last sequence of lectures on the *Whole Person*. Similar to the experientials, we provided a structured observational framework with key priming questions related to different 'actors'' perceptions, thoughts, feelings and behaviours and the complex relationship between them. The observational framework derived from the lecture structure and the key priming questions from main ideas and concepts raised in the four lectures. For example, we might have students focus on a particular actor (primed) and ask them how their behaviour in a specific situation (primed) was shaped by their perceptions, and how this, in turn, was influenced by their culture. This observational framework was then used as the basis for small group work and whole class discussion. Note that for teaching purposes, we divided the videotape into three 30 minute sessions, one session for each tutorial from weeks 10 to 12, leaving ample time for small group work and discussion (two hour tutorials).

For some, our approach may appear intensely focused, striving for depth rather than breadth. This is true. Our motto, based on years of our own undergraduate studies and teaching first year students, was: "better to understand one important thing very

well, rather than not quite understand an endless variety of things." We were intensely focused because we wanted to provide students with a framework for dealing with knowledge and theories, a framework they could take beyond this specific subject; theories which would be hurtled endlessly at them for the rest of their university days.

6.2.6 Texts

There was no set text for the subject. We did provide a set of readings (Ovington 1993c) which were placed on Closed Reserve in the library and we supplemented these with the Open Learning course materials (of which the set of readings was a part). Students were expected to utilize the readings in assignments, but the Open Learning notes were an option, made available to provide students with another learning medium.

6.2.7 Other Information

The subject outline also detailed the following important information:

Policy on extensions; re-mark and grievance procedures; and policy on re-submissions. The latter was significant. Neither Pauline nor I believed in failing students beyond redemption. In fact, we refused to write the word 'fail', or its equivalent, 'F', on any piece of work; substituting it with 'Resubmit'. For us, assessment was a powerful tool in its own right for directing student learning. Consequently, our policy read as follows:

You should also note that if you present a piece of work that receives a grade of

fail, we will allow you to resubmit the work provided you originally handed in the

work on time. However, out of fairness for other students, you cannot receive more

than 50% on resubmitted pieces of work.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to outline the overall context of the study. It has done so by drawing on and extending Schwab's (1969) schema for understanding educational situations: teachers, students, subject matter and milieu. I have begun with **milieu,** dividing this into three parts which reveal increasingly tighter focus: North Queensland; James Cook University; and the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare. I also note that the overall theoretical context for the subject has been addressed in the opening three chapters. I divide the *North Queensland* section of milieu into four further parts: geography, political environment, socio-demographic patterns and economic environment. This is important for establishing the unique regional flavour of the area, but also one whose prime concerns (e.g. indigenous and environmental issues) has becoming increasingly important on both national and global scales. It is also a region characterized by high levels of need and demand for community human services and, by implication, for trained personnel to staff these services. Hence, the strong continuing need for social work education in North Queensland. At the time of this study, *James Cook University* was in the throes of Quality Assurance procedures, another key circumstance relating the region to the wider national and international scale. This also contextualizes the present study of a teaching/learning dynamic within a time when teaching and learning issues and research into them, is assuming increasing significance. The section on the *Department of Social Work and Community Welfare* reveals a department with a complex history of program delivery, which, at

the time of the study is in the process of streamlining and the subject is part of the implementation of a revamped curriculum structure for both the BSW and BCW degrees. It is a significant subject within this curriculum structure, since it is a core compulsory first year subject for both degree programs which is conducted in first semester. In short, it is a key introduction to the students' chosen degree program.

The second major section deals with the **teachers** and indicates two important things. First, the two teachers involved in teaching and researching the subject which forms the basis of the present study were, at the time of the study, relatively junior staff members in a department where 17 of the 23 members were at Lecturer level or below. They were, however, both members of the Curriculum Review Committee, and both passionate and committed teachers who had been recipients of James Cook University Excellence Awards and who, at the end of the year in which the study was conducted, were awarded a National Teaching Development Grant to extend the work of the subject. Second, both had diverse and varied backgrounds which included two distinctive features: extensive cross-cultural experiences and recurrent cycling in and out of theory/practice situations.

The next section deals with **students.** This section indicates that, for the most part, the cohort forming the basis of this study was socio-demographically consistent with previous departmental students, which, in turn, revealed similar university-wide trends, albeit more pronounced. As with the university as a whole, the majority of students were from North Queensland, and there were large numbers of mature age and female students; though far greater numbers of both categories in this cohort than in the university as a whole. The number of indigenous students

was slightly higher than the university average, but lower than previous years; largely a result of a move towards study for higher-salaried professions. Data on the cohort's teaching and learning experiences and expectations indicate two significant factors which have a bearing on this study. First, the personal qualities of teachers and the nature of the relationships developed with students is perceived to be vital. Second, the social context of learning and active learning techniques are considered key facilitators to learning.

The final section relates to the **subject.** Essentially, the subject is about understanding human interaction and the forces which shape both human interaction and our understanding of it. This quest is characterized by an epistemological basis rooted in a form of social constructionism which is perspectival in nature and where language and power are integral features of knowledge acquisition and development. Encountering perspectives and being transformed by them is a hallmark of the subject. This is 'dialogue' in a thin sense. But we also stress dialogue in a thick sense, as a brand of ethico-critical reflection: identifying and coming clean with one's socially-constructed and historically-embedded perspectives as a prelude to opening up the space for other. This socially-constructed self is the hinge between theory and practice and integral to the subject is a form of praxis in which critical reflection on both self (critical self-reflection) and others assumes a vital role. I shall repeat my model from chapter three.

Figure 5.1:
Some Key Theory/Practice Variables in Social Work Education
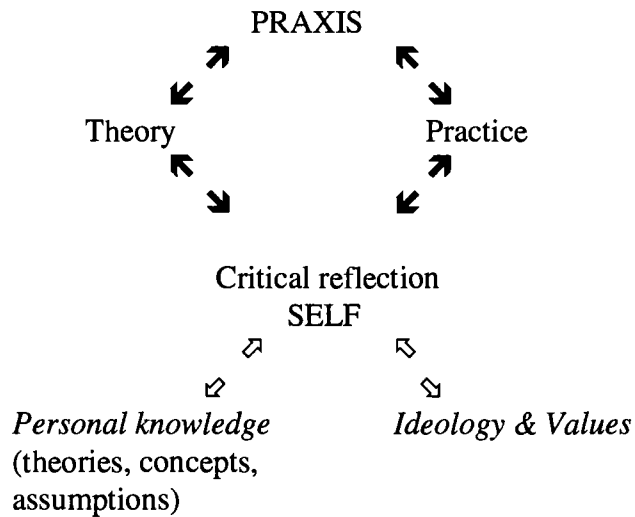
PRAXIS

Theory   Practice

Critical reflection
SELF

Personal knowledge   *Ideology & Values*
(theories, concepts,
assumptions)

The type of theories we focus on in WS1002 are primarily personal theories. We do so for two reasons. First, because in social work, theories that are grounded in 'personal knowledge' and 'practice wisdoms' are an integral part of the social worker's arsenal (see chapter one). Second, because educationally, this is the clearest route into the world of the theories of others. We attempt to facilitate this task by asking students to integrate the literature, by having them relate their own theories to theories derived from a variety of disciplines.

We can summarize all this by reiterating my conception of the aim of social work education and juxtaposing WS1002 against it. The key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with theory/practice links. This entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. The latter reflection involves a necessarily ethical perspective. This is a

prescriptive statement about how I think social work education *should* occur. Should social work education be conducted along these lines at least three purposes will be served. First, it will assist students in coming clean with their perspectives. Second, it will assist them in articulating the purposes of social work, their means for attaining them and their justification for purposes and means. Third, it will engage them in the ethico-critical process of dialogue.

Essentially, we attempt to provide students with a framework for dealing with theoretical knowledge in a critical way. This involves looking at the role of theories and theory development, and how they are constructed, including the key role of 'self' in this process. There exist three major forums for direct teaching: first, lectures, which are characterized by case-based pedagogy in order to highlight the theory/practice nexus; second, tutorials, which are linked thematically to lectures, use assessment, experientials and audiovisual materials as integrative bases, and which are characterized by high levels of active learning; third, consultation sessions, which provide scope to explore both personal and academic issues.

In this chapter I have described how we went about developing a subject, WS1002, to satisfy our general educational goals. In chapter four I sketched the broad outlines of action research, the methodology of this study. Now I need to zoom in on the specifics of how one goes about evaluating and researching the 'effectiveness' of one's broad educational goal. This is the task of the next chapter, the process of the study.

Nothing is sudden. Not an explosion – planned, timed, wired carefully – not the burst door. Just as the earth invisibly prepares its cataclysms, so history is the gradual instant.
(Anne Michaels 1997, p. 77)

CHAPTER SIX

PROCESS: APPLYING ACTION RESEARCH IN THE

PRESENT STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The opening three chapters framed the study theoretically. Chapter four dealt with the methodological aspects, the 'theory' behind the methods. The previous chapter filled out the contextual elements of the study in terms of milieu, teachers, students and the teaching subject. This chapter describes the process of the study; specifically, how the research was conducted within an action research framework It seeks to answer the question: *how did we attempt to evaluate our teaching in WS1002?* I have used the notion of 'cycles' as the primary organizational device. Within this frame I also describe in detail the monitoring tools and data sources for all cycles. A key aspect which weaves its way throughout the study relates to ethical considerations. I have discussed this vital issue in section 3.1.1, "Getting started – processes and roles", in my description of *Minor Cycle 1* within *Major Cycle 1*.

On paper, this study appears to take place at a discrete time and place focusing on a specific cohort of students studying a particular subject within a particular degree

program, *viz.*, the 67 students initially enrolled in *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience* taught in internal mode in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Bachelor of Community Welfare (BCW) degree programs at James Cook University, Townsville campus, during Semester One, 1994. In an important sense, however, this study is a snapshot, a slice in time, of an organic process that began with Pauline's employment at James Cook University at the beginning of 1988. It ended with Pauline's resignation at the end of 1996 to take up an Associate Professorship of Social Work the following year as Head of School in the Rural Community Studies Program at the Bunbury campus of Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. My face-to-face involvement with this subject and its antecedents, co-teaching and researching with Pauline, took place from the beginning of 1993, my third year of employment at James Cook University, and concluded with my departure at the end of Semester One in 1995 to take up a position as an education specialist with Save the Children Australia (SCA) in Vietnam. However, I was still involved indirectly up until the end of 1996, the time of Pauline's departure, when I returned to James Cook University for the final two week editing of the National Teaching Development Grant (CAUT) CD-Rom case study package, trialled in Semester One of that year. In an important sense, the process does not end here either, since Pauline has imported the subject into Bunbury, adapting and refining it further, including the development of new subjects for higher year students, and I exported the essence of critical reflection within an action research framework, building it into the two major training programs I designed in Vietnam. This included adapting some monitoring tools described below (e.g. instant questionnaires) to the Vietnamese context.

In summary, WS1002 1994 (internal mode) is the focus for the present study, but it is located within a broader framework of seven other related subjects and projects which inform the study. Six of these were specific subjects taught to specific cohorts of students at particular times. All six subjects also formed part of a research project so, in this sense, they were both subjects and projects. The seventh, the CAUT Grant (see below) was a research project, the tangible fruits of which were used for a specific subject. As a result, I use the terms 'subject' and 'project' interchangeably. I shall briefly describe these other subjects and projects after addressing the key issue of cycles. It is necessary to address the notion of cycles first, since these subjects/projects fit into the overall cyclical process.

I.   CYCLES

As noted in chapter four, the concept of cycles is crucial for methodological rigour. In a sense, as with all classification exercises, there is an element of arbitrariness in sharply delineating and naming cycles. We did not, as we were doing the research, think: yes, this is major cycle 1, minor cycle 3. This kind of classification and naming came later, much later; chiefly the product of my own reflections as I began the process of writing. What we did do was to alternate action and reflection in an ongoing cyclic process. Following Dick's model (see chapter four), we carried out three steps over and over again:

- Intend (reflect before action)

- Act (reflect during action)

- Review (reflect after action) – this aspect consisted of two parts: reflection on what had just happened; planning for the next cycle of actions.

Note that this second part is, in essence, identical with the intend (reflect before action) noted above, and is what gives the approach its cyclical fashion. It is also what leads Dick to simplify the action research cycle to action and reflection.

Intend

Review   Act
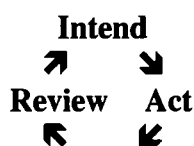
Also note that the entire process is an adaptation of the Deakin Cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (the observation is subsumed within the 'act' phase). Additionally, as Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) remark, for most groups there needs to be a reconnaissance phase, an initial stage of reflection in order to formulate an effective action plan (see also chapter four).

I have chosen *post hoc* to conceptualize the process as outlined below. Note that I have decided to consider the research focus of this thesis as just one major cycle. Given what I have already written above about the methodological problems encountered with only one cycle (lessened rigour), this might appear a strange manoeuvre. Two points address this potential criticism. First, as Dick (9/5/95) suggests, where there is only one cycle, build in smaller cycles. This has been done (see below). Second, related to my previous comments about the arbitrariness of classification, I might have decided just as easily that each of the 13 weeks of the subject constituted a complete cycle. We did, after all, intend or plan before each week's teaching; we did act (teach) and observe this teaching each week; and we did meet formally and informally after every teaching session and reflect on the process and plan for the next week's teaching. And as perusal of the data sources below reveal, we did this in a systematic way based to a large

degree, though not exclusively, on weekly student feedback provided by instant questionnaires. (And this included restructuring our program in some instances – unusual in higher education one semester subjects!). Why then, have I decided to conceptualize the present study as consisting of one major cycle comprised of six minor cycles? Essentially, I perceived a one semester subject taught each year to constitute a neat cycle in its own right. The reason for breaking up this major cycle into six minor ones is a consequence of two elements. First, the thematic arrangement of the subject. This fell naturally into four broad topic areas plus an introduction and a conclusion (see chapter five), hence making six cycles. Second, and this will become evident from perusing the material below, the subject's major reorientations resulting from reflection and consequent planning occurred at six distinct junctures. Note that these six cycles were not identical with the six subject areas. This explains why the first of the three sessions on theories and theory development belongs in minor cycle 1, not in minor cycle 2.

Initially, I shall provide a brief overall synopsis of the initial reconnaissance and the four major cycles. This will enable the reader to visualize more clearly the location of the seven subjects/projects mentioned above in relation to each other and the subject which is the focus of the present study, WS1002, taught in internal mode during 1994. Next, I shall provide a brief description of these other subjects/projects. Finally, I shall provide a more detailed account of all parts of the cycle, including reconnaissance, with particular emphasis on the processes involved in the present study, major cycle 1, including the six minor cycles, and the data sources used.

1.1 Overview of Major Cycles

The following figure summarizes the reconnaissance phase and the four major cycles:

Table 6.1: Overview of Major Cycles

Reconnaissance	
CW1002[1] – 1993 (and previous years)	
Major Cycle 1 (focus of the present study)	
WS1002[2] – 1994 (start of 'new' curriculum)	CW1002/WS1002[3] – 1994O/L
	(data feeding in concurrently)
Major Cycle 2	
WS1004[4] – 1994 (sequel subject)	PY1003[5] – 1994
Major Cycle 3	
WS1002[6] – 1995	CAUT Grant Project[7]
Major Cycle 4	
WS1002[8] – 1996 (trialling of CAUT materials)	

1. *CW1002: Human Interaction*, taught in internal mode during Semester One, 1993.

   This was the subject in the previous curriculum from which WS1002 evolved.

2. ***WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, taught in internal mode during Semester One, 1994.**

   This was the subject which formed the focus for the present research.

3. *CW1002: Human Interaction/WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, taught in Open Learning mode during Semester One, 1994.

   This is the same subject as the previous one taught over the same time period to a different cohort of students via distance education. The subject included an intensive one week workshop from 14 February to 18 February 1994, immediately prior to official semester commencement. The reason for the dual subject name is a consequence of the introduction of the restructured Bachelor of Social Work/Bachelor of Community Welfare degree programs implemented in 1994. Since all subjects in the BCW Open Learning degree (there is no BSW degree by Open Learning mode) are offered only in alternate years, those students commencing their program in 1993 were due to undertake the former subject, *CW1002: Human Interaction* in 1994. The subject was identical for both groups of students (those commencing in 1993 and those in 1994), but due to administrative requirements – a consequence of the former degree structure – different subject titles and codes were necessary.

4. *WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping*, taught in internal mode during Semester Two, 1994.

   This is the sequel to WS1002, the latter being a prerequisite. The cohort was substantially the same, though not identical. Pauline designed, coordinated and co-taught this subject with another colleague. I was an observer for all lecture sessions, one group's practical sessions, and a small working group for each week of the semester (see below, data sources).

5. *PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice*, taught in internal mode during Semester Two, 1994.

This was also a new subject designed specifically for social work and community welfare students. The Department of Psychology and Sociology was responsible for the subject design and teaching the lecture component (both done by Dr Marie Caltabiano). Both Pauline and myself provided input, particularly into the assessment. I was responsible for teaching the entire tutorial component.

6. *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, taught in internal mode during Semester One, 1995.

This was the second year of the 'new' subject. The arrangements were similar to 1994 (the exception being, that due to timetabling constraints triggered by universal problems in the higher education sector, the number of tutorial groups was reduced from three to two, with consequent increases in class sizes). Pauline and I shared the lectures, Pauline taught one tutorial group and I taught the other two.

7. "Critical Theoretical Skills Development in First Year Social Work and Community Welfare Students."

This was a 1995 National Teaching Development Grant Project commissioned by the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT). The project consisted of a CD-Rom package of case-based teaching materials and a set of six brief videos of vignettes. The six videos were completed before I left for Vietnam in July 1995. The CD-Rom package had been conceptualized and a first draft completed. Materials were developed for, and used in *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, internal mode, taught in Semester One, 1996.

8. *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, taught in internal mode during Semester One, 1996.

This was the third year of the 'new' subject.

These eight subjects/projects can be summarized as follows:

- WS1002 or its precursor, CW1002, in internal mode in 1993, **1994**, 1995 and 1996 (including CAUT materials) and in Open Leaning Mode in 1994.

- WS1004, the second semester sequel subject in 1994.

- PY1003, a second semester degree subject in 1994.

Expressed differently, the above comprised, longitudinally, CW/WS1002 from 1993-96; and cross-sectionally, three of the eight subjects studied by the cohort in 1994.

II.   RECONNAISSANCE

2.1   CW1002 – 1993 (and previous years)

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p. 9), following Lewin, suggest that the action research process begins with the general idea that some kind of change or improvement is desirable.   They conceptualize the initial process as one of identifying a "thematic concern", which "defines the substantive area in which the group decides to focus its improvement strategies."   In the present study, the impetus for change sprang from Pauline's observation over a number of years that 3rd year social work students at James Cook University lacked knowledge of both significant social work theories and basic epistemological issues such as what theories are and how they are constructed.   As a result of Pauline's observations,

and assuming that BCW students faced a similar predicament, she began to develop a subject inherited from another staff member, Ms J, originally known as *CW128: Social Literature*, in order to address these concerns. It was a number of years before I joined Pauline in these endeavours in 1993, and it was not until 1994 that the existing cohort of students joined the project. Note that this project did **not** begin as an action research project, but rather as an individual concern. In fact, the initial concern was not with research at all; simply to develop a subject to remedy the perceived theoretical and epistemological omissions. This is a major reason why I cannot accept Kemmis and colleagues' original formulations as gospel. If we were to do so, this project would never have got off the ground.

As time passed, Pauline became more interested in the effectiveness of this subject, and particularly in the most effective strategies for teaching what she came to refer to as 'critical theoretical thinking'. It was at this point that I entered the stage with the merging of different backgrounds providing extraordinary impetus to the subject. Pauline had a strong background in social work theory and practice, a rare passion for teaching and learning and a keen interest in epistemological issues. My background was in education, particularly cross-cultural education and I shared Pauline's passion for teaching and learning and keen interest in epistemology. Further, I also had a growing interest in action research, having witnessed the fruits of it, and participated on a limited scale, within an Aboriginal education context. By the beginning of 1993, when I began to co-teach the subject, then known as *CW1002: Human Interaction,* the 'thematic concern' had refined to become:

> How can we best teach critical theoretical thinking to beginning tertiary students within a social work and community welfare degree program, given

the context of large numbers of mature age and female students, a small, but historically significant and potentially future significant indigenous presence, many of whom have had extraordinarily rich life experiences, but whose formal education is limited and/or far from recent?

This is a broad agenda; or, in action research terms, a 'fuzzy question'. But even at this stage, the beginning of 1993, it is important to note that we did not set out to do an action research study. In fact, we did not set out to do research at all. We simply set out (Pauline did initially) to remedy a perceived deficiency within a specific teaching/learning context. Expressed simply, we desired change. As noted in the last chapter, I was enrolled in a PhD pursuing a study in cross-cultural education under a different supervisor, Professor Allan Luke. By the summer vacation of 1993-94, having co-taught *CW1002: Human Interaction* with Pauline for the first time, and prior to the introduction of the revamped BSW/BCW curriculum, we had decided the time was ripe to conduct a research study. Almost overnight, my PhD thesis had spun a complete turn.

III. MAJOR CYCLE 1

Semester One
WS1002 – 1994
(beginning of 'new' curriculum)

CW/WS1002 – 1994 (Open Learning)

Initially, I shall provide a brief overview of the minor cycles, followed by more detailed description of each cycle. Note that lecture numbers correspond to the week numbers of the semester. Tutorials were conducted a week later. The week numbers in parentheses after the tutorial numbers refer only to the tutorial weeks.

Table 6.2:
Major Cycle 1 – Overview of Minor Cycles

Lectures	Tutorials
Minor Cycle 1	
Lectures 1-2/Tutorial 1 (Week 2)	
• Introduction – human interaction & social welfare	
• Theories and theory development	Theories
Minor Cycle 2	
Lectures 3-4/Tutorials 2-4 (Weeks 3-5)	
• Symbolic Interaction Theory practice	Theories/assignment
• General Systems Theory practice	Theories/assignment
Minor Cycle 3	
Lectures 5-6/Tutorials 5-6 (Weeks 6-7)	
• Communication – verbal	Communication – verbal
• Communication – non-verbal	Communication – non-verbal
Minor Cycle 4	
Lectures 7-8/Tutorials 7-8 (Weeks 8-9)	
• Group interaction	Group interaction
• Analyzing groups	Analyzing groups
Minor Cycle 5	
Lectures 9-12/Tutorials 9-11 (Weeks 10-12)	
• Perceiving	Perceiving
• Thinking	Thinking
• Feeling	
• Acting	Acting
Minor Cycle 6	
Lecture 13/Tutorial 12 (Week 13)	
• Review – evaluation (TEVALs) discussions)	Review – evaluation (taped group

3.1 Minor Cycle 1 – Theory Development

3.1.1 Getting Started – Processes and Roles

Dick (29/4/95) uses the term 'contracting', which he does not define explicitly, to describe the process that takes place at the beginning of an action research project. He describes three important steps: first, gaining access to the 'stakeholders', the people with a stake in the research; second, forming relationships; third, identifying and negotiating goals and roles. Each of these issues raises **ethical** concerns. I shall present a brief general discussion on research ethics first, then I shall deal with Dick's three steps, integrating discussion of ethical issues where relevant.

Ethics of Research

The question of ethics in social research has come to occupy an increasingly prominent place in recent years. This is partly a function of the increasing volume of research, its increasingly intrusive nature and its highly computerized format, all of which tallies to a potential for the researcher to lose control over both the process and purpose of research, with consequent misuse of findings. The upshot has been the necessity "for some regulation of the research process beyond ethics and self-regulating mechanisms of the [individual] researcher" (Sarantakos 1993, p. 22). Four areas of concern have arisen, of which only the first three relate to research with humans: professional standards and ethical conduct; researcher-respondent relationship; and researcher-researcher relationship. In Australia, the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee (AVCC 1990) consulted with various stakeholders to produce *Guidelines on Responsible Practices in Research and*

Problems of Research Misconduct. On the basis of this, Australian tertiary institutions were advised to develop their own code of ethics to guide research and to establish an environment conducive to responsible research practice (Sarantakos 1993). At James Cook University two measures have resulted. First, the formation of an Experimentation Ethics Review Committee. All research involving human or animal subjects must be approved by this committee. I was Departmental Monitor and a member of this committee immediately prior to the present study, from 1991 to 1993 inclusive. Second, in 1993 James Cook University published a draft titled *Guidelines for Responsible Practice in Research* (JCU 1993).

But ethical considerations were vital to this study on at least two other counts, not simply because of mandatory university regulations. First, social work's professional accrediting body, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) publishes a code of ethics which "provides a set of standards by which the social work profession (or the social worker) can distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable behaviour within social work practice" (AASW 1994a, p. 1). While this does not refer specifically to research, the entire profession is underpinned by ethical values. It behoves the social work educator to provide appropriate role modelling for subsequent student practice. Second, ethics assumes a special role in action research projects. As Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p. 106) express it: "Principles of procedure for action research ...go beyond the usual concerns for confidentiality and respect for persons who are the subjects of enquiry and define in addition, appropriate ways of working with other participants in the social

organization." It is this issue of 'researcher-respondent' relationship that I primarily want to focus on here.

An application was submitted to and approved by the University's Experimentation Ethics Review Committee for a project entitled, *A Study of the Learning and Teaching Experiences of Students in Dimensions of Human Experience and Introduction to Professional Helping*, at the beginning of Semester One in 1994. The application included the following appendices: methodology of the proposed study; student consent form; a copy of an 'instant questionnaire', a formative evaluation tool (see below); and a copy of the baseline questionnaire (see appendix 2). I shall discuss the ethics of participation in more detail as they arise in the following sections, including use of data.

Stakeholder Access

Dick (2/5/95, pp. 1-2) defines a stakeholder as "anyone affected by a change, or able to affect it." He notes, however, that the concept has ambiguous boundaries. For our project, the people most obviously affected by the research were the students themselves. In practice, the people most able to effect changes, at least in the short term, and within certain parameters, were Pauline and myself; though note that longer term and major changes could only be done through a variety of channels, which included other departmental staff, and ultimately the Faculty of Arts, in which the department was located, and the university's Academic Board.

Following Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) advice, we 'started small'. For us, the key players in the early stages of our project were the 1994 WS1002 cohort and the

two staff members responsible for teaching the subject, Pauline and myself. We did not attempt to involve other departmental staff in the project at this stage for a variety of reasons, not least of which was that they were not directly involved in teaching the subject and so had limited scope for effecting short term (weekly) changes in the project. Additionally, given the sensitive political history of the subject, we 'trod' carefully. In other words, we attempted to involve all students and staff teaching in the subject.

Forming Relationships

The second step was forming relationships. Dick (29/4/95, p. 1) stresses the crucial nature of this phase when he writes: "Participation isn't just a matter of whom you talk to. It depends, too, on the quality of relationship you can create and maintain at the outset. And it is influenced by the style of communication you use, and the processes for decision-making." Given our respective backgrounds, Pauline as an experienced social worker, particularly in the complex and sensitive area of child welfare, and myself as a teacher, specializing in the equally complex and sensitive area of cross-cultural education, including Aboriginal education, we were under no illusions as to the importance of establishing sound working relationships. Indeed, you might say we had been trained specifically to deal with this area. The quality of these relationships will become evident when I report on data analysis.

Identifying and Negotiating Goals and Roles

The final step was identifying, clarifying and negotiating goals and roles. Obviously, Pauline and I had to identify project goals *prior* to the commencement

of the first semester subject. In broad terms these were to examine the notion of 'effective' teaching and its relationship to student learning within the context of the subject, *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience*, with a view to improving the teaching in order to facilitate student learning.

As Dick (29/4/95, p. 4) notes, relationships formed and goals identified are critical influences on the role of the action researcher, and thus, the quality of the research, but there are a number of other key decisions "which do much to determine the later success of the research." He identifies four:

- *Who* will be involved in the research?

- What *level of involvement* will they be offered?

- Within what *constraints* will the research operate?

- Whatever the roles and processes negotiated, how much *flexibility* exists?

I have already discussed the issue of who will be involved. Briefly, I shall address the remaining three.

Level of **involvement** is an issue of *participation.* Dick (29/4/95, p. 4) notes that there are many levels of participation and therefore many choices. He adds that it is important that clients help to choose the level of participation. "To me, this is more important than achieving some particular level of participation in the research." This is not the view of all action researchers (e.g. Kemmis and McTaggart, at least in their earlier writings). It is, however, the position taken in this study, for reasons already alluded to above, *viz.*, had we insisted on full participation from the outset, the project would never have got off the ground. Realistically, we could not pretend that the students were equal co-researchers in

any meaningful or honest sense. The stark reality was that institutionally we were academic staff who ultimately held power to pass or fail student work. Whatever aspirations we may have held out for equality, and in many senses the data bears out that most students felt on more of an equal footing with us than they were with other staff members, our relationships were defined at the outset by the hierarchical institutional demands of a university setting. In simple terms, we had more 'power' than students. However, this did not preclude us from attempting to share this power where possible and appropriate, and from forming sound relationships. These were the springboard for changing our own teaching practice in order to facilitate student learning, which was, after all, our major goal. Both self-interest and altruism were sources of this goal. We were doing what we were, partly because of our own passion and commitment to teaching – matters of personal and professional pride – and partly because we wanted the students to learn more effectively.

But we were adamant that students be able to choose their own level of involvement, including non-involvement. During the first lecture session we spent 15 minutes explaining to students the details and purposes of the research, our motives in conducting the research, the use that would be made of outcomes, and safeguards about anonymity. We stressed that participation in the study was *voluntary* and that there was no penalty for not participating. We handed out to students a baseline questionnaire (see chapter five), which included a cover sheet explaining the nature and purpose of the research (see appendix 1). Anonymous responses for the initial questionnaires ensured that the 'no penalty' maxim

applied. The questionnaire was discussed in detail in chapter five and I return to it briefly below, along with other data sources.

I have already referred to the *constraint* implied by the hierarchical power relations of staff and students. I shall list briefly other perceived constraints. First, we were operating within a limited *time* frame, a one semester subject. As discussion below reveals, we did build in strategies for modifying the subject on the basis of student feedback, and this did, in fact, happen, especially in the early stages of the semester. While unusual for changes to be implemented in a one semester subject, we felt it crucial to do so, since mostly staff seek only 'summative' feedback upon subject completion and any changes made and benefits accruing are reserved for students in subsequent years. Why shouldn't current students, where possible, reap the benefits of their insights, observations and recommendations? Note also that most of the cohort were enrolled in WS1004 and PY1003 in second semester, and this also gave us an opportunity to make further immediate changes for these subjects from which current students would benefit. Second, as could only be expected within an organizational setting such as a university, we were limited by *institutional* demands. These constrained the types and degree of changes that could be made within a one semester subject (or any subject, for that matter). I shall mention two types of institutional constraint. The first concerns infrastructure. One of the biggest initial complaints concerned the small size of the lecture theatre. Not only could we not change this for the cohort, but due to the rapid growth rate of the university in relation to its facilities, we were unable to change the location the following year! The second type of institutional constraint concerned curriculum change. Obviously, while Pauline

and I were free to make certain content and process changes on a weekly basis, we were not in a position to make major structural change, which could only be effected initially through the department as a whole, and later through the Faculty of Arts and the Academic Board. In practice, this proved not to be such a major stumbling block.

The issue of *flexibility* is an interesting one. Dick (29/4/95, p. 5) suggests that "to a large extent, the flexibility in the research is determined by the flexibility in the relationship between the researcher and clients." He uses the generic term 'client' in a way that applies to students in the present context. He further suggests that "at the very least, I much prefer to have regular meetings to reconsider the research: its goals, its process, those involved, the level of their participation, and so on" (p. 5). We can look at this aspect in two parts. First, Pauline and I, who were genuine co-researchers in every sense of the term – we shared subject design, coordination and teaching (including assessment) in addition to sharing the research responsibilities. Because Pauline and I *were* so passionate and committed about teaching, we found it unneccessary to organize formal meetings to discuss these issues. Initially, we had planned to have such formal review/reflection meetings once a week. In practice, we had such meetings almost every day (without planning!). These could be over lunch, at some other time of the day, and even in the evening, if not in vivo, at least by telephone. I always took notes of these sessions. Dick (2/5/95) describes this as 'full client responsibility'. The second part concerns the students, who were not co-researchers as such (it would be gratuitous and patronizing to suggest they were). In Dick's (2/5/95, pp. 3-4) terms, we were in "direct consultation" with students, a situation where "all stakeholders are offered the

opportunity to give information, or get information, or both." Regular meetings with students were built into the very nature of the teaching/learning environment (we saw them for a minimum of three hours each week in two different teaching sessions – lecture and tutorial). By their very nature, weekly instant questionnaires for all teaching sessions soliciting student feedback (see below) ensured flexibility. Perusal of the data sources below reveals the considerable extent to which students were given opportunity to "give information" and to "get information".

3.1.2 Data Sources, Monitoring Tools and Teaching Evaluation

We used 14 major monitoring tools for the study; that is, tools to assist us in checking on the progress of the study. These yielded 15 data sources. I shall briefly describe and justify each. As the previous discussion of action research implies, we did not choose all tools prior to the study; some emerged in a cyclic process. Therefore, where appropriate, I shall relate these to the minor cycles. In another sense, the monitoring tools and data sources were also evaluative tools. This is not surprising. Dick (10/6/95, p. 1) argues "that action research...lends itself to evaluation." Until now, I have tended to use the terms 'evaluation' and 'assessment' interchangeably. Some authors (e.g. Rowntree 1977) attempt to distinguish the terms on the basis of target groups and activities: students' work gets *assessed*, but teachers' work gets *evaluated*. With the advent of the Quality Assurance Project and the notion of 'quality assessment' this distinction crumbles (see chapter one). However, for the purposes of this thesis, I shall usually refer to student assessment and teaching evaluation. Evaluation is far from unitary. In chapter one in discussing 'teaching quality', I stressed the importance of viewing quality in terms of context and purpose. The same applies to evaluation. In the

present study, our purpose for evaluating our teaching practice was not linked to promotion or some other 'external carrot'. Rather, it was motivated by a quest to improve our own teaching practice in order to help students learn 'better'. But even this does not refine the evaluation concept sufficiently. We need to look at types of evaluation.

The American literature pioneered an influential distinction between two types of course evaluation (e.g. Scriven 1967) – formative and summative – which has been adapted to the student assessment literature (e.g. Rowntree 1977). *Formative evaluation* "is intended to develop and improve a piece of teaching until it is as effective as it possibly can be. ... *Summative evaluation*...is intended to establish the effectiveness of the teaching once it is fully developed and in regular use" (Rowntree 1977, p. 7). Summative evaluation is tasting the freshly-baked bread. Formative evaluation is watching the baker at work, including scrutinizing his recipe. Rowntree notes, however, that the distinction is difficult to preserve in practice for evaluating teaching, though it is "very descriptive of what goes on in student assessment" (p. 7). Bob Dick remarks (13/6/95) that some writers equate formative evaluation with 'process' evaluation, and summative evaluation with 'outcome' evaluation. I follow Dick's usage – process and outcome evaluation.

> I persist with the term 'process evaluation' because to my mind, that is what it is. It seeks to help stakeholders understand the process by which they achieve (or don't achieve) what they set out to achieve.
>
> ...I use the term outcome evaluation because it seeks to monitor outcomes. (Dick 13/6/95, p. 6)

This usage also tallies with Braskamp and colleagues' (1984) model for evaluating teaching: the input-process-product model of teaching excellence, to which I

referred in chapters one, three and five. *Inputs* are what teachers and students bring into the classroom (student characteristics; teacher characteristics; course characteristics). *Process* refers to what teachers and students do in the course (classroom atmosphere; teacher behaviours; student learning activities; course organization; assessment procedures). *Product* refers to outcomes attributable to teaching (end-of-course learning, attitude change and skill acquisition; long-term learning, attitude change and skill acquisition). Lally and Myhill (1994) note two measurement issues that need to be addressed in evaluating teaching quality in universities. The first is a "fundamental contradiction" (p. 23) occasioned by confusing process and product. Although the *process* of teaching is considered to be a vital component, it is outcomes or products which are often measured and then used to infer process variables. One example is using student grades to infer teaching quality. This ignores a whole range of other relevant variables, especially input ones concerning student baseline levels. Second, Lally and Myhill make a plea for triangulation, urging that universities need to move beyond their "current almost exclusive reliance on data from a single source – the students" (p. 23). They acknowledge the value of student ratings but argue the statistical properties of student rating scales "have provided a useful, but necessarily partial and simplistic view of a complex and variable process. Student view of this process while vital should not override or exclude those of the other main participants in the process – the teachers" (p. 23). This accords well with my earlier discussion in the methodology chapter on triangulation, or Dick's preferred term, 'dialectic'. Dick (9/5/95) advocated the use of multiple sources of information used *within* as many cycles as possible.

The conclusion to be drawn from this brief foray into teaching evaluation is that any adequate notion of teaching evaluation requires a rich array of qualitative and quantitative input, process and outcome data. Note also the fuzzy boundaries between data and context when we speak of input data – what teachers and students bring into the classroom – and process data (e.g. student learning activities; course organization; assessment procedures). Much of the information in the previous chapter on context, particularly teachers, students and subject, is also data. For example, Pauline's and Gary's story explains what they as teachers bring to the classroom; the baseline survey performs a similar function for students. The description of the subject provides data on student learning activities, course organization and assessment procedures.

1. Baseline Questionnaires

First, we needed to know our cohort. Who were we dealing with? Each student had their individual socio-demographic background and educational history (and the two interrelate). These characteristics might impact on our research. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to establish baseline conditions in respect of two major dimensions:

- Sociodemographic variables.

- Teaching/learning experiences and expectations.

This was major *input* data (see chapter five and the later analysis chapters for more detailed discussion). Due to time constraints this data was not collated and analyzed until the end of 1994. At the beginning of 1995 I instigated formal data feedback sessions with the cohort. These were open invitations. During 1994 it was easy to give and get information because I taught most of the cohort in second

semester. At the first of these formal feedback sessions I 'walked students through' the baseline questionnaire data, contextualizing it within the study as a whole and using the session to indirectly 'teach' about action research as well. Twelve students attended this lunchtime session and this continued to be the approximate number at each of the sessions, which terminated at the end of Semester One 1995 when I left the university for Vietnam.

2. Personal Journal (carried on for all cycles)

The personal journal, following Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) suggestions, was a *process* tool documenting two parallel sets of learnings: first, learnings about the *practices* being studied (our teaching of WS1002); second, learnings about the *process* of studying these practices (action research). Its main purpose was to document *reflective* practice; both teaching practice and research practice. Pauline and I kept separate journals. I began my journal shortly before teaching for the subject began and used it to record seven sets of information:

- A record of all planning and reflection meetings with Pauline. This included a record of emerging interpretations which we could carry forward to the next cycle.

- A record of my *personal* critique of the Plan, Act and Review phases of each cycle (see chapter four concerning the necessity of this).

- A record of changing methods and refinements, including conclusions drawn from these.

- A record of literature accessed and any confirming or disconfirming information obtained from it.

- Quotes from raw information which captured well interpretations being developed.

- A record of all supervision sessions with original supervisor, Professor Allan Luke.

- Reflections, observations and notes of classes, student consultations and any other conversation or incident that I felt relevant to the subject.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) suggest that such documents should contain four kinds of reflections all related to the thematic concern: changing uses of *language* and the development of more coherent *discourse*; changing *activities* in the setting and the emergence of more coherently described and justified educational *practices*; changing *social relationships* and emerging changes to the formal *organizational structure*; and changes in the way the group is participating in *the action research process* itself. While our journals *contained* these four types of reflections, they were not organized in this way. Rather, they were set out chronologically. The organization was a later analytical activity.

Ideally, according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), *all* members of the action research group should keep a diary or journal. Both Pauline and I did this, but it was neither practical nor fair to ask the students to do this. Had we thought of it at the time, we might have built reflective journals into the assessment process, but probably not, since in 1995 when we had the opportunity to do this, we decided against it. In fact, we reduced the assessment requirements from three to two pieces. This might seem an egregious omission, since in one sense the primary purpose of the subject is to develop critically reflective practice. But such a claim

rests on the assumption that reflective journals are the best way to encourage students to develop these skills (they might be the most appropriate for teaching action research skills, but that was not our primary intention). In a climate of overloaded student assessment, we felt the assessment itself was custom-built to foster critically reflective practice. This belief was borne out by later practice. Indeed, the students discovered (and we already knew from previous experience with the subject) that the assignments could not actually be completed satisfactorily without some form of critically reflective practice.

3. Instant Questionnaires (carried on for all cycles)

This tool yielded two data sources, one for lectures and another for tutorials. The tool was adapted from Gibbs, Habeshaw and Habeshaw (1989) and is designed to provide *instant* and anonymous student feedback on the teaching session. Change can then be effected for the next teaching session. As such, it is a *process* evaluation tool. We used the instrument for both lectures and tutorials on a weekly basis. We considered this a vital tool, since the Committee for Quality Assurance reported the following student concerns from their 1994 review meetings:

> Feedback about changes resulting from student surveys and questionnaires was often not made available to students. A related problem was that the benefits from any changes made to courses were usually not felt by the students surveyed, as questionnaires are usually conducted late in a course and acted upon in the following semester or year.
> (Committee for Quality Assurance 1995, p. 9)

We made a significant departure from Gibbs and his colleagues' approach. Rather than identifying the key questions we wanted to ask about the session and asking students to rate them on a five point scale, we identified three key areas and asked open-ended questions. The questions were:

- The key point(s) I remember from today's lecture…

- I found it difficult to understand about…

- I found the teaching…

The tradeoff was between efficiency and richness of data – Gibbs' original method enabled quick collation; ours provided richer data. This did present a problem initially for the lectures – we had to find a way to collate, summarize and discuss between ourselves the information before the next lecture. Feeding back the information was vital. It took until the fourth lecture before we had streamlined our approach sufficiently to present a comprehensive and accurate summary of student responses to lectures. This had not been a problem for the tutorial sessions where I found the smaller group sizes more manageable (even though I taught three of the tutorial groups, the chunks of collation and summaries were manageable). Instant questionnaires were handed out five minutes before the session's end. The collated and summarized responses were then fed back to students during the first five minutes of the next lecture or tutorial session. In some instances, we diagnosed learning difficulties and we might spend up to 20 minutes in lectures or one hour in tutorials addressing these concerns.

Note that in terms of the thesis' theoretical framework, instant questionnaires can be viewed as a form of dialogue. It is a practical measure designed to foster reflective conversation between students and teachers.

<u>4. Videotapes</u> (carried on for all cycles)

We had two purposes for videotaping each lecture. The first was to perform closer observations and analyses of our own teaching. The second was to provide students with another learning resource. Each lecture was videotaped by technical staff from the School of Behavioural Sciences. Mostly, the teacher was the focal point of the videotape, ranging from close-ups of face only, to wider-angled scenes revealing a group of students. Originally, we planned this tool to be concerned with both the teaching *process* and *outcomes*. The process aspect was to consist of either Pauline or I, depending on whose lecturing week it was, to view the videotaped lecture each week, make notes, meet to discuss the viewing, and make any planned teaching changes on the basis of this. Due to overriding commitments this was not possible. However, we did view each other's lectures each week *in vivo*, took notes and discussed the teaching session, providing constructive feedback for following sessions. In other words, we still maintained the plan, act, reflect cycle, but the observation exercise subsumed in the act phase was done only once, *in vivo*, rather than twice (plus video) as originally planned.

We did not videotape tutorials, though after the study commenced, we wish we had; primarily because it may have yielded richer data. Nevertheless, since our primary focus was on teaching we felt this was not too great an impediment at this stage. We rectified the situation in our next study, another teaching study, of *WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping*, the follow up to the present subject, WS1002 (see below).

We also used the videotapes as *outcome* data for two further types of analysis in attempts to disconfirm interpretations we had reached by the end of the semester. First, we asked an independent evaluator, Neal Sellars, a Senior Lecturer in Education and the Faculty of Education's representative on the University's Teaching Committee, to conduct an independent evaluation of my teaching as observed in the videotapes as these related to the subject outline (Sellars 1996). Second, on the basis of key variables identified from other sources, I did a fine grained video analysis of lectures 5 and 6 (see chapter seven).

The second use for videotaped lectures was a student one (the second purpose identified above). We had multiple copies made and set up a borrowing system. This was done through the School of Behavioural Science's Technical Office. The following year, 1995, we decided to monitor more closely student use of this material and I set up the borrowing system in my room.

5. Student Consultation Records (carried on for all cycles)

I kept diary records of all student consultations, whether in official consultation time slots or at other times. Indeed, this proved to be essential, since very early in the semester it was apparent that my services were in great demand. I instituted 15 minute consultation slots during each of the two 2 hour consultation periods (4 hours total). This meant a total of 16 students per week could visit in consultation time. Particularly as assignment due dates loomed, demand increased, and given that in practice I was responsible for almost 50 students, this meant that two thirds of the students could not see me. This changed the flavour of consultations since students were having to make appointments up to two weeks in advance and there

was always a line up outside the door waiting, thus increasing the pressure on the current consultation session. One student once remarked that it was 'like a doctor's surgery'. My immediate short term solution was simply to take 'bookings' at other times. In practice, this meant that in the periods leading up to assignments, I was conducting many hours of consultation sessions per week. I devised new strategies to cope with the demand in 1995 (see below and chapter seven). I also kept intensive records of the process in the following year. One student, whom I taught in the Psychology subject in second semester of 1994, wanted to tape consultation sessions so she wouldn't "forget anything". Sometimes she transcribed these sessions for private study purposes. After discussion, she agreed to give me a transcript of a session. This provided an excellent record of the teaching/learning dynamic. The monitoring strategy of student consultation records was both a *process* and *outcome* evaluation tool. It was process in the sense that it documented the process of ongoing student learning and development – and it was a superbly sharp tool for doing so – and outcome in the sense that it provided a record of the total time individual students spent in formal consultation periods.

I cannot emphasize too strongly the significance of student consultation. Often we think of teaching and learning occurring in formal classroom situations (lectures and tutorials) and during periods of student research and assignments. Few have paid attention to the possibilities of student consultation as a teaching strategy and my experience suggests that it is one of the sharpest of all tools for pinpointing student difficulties and dealing with them. Often students will feel free to discuss

particular issues that they would never raise even in the small group setting of tutorials.

<u>6. Student Work</u> (carried on for all cycles)

This was both a *process* and *outcome* tool consisting of drafts of assignments in progress and samples of completed student work for the three assignments. It was an outcome tool insofar as the three assignments provided a final outcome, both for work invested in individual assignments and the subject overall. But it was also a process tool because the samples documented student progress through the subject. This was particularly so because both Pauline and I were prepared to discuss student drafts of assignments as part of the learning process. Consequently, I saw many drafts of student work throughout the semester. This provided an invaluable tool for diagnosing student difficulties and steering their learning accordingly. We sought and gained student permission to photocopy the completed assignments and to quote relevant sections for the purposes of this thesis. Again, students were under no obligation to provide work samples (and some did not). One student gave permission for her part 2 theory material to be used, but not the part 3 'self factors'.

3.2   Minor Cycle 2 - Theories

The transition from Minor Cycle 1 to Minor Cycle 2 was characterized by two features:

- Use of partially-completed student assessment work as a teaching tool in the tutorials.

- We streamlined procedures for lecture instant questionnaires enabling us to provide extensive feedback at the beginning of the following week's lecture.

The monitoring tools were as described above.

3.3 Minor Cycle 3 - Communication

The transition to Minor Cycle 3 was characterized by:

- Use of experientials/role plays in tutorials.

- Thematic move to *Communication* topics.

Monitoring tools continued as above.

3.4 Minor Cycle 4 - Groups

The transition to Minor Cycle 4 was characterized by:

- Marking of Assessment 1 revealed some common perceived difficulties, so we introduced self-assessment sheets to remedy this.

- Thematic shift to *Groups* topics.

7. Self Assessment Sheets (carried on for remaining cycles)

This was a *process* evaluation tool. After completion of the first assignment we decided to encourage students to assess their own work prior to submission. This was partly in response to perceived problems emerging from the assignment (chiefly by those who had not availed themselves of the opportunity to discuss drafts in progress, or who had not been able to obtain a 'booking' to do so). Additionally, we considered self-assessment as an important dimension of developing skills of critically reflective practice. Consequently, we developed a proforma evaluation criteria self-assessment sheet (see appendix 3) whose

elements were based on the assessment criteria outlined in the subject outline. We gave students a blank copy of the sheet and asked them to self-assess on each criterion after assignment completion, but prior to submission. Pauline and I disciplined ourselves not to look at these sheets until after we had formed our own opinions about the quality of work.

3.5   Minor Cycle 5 – The Whole Person

The transition to Minor Cycle 5 was characterized by:

- Use of videotape in tutorials as integrative framework.

- Thematic shift to *The Whole Person* topics.

Monitoring tools continued as above.

3.6   Minor Cycle 6 – Review

The transition to Minor Cycle 6 was characterized by:

- A review session.

8. Audio Tapes (taped group discussions)

This was an *outcome* tool whose primary purpose was to disconfirm the interpretations reached by Pauline and myself by the end of semester. The final session for each tutorial group comprised a group discussion. We asked students if we could tape the session and stressed that participation was voluntary (students did not have to come to the session and even if they did, were under no obligation to participate in the discussion). Attendance was almost 100% and participation equally prolific. Pauline and I formulated a brief introduction to ensure that all groups received standard instructions (see appendix 4). Basically, we wanted

students to pursue their own lines of thought in talking of the subject. Once the tapes were transcribed we made them available to students for scrutiny. We removed names to ensure some confidentiality across tutorial groups; though any student attending the session would have been aware of 'who said what'. Particularly, we asked students to veto any comments that they would not be comfortable with appearing in published form. Like the formal feedback sessions referred to above, only a minority of students availed themselves of the opportunity to read the transcripts. None vetoed any information.

9. TEVALS

TEVAL, an acronym for teaching evaluation, was the name given to the standardized student evaluation instrument for teaching used by James Cook University at the time of this study. It was developed by the Tertiary Education Institute at the University of Queensland in 1982 and at the time was the only generic teaching evaluation instrument available nationally for purchase. James Cook University was one of six Australian universities to buy and use the software package and many other tertiary institutions used the instrument as a springboard for their own instruments. It was first used at James Cook University in 1991. Despite the original authors' intentions for the instrument to be used formatively, thus making it a process tool in the terms of our study, "the instrument has essentially a summative tone, that is a judgement at the end of a process" (Annesley et al. 1994, p. 59). We used the data to monitor *outcomes* at the end of the subject, but it also took on a *process* dimension when we used it for professional development purposes. In this sense, it is difficult to sustain a

watertight distinction between process and outcome data, since all data can be used in the ongoing quest of improving one's teaching practice.

At the time of this study TEVALs were voluntary at James Cook University. In 1993, 34% of staff regularly used TEVAL (JCU 1994a). This means that TEVAL ratings are probably skewed towards the 'better' end of the scale, since it is probably a safe assumption that only the most motivated and skilful teachers (or those seeking promotion) would evaluate with TEVALs. We conducted independent evaluations for both Pauline and myself. TEVALs have four parts. The first contains a pool of 10 standard questions asked of all academic staff participating in the evaluation. For questions 1 to 9, students are asked to rate each statement according to whether they strongly agree (1), agree (2), uncertain (3), disagree (4), strongly disagree (5), or no answer/not applicable (0). Question 10 asks "How would you rate this subject?" and ratings range from 1 to 7 with 1 rating as very poor, 4 as satisfactory, and 7 as outstanding. Section 2 contains a single standard question asking students to rate the staff member's overall effectiveness as a university teacher. Rating is as for question 10 of section 1 (1-7). Section 3 contains up to 12 statements chosen from the item bank by the individual staff member to give him/her more feedback on specific aspects of teaching. Rating is as for section 1 (1-5). Section 4 contains two standard questions about teaching strengths and suggestions for improvement. No quantitative ratings are required; responses are open-ended. This gives a total of 25 questions. Once the staff member chooses their items (and Pauline and I did so independently) they send their completed forms to the JCU Development and Training Unit who despatch the blank forms to you the week prior to evaluation.

We handed out TEVALs during lectures; for Pauline, during week 12 and for me during the final week, week 13. Students were told their responses would be anonymous. We explained the procedure for completing the forms, distributed them and, following suggested practice, had a student collect the completed forms, place them in a large brown envelope and deliver them to the Development and Training Unit. We were a little concerned that conducting independent evaluations would be overly time consuming, taking one third of the time for both the last two lectures. We discussed the issue with students who seemed amenable to our suggestion (though one is always left wondering how important the power relationship is in this context!). Our motivation for independent evaluations was twofold: first, the institutional constraint, *viz.*, chances of promotion are enhanced if staff conduct independent TEVALs and we were both applying for promotion later in the year; second, we felt independent evaluations would give us a more fine-grained view of our teaching.

The JCU Development and Training Unit processes the data and analyzes the results, which are confidential to the staff member. To minimize staff recriminations, results are not available to staff until after the final examination meetings for the subject. As part of the ethos of the subject we made TEVALs available to all students. Copies of the results were left in the department office. For purposes of comparison, the Unit also provides a distribution of results for all items calculated over the entire university. (See appendix 5a for list of standard items and appendix 5b for Pauline's and my choice of optional items).

A final point concerns the use of student ratings as a tool for evaluating teaching. I broached the topic in chapter one, again in section 3.1.2 above and will return to it in chapter eight, specifically within the context of the social context of learning. For now, I want to remark that much of the debate about the utility of student ratings for evaluating teaching and improving practice is muted when the tool is simply one of many – as it is in the present study – which is to be triangulated with a vast array of other qualitative and quantitative measures across input, process and outcome variables.

10. Grade Distribution

This is an *outcome* tool. It is standard university practice to collate the distribution of grades within a subject prior to the Faculty Examiners' meetings. We followed this practice and compared our distributions across time (previous students in the subject) and space (different first year subjects that students were doing. This included the WS1002 subject for Open Learning students; that is, same subject, same time period, but different cohort). Additionally, we computed grade distributions for individual assignments and provided this information to students in the lecture for assignments 1 and 2 (classes had finished by the time assignment 3 was submitted). I will take up the issue of grades, marking and grade distribution with a vengeance in chapter nine on assessment.

11. Library Records

This was not a planned data source. At the end of each semester the library despatches a record of the number of times each item placed on Closed Reserve by staff is borrowed during the semester. In order to provide students with yet

another learning tool, we had placed on reserve the Open Learning modules, enabling them to refer more closely to material covered in lectures as well as exposing them to additional sources of information. After receiving the library records, we realized that this was a useful *outcome* tool providing information on the quality and utility of teaching materials. The information could be cross-checked with other data sources (e.g. TEVALs). Note that the library data specifies only *total* borrowings, not numbers of students. For instance, Module 1, on theories and theory development, recorded 57 borrowings. This might have been 57 students, but it could equally have been 19 students borrowing the item on three occasions each, or some other such combination adding to 57 total borrowings.

3.7   Methodological Rigour

This was the formal end of the subject. Let me briefly summarize the data sources in terms of Dick's (1993b; 9/5/95) two steps for ensuring methodological rigour in action research projects: first, use *multiple* cycles, with *planning* before action and *critical analysis* after it; second, within every cycle, vigorously seek out *disconfirming* evidence from as *many sources* as possible. We used six minor cycles with each one preceded by careful planning and followed by extensive and systematic critical reflection. We sought out disconfirming evidence from a minimum of five data sources in each cycle (personal journals, instant questionnaires, videotaped lectures, student work samples – including early drafts – and student consultation records) and from a minimum of six data sources in three of the six minor cycles. If we include literature as a source of disconfirming evidence, as Dick suggests, then we have a minimum of six data sources for each

cycle and seven data sources for three. Additionally, since Pauline and I kept separate journals, this provided another form of rigour, what Denzin (1970) refers to as researcher triangulation. Finally, note that each cycle consisted of a blend of *process* and *outcome* data, and each cycle was informed by substantial *input* data.

IV.   MAJOR CYCLE 2

4.1   WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping – Semester Two, 1994

12. WS1004 Theory Survey

This was a tool presented to the cohort of *WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping* students prior to beginning the WS1004 subject. The instrument was a brief three question survey designed to glean student knowledge of social work theories and the sources of this knowledge. While the WS1004 cohort overlapped substantially with the WS1002 one, they were not identical cohorts. The theory survey served two functions. First, it provided baseline data for the WS1004 subject for which we had also begun a large research project. In this sense, it was *input* data for WS1004. Second, it provided some information about the effectiveness of WS1002 in introducing students to social work theories. This was because we asked students in the second question to detail their knowledge of the theories they identified in Question 1. It also allowed us to make comparisons with those few students who had not done WS1002. In this sense, it was an *outcome* tool for WS1002.

13. WS1004 Records

WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping was the follow-up subject for which WS1002 was a prerequisite. It took place in second semester. Pauline designed

the subject, delivered most of the lectures and took three of the four tutorial groups. WS1004 became the focus for a huge research study in its own right. I was not involved in the teaching of this subject, primarily because I did not have a background in formal social work practice. However, I was an observer at each of the weekly two hour lectures, one of the two hour tutorial sessions (this group was not chosen randomly, but on the basis of timetable commitments) and a small working group for one hour each Monday drawn randomly from the Thursday tutorial group. (Part of the assessment for the subject required students to work in groups of 3-5 people over the course of the semester. Initially, this was to prepare debate topics which were part of the tutorial program and later to prepare a group case conference which was to be presented in the tutorial class at the end of semester.) Building on our experience as action researchers in WS1002, we extended the data sources for this subject. Indeed, such was the extent of the data collected that there exists sufficient material for two doctoral dissertations on this subject alone! Much of this material is yet to be analyzed to the depth we would like, however, what we have analyzed presents a formidable array to supplement other data sources for WS1002. I shall briefly summarize and describe the data collected which is relevant to the present study:

- Theory survey (see number 12 above).

- Instant questionnaires for lectures, the Thursday tutorial group and the small Monday working group.

- Videotapes of lectures, the Thursday tutorial group, the Monday working group's weekly sessions and case conferences from all other working groups in all tutorials.

- Audiotapes of group discussions for all three tutorial groups (Tuesday 1-3, Wednesday 9-11 and Wednesday 1-3) for each of the following. Note that the Thursday 10-12 group was videotaped:

- group discussions held in Week 6 providing feedback on the debates held from Weeks 3 to 5

- group discussions held in Week 7 providing feedback on the case studies which formed the basis of the group case conferences

- group discussions held in Week 13 providing feedback on the subject as a whole

- small group discussions amongst members of the case conference working groups (3-5 members) held in the week after the end of semester to provide feedback and discussion on the case conferences.

- Audiotaped interviews of:

- a variety of individuals consisting of free range discussion, observations, reflections, etc., on the subject as a whole. Individuals were randomly selected from cells formed on the basis of the following socio-demographic variables: gender, age, ethnicity (indigenous, second language learner or otherwise). In cases where cells contained only one individual (e.g. a young, indigenous, male student), the individual was approached to participate.

- a small selection of working groups (volunteers) providing feedback on their small group work experiences

- Student assessment sheets for case conferences. Students chose not to peer assess the case conferences for formal evaluation purposes, but all were involved in completing the assessment sheets to provide feedback to other students.

- TEVALs.

- Grade distributions.

- Students' written work (the third assignment: a choice between a reflective learning journal or articulation of a personal practice model).

- Personal journals (teacher-researchers).

Again, this represents a vast array of process and outcome data.

The major data collection changes from WS1002 can be summarized as follows:

- Used instant questionnaires for the one small working group that was the observational focus; eliminated instant questionnaires for three of the four tutorial groups.

- Videotaped the Thursday tutorial group, the small working group and all working groups' case conferences.

- Audiotaped all tutorial groups three times during the semester, rather than simply once at the end.

- Interviewed and audiotaped a cross-section of individual students.

- Added peer assessment (but not for grading purposes – student wishes) for the case conferences.

4.2   PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice – Semester Two, 1994

14. PY1003 Records

PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice was a newly designed second semester subject in the new Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)/Bachelor of Community Welfare (BCW) curriculum. Previously all BSW students enrolled in

PY1001: Introduction to Psychology, a general purpose subject for students across a range of disciplines. BCW students had not been obliged to complete any studies in psychology. A precedent had been created in 1992 when an introductory psychology subject tailored to meet the needs of students in the Faculty of Nursing Sciences had been introduced. During the Social Work and Community Welfare Departmental Review plans were set in motion to introduce an introductory psychology subject tailored to meet the needs of social welfare students. While the Psychology Department was ultimately responsible for the design of this new subject, both Pauline and myself were given ample opportunity to input suggestions and certainly the assessment was redolent of a Pauline/Gary aroma, using cases as assessment tools to facilitate theory/practice links.

The arrangement was for the Psychology Department to deliver the lectures (two hours each week) and the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare to deliver the tutorial sessions (two hours per week for each of three groups). Given my undergraduate background in psychology and my keen interest in both the development of this new psychology subject and in the WS1002 cohort, almost all of whom would pursue the subject, I volunteered responsibility for teaching all three tutorial groups. This gave me first hand knowledge of how the WS1002 cohort was applying WS1002 learnings, particularly thinking critically and reflectively about theory/practice links in the domain of psychological theory. The major data sources available to me in this subject were:

• Participant observation of tutorial classes.

• Student work (I was responsible for marking 50% of all assessment).

• Student consultations.

- Personal journal.

Again, this provided a blend of process and outcome tools. As such, PY1003 provided an excellent evaluative tool for the teaching of WS1002. All tools could be viewed in outcome terms insofar as they indicated outcomes derived partly from WS1002. But they were also process tools – and in the case of student work, an outcome tool – for PY1003.

V.   MAJOR CYCLE 3

5.1   WS1002 – 1995

A number of changes were made in this cycle as a consequence of learnings derived from earlier cycles. These changes were twofold: changes to the actual subject WS1002; and changes to how we researched the subject. I shall discuss each briefly.

5.1.1   Subject Changes

The major theoretical difference concerned the knowledge/power nexus. In 1993 when I joined the subject one of the things that struck me initially was that the subject lacked a critical edge in terms of a coherent political and sociological theory to frame the constructivist epistemology. Foucault's glittery garments enticed and Habermas stamped in the wings, but we seemed unable to relinquish the increasingly uncomfortable bodice of Gestalt Psychology, a legacy of the enduring tenacity of Jacqueline Hering's originally conceived subject. This aspect had always worried Pauline. We discussed the issue many times over the next two years, recognizing that the subject needed more theoretical coherence overall. Consequently, in 1995 we finally formally introduced changes into the subject

outline that had crept into the subject de facto over the last two years. I still don't think we got it quite right in 1995 – does one ever get these things right? – but we were on the way, robing ourselves in a theoretical framework that we could wear in comfort. Our reorientation affected the following aspects of WS1002: rationale; objectives; the framing of the four major content areas, which had formed four of the minor cycles referred to above; and changes in the content of both individual lectures and tutorial sessions. Additionally, for other reasons, we made changes in the teaching process of tutorials; introduced small group (4-6) consultation/teaching sessions on a voluntary weekly basis; and changed assessment requirements. I shall discuss these seriatim.

Rationale

The significant changes in the rationale were twofold and reflected our burgeoning awareness that we needed to make the knowledge/power nexus more explicit for students. First, we added the following second sentence: "This world [the world of human interaction] is a negotiated world of social meaning where certain groups in society have greater access to the control of social meaning and what is constructed and valued as knowledge" (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1995, p. 1). Second, we changed the final sentence. In 1994 it read: "Particular attention is paid in the subject to how such factors as race, culture, class, gender, age, sexuality, etc., shape our understanding of human interaction" (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1994, p. 1). In 1995 we changed it to read: "Particular attention is paid to how power and powerlessness are defined and negotiated through such factors as race, culture, gender, class, age, sexuality, disability, etc., which then impact on the nature of

human interaction and our understanding of it" (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1995, p. 1).

Objectives

We retained the six objectives from 1994, though made small changes to two, and added two further objectives. The new objectives were:

- To develop an awareness and understanding that *meaning* is socially contested.

- To develop an awareness and understanding of the role that *power* and *powerlessness* plays in negotiating the meaning and construction of knowledge.

Framing and Changing the Content

In 1994 we loosely organized the lectures (and tutorials) around four themes: theories and theory development; communication; groups; and the whole person. We kept the first set of four lectures in "Theories and theory development", but now labelled it *Socially Contested Meaning and the Social Construction of Knowledge*. Additionally, we relabelled lecture 1 to read, "Meaning, human interaction and social welfare." Again, we wanted to draw explicit attention to the subject's rudder. We kept the two lectures under *Communication* (lectures 5 and 6) and lectures 7 and 8 from *Groups*. The last series of four, previously grouped under "The whole person", we split into two. We introduced two new lectures, lectures 9 and 10, on "Power" and "Powerlessness" respectively and grouped these under the theme titled, *Negotiating the Interaction Process*. We kept *The Whole Person* theme, but now with the perceiving, thinking, feeling and acting lectures truncated from their previous four to two. Power and Powerlessness were intended

to frame *The Whole Person* set of lectures, to give a broader social and political context to the 'individualistic' sounding notion of the whole person. The reduction from four to two lectures on this theme meant we no longer taught perceiving, thinking, feeling and acting as four discrete lectures (with integration efforts on our part), but integrated all four aspects into both of two lectures. These four elements were now firmly divorced from their uneasy marriage with Gestalt Psychology and rewedded within a Foucauldian framework.

We were still not entirely happy with this arrangement. It was not so much the content, which was geared to how 'structural' factors such as race, gender, class, and so on shape both the nature of human interaction and how we understand these interactions; rather it was the thematic title, which for me, bore vestiges of an individualist, apolitical, psychological framework. When it came time for the two lectures on *The Whole Person* our simmering discontent bubbled over after the first one and we changed lecture 12 which took on an unabashed Foucauldian flavour. I gave the lecture and it was titled "'Alternative' Knowledges: Paradigms and Discourses", using a case study from an Aboriginal community to frame the lecture. For the first time in the subject we spoke explicitly of Foucault. Gone were the days when he rumbled in the subject's belly. Now he echoed down the long corridors of the Behavioural Sciences building.

Tutorials

The changes in lectures also impacted on tutorial sessions. I mentioned previously that on the basis of student feedback we extended the use of assessment requirements for assignment 1 as the basis for organizing tutorials from weeks 2 to

6 (tutorials 1 to 5), almost half the program of 12 tutorials. This entailed the construction and deconstruction of theories. We kept the two *Communication* tutorials (tutorials 6 and 7), though split the observational exercises between a role play for one week and a video stimulus the next. We retained our experientials for the two tutorials on *Groups* (tutorials 8 and 9). We combined the two thematic groupings of *Negotiating the Interaction Process* and *The Whole Person* into tutorials 10 and 11, sessions driven by a role play, but which required students to work both individually and collaboratively in developing a theory of the group interaction and in identifying the key concepts, assumptions and propositions. This, we felt, gave much better integration than previously. In a sense, we were actually again using assessment to steer the learning, but this time it was assignment 2. Overall, this meant more than half the tutorial program (7 of 12 sessions) was framed around assessment. I will talk much more about this in chapter nine. The final tutorial, number 12, was a structured group feedback session done in three stages: individuals, small groups (4) and whole group.

In summary, we increased the use of both assessment and experientials as integrative devices at the expense of videos, which had not proved to be popular when running for three successive weeks at 30 minutes a stint. Our sole use of video during tutorial 7 was a 20 minute stint.

Small Group Consultation Sessions

I previously referred above (data source 5, student consultation records) to the problems students experienced in making bookings to see me. As a result, and as an interim measure until we got the CD-Rom materials developed (see below), I

introduced small group consultation/teaching sessions for four to six students on a voluntary weekly basis (see chapter seven for more details).

Assessment

We reduced the number of assignments from three to two, eliminating assignment 3. By the time we marked assignment 2 in 1994 Pauline commented in one of our reflection meetings that we were a "victim of our own processes and successes." A quality product demands resource intensive input. As we learned to teach the subject more effectively, students did the assignments better, and in much more detail, thus increasing the marking workload. We particularly noticed the difference between assignments 1 and 2 as students gained a better handle on the material. The weighty marking load was of prime concern to us since we considered student feedback vital in directing student learning and did not want to short-circuit this process (see chapter nine).

On 29 May during week 12 of semester, Pauline and I met to discuss this issue specifically. We considered three possibilities. First, dealing with theories and their constituent parts in assignment 1 and self factors in assignment 2. We quickly dismissed it since we felt the educational logic concerning social construction of knowledge was eroded by separating theory from self. Second, eliminate assignment 2 or combine the first two assignments. We also rejected this idea since we felt the material was challenging for first years, and theory construction and analysis required repetition and practice, practice which would be halved by such a move. Experience told us that students needed two formal attempts at this endeavour. Further, it was sound pedagogy to have the progression

from a dyad to a group, since the latter entailed additional theoretical considerations that do not emerge in dyadic interactions. This perceived need for repetition and practice and the resource intensive nature of it in terms of teacher input was a major catalyst for developing the CD-Rom package as part of the CAUT grant. The third alternative we considered was to eliminate assignment 3 and move it or a related version to the new subject, *WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping*. Assignment 3 is the logical culmination of assignments 1 and 2 in terms of social work practice. Previously, in the former curriculum there was nowhere to follow up with an assessment like assignment 3. We reasoned that WS1002 could become the teething ground where we provided students with the conceptual and analytic tools for thinking about human interaction. WS1004 could be the applied culmination where students could draw upon these tools for real life practice situations; though we were aware that this distinction could not be pressed too strongly (see chapters one to three). Consequently, after raising the issue with students in the final week taped group discussion evaluation session, we decided to eliminate assignment 3 and to increase the word lengths for assignments 1 and 2. Previously, both assignments 1 and 2 were 1,000-1,500 words. In 1995 we increased this to 1,500 words for assignment 1 and 2,000 words for assignment 2.

5.1.2   Research Changes

The major changes concerned the data sources and monitoring tools that we used to evaluate our teaching and the subject. We made three changes:

Instant Questionnaires

On the basis of student feedback, we eliminated as unnecessary, instant questionnaires for tutorials (they were retained for lectures). Students said they felt comfortable enough within the small group setting to raise any concerns or issues. Note, however, that they were reinstated when Pauline transported the subject to Bunbury (see below).

Student Consultation Records

After adding small group consultation/teaching sessions, I maintained detailed records of student use: who came, how often, when, and what the nature of the session involved, including any learning difficulties. After plotting student use it was fascinating to see graphically the troughs immediately after assignment due dates and the rising crescendos as assignment due dates loomed.

WS1004 and PY1003 Records

We no longer used data sources 12-14, records of the two second semester subjects. This was primarily a logistical decision – we had been unable to keep pace with the data analysis from WS1004 in the previous year and I was going to Vietnam and would not be there during the second semester. Further, we were inordinately busy trying to develop the CAUT materials.

5.2   CAUT Grant Project

During first semester 1995 we formally began work on a National Teaching Development Grant project sponsored by the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) (the project had its origins as early as Semester Two,

1993). The name of the project was *Critical Theoretical Skills Development in First Year Social Work and Community Welfare Students* (Ovington and Meemeduma 1995; Meemeduma and Ovington 1996). We were assisted in this project by Dr Neal Sellars, Senior Lecturer in Education; Mr Erich Barkmeyer, an indigenous staff member, formerly Coordinator of AICWEP (Aboriginal and Islander Community Welfare Education Program) and later Lecturer in the newly-formed CATSIPRD (Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation, Research and Development); and Ms Margaret Smallwood, who, during 1995 was a mature age, indigenous Honours student in the BCW program, having successfully completed the precursor subject, *CW1002: Human Interaction*, in 1992, as the top student in the year. The project's aim was to provide a culturally and developmentally appropriate multi-path teaching/learning package consisting of three elements: computer-based audio-visual materials (a CD-Rom package of five case studies); a set of six video vignettes; and a senior student mentor system designed to address issues in the social context of learning. Funding was not granted for the third item. The package was trialled in WS1002 in 1996, Major Cycle 4 (see below for more detailed discussion).

VI.   MAJOR CYCLE 4

6.1   WS1002 – 1996

By the time CAUT materials were trialled in this subject, I was living and working in Vietnam. Therefore, all data and monitoring from this period has been gleaned from Pauline. However, due to the technological wonders of the modern age, Pauline and I were able to maintain contact during all this time (with a few hiccups from the Vietnamese end, and, albeit, a trifle tardy at times). The major changes in

1996 follow. Note I have also referred, where relevant, to 1997 and 1998 changes when Pauline transported the subject and materials to the Bunbury campus of Edith Cowan University.

6.1.1 Subject Changes

Staff

I was replaced by Mr Andrew Lowth, an Associate Lecturer with a strong practice background, who, fortunately, had started to become familiar with the subject in 1995 during collegial discussions with Pauline and I, and became committed to the subject's ethos.

Assessment, Tutorials and the Videos

In 1996 assessment became the major driving force of the subject and tutorials were largely framed around assessment requirements. When Pauline and I wrote the six video vignettes as part of the CAUT project, we first canvassed the 1994 cohort for relevant topics, and second, wrote deliberately ambiguous interactions. This gave ample scope for contested 'explanations'. The videos were completed in 1995 prior to my leaving for Vietnam and Pauline first used them in WS1002 in the 1996 tutorials. Pauline also trialled using the video interactions as the basis for assessment. Recall that previously students were free to choose their own interaction to develop their theory. One interesting consequence of using a 'standardized' set of interactions (there was still a choice of six) was that it was easier to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of knowledge and the role of selves in this process (see chapter eight for further details).

CD-Rom

In 1996 the CD-Rom was only a prototype; it contained only three of the five case studies. Consequently, Pauline used it as a pilot and at this stage it was regarded as a supplementary learning tool to be used by students on a voluntary basis in their own time. For this purpose, four computers with the CD-Rom were set up in the School of Behavioural Sciences student computer laboratory. Some students used the package extensively.

Moving to Bunbury

When Pauline transported the subject and accompanying materials to Bunbury in 1997 there were some significant changes. First, the structure of the degree program was different: a 'two-by-two' program, requiring two years of generalist social science training, then two years of specialist social work training, but all within a single four year undergraduate degree (see chapter one). This meant that first year social work students at Bunbury were third year university students, or, in some cases, postgraduate students. Second, the subject was a single unit one taught in first semester over 12 weeks, but expanded to six contact hours per week. It was one of three single unit subjects taught in first semester, one of six during this year and one of 11 units, including two field work practice units, taught over the two years. Third, the subject was named Social Work Theory and Practice I, a name much more in keeping with our originally conceived intentions. Fourth, the subject's teaching format was changed from the traditional lecture/tutorial format. It consisted of two parts. In weeks 1-5 students spent the first two and a half of the six hours in the computer room with the CD-Rom package. Each of the 21 students had their own computer. They were also free to access this machine in

their own time. The basic aim of this 'framing' session was to have students understand the principles of theory/practice links by systematically working through the cases (one week per case) under Pauline's guidance. The remaining three and a half hours during weeks 1-5 were spent in the 'groupwork room'. Here the major purpose was to have students extend their understandings beyond the five CD-Rom cases and begin to apply theoretical explanations to actual cases which Pauline was working on (Pauline had negotiated as part of her new job as Head of Department to spend one day a week in practice). For ethical reasons, these were adapted and disguised. For weeks 1-5 'lectures' were now integrated into the total learning package and consisted of 'Pauline spiels' ranging from two to 10 minutes. Weeks 6-12 were spent entirely in the 'groupwork room' but now the group was split into two smaller groups. Pauline taught one group and Ms Dyann Ross the other. The purpose of these sessions was to continue the applied focus but with three additional foci: supplement the teaching program with core 'mini lectures' on major social work theories; carry the adapted real life cases through to the 'intervention' stage; and as a consequence, focus on case skills practice, including interpersonal skills. Note how lectures no longer 'drove' the subject; they were essentially a supplementary learning tool. Pauline continued to use the videos as a teaching tool and for assessment. Additionally, Pauline asked students to keep a reflective learning journal.

The CD-Rom package of case studies was also used as the organizational framework for the other two compulsory first semester subjects for these third year university students, but first year social work students: *Social Work Research*; and *Politics and Law in Australia*. Note particularly the linkage of theory, practice and

research. We were aware during development that the materials would be most useful if adaptable to a range of teaching subjects. Ms Marilyn Palmer taught the research subject and an outside lawyer taught the politics and law lectures while Pauline ran the tutorials.

In 1998 Pauline continued to structure the teaching and learning program around the CD-Rom cases. But now she also used these cases rather than the videos for assessment. Students had a choice between five cases and within each case were free to focus on any aspect of the chosen interaction. The videos were still used in tutorials and to do 'practice runs'. Pauline found that students did not like the reflective learning journals and that it was better if she 'dehyped' them by calling them learning logs and telling students they could use them to make notes, collect newspaper clippings and so on. The CD-Rom package continued to be used for the subject *Politics and Law in Australia*, now taught almost entirely by Pauline, but students conducted a piece of research in the community for the *Social Work Research* subject.

Framing the teaching program around cases gave the subject more theoretical and structural coherence. It was something we had been moving towards when we used case studies to frame the 1994 lecture program, but despite our best intentions and efforts, tutorials were not integrated as well as we might have liked. The completion of the CD-Rom provided a pivot on which the entire teaching program could swing. Further, completion of the materials eliminated the need for small group consultations which I had introduced in 1995 in order to better service student needs.

<u>Relationship of Subject to Degree Program</u>

The development of WS1002 and its precursors can be divided historically into three phases.

1. Pauline *develops* the initial subject (1988-1992).

   At this stage the subject is 'underground' and is taught only to the smaller BCW first year cohort.

2. Pauline and I *refine* the subject to give it a more Foucauldian slant, begin *research*ing our teaching practice and develop a variety of *learning media* (1993-1996).

   Now the subject is part of the revamped curriculum and is a compulsory first semester first year subject for both the BSW and BCW cohorts. While it has been theoretically integrated with the rest of the degree program through the curriculum review process of 1992 and 1993, in practice it sits alone, a severed limb, since nobody else on staff shares the same epistemological position as Pauline and myself. This is powerfully demonstrated by the fact that despite the introduction of the 'new' curriculum which is supposed to be standardized across campus (Townsville, Cairns) and learning mode (internal and Open Learning), Cairns campus continues to teach the 'new' subject in the old way, *viz.*, the Ms J model.

3. Pauline transports the subject to Bunbury and uses the subject as the *central plank* for the entire *degree program* (1997→).

6.1.2 Research Changes

With my departure Pauline did not continue to research the subject in the same intensive way. While logistical reasons were important, equally so was the fact that we were reasonably happy with the key monitoring tools we had developed over the three previous semesters. What did happen was that Pauline institutionalized action research as part of her ordinary teaching arsenal. She retained the following monitoring tools in order to evaluate the subject and student learning:

- Personal journal.

- Instant questionnaires.

- Student work samples (including drafts).

- Self-assessment sheets.

- Taped group discussions – held in mid-semester and at the end of the semester.

- The standard Edith Cowan University teaching evaluation form – this was still voluntary at ECU.

- Grade distributions.

At Bunbury in 1997 Pauline continued to use these tools in addition to striking up a partnership with a colleague, Dyann Ross. This enabled peer observation and reflection as Dyann observed the first three weeks of *Social Work Theory and Practice 1* in the computer room, facilitated weeks 4 and 5, and taught one of the two tutorial groups during weeks 6 to 12. Pauline and Dyann met formally once a week for 'reflection meetings'.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the process of how the study was conducted, paying attention to application of action research principles. I have contextualized the present study by locating it as a 'slice in time' of a much larger organic process that included seven other related subjects and/or projects. Taken together, these eight subjects/projects comprised, longitudinally, the subject, *Dimensions of Human Experience*, or its harbinger subject, from 1993 to 1996 inclusive; and cross-sectionally, three of the eight subjects studied by the cohort in 1994. Additionally, I have located all eight subjects/projects within an action research framework consisting of a reconnaissance phase and four major cycles. The focus of this study is Major Cycle 1 consisting of six minor cycles. I have paid particular attention to describing the critical issue of negotiating processes and roles at the beginning of the study and to the equally vital concern of ethical considerations. Finally, I have described in detail the monitoring tools and data sources for all cycles.

We have now completed a long journey. I have attempted to contextualize the present study in the following ways: theoretically, including the study's epistemological, ontological and educational dimensions; methodologically, including the specific techniques and methods used to garner data; and finally, in terms of its various milieux, including attention to teachers, students and the subject itself. It is now time to take a closer look at the central question driving this study: how do we best teach beginning social work and community welfare students to grapple with the complex relationships between theory and practice?; or, how do we best teach these students to think theoretically and critically about

action? While the discussion to date adumbrates clearly marked grid lines, we need to trace over these by examining in much greater detail the data sources described in this chapter. I have divided this task into three sections which correspond to three chapters. The first, chapter seven, deals more specifically with theory/practice issues, particularly in relation to the case-based pedagogy which evolved in this study. The second, chapter eight, addresses issues in the social context of learning and revisits the notion of 'self' discussed in chapters two and three. The third, chapter nine, explores the notion of student assessment as a device for both directing student learning and evaluating it. My rationale for this division has emerged from analysis of the data. I shall explain this rationale in the next chapter.

To practise without theory is to sail an uncharted sea; theory without practice is not to set sail at all.
(M. Susser 1968, p. v)

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEORY/PRACTICE AND CASE-BASED PEDAGOGY

INTRODUCTION

I have stressed that evaluating teaching requires attention to three sets of measures: *input, process and outcome.* This chapter will draw on all three types of data. However, note the role of the teacher across all three sources. First, the individual teacher characteristics form part of the *input* data. Second, the teacher has a vital role – most would argue, *the* most vital role – in *process* variables, including classroom atmosphere; student learning activities; course organization; and assessment procedures. Finally, all these input and process factors in which the individual teacher has played a significant role, will impact on student *outcomes.* This applies particularly to the teacher's role in using assessment both to direct and evaluate student learning, the central theme of chapter nine. I say this by way of introduction not to downplay the key nature of other factors which shape the individual teacher's role, including institutional factors at both departmental and university level, not to mention broader social and political factors which frame higher education; but to emphasize that even in the most difficult 'environments' the individual teacher plays a critical role. And by difficult I include scenarios like

the following: trying to teach Vietnamese within the framework of an irrelevant Stalinist-influenced National Curriculum to a non-Vietnamese speaking five-year-old indigenous student suffering from malnutrition in a dilapidated classroom with no textbooks or learning resources when you are an unqualified 'mainstream' teacher who is so poorly paid that you must seek additional employment in order to survive. Higher education teachers in the grip of depression take note. Yes, your life is getting tougher, but believe me, you don't know what tough is (yet!). The point is that, whatever the circumstances, the individual teacher plays a vital role in student learning. So Moses, for instance, argues that "the individual university teacher in his or her involvement with students has the most direct impact on the quality of student learning and educational experience" (Moses 1995, p. 14). Similarly, Ramsden argues:

> There are no certain prescriptions for good teaching. There are no foolproof techniques for guaranteeing quality. There are only teachers, and educational effectiveness depends on their professionalism, their experience, and their commitment. We must ask the right questions in the search for quality. We must emphasise the importance of the 'who' in order to achieve quality.
> (Ramsden 1994, p. 2)

This helps to explain the following student comments from the 1994 WS1002 cohort:

> I looked at this subject so closely last year and because this particular subject wasn't in the social work degree at that stage, I really reacted because I didn't want to be doing social work without doing this subject. I had to choose and other people had told me about the subject. So it was that definite for me.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 19)

> Pauline, your lectures and your tutes have really stood out and as soon as we say that we have Pauline and Gary to any second, third, fourth years, they always say, "you're on the right path right from the very beginning."
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 20)

The first student, an intending BSW student, deferred doing her social work degree for a year until *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience* became part of the common first two year program for both the BSW and BCW degrees, rather than simply a BCW subject. The second student refers specifically to the reputation of the teachers. Anonymous TEVAL data confirm these impressions, indicating that students considered the subject and both teachers as outstanding. The item, "How would you rate this subject?", yielded scores of 6.7 for Pauline's TEVALs and 6.5 for mine compared to the university average of 5.0. The item, "All things considered, how would you rate this staff member's overall effectiveness as a university teacher?", also yielded ratings of 6.7 and 6.5 for Pauline and myself respectively compared to the university average of 5.4. (The scale ranged from 1 = very poor through 4 = satisfactory to 7 = outstanding.) Only one student rated Pauline and I less than 6 (at 5). At the time of this study TEVALs were voluntary at James Cook University. As noted in chapter six, this means that TEVAL ratings are probably skewed towards the 'better' end of the scale, since it is probably a safe assumption that only the most motivated and skilful teachers (or those seeking promotion) would evaluate with TEVALs. In short, anonymous evaluations indicated that not a single student regarded either the subject or our teaching as remotely approaching a ranking as low as 'satisfactory'. Pauline's and my ratings for this subject were not exceptional compared to our ratings for all subjects over a period of several years. Indeed, they were largely similar (compare ratings of 6.6 for the WS1002 Open Learning workshop – a joint evaluation of us both – and 6.5

for my preparation of study materials, the Open Learning modules), and there is no doubt that such consistently high ratings across a range of subjects over a number of years were instrumental in Pauline achieving Teaching Excellence Awards in 1992 and 1994 and myself in 1993. I am aware that taken alone student ratings data can be problematic – I have raised this issue already and I shall discuss it again later – but this data triangulates well with other sources, including colleague appraisal. I state this at the outset because the various data sources indicate that one key issue in terms of this research thesis is not whether Pauline and I are 'effective' university teachers, but **why** they are effective university teachers. What is it that leads students to rate them so highly as university teachers? These two questions are not identical. It is one thing for student appraisals of teaching to be outstanding, another for students to actually achieve effective subject outcomes. Without student learning data indicating effective learning outcomes, student appraisal of teaching would be hollow irrespective of the extent of laudatory discourse. Teaching and learning, though not in an isomorphic relationship, are strongly correlated. The position taken in this thesis is summarized in the following diagram:

Figure 7. 1: Relationship between Objectives, Learning Experiences and Evaluation
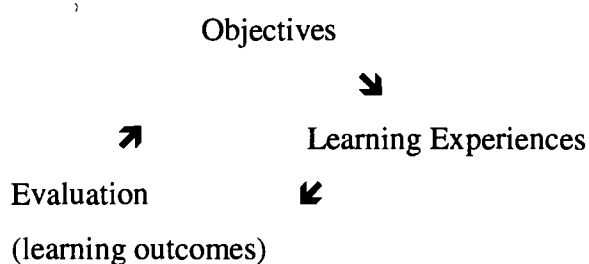
Objectives

↘

↗ Learning Experiences

Evaluation ↙

(learning outcomes)

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The key component in determining the effectiveness of a subject and the effectiveness of teaching in a subject is to compare student learning outcomes with subject objectives: how well did students achieve what it was that you wanted them to? This will be a key focus of chapter nine on assessment, when I look more closely at student learning outcomes. Note that the diagram is cyclic: evaluation feeds back into objectives, which might change. The above diagram applies to all six minor cycles in Major Cycle 1, the focus for this research. The result is that objectives are not set in concrete at the beginning of a subject. But though they might change, it is crucial that new objectives be documented. As noted in chapter six, Pauline and I retained the six key learning goals for WS1002 throughout the semester, but made changes prior to WS1002 in 1995, adding two learning goals (see also chapter nine).

I shall pre-empt by stating that student outcomes in this subject as well as a variety of process data throughout the subject indicate that students performed more than creditably in tackling material that many teachers claim to be too difficult for beginning tertiary students. This outcome data shall be explored in much more detail in chapter nine.

We can summarize and reframe the above questions by asking a dual barrelled question: why have students achieved so well in this subject, and why are Pauline

and I effective teachers?, noting that a more complete answer awaits detailed discussion of student outcome data in chapter nine.

Writing up the Data – Organizational Questions

In writing up this analysis of research data at least three feasible options presented themselves, one chronological, the other two thematic. First, a chronological option: recording emerging interpretations and analyses as they occurred within the course of the study. Second, an *a priori* thematic option: the analytical categories dictated by the subject objectives. Third, an *a posterior* thematic option with the analytic categories emerging from the data in 'grounded theory' fashion (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Each has its merits. As a consequence, I opted for a hybrid method which attempted to retain these strengths while avoiding, as far as possible, their weaknesses. The strength of the chronological option was that data was collected and recorded in sequence and the progression of major and minor cycles did provide a scaffold on which to hang emerging interpretations. But a purely chronological narrative lacks sharpness, tending to offer a melange of thematic concerns, temporal order saving a complete plunge into a bubbling stew. Chronology is important in an action research project, but so are thematic concerns and analytic categories emerging from the data. Because rigid *a priori* categories can calcify and blinker perceptions to fresh interpretations, I did not want to be guided solely by a thematic framework dictated by subject objectives. But again, these could not be ignored. Any analysis dealing with the vexing question of pedagogy and student

learning that failed to address the issue of student achievement of subject objectives would be a flawed analysis. (This is not to say, as I noted above, that incidental objectives could not arise in the course of the project.) A grounded approach seemed most conducive to an action research project, an approach where the analytic categories and themes arose from the data. Thus, I chose this as the overarching organizational framework for analysis. But the *a priori* categories of subject objectives had to appear as a lower order category within this framework, as did the temporal sequence of major and minor cycles, particularly since emerging interpretations and consequent attempts to disconfirm these were an integral part of the rigour of the cycle approach. As it turned out, the three major analytic categories which emerged from the data after the completion of the study as I began to write it up, were not so different from the initial emerging interpretations. The key difference was a reclustering. Therefore, it became a fluid task to organize the data analysis and interpretation around three key themes. A related consideration was that I felt I should organize chapters around key findings. I shall begin by outlining the key emerging interpretations from the cycles, then explain how these were refined into the current chapter framework.

One of the fundamental assumptions that we both made about social work practice is that effective thinking leading to understanding is a key ingredient of effective action. This led quite naturally to a key assumption about social work education. If we want to prepare students to practise effectively, we need to teach them to think effectively. In other words, we wanted students to learn how to think

theoretically and critically about action. So, we initially had a strong sense about

the relationships between theory and practice. Later, having accessed the 'critical

reflection' literature, we conceptualized this link in terms of critical reflection.

Figure 7.2: Praxis

PRAXIS

Theory   Practice

Critical reflection
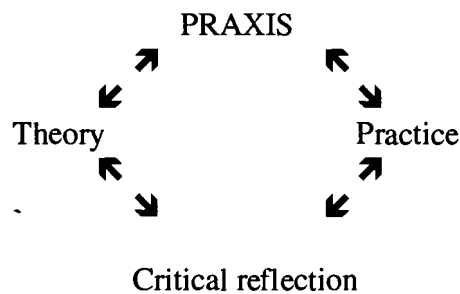
The more pertinent issue was: how do we best teach students to *think* about

practice? After the first use of case studies, we had such a fantastic student

response that we began to feel we had hit on something quite special. So our first

emerging interpretation during Major Cycle 1, the focus of the present study, was

that case studies were an excellent way to teach students to think about social work

practice. This had grown from increasing recognition in previous years that

students found use of lecturer personal experience an effective learning tool.

Having completed the study and reviewed all data, these issues resurfaced

constantly. Therefore, I considered we needed a chapter which explored

theory/practice issues, particularly from the perspective of case study pedagogy.

A second fundamental assumption that we made about social work practice is that

self understanding is logically prior to understanding of others. Before we can

understand the theories, implicit or otherwise, that others use to operate in the

world (compare Argyris and Schön 1974), we need to understand our own theories about the world, including the assumptions that underpin these theories. I realize now that this may be a questionable assumption – there are numerous people who seem to develop trenchant analyses of the behaviour of others yet who have very little insight into their own behaviour. This is an important source of irony used to brilliant effect in the novels of Jane Austen. For instance, Emma Woodhouse in Jane Austen's (1996, orig. 1816) *Emma*. Despite the fact that I now consider this a dubious assumption – it is not universally *descriptive* of actual human behaviour, I would still subscribe to it as a *prescriptive* notion for social work education: if you want to practise as a social worker, your practise will be more effective if you can understand the motivations and theories that underpin your own behaviour. This is because you are in a relationship with 'clients' and your behaviour and how you understand this will have an impact on this relationship. If you cannot understand your behaviour, you cannot understand how you are impacting on those with whom you are working. Emma Woodhouses don't necessarily make good social workers. This also had important implications for social work education: if we wanted students to practise effectively, we had to teach them to analyse and deconstruct their own theories of the world, or, expressed differently, we had to provide them with the analytic tools for understanding self. Thus the role of self in thinking and action became paramount.

Figure 7.3: Praxis – Self
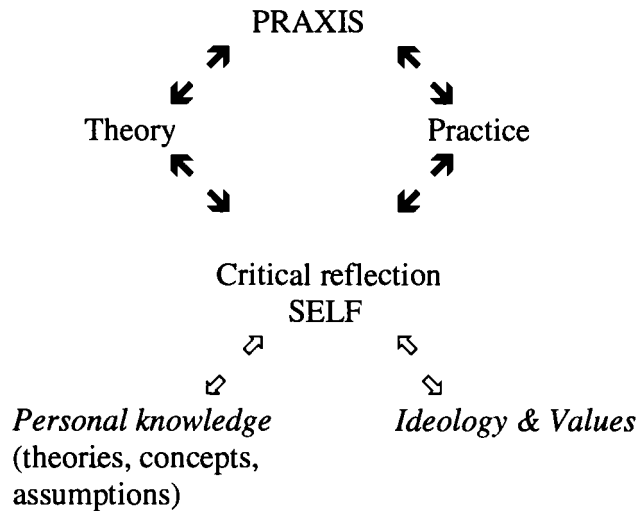
Buried within this, and fiercely related, lies another key educational assumption: start where students are at, build on what they know. Or expressed more specifically, start with the concrete experiences of students and build from there (compare Kolb's 1984 experiential learning cycle; indeed almost all the experiential learning literature). Leading American academic Thomas Angelo argues that,

> ...academics in their traditional practices often worked against principles known from cognitive science and psychology about how people aged over 16 learned; how the brain made connections; how memory worked. They tended, for example, to assume that in a beginning course they should start at the beginning. But in fact the single most powerful factor influencing students' learning are those things they bring with them. ... It's one of the reasons we teach things so many times: we don't deconstruct the prior knowledge and build on solid foundations.
> (Angelo quoted in Richardson 27/5/98, p. 36)

So, a second emerging interpretation was that in order to teach students to think theoretically and critically about action, we had to use self as a pedagogical tool (I have already discussed contemporary assaults on the 'foundational' view of self,

mostly sheltering under the postmodern umbrella and I shall revisit this theme in chapter eight). This interpretation from the cycles also resurfaced as a constant theme in final perusal of data. Therefore, initially, I thought to include a second analytic chapter dealing with the role of self as a pedagogical tool. I had planned a separate chapter titled "The Social Context of Learning". We knew this was important from a number of years teaching in a variety of environments and it was emphatically reinforced by this cohort of students in the baseline surveys completed at the subject's beginning as well as at various points throughout the semester. Again, the issue emerged as a major analytic category when I reviewed overall data prior to writing up. But when I scrutinized the data more carefully, I realized that the issues emerging concerning personal relationships and the social context of learning were, in fact, related to issues concerning use of self as a pedagogical tool. Due to the case study pedagogy in which Pauline and I drew upon our own personal and professional experiences to formulate cases, we were actually modelling the use of self and using self-disclosure to create an environment which students found conducive to learning. Thus, I opted for a second analytic chapter dealing with the social context of learning, particularly personal relationships, and the use of self as a pedagogical tool.

A third assumption we made related more specifically to educational principles and how students learn. My own undergraduate learning experiences in four universities in two different countries as well as my varied teaching experience on remote Aboriginal communities, in India, North Queensland and Vietnam, had

taught me that not only do different individuals learn differently at different times, but that the same individual can learn in very different ways at different times depending upon, amongst other things, the *nature of the learning task*. We were both familiar with the concept of 'surface' and 'deep' approaches to learning (see chapter three on phenomenographic research) and recognized that if we wanted students to develop skills of thinking theoretically and critically about action, we had to set appropriate learning tasks to achieve this, tasks which would engage the learner in deep processes. We also knew that assessment tasks were ultimately the critical task. For us, assessment was a dual-edged sword: evaluation of student learning; and equally significantly, a tool to direct student learning. We knew this prior to the commencement of Major Cycle 1, but in 1994 student performance and feedback indicated that at least for assignment 1 we needed to use assessment as a key pedagogical tool, we needed to frame the first part of the tutorial program (tutorials 1-4 in weeks 2-5) around assessment requirements. Emerging interpretations confirmed the significance of this venture. Despite this, it never occurred to me to frame a chapter around this theme; not until I perused the data again at the study's end prior to writing up and realized that assessment was a pivotal analytic category. Consequently, I decided to frame the third analytic chapter around the notion of assessment, particularly its dual role of evaluating and navigating student learning.

Within these three broad analytic chapters, I needed to do two things to satisfy my hybrid model. First, I had to organize the material in a temporal sequence which

captured the flavour of the cycle approach as we effected changes due to the 'reflect' phase of cycles. This was not always possible – chapter nine on assessment lent itself more readily to chronological treatment – and where it was not I sacrificed it to the higher order thematic categories that emerged from the data. Second, I had to ensure that, where appropriate, I addressed student achievement of subject objectives. This was not entirely outcome data, since students completed three pieces of continuous assessment throughout the semester. Further, additional process and outcome data from two second semester subjects, *WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping* and *PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice* also shed light on the issue.

This chapter deals with the first of these three analytic categories: the theory/practice nexus, and particularly the role of case-based pedagogy in stimulating students to think effectively and critically about the role of theory for practice. Chapter eight addresses the second broad analytic category: the social context of learning, particularly personal relationships and the use of self as a pedagogical tool. Chapter nine deals with the third of these categories: assessment for directing and evaluating student learning.

A final point concerns quotation of student transcripts from the end of semester taped group discussions. Because names have been removed it is not possible to indicate who exactly is saying what. Consequently, I have used standard editing and literary practice by beginning a new line for each new speaker.

I.   LECTURES – AN APPROPRIATE MEDIUM?

One thing that might immediately strike the reader is that lectures, although consisting of only one third of official student contact time, were a hinge on which the subject swung – tutorials took their cue from lectures (though the early part of the tutorial program was reshaped around perceived student difficulties with *assessment* requirements).   The pivotal role of lectures is surprising given the literature on their effectiveness as a form of pedagogy.   Gibbs (1982) provides a comprehensive critique of lecturing and more recently Ramsden (1992) extends this analysis.   Ramsden draws attention to a number of pitfalls.   I shall highlight two.   First, and "perhaps the most compelling argument against lecturing is that few lecturers do it well, many do it just about passably, and quite a lot do it very badly indeed" (p. 155).   Second, "students are usually very passive and dependent during lectures" (p. 155).   These are serious issues indeed.   Why would two experienced and supposedly competent teachers design a subject with a form of pedagogy of dubious effectiveness as its axle?   Undoubtedly, student numbers played a role, but this was far from a complete explanation.   One simple answer is that students wanted lectures and found them an effective form of pedagogy in this subject.   But how does this 'simple' answer account for our baseline data which indicated that a significant cluster of students when asked about the type of person they considered to be a poor teacher identified pedagogical issues such as "too much use of notes", "too much lecturing", and "lack of variety in presentation"? We shall see.

Two major forms of outcome data, TEVALs and the taped group discussions, echoed resoundingly the process whispers of semester. **Lectures are not long enough.** Calls for the increase began early in the semester, both through informal feedback in classes and consultation sessions, and formally via instant questionnaires. For my TEVALs, 43 of 48 students responded to the question concerning improvements and of these, 36 provided suggestions (the other seven students wrote "none" or "nothing"). Twenty two asked for longer lectures (either one and a half hours or two hours) and for 17 of these 22 this was the sole feedback relating to suggested improvements. For Pauline, 40 of 51 responded and 30 offered specific suggestions. Twenty one of these 30 suggested longer lectures and for 20 of the 21 this was the sole feedback. No more than four responses were received for any other suggested improvement in either Pauline's or my TEVALs. The TEVALs were unequivocal: the surest way to improve this subject was to increase the length of lectures. Taped group discussions chimed a similar message. All four groups spontaneously suggested that a one hour lecture was insufficient and two hours was desirable. Three of the four groups made it clear, without prompting, that this was in addition to the two hour tutorial. One group suggested that they did not necessarily want more content, but more time to deal with the same information: "a little bit more access to develop the concepts that you proposed (Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 1).

This is a startling finding. Why were students unanimous in asking for longer lectures? And perhaps more importantly, were lectures really an effective learning forum for students? This investigation leads us initially into the realm of the roles and functions of lectures and tutorials and the relationship between them. After briefly discussing this, I examine the data bearing on the issue of lecture enjoyment and effectiveness within the context of pedagogical skills. Two salient elements emerge from this exploration. First, the notion of interactive lecturing. Second, the role of using case studies to bridge the traditionally entrenched moat of theory and practice. Consequently, I later take up these issues in some detail.

1.1 Role of Lectures and Tutorials and the Relationship between Them

When discussing the issue of whether lectures should be one or two hours and whether this should be at the expense of tutorial time issues were raised about the function of these different learning forums. What is the function of lectures? Of tutorials? What is the relationship between them? One traditional and entrenched view of lectures is that they are the most effective and cost-efficient means of transmitting information – factual knowledge, concepts, explanations of theoretical considerations – to large numbers of students (though see Gibbs 1982 and Ramsden 1992 for counters to this). As noted above, a standard feature of such lectures is passive and dependent students (Ramsden 1992). This was not our view, as evidenced by the following quote from Dr Neal Sellars, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education and the Faculty of Education's representative on the University Teaching Committee, and author of *Introduction to Lecturing:*

Improving Your Lecturing, a publication prepared on behalf of the Staff

Development Unit at James Cook University, whom I approached after subject

completion to conduct an independent evaluation of my lecturing using the

videotaped lecture material and the subject outline as data sources.

> While the lecturers in this subject use the lectures for this purpose, it is clear
> that they see the lecture as an interactive teaching strategy in which they expect
> students to contribute ideas and express viewpoints. At several points in each
> lecture they challenge students to think about and react to the ideas and issues
> being presented, usually by asking probing questions.
> (Sellars 1996, p. 3)

The following outcome data drawn from end of semester taped group discussions

illuminates student perceptions of the function of lectures and tutorials and the

relationship between them:

> I think having a two hour lecture would give enough time for people to ask
> questions, whereas we were trying to get questions answered in that one hour,
> like if there was something that came up – you're not supposed to, but we
> have...
> In lectures at university you don't usually ask questions, like in anthropology
> you just sit there and listen to it. And then in the tutorials you ask the
> questions. And so sometimes I think that because this course has been run in a
> refreshing, friendly atmosphere, that often sometimes students have to still
> understand that this doesn't give them the right to make it too informal, and
> like you say, throw in comments all of the time. A lecture after all is a lecture.
> But that is his own personal opinion on that. I didn't see it in that line at all.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 8)

This student exchange reveals the powerful socializing influence of university

studies. Regrettably, the interactive lecture experiences we were providing

students were so uncommon that the first student was apologizing for asking

questions: "you're not supposed to" and the second student while acknowledging

that it was "refreshing" to have this input, suggested that you couldn't let it get out

of hand. "A lecture after all is a lecture." Fortunately, the third student had

different ideas. Compare this with a comment from the baseline data in answer to

the question, *What do you think/or know about how teaching occurs at university?*

– "lectures you listen, tutorials you discuss."

The Tuesday group also endorsed the positive quality of interactive lectures and

raised issues relating to the lecture/tutorial nexus:

> I don't know about everybody else, but I personally enjoyed the subject the
> most out of...   ~
> Yeah (mass agreement).
> I find the other ones very monotonous and boring especially like sociology,
> that type of...I look forward to these like listening and getting involved.
> Yeah.
> And with the other compulsory one – I like this one much better.
> Yeah (mass agreement).
> You've got more input between us and the lecturers, it's not just like it's...
> Not just take notes and go home.
> Yeah. Interesting.
> I think the format, the layout you've got for this subject is really good.
> And it flows, doesn't it? From one week to the next. With other subjects you
> don't have that continuity from one week to the next leading on to the next set.
> You just have, some of the other subjects are really disjointed.
> One subject this week, the next week you can be talking about something
> totally different, unrelated, and with Gary, you're the tutor and the lecturer and
> that works out a lot better cause with the others like Sociology I have the
> lecturer and the tutor and she doesn't even go to the lectures.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, pp. 3-4)

And, equally importantly, the group also raised issues about the role of lectures

and tutorials:

> With the other subjects, I thought at the beginning of the year the tutorials
> would just be there to clear up anything, but with like sociology and
> anthropology, it's like the tutorials are just there for the readings and they don't
> really go into the lecture.
> That's right.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, pp. 4-5)

Pauline's TEVAL data corroborated these findings with responses to her optional bank item, "Tutorial sessions helped me understand the lecture material", with a rating of 1.3 compared to the university average of 2.0.

I began above by posing two questions. First, why were students unanimous in asking for longer lectures? And second, were lectures really an effective learning forum for students? For now, I shall focus on the first question. Both *process* data (instant questionnaires) and *outcome* data (taped group discussions, TEVALs) indicate student enjoyment of and interest in lectures. Indeed, in TEVALs, 21 students spontaneously identified ability to make the subject enjoyable and/or interesting as one of Pauline's key teaching strengths and five did so for me. A number of significant factors emerged to account for this – personal qualities such as approachability and enthusiasm, pedagogical skills such as explanation, communication skills, individual attention and concern for students, and use of personal experiences and case studies. First, I shall examine broad pedagogical skills revealed by the data. Next, I will take a closer look at interactive lecturing. Finally, I shall focus more exclusively on case study pedagogy.

1.2 Pedagogical Skills and Personal Qualities

There are five such groups of skills I wish to highlight in this section. They are related, and although for convenience I group them into two, I list them separately in order to remain faithful to the precise language students used in the data. After

all, most concepts are contested and there is no guarantee that my renaming and clustering them into my own categories would be an accurate reflection of student perceptions. Three major sets of student data inform this analysis. Two are *outcome* data, one is *process*. First, instant questionnaires from both tutorials and lectures, *process* data. Second, TEVALs, and third, taped group discussions, both *outcome* data. Two additional forms of data inform the analysis. First, my personal journal, a *process* record, which includes salient observations of all classroom teaching. Second, student consultation records, another type of *process* data. Before proceeding, I should briefly summarize the instant questionnaire data, as these relate to pedagogical skills.

In both lectures and tutorials, almost all students praised the teachers extensively, often in general terms ("excellent", "terrific", "marvellous"), but occasionally more specifically, especially in the "experiential" tutorials from weeks 6-9 ("well presented", "enjoy the examples", "role play was a good way to show status, roles and norms", "a wonderful example of points being explained", "very easy to understand! Extremely interesting way of explaining groups", "great, the group project made it easy to understand these concepts"). In some lectures one student, and occasionally two, suggested that the lecture was too fast and that it was too difficult to take notes. The above data was consistent with student outcomes as identified on the instant questionnaire sheets: most students remembered key point(s) which were consistent with the lecture's objectives, though at times a significant number of students identified these in general terms.

1.2.1 Communication, Explanation and Understanding

The first group can be labelled broadly, communication skills. Eleven students from my TEVALs used this exact concept in describing my teaching strengths and five did so for Pauline. "Teacher is able to communicate effectively that allows learning to be fun and enjoyable, not just sit and listen and write notes." "Gary is in my opinion expert at clearly communicating and ensuring that the correct message has been communicated." "Great communication skills." "His communication skills – excellent". "Confidence and the ability to communicate made it easy to understand." And for Pauline: "Great communication skills." However, 12 of Pauline's respondents used the concept "clear" or teaches in "easy to understand way". Six students did so for me. Related to this, nine of Pauline's respondents identified "explanation" as one of Pauline's teaching strengths and three did so for me. Here follow student comments relating to Pauline's communication skills, particularly her ability to foster understanding with clear explanations. "Pauline has a wonderful teaching style, she is easy to understand, interesting and well versed in the subject matter." "The lectures are easy to understand and relate to." "Points came across clearly." Pauline has a "unique ability to come to the level of students by explaining difficult concepts in a simple and understandable manner." "Obviously knew subject extremely well and taught us in 'layman' terms. Presented subject matter very well even though she was well educated, we understood her!" "I like her style of teaching. Everything is clear." "Maintains the attention of the class, presents materials well → have no difficulty

comprehending what is being said and makes the subject entertaining but at the same time informative. Loved it!!" "Very easy to understand, clear and concise in her teaching." "Explains everything very clearly." "Very good at teaching and explaining new concepts." "Explains the topic under discussion in clear precise ways." "Lecture material is explained very clearly and relates the subject matter in an interesting way that can be understood and has relevance to the course." "Makes it all clear". "Time taken to ensure understanding." The following student responses for me are separate from those identifying my communication skills and relate more specifically to student understanding as a result of clear explanations: "Everything is very clear and he makes sure everyone understands, if they don't, he takes the time to explain things." "Can express self clearly, therefore things are easily understood." "His lecturing style is easy to listen to and easy to understand." "Gary ensures that students get a clear picture of what he is lecturing about." Open Learning data strongly endorsed these comments.

The following student interaction from my Thursday taped group discussion captures student feeling:

> Compared to the other social work courses I think this is brilliant.
> Compared to any other subject this is the best one, the one that I look forward to.
> Hear, hear.
> I agree.
> (Transcript 2/6/94, pp. 3-4)

You will note that these three concepts overlap in a Wittgensteinian sense and classical Aristotelian definitional forms cannot circumscribe them adequately.

This open-ended data is also confirmed by the closed questions asked in the TEVAL. For the item, "The lecturer's explanations were clear", for which the 'skewed' university average was 2.1, Pauline rated 1.2 and I rated 1.5. This tallies with student's open-ended comments where considerably more students identified this as one of Pauline's teaching strengths. The optional bank items also endorse the above data. Pauline's item, "The lecturer makes good use of examples and illustrations", yielded a rating of 1.1. compared to the university average of 1.9. Interestingly, Open Learning students were more inclined to identify explanation as one of my key strengths with many focusing on my ability "to bring the information to a level understood by all the class", a key strength constantly identified for Pauline.

While communication, explanation and understanding all emerged from *process* and *outcome* data, they are actually teacher characteristics, and as such, are, strictly speaking, *inputs* in terms of the input-process-outcome model I outlined earlier. This is significant because these belong to one of the five main areas or dimensions of teaching that have emerged as important in input-process-product research – communication/teaching skill. A second, rapport with students, is discussed below (Lally and Myhill 1994). It also links to one of our major forms of input data, the baseline questionnaire where significant clusters of students referred positively to skills which could be broadly subsumed under the communication rubric: *listening skills*, specifically openness to feedback and other opinions, and *encouragement*, especially encouraging participation, discussion and

interaction. Students were more explicit in identifying *lack of communication skills* as a feature of poor teaching.

1.2.2   *Enthusiasm and Ability to make Subject Interesting and Enjoyable*

Ramsden (29/4/98, p. 39) argues that "the first duty of a university teacher is to create a sense of excitement about the subject matter. When people are inspired to learn, they do marvellous things and persist at difficult tasks." Meyers (1987, p. 99) highlights the importance of these issues specifically within the context of developing critical thinking skills, which, he suggests, can be an intimidating experience. "A teacher's enthusiasm, interest, and genuine concern help create a challenging yet safe atmosphere in which students feel confident enough to let go of old ways of thinking and trying out new ones."

There is no doubt that enthusiasm is one of the most salient features of both Pauline's and my teaching and that it is well appreciated by students. In the closed question which both Pauline and I chose to be evaluated on, "The lecturer communicates his/her enthusiasm for the subject", we both rated 1.1 compared to the university average of 1.7, with 94% of my respondents strongly agreeing with this claim, and 90% of Pauline's. In the open-ended identification of teaching strengths, 14 respondents identified this trait for me and 12 for Pauline with another six for me and five for Pauline using a closely related concept, "love of subject". The following quotations capture the flavour of student feedback: "Excellent and so enthusiastic, which he really passes on to all students. It's got to

the stage where he actually has to tell us to pack up and leave at the end of tutes because we all enjoy it so much." His "enthusiasm has inspired me in my study of this subject." "He is very confident and his enthusiasm and passion for social work is obvious and catching." "Gary's enthusiasm for his subject was very contagious, making it much easier for me to learn." "Gary fosters interest in the subject and gets everyone enthusiastic through his teaching methods." This quotation highlights why I have linked the concepts of enthusiasm and ability to make subject interesting and enjoyable. Another of my respondents had this to say: "Ability to hold people's interest in class contributed to greater learning." Note that students themselves are endorsing Ramsden's above comments about the link between teacher enthusiasm and student learning. Pauline's respondents also had much to say about these issues: "She is so enthusiastic and presents everything in such an interesting manner. It would be a complete crime to miss a lecture!!" "She is passionately interested in the subject, which instils enthusiasm." "Good communicator with enthusiasm." "Great enthusiasm". "The lectures are interesting, entertaining and very motivating." "Pauline exhibits a great enthusiasm for the subject and the profession of social work in general." "...brings great enthusiasm to it. Her enthusiasm has made me feel great towards this subject." "Shows enthusiasm for subject. Catches our attention. Makes subject fun and interesting." "She makes the lectures very interesting." "Has a passion for the subject which is reflected in her teaching, which makes the subject more interesting." "Like Gary, Pauline seems to enjoy what she is lecturing. An excellent introductory social work subject!" "Makes the subject exciting and

interesting. I definitely enjoy coming to this lecture." "Makes everything interesting." "The enthusiasm of the subject is conveyed to students and the subject matter is relevant and interesting." The closed item from the standard bank, "The lecturer stimulated my interest in the subject", also confirmed the above with ratings of 1.1 and 1.2 for Pauline and I respectively compared to the university average of 2.3. Two of my optional bank items also endorsed the above with "I have developed interest in this subject" yielding a rating of 1.1 compared to the university average of 2.3, and "The lecturer presents material in an interesting way" yielding a rating of 1.3 compared to the university average of 2.1.

The following spontaneous comment from the taped group discussions captures the essence of student opinion. In fact, this was the opening comment in Pauline's Wednesday group: "I've enjoyed the subject immensely, I really have" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 1). And another student later in the discussion: "I found this subject the only one that held my interest about the way you felt and about life experiences" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 13). This was a powerful comment when one considered that it was from a third year BCW student in the final year of her degree who due to an administrative quirk was forced to do the subject (see below). The following comment links both groups of pedagogical skills: communication, explanation and understanding; and enthusiasm and ability to make subject interesting and enjoyable. It was prompted by Pauline's question: "What makes good university teaching?"

You have to be enthusiastic for your subject to instil it in the class room. And also you don't put yourself on a pedestal, you're the same level so you're talking straight to people.
(Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 16)

There is no doubt that passion and enthusiasm were key ingredients in the success of all teaching, not just lectures. As with the data above on communication, explanation and understanding, the data on enthusiasm and ability to make the subject interesting and enjoyable, while derived from *process* and *outcome* data sources, actually refers to *input* data: teacher characteristics. And again, it replicates a significant number of studies (Prosser 1980; McFadden and Perlman 1989; HERDSA 1992; Ramsden 1992, 1994). Indeed, Ramsden (1992, p. 73) argues that "there are numerous accounts in the literature of higher education of the way in which enthusiastic teaching may lead to greater student involvement and commitment to the subject." This finding also links to our baseline questionnaire data. One of the five significant clusters of student responses in identifying 'good' teacher characteristics referred to "*enjoyment in teaching*" and teacher ability to make learning "interesting", "fun", "enjoyable". Conversely, a significant number of students in responding to negative teacher characteristics identified *lack of professional commitment*, teachers who "treated it as a job", "didn't want to be there."

I have spoken thus far as if Pauline and my pedagogical skills were largely similar. The data is clear we were both highly competent teachers, but close scrutiny reveals some interesting emphases. I stress these are emphases and by highlighting

them I do not wish to suggest they demonstrate weaknesses on the part of either Pauline or myself. TEVAL data asked students explicitly to specify teaching strengths in an open-ended way. The data emerging from this confirms instant questionnaire data throughout the semester. I have identified four major clusters from my TEVAL data, that is, clusters spontaneously identified by at least a third of all students. The first referred to personal qualities: "approachable" (15 respondents) and "friendly" (11). The second related to "individual attention" and "student concern" (10 responses) with another seven students using the terms ""helpful", "understanding", "compassionate". I shall discuss both these clusters in more detail in the chapter on the social context of learning, chapter eight. The third major cluster identified has just been noted, "enthusiasm" (14 responses). Related responses were "energy" (1) and "love of subject", "interest in subject" (7). The fourth cluster refers to "communication" (11), "teaches in easy to understand way" (6) and "explanation" (3). Note these last categories slide into each other in the sense of Wittgenstein's overlapping concepts (compare recent work on prototypes in cognitive psychology).

Pauline's TEVAL data, also confirmed by instant questionnaire data throughout the semester, revealed five major clusters. Three of these were the same as mine: first, "approachable" (10), "friendly" (7); second, "communication" (5), "teaches in easy to understand way/clear" (12), "explanation" (9); and third, "enthusiasm" (12), "love of subject", "interest in subject" (5); though note the different emphases within clusters. For instance, students tended to refer more to my

"communication", but to Pauline's teaching in an "easy to understand" way, buttressed by the nine students identifying "explanation". This is a significant difference and I shall return to it shortly. Pauline's final two clusters contained large numbers of responses. First, was "ability to make subject interesting/enjoyable" (19) plus "motivating" (2). Second, was "personal experiences" (14) and use of "cases studies" (10). Many of these responses relate to *communication/teaching skill* and *rapport with students*, two of the five major dimensions of teaching referred to above by Lally and Myhill (1994) in their comprehensive review of input-process-outcome research into teaching excellence.

I now want to examine two aspects in more detail. First, the notion of interactive lecturing. Although only some students referred specifically to this in TEVALs ("Allows questions in the lecture to aid understanding"), it was a recurring theme in instant questionnaire data, was a key point made by Neal Sellars in his analysis of lectures, and in the baseline questionnaire in answer to the question, *"How do you think you learn best?"*, a large number of people identified "interaction" and "discussion". This was replicated in the subtly different item designed to cross-validate responses, *what circumstance, or factors make it difficult or easy for you to learn?*, where one of the three major clusters identified "group discussions" and "class interaction". Further, it is, I would argue, a key integrating concept for many of the clusters identified in TEVALs and other data sources. Interactive lecturing is a form of offering "individual attention/student concern", it is a powerful form of "communication", and it is an activity that would be likely to

lead students to conclude that the lecturer was more "approachable". Second, I want to examine the notion of using case studies, a major cluster identified for Pauline (though note that a significant number of students, eight, identified my use of "personal experiences"). This also emerged as significant in the baseline questionnaire where the largest cluster of responses to the question, *"How do you think you learn best?"*, cited "practical examples" from the teacher's "experience" (including stories) which were "related back to the self". I shall use my own teaching to illustrate interactive lecturing.

1. 3   Gary – The Power of Interaction/Participation

I have argued above that a number of characteristics were responsible for sustaining student interest, but in this section I shall focus on interactive lecturing, involving students. Data indicates already that students feel we both are highly successful at engaging and sustaining student interest. In this section I want to focus on my lecturing; in the next section on Pauline's. My key question then became: How did I sustain student interest in my lectures? Obviously there are a variety of factors which interact in complex ways. I think at least part of the explanation lies in the intrinsically interesting subject matter, but this is quite inadequate as an explanation, since TEVAL data for both Pauline and I across a number of subjects over several years revealed similar patterns: students found our lectures extremely interesting irrespective of the subject or the particular topic with which we were dealing. One recurring theme that emerged in my teaching for *both* lectures and tutorials was encouraging student interaction and valuing their

opinions and ideas. The following TEVAL data on teaching strengths captures this: "Allows questions in the lecture to aid understanding." "Includes class members and encourages participation." "Is very encouraging of student input and takes our ideas seriously." Additionally, there were many comments relating to gaining and holding student attention. Note also the consistency with the initial baseline data where two of the five significant clusters of 'good teaching' identified were *listening skills*, specifically openness to feedback and other opinions; and *encouragement and support*, particularly encouraging participation, discussion and interaction.

I was particularly intrigued by the notion of lecturer-student interaction in lectures – I had always had a gut feeling that I was very interactive, conversational, and this gut feeling was continually reinforced by both informal student feedback and instant questionnaires. Indeed, once in a third year subject I had two students comment on TEVALs that my lectures were like giant tutorial sessions. This notion of the lecture format as a huge interactive conversation was certainly worth exploring.

This exploration became even more poignant as soon as one looked at the relevant literature. Carroll and colleagues report on a two phase research project at the Queensland University of Technology dealing with "Fostering Effective Lecturing Techniques in Large Groups" and draw the following conclusion:

> The most significant factor revealed by this study is the importance of student involvement in the lecture. As Coleman (1989: 20) points out, large classes are

an argument **for** interactive teaching rather than against it. Numerous studies support this by finding that students retain more for longer in interactive classes (Pearson 1990; Coleman 1989; Goetz 1983; Lowman 1984).
(Carroll, Green, Rosser, Spreadbury and Van Homrigh1993, p. 74)

The issue of lectures may become increasingly important in the future as global fiscal crises leading to budgetary restraints in the higher education sector may require larger classes. This is already happening (see chapter one). Carroll and colleagues (1993) suggest various strategies to promote student interaction. I shall mention four which we used in WS1002 lectures. First, pre-lecture reading – students need to know in advance what the lecture is about. Note that our Open Learning modules effectively provided such pre-reading. But also note that some students preferred to use them as post-reading (see chapter five and again below). Second, pair/small group responses. Third, question/responses in the sense of having students submit questions in writing at the end of each lecture, collating them and dealing with them at the beginning of the next lecture. This is precisely what happened in our instant questionnaires. Fourth, a quality control circle which involves a small delegation of students meeting regularly with the teaching team to provide feedback on content and quality of lectures. We effectively did this in two ways: with instant questionnaires; and a variety of discussion channels, particularly tutorials, as part of our participatory action research approach.

But how could I be more certain that my lectures were really interactive? In true action research spirit, I needed to try and disconfirm the notion. So I decided, after subject completion, to conduct some fine-grained analysis of two of my lectures in

order to study the phenomenon in more detail. The two lectures I chose to examine in detail (I gave six in the subject) were the communication lectures; one on language and one on non-verbal communication. These seemed to be highly appropriate topics to study such a phenomenon. Additionally, as noted above, I approached Dr Neal Sellars to conduct an independent evaluation of my lecturing using the videotaped lecture material and the subject outline as data sources.

I decided to begin without a precise analytic framework. First, I would view both lectures, stopping where I saw fit, and considering what gross observations emerged about interaction. Having done this, I adopted the following strategy. Lecture time could be carved up into my talk, student talk, plus silences, laughs and other non-verbal behaviours. I focused on the concept of *'verbal interactive episodes'*, which I defined as instances where at least one student, possible more were talking, or where all students were involved in an exercise which required them to interact with each other, or where I was responding to a student request or question. Initial viewing revealed that student interactions were of two types: *invited interactions*, where I either asked students a question, sought their opinions and ideas or asked them to perform a small group activity; and *spontaneous interactions*, where students felt free to 'interrupt' the lecture unsolicited. I then went back and watched the videos a second time, measuring both the number and duration of both types of interactions as well as the longest space between interactive episodes. I also noted the *qualitative* data, recording the content of the interactions. The data is summarized below in the following table:

Table 7.1:
Interactive Episodes in Selected Lectures

	Number		Length (mins-secs) Lec 5		Lec 6		Number/Min-Secs (average)	
	Lec 5	Lec 6	Stud	Total	Stud	Total	Lec 5	Lec 6
Invited interactions	35	39	4-13	7-34	5-50	10-05	1/1:20	1/1:15
Spontaneous interactions	18	21	3-06	3-15	5-43	5-58	1/2 :35	1/2:19
TOTAL	53	60	7-19	10-49	11-33	16-03	1/0:53	1/0:49

Notes:

• Lecture 5 = 46 minutes and 32 seconds

• Lecture 6 = 45 minutes and 27 seconds

• Range in length of interactions   = 2 seconds to 50 seconds for lecture 5

                                               = 1 second to 65 seconds for lecture 6

• Longest space between interact- = 3 minutes and 11 seconds for lecture 5

  ions   = 2 minutes 38 seconds for lecture 6

Perusal of this table indicates that, as I suspected, my lectures were highly interactive. In lecture 6, student interactions, excluding my responses to these interactions, accounted for approximately one quarter of the whole lecture time (11 minutes and 33 seconds of a 45 minute and 27 second lecture). The same statistic for lecture 5 accounted for almost one sixth of the lecture. Both these figures increase if we add my responses to the interactions (which might be answering questions, offering feedback, further probing, etc.). In neither lecture was there a period of time greater than 3 minutes and 11 seconds where students were not involved in some type of interaction. Indeed, there were only five occasions in

both lectures where this non-interactive period exceeded two minutes. Close scrutiny of these 'longer' periods reveals the longest one in each lecture was spent in an activity that students had previously identified in positive terms: personal experiences. They were, in fact, personal anecdotes designed to illustrate a point. Sometimes the interactions were extremely brief (a few seconds), occasionally they did extend to the 45-60 second period. To summarize, both lectures (by lecture standards) were highly interactive, with lots of short and sharp episodes which tended to give the lecture pace.

Neal Sellars provides a more detailed and specific account of the techniques I used to sustain interaction:

> He used a variety of interaction patterns to gain and hold students' attention – overhead projections used sparingly but effectively, use of blackboard, voice and gestural variation, eye contact with students, and involvement of students via questioning. An effective technique which he used to focus attention was to pose a question. He would then proceed to explore that question, returning to it as it was further clarified by example, by illustration, and by students' contribution to discussion.
> (Sellars 1996, p. 3)

Meyers (1987, p. 58) refers specifically to the development of critical thinking in writing of balancing lecture and interaction. "The most brilliant lectures will not foster critical thinking if no time is available for students to raise questions and otherwise respond to those lectures. We must all process information before we can truly make it our own." Meyers also outlines a number of "keys" to creating an interactive classroom. One of these, begin each class with a problem or a

controversy, is pertinent to the next section, which deals with Pauline's narrative prowess.

1.4   Pauline – The 'Power of the Narrative'

...begin each course with something that is a problem or a cause for wonder. Set students' minds to pondering, for in such a context they will experience both curiosity to know more and disequilibrium that will challenge their old ways of thinking and prepare them for new modes of critical thinking.
(Meyers 1987, p. 44)

Now ponder the following:

Peter was an eight-year-old boy living in a children's home. He was a 'good boy', suspiciously compliant to the trained eye. One day he asked the social worker if she could help him find his mother. The social worker made enquiries and soon located her whereabouts. She visited her and discovered that the woman, a German migrant, living in a nearby mental institution, was severely disfigured – one side of her face had caved in, she was severely brain damaged and had reverted solely to German. This was the result of domestic abuse from her husband. Her total linguistic repertoire now consisted of angry outbursts in German punctuated by wild and raging screaming.

What should the social worker do?

This is one of the cases that Pauline used to begin a lecture. It was also one of the five cases written up for the CD-Rom package. (Although the information was not presented in concise form as above, either in the lecture or the CD-Rom; it was staggered, as it would be in actual practice.) Barone (1992, p. 142) writes of the importance of 'critical stories', which, he argues, promote two kinds of activities: enabling us to "hear...each other's heartbeats", and making 'transformation' possible. Stories were a vital part of Pauline's pedagogical arsenal. In addition to myself, three colleagues from entirely different departments provided some

interesting feedback on Pauline's lecturing style which confirmed my initial gut observations when I first saw Pauline lecture and my finer-grained analyses. The first colleague, Barbara White, worked in the Centre for Interactive Multi Media (CIMM) and was the instructional designer for the CAUT grant CD-Rom package and video vignettes. Additionally, she had also collaborated, providing advice, with the Open Learning modules. The second was the Professor of Nursing, Barbara Hayes, who had invited Pauline and I to do a staff development session with Nursing staff. I was subsequently unable to attend. Completely independently, these two staff members provided very similar feedback on Pauline's teaching style. The first referred to the "power of the narrative", the second to Pauline's ability to tell a "gripping story keeping the audience spellbound." Note that these skills were an important element in the use of case-based pedagogy (discussed below). The third colleague was a Senior Lecturer in Education, Dr Kay Martinez, who was specifically researching best teaching practice for an internal university research grant and who approached Pauline as part of this project on the basis of her Teaching Excellence Awards. Kay viewed Pauline's videotaped lectures of WS1002 in addition to a series of videotaped lectures for *SW3001, Social Work II*, the key third year social work subject for linking theory and practice. My conclusions on Pauline's lecturing style are based on observing her for nine lectures in CW1002 in 1993, for seven lectures in WS1002 in 1994, for 11 lectures in WS1004 in 1994, and for eight lectures in WS1002 in 1995; a total of 35 lectures. I took notes on Pauline's lecturing style on

each occasion. Additionally, in 1994, the year of this study's major focus, I also viewed Pauline's seven lectures on videotape.

One was immediately struck by the fact that although Pauline appeared to have lecture notes, she almost never used them (compare also Martinez 31/1/95). This was important, because it meant that she could maintain constant eye contact with students. The second thing to strike you was that, indeed, Pauline could tell a gripping story. The student comment in the end of semester taped group discussion is revealing: "The only subject that I've sat on the edge of my chair waiting for an ending. To see what happens" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 3). I am not exaggerating when I say that this was my response the first time I ever heard Pauline lecture. I was instantly intrigued since, due to my own experiences and professional training as a teacher, I had believed that interactive lecturing was the key to success. Yet, Pauline, while allowing students to ask questions, invited little interaction from students. This went against the grain of what I thought was involved in successful lecturing. As it turned out, there was no question students enjoyed these lectures, but the more salient question was: could students be encouraged in our goal of learning to think critically and reflectively about practice by inviting interaction more often? For instance, rather than just explaining to students what a theory was, could Pauline ask them first? As time went on, we discussed these sorts of issues and Pauline quickly included such pedagogical skills in her repertoire.

I also noted that Pauline did not use an overhead projector. It was simply the classic 'chalk and talk'. Or was it? Done superbly, it appeared as a trenchant example of flouting 'textbook' theory of effective pedagogy. It was not until Pauline's fifth lecture in 1994 that I began examining more closely her board work. Pauline used her 'lecturing space' to walk back and forward in a circular motion, from the board to the lectern, almost always facing the class wherever possible, even partially turned when writing on the board. Note that all these elements facilitated interaction with the class. She also frequently gestured to the board to draw student attention to particular concepts or features. These gestures were never random. She always pointed to the part of the board relevant to discussion. Kay Martinez (31/1/95) remarked that she gave students cues as to the essential parts or when to write notes. Additionally, she paused and waited for students to stop writing. For variety, she frequently stood towards the middle of the room, still facing the class and maintaining eye contact, but gesturing alternatively to right and left. How did she manage this? She prepared her board carefully prior to the lecture by dividing it into four sections as detailed below:

1	*2*	*3*	*4*
Case study details	*Relevant factual details* e.g. Intervention methods: - casework - group work - community work Types of groups: - primary - secondary	*Floating/rotating information*	*Concepts & definitions* e.g. group definition – 6 characteristics listed Status Role Norms Conformity

Information in three of the four columns (numbers 1, 2 and 4) remained for the entire lecture. This enabled either lecturer or students to refer to this key

information at any time. The third column, 'floating/rotating' information, was blank at the beginning of the lecture to be filled and removed on demand depending on what came up in the lecture, itself partly a function of student queries. I noticed that sometimes Pauline interchanged columns 2 and 4 from one lecture to the next.

This technique, as I discovered, was actually more effective than overhead transparencies. With the latter, you can display only one at a time. With Pauline's method you can have the equivalent of four transparencies displayed simultaneously; powerful evidence that new is not always better. Technologies cannot be divorced from the skills of the people using them. Interestingly, when I asked Pauline about her technique, she was entirely unaware of what she was doing in any precise sense.

Some important conclusions can be drawn. First, it is not necessarily finely tuned micro skills alone that make effective lecturing. What is it then? Our data indicate at least four crucial aspects. First, knowledge of subject matter; second, pedagogical skills and personality traits such as enthusiasm, communication skills, approachability, explanation skills; third, ability to 'ground' theory with practice examples. Fourth, in Pauline's case, ability to tell a gripping story.

1.5   Summary

The differences in style of Pauline's and my lectures reinforce a fundamental tenet of learning theory: different individuals learn in different ways and even the same individual can learn in quite different ways at different times depending on, amongst other things, individual learner characteristics, the nature of the learning task and if and how any learning will be assessed. However, it should not be supposed that Pauline was not an interactive lecturer – data indicates she was, and seemed to become more so after I discussed the issue with her early in the project. Nor should it be assumed that I could not tell a good story. Again, data indicates that my use of personal experiences and anecdotes were highly valued by students. And in this instance, I learnt from Pauline. After seeing how effectively and powerfully she used case studies in the early lectures of the 1994 program, I resolved to do the same in my lectures. This was one of the joys of working together: we were able to provide constructive feedback in a supportive environment which led to both of us fine tuning our teaching skills. The pedagogical aspects I have identified and analysed reflected emphases, our trademarks. Pauline was the supreme raconteur, who used her storytelling skills, drawing upon her personal and professional experience, often via case studies, to highlight and explain the links between theory and practice in a way readily assimilated by students. I was more the interactor who used the lecture forum as a giant conversation, prodding and probing students to reflection.

The above findings are not an argument for increased lecturing in universities. As Ramsden (1992) points out, there are instances where lecturing can be done well and students appreciate this, but unfortunately it is all too rare. I think Pauline and I are special cases because she has the 'campside' skills of the raconteur and my lecturing tends to be appreciated because of its hugely interactive style. For many higher education teachers lecturing will not be the most appropriate forum. Further, I suspect that Pauline and I could have lectured less and it would have been more effective; or at least not any less effective. Evidence for this comes from subsequent experiences: Pauline in Bunbury with CAUT materials where lectures in a formal sense were reduced considerably (see previous chapter); and me in Vietnam with the workshops where 'Presentations' ranged from 10-30 minutes and were interspersed with lots of small group work.

The above analysis provides cogent reasons in answer to the first question raised near the chapter's beginning: why did students want longer lectures?; or, probing more deeply, why did students enjoy lectures so much? The second question raised above is crucial in evaluating teacher effectiveness: were lectures an effective form of student learning? In the next section I want to argue that they were, but with some important caveats. Most of our data, particularly the *outcome* data evaluates the effectiveness of students' overall learning experiences, experiences which include lectures, tutorials and, equally importantly, student experiences outside these forums, including, but not restricted to, their own self-initiated group work on the subject. Strictly speaking, we cannot use crucial

student outcome data, particularly assignments, to argue for the merits of lectures or case studies, since student assignments are the result of *all* student learning experiences. The only data which relates exclusively to lectures is the lecture instant questionnaire data. But we can also take into account the prolific TEVAL data and the taped group discussions, referred to above, where students specifically identify these features.

The following argument has two key components. First, is the notion that social work is a professional subject consisting of two related aspects: practice and thinking about the practice. This is often formulated as the theory/practice problematic. Following Pilalis (1986) in my chapter one discussion, I use the term 'practice' not simply to refer to an 'ethical deed' and a 'technical act' (though it is both these things), but more importantly, to refer to *general professional purpose or intention*. Used in this way, practice is an inherently theoretical activity. WS1002, the subject which is the focus of this research study, is concerned primarily about the *thinking* aspect of social work practice. As extended discussion in the first three chapters demonstrated, one cannot reduce this to 'the' theoretical component. We originally referred to it as critical theoretical thinking. I now prefer to conceptualize it as thinking critically and reflectively about practice (or action). We can summarize the first aspect of the argument to follow by stating that our broad aim in this subject, the one that unifies all our objectives, is to have students begin to bridge the theory/practice moat by a process of critical reflection (note that we would need very different longitudinal data to make such claims

about the subject's benefit for future practice, a claim we do *not* want to make chiefly because it was never the subject's intention per se, and it would be ludicrous to pretend that it ever could be during the first semester of a degree program).   So, the first part of the argument provides evidence suggesting that students were beginning to learn to think critically about practice issues.   I shall leave discussion of much of the student outcome data until chapter nine on assessment.   The second key component of this argument is that case studies were one of the more significant pedagogical strategies for achieving this overall goal. Though again, I do not want to restrict myself solely to use of case studies as the drawbridge for theory/practice links, nor to lectures.   Where appropriate, I shall draw upon other relevant strategies, particularly in tutorial sessions.   Expressed simply, the first prong of the argument states *what* we want to do and the evidence that it is happening, the second, *how* we do it.

II.   CASE STUDIES, PRACTICAL EXAMPLES, PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND THEORY/PRACTICE LINKS

This section – and it is a large one – should be seen in the light of two related issues raised in chapter one.   First Neumann's (1994, p. 10) argument about the generic and discipline-specific characteristics of effective teaching when she urges that "teaching is far more complex and subtle than listing generic principles of behaviours and attributes."   She advocates studying "more closely what occurs in specific disciplines and in specific contexts, in order to better 'get inside' the teaching process" (p. 9).   On a related front, Lee Shulman (1987, p. 9) argues that

"good teaching goes beyond principles of teaching or attributes of good teachers and includes detailed subject knowledge which can be communicated and transformed through knowledge of situations and ways of responding to these situations. It is important to comprehend how good teachers transform their knowledge of a subject in ways that leads to student understanding." Lee Shulman (1987) argues that because teaching is essentially a private activity, it lacks a history of practice. The future direction of educational research will be to undertake what he terms "wisdom-of-practice" studies which "collect, collate, and interpret the practical knowledge of teachers for the purpose of establishing a case literature and codifying its principles, precedents and parables" (p. 12).

2.1   Evidence for Students' Critical Reflection

I shall draw on five sources of data to support the claim that students themselves felt that the subject was beneficial in getting them to think about practice issues in a critical way and that case studies and lecturer's personal experiences were an important part of this. Some of it also warrants a conclusion extending beyond student perceptions. The five data sources are: instant questionnaires from lectures; instant questionnaires from tutorials; taped group discussions; TEVALs, including both closed rating questions and open-ended responses; and student consultation records. Note the broad range of *process* and *outcome* data. In chapters eight and nine I shall draw extensively upon student work to further substantiate the critically reflective abilities of students, though in this case we

cannot necessarily attribute case studies, lecturer personal experience and practical examples as key ingredients in these student outcomes.

From the very first lecture it was clear that students were getting the message about the relationship between thinking and acting, theory and practice. Instant questionnaires from lecture 1 indicated that almost 61% of students specifically cited "think before acting" as the key point they remembered from the lecture, while another two suggested that thinking is the key to practice. Several other respondents offered similar comments with two suggesting the importance of observation and interpretation prior to action, one urging the need to analyse all areas of experience and knowledge before decisions, and another four stressing the importance of thinking as an informed process without, at least in their responses, drawing an explicit link to behaviour, practice or action. Indeed, perusal of the lecture instant questionnaires for the first four sessions on theory and theory development indicated that most students were on track, even if many students in lectures 3 and 4 simply named the specific theory as the key point remembered. Only a handful of people (range 3 to 9) responded to the item, "I found it difficult to understand about…" and only in one instance was there more than one response for the same issue. Nonetheless, these issues were taken up in the next lecture. Further, almost without exception, all students responded to the item, "I found the teaching…", in glowing terms.

Instant questionnaires for tutorials revealed some small, but significant differences. Again, most people identified the main points, though there was a tendency to do so in general terms. For instance: "concepts, assumptions and propositions." Some students demonstrated a beginning understanding of the social construction of knowledge, one of the subject's key objectives, with comments like: "That knowledge is socially constructed. That culture is not limited to Western culture." Others demonstrated powerful learning that went beyond this: "All theories are based on assumptions. There are no facts, there is no right or wrong, but to be critical of our theories." And in similar vein: "Developing a theory, recognizing how our opinions and perceptions affect the theory." One student made a comment which revealed a promising start to critical thinking: "Not to get set in rigid ways. Try looking at things from a broader perspective." Similarly, with very few exceptions, the teaching was evaluated in glowing terms. Although this was often in terms such as "great", "enthusiastic", "thoughtful", "interesting", sometimes it was in more enlightening terms from our perspective, in the sense that we could understand at least part of the reason for their favourable reactions. "Where the theory came from to start with. Explanation helped to clear it later." However, students did identify more difficulties than in the lectures. This is not surprising since the tutorials involved students having to tackle the daunting task of beginning to construct and analyse their own theories. Additionally, identification of key points sometimes revealed student misunderstandings and difficulties. The main types of problems that arose were as follows: identifying assumptions, particularly stripping them back to the most basic level; the

difference between a proposition and a theory ("when does it stop becoming a proposition and becoming a theory?"); the difference between a proposition and an assumption. I shall discuss these difficulties in some detail in the chapter on assessment.

One interesting feature of these early tutorial sessions was that some student comments suggested that mastering critical theoretical thinking was not a simple linear or additive process. The material was much more elusive with one student suggesting that "sometimes I lose the plot. Then I pick it up again," and another that "well sometimes I think I've got it, then it's gone." Another student suggested that "I think it takes time to think in a different way." This is consistent with Kolb's (1984) work where he emphasizes the cyclic nature of learning.

Outcome data confirmed much of the above. The following exchange from my Wednesday group's taped group discussion is instructive.

> I think it's been a very valuable course. I think it's good to analyse yourself and I think it's very helpful to have it structured so that you can work out how we can go about that process.
> I think that like this is the main subject that will, so far, that will help us further on. The other ones are very general, but this one we can specifically use it when we branch out into social work. For practice (agreement by another student).
> I think at times I with the others too, because the others give you background, but this one gives you a better practical idea.
> Yeah, the others have more theory, but this one is a lot more practical.
> And I think that you probably need both. You couldn't just do... (interruption).
> Yeah.
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, pp. 1-2)

The Thursday group also referred explicitly to the foundational value of the subject: "We've learnt a heck of a lot. In one semester we've learnt a really good foundation to what we'll be doing. And yet it didn't get cluttered with a lot of information" (Transcript 2/6/94, p. 4). This is a revealing comment which speaks to a key issue: the notion that providing people with the tools for learning (learning how to learn or meta-learning) is equally as vital as mastery of content.

Some students found it enlightening to be provided with the language to name their experiences:

> You've been in the group, you've seen how it works, but you just didn't realize that it was actually a term for this.
> Yeah. And you realize more when you're doing it too. Like I never realized that I was doing such stuff until suddenly it had a name – and stuff like that. And then I thought, 'ah! I really do know that you know'.
> (students talking over one another in agreement)...I mean, what happened? One minute we were working fine on what happened, now perhaps there's that ability now to go back and say, 'aha! This is what happened'.
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 2)

The Tuesday group endorsed these views:

> I found this subject very easy to put into practice too. You know when I was out and about, you know some of the concepts of it. I was always consciously thinking.
> I found that too.
> You'd find a lot of people they'd sit down at the Refec saying 'I perceive, I think, I feel. What do I assume?' You think, 'well, I wonder where they got that from.' They didn't think that before.
> All these words come into it now they have so much more meaning. They were probably there before but you didn't notice them, but now you see them and you're aware of them.
> And it's like when you get in a group you work out who is the group leader cause I've been going back to, before that you just accept it, but now I can work it out a bit better.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, p. 11)

And a little later:

> I think the thing is a lot of the things that we're learning are a lot of things that
> we've never really thought about before and this subject has made us aware of
> all the things that are happening around us and made us think about them and I
> think that's where all the conflict with other people, for want of a better word,
> it's probably not conflict, but you have a new awareness.
> I think before a lot of things you were aware of but we didn't bring it up to the
> surface because but now we've learned how to stick up for ourselves, argue our
> point with an informed view.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, p.13)

Followed by:

> I enjoy sitting down and being able to watch the groups and when you're
> sitting with a group of people and you can actually watch all of the alliances
> and stuff, signs of who wants something off whom, you can't work out what it
> is but you can actually see what's going on.
> You start analyzing people around you.
> Yeah.
> No offence Gary, but I was at this meeting for the degree the BCW and it's like
> you can watch the Head of Department align himself with somebody else...
> It's a really interesting learning thing, it's actually got a use for it, it's not just
> there in theory.
> Yeah, like you're never going to use it.
> And wouldn't you agree that a lot of the people refuse to accept that they do it
> – those alliances and that – they say that's not true even though you see it
> going on, they actually refuse to admit that it's happened.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, p. 14)

Pauline's Wednesday group spoke explicitly of the theory/practice issue,

particularly as this relates to previous study experiences, but as the following quote

demonstrates, they located this within a much broader framework concerning the

purposes of education:

> I resented having pure theory shoved down my neck and in the end I thought,
> "how does this relate to my life? What is this doing for my life? Am I really
> growing? Am I really becoming a person to contribute to society?" And
> actually, this subject out of all, I was just thinking about it today, has luckily
> put that all behind and given me a totally new outlook that education can
> actually be formed in part of theory like General Systems...; and at the same

time can be relevant to life and not only that, it can be well understood by first year students, but it depends on how it is taught... I find it is often the use of language which goes past the first year students, not the theory itself. But I was very impressed with the modules because the theories are very deep and compound; they are speaking in regular language and therefore I feel not only are they understood, they also don't miss out on the high level and I think that that is what they don't understand – you know, how to actually teach theory to any level of students. For the first time I can say that I've really gained something out of learning personally and they're teaching us also understanding of society, rather than just producing some paper work, walking away with a good grade, and that was about the outcome, which I think is very poor. I don't think that that is actually the goal of education, but I think that a lot of people still haven't, even within the education system, understood that this course has impacted in a very effective way.
(Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 2-3)

One of Pauline's students had a fascinating comment to make which reinforces one of the subject's primary goals concerning the relationship between theory and practice, thinking and action:

I've been conscious that when I make a decision that I am going through some processes. I am aware of certain eliminations and sometimes make the right decisions and sometimes I make the wrong decision, but there are aspects of the process that I have done unconsciously and now I am think that I am aware of those and possibly make less mistakes in the future – thanks to this subject. The other thing, I was talking to one of the third year students and a lot of the aspects of this course they're only doing now and that that's been hard for them and I think that for us it'd been really good cause we're getting a feel for exactly what we have to do right at the beginning. That will just carry through and like it helps you in other areas as well.
(Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 1)

This was interesting because under the previous degree structure recall that this subject's forerunner was available only to Community Welfare students (as a compulsory subject). In an interesting circumstance a third year BSW student decided to transfer to BCW at the beginning of her third year. As a result, she was

required to complete this subject (a strange administrative quirk of universities).

She had the following comment to offer:

> Well I couldn't quite believe that I'm third year and I missed doing this subject in first year and just how I got this far without having this grounding. This is very important, I hadn't thought about specific things before, this far, that sort of been informed of in this subject.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 13-14)

Another of Pauline's group justified increasing the lecture time slot to two hours in

the following way:

> I look at it, to me it is a base subject for a course that, when it should be remembered that you are dealing with people's lives and a subject to me that is so essential, can really well afford to have the two hour lectures because to me I think that this subject now is the foundation of everything that we will do.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 5)

And a little later, another student:

> I agree with it being the foundation because as well as this subject has taught us to think about our actions, it has also got me to think about me and who I am. Especially through the assignments, that last one, 'what is it that makes you the person you are today?' And I think that that's really important because you can't do anything in social work unless we know ourselves, we can't help other people.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 5)

The Thursday group provided yet another perspective on the thinking/action,

theory/practice nexus:

> I'm really glad that we've done it because it's given me a way of looking at things analytically. I think we all basically get the idea that we know what's happening, we had to show that we can get there, and because I believe from what you are saying that later on we've had to be able to show we've all had theories, but we'll have to show how we get them. It will have to be done methodically. Is that right? Becoming practising social workers we can't just say that 'this person is doing that because', we have to go and show all the, like working out. You know.

There's the packaging outside of it too, which is a good thing to lay out first up. Before anything else you need to be able to do that and know where your own thoughts are before you can start to look further than that. It can be very valuable to have that right now, first up.
(Transcript 2/6/94:, pp. 10-11)

Note that this exchange not only highlights the importance of the thinking/action

link, but also the role of self in theory construction.

A member of my Wednesday group powerfully illustrated some key learning about

social work practice:

And it's pointed out in the module that you're not there to solve each and every problem with every fantastic wonderful solution. You're there to help them to facilitate, to create a solution or work towards a solution. Or at least offer them a range of solutions rather than being there to be the one who solves it all.
(Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 6)

TEVAL data buttressed the transcript data. Relevant are a number of items from

the optional bank for both lecturers in addition to numerous responses to the open-

ended questions concerning teaching strengths. I shall briefly review these.

Pauline and I both posed the item, "I have learned to think critically". Obviously

this is vital, since in many respects we perceive the subject to be an introduction to

our brand of critical reflection. Pauline rated 1.4 and myself 1.7 compared to the

university average of 2.3. For me, this item was 'worse' than any other in the

entire TEVAL and clearly worse than any other item in the optional bank (the

nearest was 1.4 and there was only one of these). So, while compared to other

staff in the university our performance in teaching critical thinking was sound

indeed, my performance must be interpreted as disappointing overall given the

nature and aims of the subject. I shall return to this issue later. One of my

respondents, refreshingly, offered the following comment: "Born teacher – teaches

to think – not just cram material down", and another added, "stimulates thought".

The item, "I have learned the relevance of this subject to my future profession",

was far more satisfactory with Pauline rating 1.1 and myself 1.3 compared to the

university average of 1.9. This item addresses more specifically the

theory/practice link, while the former is more directly relevant to thinking per se.

But since it is our argument that it is only by 'better' critical and reflective thinking

that practice can be improved, this is still an issue of grave concern. Interestingly,

students responded more favourably to my item, "The lecturer stretches my mind",

where the rating was 1.4 compared to the university average of 2.3. Note,

however, that this was my second worst rating in the optional bank. Despite this, it

does seem that students are making quite a clear distinction between "having their

minds stretched" and "thinking critically." Pauline posed four other items

germane to the present discussion. First, another theory/practice link item, "I have

learned to apply principles from this class in new situations", with a rating of 1.3

compared to the university average of 2.3. Second, "I have learned to make

connections between this subject and others", which rated 1.5 compared to the

university average of 2.3. Third, another item related more specifically to

thinking, "I have reconsidered many of my former viewpoints", with a rating of

1.5 compared to the university average of 2.4. Finally, "The lecturer emphasizes

understanding as the basis for learning", which rated 1.2 compared to the university average of 1.9.

Open-ended responses lend further support to the importance of explicitly teaching theory/practice links. I shall offer some quotations which capture the flavour of student responses, beginning with my TEVALs. "The need to critically think about the world and those around, has made me realize that each person has a different reality. This is extremely important in social work, and Gary teaches this in an easy to understand way." This comment reveals a number of things about this student's perspective. First, that this student has begun the process of critical thinking within our subject aims. Second, s/he has some understanding of the social construction of knowledge and the role of self in this process (to be discussed in more detail in chapter eight). Third, that these understandings are important for social welfare practice. Fourth, I have managed to teach these things, at least to this student. "Extremely good with presentation and life experience examples. These help in understanding the matter under discussion." "His ability to share his experiences and in doing so reinforcing the concepts he was trying to teach." "I think the main strengths are their experience they both have in the practical world of SW and how good they have used this experience to produce interesting, entertaining and valuable lectures and tutorials. I have really enjoyed this subject and its structure." It is interesting that at various times students referred to my passion for social work and my practical social work experience. This is despite the fact that I was not a social worker, never had been

and made this clear to students at the beginning of semester. Pauline's respondents were even more enthusiastic in their praise of this trait. "Theory was reinforced by practical examples. This was excellent and enabled me to link theory to future practice." "Makes lessons relevant to life – not just abstract theories." "Effective in using personal experience to illustrate situations." "Good balance of theory and practical illustrations." The following comment remarks on Pauline's use of practice failures. "Willingness to use examples which ended in failures shows the nature of social work and perhaps help to put feet on ground for those who have idealistic expectations." "Gary and Pauline are very interesting people to listen to and at the end of their lectures, especially Pauline's, it makes me more determined in practising social work." "Pauline makes great use of her field experience to bring the relevance of subject matter to life!" "She is very open and enthusiastic and gives personal experiences as examples which is very useful and makes what we're learning applicable." "She can relate everything to real life." "Great use of personal experiences in relating elements of the subject to class. Very enjoyable!"

Additionally, as late as August, some weeks after the subject was finished, students, whom I was now teaching in *PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice*, were providing informal feedback in consultation sessions that WS1002 had been invaluable in understanding their own life issues. Another student in an August consultation provided evidence of some very sound understanding and application of knowledge. Having read the introductory chapter of the Psychology text which outlined five major approaches/paradigms to psychology, she attempted

to locate WS1002 paradigmatically. This was actually an almost impossible exercise, since none of the psychological paradigms referred to either critical theory or poststructuralism. But it was fascinating to see her grappling with complex ideas that even staff struggle with. Admittedly, this was one of our top students, but it was sheer delight having this student return from the library having read a book on social work and existentialism and wanting to discuss the finer points of existentialism with me in consultation sessions. This student was also studying English literature and because key existentialist philosophers (e.g. Sartre, De Beauvoir, Camus) had also written novels exploring existentialism, she was also able to draw on this link.

The above data indicates, amongst other things, that students themselves feel that the subject was beneficial in getting them to think about practice issues in a critical way and that case studies and lecturer's personal experiences were an important part of this. Some of it also warrants a conclusion extending beyond student perceptions. I now want to examine more closely the role of case studies in this process.

2.2   Case Studies

The use of case studies in higher education spans a number of professional fields where practice/theory links are integral to professional success. These include: medicine, nursing, law, business, education, social work.

> Teaching is not alone in confronting this fundamental gap between theory and
> practice. It is the challenge facing all education for the professions. Indeed,

our colleagues in the law, business, and medical schools have already developed traditions for teaching principles through reality-based cases. The case, in this sense, is a piece of controllable reality, more vivid and contextual than a textbook discussion, yet more disciplined and manageable than observing or doing work in the world itself.

In the past few years, the role of case-based teaching in the education of teachers has received increasing attention as a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Though not a new idea, the use of case methods in teacher education has been relatively ignored in the literature on teaching. (Judith Shulman 1992, p. xiv).

In fact, Judith Shulman (1992, p. vvii) claims that "unquestionably, case methods are the most exciting potential source of improvement for the contemporary pedagogy of teacher education." What is a case? What are case methods? Where have they been used? What are their purposes? How were they used in WS1002? Were they effective, and if so, why? What are their disadvantages? The following sections seek to answer these questions.

2.2.1   What is a Case?

Lee Shulman (1992, p. 17) argues that "to call something a case is to make a theoretical claim. It argues that the story, event, or text is an instance of a larger class." His definition (1992, p. 21) is "that a case has a narrative, a story, a set of events that unfolds over time in a particular place." He suggests further that cases have two useful features for learning purposes. First, their narrative status; second, their contextualization in time and place. The issue is of more than academic interest. Grossman (1992), in the context of teacher education, argues that if we want to develop a 'canon' of cases for pedagogical purposes, this is a vital question. Teacher education, she notes, has drawn heavily from business and law

in definitions and criteria for cases. As for social work, we need to evaluate their utility for the discipline under consideration. She also raises the as yet unanswered question about genres of cases, each of which may serve different purposes, stressing the need to develop a typology of different kinds of cases and their purposes.

2.2.2   *Case Methods – a Definition*

There is no such thing as *the* case method. Cases can be used in a variety of teaching/learning ways. One central question concerns teacher role. Lee Shulman (1992) sketches two broad categories, both with their roots in Harvard. In the first, the Harvard Business School tradition, the teacher is central as the manager of discussion. Student participation is vital, but so is a skilled teacher capable of facilitating group discussion and well-versed in case content. Cases are presented to small groups in written form, usually prepared in at least two versions. Case A presents background and basic situation, offering a set of alternate courses of action. The B Case is not introduced until after thorough discussion and analysis of the A case and adds more information, usually including an account of actors' actions and consequences. Incompleteness of the A case is essential in order to forestall closure. The second approach, pioneered by Harvard president Conant in undergraduate science courses, uses cases to present a 'narrative of discovery' contextualized in space and time. Instruction mode is usually a large-group lecture. Our initial approach in WS1002 was akin to the latter. We did not, at this

stage of our research, use the case studies in tutorials. I shall discuss this in more detail below.

Barrows (1986), writing about medical education, presents a more finely-grained taxonomy, conceptualizing cases as a type of 'problem-based learning'. Barrows notes that this latter term does not refer to a specific educational method – it has many meanings, depending on design of the employed method and teacher skills. Boud (1985) and Woods (1994) agree that problem-based learning takes various forms, though Boud (1985, p. 16) suggests that it can be "regarded as one form of learning from experience, or experience-based learning, in which learning is focused on problems derived from practice." Barrows' taxonomy of six problem-based learning methods is based on the dual axes of design of educational method (including teacher and student roles) and potential objectives. I shall follow his taxonomy in classifying our approach.

Lecture-Based Cases

The teacher presents students with information in lectures and then uses a case or two, usually vignettes, to demonstrate the relevance of this information. Students are asked to understand the cases presented in terms of the information given in the lecture.

Case-Based Lecture

Students are presented with case vignettes or more complete case histories *before the lecture*. Cases highlight the material to be covered. Students must analyse the case using prior knowledge before any new information is given.

Case Method

Students are given a complete case for study and research in preparation for subsequent class discussion. The teacher facilitates its discussion by combining both student-directed and teacher-directed learning.

Modified Case-Based

Patient management problems or similar problem formats are used to cue thinking and discussion, but may restrict free enquiry by students.

Problem-Based

Students are presented with the client's presenting picture in simulation formats that allow free enquiry. They can develop their own data base and hypotheses – usually with some teacher-guided exploration and evaluation of the problem, drawing on students' prior knowledge. This activity facilitates their understanding and retention of new, problem-related information.

Reiterative Problem-Based

This is an extension of the above method, but with additional emphasis on student review of learning processes. They are asked to evaluate the information sources they used and then to return to the original client problem to check how they might have improved their reasoning and gained better understanding.

Below, I shall discuss in more detail the specifics of how cases were used in WS1002 during 1994, the focus of this study. Here, I shall restrict myself to a broad brush view. In terms of Barrows' taxonomy, our methods were refined and evolved over time, employing initially Lecture-Based Cases. In *WS1004, Understanding Professional Helping*, the second semester follow-on subject, we used Case Method during the initial stages, and Reiterative Problem-Based in the later stages of this subject. With the completion of the CAUT CD-Rom package and videotaped vignettes, we also used Reiterative Problem-Based methods in WS1002 from 1996 onwards. In WS1004, we used a variety of cases from which students, working in small groups, could choose one for assessment. Note that we also negotiated to have the Case Method used as the major form of assessment in *PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice*. Case Method moves closer to the Harvard Business School tradition with its mix of teacher-directed and student-directed learning. Reiterative Problem-Based methods move even further towards the student-directed learning end of the spectrum.

This brief survey indicates our own learning over time – an integral part of action research. We stumbled upon cases as a way of introducing lectures, based the lectures around these cases during WS1002 in 1994, then discovered we could get more mileage out of them by introducing Case Method in both second semester subjects, WS1004 and PY1003, and finally Reiterative Problem-Based Methods towards the end of semester in WS1004 and for the 1995 CAUT materials. A key feature of this 'movement' over time is the transition from more teacher-directed methods to more student-directed ones. Part of the reason for our apparent 'tardiness' in making this transition was not our fear at loss of control of the learning situation, but because students were requesting longer lectures!

2.2.3 *Where have Case Methods been used?*

Case-study learning or problem-based learning in one or other of its above variants, has grown steadily over the last two decades in Australia, Europe, Canada and the United States. Aldred, Aldred, Walsh and Dick (1997) note that from its advent in Medicine at McMaster University in Canada and Maastricht in the Netherlands, it has been adopted into Nursing, Social Work, Engineering and Architecture (Boud 1985), as well as Law, Teaching, Optometry and Management (Boud and Feletti 1991). More recently, the approach has spread into teeth with initiatives in Dentistry at the Universities of Adelaide (Wetherell and Mullins 1993) and Queensland (Aldred 1995) in Australia and Harvard in the United States (Howell and Matlin 1995). Boud and Feletti (1991) note that the approach has been used to deliver complete degree courses (e.g. Medicine at McMaster and

Newcastle, Australia) or one or more subjects within a degree course. In this context, note my discussion in section 6.1.1 of the previous chapter where I described the changes that resulted when the subject was moved to Bunbury campus of ECU.

However, its use in social work has been limited. The earliest documented use I could find in Australia was in a single subject, Social Work Practice I, introduced at the University of New South Wales in 1983. Here, "the students learn about social work by looking comprehensively at a series (seven to date) of specific problems they could encounter in social work practice, problems chosen from the real world" (Smith 1985, p. 109). Burgess (1992), writing of the United Kingdom, notes that a similar approach has been used in the first term of the University of York's CQSW (Certificate of Qualification in Social Work) (Downes and McCluskey 1985), in parts of the course at the University of Leicester (Hardiker and Barker 1981; Hardiker and Curnock 1984; Harris 1987) and was used briefly at the University of Southampton. Prior to the development and introduction in October 1990 of Bristol University's two year Diploma of Social Work course, which was based on an Enquiry and Action Learning (EAL) approach, no social work program anywhere in the world was modelled entirely on a variant of a case-based or problem-based learning approach. The Bristol model, which was actually developed in consort with a number of other social work agencies in the west of England, drew its theoretical inspiration from the experiential learning cycle outlined by Kolb, Rubin and McIntyre (1979) (Burgess 1992). Given my

discussion in chapter three, I have some concerns with this theoretical base. However, this should not detract from the overall freshness and vigour of the approach and Burgess' (1992) book indicates, that despite the 'teething' problems, the course has been largely a success.

2.2.4 Case Methods – Purposes

Lee Shulman (1992) presents a detailed analysis of purposes. I shall review these briefly in this section, then refer to them in greater detail in the next section on how we used case methods in WS1002. Shulman identifies five major purposes, using case methods to teach:

1. Theoretical principles.

2. Precedents for practice.

3. Morals or ethics.

4. Strategies, dispositions and habits of mind.

5. Visions or images of the possible.

He outlines four additional ways in which cases can be viewed:

1. Creating or increasing motivation for learning.

2. Providing unique benefits for practitioners who participate in writing as case authors or commentators.

3. Providing specific antidotes to the dangers of overgeneralization from either the learning of principles or from prior cases.

4. Serving as the instructional material around which participants can form communities for discussion or discourse.

2.2.5 How Case Methods were used in WS1002

When I first co-taught this subject with Pauline in 1993 she was introducing lectures by reading a pertinent piece of fiction, a legacy of the Hering *CW128: Social Literature* subject, from which this one had evolved. However, Pauline always drew upon practice examples and personal experience to reinforce her theoretical points and to teach new concepts. After much discussion, in 1994 we introduced a new strategy. (Or perhaps more accurately, we stumbled upon it in the first class, noted its impact and then began much reflection and discussion on the approach.) Rather than using a series of disconnected practice examples throughout a lecture, we began to use a single case study and followed it through for the entire lecture. Indeed, for my final set of lectures I used a single community setting and followed through different aspects of it over a sequence of three lectures.

We used Lecture-Based Cases for each of the five Shulman-identified purposes above, though there were varying emphases. I shall systematically refer to each. I stress, however, that the purpose which undergirds all others was *critical reflection*. We used cases as a means to get students to think critically about practice; practice in the sense of *general professional purpose or intention* (see Pilalis 1986 above).

Theoretical Principles

"Christopher Columbus Langdell, first dean of the Harvard Law School in 1875, proposed the case method in legal education precisely because he believed that cases could become the most powerful medium for teaching theory (Stevens 1983)" (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 3). As Lee Shulman (1992, p. 3) notes, "cases are occasions for offering theories to explain why certain actions are appropriate." Therefore, he argues, when constructing a case-based curriculum, the first step is to identify the theoretical principles one wishes to teach. Note that although we had a clearly structured lecture program designed before semester, with clear theoretical principles, and although we decided at the beginning of semester that we would use cases, among other things, to illustrate these theoretical principles, we did not know precisely which cases we would use at the beginning of semester. Indeed, in some instances, we did not know until several days before the lecture. We were, in classic action research style, working by trial and error, responding to student feedback, before deciding our next move. In fact, we were not even certain at the beginning of semester how students would respond to our cases, and if they were not effective, we were prepared to oust them. This explains why Pauline and I felt — though we did not get this feedback from students — that lectures and tutorials were not as well integrated as they could have been in 1994. We worked on this issue the following year, but it was not until 1997 when Pauline was in full swing with the CAUT materials at Bunbury that we felt we had achieved the desired degree of integration.

Having decided on the theoretical principles, we then chose vividly presented case histories which included failures. Serendipitously, the inclusion of failures turned out, as we shall see below, to be a powerful learning tool. Ironically, though we did not know it at the time, this was very similar to the highly successful approach taken by James B. Conant when teaching science to non-scientists at Harvard in 1946 (Lee Shulman 1992).

I shall provide one example from Pauline's lecture 8, "Group Processes", to illustrate the procedures. First, I shall demonstrate how the material was presented visually to students on the whiteboard prior to the lecture commencing.

1	*2*	*3*	*4*
Case study details	**Relevant factual details**	**Floating/rotating information**	**Concepts & definitions**
* Residential home in London * Severely emotionally disturbed children * 10 staff (7 male, 3 female) * Staff untrained * Low staff morale * Poor treatment of children * No program plans * Appointment of Australian social worker as coordinator	*Intervention methods:* - casework - group work - community work *Types of groups:* - primary - secondary		*Group definition:* * Number * Contact over time * Contact patterns * Member definition * Behaviour *Concepts:* * Status * Role * Norms * Conformity * Leadership * Collusion * Hidden agenda

Information in three of the four columns (numbers 1, 2 and 4) remained for the entire lecture. This enabled either lecturer or students to refer to this key information at any time. The third column, 'floating/rotating' information, was

blank at the beginning of the lecture, to be filled and removed on demand depending on what came up in the lecture, itself partly a function of student queries.

Pauline began by telling the beginning of the story – and she always did this in gripping style – and soon it was evident that there was much friction in the London group. Indeed, though we did not know it at the time – we were not familiar with case method literature – the most effective cases from a pedagogical perspective were those earmarked by crisis and unresolved tension, situations oriented towards crisis management, problem solving and decision making (Lee Shulman 1992). Pauline would spend the rest of the lecture weaving the key theoretical principles and concepts through the narrative, whose outcome would never be apparent until near the lecture's end, thus sustaining student interest throughout, as evidenced by the previously cited comment: "The only subject that I've sat on the edge of my chair waiting for an ending. To see what happens" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 3). Sometimes she left the outcome – and by outcome I simply mean what she did in that situation at that time – until the next lecture. Interwoven with this narrative would always be one or more significant priming questions of the order, "what do we do next?"

Early in the lecture Pauline did three other things. First, she located, or more accurately, asked students themselves to locate, the intervention method (see column 2). Second, she invited students to decide whether this was a primary or

secondary group (column 2). Third, she invited students to address systematically the criteria for definitions of groups in order to determine if this was a group according to the given definition (column 4).

I shall provide a more specific example of how Pauline was able to illustrate the use of key theoretical concepts via the case. According to all theories of group behaviour, the person or persons who has the most status is in the best position to assume de facto, if not de jure, leadership. Pauline was trained, indeed, she was highly qualified, but she was able to show how status is conferred by the group, whose members themselves decide what they will value. In this instance, Pauline had low ascribed status on three grounds: gender (she was female), age (she was young – 28), ethnicity (she was a foreigner). She was then able to move on and demonstrate how one particular man on the basis of his age and gender and his longevity working in the home, was de facto the group leader and how a peculiar and complex set of factors were at work to undermine her (hence the hidden agendas and collusions). But she did not necessarily impose her explanation on the class, noting it was her explanation and justifying it, but not before inviting alternative student explanations prior to providing hers. Note that Pauline did not attempt to teach all seven key groupwork concepts in the same lecture. This was the second lecture on groups and in the first Pauline had introduced the concepts of status, roles, norms and conformity. But she was able to use this case again to reinforce the previously learned concepts and to build on these by introducing the three new ones of leadership, collusion and hidden agenda.

Note that one of the most interesting side effects of this preliminary orientation to group processes was that the first year student representatives used to hone their observational and group analysis skills at departmental meetings! For professional reasons, my 'lips were always sealed', but I was continually astonished by the acumen of our burgeoning group process analysts.

We also ensured a variety of cases to cover three of social work's primary intervention methods: individual casework, group work, and community work. We drew on our expertise and strengths to determine this. Since Pauline had a strong practice background in casework and group work, she used cases exemplifying these in her teaching. I was not a professional social worker, but a teacher who had worked on education projects within community development contexts. Thus, we resolved that in my lectures I would use community examples for my case studies.

Students seemed to like the variety of cases:

> ...cause really being such a mixture of a course that we are realizing more often that individual casework and group work and community development are all in results; so it's not always just sitting down one-on-one with a person...I think people have already started sitting down in our own group and saying, 'yeah, I don't know how I'd go with that, I think I'd have my own personal problems with that group or that group of people.'
> A race, a culture, whatever, that say, six months before they would not have done.
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 5)

Lee Shulman (1992) points out an interesting difference in legal case methods, which typically ask students to discern underlying principles, and business cases, which are more likely to press students to examine the consequences of each action they propose. "Legal cases focus student attention on judgements and reasons; business cases focus on actions and consequences" (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 29). Our approach in the 1994 WS1002 lecture program was a blend of both, in addition to including a third aspect, student development of theoretical explanations and analyses. Assessment also bears this out, with assignments 1 and 2 focusing on student theory development and analysis, which includes reasons, though not necessarily judgements in the legal case sense, and assignment 3 focusing on actions and consequences (see chapter nine for a more detailed discussion of assessment and learning).

Precedents for Practice

Whether we like it or not, students often treat cases as a model for practice, a precedent for future action. As Lee Shulman says:

> Cases may be crafted and organized as exemplars of particular principles, maxims or moral visions. But once apprehended and interpreted by their readers, cases will and come to exemplify other ideas, attitudes, and practices as well. ...The author's intentions and the reader's constructions are rarely identical.
> (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 6)

Our aim in this subject was *not* to have students treat our cases as prescriptive exemplars for action. But given the above, how could we avoid it? We had two strategies. The first concerned the general nature of the subject itself, the second,

our specific choice of cases. First, the subject. Social work is highly contested. In the most challenging cases there often are no easy solutions. All you can ask of practitioners and students is that they can rationalize and justify their course of action. They can do this by understanding the theories that guide their behaviour, the key assumptions undergirding these theories and the self factors that have shaped them; all the features that are the essence of this subject. This, too, in itself is no guarantee, but at least it is a broad amphitheatre for their practice. Second, and perhaps more vital, is the actual choice of cases. Cases where there are many alternative courses of action, each of which can be rationally articulated and justified, are best. Or even better, cases where the 'solution' seems clear, but where the practitioner acts differently, even appearing to 'fail'. The above case is a prime instance. To many of the students, Pauline should simply have sacked the man who was undermining her and proceeded to reform the group, so adequate programs for the children were conducted. What Pauline in fact did, was ring her mother, cry and follow her mother's advice by resigning and returning to Australia. Students were shocked by this action, but it proved to be an immensely powerful learning tool, as the following extended quote from the taped group discussions indicates:

> Someone brought up the other day what I really admire is Pauline bringing up her failures.
> Yeah (a number of other students agree).
> Everyone commented that on how startling it was to see failure as being discussed and something that is usually not done.
> It was a shock you know. Pauline commented on how often (words are muffled here) the end of a story and the endings aren't very nice...
> But they're very real.
> They are real...

And the thing is having real issues you can always remember them better than you could ... (general agreement) You know that I probably remember all those case studies if I thought about it you know. There are so many links with the theory and that.

Whereas in normal lectures you just forget half of it because it's just straightforward talking about.

And there is confusion over how you can actually relate it back into actual social work and into practical work. They always say that you can use this and you can use this, and then you sort of think. 'how?' 'How would I actually do it?' Using them makes it blatantly clear how all these theories...

Yeah. With the case studies, like, it's not really abstract. A lot of stuff you learn in other subjects, like, it's all you have to do is to take this in and just put it back out in tests and then you just think 'what does that mean?' With this you know, you see the case studies and you think, 'oh yeah'.

It really helps you understand things a lot clearer.

(Transcript 1/6/94b, pp. 4-5)

Cases are often used to model clinical or practice reasoning skills (Barrows 1986; Kleinfeld 1992). We also attempted to do this, but always stressing that any proffered solutions were one among a number in a highly complex, contested and controversial practice arena. The key was *not* the solution itself, but the ability to articulate and justify it by drawing on personal experience, practice experience, relevant theories and research (compare Mullens 1983). Note, however, as Kleinfeld (1992) points out, that case methods invite and legitimize discussion of not just how the teacher performs this process, but also how the teacher constructs the issues. In short, how does the teacher frame and analyse the issues?

Moral or Ethical Principles

We did not consciously set out to convey strong moral or ethical principles, but the barest hint of self-reflection and perusal of the subject outline reveals that we did in fact do so. This occurred at two levels; first, a meta level, and second, a more

concrete, particular level. The meta level pervaded the entire subject and was not particular to case methods. At a meta level we conveyed two powerful messages. First, it is unethical and irresponsible practice not to be able to articulate and justify your practice in terms of theoretical underpinnings. Second, and related to this, it is unethical and irresponsible practice not to be able to understand your personal practice in terms of your own self. At a more concrete level our major moral principle was an anti-discriminatory one, namely, that it is unethical practice to discriminate against another on the basis of ascribed characteristics such as race, culture, age, gender, sexuality and disability. Some of the cases we chose in WS1002, and certainly the later ones in WS1004 would have reflected these principles. However – and this is important – conveying direct moral and ethical principles was not an aim of the subject. The closest we got to this in terms of subject objectives was "to develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment."

Strategies, Dispositions, Reflection and Habits of Mind

As Lee Shulman (1992, p. 7) points out, "in all forms of professional education, there lurks an overarching goal: to teach the neophyte 'to think like' a member of the profession." He further suggests that they are more stylistic than rule-governed, more metacognitive than cognitive and that presenting students with realistic cases and asking them to respond as if they were more mature members of the professional community, provides opportunities for them to 'think like' a professional. Further, he argues, because cases know no disciplinary boundaries,

are messy and rarely admit of a single right answer, they are "ideal for inducting the neophyte into those worlds of thought and work that are themselves characterized by unpredictability, uncertainty, and judgement. ... Thus case methods model modes of thinking in many fields far more accurately than do the simplifications of didactic pedagogies" (p. 8). Kleinfeld (1992, p. 34) endorses this perspective in her work with teacher education students arguing that "stories and cases develop the frame of mind that characterizes a well-trained professional in this field of expertise." This use of case studies became far more pronounced in WS1004 in second semester when we introduced case studies as a form of assessment, and even more so once the CD-Rom material and video vignettes were developed for the 1996 cohort onwards.

But even more importantly, given the goals of this subject, is the use of cases to develop students' reflective skills (see chapter three). Note that we structured assessment requirements around the notion of reflective practice – we certainly did not leave it to chance. I shall discuss assessment in much greater detail in chapter nine. Lee Shulman (1992, p. 8) argues that "because of their inherent complexity and multiple layers, cases lend themselves to programs that value such a view of the purposes of teacher education."

Visions or Images of the Possible

As Lee Shulman (1992, p. 8) notes, most forms of professional preparation are characterized by "a continuing tension between the realities of current practice and

the ideals of desired reforms." He further suggests that "case studies of unusually visionary yet well-grounded exemplars of good practice may present the ideal middle ground between the unfettered fantasies of the dreamers and the unimaginative practices of the uninspired." For us, 'good practice' was always doing what was realistically possible given existing constraints and being able to articulate and justify this practice in a cogent way. This justification would include drawing upon four bases or sources of knowledge: personal knowledge, practice knowledge, theory and research (see Mullens 1983) We were less hard-line than Shulman's notion. While we certainly did present our exemplars of what we thought was good practice at the time, we were always quick to point out that there could be a number of 'good' or best available solutions at any time

Additional Purposes

For us, the single most important additional purpose was the ability of cases to motivate (compare Smith 1985 writing on first year social work at UNSW). This will become clearer in the student data below in the section on case effectiveness. I have already addressed above two previously-cited additional purposes, but I will repeat them here. First, providing specific antidotes to the dangers of overgeneralization from either the learning of principles or from prior cases. Second, serving as the instructional material around which participants can form communities for discussion or discourse. This became particularly prevalent in WS1004.

Although there is a clear link between lecturer's personal and professional experiences and case studies – in this instance, the case studies were part of the lecturer's personal and professional experience – using concrete lecturer experiences and practical examples in lectures is not the same thing as self-consciously using case studies as a pedagogical tool. Indeed, it is theoretically possible to use case study pedagogy without having personally experienced the cases yourself; they could be drawn from the literature or some other sources such as colleagues' experiences. The following quotes demonstrate the importance of personal experience independent of case study pedagogy. They are drawn from my TEVAL respondents, since as I shall discuss below, Pauline's data were more explicit about case study pedagogy. "Background experience made the lectures extremely interesting." "His experience in his different travels and employment help to relate and explain difficulties." "His ability to share his experiences and in doing so reinforce the concepts he was trying to teach." "Extremely good with presentation and life experience examples. These help in understanding the matter under discussion." "...his travels have given him a wide perspective in relevant areas."

Grossman (1992, p. 228) raises an interesting point when she notes that most cases have been represented in narrative form and asks: "Does the narrative structure itself impose a linear quality to a case that may misrepresent the 'buzzing confusion' of classroom life?" This is precisely the issue we attempted to address in the design of the CD-Rom package where the interactive media allowed

students to continually loop back in a cyclical approach. Indeed, it was possible to 'enter' the cases at a number of points in the cycle. But her general point still holds. Far more research is required to determine how the structure and medium of cases impact upon learning. She also observes that we know little about how the criteria of case verisimilitude affects what people learn from cases.

2.2.6 Effectiveness of Case Methods

There is no doubt that the case studies were a singular success, at least from the perspective of students. The following quote is representative of all groups:

> I like the way you guys bring case studies up. That every lecture (yeah, they definitely help – agreement of other students) straight away, every time all the way through, I'm making this point about a theory and here's my case study. I'm showing you so it's bringing it down to earth every time ...
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 3)

At least two aspects of case studies were specifically identified as important: personal experiences of lecturers and discussion of failures (see above). "The personal experiences of the lecturer are really important for examples to reinforce what they're teaching" (Transcript 31/5/94, p. 8). "Experience is a great foundation from which everyone can learn from. I think that any academic without any experience in the real world is disadvantaged because they themselves don't realize the number of factors that will play a part that they don't see in a book or an air conditioned room" (Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 24-25).

This data was reinforced by instant questionnaires throughout the semester and by TEVALs at the end of semester. Almost half the students in Pauline's TEVALs

spontaneously made explicit reference to lecturer's personal experiences (14/51) or use of case studies (10/51) as a teaching strength. In my TEVALs eight of 48 students referred to my personal experiences as a teaching strength. Interestingly, nobody mentioned my case studies. I believe there were two reasons for this. First, Pauline's case studies were either individual casework or group work, mine were community work. People seem to identify more closely with specific individuals rather than larger communities. Second, Pauline's case studies were, I believe, intrinsically more gripping and dramatic. Recall: "The only subject that I've sat on the edge of my chair waiting for an ending. To see what happens" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 3). The following quotations from Pauline's TEVALs demonstrate student belief that the case studies facilitated their learning. "Her ability to present theory clearly and relate it to casework is excellent – it makes learning easier and understanding a natural consequence." "Use of case studies personally experienced by Pauline activates interest and links learning." "Case studies Pauline uses help for greater understanding of subject." Indeed, one student suggested that more case studies should be used "as these make the lesson interesting." "Pauline uses wonderful case studies to make her point." "Her clear 'down to earth' style of teaching using case studies and her own personal experiences." "The ability to relate personal experience to subject matter is an excellent teaching tool which enabled a greater understanding of the literature." I shall add a few other student comments which referred more specifically to lecturer experiences without necessarily mentioning case studies. "Great way of

using her own experiences in relation to the lectures." "Pauline's 'real life'

experiences made the lectures enjoyable while learning about things."

Pauline's group also endorsed this view in their taped group discussion:

> I think that the practical examples used in the lectures, you know, and showing how it illustrated the concepts really helped and how it came about, rather than just presenting it as a theory...
> I found that it worked really well. Not only the ways the theories worked, but then they were always backed up with a practical example and so we didn't have this experience yet perhaps, like field experience, because you provided us with that experience and that is something that can be passed on, an experience that you can draw on later. It gives us a frame of reference to theory, so that it doesn't just go from our head.
> Yes, I found that very helpful too that the theory, the case studies and summing them up in the tutorials all creates a helping approach to understanding.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 3)

> I should say that this subject is very practical. In fact I'm actually doing a B.Psychology where I learn lots of theory which are supposed to be associated with individual as well instead of being – I'm not comparing the two subjects – but I find it very practical. It communicates and we know what it is and it related to us, real case studies, which makes it very interesting and easy to identify too.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 3-4)

My Thursday group provided a slightly different angle on the importance of case

studies, a view which reinforces the importance of lecturer's personal experiences:

> The practical examples, you know, the experiences, like Pauline and yourself, that related back to the theory. That was good. The case studies, like the 28 year old mother with the eight year old daughter. You know those ones? That got a lot more respect from the people, towards youse. So that when you said something, we know that you know what you're talking about.
> Yeah, well this is going to be our career and we want to know about, that's why we're doing the course.
> We want to recognize the practical application.
> Plus I know I like to hear what sorts of things we're going to have to be doing in the future.

Not just, you know, do this and you read this chapter and go off and do it. You know, you can relate like what you've said during the lecture and we can take it away.

...So we don't see you as teaching us from a book, we see you as teaching us from your own personal experience. We see that as one higher.

More credibility cause there's nothing worse than getting someone to teach you to ride a horse and they can't even ride a horse themselves.

(Transcript 2/6/94, p. 18)

Why are cases such a powerful learning tool? Lee Shulman (1992, p. 21) suggests two broad types of reasons. First, epistemologically, "cases may be more congruent with the forms of practical knowledge that undergird the varieties of practice." Second, professionally, "cases may have more immediate credibility and relevance." As the above data illustrates, students were unequivocal in stressing this issue of credibility and relevance. But before we are carried off in a sea of intellectual ecstasy, let me sober you with the following claim:

We do not really have evidence that case-based approaches work any better than lecture or discussion approaches. It seems ironic that after so many years of applications in business, law, and medicine, no comparative evaluation studies exist that confirm the widely held belief that cases are more motivating, promote better transfer from theory to practice, and produce better problem solvers and critical thinkers.

(Lee Shulman 1992, p. 22)

In fact, it would be almost impossible to design a single appropriately 'uncontaminated' study to answer unequivocally the question of whether case studies are more effective than lectures or discussion groups. Note, though, that in WS1002 in 1994 we used cases in conjunction with lectures, Barrows' so-called Lecture-Based Cases. Even in WS1004 where we used Case Method, and later, Reiterative Problem-Based Method, we did so in conjunction with a contiguous lecture program, making it virtually impossible to tease out accurately the

respective contributions of the different pedagogies. Adding to the impossibility of this venture were two other 'facts'. First, although the cohort was largely similar, it was not identical. Second, WS1004 was conducted subsequent to WS1002. It would be impossible to rule out maturation effects. For instance, how much did prior learning in WS1002 contribute to learning in WS1004?

But remember: it was never our purpose to establish that case-method pedagogy was better than any other pedagogy, and given the popularity of student lectures, it was certainly not our intention to denigrate lecture pedagogy. We simply operated by trial and error in a typical action research approach in order to determine what appeared to be working effectively at the time. Because we did teach the subject over a number of years at James Cook University and because Pauline did transport the subject to Bunbury, we have some scope for small-scale generalization, but our intention is not to elevate any pedagogy at the expense of another. Indeed, WS1002 in 1994 demonstrates powerfully how one can combine two pedagogies effectively, lecturing and using cases. This seems to be the position of Shulman when he writes:

> Our challenge as educators will be to devise that judicious blend of the economy of expository teaching with the complementary power of families of well-crafted, compensating cases. In the dialectic between principle and parable, we are likely to discover wisdom.
> (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 28)

By the time the CD-Rom materials were trialled and completed and Pauline had transported the subject to Bunbury as a central plank of an entire degree program, we were beginning to feel that this "judicious blend" was within our grasp.

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Having said all this, what conclusions am I entitled to draw? Let me return to the two questions posed near the chapter's beginning, and let me offer tentative answers based on the data analysis thus far. First, why were students unanimous in asking for longer lectures? Second, and perhaps more importantly, were lectures really an effective learning forum for students? Students wanted longer lectures because they enjoyed them immensely and found them interesting. They enjoyed them for a variety of reasons, including personal qualities of the teachers (enthusiasm, approachability, individual attention and student concern), pedagogical skills (communication, explanation), and use of lecturer's personal experiences and case studies. The data is clear that use of case studies was a significant contributing factor in student enjoyment of lectures and consequently of student desire to see lecture time increased. But it is one thing to enjoy lectures, quite another to learn from them; though again I suspect strong correlation. What can we say about lectures as an effective learning forum? We cannot say that the lectures were more effective than tutorials, the assignments or other student learning experiences outside the environment of this subject. But we can say that students themselves perceived lectures to be an effective learning forum and that this is a perception shared by the two lecturers. We hold this perception because of our experiences in both this subject over a number of years and teaching and lecturing experiences in other subjects.

Despite the limited nature of my claims for case method pedagogy, Lee Shulman (1992) presents some interesting oblique evidence from contemporary psychological theory and research as to why cases might be a powerful learning tool. He discusses three types of evidence: narrative modes of knowing; situated cognition; cognitive flexibility in ill-structured domains.

Narrative Modes of Knowing

Bruner (1986; 1990) suggests there are primarily two ways of knowing, the paradigmatic and the narrative. The former is usually associated with scientific knowing. It is analytic, general, abstract, impersonal and decontextualized. "To know paradigmatically is to know in general, to know quite independent of individual knowers and particular contexts. Boyle's law, reinforcement theory, and the principles of supply and demand are all paradigmatic forms of knowledge" (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 22). Note the implied dualism between knower and known. Narrative modes are specific, local, personal, and contextualized. Verisimilitude rather than validity is the primary criterion. Does it ring true? Notice the epistemological and ontological bedrock lurking beneath these notions. Paradigmatically, it represents the transition referred to in chapter two from the 'spectator' theory of philosophy – a hallmark of positivism and its empiricist predecessors – to a view which stresses knowledge acquisition and development as an active enterprise, a social practice mediated by language in which knower and known are in dialectical relationship.

Until the 1980s, the psychology of learning and cognition focused on paradigmatic

learning. However, much recent research (e.g. Bruner 1986; Coles 1989) suggests

that stories appear to lodge in memory more easily, and that many of our

'performances' are readily organized via scripts and story grammars. As Lee

Shulman (1992, p. 23) says, "cases engage our attention, lodge in our memory, and

capture our commitment." The following quote from the end of semester taped

group discussions captures this poignantly:

> And the thing is having real issues you can always remember them better than
> you could ... (general-agreement). You know that I probably remember all
> those case studies if I thought about it you know. There are so many links with
> the theory and that.
> Whereas in normal lectures you just forget half of it because it's just
> straightforward talking about.
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, pp. 4-5)

Situated Cognition

Situated cognition refers to circumstances where the contextualization of

performance occupies a pivotal role. In the 1980s anthropology, the intellectual

bastion for 'story data', exerted a key influence on psychological theorizing about

learning. "People who looked dumb on tests or in the laboratory frequently looked

quite smart *on comparable tasks* when observed in situations with which they were

familiar" (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 24). It seemed 'natural settings' were more

conducive to performance. "Many tasks individuals could not perform in general,

they could perform readily in particular settings. Many things they could not

perform alone, they could perform in collaboration with others" (Lee Shulman

1992, p. 24). That such discoveries should have emerged as epiphanic moments

for psychologists in the 1980s is possibly a more accurate reflection on the

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retarded growth of the discipline than on any of the 'subjects' they were studying. It says just as much about socialization of psychologists as it does about socialization practices anywhere in the world. Be that as it may, we now had theoretical and empirical support for the importance of situated cognition from the chief powerbrokers in the study of learning, psychologists. The research indicated that learning was much more situation-specific than previously imagined (see Lee Shulman 1992, p. 24 for examples). The significance of this research for case methods is that specificity and localism of cases, far from being problematic for learning, may actually facilitate learning.

> While principles may be powerful in their efficiency and economy of representation, learners may find it far easier to remember and use ideas that are located in the narrative form of cases. Moreover, cases may reduce the problems of transfer because they simulate the way in which the most effective forms of learning are situated in specific contexts and circumstances.
> (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 24)

The above quoted student transcript data does much to support this claim.

Bruner (1986) and Coles (1989) provide evidence of the power of stories which remain in memory, they suggest, in a way that decontextualized information may not. But as Grossman (1992) so trenchantly points out, what do people remember most about cases? Perhaps students take away a clutter of specific gritty details which do little to satisfy the objectives of this subject. This is another of my attempts at disconfirmation and I shall revisit the theme in chapter nine on assessment when I review some of the major *outcome* data for this study.

Cognitive Flexibility in Ill-Structured Domains

Ill-structured domains are typical of most professions, including both social work and education. This simply means that there do not exist clearly prescribed formulas and recipes for practice. Practice is conducted on uncertain, ambiguous and contested territory. Contrast this situation with mathematics and physics, well-structured domains. A new strand of work emerging in psychology in the last decade is examining the role of cases in facilitating learners to cope with the judgemental complexities of ill-structured domains of knowledge and performance.

> The best way to learn and instruct in order to attain the goal of cognitive flexibility in knowledge representation for future application is by a method of case-based presentations which treats a content domain as a landscape that is explored by 'criss-crossing' it in many directions, by re-examining each case 'site' in the varying contexts of different neighbouring cases, and by using a variety of abstract dimensions for comparing cases.
> (Spiro, Vispoel, Schmitz, Samarapungavan and Boerger 1987, p. 178)

Spiro and colleagues effectively argue that knowledge of ill-structured domains is stored in cases. Lee Shulman (1992) points out that Spiro reached these conclusions after several years studying a problem of teaching and learning in a complex setting of medical school courses in physiology. Spiro and his colleagues noticed pervasive misconceptions among excellent students, misconceptions which they seemingly did not hold at course commencement. The study of misconceptions has become a central focus of research on cognition due to recognition of the pervasive influence of prior knowledge on learning and thinking. "The manner in which prior understandings serve to frame, organize and scaffold future learning is undeniable. The message of a constructivist social

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science is consistent and clear" (p. 25). Again, note the clear links with my discussion of knowledge in chapter two.

However, closer scrutiny revealed that Spiro's medical students' problems were *pedagogenic* – they were created by the instruction rather than predating it. "More specifically, the misconceptions appeared traceable to the power of initial analogies, metaphors, examples or cases used by the teachers to introduce and frame the new topics in the course. Since all analogies, like all cases, breed distortion when overgeneralized, these organizing analogies had apparently overwhelmed the expositions and fine-tunings that succeeded them" (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 25). Spiro's insight was "that the problem lay not in the distortive power of analogies and cases, but in a pedagogy that permitted single representations to remain unchallenged" (pp. 25-26). Spiro's solution was methods of multiple representations and multiple cases. Again, we were not familiar with Spiro's work prior to or even during our study, but we certainly operated according to principles of which he might have approved. As noted above, we were meticulous about the notion of multiple representations – the subject was prefaced on this very notion. Perusal of subject objectives reveals how seriously we took this idea (e.g. "social construction of knowledge" – objective 1; "socially contested meaning" – objective 2 (added in 1995); "role of self" – objective 2 in 1994; "critical awareness of self" – objective 4 in 1994; "alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting" – objective 5 in 1994). We modelled this behaviour ourselves – and this was not just our perception. Unsolicited, Neal Sellars'

independent evaluation referred to the following: "Mr Ovington personalised the material presented by drawing on his own experience and sharing his views as one of a possible number of views. This modelling for students of openness and self-awareness by a lecturer I regard as a powerful teaching technique. It reflects closely some of the objectives in this subject..." (Sellars 1996, p. 3). Further, when we developed the cases for the CAUT grant, this consideration was uppermost in our mind. I shall illustrate this more specifically. First, the videotaped vignettes were open-ended interactions, ambiguous even, in order to stimulate theorizing and discussion. I shall discuss this in more detail in chapter nine. Second, the five case studies on CD-Rom were highly problematic and non-prescriptive, leaving multiple defendable options open. Our primary purpose was to develop critical theoretical thinking skills, not provide case exemplars (see above). In this respect, we used cases quite differently from most uses reported in the literature.

Kleinfeld (1992), writing in the area of teacher education, provides some evidence for the beneficial use of cases, claiming five potential advantages. First, vicarious experience with typical problematic practice situations. Note the student comment above: "so we didn't have this experience yet perhaps, like field experience, because you provided us with that experience and that is something that can be passed on, an experience that you can draw on later. It gives us a frame of reference to theory, so that it doesn't just go from our head" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p.

3). Kleinfeld adds that this extends to preparing students emotionally for an unjust world; though note Wilson's 1992 caveat that cases are *not* a substitute for field experience. Second, cases are a model of how an expert practitioner goes about framing and constructing practice problems (compare Schön's work, and Argyris' work). Third, they are a model of how a sophisticated practitioner inquires about and reflects on such problems. Schön also emphasizes this, as he does the fourth, a stock of practice strategies for use in analogous problem situations; though note my previous caveats about 'exemplars'. Fifth, cases present a sense that practice is an inherently ambiguous activity requiring constant reflection. This was a trademark of the entire subject.

Pauline probed her group about the relative efficacy of breadth and depth in case studies. She used a different case each week to illustrate the variety of practice situations, whereas for the final sequence of lectures I used the same setting and community of people, but focused on different aspects of the community's issues in each week. The response was enlightening:

> I greatly enjoyed the shared experience, the variety, and like I said, when Gary the second time, when you brought up the same story, I thought, 'oh, what a cop out. He'd just taken the easy way out for himself', or something like that... The third time he brought it out I really appreciated the fact that I didn't have a lot of background to pick up at the same time. Your different stories were just as good. You can also express the background very quickly without wasting a lot of time on the story, you know we were doing more on thinking. I was trying to be complimentary to both styles...
> I like the more individual ones that you did and like William I liked Gary's. Where I saw a difference with Gary's was it showed you a progression within the one community – how solving one problem doesn't mean solving the lives, that life is ongoing with its problems, with good things and bad things, and it also showed that there's not always answers because we really look for the clearcut, don't we?

It challenged me. And that's what I found so fantastic too and because I think part of me always realized from those talks, you know, very black and white, but that's not what life's all about. Particularly as you get older and I came to think, you know lecturers forget that. I found an immediate rapport here and it sort of really helps you to sort of...If you remember case studies are often better than the theory, but then you link that with the theory.
(Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 23-24)

This quotation provides support for a number of issues discussed already and reinforces Kleinfeld's (1992) fifth advantage of cases above: that they present a sense that practice is an inherently ambiguous activity requiring constant reflection.

During week 2 of WS1002 in 1995 on the basis of student feedback, I raised the issue with Pauline of integrating the case studies from lectures into the tutorial program. We did refer to them at times, particularly in response to student queries, but basically, we had used the case studies as a teaching tool in the lectures during 1994, while in the tutorials we mainly used students' own 'cases' or theories from assessment requirements in order to direct learning. I had a twofold rationale for integrating them into tutorials. First, some cases were quite traumatic and required debriefing. Second, it provided a further tool for linking theory and practice. As a result, we took swift action and integrated the case study from the week 2 lecture into the second week of tutorials (which occurred in week 3). However, I still felt by the end of WS1002 in 1995 that we were yet to achieve the most effective integration between lectures and tutorials via case study pedagogy. This scale of integration eluded us until the development and use of the CD-Rom case studies,

beginning in 1996. I shall refer to this issue again in the next chapter on the social

context of learning and in greater detail in chapter nine on assessment.

Grossman makes a poignant point when she writes:

> What makes a case effective pedagogically depends to a large extent upon
> what we mean by learning from a case. As we advocate the use of case
> methods, we must come to understand the nature of learning from cases and
> how this learning is distinguished from what [practitioners] learn from other
> forms of...education.
> (Grossman 1992, p. 231)

Grossman's (1992, p. 232) question is: "When we talk about learning from cases,

are we talking about learning particular content differently or learning a different

way of thinking about [practice]?" Perusal of previous chapters, and the above

data and its analysis, should indicate that in WS1002 we were quite clear that the

latter was our primary aim. Recall: our overall general purpose was to have

students critically reflect on practice. As Grossman notes, the issue of learning

from cases is tied closely to purposes for using cases in the first place. My

previous discussion also indicates that we had a number of more specific purposes

and we chose our cases accordingly. Often, our primary purpose was to illustrate a

particular concept and our data indicates that students felt we were extremely

effective in this endeavour. Student 'outcome' data – the three assignments – also

indicated considerable success in this venture. A second purpose noted above was

to help develop a vicarious understanding of the inherent dilemmas of practice.

Again, our data indicates considerable, though by no means, definitive success. A

third purpose – and a major one – was to develop ways to analyse and reflect upon

theory development. Again, our data reveals significant success. But the question must remain – and we cannot answer it definitively from our research – would student learning have been more effective, as evinced in student assignments, had we not used cases for the above purposes? Comparing student efforts with Open Learning students pursuing the same subject at the same time (see chapter nine for comparative data), while suggestive, can never be definitive, since it is a different cohort and use of cases was one of many different variables for the two groups.

Grossman (1992, p. 237) does see enormous potential for case methods – they can represent the "messy world of practice", they can "stimulate problem solving in a realm in which neither the problem nor the solution is clear." But, she urges, before this potential can be reached "the development of case methods…must be accompanied by a research agenda that seeks to illuminate what prospective teachers actually learn, and do not learn, from different genres of cases and the instructional methods that best support this learning." Our research cannot answer such fine-grained questions. She further suggests that such research would benefit from drawing upon a diverse range of fields including cognitive psychology, cognitive anthropology, literary studies and Biblical hermeneutics as all these fields address the issue of learning from text.

2.2.7 *Disadvantages of Cases and Case Methods*

Lee Shulman (1992) outlines five potential disadvantages of case methods. I want to examine these briefly in the light of our experiences and data.

First, cases are *expensive* and *time consuming* to produce and demanding to field test. The way we initially used cases in WS1002 and WS1004 in 1994 this was not the case. They did require some additional thought and lecture preparation time, but Pauline and I tended to revise our lectures every year anyway, so additional input was minimal at this stage. Extra cost was non-existent. For WS1004 and the CD-Rom package there is no question that costs and time increased astronomically. However, student data indicates that even limited use of cases in terms of vignettes and/or lecturer's personal and professional experiences are important aids to learning. This is particularly the case with practice professions like social work.

Second, cases are *difficult to teach* well. Especially when paired with Socratic teaching, they require well-trained, gifted teachers who are willing to invest longer periods of preparation than is typical for other methods. Grant (1992) believes that cases can potentially make a significant contribution to effective pedagogy, but cautions about the difficulty in incorporating cases effectively. I am willing to concede that Pauline and I were not ordinary university teachers. Pauline's two Teaching Excellence Awards and my own, awards given for "sustained excellence", would indicate this not to be the case. Further, we were passionate about our teaching and spent hours each week discussing the nuances of teaching and learning. Recall, I began my doctoral thesis in another area, cross-cultural education, with another supervisor, but as time marched on I realized I would

never complete such a thesis in the James Cook University setting at this time because my commitment to teaching meant I always placed student needs before my own research ones. The development of the CD-Rom materials went some way to alleviating this problem, since their open-ended nature meant students could use them in self-directed learning. But I must confess, the issue of teacher quality and commitment was always a niggling concern. For me, it applied not just to the specific area of case method pedagogy, but indeed, the entire subject. I recognized this was not a subject that was easily transportable to other hands.

Third, cases are very *inefficient*; very little material is covered in rather long periods of time. Lee Shulman (1992) points out that even if we argue content is far less important than process, we must attain a judicious blend of the two, and that cases make this hard to accomplish. In our situation – at least in 1994 – we found this not to be problematic, chiefly because we did not rely solely on case methods; they were an adjunct, one of a number of methods we employed.

Fourth, cases are *episodic, discontinuous, hard to structure and organize into larger wholes* in the minds of students. "Learning through cases, therefore, could blind the learner to critical generalizations and principles because the particularities of the narrative overwhelm the general conceptions" (Lee Shulman 1992, p. 27). This was not problematic for WS1002 since the entire nature of the subject was premised on metacognitive principles, stoutly reinforced by assessment (see chapter nine). The prime function of cases in WS1002 was to

facilitate student learning of theory development and critical analysis of developed theories.

Fifth, cases may be susceptible to *overgeneralization*. A single case may be so powerful that its apparent message is transformed into a rigid maxim by the learner. Again, for similar reasons noted in the previous paragraph, this did not appear to be a major problem in WS1002.

2.3   Case Studies and Critical Reflection: a Summary

In WS1002 during 1994 we used Lecture-Based Cases as a tool for getting students to critically reflect on practice in the sense of general professional purpose or intention. Despite the problems with using cases and the many unanswered questions, the data indicates that students were largely successful in critically reflecting on practice and that students themselves perceived the use of case studies to be an important part of this process. But Lecture-Based Cases were simply part of a larger learning package. I now want to look at other pedagogies and resources used in this package.

III.   OTHER PEDAGOGIES AND RESOURCES

I want to conclude this chapter by examining the role of other pedagogies and resources identified by students as contributing to, or hindering, effective learning. One thing we attempted to do in this subject was to provide as great a range of learning media as possible. I shall begin with face-to-face strategies – first,

pedagogies used in tutorials: 'experientials' in tutorials 5 to 8 (weeks 6 to 9); and audiovisual materials used in tutorials 9 to 11 (weeks 10 to 12). Note that discussion of using assessment requirements to steer student learning in tutorials 1 to 4 during weeks 2 to 5 will be deferred until chapter nine. The second face-to-face strategy I discuss is consultation sessions. I finish with 'non-face-to-face' resources: videotapes of lectures for student borrowing, and the Open Learning modules.

3.1 Tutorials

3.1.1 Experientials

As noted previously in chapter five, we used a variety of experientials, particularly role plays and structured observation exercises during the tutorial sessions in weeks 6 to 9. These were regarded as effective pedagogy by students. Many students drew attention to this feature in instant questionnaires for tutorials. In some sessions most of the group commented. Further, extremely few students identified difficulties in understanding during these sessions. Here follows some sample comments, most of which appear in response to the question , "I found the teaching...": "Role play was a good way to show status, roles and norms." "A wonderful example of points being explained." "Very easy to understand! Extremely interesting way of explaining groups." "Great, the group project made it easy to understand these concepts." "Good, and these plays are good for getting a better understanding of the topic." "Really interesting – role play made the session different in a fun way." "Very 'hands on' – really good how everyone was

included in a situation – made discussion easier." "Easy to follow role play. Better than book learning." "Useful tool." "Enjoyed the role playing." "Role playing is fun learning method – covered lots of information and ideas in this format." "Fun – easy learning material – practical work is great." "The role play is good format – appreciated the framework to analyse the observation." "The role play worked quite well again today and illustrated the points made in the lecture etc. very well." "Excellent the way everyone can become involved." "Very good. The role play demonstrated/illustrated the theory very well." "Was heaps of fun. Role plays are a great way of breaking down barriers within the class." "Role play was extremely interesting and fun." "The interaction is fun and unconsciously points out factors we would not normally realize." "I learnt a lot from the role play and observation." "Fun – role playing is a good way to reinforce the lesson." "Role play was stimulating." There were two mildly negative comments concerning the role plays and both of these recognized the positive value of them as a learning tool; they were simply a little shy in participating. One person stated unequivocally that they didn't like role plays. No redeeming features were mentioned. Note that the above comments draw attention to two aspects: enjoying learning and the effectiveness of learning.

3.1.2   Audiovisual Materials

As noted in chapter five, we used a 90 minute video, *Joe Leahy's Neighbours*, a documentary on a classic case of cultural misunderstanding, set in the New Guinea Highlands, to integrate the last sequence of lectures on the *Whole Person*. We

divided the video into three 30 minute sessions, one for each of tutorial weeks 10 to 12. Only Pauline's group raised the use of videos in the taped group discussions and mostly in a negative light. The major problem seemed to be the length, despite our restricting them to 30 minutes per session. One student suggested using them, but making them shorter, while another suggested "or stop them and ask questions about what we've just seen. What's happened, what's the main points?" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 15). It is significant that when we designed the teaching videos for this subject as part of the CAUT grant we canvassed students from this subject for relevant content and restricted the videos to a maximum of 5-10 minutes. Further, partly as a consequence of having developed the CAUT materials, we no longer used the Joe Leahy video from 1996 onwards, and in 1995 we used it only for a 20 minute segment in the tutorial on non-verbal communication.

3.2   Consultation

Both Pauline and I offered four hours of formal consultation each week, the upper limit for most academics (and more than many!). However, this was misleading, since Pauline actually gave students her home phone number during the first lecture and one can only hazard a guess at how many evening hours she devoted to this subject over the semester. Additionally, both of us were prepared to provide additional time slots by appointment, and indeed, as assignment due dates loomed, bookings were heavy. I previously remarked that a student once commented outside my door that it was like a doctor's surgery and another wrote in the open-

ended question concerning teaching strengths in the TEVALs that "because Gary is so popular it is hard to get an opportunity to see him." In fact, the situation got out of hand. I had to limit consultations to 15 minutes, enabling me to fit in eight people for each of the two hour sessions, or 16 students per week (I had approximately 48 in this subject alone). As we approached assignments, students were having to make 'bookings' up to two weeks beforehand to ensure a consultation. This actually led to student complaints in the Tuesday group's taped discussion:

> I think maybe the consultation times for assignments could be a bit longer than 15 minutes, ... so maybe, depends on how much time you've got yourself...
> Especially with the long assignment. ...
> ...The impression I got with the first few lectures you were saying about the consult hours was that we could come without making an appointment to see you, but it got to a stage that even if you went during the consult hours you weren't available anyway and nine times out of ten you had to wait an extra week or at least a few extra days, which as the assignment gets closer is valuable to us because in terms of refining it and typing it up and whatever. (Transcript 31/5/94, pp. 5-6)

My TEVALs reinforced this finding with three students suggesting more consultation time and another asking for fairer access to consultation.

In August – I was by this time teaching an almost identical cohort in *PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice* – both formal and informal student feedback indicated concerns about students who dominated the consultation sessions while others did not "get a go". My policy had been 'first in, best dressed', but student feedback indicated that this policy advantaged those who were precociously organized. I had not discriminated at all on either ability or the

number of visits. Consequently, on 7 August 1994 I announced a new policy: everybody (who desires a consultation session) gets a turn before anybody else is booked up for a second visit.

A consultation session in October to discuss PY1003 issues provided a catalyst for change. One student had a booking to discuss the case for her assignment. She brought a friend who did not have a booking, but who was hoping to be "squeezed in". Simultaneously, another student turned up. All had a class soon, so they suggested we combine the consultation. Spontaneous feedback at the end revealed they had all enjoyed the session immensely and fed off each other's questions. One student mentioned that although she was not doing the same case as the others, there was a lot of relevant overlap. This stirred me to think about the logistics of group consultation sessions for 1995. During the break in the two hour evening Psychology practical, I sought feedback from a group of six to eight students, all of whom had been WS1002 students, about the feasibility of group consultations. Most thought it was a sound idea. My initial idea was to break the students into groups of six, then break each of the two 2 hour consultation sessions into four lots of 30 minutes each, allowing eight group consultation sessions per week, a total of 48 students, approximately the number of WS1002 students I had had in 1994. When I discussed the idea with Pauline she pointed out that time would still be needed for individual sessions, particularly where students had personal issues to discuss. When first semester of 1995 did arrive, I retained the four hours of regular consultation sessions, but added to them another four and a

half hours of group consultations for WS1002. While taxing on both my time and energy, the sessions were an excellent learning forum and provided some superb data on learning difficulties. Pauline and I were also working on the videotapes and CD-Rom for the CAUT grant, and we knew that by first semester in 1996 the CD-Rom case study materials would be available to enable students to pursue the repetitive learning and practice which we had discovered was essential to mastery of understanding theory development and critical theoretical thinking. We would then be able to eliminate the group consultation sessions.

3.3 Videotaped Lectures

In order to provide yet another learning mode for students we made available the videotapes of all lectures. During 1994 the borrowing was handled by the School of Behavioural Science's Audiovisual Department, but in 1995 I handled all borrowing in order to monitor student uptake and to be able to discuss informally with students the value of the videotapes when they returned them. The Thursday group was the only one which voluntarily raised the topic of the videotaped lectures.

> I thought it was a very good idea with the video. I didn't have to use it myself, but you could just tell by the way you had everything set up that youse were doing your best to try and get us all through, giving us every opportunity. I mean, we could even borrow a video of the whole lecture and take it home.
> Oh yeah, it's wonderful the video. I've got a lot out of the videos.
> (Transcript 2/6/94, p. 16)

One perhaps remarkable feature of this borrowing was that almost 100% lecture attendance throughout the entire semester indicated that the videos were being

used as a supplement to the lecture, not as a substitute. Indeed, the following

comments from Pauline's group are extremely telling:

> How many people have missed a lecture? I've missed one and went and got
> the video to watch it. There were 50 people in anthropology out of 200 for the
> last three lectures. That's about right isn't it?
> In social welfare they got exactly the same towards the end. Social welfare
> would have been flat out having 50.
> Sociology, they never get it.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 26)

This lends support to previous discussion about student enjoyment of lectures.

3.4 Open Learning Modules

The Open Learning modules (Ovington 1993a; 1993b; 1993c) began as part of a

different, but related project: materials for the IEW (Indigenous Education

Worker) Program, a joint venture between the James Cook University School of

Education and the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare. These

were mostly, mature-aged indigenous women, many of whom had limited formal

schooling, who were working alongside teachers in indigenous classrooms, but in a

role which combined education with community issues. These women pursued a

BCW (IEW) which included a healthy swag of Education subjects as well as BCW

ones. The former CW1002 was one compulsory subject. Since these women had

limited formal schooling and most of it not very recent, but because they had a vast

and deep reservoir of personal experiences, I wanted to write the theoretical

materials in a way that was accessible to such a group. The same materials were

also used with regular BCW Open Learning students and we decided after their

successful use with these two groups to use them as an additional resource for the

internal students. Indeed, Pauline later used them with a group of Masters students who, likewise, praised their utility. I was actually a little embarrassed about the materials because they were so basic and written in such simple language. However, their utility was a bonus feature of the subject. I have quoted at length above one student's comments. All four groups, without prompting, raised the issue of their utility in the taped group discussions. Sample comments follow: "It's like a little crutch, a support system" (Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 13). "With a 50 minute lecture if you read the modules then that sort of often helps a lot to follow" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 9). "I was very impressed with the modules because the theories are very deep and compound; they are speaking in regular language and therefore I feel not only are they understood, they also don't miss out on the high level..." (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 2). "Getting Gary's notes out there's a lot when you actually go home and look through it all" (Transcript 2/6/94, p. 8).

> Well I found it helpful to have the Open Learning notes as well.
> Oh yeah. Great (number of students agree).
> (Transcript 2/6/94, p. 5)

This data can be triangulated with the data provided by the library for materials placed on closed reserve, which the Open Learning materials were. In particular, Module 1, the module dealing with theories and theory development, was used extensively throughout the semester. Module 1 was borrowed on 57 occasions which is an approximate average of one borrowing for each student. The data does not specify who precisely borrowed the items, so theoretically a single student could have borrowed the module on 57 occasions, though other data, including the taped group discussions, indicates this to be an extremely unlikely scenario.

Pauline specifically asked her Wednesday group whether they needed the lecture when they already had the modules. A number of students spoke up and felt they still needed the lectures. "Learning experience is not just reading, what we experience in the lecture listening to someone speak is greater than reading" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 9). One student suggested that after some trial and error they preferred to read the modules after the lectures "because I found that where I read the module first I don't seem to take the notes and for some reason for me actually writing the notes puts it into my head. And then reading the module after is what emphasizes, you pick up what you've missed" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 9). This illustrates powerfully two important points about student learning. First, making available a number of learning materials and modes enables students to utilize what best suits them. Second, students may use the same materials in quite different ways.

Another piece of striking evidence for the perceived utility of the modules occurred in 1995 when I was conducting research feedback sessions for the 1994 WS1002 cohort. At the session on 26 May 1995, a number of the group informed me they were still using the modules during first semester of second year. One student described the materials as "priceless".

CONCLUSION

The chapter began by emphasizing the importance of three sets of measures for evaluating teaching – *input, process* and *outcome*. It also stressed the central role of the individual teacher across all three types of measures. Data sources for this thesis indicate first, that Pauline and I were considered to be effective teachers by students and colleagues, and second, that student outcome data echoed this conclusion. I began by asking two questions: why were we rated so highly by students?; and why were we perceived to be effective?, noting that the key component in determining the effectiveness of a subject and the effectiveness of teaching in a subject is to compare student learning outcomes with subject objectives (a key focus of chapter nine, but also addressed in chapter eight). Next, I reframed the two original questions to read: why have students achieved so well in the subject WS1002? Why are Pauline and I effective teachers?

Before addressing these questions in detail I explained and justified my rationale for organizing data analysis in three chapters dealing respectively with: case-based pedagogy and its role in fostering theory/practice links; the social context of learning and the use of 'self' as a pedagogical tool; and the use of assessment for the dual purposes of navigating and evaluating student learning. This overarching organizational framework, an *a posterior* thematic one, emerged from the data in grounded theory fashion. Subsumed within it were two lower order categories. First, a chronological one, which described the temporal sequence of emerging

interpretations from the major and minor cycles. Second, an *a priori* thematic one where the analytic categories were dictated by WS1002 subject objectives.

I next explored the role of lectures. This issue was stimulated by startling data indicating that a vast majority of students felt the single biggest improvement to the subject would be increasing the length of lectures from one to two hours, though not at the expense of tutorials. I raised two related questions. First, why did students enjoy lectures so much leading them to request more? Second, why did lectures appear to be effective for student learning? A number of reasons emerged covering both input variables (teacher and student characteristics) and process variables related to what 'happened' during lectures. These can be summarized as lecturer personal qualities such as approachability and enthusiasm; individual attention and concern for students; pedagogical skills such as explanation and communication skills; and use of lecturers' personal experience and case studies.

Scrutinizing the data more closely led me to conclude that Pauline and I had different emphases or trademarks. I was more the interactor who used the lecture forum as a giant conversation, prodding and probing students to reflection. Pauline was the supreme raconteur, who used her storytelling skills, drawing upon her personal and professional experiences, often via case studies, to highlight and explain the links between theory and practice in a way readily assimilated by

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students. This led to a more detailed analysis of the role of case studies in our lecture program.

Using Barrow's taxonomy, who classifies use of case studies as a form of problem-based learning, I located our approach in WS1002 during 1994 as Lecture-Based Cases, but noted that our methods were refined and evolved over time to include approaches that were more student-directed such as Case Method in PY1003 and the beginning of WS1004, and Reiterative Problem-Based in the later stages of this subject as well as in the CAUT CD-Rom package. I briefly reviewed the use of case methods during the last 20 years across a diverse range of fields from Medicine, Dentistry and Optometry, through Engineering, Architecture, Law and Management, to Teaching, Nursing and Social Work. The literature indicated variable use from a single subject to an entire degree program. I noted the limited use of case-based approaches in the social work literature, finding only one documented instance where an entire degree program was structured around cases in a problem-based approach. By reviewing the purposes of case methods I demonstrated how we used cases specifically in WS1002.

Data from numerous sources indicated that case studies in particular and lecturer's personal experiences played a key role in fostering students grappling with theory/practice links via a process of critical reflection, though I was careful to point out two limitations to this conclusion. First, we referred only to students' theory/practice efforts during 1994 in WS1002, and to a lesser extent in the second

semester follow-on subjects, WS1004 and PY1003. Claims made about future practice were way beyond the scope of this study. Second, case studies were simply one of a number of strategies, albeit a powerful one, for fostering students' theory/practice grapplings via critical reflection. I closed the chapter by examining the data for these other pedagogies and resources, including the use of experientials and audiovisual materials in tutorials; student consultation sessions; videotaped lectures; and Open Learning modules.

The self is not contained in any moment or place, but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door, which disappears at once.
(Jeannette Winterson 1987, p. 87)

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LEARNING:

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND USE OF SELF

INTRODUCTION

The last chapter was the first of three examining the major data or key findings of

this study. It focused particularly on case-based pedagogy and its role in fostering

critical reflection in students. The notion of critical reflection in the style of

Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection (see chapters two and three) is central

to both the research conducted for this thesis and for the teaching subject WS1002

at the heart of this thesis. I have argued that critical reflection is the lynchpin that

connects theory and practice, and that pivotal to critical reflection is 'self', or in

poststructural terms, 'the subject'. Recall my model from chapter three.

Figure 8.1:
Some Key Theory/Practice Variables in Social Work Education

PRAXIS

Theory   Practice

Critical reflection
SELF

Personal knowledge   *Ideology & Values*
(theories, concepts,
assumptions)
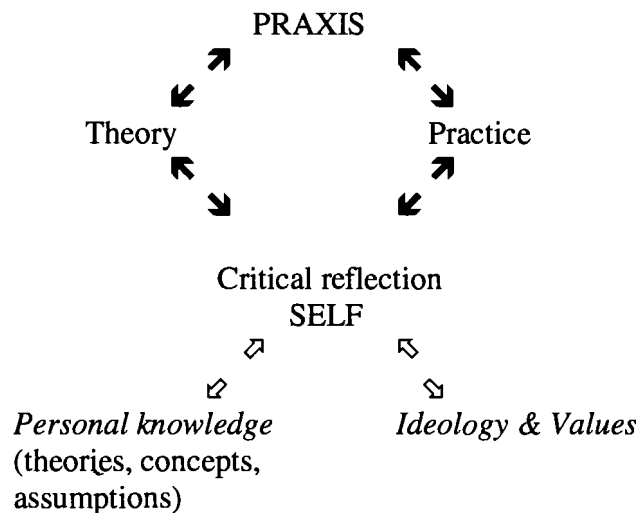
I argued for a *prescriptive* statement about how I believed social work education should occur: the key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with the theory/practice nexus. This entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. Due to the 'objects' of reflection, both types of critical reflection are forms of *critical self-reflection*. Perusal of the description of WS1002 in previous chapters, particularly its assessment requirements, indicates that students cannot actually complete the subject without developing their own theories of specific human interactions, including deconstructing the major concepts, central proposition/s and key assumptions of their theories, and without reflecting critically on the 'role of self' in constructing these theories, including ideologies and values, but also other salient 'structural' factors such as gender, ethnicity and class. But there was a

second rationale for ascribing such a significant role to self. Simply put: start where students are at. It was our perception that if you want students to think critically about the avalanche of theories descending on them during their university days, you need to show them such 'abstractions' are born of flesh and blood like themselves, spawned as it were by the concrete experiences of particular theorists located in time and place. This perception was bolstered by our understanding of the literature (compare Kolb's 1984 experiential learning cycle; though note my criticisms of Kolb's approach in chapter three; Solas 1990; and AVCC 1993).

During Major Cycle 1 of the present action research project the effectiveness of using self as a pedagogical tool to teach students to think critically about action also emerged as a recurring interpretation. Running in tandem with this was related data concerning the social context of learning, particularly the importance of personal relationships between student and teacher. We were already aware of this from the baseline data: students' previous teaching and learning experiences and the identified characteristics for 'good' teachers and 'poor' teachers. Note that notions of self also played an important role in Lecture-Based Cases since these were drawn from Pauline's and my personal and professional experiences. As such, we were modelling the use of self and using self-disclosure to create an environment which students found conducive to learning.

Consequently, this chapter will look more closely at the second broad analytic category which emerged from the data, the social context of learning. There will be two aspects. First, personal relationships, chiefly between students and teachers, but also between students themselves; and second, the use of self as a pedagogical tool.

I.   PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

James Cook University is relatively fortunate: "Students benefit from personalized lecturer/student interaction, the University having the fifth lowest student/teacher ratio nationally at 13.1" (JCU 1994a, p. 4). This jelled with one of Pauline's and my fundamental educational assumptions: learning occurs best in situations where there is a comfortable relationship between teacher and student. Indeed, this notion is vital to Aboriginal education, an important background for me (see, for instance, Harris 1984). The baseline questionnaires which we distributed to students at the subject's beginning endorsed this view (perhaps not a surprising finding for a cohort of social work and community welfare students). We also believed that first year at university is a crucial time and one in which you need to provide extensive student support. This is largely because of the high attrition rates in first year university courses across the country (DEET 1993). Grayson, Clarke and Miller's (1998) recent study confirms student perceptions of lecturers as an important source of help. Patrick and Smart's (1998) equally recent study tapped into student perceptions to identify three critical factors of teacher effectiveness, one of which is *respect for students*. "The teacher who genuinely

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respects students and treats them as equals is positively regarded by tertiary students" (p. 175).

I shall briefly review the baseline data so that it might serve as a benchmark for the rest of the chapter. In terms of the input-process-outcome model of teaching excellence I outlined earlier, the baseline questionnaire provides *input* data concerning desirable teacher characteristics. But note that teacher characteristics are also likely to exert a strong influence on *process* variables, what happens in the classroom. When students were asked to identify *what type of person did you consider was a good teacher...?*, they responded with a rich and varied mix. But the most significant cluster of responses identified the quality of the *personal relationship*, citing aspects such as "treated as an individual", "individual attention", "concern", "treated as an adult", and "treated as an equal". Another significant cluster identified *listening skills*, specifically openness to feedback and other opinions. A third set mentioned *"encouragement"* and "support", particularly encouraging participation, discussion and interaction. A fourth cluster identified *personal qualities*: "open", "approachable", "sense of humour", and "patience"; while a fifth group referred to *"enjoyment in teaching"* and teacher ability to make learning "interesting", "fun", and "enjoyable". Interestingly, only small numbers specifically identified technical pedagogical aspects. In short, almost all respondents identified the significance of factors that relate to the quality of interpersonal relationships.

When students were asked *what type of person did you consider was a poor teacher when you went to school?*, again, variability was huge, yielding rich data. But, not surprisingly, a significant number of respondents answered in binary opposition to the preceding question. So for instance, one cluster identified *lack of "concern"* and "interest" for students, including failure to treat them as individuals, and another set referred to *lack of communication skills* ("openness to student ideas" and "interaction", including "talking down" to or "putting down" students. Disconcertingly, a number of respondents cited "verbal" and "physical abuse". Related to this, a small cluster identified "authoritarian" or "domineering" behaviour.). Many *personal qualities* were identified, including ones which related to communication skills: "cold", "distant', "unapproachable". A significant number mentioned *lack of professional commitment*, teachers who "treated it as a job", "didn't want to be there". A significant cluster referred to "inconsistent *discipline*" and lack of control while a final set of responses identified *pedagogical* issues such as "too much use of notes", "too much lecturing", and "lack of variety in presentation".

One other question from the baseline survey is relevant: *What circumstance, or factors make it difficult or easy for you to learn?* One of the four major clusters identified as a barrier to learning can be described loosely as *self esteem* factors (e.g. "feelings of inadequacy", "worried people are going to be critical or judgemental"). Three major sets of clusters were identified as facilitating learning and one cited a "friendly and supportive atmosphere". Again, the message was

clear: for this cohort of students the quality of interpersonal relationships was regarded as vital.

This is not a surprising finding; at least not for social work students. Solas (1990), working in an Australian context, used Kelly's (1955) repertory grid technique as an alternative to traditional questionnaires for eliciting and evaluating the criteria for effective teaching held by four undergraduate [social work] students, two in 1st year and two in the final 4th year. The significant finding was that "students at both the introductory and graduating levels of the social work course felt that the most important component of overall teaching effectiveness was *the relationship between the educator and themselves*" (p. 149, *my italics*). Petchers and Chow (1988), however, working in an American context, and with much larger numbers, applied factor analytic techniques to student responses to 16 items assessing teaching effectiveness in 66 different social work courses at one university. Three dimensions emerged: instructional merit or skill; evaluation process or feedback; and course value or content. Petchers and Chow noted that the emergence of instructional skill was consistent with factor analytic studies in other higher education settings (Kulik and Kulik 1974; Kulik and McKeachie 1975; Mazer 1977). They also remark, however, of the second factor, evaluation process or feedback, that though items "loading on this factor were restricted to instructor's feedback on assignments, its core component appears to parallel that of Interaction factors which have emerged in other studies (e.g., Instructor/Student Rapport [Finkbeiner, Lathrop and Schuerger 1973]; Instructor-Individual Student

Interaction [Hildebrand, Wilson and Dienst 1971]; Student-Teacher Interaction [Hartley and Hogan 1972]" (Petchers and Chow 1988, p. 58).

Anybody who has ever mastered the techniques of factor analysis – and perhaps a good deal who haven't – knows that factor analysis is like a mince machine: what comes out at the other end depends very much on what was input in the first place. The reason that Petchers and Chow did not 'discover' the importance of interpersonal relationships is revealed in the following – and for me, horrendous conception of teaching and learning: "Factors emerging in these other studies have included the broader notion of rapport in the interaction process which has the attendant risk of involving relational issues falling outside of the course objectives. The narrower notion of Evaluation Process used herein strays less from the central educational goal" (Petchers and Chow 1988, p. 58). It is precisely these sorts of 'technical' and theoretical weaknesses that lead Solas (1990) to advocate the use of techniques like Kelly's repertory grid. It is also a powerful demonstration of the issues I discussed in chapter one about teaching 'quality' or 'effectiveness'. How you define these terms will dictate how you measure them, and your definitions will be anchored in a sea of background epistemological, ontological and educational assumptions. In Petchers and Chow's case teaching and learning is to be a strictly neck up cognitive activity, denying much that is human in us.

In chapter three I discussed my holistic conception of education arguing that self embraces cognitive, affective, social, physical, sexual, ethical and spiritual

dimensions. I further argued that even such seemingly rational/cognitive activities as holding particular theories and critical thinking derive vital input from all these multi-faceted aspects of self. I drew on a number of writers to support such claims, including the work of Stephen Brookfield and David Boud. Chet Meyers (1987, p. 91), likewise, argues that "the force that stimulates and sustains critical thinking is often rooted in personal values and commitments, as well as a need to order one's experience rationally." Indeed, almost the entire experiential learning literature highlights the importance of non-cognitive factors in learning of any kind. But the role of non-cognitive factors even finds a place in the physical sciences, that paragon of the rational. "I never came upon any of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking" (Albert Einstein quoted in Hayward and Cohan 1987, no page numbers). In *Personal Knowledge,* Michael Polanyi (1958, p. 92) argues that "interest, passion, and personal values play a crucial role in development of the theoretical foundations of the physical sciences... ." Polanyi's main argument is that none of us, whether scientist or teacher, can be relieved of "the personal responsibility for our beliefs" by hiding behind the cloak of "objectifiably verifiable criteria of validity" (p. 97). Pre-empting Brookfield (1987) three decades later, Polanyi argues – passionately – that the "development of critical thinking skills is not a dispassionate learning process, in which students need only be shown a new way of perceiving things in order to follow it, but a threatening encounter that challenges one's very 'selfhood'" (Polanyi 1958, p. 97). He also stresses the key role of the teacher. "When teachers model their own values, interests, and critical thinking styles, they give students concrete

alternatives to react to as the students attempt to define their own values and thinking styles" (p. 100). Note Neal Sellars' (1996) previous comment about the powerful influence of teacher modelling as a pedagogical strategy in his evaluation of my teaching.

Kulik and McKeachie (1975) and Marsh and Dunkin (1992), working in a higher education context, report five dimensions of 'excellent' teaching, one of which is Rapport. Jirovec, Ramanathan and Alvarez (1998) report on a huge empirical study that examined teaching evaluations collected from 316 social work courses over a two year period from social work students at a large urban university in the United States. Their study is interesting because it was conducted mindful of previously identified problems in the student evaluation of teaching effectiveness research. Consequently, they examined a number of variables impacting on student evaluations: elective or compulsory subjects, class size, student effort, and teaching skills. They found, in general, that elective social work courses were rated higher than required ones. In terms of the present study, WS1002 was one of three required subjects in first semester (out of four) and one of six required subjects (out of eight) for the whole year. Because it was a required course, this, if anything, should have depressed student ratings. Jirovec and colleagues also note that "previous research, especially in educational settings other than social work, have reported a modest, inverse relationship between class size and perceived teaching effectiveness (Centra 1993; Hepworth and Oviatt 1985; Kulik and McKeachie 1975)" (p. 235). In their study, however, class size was unrelated to

student ratings. This is interesting, since I would suspect that the smaller the class

size, the easier it would be to develop strong interpersonal relationships, provided

the teacher was so disposed and skilled. Jirovec and colleagues' results showed

strong positive relationships between ratings of teacher effectiveness and ratings of

skills reflecting course organization, rapport with students and fair grading. In the

present study, for course organization, the first compulsory TEVAL item is

relevant: "Class sessions were organized to ensure maximum learning". My

respondents rated this item 1.5 compared to the university mean of 2.1 and

Pauline's respondents rated her at 1.1. This was one of my worst ratings and one

of Pauline's better ones (though 54% of my respondents strongly agreed with this

statement). In fact, I suspect this item was measuring something else since I think

Pauline herself would be one of the first to agree that my organizational skills are

second to none. Note again the dimension of rapport that emerges in Jirovec and

colleagues' study. I shall discuss their third item relating to assessment issues in

the next chapter.

One important conclusion that Jirovec and colleagues (1998) drew from their study

was that "standardized course evaluation forms...should be expanded to assess

additional student variables...that are linked to student ratings of teaching

competence" (p. 235). Crawford and Leitmann (1995, p. 6), working in an

Australian social work context, go even further by arguing that their study

"demonstrates that quantitative measurements of teaching quality while providing

a useful overview, do not offer a deeper evaluation that takes into account specific

disciplinary and pedagogical matters operating at the local level. For that open and interactive communication is needed." Note the kinship with the discussion in chapter one where I cited Neumann's (1994, p. 8) argument that "teaching is a highly complex practice comprising both generic and context specific skills and expertise. It is the context specific aspect of teaching that has been largely ignored in the past few decades by researchers and policy makers." I agree wholeheartedly with these positions. It is one of the reasons why the issue of the validity and reliability of student evaluations of teaching effectiveness remains a minor issue in the present study since student evaluations of teaching (TEVALs) was simply one of many data sources used and were triangulated with other sources.

This 'digression' into the higher education and social work literature on student ratings of teaching effectiveness indicates for the most part that issues of rapport or interaction with students is a key ingredient in student perceptions of teacher effectiveness. This supports our original baseline data derived from a questionnaire at the beginning of semester. But what about data derived at the end of semester, *before* student grades are known? (This has been shown to have an impact on ratings – see Jirovec and colleagues 1998). What was emerging about personal relationships and their role in learning as the semester wore on and drew to a close?

In the taped group discussions, a number of students explicitly addressed both issues of personal qualities/ relationships and support for first year students.

I often think that they're thrown at you and you are expected to do things. I find that with the other assignments and I think that we're not given the knowledge or skills so to speak. Your first assignment in your first semester at university, it's real, that's what you do. The help is given, I'm not saying they aren't helping, but still you are expected to be independent and do your own thing. Whereas in this course I find that we were given assistance. At first I was thinking that it was different or it could be easy, but that assistance actually, I think, developed to its full potential. Otherwise we could not have brought out what we have, the best, you know. It kind of brought out the best.
...
I think one of the, it did for me was encouragement. Encouragement is a great gift to have. ... you and Gary remember what it's like to have no knowledge.
(Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 17)

And a little later:

I'd like to say that to our tutes, with Pauline, and even though Pauline's been my tutor all of the time, I've actually got a very similar rapport with Gary – and I've never been to one of Gary's tutes – because he really does make himself very approachable and we know that if we can't get a hold of you, we can go to him and he will certainly help us. That's very important because there are a lot of aspects throughout your first year when you're still learning about things that you're trying to cope with a whole range of things. For instance, you sat in one tute one day and said, 'if you don't understand the theories, we'll go over and over and over it.' And I was really pleased about that because I did not have to understand them totally and I'm still sort of coming to grips with some of it.
You haven't forgotten, you convey, and Gary does too, that you and Gary haven't forgotten what it's like to (muffled voice).
(Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 18)

There is no doubt that one of my 'self factors' was instrumental here. Although this specific incident occurred in 1995, its influence on my teaching and learning ideas was prevalent in 1994. In 1995 I told WS1002 students about my experiences with driving: the mental blocks, the fears, how I had failed the test, not once, but twice now (I passed the third time amid great celebrations from my students!) and the examiner-induced discomfort. I related my experiences because I wanted to highlight the importance of the social context of learning. After my

first failed test, when I turned up to the second test and discovered that the examiner was the same man, I knew I would never be able to pass, although according to my instructor, I had been mastering the intricacies of driving. One of the key discoveries I made, particularly in consultation sessions as I taught WS1002 over the three years, was that many of the major 'learning' issues faced by mature aged women in particular, though not exclusively, were self-esteem ones. These issues were buttressed by previous educational experiences which 'told' them they were 'no good' at theory. I suspect that when you share your 'learning failures' with students it enhances rapport, since students may no longer perceive you as the knowledgeable lecturer sitting astride his pedestal. In fact, it would be very difficult to maintain one's balance on a pedestal after students realized that at 38 years of age you had not managed to accomplish what most people in our society regard as a mere formality.

The following student also speaks of the importance of receiving encouragement, particularly in first year.

> I think that the first year is very crucial because it sort of sets the scene also on how you see yourself according to what we've heard. Symbolic interactionism – and I think too if you start and immediately think, 'oh, I can't do this or it's just too hard', then in the end you end up doing the whole three years like that. But if you needed to get the encouragement and then fine, you can do well, then you think, 'oh gee, I can do this,' and then you immediately get encouraged and motivated, so to me actually how well students do is actually a reflection, a credit to the teacher. It shows a teacher that uses certain language and takes more time, actually it's not a reflection of a lecturer that speaks high falooting language and gets on like a steam train. I think actually the opposite, because a student doesn't understand and to me that is a very poor lecturer and probably would be better in another profession as I've come across many in three different cultures and societies and so it's really encouraged and refreshed because I half way expected that here. But then coming to this

subject I thought, 'Hang on, this is really wonderful because at last people are waking up to this very important fact - what education is really about'.
(Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 22-23)

Quite later in the same transcript another student referred explicitly to the importance of confidence. "You build our confidence up, like you make us feel confident. So does Gary. ... So you and Gary have actually given us confidence, which is often, my confidence has dropped right down, even at times when I'm doing this subject, but you always manage to pull us back up again" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 29).

The Thursday group also discussed similar issues about the personal and social context of learning:

It gives you more rewards too for what we've done like personal rewards in this course.
Well this course is a lot more personal.
It is. Then in the other one, 1001, the sort, I don't think the same sort of satisfaction has come about.
There has been no personal contact in the other subject.
And even though the amount of work that was put into it, it doesn't seem to have been fully appreciated really. I think that in this course here we know we've been appreciated for what we've done. Our interaction and everything has been very personal.
Well with this one we've got to know everyone in our group, whereas in the Anthropology one, I know two people in it out of sixteen people and that's going to turn you off every tutorial. We didn't get to know anyone else. The tutor came and said, 'alright, this is what we're going to be discussing today,' and you put in two cents worth, sit back and that was it. Everyone left. There was no personal contact at all.
Is that really important?
Yeah it is (mass agreement).
It makes it more enjoyable.
It develops you as well.
Oh yeah.
You enjoy it a lot more. Like we'd go to Anthropology tutorials, it was a real, 'oh shit, another Anthropology'.

Cause if you don't want to go, it's just you know...
I like Anthropology, but it was just a strain to have to go through the tutorials.
So there's no bonding.
No.
There's more of a team spirit like when you know everyone and you push each other along.
Yeah.
(Transcript 2/6/94, pp. 8-9)

My Wednesday class felt similarly about the group feeling:

I think, like the size of tutorials is good too, like even if we could get them a bit smaller. Like as you said before, we're like a group now more, you know.
It's a shame. Even though we're going to do the subject next semester, it's a shame that, well it would be nice if some of us could get together in the same group. It would help because we've already broken ground and worked out a few things.
We feel comfortable with each other and...(noise).
(Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 3)

The taped group discussions provide striking evidence for the significance of the social context of learning. TEVALs, likewise, were unequivocal in highlighting this aspect. In the open-ended question related to teaching strengths, more than half my TEVAL respondents referred to my being "approachable" (15) or "friendly" (11). The respective figures for Pauline were also quite high (10 and 7). Add to this the figures for "understanding", "compassion", being "helpful", "encouraging" and "individual attention" and "concern" for students (an additional 18 for me and 12 for Pauline), and you begin to see the key nature of these issues in student eyes. One of my TEVAL items from the optional bank, "The lecturer is approachable", yielded a rating of 1.2 compared to the university average of 1.8. One of my TEVAL respondents stated that "I've never been a part of a course which allowed such an individualistic approach, yet remained clear in its structure

and goals." Similarly, "most importantly his friendliness towards me made it enjoyable and easy to learn." And another. "His open and friendly nature makes the subject more personal and provides a comfortable learning atmosphere."

> His avid interest in each person as an individual. He is approachable, friendly and at no time was I threatened by his 'status' as a teacher. I was a little dubious about entering uni as my recollections of some teachers were those of 'dominant, controlling' people who knew 'everything'. My experience with Gary has made my first semester an enjoyable, educational and stimulating experience. I am disappointed that I will not have him as a lecturer or tutor next semester.

"As a student doing this subject I found it very understanding. I feel that this subject has given me the strength to work harder and carry on with life itself." "He cares for his students and takes a valid concern for their welfare. E.g. understanding, assignment work." Pauline's students were similarly rhapsodic in their praise. "Pauline gets me motivated. I was thinking of dropping out because of another subject. But I have found that Pauline gets me going." TEVAL ratings for the standard bank item, "The lecturer seemed willing to offer individual help" also strongly endorsed the above data with ratings of 1.1 and 1.4 for myself and Pauline respectively compared to the university average of 2.0. We also both chose an optional bank item, "The lecturer is willing to assist me", which is a subtly different statement. My rating was 1.3 and Pauline's 1.5 compared to the university average of 1.8.

But it would be misleading to suggest that both Pauline and I had exemplary relationships with all students. Our aim was not, per se, to develop perfect relationships with all students. Rather, it was to create an environment where

students felt comfortable to contribute their critically informed opinions about issues and for everybody to be adult enough to take constructive criticism 'on the chin'. Indeed, one of the key notions underlying an action research approach is that conflict will arise inevitably, but it is this clash of opinion, this dialectic, which will lead ultimately to 'higher order thinking'. The following example captures the essence of this notion and how I dealt with it. In week 11, I had a student approach me in a consultation session immediately following a class, expressing anger about two incidents. First, she had been speaking to me during the break, another student interrupted and I went off talking to this student. Second, she had tried to speak during the tutorial and I raised my hand to interrupt her. Additionally, she stated, she had become aware of a third matter: I seemed to have granted one student more status within the group, and the rest of the group were aware of this, having discussed the matter.

My responses/explanations were as follows. First, the other student had attempted to see me before the class, I had been too busy and had arranged to see her during the break. So, I had a prior arrangement. The student responded, 'fine, but you could have explained this briefly'. I did a little swallow in my throat (because I knew she was right), reflected for a moment and agreed, yes, it was my fault. I reacted to the other student in 'guilt mode' because she had turned up unannounced, outside consultation hours, the previous week with her sick baby in order to discuss her assignment and I had been unable to see her then either. I expressed this to the student and she seemed happy with my apology and

explanation. Second, during the tutorial in question, I relinquished the reins for 30 minutes, allowing a student to facilitate the session. This was a 'habit' of increased frequency as the semester progressed. The 'arrangement' had been for the students to manage the group themselves. I took a backseat role, not uttering a word and offering only limited, coerced non-verbal behaviour. As I explained to the student, I perceived her attempt to 'invite' me into the discussion that she and another student had launched as an effort to enlist my support to confirm her assertion. I had not wanted to take an active part in the group, least of all in this way. I raised my hand without saying a word in response to her attempt to 'enrol' my support. She did not disagree with me.

The third issue was interesting. I must confess, I felt my heart spear my gullet and felt considerably threatened – a sure sign her observation was astute and accurate. I reflected for a moment and hoped my face wasn't too flooded with blood before responding. Yes, I agreed, I had unconsciously granted this student more status within the group. The reason? Probably my insecurity. During the first class of introductions it became apparent that this student had a wealth of personal and professional experience and I, quite frankly, felt a trifle fraudulent. My gut reaction had been: "My God! What am I doing here?" The student was more than willing to accept this explanation and recognized that I was just as human, just as foibled as they were, but what was important, for critically reflective practice, was that we could look at these things, take them on board, and attempt appropriate behaviour change as a result.

Reflection after the student left led to my feeling extremely pleased with this particular student's learning. First, she had a clear grasp of the concept of status in group behaviour (wonderful applied learning), and second, she had felt sufficiently comfortable to straddle the lecturer/student divide by broaching what, for most students, would have been an intimidating subject. And further, I had learned something important in the process. So, critical reflection isn't all a one way process: students can be instrumental in inciting teachers to some painful reflective practice.

In the 1995 class I had a fascinating incident which confirmed poignantly that the path to sound relationships is paved with thistles. A mature aged female student (who was older than me) was in a consultation session with another female student. During the session, which was discussion of assignment 2, she told me that her initial gut reaction after reading my overall comments for assignment 1 was: "you supercilious prick." I was clearly alarmed – not because she had said this, but because she had felt it – and we talked this through (which she seemed happy to do in front of the other student). She reassured me that obviously this was not what she felt now, otherwise she wouldn't be telling me. In fact, because her interpretation of the written comment had not matched her experiences of me in vivo, she felt she could take up the issue, albeit many weeks down the track. Rather than taking this episode completely negatively, my critical reflection led me to distil some gleaming positives. How fantastic that a student could actually tell

you in a non-threatening, matter-of-fact way that they thought you were a "supercilious prick"! The following day the same student returned with a gift: a beautifully wrapped single red rose.

Continuing in similar vein, some group dynamic problems emerged during second semester. It was partly because I had a sound relationship with students and partly because I was the Staff/Student Liaison Officer that I came to hear about matters that might otherwise have escaped my attention. One student – and she was not the first – told me in early September that competitiveness in the student body among certain female students had reached the point where for group assignments some students were asking others what their grades were before allowing them to join their group. This matter was also taken up with me on October 14 by another staff member who expressed anger about the competitiveness of the same group of female students who were disputing her grading for one of their group assignments. On October 18 yet another student approached me stating she had had a 'gutful' of the group dynamics of a small group of female students, claiming that everyone was overreacting and that there was lots of professional jealousy. She pinpointed the problem as competitiveness for grades. This raises all sorts of issues about grading, assessment and its relationship to psychological factors such as self-esteem. I shall return to this issue in the next chapter. Suffice to say for now that I suspect that broader social and institutional factors account for this state of affairs and not the teaching and learning of WS1002. Further, this sort of behaviour demonstrates powerfully that although learning to critically reflect on

our behaviour may be a *necessary* condition for effective practice, it is not a *sufficient* condition. Compare Barnett's (1997) argument that critical reflection is similarly a necessary, but not sufficient condition of *critical being*.

One of the most pleasant aspects of teaching the WS1002 1994 cohort was that in 1995, although I was no longer teaching any of this group, students would often drop in for a chat. After I departed for Vietnam, a number of students wrote to me (and continued to do so) and when I returned to Townsville for a two week visit in November/December 1996, despite the fact that semester had finished and many students had left town, a dozen students managed to congregate for a small party at Pauline's house, a party which doubled up as a 'welcome back' for me and a 'farewell' for Pauline, who was poised to take up a Head of School position as an Associate Professor of Social Work at Bunbury campus of Edith Cowan University. It is now almost four years since the 1994 WS1002 finished and a small number of the cohort are still in touch with me. Two have rung me in recent months to tell me about the jobs they had just got.

Taken together, the above input, process and outcome data, from the baseline questionnaires, student consultations, classroom observations, taped group discussions and TEVALs indicate that the social context of learning, particularly the interaction and personal relationships between teacher and students, is a key ingredient of effective learning. The literature largely confirms this assessment. In the next section I want to take a closer look at the role of self in learning. I shall

focus on three aspects. First, I want to revisit, briefly, the self as a *theoretical* entity. Second, I also want to revisit ethical issues, specifically the question of the *ethics* of using self as a pedagogical tool. Finally, I want to examine student outcome data (student assignments) to assess how successfully students achieved WS1002 subject objectives relating to the notion of 'self'.

II.   THE ROLE OF SELF AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

Almost all the subject's objectives relate to this. Two address the issue explicitly. The second learning goal states:

> *To develop an awareness of the role of 'self' in shaping how we perceive, interpret and act upon the environment.*

The fourth learning goal states:

> *To develop a critical awareness of 'self'.*

A third learning goal, number five, "*to develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment*", is related by implication, since one cannot logically satisfy this objective without first acknowledging and understanding one's own perspective; that is, without having developed a critical awareness of self. Additionally, self is clearly implicated in the first and sixth learning goals: "to develop an awareness and understanding of the social construction of knowledge"; and "to have an enjoyable thinking/learning experience". These objectives emerge in part 3 of both assignments 1 and 2, worth 40%: "What factors about you (background, culture, gender, age, beliefs, ideas, experiences) have led you to develop the theory you have?" In short, self is a

fundamental driving force of the subject WS1002. Before tackling data shedding light on these objectives, I want to respond briefly to the theoretical and ethical dilemmas which occur in a teaching subject in which 'self' assumes a pivotal role.

2.1   Self as a Theoretical Entity

I discussed issues relating to self in some detail in chapters two and three. In chapter two on knowledge one of my three focus questions concerned the relationship between knower (the knowing self) and known. In chapter three I particularly looked at the role of self in critical reflection. Here I simply wish to review my position from a philosophical perspective, but also to locate my notion of self within contemporary theorizing in the field of psychology. I consider this important since the self is the major unit of analysis in the discipline. "In spite of the many disagreements that continue to plague the field, the majority of psychologists appear to have reached a consensus that the individual person – what I term 'psychology's subject' – is the proper object for psychological enquiry" (Sampson 1989, p. 1).

My previous discussion railed against the foundational, essentialist subject, the enduring 'human nature' which provided the channel for certain knowledge of the 'outside' world. This self also had a teleological bent insofar as the human quest for growth and self-fulfilment was motivated by the search for this 'ideal' self. Habermas' ideal self, for instance, was a fully rational autonomous being who operated according to notions of the 'ideal speech situation'. I have already noted

Foucault's disdain for the 'hermeneutic confessional' as a modern form of power whose norms are to be questioned and if necessary, resisted. This is because underlying this notion is the foundational, essentialist subject, the aim of such practice being to discover our 'true selves'. For Foucault, the aim "is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are" (Foucault 1983, p. 216). We require self-creation. I argued that the kind of specifically philosophical reflection or critical activity that fostered this process of individual and cultural self-creation could not be anchored in a foundational metaphysics. Rather, we needed to draw on a notion like Foucault's concept of *ethico-critical reflection*. It is ethical – and I shall return to this briefly in the next section – because its fuel is 'opening up the space for the other'. It is critical because it is constantly vigilant that "what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory" is perhaps "singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints" (Foucault 1984b, p. 45). In other words, reflection is mobilized in the task of excavating subjugated knowledges, for re-creating both self and culture. Foucault's form of reflection, which he initially called 'genealogy' (Foucault 1984a) and later, the 'historical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault 1984b), is essentially a historical form of reflection, one which interrogates the present. It is a form of criticism "that will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events" (Foucault 1984b, p. 46).

This is precisely the theoretical position taken in both the subject WS1002 and in this research thesis. When we ask students in part 3 of assignments 1 and 2, *"What factors about you (background, culture, gender, age, beliefs, ideas, experiences) have led you to develop the theory you have?"*, we are not asking them to 'discover' their real, essential selves so that, equipped with this armoury they might then tackle the complex world of social work. We are expecting them to discover that knowledge is contested because human beings, the vessels through which knowledge flows and is constantly transformed, are social beings who are produced, reproduced and transformed by the *Zeitgeist* in which they live and by encounter with 'the other', whether this other be a subatomic particle or another human being. When Pauline and I wrote the six video vignettes as part of the CAUT project, we first canvassed the 1994 cohort for relevant topics, and second, wrote deliberately ambiguous interactions. This gave ample scope for contested 'explanations'. The videos were completed in 1995 and Pauline first used them in WS1002 in the 1996 tutorials. Pauline also trialled using the video interactions as the basis for assessment. Recall that previously students were free to choose their own interaction to develop their theory. One interesting consequence of using a 'standardized' set of interactions (there was still a choice of six) was that it was easier to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of knowledge and the role of selves in this process. This was because the same video interaction would lead different students to develop vastly different theories to explain what was happening even when they chose to focus on similar aspects of the interaction. "How could this happen?", one might probe the students. You have been

presented with identical 'information' and you develop different, even contradictory theories to explain it. From here it is only a small step for students to recognize the vital role of self in theory development and another step removed comes the corollary that self cannot possibly be a universally given, an essentialist, logically necessary entity. Of course this is neither readily grasped nor accepted, even if it is, by very many students. But the 'fact' that we cannot agree on such a 'simple' matter as 'human nature' – such 'common wisdom' at that – tends to lend conviction to our argument (as we might gleefully point out).

Seyla Benhabib (1992), in her highly stimulating collection of essays, *Situating the Self*, attempts to reform the project of modernity by using the intellectual, moral and political resources of modernity. "A central premise of this book is that the crucial insights of the universalist tradition in practical philosophy can be reformulated today without committing oneself to the metaphysical illusions of the Enlightenment" (Benhabib 1992a, p. 4). One of these illusions is that of a "disembedded and disembodied subject" (p. 4). Benhabib outlines what she perceives to be the two necessary steps to reform the project of modernity, "to move beyond the metaphysical assumptions of Enlightenment universalism" (p. 6). The first is a "shift from a substantialistic to a discursive, communicative concept of rationality" (p. 5). This entails a reworking of Habermas' ideas of communicative rationality. The second relates specifically to the 'self'. "The identity of the self is constituted by a narrative unity, which integrates what 'I' can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of 'me', interpret my acts

and intentions to mean, wish for me in the future, etc." (p. 5). She refers to this as

" 'the narrative structure of actions and personal identity'" (p. 5).

> If reason is the contingent achievement of linguistically socialized, finite and
> embodied creatures, then the legislative claims of practical reason must also be
> understood in interactionist terms. We may mark a shift here from *legislative
> to interactive rationality*.
> (Benhabib 1992a, pp. 5-6)

Although one could say that Benhabib springs from the loins of the critical tradition, her notion of 'situated criticism' is very similar to the perspectival epistemology for which I have argued. I sense that Benhabib and I are talking the same language. She won't quite let me pull the rug of universalism from under her feet, but she's only got one toe on it now and sees its frayed edges are sadly in need of stitching.

Usher and colleagues (1997), in a trenchant analysis of the role of conceptions of self and experience in adult learning, observe the reification of experience as the kernel of knowledge production and acquisition.

> One consequent danger is that experience comes to be taken as foundational
> and authoritative and hence we stop asking questions about it. ... Experience
> seems to be the incontestable evidence, the secure originary point, with the
> clear implication that explanation must be focused on what is learnt from
> experience rather than experience itself. Yet, it could be argued...that
> experience is not unproblematic that, in fact, rather than the origin of
> explanation, it is precisely that which is in need of explanation.
>
> In other words, the very *use* of experience presupposes a prior *theory* or
> epistemology of experience.
> (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997, p. 100)

The major educational implication that Usher and colleagues draw from their analysis is "that educators need to help students to problematize and interrogate experience as much as to access and validate it" (p. 118). In WS1002 we do take students' experiences as the launching pad for their theories of the world, but this experience and the selves who 'constitute' this experience and are constituted by it are not taken as unproblematically given. Indeed, the major purpose of part 3 of assignments 1 and 2 is to have students deconstruct these experiences and these selves. As noted, this task was made easier with the introduction of the CAUT videos into the teaching program. The 'self' who 'inhabits' WS1002 is far from unproblematically given. This self is produced through language and systems of meaning and power. It is a product of culture, rather than cultures being different ways of expressing it. Human beings both create and recreate their social conditions and are in turn shaped and reshaped by these social conditions. This 'self' can only be accessed through the very language, systems of meaning and power which constitute it, so there is no unmediated access to a pre-given self. In WS1002, experience, like theories, are 'texts' which are open to multiple readings and re-readings. In 1994, before we used the CAUT videos, we used the assessment tasks in the tutorials of weeks 2 to 5 as the central framing device for the session. Students gradually built up their descriptions of interactions and their theories of these interactions. With student permission – most were clamouring – we used some of this material for class discussion. This resulted in numerous multiple readings and challenges to 'accepted wisdom'. Student experience became the target for interrogation. For us, there was never any question of a

binary opposition between 'experiential knowledge' and 'theoretical knowledge'.

As perusal of the earlier theoretical chapters demonstrates, not to mention the very

nature of the assessment tasks themselves, experience is infused with theory and

vice versa.

Solas, writing specifically of social work education, argues that classical and

contemporary social work educational practices

> ...have served to construct a particular (sovereign) subjectivity or being-in-the-world for both the educator and the student. The identity of the subject constructed at this time and place is essentially humanistic. ... Other subjectivities which have been squeezed out by the press of this humanism include those of women, men and women of colour, the poor and so on. This humanist conception views the subject as an origin and unity (a self-identical consciousness) which constitutes the individual as a non-contradictory, rational and autonomous being; it represents an image which is central to Western philosophy. The Other in this case, is everything the humanist subject is not.
> (Solas 1994, pp. 79-80)

WS1002 has been framed in explicit recognition of how these 'others' are

excluded. As noted in chapter six, the rationale for the 1994 cohort states:

"Particular attention is paid in the subject to how such factors as race, culture,

class, gender, age, sexuality, etc., shape our understanding of human interaction"

(Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1994, p. 1). In 1995 we

changed this to read:

> Particular attention is paid to how power and powerlessness are defined and negotiated through such factors as race, culture, gender, class, age, sexuality, disability etc., which then impact on the nature of human interaction and our understanding of it.
> (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1995, p. 1)

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We also added another sentence in the rationale which drew explicit attention to such exclusion practices:

> ...the world of human interaction...is a negotiated world of social meaning where certain groups in society have greater access to the control of social meaning and what is constructed and valued as knowledge.
> (Department of Social Work and Community Welfare 1995, p. 1)

In passing I might note my reaction to Solas' use of the concept of "men and women of colour", an increasingly common usage. It is quite bizarre if we scrutinize it. The concept is equally guilty of 'binarization' – a favourite accusation of poststructuralists – implying that this group is to be demarcated sharply from 'white' people, or, if we are to take the concept literally to its logical conclusion, to "men and women *not* of colour". That a human being could be colourless is a proposition of mind-boggling dimensions.

I have revisited my theoretical framework as it relates to the notion of 'self' or the 'subject' and have argued for opening up the space for other: other selves and other knowledges. But how does this accord with 'contemporary' theorizing in the field of psychology?

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz described Western conceptions of self in the following terms:

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures.
> (Geertz 1979, p. 229)

Sampson (1989, p. 1) notes that this is the dominant view of personhood in psychology, but that it has borne the brunt – and borne it well it must be said – of at least "six discernible challenges": cross-cultural investigations; feminist studies; social constructionism (building on Mead 1962, orig. 1934); systems theory, in which "ontological primacy is granted to relations rather than individual entities"; critical theory; and deconstructionism, emerging from poststructuralism. Note that Mead's Symbolic Interactionism and General Systems Theory were the two theories we chose to focus on in WS1002. Also note that some of these challenges have as their nucleus a major concept which describes excluded others and which are explicitly named in the WS1002 subject outline's rationale: culture (cross-cultural), gender (feminism), class (critical theory).

Sampson's analysis is instructive:

> The resistance of North American psychology to modify its assumptions in light of these devastating challenges is truly amazing. This stubborn refusal is testimony less to the validity of the current rendering of psychology's subject as some naturally occurring reality, than to the service which that view provides to current social structures. Needless to say, both the character of psychology's subject and its resistance to change are pieces of evidence that support the view propounded by the challengers. That is, if indeed psychology's subject is a sociohistorical, sociocultural product, as all the challengers in one way or another imply, then it must necessarily 'belong' to its particular time and place. In this sense, 'to belong' means to fit the ongoing structures and arrangements of current Western society. Changing conceptions of personhood, then, is somewhat equivalent to a Kuhnian paradigm shift: it is likely to occur only with a major shift in the shape of the underlying culture that has produced it and sustains it even as it reproduces that underlying culture.
> (Sampson 1989, pp. 2-3)

But the last decade indicates there are lone voices in the night crying out in the

wilderness of contemporary psychology. See, for instance, Shotter and Gergen's

(1989) edited volume, *Texts of Identity*, of which Sampson is a contributor; and the

1990 spring volume of *Humanistic Psychologist* devoted entirely to psychology

and postmodernity, particularly Shotter (1990), Gergen (1990), Kvale (1990),

Richer (1990) and Lather (1990). Some of these voices have been wailing for

three decades (Gergen 1973). Ian Parker (1989) draws on Foucault to talk about

discourse and power, concepts unheard of in psychology until the last decade. He

links this particularly to notions of 'self' within social psychology, traditionally the

most 'social' field of enquiry in the individualist conceptions flying under the

banner of contemporary psychology.

> What the work of Foucault shows us is that, if we really want to break out of
> the cultural assumptions that underpinned the 'old paradigm', we need to be
> even more uncertain about agency and the self. We need, in fact, to ask how
> the self is implicated moment by moment, through the medium of discourse, in
> power.
> Parker (1989, p. 68)

Slowly, Foucauldian conceptions are filtering into the non-porous bedrock of

psychology. Gergen's (1989, p. 71) incisive analysis argues that "one enters

conceptually perilous waters when the attempt is made to show how discourse on

mind could be derived from observation", that traditional smug strategy of the

'experimental' psychologist, whose smugness cannot stop the little boys

exclaiming, "the Emperor has no clothes". How long before the crowd sees the

Emperor strutting in his positivist underwear? Gergen (1989) offers a similar

analysis to Sampson when he argues that "in important measure the mental world

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becomes elaborated as various interest groups within the culture seek to warrant or justify their accounts of the world. In effect, our vocabulary of self shifts as pragmatic exigencies dictate" (p. 72). Gergen presents a 'political' account of self which is similar to that adopted in WS1002.

> What we take to be the dimensions of self in the present era may be viewed, in part, as the accumulated armamentarium of centuries of debate. They are symbolic resources, as it were, for making claims in a sea of competing world constructions.
> ...self-knowledge is not...the product of in-depth probing of the inner recesses of the psyche. It is not the result of acute sensitivity to the nuances of emotion, motivation, intention and the like. Rather, it is a mastery of discourse – a 'knowing how' rather than a 'knowing that'.
> (Gergen 1989, p. 75)

Gergen's (1989) analysis of the emergence of professional psychology argues that psychology has used "its investigations to gird its own loins" (p. 79). While he sees this as "an epitome of self-sustaining efficacy", he urges that "one must raise the painful question of the social utility of the discipline if its major goal is that of sustaining itself" (p. 79). Arguing for multiplicity of perspectives – or, in my terms, of 'opening up the space for other' – he suggests that "rather than singing the same old refrain decade after decade (albeit in different words), a premium should be placed on new songs" (p. 80). Rose's (1989) analysis, which echoes Foucauldian refrains, chimes a sociological chorus seldom found in psychology. He argues that scientific knowledges of human individuality have been constitutive in two senses. First, "individualizing knowledges had a constitutive role within the new forms of political authority that took shape in nineteenth-century Europe and North America" and second, "it was around the issue of individualization that

psychology constituted itself as a scientific discipline in its own right, as distinct from biology, philosophy, medicine and ethics" (p. 119).

This brief foray into psychology, the self-appointed guardian of the 'altar of the self', reveals that other sects increasingly refuse to worship at this shrine and within the fold of psychology itself there is a small, but growing number of heretics who light there candles elsewhere. Still the gospel rings true for large hordes of believers and it is clear that rational argument is not the key to unlocking this unshakeable faith. This is ironic given the great store these believers place in rationality. Before moving on to the next section I want to briefly raise some niggling concerns about the concept of 'self'.

I spoke in this section of reviewing my theoretical conception of self, a conception that played a central role in chapters two and three in relation to knowledge and critical reflection. In chapter five when discussing 'my story' I noted the following:

> While the 'self' might be a useful device for organizing and analyzing my own experiences, and possibly others with shared cultural experiences, its utility at both empirical and conceptual levels, may deteriorate as a function of culture, particularly in non-Western cultures. This can be expressed at a higher level of generalization and abstraction in the following way:
> The empirical and conceptual significance of the individual 'self' is not necessarily a cultural universal.

Yet my discussion of knowledge in chapter two primarily traced the history of *Western* concepts. I have spoken of 'opening up the space for other', yet my thesis is largely framed in Western academic terms. What has happened to these other

voices, these other subjugated knowledges? I am familiar with these other notions of self through my study of Indian philosophy, through my lived experiences in Vietnam, India and Aboriginal communities. Why have they not played a more vital role in my thesis? The simple answer is a pragmatic one and can be understood in Foucauldian terms. My PhD is a text framed by the discourse of doctoral theses with all its attendant institutional practices and frameworks of power. Within this 'milieu' it is my perception that there is room for 'nibbling at the boundaries'. One can wriggle in this straitjacket. Bulges are acceptable. Split corsets are not. I say this from bitter experience. My first Honours student was a conceptual thinker of the highest order and a wonderfully creative thinker, but he was struggling to find an appropriate conceptual framework. I suggested he might like to try the philosophy of Jainism (with which he was familiar) and which appeared to me best equipped to tackle the task. He did so and produced what I believed to be a superb piece of work. Pauline, who had read every honours thesis ever written in social work at James Cook University – there had only been 46 until this time – described it as a brilliant piece of work, the best honours thesis ever to be produced in the department. His result? A Distinction. Consequently, I have clipped my wings. But not entirely. In the next section on ethics, while I will not soar, I shall glide a little, and introduce some notions drawn from traditional Indian philosophy.

2.2 The Ethics of using Self as a Pedagogical Tool

What are the ethical dilemmas in using the 'self' as a tool for education? There are two potential objections. First, what are the ethical implications of "efforts to assist learners in challenging and transforming their meaning perspectives, especially when collective social action is a logical outcome?" (Mezirow 1990c, p. 361). Second, what rights do staff such as Pauline and I have to set compulsory assignments which require students to unpackage self? And related to this, if we can justify this process, what support do we provide for students experiencing difficulties, psychological discomfort and anxieties? I shall deal with each in turn, though it should be apparent that the two are related.

2.2.1 The Ethics of Collective Social Action

Mezirow notes the risk of teacher indoctrination and counters it in the following way:

> Perhaps the most significant kind of adult learning involves bringing psychocultural assumptions into critical consciousness to help learners understand how they have come into possession of conceptual categories, rules, tactics, and criteria for judging that are implicit in their habits of perception, thought, and behaviour. Such transformative learning enhances our crucial sense of agency over ourselves and our lives.
>
> Emancipatory education, which helps learners become aware and critical of the presuppositions that shape their beliefs, is not the same thing as prescribing a preferred action to be taken. Nor does the transformed meaning perspective itself prescribe the action to be taken; instead, it presents a set of rules, tactics, and criteria for judging. ...
>
> Education becomes indoctrination only when educators try to influence specific actions as extensions of their will... To show learners a new set of rules, tactics, and criteria that allows them to judge situations in which they must act is significantly different from trying to engineer learner consent to take the action favoured by the educator.
> (Mezirow 1990c, p. 361)

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Mezirow emphasizes that this does not mean that educators are value-free. Educators' own meaning perspectives will be included among the alternative perspectives opened up for learners. Recall Neal Sellars' unsolicited comment, when evaluating my teaching in WS1002:

> Mr Ovington personalised the material presented by drawing on his own experience and sharing his views – as one of a number of possible views. This modelling for students of openness and self-awareness by a lecturer I regard as a powerful teaching technique. It reflects closely some of the subject objectives in this subject (e.g. Objective 4, "critical self-awareness", and 5, "alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting on the environment". (Sellars 1996, p. 3)

Returning to my earlier argument, we all have normatively grounded positions. It behoves us as educators to come clean with our perspectives, our positions. But this still does not quite tackle the issue of the "collective social action" which might result from engaging students in critical self-reflection. Is this ethical? In terms of the action research approach outlined in chapter four, it is something more than ethical, it is *mandatory*. I would argue that provided the 'indoctrination principle' is satisfied, it would be unethical to prevent students from engaging in collective social action where they perceived unjust educational practices (with a caveat to be discussed below). Action research is about *change*, though for me it is negotiated change, change where, if possible, all stakeholders' voices are heard and the compromise of best fit emerges from the dialogue. This is particularly so since they are social work and community welfare students who will be expected to advocate for clients who are oppressed by a variety of structural constraints. Note the AASW's (1994a, p. 3) code of ethics: "The social worker will advocate

for changes in policy, service delivery and social conditions which enhance the opportunities for those most vulnerable in the community." I will return briefly to the issue of the special case of social work below.

Perusal of the transcripts and quotations from these cited to date indicate that at times students drew attention to problematic aspects of other subjects. Indeed, as a result of the action research process we implemented in WS1002 there is no doubt that some of the cohort, many of whom were mature aged women of rich life experiences, became more outspoken about the quality of education services being delivered. I have already referred previously to a staff member who complained to me that she was upset because a group of these students were challenging grades she had awarded to group presentations. One of the most poignant moments of the conversation came when this staff member gently chided: "These women have to remember that they are only first years and there's a lot they don't know." I mentally noted that she did not draw attention to the fact that a significant number of these women were older than her and perhaps vastly more experienced and knowledgeable in other dimensions. In other words, she was privileging a particular type of knowledge – Western academic knowledge – and using this as a weapon to fend off the assault of 'subjugated knowledges'. In fact, so many of the cohort became militant that a huge group meeting between staff involved in teaching this other subject and the cohort was organized towards the end of semester. As it happened, many issues were aired at this meeting and although all matters were far from resolved, feedback and observation indicates that the air had

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cleared and a better feeling of goodwill and mutual respect prevailed. Could Pauline and I be accused of inciting students to riot? Were our teaching practices unethical? I would argue not. We certainly did not suggest that students should complain about other subjects. According to the precepts or provisional best guesses I have outlined in this thesis, we have an obligation to 'open up the space for other'. In Mezirow's terms:

> Our tasks as educators are to encourage the multiple readings of 'texts', to make a wider range of symbols or meaning perspectives available to learners, and to create reflective dialogic communities in which learners are free to challenge assumptions and premises.
> (Mezirow 1990c, pp. 360-361)

The question that arises is not so much whether these educational practices are ethical, but are they *strategic?* How does such social action impact on students? How does it impact on Pauline and I? Particularly, will it have an impact on student relationships with other staff members, and dare I say it? – could it impact on student grades in other subjects, if not now, further down the track? And what about relationships between Pauline and I and other staff? There are no easy answers to these questions? For me, the prime motivating force must be dialogue. I am aware that Habermasian-style 'putting your cards on the table' may be politically naïve, you may leave yourself vulnerable to others who are not so easily inclined to show their hand, or at least not the one they are gambling with. But there is no question that dialogue will start sooner or later. And I do not say this in a *prescriptive* way: dialogue *must* start now. Dialogue is happening whether we like it or not, in the 'thin' sense I described in chapter two. We are engaging by virtue of our presence in a structure defined as an academic department. It is

simply a question of what sort of dialogue we will have. My preference is for honest, open dialogue, for putting my hand on the table. But if that is not politically strategic I will content myself with showing one card at a time.

2.2.2 The Ethics of Psychological Insecurity

The second issue is more personal in nature. Mezirow (1990c) remarks that many contributors in his book note the threat to psychological security that transformative learning imposes. Mezirow does not see this as a deterrent – far from it – and he offers a number of suggestions for how support can be provided: role modelling; uncritical group support and solidarity; helping learners to link self-insights with internalized social norms and to understand that others share their dilemma; and providing a secure environment that fosters the trust necessary for critical self-examination and the expression of feelings. Boud and Walker (1998) also draw attention to these issues, particularly the "belief that reflection can be easily contained" (p. 194), "inappropriate disclosure" (p. 195), and "going beyond the expertise of the teacher" (p. 195). Pauline and I acknowledged that reflection cannot be contained – and we had no desire to bottle it so – but we believed, given our respective training and experience, that we had the appropriate expertise and skills to handle student difficulties and were also in a position to draw on additional counselling expertise if necessary. Pauline had a background in child welfare practice involving difficult cases of severe child abuse and I had a background in delicate cross-cultural situations in politically volatile environments. It was never necessary to draw on external help during the teaching

of the subject over a period of many years. I could content myself with an argument that justified our approach in terms of social work's mission: if social workers are to work effectively and appropriately with clients as set out in the AASW's (1994a) *Code of Ethics*, they need to unpackage self as a prelude to understanding how they as an individual and a social worker impact on the relationship with clients. But I can mount a much stronger argument which suggests that use of self as a pedagogical tool should not be restricted to the domain of social work and the helping professions; it has a place in higher education in general. I will draw on two sources to support such claims. The first is the promised excursion into Indian philosophy; the second, a brief examination of the notion of reflexivity as a 'condition' of late modernity (recall Barnett 1997, chapter three).

2.2.3 Other Notions of Self/ves

This section is not intended as a potted history of the concept of 'self' in other cultures. As we saw in chapter two, potted histories, even brief ones, tend to reduce forest growth at an alarming rate. The prime purpose of this section is to draw on one other concept of self in order to argue the case that far from being unethical to use self as a pedagogical tool, if you start from different cultural assumptions, different subjugated knowledges, one could mount a case that suggested it is unethical and intellectually dishonest not to use self as a pedagogical tool! This also dovetails with my previous discussion on the

necessarily ethical dimension of knowledge in chapters two and three. In this case I was drawing on an ancient Greek tradition.

The notion of self I have chosen is drawn from Hinduism, or strictly speaking, the Vedanta tradition of India, particularly as exemplified in the *Bhagavad Gita* (Mascaro 1970). The Gita, which was Mahatma Gandhi's favourite text (Gandhi 1927), is a beautiful spiritual poem which forms part of the *Mahabharata*, one of India's two rambling epics. These epics contain a large number of popular tales and are the principal vehicle by which Hinduism reaches the masses in India. This is partly because they are available in oral text through live performances at festival times. The *Gita* is essentially a dialogue between the god Krishna and the warrior Arjuna, in crisis because he is forced to fight his kinsmen in a civil war, which may or may not have taken place in northern India around 1200BC (Götz 1995). Disguised as Arjuna's charioteer, Krishna drives the chariot between the two armies on the brink of war and begins to reveal to Arjuna the most profound truths of Hinduism (Capra 1983). Krishna's spiritual instruction draws on two concepts vital to the Vedanta tradition, *Brahman* and *Atman*. Brahman is loosely translated as the ultimate reality and Atman as 'self' or the 'soul'. Brahman is supposed to be beyond comprehension by the intellect, it is ineffable. But in an important sense Atman is not separate from Brahman; it is "the manifestation of *Brahman* in the human soul" (Capra 1983, p. 100).

> That which is the finest essence – this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is *Atman*. That art thou.
> (Hume 1934, p. 246)

Much of the Vedantic spiritual quest is finding the path to achieve this union – and there are numerous paths – between Brahma and Atman, between self and whole. Indeed, the word yoga comes from the Sanskrit word 'union' (Thompson – *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 9th Edition* 1995). A cursory and uninformed view of Vedantism perceives a polyglot conglomeration of gods major and minor in manifold incarnations accompanied by consorts and children, each of whom have their own various incarnations. Do not be deluded:

> To understand how the Hindus can cope with this multitude of divinities, we must be aware of the basic attitude of Hinduism that in substance all these divinities are identical. They are all manifestations of the same divine reality, reflecting different aspects of the infinite, omnipresent, and – ultimately – incomprehensible *Brahman*.
> (Capra 1983, pp. 103-104)

Having said this, it must not be supposed that dualist conceptions have played no role in the subcontinent. Far from it. In fact, Götz (1995, p. 484) argues that "the *Gita's* effort to achieve a synthesis of competing ideologies is fundamental to an understanding of Arjuna's crisis." This can be seen in Krishna's response to Arjuna's anguish at having to fight his kinsmen. Krishna points out Arjuna's "error of identifying his real self with his phenomenal self, the self that he is transcendentally, with the self that acts in the world" (Götz 1995, p. 485). The concept of *karman*, popularly known as 'karma', is relevant here. Capra (1983) remarks that karma has acquired a psychological sense in its transition from a cosmic to a human level. Götz (1995, p. 485) points out that the concept of *karman* simply means action, act or deed and that "in the thinking of the Upanishadic sages...becomes a sort of summary term for the causal connection

between action and consequence, both in a physical sense as well as in the moral sense of merit." This transcends a person's current life and consequences connect with the doctrine of transmigration and rebirth. Seen in this way, Arjuna's crisis becomes something else. It "consists in his thinking that he is a real agent in his world, as if his phenomenal self, immersed in the flux of actions and consequences, were ontologically united with this flux and were not, in truth, identical with the transcendental Self" (Götz 1995, pp. 487-488).

How does all this relate to education? The relationship can be gleaned from the following passage:

> ...the ultimate aim of education in ancient India was not knowledge as preparation for life in this world or for life beyond, but for complete realization of self.
> (Vakil and Natarajan 1966, pp. 8-9)

As soon as one posits the aim of education as development of the self, all sorts of implications follow. It becomes nonsensical to say that it is unethical to use the self as a pedagogical tool. The ancient Indian would be bemused by such a claim. In fact, we would not share the language for talking about the issue. How, he or she might reply, could one possibly educate without using self? If you leave self out of the process, exactly what are you going to put in? Note that use of self does not logically entail a form of the 'hermeneutic confessional'.

This brief incursion into Vedantic philosophy leaves much unanswered. It raises fascinating and complex questions not just about self but other ontological and

epistemological notions including causation. My purpose here has not been to argue the nuances of these issues; it has simply been to sketch a portrait which supports the argument that using the self as a pedagogical tool is not unethical. Quite the opposite. Those who argue such a case do so from an ontological and epistemological position which is unashamedly dualist in character, a perspective which attempts to amputate self from knowledge, a perspective which attempts to perform a highly questionable operation, that of separating the Siamese twins of ontology and epistemology.

2.2.4   Reflexivity, the Self and Ethical Space in Late Modernity

Recall that Barnett (1997) drew on Giddens (1990) to argue that reflexivity induced by ontological uncertainty was a defining characteristic of late modernity. This analysis provided justification for Barnett's claim that:

> Reflexivity is necessary if we are to gain critical control over our world and critical thought is a necessary element of reflexivity. Through such critical self-reflection, we become more fully human: we realize the personal potential for reflexivity that lies in language. And through critical self-reflection, we come to a fuller insight into our knowledge frameworks and their ideological underpinnings, which we might otherwise take for granted.
> (Barnett 1997, p. 45)

And Barnett was unequivocal that this entailed more than the cerebrum. "Higher education...cannot be seen as purely cognitive, but has to be seen as experiential: the development of critical reason calls for whole persons" (p. 22). He also, recall, distinguished between self-reflection and critical self-reflection. "The term 'critical' indicates that the self-reflection is accompanied by a range of alternatives" (p. 94).

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If the student's self is being pulled in new ways, operationally in the world and epistemologically through a wider range of knowing activities, self-reflection becomes not just a curious effete add-on, marginal to the main enterprise. It becomes a crucial component in stabilizing the educational, personal and cognitive disturbances that the student faces. Self-reflection takes on a central role in an education for the modern age.
(Barnett 1997, p. 95)

Barnett distinguishes between eight forms of self-reflection, noting there is no abstract self on which to reflect. Critical reflection is the one most relevant to the present discussion. Although Barnett's notion is neo-Habermasian (see chapter three) his basic point is relevant; viz., that this form of self-reflection may be painful for students and educators must address students' self-concept if this idea of self-reflection is to take off (compare the above discussions of Mezirow and Brookfield, for instance).

This links with Barnett's earlier analysis of modernity. Drawing on Giddens (1991) again, he argues that,

...paradoxically, late modernity poses problems not essentially of knowledge, since the world is unknowable both substantively and in terms of the tests of validity by which we come to know the world. Instead, amidst discursive challenge and even discursive contradiction, late modernity poses problems of *being* and of the constitution of the self.
(Barnett 1997, p. 106)

Given this state of affairs, it would be unethical and professionally negligent, if educators were to neglect the role and use of self in education.

Charles Taylor (1991) echoes the theme that reflexivity is a feature of late modernity, but he extends it in two ways. First, by drawing explicit attention to

the concept of 'self', and second, by locating this self in a necessarily ethical space. Taylor argues that in important respects 'the self' is a modern phenomenon, noting that it is only in modern times that we begin to use the expression by either prefacing it with an article (definite or indefinite), or pluralizing it. For Taylor this signifies "something that has become a crucial feature of the human person for us, viz., certain powers of reflexivity" (p. 304). He argues further that it is a 'radical reflexivity'. "To be interested in my own health, or wealth, is to be reflexively oriented, but not radically. But when I examine my own experience, or scrutinize my own thinking, reflexivity takes a radical turn" (p. 304). In fact, Taylor argues that the very subject of such reflexivity must be 'a self'.

> What I am suggesting is that we see ourselves as selves, because our morally important self-descriptions push us in this direction or, alternatively, because we identify ourselves with this kind of description.
> (Taylor 1991, p. 305)

Taylor also argues that the one recurrent dimension of reflexivity is that humans devise, accept or have thrust upon them self-descriptions which help define them, including moral or ethical self-characterizations.

> A human being exists inescapably in a space of ethical questions; she or he cannot avoid assessing himself or herself in relation to some standards. To escape all standards wold not be a liberation, but a terrifying lapse into total disorientation. It would be to suffer the ultimate crisis of identity.
> (Taylor 1991, p. 305)

Taylor (1991, p. 305) argues that 'identity', which is linked to 'who' we are, can be defined by function (I am a lecturer for WS1002), or by relationship (I am X's brother), "but the kind of identity that is crucial to having a coherent sense of self is one that relates us to ethical space. To have an identity is to know 'where you're

coming from' when it comes to questions of value, or issues of importance."

Taylor summarizes this in the following way:

> ...human beings always have a sense of self, in this sense, that they situate themselves somewhere in ethical space. Their sense of who they are is defined partly by some identification of what are truly important issues, or standards, or goods, or demands; and correlative to this, by some sense of where they stand relative to these or where they measure up on them or both.
> (Taylor 1991, p. 306)

Taylor (1991, p. 306) argues that identity defined solely in terms of self-awareness without the richness of the moral dimension "is itself a product of the disengaged perspective that has helped to shape the modern self." But it is important to distinguish, in Taylor's terms, between the 'perennial' and the 'changing'. Although humans always have a sense of self which situates them in ethical space, there is considerable variety in the parameters of this space: the terms that define it and that situate us within it. So, in one sense, humans have always had a sense of self, at least in terms of being self-aware and defining themselves in relation to an ethical space. But what is new, what is modern, is seeing ourselves as having or being a 'self'.

2.2.5 Summary

I began by asking "what are the ethical dilemmas in using the 'self' as a tool for education?" I noted two potential objections: one related to the ethical implications of collective social action, the other to the ethics of potential student psychological insecurity. I justified the first objection in terms of the aim of action research, change, and the goals of a non-teleological form of emancipatory

education. After noting that Pauline and I had the expertise and skills to provide the appropriate support for students suffering from psychological insecurity, I dealt with the second objection in three ways. First, by justifying the use of self as a pedagogical tool in terms of social work's mission. Second, by arguing that pedagogical choice is a function of prior questions about the role of education. If your chief educational aim concerns development of self, as in ancient India, then it would be unethical not to use self as a pedagogical tool to achieve that aim. Third, I argued that self and self-reflection are features of late modernity and such selves are constituted in ethical spaces. Therefore, it would be an abrogation of our teaching responsibilities were we to neglect the use of self in pedagogy.

Having reviewed the theoretical and ethical dilemmas involved in the use of self as a pedagogical tool, I now want to turn to how effective we were in our stated WS1002 objectives that related to 'self'.

2.3   The Effectiveness of using Self as a Pedagogical Tool

This section will draw primarily on *outcome* data relating to student assignments, notably assignments 1 and 2, and to a lesser extent, assignment 3, as evidence for the effectiveness of using self as a pedagogical tool. But this does not imply that this *outcome* data is the sole relevant data source. I have discussed already numerous other data sources which indicate potential effectiveness, particularly in the taped group discussions, but as previously noted, the concept *effective* itself implies some form of outcome and there is no doubt that 'the proof of the pudding

is in the eating.' It is one thing for students to say that the subject and particularly the use of self has played a central role in their learning, but is this borne out in their actual assignments? (I ignore for the moment changes in their lives). Using student assignments to gauge how effectively the subject's learning goals were satisfied hinges on a key link: that between original learning goals and the assessment tasks. Neal Sellars' evaluation is relevant:

> In my view, the assessment tasks in this subject integrate very closely with the subject objectives and content.
> (Sellars 1996, p. 2)

As a benchmark I shall review briefly both the relevant learning goals and the relevant sections of assignments 1, 2 and 3.

Learning Goals

While all the learning goals are relevant to some extent, two are explicitly so:

2. To develop an awareness of the role of 'self' in shaping how we perceive, interpret and act upon our environment.

4. To develop a critical awareness of 'self'.

Two others imply the role of self:

1. To develop an awareness and understanding of the social construction of knowledge.

5. To develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment.

Assessment Tasks

Assignments 1 and 2.

Part 3 – 40% of both assignments:

What factors about you (background, culture, gender, age, beliefs, ideas, experiences) have led you to develop the theory you have?

Assessment criteria for this part of the assignment were as follows:

- *Identification* of self factors shaping theory developed   15%

- *Linkage* of self factors to theory developed   15%

- Integration of readings, study materials and tutorial sessions   10%

Assignment 3 – select a person either from the interaction described in assignment 1 or 2.

Part 2 – 40%:

What kind of assistance do you feel the person would feel to be beneficial for them? Give reasons for your choice.

Assessment criteria:

- Description of assistance   10%

- Reasons for choice of assistance   20%

- Integration of readings, study materials and tutorial sessions   10%

Before examining data from student assignments, I shall briefly review other data sources related to achievement of subject objectives concerned with self. Process data in the form of instant questionnaires for the tutorials shed some interesting light on our subject goals. In the tutorial sessions where we focused largely on this aspect of assignment 1 (week 5), most students identified the role of self in theory construction and a significant number did so with a critical bent. Some typical responses to the item, "The key point(s) I remember from today's lecture…" were: "Identifying self factor. Linking these factors with the theory developed." "How to use our personal experiences in our assignment background to our theories." "Identifying self factors – unpackaging." "Identifying self factors – what about you makes you see things the way you do." "Identifying self features that influence a theory." "Linking personal experience to theory." "How to try and understand your own feelings and to link them to your theories." Interestingly, the few students who did identify difficulties in the instant questionnaires for the tutorials, spoke of problems in linking the literature to their theory (an assessment criterion for all assignments). Later tutorials cast light on these objectives as well. For instance, most students when asked to record their key point(s) remembered from the week 10 tutorial referred to alternative perceptions and interpretations: "Everybody perceives things differently." "Perception of what is said is different. Complex when there are culture clashes." "The differing realities of perception cause miscommunication." "About perceiving – what it is and the difference each individual perceives what is important." "That people see things different and it causes problems." "Culture, context and learning will determine your perceptions

and actions. Not everyone has the same perceptions of reality." "People see the same circumstances in very different ways." "Discussion was excellent. Demonstrates everybody's different perceptions." "It's great to have such diverse theories on how we think about different interactions." One student was so impressed with the week 9 experiential that they offered the following comment: "WELL DONE GARY. This was one wild afternoon." Some students initially found it difficult to distinguish between perceiving and thinking. In week 11 one student noted in their key points remembered, "Could understand now the distinction between perception and thinking." Overall, in week 11 very few people indeed identified difficulties. In week 12 some students reiterated in key points the notion of alternative perceptions and the consequences of this for behaviour.

2.3.1 Student Assignments

I shall divide this discussion into two parts: the first, assignments 1 and 2; the second, assignment 3.

Assignments 1 and 2

In assignments 1 and 2 there were two main aspects I want to focus on: *identifying* self factors relevant to the theory developed; and *linking* these identified self factors to the theory developed. I shall discuss integration of the literature in chapter nine.

Identifying Self Factors

Part three of assignments 1 and 2 asked students to identify self factors, things about themselves which were important in developing their specific theories. During teaching we emphasized two broad sets of factors. The first were broader structural factors such as race, culture, gender, age, sexuality, disability, history, geography and so on. The second were more personal factors: individual experiences, beliefs and ideas; though we were careful to stress the close interconnections between the two. For instance, one's beliefs and ideas were shaped by factors such as culture and gender, though one's beliefs and ideas could also be important in shaping and reinterpreting these structural factors.

The single biggest problem in this area emerged in assignment 1, but fortunately had abated considerably by assignment 2. It was revealed in student work samples, both drafts and assignments. It was this: rather than identifying self factors as such, students continued to develop their theories. For example: a student might have developed a theory to explain why a man in a relationship had got angry and struck his wife. They may have used key structural concepts such as gender as part of their explanation. But in part 3, instead of identifying a self factor relating to their own gendered experiences, whether male or female, they further developed the gendered explanation by introducing new concepts such as poverty without reference to self at all. Informal discussion indicates that this confusion probably arose because students felt that, unlike their other university assignments, they had scope to develop their own subjective theories of the chosen

interactions (which they did). This sense of subjectivity or 'selfness' led them to believe they were in fact discussing self factors because they were providing their very own theory of the interaction. In other words, there was still confusion about the distinction between theory generation and development and the *reasons* for generating and developing particular theories.

A second problem in assignment 1, which had also abated significantly by assignment 2, was the *quantity* of material presented in this section, a circumstance which sometimes affected the structural balance of the assignment, since both parts 2 and 3 (theory and self factors) were weighted of equal value, but often students wrote significantly more in part 2. It took time and perseverance to get many students to think in this way, but persist we did, since the social construction of knowledge was pivotal to our subject's aims. Part of this difficulty can be attributed to previous educational experiences, data we had from the original background questionnaire. So much of our educational system is designed to foster surface learning where students are asked to recall 'factual' information. No book in any university library in the world could have provided the 'answer' to part 3 of assignments 1 and 2. Students had to think, and think deeply! I shall provide some selected examples. Note that these examples straddle both identification of self factors and explicit theory linkage.

One student in assignment 1 chose an interaction from the final scene of Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible* (1978). The interaction involved John Proctor, a

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leading citizen of Salem, and the Deputy-Governor Danforth. The question which intrigued this student concerned how Proctor could refuse to provide a public signed confession, albeit an untrue one, when doing so would save him from being hanged. In her theory the student argued that,

> John Proctor is able to face death with equanimity because he realizes his life is his honour which he is now able to pass untarnished to his children. He is finally able to see himself as a person capable of goodness and is able to accept Elizabeth's forgiveness thereby allowing him to forgive himself for his adultery.

The student identified a number of relevant self factors. Here I describe one and how she linked it to her theory:

> I have always been very proud of the standards set by both my parents, particularly my father's honesty, which was virtually a byword throughout the Queensland Railways. He was not always liked, but he was always respected and I was always proud to say I was his daughter. The pride John Proctor has in his name and the wish to leave that name undefiled is therefore something I can also readily understand.

Another student, this time a male, chose a building site for their assignment 2 group interaction. In attempting to explain certain group dynamics he argued that "the status of the individuals [apprentice etc.], combined with the norms of the trade or their personal experience, have created certain distinct alliances." More specifically, "the age and experience of the three tradesmen have created a natural alliance, reinforced by the norms of treatment and attitude towards apprentices"; and "Dan and James [apprentices] have also formed an alliance due to age and experience, and it is the awareness of the tradesmen's norm that usually creates a unity." This was actually only the first of three parts to his theory which was very comprehensive. In identifying relevant self factors and linking these to his theory

he particularly drew attention to gender (male) and class (blue collar workers in the manual trades).

> My class background and the culture that surrounded it shaped my outlook towards work, and somehow pushed me towards the manual trades. ...

> Being male has obviously had an influence on my outlook. Were I a female growing up in the same environment I would now be a housewife. I learned that men were men, and that you had to prove this. There was little room for softness, and until I earned respect, I would be treated as nothing. You were to expect poor treatment and to treat it as your lot.

> By nature, a lot of this 'paying out' attitude didn't much appeal to me, but I did make a great door mat. It's ingrained in my thinking to 'submit to authority', and not to fight against that. In viewing this interaction I was reliving this pattern of thought. Each of the tradesmen had tradesmen for fathers, and each grew up with the same indoctrination: "take crap until you're in a position to give it back, then give it hard."

> According to their values, they'd earned the right to humiliate the apprentice, and Dan had been conditioned to accept this as normal, and for me this had always been an acceptable situation.

As with the above female student, this student has developed an acute "awareness of the role of 'self' in shaping how we perceive, interpret and act upon our environment" (objective 2). That this had moved to a "critical awareness of 'self'" (objective 4), is demonstrated by the student's use of past tense: "I *did* make a great doormat"; "this *had* always been an acceptable situation." Some students developed such a critical awareness of self that they were brutally honest: "In my theory I have identified the power games they are playing. I have played them in the past, trying to have control over others. This game only resulted in my complete powerlessness over my own life."

By the time we reached assignment 2, we expected satisfactory students to be able to identify at least two self factors, and to demonstrate that these were, if not the most relevant, at least relevant. In short, two relevant self factors. Better answers would identify most of the relevant self factors, and the best ones would appear to identify all the key self factors (I say appear because we could never know this). For a detailed discussion of assessment and grading procedures, including quality control checks, refer to the next chapter on assessment.

Table 8.1
Identifying Self Factors – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 15	Ass 1	Ass 2
15	-	-
14	18	7
13	12	10
12	15	10
11	5	6
10	5	8
9	1	8
8	2	5
7	4	1
6	-	1
5	-	

We were delighted with how students performed in this aspect of the assignments. Admittedly we were much more lenient in assignment 1, but still, in order to score highly students had to identify a significant number of *relevant* factors and include no irrelevant or marginal factors (which reduced the grade). It seemed that students warmed to this exercise, particularly after the usual tertiary padlocks on this type of activity, and once the fetters were released the torrents flowed. In assignment 1, almost one third of all students (18/62) scored a High Distinction (14/15), almost three quarters (45/62) scored a Distinction (12/15) or better, and all

but seven students scored a Credit (10/15). Four students failed marginally (7/15). In assignment 2, we graded seven students at High Distinction, almost half the students (27/56) at Distinction or better, 41 students at Credit or better, and only two students failed, one with 7/15, the other with 6/15. These may seem like proportionally high grades, but remember: once students were keyed into the nature of the exercise, the level of conceptual difficulty was not great – it was simply an *identification* exercise. Linkage was a different matter.

Linking Self Explicitly to Theory

This was a difficult task for many students. In assignment 1, all students were able to *identify* at least one self factor, many students more. But the more challenging task was to *link* these identified self factors to the developed theory in a logical and systematic way. Even in assignment 2 a significant number of students were still experiencing difficulties doing this consistently – sometimes linking clearly, at other times tenuously or not clearly. However, many students were performing this task satisfactorily by assignment 2, and the best students were doing it superbly (see above). Another student who developed a group interaction theory around co-dependency linked it beautifully to having worked as a trained nurse for 30 years and the 'rescuing mode' she imported from this to her two marriages.

My original pedagogical tack had been to tell people to use their key propositions as the basis for systematically ensuring that self factors were linked to their theory. I did not instruct students to necessarily perform the task in this way – though they

were free to do so – I simply suggested this strategy as a self-checking exercise. One student stated that she used her concepts in this way. It was also possible to use assumptions in such a manner. Indeed, in many ways, assumptions were likely to provide a much keener insight into self factors than either of the other two constituents of theories. But because in the beginning students found it more difficult to identify assumptions, I did not steer them in this direction (see chapter nine). The most effective pedagogical strategy seemed to be to provide students with a smorgasbord of strategies and self-checking devices and allow them to pursue that which suited their needs best. One reason why I did not necessarily want students to use slavishly either concepts or propositions, or assumptions for that matter, as tools for linking self factors to developed theories, is because such a strategy hinges on correct identification of the theory's constituent parts: concepts, assumptions and propositions (I discuss these issues in detail in chapter nine).

Table 8.2
Linking Self Factors to Theory– Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 15	Ass 1	Ass 2
15	1	1
14	5	4
13	7	6
12	17	9
11	6	4
10	10	11
9	6	8
8	3	11
7	5	-
6	1	2
5	-	
4	1	

For assignment 1, we graded six students at High Distinction, including a perfect 15, almost half (30/62) at Distinction or better, approximately three quarters

(46/62) at Credit or better, with seven students failing, five marginally with 7/15. In assignment 2, we awarded five students a High Distinction, including another perfect 15, more than a third of students (20/56) scored a Distinction or better, 35 students scored a Credit or better, and this time only two students failed, both at 6/15.

Overall Grades for Part 3

The following data reveal that although in assignment 1 students usually performed better on part 2 (theory development) than part 3 (self) (see chapter nine), part 3 was still done very well overall. Interestingly, there was little difference in overall distributions between parts 2 and 3 for assignment 2, indicating that students were on the improve (since the part 3 distributions rose to match the part 2, and this was even with the increased expectations and harder marking).

Table 8.3
Overall Grades, Part 3 – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 40	Ass 1	Ass 2
40	-	-
39	1	-
38	-	1
37	1	2
36		-
35	1	2
34	3	3
33	2	1
32	6	3
31	4	5
30	1	5
29	2	1
28	6	5
27	6	3
26	9	4
25	2	5
24	1	3
23	1	3
22	5	2
21	4	1
20	1	4
19	-	2
18	5	-
17	-	-
16	-	1
15	1	

In assignment 1, two students scored a High Distinction, one of whom scored 39, almost a quarter of students (14/62) scored a Distinction or better, just over two thirds (42/62) of students scored a Credit or better. Six students failed, five scoring 18/40 and one 15/40. Two of these failed solely due to deficiencies in integrating the literature, having passed both other components, another failed because she scored poorly on the linkage component and zero for integration, two marginally failed all three components, and the final student failed all three components, but one of them badly, the linkage of self to theory.

In assignment 2, three students scored a High Distinction, 12 a Distinction or more, well over a half (35/56) scored a Credit or better, and 53 passed. Only three students failed part 3 in assignment 2, a reduction from six students in assignment 1. Of these, two failed marginally (19/40), the other scored 16/40. One of these failed only because they failed the integration of literature component, having passed both other components, another performed poorly on all three components, and the third was marginal on all three components.

In assignment 1, there were greater gaps in student performances for parts 2 (theory development) and part 3 (self) with 37 students performing better in part 2, seven scoring the same, and 18 scoring higher marks in part 3. By assignment 2, this had evened out with 23 scoring higher marks in part 2, 24 scoring better in part 3 and nine scoring the same. This levelling in overall distributions between the two major parts of assignments 1 and 2 was also reflected in individual student grades. In assignment 1, of the 37 students performing better in part 2, for over half these (18/32) the gap was 5 marks (12.5%) or greater and for six of these the gap was 10 marks (25%) or greater, reaching a maximum difference of 12 marks (30%). Of the 18 students scoring higher in part 3, the corresponding figures were only five students scoring five marks or higher, and of these, only two scoring 10 marks or greater, with the maximum difference being 13 (32.5%). By assignment 2, students were writing assignments of much more even quality and no student had a difference of more than nine marks (22.5%) between parts 2 and 3. Of the

23 students scoring higher marks in part 2, only seven had a difference of five marks (12.5%) or more, and of the 24 students scoring better in part 3, only one student had a difference of six and two a difference of five.

The above data indicates that, initially, students found it more difficult to identify and link self factors, particularly the latter, than to develop a theory of a chosen interaction. But over time students warmed to the task so that by the end of the subject most students had satisfied the subject's objectives, including those related to self.

Assignment 3

In assignment 3, part 2 is the assessment task most relevant to subject objectives relating to self: "What kind of assistance do you think the person would feel to be beneficial for them? Give reasons for your choice." Recall that students were asked to choose a person from one of their chosen interactions in assignments 1 or 2. There were two aspects to this part of the assignment: *describing* the assistance; and *justifying* it. I shall discuss each separately. Again, I shall leave discussion of integration of the literature until chapter nine.

Description of the Assistance

We were very pleased with this aspect of the assignment because it required students to 'step into the world' of the other person, the one chosen from the assignment 1 or 2 interaction. The question did *not* ask students to describe the

type of assistance they personally considered to be the most appropriate, but the assistance that the other person themselves considered most appropriate. This is a fundamental difference and strikes at the core of both Pauline's and my beliefs about the nature of social work practice.

Table 8.4
Description of Assistance – Assignment 3

Max = 10	
10	-
9	9
8	19
7	17
6	8
5	1
4	1
3	-
2	-
1	-
0	1

Overall, this aspect of the assignment was done very well. Nine of 56 students scored a High Distinction (9/10), exactly half (28) scored a Distinction (8/10) or better, 45 of 56 students scored a Credit or better (7/10), and only two students failed, one of whom was a student absent for most of the semester due to employment commitments. The 11 students scoring a Pass or less (and eight of these scored 6/10) were graded lower because at times they 'slipped out of the other's shoes' – too often, for one of the students who failed this section – and a small handful of students devoted too much energy to describing (and justifying) forms of assistance they felt were *not* appropriate. The other failing student, the absent one, scored zero because she basically did not fulfil the requirements of Part 2 at all.

Justification of Assistance

In many ways this was the most challenging part of the assignment since it required two major steps, an empathic one and a cognitive one. First, it required students to step into the world of other (an empathic exercise); second, it required them not simply to describe this experience of other, but to justify it (primarily, though not exclusively a cognitive exercise).

Table 8.5
Reasons for Assistance – Assignment 3

20	-
19	1
18	7
17	5
16	4
15	9
14	4
13	9
12	7
11	2
10	5
9	-
8	2
7	-
6	-
5	-
4	-
3	-
2	-
1	-
0	1

Considering the difficulties involved, this aspect of the assignment was done very well indeed. Eight students of 56 scored a High Distinction (9/10) for this part, 17 scored a Distinction or better (16/20), over two thirds (39/56) scored a Credit (13/20) or better, and only three students failed (two scored 8/20 and the 'absent'

student scored zero). Common weaknesses for the 17 students scoring a Pass or less were the following: inclusion of irrelevant material, some of which should have been included in part 1; lack of a well-thought out and systematically developed rationale for the assistance; 'thinly' developed justification section – often less material than the description – giving poor structural balance; not always justifying in terms of the other's world.

I shall provide a couple of examples from student work. I have chosen these particular examples since they do not necessarily indicate what the student themselves believed to be the most appropriate course of action. In other words, they demonstrate 'stepping into the world of other'.

A 15 year old unlicenced and inexperienced male on holiday from boarding school took the family car on the final night of his stay after the family had retired and drove off into the night. The father was 'in a state'. What sort of assistance would the father himself feel he needed? The student suggested a number of strategies, one of which was to ring the police.

> This appeals as it is the established institution to help individuals in crisis. ...
> Because of his occupation within the military, he was used to established
> procedures being utilized to complete specific jobs. He would consider the
> police to be the natural choice to help find his son. The symbols that
> represented the interaction by a structured organization (Symbolic Interaction)
> such as titles, uniforms, code of behaviour and written laws and procedures
> would match his expectation of how best to operate.

Another student, a female, described the problems of an inter-cultural marriage. One of these problems appeared to be that the husband was drinking and gambling

excessively. The student acknowledged that the woman didn't want someone to solve her problem; simply someone to listen, empathize and offer the occasional suggestion. By talking the issue through, the student and the wife

> ...recognized the need for Bruno to have contact with his mates at the German Club, and suggested [the wife] that they go there on a weekend together for a meal. This would serve a two-fold purpose: it would support and recognize Bruno's needs as well as allow them to do something together. She realized that Bruno didn't have a drinking and gambling problem, but the need to be 'accepted' by his peers was important.

While the suggested strategies may not appear as very startling, what they do demonstrate is a clear ability "to develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment" (objective 5). I shall return to the objectives when I discuss student assessment in much greater detail in the next chapter.

Overall Grades for Part 2

Part 2 was not done as well as part 1 (see chapter nine). This is not surprising since part 2 was more challenging. Nonetheless, part 1 was done very well overall.

Table 8.6
Overall Grades, Part 2 – Assignment 3

Max = 40	
40	-
39	-
38	-
37	-
36	3
35	2
34	3
33	3
32	3
31	1
30	4
29	4
28	4
27	3
26	5
25	2
24	5
23	4
22	1
21	2
20	1
19	2
18	1
17	1
16	1
0	1

Three students scored a High Distinction (36/40) compared with five in part 1, one quarter of the students (14/56) scored a Distinction (32/40) or better (compare 21), well over half (35/56) scored a Credit (26/40) or better (compare 42), and six students failed (compare two). Two of these students failed because, although they passed both the description and justification, they scored zero for integrating literature. Another failed because of poor justification; another due to both poor justification and integration; a third because of poor description and integration; and the final one, the 'absent' student, because she effectively did not fulfil the requirements at all for part 2. Thirty seven students scored more highly in part 1,

eight scored the same, and 12 students performed better in part 2 than in part 1. Of those performing better in part 2, mostly it was a single mark or two, two students scored three more marks and one student four more. However, the gaps were much greater for those students performing better in part 1, with 10 students scoring at least five more marks out of 40 (12.5%); with the biggest gap being 17 marks (42.5%).

I shall conclude this chapter by reviewing briefly the extent to which student assignments indicated achievement of subject objectives which related to self.

Student Assignments and Objectives Relating to Self

Objective 2 – "to develop an awareness of the role of 'self' in shaping how we perceive, interpret and act upon our environment" – was the easiest to satisfy, since students could not complete and pass part 3 of assignments 1 and 2 without realizing this aim. In assignment 1, six students failed part 3 overall. By assignment 2, this had been reduced to three failures, two of whom were marginal (19/40), and one of whom actually passed the sections dealing with identification and linkage of self factors, failing only because they failed the third component, integrating the literature.

This also fed into *objective 1* – "to develop an awareness and understanding of the social construction of knowledge", since again, in order to complete and pass part

3, particularly linking self factors to the developed theory, students needed to understand that they were an integral part of the theory they developed.

Objective 4 – "to develop a critical awareness of one's own 'self'" – cannot be so glibly claimed from student results without close scrutiny of all student work and behaviour, both inside and outside formal classes. What does it mean to develop a 'critical' awareness, and how does one evaluate when this has been achieved? In terms of the theoretical framework outlined in this thesis, this objective relates to the notion of *critical* reflection, a hotly contested notion, but one which I have defined in terms of Foucault's brand of 'ethico-critical reflection'. The ethical entails 'opening up the space for other', the critical maintains a constant vigil against the universal, the necessary, the obligatory. How well did students in WS1002 open up the space for other, how will did they maintain such a constant vigil? I would be reluctant to use student assignments solely, or even partly, to gauge how well this objective was satisfied. Observation of tutorials indicates that some students were already beginning to practise such endeavours, some made headway through the subject, and some stood as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar. Indeed, it is my perception that two of the better students (students in the top 12 who received a Distinction or better as an overall subject grade) did not budge an inch in their views throughout the entire year. I am aware that it is completely unreasonable to expect mass movement in such a subject over such a short period of time – one semester (even a year is relatively brief). But for some people I suspect a lifetime is too short.

Objective 5 – "to develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment" – is indirectly implicated in the notion of self, since logically, one needs to take a cold hard stare at one's own self and be clear on what one's own perspectives are before developing an awareness that there might be other perspectives. This is best evaluated, in terms of student work, by part 2 of assignment 3, which asks: "What kind of assistance do you think the person would feel to be beneficial for them? Give reasons for your choice." Again, student assignment data indicates that by far the majority of students satisfied this learning goal. Only six of 56 students failed this part of the assignment and for two of these this due entirely to failure to integrate literature. In other words, they passed the aspects relating to 'self'.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the social context of learning in the subject WS1002. It has done so at two levels. First, in terms of personal relationships, particularly between staff and students; second, in terms of the use of self as a pedagogical tool. Input, process and outcome data, from the baseline questionnaires, student consultations, classroom observations, taped group discussions and TEVALs indicate that the social context of learning, particularly the interaction and personal relationships between teacher and students, is perceived to be a key ingredient of effective learning. The literature largely confirms this assessment.

In exploring the use of self as a pedagogical tool in the subject WS1002, I begin from the notion that the key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with the theory/practice nexus and that this entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. Both these dimensions necessarily involve self-reflection. First, I review the concept of 'self' as a theoretical entity. I briefly recap on Foucault's brand of 'ethico-critical reflection', then locate my philosophical position about self within contemporary theorizing in the field of psychology. I consider this important since the self is the major unit of analysis in the discipline. We discover gentle rumblings in the discipline's bedrock, but an earthquake is not nigh. Second, I explore ethical dilemmas in using self as a pedagogical tool. I note two potential objections: the ethics of potential collective social action, and the ethics of student psychological insecurity. I justify the first objection in terms of the aim of action research, change, and the goals of a non-teleological form of emancipatory education. After noting that Pauline and I had the expertise and skills to provide the appropriate support for students suffering from psychological insecurity, I dealt with the second objection in three ways. First, by justifying the use of self as a pedagogical tool in terms of social work's mission. Second, by arguing that pedagogical choice is a function of prior questions about the role of education. If your chief educational aim concerns development of self, as in ancient India, then it would be unethical not to use self as a pedagogical tool to achieve that aim.

Third, I argued that self and self-reflection are features of late modernity and such selves are constituted in ethical spaces. Therefore, it would be an abrogation of our teaching responsibilities were we to neglect the use of self in pedagogy.

I concluded the chapter by examining student outcome data, student assignments, to assess how successfully students achieved WS1002 subject objectives relating to the notion of 'self'. I concluded that, after initial difficulties, the vast majority of student work demonstrated clear satisfaction of subject objectives relating to self.

If we wish to discover the truth about an education system, we must look into its assessment procedures.
(Derek Rowntree 1977, p. 1)

CHAPTER NINE

ASSESSMENT:

WE CAN EVALUATE, BUT CAN WE DIRECT STUDENT

LEARNING?

INTRODUCTION

...the assessment of students is a serious and often tragic enterprise.
(Ramsden 1992, p. 181)

There was little evidence that universities are looking at assessment methodologies to determine the extent to which they contribute to learning outcomes and insufficient attention given to the question of 'appropriate assessment'.
(Committee for Quality Assurance 1995, p. 5)

Assessment provides an evaluation of the students' competence in meeting specified objectives. But it is also part of the teaching and learning process. Properly selected assessment tasks help students to structure their time, signal the importance of particular content, skills and concepts, and influence approaches to study. Constructive and timely feedback on assessment helps students to gain a sense of progress, a knowledge of standards and criteria for judgements in the field, and to learn from their attempts.
(AVCC 1993, p. 3)

These three quotations provide the grist for this chapter. The first announces a

problem. The second elaborates on the problem, particularly the relationship

between assessment and learning outcomes. The third hints at one of the sources

to the problem and charts one potential solution by highlighting the dual nature of

assessment: a compass for navigating learning and a map to evaluate learning. I

shall begin the chapter by addressing key conceptual and theoretical issues in

student assessment. Next, on the basis of the key 'findings' emerging from this

discussion, I shall offer guidelines for appropriate assessment and compare

WS1002 with these guidelines. Finally, I shall move on to a detailed examination

of assessment tasks and requirements in WS1002 and how well students satisfied

the learning objectives embodied in the assessment tasks.

I.   WHAT IS ASSESSMENT? – WHAT ARE ITS PURPOSES?

What is assessment? What are its purposes? Why does it appear as an "often

tragic enterprise?" Why is there "insufficient attention" devoted to the issue?

When Derek Rowntree wrote "the best of all books on the subject" (Ramsden

1992, p. 181), he noted the existing extensive literature, but that "for the most part,

the literature takes for granted the present nature of assessment and seeks

improvement merely through increasing its efficiency" (Rowntree 1977, p. 2). My

discussion in chapter two indicates that all concepts – and this includes

'assessment' – are theoretically embedded; they assume their meaning from the

role they play in larger theories, in this case educational theories. Before one can

talk of 'effective' or 'appropriate' assessment, one must be clear about how

assessment slides into the larger bedrock. In Rowntree's (1977, p. 31) words:

"The teacher's use of assessment will be heavily influenced by the expectations of

the teaching system within which he is working. But his attitudes to assessment will largely depend on his ideas as to what teaching and learning and knowledge and education are all about." Rowntree portrays a continuum:

> To put it crudely, one end of the continuum tends to attract the teacher whose first loyalty is to a public corpus of pre-existing knowledge or expertise (which he knows everyone ought to acquire) and the need to 'get it across' to a succession of students who learn, as far as their limited capacity and motivation will allow, by absorbing and reproducing the products of other people's experience. The other end of the continuum attracts the teacher who distrusts generalizations about what everyone ought to know, and who, believing people to have unlimited potential for growth unless 'discouraged', gives his first loyalty to individual students and encourages them to exercise their own developing motivation and sense of purpose in mastering cognitive and affective capacities, making their own meaning and creating new knowledge out of their own ideas and experiences.
> (Rowntree 1977, p. 32)

In terms of my previous discussion we might characterize the first position as a positivist one, the other as a hermeneutic one. But the second position can be co-opted for critical theory and poststructural positions. Locating Rowntree's "individual student" in discursive space as a product of socio-historical conditions is the first step. That is not my purpose here. How I enlist Rowntree's second position for the purposes of my theoretical position will become clear enough when I review the assessment tasks for WS1002. My purpose here is to highlight Rowntree's general point: a "teacher's pedagogic paradigm" (p. 33) will dictate his or her view of assessment. Ramsden (1992, p. 212) is equally strident in his claims: "No other aspect of instruction reveals more starkly the essential conception of teaching inherent in a course or in a lecturer's view of the educational process."

The first task in dealing with the concept of assessment is to revisit the chapter six discussion on the distinction between 'assessment' and 'evaluation'. I have followed Rowntree's distinction based on target group and activities: students' work gets *assessed*, but teachers' work gets *evaluated*. The British literature tends to use the single term 'assessment' to refer to both types of activities; the American literature uses the term 'evaluation' to refer to both types (Rowntree 1977). I break with this tradition in following Rowntree.

I have already outlined my distinction between *input, process* and *outcome* data in Braskamp and colleagues' (1984) model for evaluating teaching excellence. I eschewed the *formative/summative* distinction pioneered by Scriven (1967), partly, but only partly because, as Rowntree remarked, the distinction is difficult to preserve in practice for teaching evaluation. He noted, however, that it is "very descriptive of what goes on in student assessment" (Rowntree 1977, p. 7). To retain consistency, I shall continue to use the terms *process* and *outcome* to refer to student assignments and their assessment. Overall student grades at the end of the semester are a form of outcome data and a form of outcome assessment. Each of the three individual assignments spread over the semester is a form of outcome data and outcome assessment for a specified period of time, but also acts as a form of process data and process assessment in the overall learning of the subject. When I discuss Ramsden's (1992) conception of assessment below, we shall see that he also acknowledges the blurred boundaries.

Rowntree's working definition of assessment highlights it as a "human encounter" (p. 4). Indeed, the subtitle of his book *"How shall we know them?"*, sums up his view of assessment as "an attempt to *know* that person" (p. 4). This, he emphasizes, involves more than formal measurement and end of term exams (compare Ramsden 1992). While this chapter focuses primarily on student assignments, this is not because I consider informal assessment to be unimportant. And as should be evident from the description of WS1002 in chapter five, end of term exams found no place in this subject. Four points are relevant. First, I have dealt already with an array of data sources bearing on the issue of both the *processes* and *outcomes* of student learning at an informal level, but particularly the processes. This data has included recorded observations of lecture, tutorial and consultation sessions at all points throughout the teaching and learning of WS1002. Second, in this chapter I shall draw on other data sources, including taped group discussions and TEVALs, where these refer explicitly to assessment. Third, my discussion of student assignments includes reference to assignment drafts, thus the informal infuses the formal. Fourth, echoing my point above, although student assignments are a form of *outcome* data, they were not entirely so, since there were three assignments spread over the semester and students were able to draw on earlier assignments, especially informal and formal feedback, to tackle later assignments.

The view of assessment taken in this thesis is captured by the following quotation:

> *Assessment is about several things at once.* It is not about simple dualities such as grading versus diagnosis. It is about reporting on students'

achievements and about teaching them better through expressing to them more clearly the goals of our curricula. It is about measuring student learning and it is about diagnosing specific misunderstandings in order to help students to learn more effectively. It concerns the quality of teaching as well as the quality of learning: it involves us in learning from our students' experiences, and is about changing ourselves as well as our students. It is not only about what a student can *do*; it is also about what it *means* he or she can do.
(Ramsden 1992, p. 182)

Ramsden unpackages this bulky definition in terms of three functions of assessment. First, helping students to learn; second, reporting on student progress; and third, making decisions about teaching. Ramsden stresses that the first two are inextricably linked: "the two separate worlds of assessment called 'formative' and 'summative' in the assessment manuals do not exist in actuality" (pp. 212-213). The chapter heading draws attention to these first two aspects. The third aspect, making decisions about teaching, is the motor that drives the entire thesis. Ramsden summarizes well the link between the three functions of assessment.

The connection between diagnosis and judgement is like a one-way street. There can be no truthful reporting or effective changes to teaching in the absence of faithful diagnosis of students' understandings. The belief that getting to know about our students' learning and sharing those findings with them must take priority is an inescapable consequence of a view of teaching as a highly interventionist process whose cardinal aim is to change students' understandings of the world around them.
(Ramsden 1992, p. 213)

When I discuss the student assignment data I will be *reporting* on student learning and progress; but I shall also integrate discussion on how students went about *learning* as a result of these assignments and what *decisions* we made about teaching in the light of student learning. Bear in mind particularly that the entire tutorial program was restructured around student learning issues. Student

performance and feedback, both from 1993 and the beginning of 1994, including from instant questionnaires, indicated that at least for assignment 1 we needed to use assessment as a key pedagogical tool, we needed to frame the first part of the tutorial program (tutorials 1-4 in weeks 2-5) around assessment requirements. In 1995 we extended this for a fifth week. This meant that almost half the tutorial program (five weeks of 12) was structured around assessment requirements, a decision made on the basis of student learning and feedback. But before I launch the discussion about the assignments I want to take up briefly the relationship between assessment and learning outcomes.

II.   ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING

From our students' point of view, assessment always defines the curriculum.
(Ramsden 1992, p. 187)

The methods we use to assess students are one of the most critical of all influences on their learning.
(Ramsden 1992, p. 67)

To understand the powerful role of assessment in shaping student learning we need to revisit the concept of 'approach to learning', first raised in chapter three, and the distinction it spawned between 'surface learning' and 'deep learning'. Recall Ramsden's distinction in terms of active understanding and passive reproduction. If we want to encourage superficial rote learning of vast amounts of material the surest way to achieve this is to set students assignments or examinations requiring simple recall of 'facts'. For example, if I were to tell WS1002 students that at the end of semester they would sit a 100% examination consisting of multiple-choice

items designed to test their recall of the definitions of the subject's key concepts –

knowledge, theories, concepts, assumptions, propositions, self – I should hardly be

surprised to find their learning so shallow that barely a ripple breached the surface.

Indeed, I might question whether they had 'got in the water' at all; they were

simply passive spectators on the shore.

We are said to live in a world of economic rationalism, and nowhere is this

reflected more strongly than in student choices about learning and assessment.

One comment from a student in 1995 illustrates this poignantly. The student had

missed the previous tutorial session and was discussing her second assignment

with me when I began to review part of the missed tutorial session. She quickly

cut me off, informing me that other students had already given her feedback that

there wasn't much in the session that could be used for the assignment. I see.

Ramsden (1992) is adamant that it is misconceived to refer to *individuals* as 'deep

learners' or 'surface learners'. Deep learning and surface learning are products of

context, they are adaptive responses, not student characteristics, and assessment

plays a crucial role in shaping these adaptive responses. A personal example will

illustrate this clearly. The context, including the assessment, of 'doing' this PhD

has encouraged deep learning for me, particularly as I try and wade my way

through the treacherous depths of Habermas (I dare not pretend to say I swim). I

am motivated by a desire to *understand*, not passively reproduce. I am particularly

motivated because I discover so few people actually read Habermas, yet many are

happy to make pronouncements on his work. I acknowledge that it was beyond me

to dive cold into Habermas. I had to content myself with boarding a raft and viewing the coral through the glass-bottomed boat, piloted in the first instance by Anthony Giddens, and later David Held. But eventually – when courage prevailed – I had to don my conceptual goggles and wiggle my toes in the Habermasian reef. Although I am yet to learn to swim in this channel of hazards, I can comfortably tread water for a chapter or two. While wading through Habermas bears intrinsic rewards, another element of the context spurs me on. It is the spectre of three cloaked examiners who will pronounce on my work: yea or nay. And like Josef K. in Kafka's chilling novel *The Trial* (1925), I will never be certain when the trial takes place, all the usual cues will be removed, I will see no courtroom, no judge, no jury. Their presence will be all the more potent for their absence. This is the context of doctoral dissertations in Australia. But I know this much: I must write in a way that demonstrates my *understanding* of the key teaching and learning issues raised by the present research. I must answer their questions without quite knowing what those questions are; or indeed, if they ask any questions at all. I suspect, though, that I must use a deep learning approach and have prepared myself accordingly.

Now contrast the following. As one of 1,100 first year Psychology students at Sydney University almost 20 years ago I demonstrated my immense capacity for 'effective' surface learning. The irony was not lost on me that 'understanding' of the sub-discipline of Learning in Psychology I was tested by 30 meticulously chosen multiple choice items, including a bank of common items drawn from

previous years to enable comparisons across cohorts. I was told I had done extremely well at this exercise, a High Distinction. My 'learning' of Learning continued for another two years. In third year Psychology – by this time I was in New Zealand – I studied advanced theory in operant conditioning. I even studied Herrnstein's 'matching law', which was seen in the field to be a significant breakthrough in understanding the behaviour of pecking pigeons. The implications for human learning were, of course, assumed. My learning from this excursion into the avian realm was tested by 15 multiple choice questions and five short answer questions, each of which required me to regurgitate as much factual gruel as I had been able to temporarily store in my fast-leaking cerebral silo. (Had only the pigeons known, they would have had a field day.) Fortunately, yet again, the cerebral structure stood firm and I achieved another glorious High Distinction. Unfortunately, I was equally aware that I hadn't actually learned very much. This tallies with Ramsden's comment (1992, p. 72) that "the students themselves are often painfully aware of the fact that the approaches to learning they are using will lead to inferior outcomes." Fourteen years later I taught introductory Psychology to most of the present cohort. Part of this subject – a small part fortunately – involved a session on classical and instrumental (operant) conditioning. As I prepared for this session I was struck by the incredible irony that if I had had to explain 'cold' what the fundamental difference between the two types of conditioning was, I would have 'made a meal of it' (I am a victim of 'imprinting' – Karl Lorenz's geese are not to blame, but the pigeons). I had studied the 'psychology of learning' for three years and yet I could not even explain the basic

difference between the two types of conditioning in a way that students might be able to understand. And I had always been a 'High Distinction student'.

This brief digression serves two purposes. First, it offers a scathing indictment of an education system which fosters surface learning par excellence. If we are genuinely committed to the notion of real student understanding we will be much more mindful of the assessment strategies we employ. Second, it underscores the point that approaches to learning are not individual student characteristics; they are an adaptive response which is 'conditioned' by variables of which assessment emerges as crucial.

The above 'anecdote' is not idiosyncratic. It echoes numerous studies using different measures over the last 20 years, beginning with some of the early phenomenographic work in Sweden (Marton and Säljö 1976; 1984) and extending beyond (Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; van Rossum and Schenk 1984; Hounsell 1984; 1985; Biggs 1988). The research is unequivocal: there is an extremely strong correlation between approaches to learning and the outcomes when *understanding* is specified as an outcome. Interestingly, Ramsden (1992) reviews research which indicates that using deep learning strategies will even improve learning outcomes when the assessment requirements encourage surface approaches. Scouller's (1998) recent research with 206 second year Education students at Sydney University runs counter to this finding. These students were assessed in two ways for the same course: end-of-course multiple choice questions

(MCQ) and an essay assignment. Not only did she discover that students were far more likely to employ surface approaches for MCQ, but that "some students may actually be disadvantaged by employing deep learning strategies" (p. 470).

It is important to stress that it is structuring assessment which is the key variable in steering student learning (Thomas and Bain 1984; Boud 1990; 1995; Entwistle and Entwistle 1991; Entwistle, Entwistle and Tait 1993; Scouller and Prosser 1994; Tang 1994; Atkins 1995; Tynjälä 1998). Scouller and Prosser (1994), in their review of the literature conclude that assessment shapes how much students learn (quantity), how they learn (approach) and what (content) they learn. It is not sufficient to adopt a 'deficit model' and teach students deep learning strategies. Ramsden's (1992) work is unequivocal that *explicitly* teaching study skills and/or deep learning strategies does NOT necessarily lead to deep learning. This is because the subject and its assessment may encourage surface learning. Gibbs (personal communication 1994) marked a doctoral thesis examining how engineering students learn. Findings confirmed Ramsden's work. Students were explicitly taught study skills and deep learning strategies, but assessment encouraged rote learning and similar surface learning strategies. It seemed that now these engineering students had become increasingly aware that they did not need to use deep approaches! The key factor in fostering deep learning is how the subject and its assessment is structured. In short, assessment can be used as a powerful tool to steer learning.

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Above, I quoted Ramsden as saying that for students assessment defines the curriculum. I then offered some personal reflections which were consistent with the research literature demonstrating how assessment defined the curriculum for me in my own studies. Ramsden notes that there are two aspects to this: one concerns assessment practices; the other the amount of content we try and cover in a course.

> Whatever we may say about our ambitions to develop understanding and critical thinking in our disciplines, it is in our assessment practices and the amount of content we cover that we demonstrate to undergraduate students what competence in a subject really means. There, starkly displayed for students to see, are the values academic staff attach to different forms of knowledge and ways of thinking.
> (Ramsden 1992, p. 72)

I have indicated already how assessment influences the quality of student learning by affecting student approaches to learning. Ramsden also points out that if assessment fails to test understanding it also allows students "to pass courses while retaining the conceptions of subject matter that teachers wished to change" (p. 72). But there is a second way in which assessment influences the quality of student learning: "Should the assessment of students' learning go no further than testing what can be unreflectively retained in their memories, misunderstandings will never be revealed" (p. 72). "These two aspects interact to support a stable system: the undetected misunderstandings are a result of superficial engagement with the subject matter and they in turn set the scene for the future use of surface approaches" (pp. 72-73). Ramsden cites Dahlgren's study with economics students who "had passed end-of-year examinations" yet "could not answer questions that tested their understanding" (p. 73).

I seem to have painted a bleak picture of assessment in higher education. But the artist can strike the canvas in different ways. The trick is to use the potent power of assessment to shape both teaching and learning in productive ways. How does one do this? I want to briefly sketch some guidelines for the sort of assessment likely to foster deep approaches to learning in higher education. Integrated in this discussion I examine how well the learning goals and assessment tasks in WS1002 match these guidelines, and where they do not, offer explanations. After this, I shall be ready to launch into the promised discussion of student assignments.

## III.	GUIDELINES FOR 'DEEP LEARNING' ASSESSMENT:
##	A COMPARISON WITH WS1002

I have adapted the following guidelines from Ramsden (1992, pp. 210-212), who has been heavily influenced by the seminal work of Rowntree (1977). In order to offer a comparison between the guidelines and WS1002, for ease of reference, I shall repeat from chapter five both the learning goals and the description of assessment tasks. Then I will demonstrate explicitly how these learning goals translate into the assessment tasks. Finally, I shall outline the 'deep learning' guidelines and compare WS1002 with these.

### 3.1	Learning Goals

1. To develop an awareness and understanding of the social construction of knowledge.

2. To develop an awareness of the role of 'self' in shaping how we perceive, interpret and act upon our environment.

3. To use the various mediums of communication to develop an understanding of human interaction.

4. To develop a critical awareness of 'self'.

5. To develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment.

6. To have an enjoyable thinking/learning experience.

3.2   Description of Assessment

3.2.1   Assessment 1

Choose a selected piece of interaction between two people, either from a book, magazine, TV or radio programme, or an interaction you have observed.

Part 1. Provide a 250-500 word descriptive summary of the people, the context and content of the interaction (non-assessable).

Part 2. Provide your 'theory' for what is happening in the interaction, both in relation to the individuals and in relation to the interaction between the individuals. In your theory, pay particular attention to identifying the *concepts* you have chosen to use, the *assumptions* underpinning your theory and the *propositions* made.

Part 3. What factors about you (background, culture, gender, age, beliefs, ideas, experiences) have led you to develop the theory you have?

1,000-1,500 words   30%   Due Friday April 15, 1994 (end of Week 7).

3.2.2 *Assessment 2*

Assessment 2 was identical with the following significant difference: interaction choice was no longer a dyad, but a group of three or more people. This assessment, also worth 30%, was due at the end of Week 10.

Assessment Criteria (assessments 1 and 2)

Part 2	40%
Part 3	40%
Written expression/ presentation of ideas (logic, reasoning)	20%
TOTAL	100%

Breakdown of *Part 2*:

Presentation of overall theory	20%
Identification of concepts, assumptions, propositions	10%
Integration of readings, study materials & classroom sessions	10%
TOTAL	40%

Breakdown of *Part 3*:

Identification of self factors shaping theory developed	15%
Linkage of self factors to theory developed	15%
Integration of readings, study materials & classroom sessions	10%
TOTAL	40%

More detailed assessment criteria were provided verbally as the semester and the action research project progressed. These are discussed in detail in the analysis of student assignments below.

3.2.3 *Assessment 3*

Select a person either from the interaction described in Assessment 1 or 2.

Part 1. Take one event or phase in that person's life which is a problem to them. Describe the person and the event. In your description indicate why you have chosen to present the details you have about the person and the event (500-750 words).

Part 2. What kind of assistance do you think the person would feel to be beneficial for them? Give reasons for your choice (500-750 words).

1,000-1,500 words   40%   Due Friday June 10, 1994 (end of Week 14).

Assessment Criteria

Part 1	40%
Part 2	40%
Written expression/ presentation of ideas (logic, reasoning)	20%
TOTAL	100%

Breakdown of *Part 1*:

Description of person and event	10%
Reasons for your choice of details	20%
Integration of readings, study materials & classroom sessions	10%
TOTAL	40%

Breakdown of *Part 2*:

Description of assistance	10%
Reasons for choice of assistance	20%
Integration of readings, study materials & classroom sessions	10%
TOTAL	40%

As with assessments 1 and 2, more detailed assessment criteria were provided verbally as the semester and the action research project progressed. Again, these are discussed in detail in the analysis of student assignments below.

3.2.4   Summary

There were three pieces of assessment for this subject. The first two were weighted at 30% each, the third at 40%. The key difference between assignments 1 and 2 was that between a dyadic and a group interaction. This difference enabled students to build on their learning from assessment 1, and extend it, since a group dynamic introduced new theoretical ideas concerning group behaviour. The final assessment builds on the previous two by having students take one

character from their earlier theoretical analyses and extend this to providing a theoretically justified course of action (practice).

Part 2 of assignments 1 and 2 which asked students to provide a theory and identify the constituent parts of these theories could be summarized as *theory development*. Part 3, also worth 40%, asked students to identify the self factors which had led them to develop the theory they had. Part 3 could be summarized as *social construction of knowledge*.

3.3   Linking Learning Goals with Assessment Tasks

1.   To develop an awareness and understanding of the social construction of knowledge

Part 1 in both assignments 1 and 2 asked students to develop their *personal* theory of the interaction. To ensure that students drew the link between development of their own theories and those of others (rather than dismissing their own efforts as not real knowledge), students were asked to integrate the literature into their discussion. We also continually emphasized that all theorists were 'flesh and blood' human beings located in particular socio-historical spaces. Part 3 in assignments 1 and 2 required students to explicitly link their self factors with their developed theory. This provided an extremely strong link between our first subject goal and the assessment tasks.

2. *To develop an awareness of the role of 'self' in shaping how we perceive, interpret and act upon our environment*

Part 3 of assignments 1 and 2 – both identification and linkage aspects – explicitly draw attention to this learning goal. Part 2 of assignment 3 requiring students to 'step into the world of other' also addresses this goal.

3. *To use the various mediums of communication to develop an understanding of human interaction*

Allowing students to choose interactions from a variety of media satisfied this learning goal. Students utilized this avenue to the full. Note also our use of a variety of media in the tutorials, including videos, role plays, group exercises and observational exercises.

4. *To develop a critical awareness of 'self'*

Part 3 of assignments 1 and 2 – self factors – was important for initiating this learning goal. Conceivably, this aspect of the assignments could be done simply by developing an awareness of self without the *critical* factor. The critical element was provided by two avenues. First, using student work in the early part of the tutorial program. This engaged students in discussion about their individual perspectives, which were open to challenge. Second, part 2 of assignment 3 asks students to 'step into the world of other' by outlining and justifying the kinds of assistance another individual would find beneficial. To achieve this task requires some form of critical self-awareness; otherwise

students simply describe ideas from their *own* perspective. Logically, students must be able to discriminate carefully between self and other.

5. *To develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment*

Again, part 2 of assignment 3 addresses this learning goal. Additionally, as above, using student work in the tutorial program lends itself to awareness of alternative perspectives. This became more poignant in 1996 with the development and subsequent use of the CAUT videos in tutorials and as the basis for assessment. Not surprisingly, students could develop quite different theories to explain aspects of these deliberately ambiguous interactions.

6. *To have an enjoyable thinking/learning experience*

One cannot make *a priori* claims about intrinsic links between assessment tasks and student enjoyment. This must spring from the data. Suffice to say, that it was Pauline's and my perception that assignments allowing students to pursue human interactions of their choosing lent itself to enjoyment. This was supported by the data (see below).

3.4   Assessment Guidelines for Deep Learning

Unless otherwise specified, all references to Ramsden refer to 1992.

1. Link assessment to learning

Learning goals and assessment strategies must be connected. Arguably the most important guideline, this may seem obvious. That it is not is evident from the briefest scrutiny of a representative sample of subject outlines in higher education. A caricatured example is when a lecturer specifies the development of critical thinking as a learning goal – an increasingly popular objective – and the assessment consists of an end of semester examination heavily loaded with multiple choice and short answer questions primarily requiring recall of factual information.

How well does WS1002 stand up to this guideline? Recall Neal Sellars' independent evaluation:

> In my view, the assessment tasks in this subject integrate very closely with the subject objectives and content.
> (Sellars 1996, p. 2)

The above discussion puts fat on the bone by explicitly outlining how the learning goals of WS1002 translate into specific assessment tasks.

2. Make criteria for assessment explicit and public

Above, I describe in detail the assessment criteria for each of the three assessment tasks. Note that these criteria and their respective weightings formed part of the subject outline. This was a particular bugbear of mine. I remembered particularly my own student days when one was left to drown in the murky waters of assessment. I had one lecturer who once announced the topic and due date for the

major essay (worth 35% of the entire year's mark) in the last week of Trinity Term – yes, you guessed: Sydney University. He informed us the essay would be due the first week back after the three week May holidays. I had worked very hard at this subject. I had planned to go to New Zealand for three weeks in the May holidays. It was an important trip. I got engaged on the last day of it. I had meticulously organized all my assignments and study arrangements around this trip. Had I even known the topic at the beginning of semester – information one would reasonably expect a subject outline to contain – I could have easily completed the assignment by the due date. As it was, I had a choice: cancel the trip to visit my prospective fiancee, or withdraw from the subject. I chose the latter. Effectively, I was forced to withdraw from a subject due to a lecturer's professional negligence. Of course I attempted to explain my situation. And of course he listened patiently and smiled that seductive smile of his that was usually reserved for female students. But the end result was that I had to withdraw from the subject. It was these types of experiences from my undergraduate days – and there are others – that led me to develop a subject outline proforma which was accepted by the department and ultimately adapted campus-wide as part of the Quality Assurance Project. On this document I outlined all the necessary information that should be included on subject outlines, with particular attention directed to assessment, including topics, due dates, assessment weightings and specific assessment criteria (see the subject information in chapter five for details).

3. Feedback

Never assess without giving students comments about potential improvements. I shall discuss this below in the section entitled *Feedback* and provide concrete examples of typical *written* feedback on student work, noting that this is only one form of feedback, albeit an important one.

4. Learn from students' mistakes

Ramsden suggests using assessment to discover student misunderstandings, then modifying teaching to address them. I shall integrate discussion of this in the analysis of student assignments. Now, I shall point out that the entire subject was premised on learning from student misunderstandings and modifying teaching in the light of these. Note the tutorial program restructuring. This type of *change* is a hallmark of action research.

5. Use a variety of assessment methods

Ramsden (1992, p. 191) argues that "a conception of assessment for learning first and grading second implies the use of a spectrum of methods." This was something we did not do; at least in a significant way. It was regular fare of our teaching arsenal for other subjects. Compare, for instance, WS1004, the follow-on subject which consisted of three pieces of assessment. The first, a 'social welfare experience', required students to identify an individual, group or community they considered to be disadvantaged in Australian society, and to imagine themselves as an individual who is now part of this experience. They were then required to

perform two tasks: describe a week in their life, addressing both the individual experience and the wider systems they impacted on and were impacting on them; next, they were told that in their week they sought help – where did they go and what happened? The second piece of assessment was a group case conference. Small groups of students chose from a variety of adapted real life cases and worked on them over the semester, culminating in a 20 minute case presentation, as in social work practice, presented to the rest of the class during the last two weeks of semester. The third piece of assessment was another written piece, a choice between a reflective learning journal kept over the semester or a 'personal practice model'. Note the variety along two dimensions in particular: individual versus group work; and written versus oral presentation. But in WS1002 we chose three pieces of assessment, all of which were individual and all of which were written. Why did we do this? There were a number of reasons, some relating to the specific objectives of WS1002; others relating more generally to tertiary study. I shall discuss them briefly.

First, Pauline had gradually modified and trialled the assessment tasks as she moved the subject's orientation from the Ms J Gestalt-based model to its present epistemological focus. Second, this was a subject that we knew students found challenging; rewarding, but challenging. We operated on the principle that writing is a key ingredient in learning: we write to learn (see Graves 1994). It is true that there are numerous other key ingredients in this process and that written assignments are probably over-represented in higher education, but for the present

subject with its huge emphasis on *thinking* critically and reflectively, past experience had taught us that, despite the difficulties, students performed better when asked to go through the sometimes difficult process of writing. This, of course, is not to downplay the role of peer discussion in this process. While we did not formally build such peer group input into the assessment tasks – as we did in the next semester with WS1004 – we actively encouraged collaborative work in preparing the assignments. This is borne out by perusal of the transcript data. Third, the assignments were carefully designed with a particular graded progression in mind. Assignment one dealt with dyads – two way interactions. We had discovered, and student feedback strongly supported this, that basic mastery of theory construction and development required two assignments. The second assignment was to build on the theoretical and conceptual scaffolding of the first with the added dimension of a group interaction, an inherently more complex human interaction which required additional knowledge and concepts to explain. Once students had acquired basic mastery of the process of theory construction and development the third assignment moved to a more 'applied' level in the sense that it was more akin to an actual social work practice situation. In short, the order of assignments could not have been reversed or changed in any way. Each succeeding assignment built on the previous one. It was this graded progression of both task and difficulty which enabled us, we believed, to satisfy all the subject's learning goals (compare also Meyers 1987 on the importance of graded practice). Finally, there was a further reason for not including formal group assignments or oral presentations. It had been our experience that when you have

a cohort which consists of large numbers of mature age students, even if many of them have had post-school experience, it has been in settings that emphasize traditional pedagogies and assessment methods. Coming from this background we found over the years that many students are initially intimidated and alienated by oral assessment and group presentations. We liked to give students a semester of familiarizing themselves with these 'new' techniques. Interestingly, a corresponding first semester subject included a group presentation as assessment and while there was no doubt that some productive learning took place, it also caused no end of trouble for staff and students.

6. Student participation in the assessment process

Ramsden suggests a number of strategies for achieving this. First, discuss appropriate methods and how the methods relate to the course goals. Second, joint staff-student design of assessment questions and assessment criteria negotiation. Third, self and peer assessment activities. Fourth, offering students responsible choice among different methods.

How well did WS1002 measure up to this guideline? First, we did make a point of discussing assessment methods and how these relate to course goals. The issue also arose spontaneously in the transcript data. Second, we did not jointly design and negotiate either assessment questions or assessment criteria. In retrospect I perceive this to be a weakness of our teaching in this subject. It was a strategy I commonly used with later year students, especially my combined second to fourth

year elective on cross-cultural interaction. I had this perception – a misguided one, I am now prepared to admit – that first years had to be introduced slowly to these things. I still hold by my above claim about mature age students feeling anxious and intimidated by oral presentations, and group work to a much lesser degree, but I believe we could have done a lot more about negotiating assessment tasks and requirements. The mitigating circumstance – but only slight – was that we allowed students, at least in 1994, complete freedom to choose their own interaction. This also relates to Ramsden's fourth point above about choice of methods. Although we set the compulsory assessment tasks, there was ample room to manoeuvre – students could choose any dyadic interaction for assignment 1 and any group interaction for assignment 2 from any medium (book, magazine, TV or radio programme, or an observed interaction) and could focus on explaining any aspect of that interaction they so chose. But having said this, when I crank into top gear critical reflection mode I am led to the very sad conclusion that we behaved in an authoritarian, hierarchical manner – had I only thought so at the time – by making all decisions about student assessment, thus unconsciously or otherwise, sending out clear messages that, despite the surface gloss, we were running this ship and keep your bloody hands off the rudder thank you very much.

Ramsden's other point, self and peer assessment, is an interesting one. In WS1002, due to perceived difficulties in assignment 1 (see below), we asked students to self-assess by completing a self-evaluation sheet (see appendix 3) against the assessment criteria for assignments 2 and 3. This was not for formal

grading purposes. Peer assessment in my experience is a tricky enterprise. We tried it later in the year in WS1004 for the case conference presentations. Although students were prepared to carry out the exercise of peer assessment, they still wanted their grading done by Pauline. Peer assessment is another strategy that I think is very difficult to pull off in the first semester of tertiary study. Again, the fetters of traditional education for mature age students seem to clamp innovations. My experience is that many students find it exceedingly discomforting and anxiety-producing to assess others' work. In 1992 I introduced peer assessment into student seminar presentations for a combined second year Community Welfare and third year Social Work compulsory subject consisting of about 60 students. This was not a token gesture – seminar presentations were weighted at 30% of the subject. I was overall coordinator of the subject and taught three of the four seminar groups so I was in a position to negotiate criteria and monitor the process for these three groups. In the final session I handed out a survey which addressed explicitly issues pertaining to peer assessment. I visited the fourth group I did not teach and conducted an informal feedback session in addition to the survey. During the informal session I was badly mauled. One mature age female student informed me that the notion of peer assessment as an adult learning strategy was a sham. When I attempted to defend the procedure, she pointed out, poignantly, that if I were serious about collaborative decision-making, I would have consulted and negotiated with them about the implementation of peer assessment. As it was, she claimed, I had imposed peer assessment in an authoritarian manner. This was an interesting twist and a vital introduction to my

first year of lecturing. The survey results were interesting. Most students did indeed find peer assessment intimidating, though most agreed that by the end of the semester it had been a worthwhile exercise. By far the biggest disadvantage identified was that it tended to corrode group cohesion, introducing a competitive spirit into the sessions which became even more pronounced than if the lecturer were evaluating the seminars.

I think the major lesson to be gleaned from this is that we cannot assume, as Ramsden seems to, that peer assessment is automatically a beneficial exercise. I think it can be, but it requires considerable time and energy and is fraught with hazards as long as we are locked into a compulsory grading system.

7. *Give lucid and frequent messages that success is to be achieved through deep learning strategies*

Ramsden suggests that this can be realized both in the assessment questions set and course goals. He isolates memorization, reproduction and imitation as targets for attack. The most cursory examination of the assessment requirements for WS1002 and the subject goals indicates how seriously we take this. Indeed, as I have already pointed out, it is hard to imagine how a student might actually complete the assignments satisfactorily by using surface approaches such as memorization, reproduction and imitation.

8. *Use multiple-choice and other 'objective' tests very cautiously*

Ramsden urges that where numbers of students and time permit, alternative techniques are to be preferred. If this is not possible, use them in combination with other methods. I confess to being permanently cured of such assessment strategies after my career as a Psychology double major. I am proud to say that I have never included such methods in any subject I have taught.

9. *Focus on validity before reliability*

Expressed simply, focus on the importance of *what* you are measuring rather than on whether your 'test' is consistent. This echoes Lee Shulman's comment (1988) about teaching evaluation being controlled by pedagogical principles rather than measurement choices. For us, what we were measuring was paramount. While we made the utmost effort to make our assessment and grading procedures fair and transparent (see below), we were never prepared to sacrifice validity.

10. Reduce anxiety

In the previous chapter I drew attention to the nature and quality of the social context of learning, particularly personal relationships. I also highlighted my own experiences in being examined three times for a driving licence and how my examiner for the first two tests had a particular knack for inducing anxiety. I also remarked how I observed over the years that many of the major 'learning' issues faced by mature aged women in particular, though not exclusively, were self-esteem ones. Anxiety seemed to be an integral part of their learning tool kit.

Meyers (1987, p. 70) relates some of the anxiety to the type of assessment, the 'traditional term paper'. "The problem is that most students feel intimidated when asked to analyze the work of writers who clearly know more than the students." Note that our assessment focused primarily on having students analyze their *own* work and only later trying to integrate the work of others into this personal framework or theory. In order to counteract the anxiety issues, we expended considerable energy in individual consultation sessions as well as all other teaching forums in reducing anxiety for all aspects of the learning process, not simply for assessment. The form of assessment made this task easier since there were three pieces staggered over the semester with considerable feedback given both during the process of preparing the assignments and when they were completed and marked. Additionally, assessment was built into the tutorial program. Meyers (1987, p. 71), likewise, highlights the importance of this. "Traditional term papers are ill chosen because they demand too much of students too late in the course."

11. *Never set an assignment or examination question you are not ready to answer yourself*

The present thesis should provide ample testimony to my willingness to tackle the tasks asked of students.

12. Reduce the competitive aspects of assessment while providing inducements to succeed against a standard

Ramsden seems to think that this can be done "through using assessments of group products and deriving standards from several cohorts of students" (p. 212). I have little problem with deriving standards from several cohorts of students and this is indeed what we attempted to do. Note that in 1994 we also had an Open Learning cohort pursuing WS1002 by distance education. But our experience with the internal cohort during the second semester subject WS1004 taught us that group assessment, far from reducing competition, actually increased it. Recall my discussion in the previous chapter where I spoke of a student approaching me in early September informing me that competitiveness in the student body among certain female students had reached the point where for group assignments some students were asking others what their grades were before allowing them to join their group. This is a very sorry state of affairs. I agree wholeheartedly with Ramsden about reducing the competitive aspects of assessment. I simply doubt his strategy. I don't think we will ever fully surmount the competition issue as long as we are locked into a higher education system which awards merit-based grades.

13. Human judgement is the most important element in every indicator of achievement

We were acutely aware of this – it is also pivotal to social work practice. Below I discuss quality control measures designed to reduce the 'error of judgement'.

Ramsden (1992) provides us with a general set of assessment guidelines for higher education. Before discussing student assignments I shall briefly flesh this out by drawing on Meyers (1987), who writes specifically of assessing critical thinking. Meyers acknowledges the challenge in "creating written assignments that encourage critical thinking...because there are so few appropriate models" (p. 69). One element he does stress is that "in assessing critical thinking abilities it is often as important to know *how* a student arrived at a conclusion as it is to know the conclusion itself. Assignments in critical thinking should give students opportunities to puzzle over issues, to sort things out, and to formulate their own independent judgements" (p. 69). Note how our assignments allow this. Particularly note how our extensive consultation sessions and providing feedback on drafts of student assignments enable us to "know *how* a student arrived at a conclusion." This will be borne out in the data discussed below.

Summary

I have tried to 'measure' assessment in WS1002 against a set of guidelines. While we do not score 'top marks' on all measures, I think the above discussion indicates that our assessment is designed to foster deep learning in students, particularly thinking critically about action, and that there is a close union between subject objectives and assessment tasks. The next question is, how well did students perform on these tasks?

IV.   STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

I begin by offering general comments and data about assessment followed by discussion of marking and grading procedures and quality control measures. Next follows specific discussion of assignments 1 and 2. Immediately after this, I discuss the distinct aspects of assignment 2 triggered by the group dynamic. This is followed by discussion of those aspects of assignment 3 not already raised in the preceding discussion. Integrated into the discussion of assignments 1, 2 and 3 is comparative data from the Open Learning cohort. I follow this with a comparison of Pauline's and my marking. Next, I discuss final subject grades, compare them with Open Learning final grades, and break up the internal cohort's final grade data by degree program (BSW, BCW, other), gender and age. I also compare this data according to degree program, gender and age with *PY1003: Psychology for Social Welfare Practice*, taught in second semester. Finally, I discuss the importance of assignment feedback and our resubmission policy.

4.1   General Comments

There was unanimous agreement in the Tuesday group that three assignments was far preferable to exams and a number of students commented favourably on having the three assignments with similar weightings:

> Yeah, you get more feedback.
> Yeah, I think that 30% for each one was good compared with like our other subject which was 60%. That was too much and this idea of feedback is really giving us a good direction of where we are going.
> I like the way you get the assignment back with all the comments and stuff on it so if you've stuffed up you can improve it.
> Yeah. Like with sociology it's just like a mark and that's it. You don't where you went wrong and all that. With the second one I sat there with the

assignment and saw I did that with the first one, what do I have to do to make it better".
(Transcript 31/5/94, p. 3)

Note also the important references to feedback. I shall return to this issue below.

An exchange from Pauline's Wednesday group also spoke favourably of assessment:

> Well when I first seen that the assessment for this subject was three assignments for one subject and it was involved in theory, I freaked out. But then once you get into the assignments it just makes a big difference. The way it was approached.
> I found in some of the other subjects in my experience I ended up saying 'what is expected', but with this subject I felt that... and I did best for this subject, so I feel that there is a reason behind this.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 22)

The Thursday group provided a slightly different angle by referring specifically to the 'applied' value of the assessment tasks:

> It's important too that we've learnt we can actually see where we can use it in our career later on, especially with those assignments.
> They really bring out the fact that what we've learned in class can be applied to a real life situation... A lot of times you go to a class and you think 'where the hell am I going to use it?'
> It helps me to talk about it a lot too. You go over there and somebody says something and somebody says 'is that an assumption or a...', you know it's always kind of everyone is thinking more.
> Yeah.
> You got to watch what you say.
> You start using the language at home – 'My perception of this particular situation...'
> It doesn't seem to stop coming from my mouth.
> (Transcript 2/6/94, pp. 11-12)

TEVAL data suggested that these exchanges were representative of students. Both Pauline and I posed optional bank items relating to assessment. I asked, "Assignments tie in with the course objectives", which yielded a rating of 1.2

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compared to the university average of 1.7, and Pauline posed, "I like the assessment requirements", which yielded a rating of 1.3 compared to the university average of 2.7. This average of 2.7, one of the lowest across more than 250 items, indicates that a lot of students in the university did not like assessment requirements, providing a powerful contrast to our assessment requirements. Additionally, Neal Sellars' (1996) analysis confirmed the congruence between subject objectives and assessment tasks at two levels: correspondence between subject objectives and assessment *criteria*, and congruence between subject objectives and content and assessment *tasks*. "There is, in my view, a close correspondence between subject objectives and assessment criteria. ... In my view, the assessment tasks in this subject integrate very closely with subject objectives and content" (Sellars 1996, p. 2).

4.2   Marking and Grading Procedures

Since I want to make some claims based on student grades, a hazard-fraught venture at the best of times, it is vital that I explicate clearly the procedures adopted in marking and grading assignments. Rowntree (1977) notes that much of the criticism directed against assessment is aimed at 'the grading system'. He argues, however, that "grades are more to be blamed for what they don't do than for what they do" (p. 68). And what they don't do, he argues, is "tell all that is known about the student's performance or abilities. Information is lost" (p. 68). Consequently, in the following analysis I shall attempt to restore the bytes. I shall use a number of strategies for doing this. First, I will break down and discuss

student grades by assignment and by each of the assessment criterion within each assignment. Second, I will supplement student assignment data with data derived from student drafts and classroom teaching sessions, particularly the tutorial program in weeks 2 to 5 which were structured around assessment tasks and requirements.

At the time of this study in 1994, the university awarded four passing grades: High Distinction, Distinction, Credit and Pass. Departments were free to decide on the raw score ranges corresponding to each grade. Indeed, the university conducted a review in 1994 which indicated vast variability and as a consequence, as part of its Quality Assurance procedures, instigated a university-wide standard to be adopted in 1995. But in 1994, at the time of the study, the following raw scores applied in the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare:

- High Distinction: 90-100%

- Distinction: 80-89%

- Credit: 65-79%

- Pass: 50-64%

- Fail: 0-49%

However, this says nothing of how individuals understood the standards expected for each grade level, nor of their psychometric understandings. Indeed, the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare conducted its own survey in second semester of 1994 in an attempt to ascertain such understandings. The crux

of the matter was: did staff members mark according to grades, and adjust a raw score to their chosen grade?; or, crudely expressed, did they simply pluck numbers out of the air and discover after the fact what grade had been obtained? Or did they use a combination of these two approaches? In short, were grading procedures grade-driven, mark-driven, or a combination of both? The departmental survey revealed that staff members were using all three approaches.

A related issue concerns grading according to preconceived notions of likely distributions. That is, using something like the 'normal distribution curve' where pre-determined percentages dictate what proportions are awarded for each level of grade. In such cases, awarded grades depend not on *absolute* levels of performance, but on how students perform *relative* to each other. This acts to place a ceiling on high grades and even ensures that some students will fail irrespective of the quality of their work. Scrutiny of our assignment grades reveals that we did *not* operate according to 'normal distributions'.

Pauline and I adopted very similar psychometric approaches for grading assignments. (Given a choice I would have been happy to have non-graded assessment. University and faculty guidelines prohibit this, and informal student feedback over the years indicates that most students also prefer graded assessment.) We understood the following broad qualities to obtain for the respective grade levels, whether the grade applied to an overall one for the subject as a whole, an individual piece of assessment contributing to this overall grade, or

to specific assessment criteria contributing to student grades in an individual assessment piece. I shall refer more specifically to our explicit expectations for respective assessment criteria in the relevant sections below. The following outlines broad and general qualitative judgements and are adapted from the department's criteria for evaluating social work honours' theses:

- High Distinction – outstanding work with, at most, very minor flaws.

- Distinction – very competent work, though with some limitations.

- Credit – competent work, but with some significant flaws.

- Pass – satisfactory work which meets minimum standards.

- Fail – does not meet minimum standards.

I shall discuss how we determined final grades after reviewing the analysis of each of the three assignments. The following discussion refers to how we determined grades for each of the three assessment pieces. Pauline and I marked according to the assessment criteria outlined in the subject outline. We did not pluck raw figures out of the air. For me, this was chiefly a result of my initial training in psychology, and particularly in measurement, where I was acutely aware of reliability issues when one attempted to discriminate in interval bands of less than 5%. Rather, we thought in terms of *grades* – High Distinction, Distinction, Credit, Pass or Fail, and for each criterion we asked ourselves at which of these levels we considered the criterion to be satisfied (all criteria were weighted at either 10%, 15% or 20%). For criteria weighted at 10% this was the only discrimination made, except at the Pass level where we asked if the effort were a bare Pass or a much

higher one closer to a Credit. In the former case, we awarded 5/10, in the latter, 6/10. Credits were awarded 7/10, Distinctions 8/10 and High Distinctions 9/10. In rare instances, if we considered a criterion to be satisfied to such an exceptionally, almost flawless standard – that is, given the academic levels and stage of degree of students, we could not reasonably have expected them to perform at a higher level – we awarded perfect marks, 10/10. We did not use half marks. For criteria weighted at 15% we performed the same initial function of establishing the *grade*, then made two discriminations within each range: those efforts which minimally satisfied the grade, and those satisfying at a more substantial level which began to approach the next grade level. Using this system, Passes were scored at either 8/15 or 9/15; Credits at 10/15 or 11/15; Distinctions at 12/15 or 13/15; and High Distinctions usually at 14/15, or, in very rare instances, at 15/15. Retaining our 5% reliability discrimination benchmark, we also performed two steps for 20% criteria. First, establish the grade, second determine where in the grade range the effort lies. For High Distinctions and Distinctions we retained two levels, scoring High Distinctions at 18 or 19 (20 was awarded on one occasion), and Distinctions at 16 or 17. For Passes and Credits, we made three distinctions at 5% intervals. Bare Passes were scored at 10/20, mid range Passes at 11/20 and high Passes at 12/20. Bare Credits were scored at 13/20, mid range Credits at 14/20 and high Credits at 15/20.

We can summarize all the above by saying that we marked by *grades* rather than raw scores – which are unreliable once you begin discriminating in bands of less

than 5% – and fitted the raw scores to the grade. Once we had done this for each part of the assignment (there were two assessable parts in each assignment), we added the criteria to form an overall score for that part, and did an overall check to see if the grade revealed by this addition confirmed our holistic perception of the part as a whole. Mostly, it did; in those cases where it did not, we re-read if necessary, and readjusted the criterion raw scores to tally with our overall grade for that part. Having completed this exercise for both parts and the written expression/presentation criterion, we repeated the exercise for the assignment as a whole; that is, did the final grade reflect our overall perception?

Having said this, I noted in my personal journal on 15 June 1995, having just completed marking the second and final assignment, that in 1994 I felt I was more trapped by the rigid assessment criteria we had outlined, whereas in 1995 I developed a more holistic view, making more effort to make the marks for each of the criterion fit this overall picture. Note that this had always been Pauline's tactic. This had been apparent to me when I marked a student's second assignment in 1994. I had read the assignment carefully and graded it according to each of the criterion, revealing a grade of borderline Distinction/High Distinction. But my gut feeling told me this was way off the mark. As part of our quality control measures, I gave the assignment to Pauline to read without any prompts or comments as to my opinions. Pauline's response was a low Credit. I went back and reread the assignment, ignoring the individual assessment criteria and focusing on a holistic

view. Although I felt Pauline had undergraded slightly, I was now clear that from a holistic perspective this assignment was worth no more than a high Credit.

One other comment is worth making. Pauline and I had very similar philosophies about borderline cases for overall assignment grades, with one exception. If in doubt between awarding a Distinction and a High Distinction or a Credit and a Distinction, we both always awarded the lower grade. But if in doubt between a Pass and a Fail or Resubmit, we both always awarded the higher grade, a Pass. The one area where we differed was between borderline Passes and Credits. Pauline tended to opt for the lower grade, me for the higher. Note that this made a difference of only 1% for each assignment, and hence, only approximately 0.3% for overall subject grade.

Pauline marked all her students' work in all three assignments. For assignment 3, I marked the work of all three of my groups (with one chance exception whose assignment Pauline had marked before she realized), but in assignments 1 and 2 we shared the load a little more equally with Pauline marking some of my students' work as well. For assignment 1, I marked 37 pieces, Pauline 26, of which 16 were Pauline's students and 10 mine; and for assignment 2, I marked 33 pieces and Pauline 27, of which 16 were Pauline's students and 11 mine. The process for deciding which of my students' work that Pauline marked was random.

4.3 Quality Control

In order to ensure consistency and equity across Pauline's and my tutorial groups we instigated two sorts of quality control measures. The first was for Pauline and I to read 'blind' (without knowing the other's grade or reading their final comments) a sample of each other's graded assignments. We chose one 'borderline' assignment for each grade level; that is, for Pass, Credit, Distinction and High Distinction pieces of work. The degree of agreement was surprising – though by no means unanimous – considering the nature of the task. Where differences occurred, we discussed them and reached agreement. This discussion was always productive and served to remind each other of our own assessment processes. This quality control check was important since, by agreement, we instituted graded progression in the marking; viz, we marked each succeeding assignment a little harder. Of particular note was the difference between assignments 1 and 2. We tended to be a little lenient in assignment 1, since the material was quite new compared to other subjects, and it was challenging. The leniency, however, took place for both of us at the bottom end of the scale. Our basic policy, noted above, was: if in doubt as to a Pass or Fail (Resubmit), award a Pass; if in doubt as to a Pass or Credit, Pauline awarded a Pass and I awarded a Credit. But if we were in doubt with Distinctions and High Distinctions, we always awarded the lower grade.

I shall provide some specific examples of this graded progression. In assignment 2 we expected students to identify fewer key concepts (avoid the shopping list

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approach) and to include an explanatory paragraph for each one. We expected students to be better at stripping back assumptions to their most fundamental forms. For propositions, we became stricter in ensuring that students show the causal relationship between concepts. For self factors and integration of literature, we focused more on quality rather than quantity. We now expected students to become better at identifying the most relevant self factors and linking these in a cogent way. Previously, we were more lenient if students demonstrated capacity to identify a whole range of self factors. Similarly, with literature integration, we were more content in assignment 1 if students demonstrated capacity to actually link a range of material, but in assignment 2 we were much more selective about the quality of this integration.

The second quality control measure was the standard Departmental Re-marks Policy (for which I had been the prime 'mover and shaker' and which I had in fact collated after consultation with both student representatives and staff), where students unhappy with their assigned grades could pursue a variety of succeeding avenues in order to obtain satisfaction, including re-marking by independent assessors. It is powerful testimony that in my three years of teaching this subject not a single student in this subject pursued this avenue. At various times some students were unhappy with their grades, but, following Re-mark Policy Guidelines, they always came and discussed the issue with the marker. Mostly they left satisfied, but on those occasions where they were not (rare – possibly two per year), rather than pursuing the official re-marks option, they allowed the lecturer who had not marked their assignment to review it.

The following sections examine systematically how assessment shaped the learning process for students. I particularly look at difficulties encountered and strategies designed to ameliorate these.

4.4 Assignments 1 and 2

4.4.1 Interactions and Descriptions

Choice of Interaction

One key issue that arose very early in our experience of teaching this subject concerned choice of interactions for assignments 1 and 2. Clearly, some interactions are more amenable to theory development than others. This had become clear to me in 1993 and to Pauline even earlier. Some interactions do not allow students to sprout wings. What is it, precisely, that makes an interaction appropriate for theory development? A number of years teaching this subject tells us that there exists no simple answer to this question. The key is that students need to be able to generate from the interaction a question which seems worthwhile explaining. Choosing a question because it appears to have a relatively simple and straightforward answer is not conducive to 'thick' theory development. Because we used assessment as a teaching tool in the tutorials of weeks 2 to 5, we mostly avoided this problem, since one of the major foci of week 3 was discussion of the students' chosen interactions, their descriptions of same and their adequacy. The issue also has implications for assignment 3, since students were locked into choosing to assist a person who had appeared in either assignment 1 or 2.

By 1996 the problem had been largely bypassed, since we used the video vignettes from the CAUT materials for assessment purposes. These essentially provided students with a set of six interactions from which they could choose one, then proceed to formulate a question requiring explanation.

Description of Interaction

One problem that emerged during both tutorials and consultation sessions was significant student confusion about the boundaries between descriptions of interactions and theories developed to account for some aspect of these interactions. Expressed differently, the confusion was about the differences between *descriptions* and *explanations*. In their descriptions some students conflated *what* happened with *why* it happened. Despite dealing with the issue explicitly in tutorials, a small number of students experienced difficulties in the first assignment; less so in the second.

4.4.2 Theory Development

The single biggest stumbling block to successful theory development in the early stages of this subject was to isolate a clear question. The following example drawn from the Open Learning modules is instructive:

> Imagine you are working in a welfare agency. You are talking to a 16 year old youth who is in trouble with the police again. He has stolen a video player. You want to help him. But he refuses to talk with you.
> (Ovington 1993a, p. 3)

There are at least three things to explain here. First, why he stole; second, why he was caught; third, why he won't talk with you. Each of these requires different types of explanations or theories. It is vital for students to frame a specific question in order to develop a cogent theory. Imagine what a melange of theories would result if students plunged into 'explaining' this scenario without specifying a clear and specific question. Some of the confusion for assignment 1 arose with my students (not Pauline's) because I recognized, with hindsight, that I failed to emphasize sufficiently this critical fact during the early classes (though I had done so in the Open Learning materials).

Having developed a clear question was not the end of student difficulties. The major weaknesses emerging early in the semester and in assignment 1 were the following. First, some students developed very brief theories – single paragraphs; though by assignment 2 students were in full flourish, with most having little difficulty in unleashing theories of 500 words (theoretically, the word limit). The key remedy in these instances was to get students to expand their ideas and this could be achieved with probing. For example, in assignment 2 sometimes a student would speak of the importance of group norms for shaping conformity behaviour, but without clearly specifying what all these norms were. Or they might develop this aspect of their theory but fail to explain the mechanisms by which these norms were maintained, possibly in terms of concepts like roles, status and leadership. Another strategy for expansion and development of ideas was exploring integration of literature.

The second weakness was that students did not always develop their theories in a systematic and logical way with clear causal links. Following on from assignment 2, group interaction theories, an example would be when a student discusses conformity to group norms before actually articulating what these norms were (which they did later). Sometimes this was a shame as some students' theories contained some fine ideas and keen insights. I have found organization of ideas and structural cohesion to be major drawbacks for significant numbers of students across a range of subjects and years. I encouraged (and demonstrated) a number of visual strategies for tackling theory development. Once students had settled on key concepts (see below), I would ask them in the tutorial sessions to write these concepts on separate pieces of paper and shuffle them around, attempting to draw arrows to show the links. If students were experiencing difficulties identifying clear concepts, I would take it back a step and simply ask them to write key sentences on separate pieces of paper and move these around.

Assignment 1 asked students to provide a theory of both the two individuals and the interaction between them. Some students structured their theory in three distinctly labelled parts: a theory of person A; a theory of Person B; and finally a theory of the interaction between A and B. Others, while addressing each individual, provided a more integrative format. We allowed students discretion in this – whatever was easiest for them. Our requirement was that they address both individuals *and* their interaction. Some students focused a little too much on

theories of individuals rather than the dynamics of the interaction. We addressed this issue in subsequent classes, but did not succeed entirely in stamping out the practice in assignment 2. We had been aware that this was a small problem from 1993, so we took pains to emphasize this dimension during classes. Alas! Some messages take longer to process than others. We persevered in 1995 and by the end of WS1002 in first semester of that year we were sufficiently satisfied that the message was clear. A related problem was a small number of students, having outlined their theory, proceeded to identify and outline concepts, assumptions and propositions independently for each of person A and person B in two distinct parts. This was not acceptable (and it was unexpected – it had not occurred the previous year) and we quickly redirected students. Note that any student who pursued their doubts in either classes or consultations (remember: we used the assessment as a teaching tool in the tutorials for weeks 2 to 5) were free of this difficulty. Not surprisingly, the students who usually had the biggest problems were the small minority who did not use consultation periods or who missed classes.

In assignment 3 it was clear that a small number of students had still not mastered an understanding of what theories are (perhaps hardly surprising; we had been told, after all, that this material was too difficult and boring for first year students). Confusion was demonstrated by comments such as: "Sarah's actions were based on General Systems Theory". This was disappointing since I had gone to great pains to explain – the issue had also arisen in assignments 1 and 2 – that people's actions are/may only be based on their own theories, implicit or otherwise. The

theories of others (e.g. General Systems Theory) can be used to *explain* the actions

of individuals. But it underscores the fact that the abstract nature of the material

with which we were dealing, even when located in the concrete experiences of

students, is not mastered by all students in a one semester subject.

One key issue raised in many of the groups' discussions was some confusion or

lack of consistency between Pauline's and my interpretations. While this was

essentially a pedagogical difference, it is significant that the three groups that

raised the issue in the taped group discussions, did so within the context of

assessment. The Tuesday group had this to say:

> And also with the assignments like next year or whenever you do the subject
> again, it might be a good idea to talk to the students on a whole in the group
> because, like between our group and Pauline's group there's a lot of confusion
> about what's expected from the assignment.
> Maybe we're getting told the same things but we're being told in such a
> different way that people are just confused because they've heard what
> Pauline's told them and I think I am doing it the right way.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, p. 7)

My Wednesday group echoed this when I prompted them for negative comments:

> The conflict that we've been getting between the assignments has probably
> been the biggest one that I've found. I remember speaking to you about it
> before and you were explaining that it was a technical thing about the concepts
> and the propositions and we had one way that we were explained how to do it
> and Pauline's tute explained a different way. Which was fine until we
> overlapped and discussed and then it seemed to come up again...
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, pp. 8-9)

Note the collaboration between students across tutorial groups.

Pauline's group offered similar comments:

The only problem that I found with it is Gary's approach and yours when it comes to assignment wise and I didn't really notice that until the last one to be marked. One night a few of us had a meeting and the ideas – I didn't have a clue where they were coming from and they didn't have a clue where I was coming from. And I just found that a bit of a stumbling block. I know the end result will be the same basically, but just that one, you know. ...

But what I'm saying Pauline is the fact that in a way I had trouble understanding them and they had trouble understanding me. ...

We found the end result was good, like we all sat down through our ideas and got to where we wanted. But I had to sit down and say, 'well alright, what's Gary's interpretation?', and they had to say, 'what's Pauline's?' ...

I actually thought that having the two lecturers was really good because it was different. The contrast of approach and style just seemed to put different things into release and in that way emphasized various aspects and just seemed to jell".

(Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 5-7)

The Thursday group did not raise the issue in the taped group discussions. However, this, and other pedagogical issues related to assignment completion, first came to my attention much earlier in the semester, initially through tutorial classes, then student consultations, and later via assignment 1. Observations from classes were documented in my personal journal and from consultations in student consultation records, which I included in my personal journal. Student work samples from assignments provided the other data source. The above quotations illustrate two related issues I would like to pursue. First, are two points concerning student learning, second are two points concerning our teaching. First, the student learning issues. Note two positive outcomes of the subject. First, students often worked together on the assignments in small groups. This is something Pauline and I had encouraged. There is no doubt, as is evident from the above, that overall this was a productive, though not always comfortable, learning experience. Second, student comments above indicate a burgeoning capacity to think critically,

perhaps the major aim of the subject! The points relating to teaching revolve around two issues. First, teaching the derivation of concepts, assumptions and propositions; and second, the role of self factors in assignment three. Note that when these problematic issues were raised in the taped group discussions both Pauline and I offered our explanations and understandings. I shall discuss these issues in more detail in the relevant subsections below.

Sixty three students submitted work for assignment 1. Break up data is available for 62; one of Pauline's students who was a 'Resubmit' had clearly not satisfied assessment requirements and Pauline did not feel the need to provide a mark for each criterion. Sixty students submitted work for assignment 2. Break up data is not available for two of Pauline's students who, by arrangement, handed in work later. No break up data is available for two of the three students graded Resubmit, since it was clear they had not satisfied assignment requirements. Thus, the assignment 2 break up data refers to 56 students.

Table 9.1:
Theory Marks – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 20	Ass 1	Ass 2
20	-	-
19	-	1
18	11	7
17	7	5
16	12	2
15	12	11
14	8	6
13	5	6
12	6	11
11	-	4
10	1	3

In assignment 1, 11 of 62 students scored a High Distinction (18/20), almost half (30/62) scored a Distinction or better (16/20) and all but seven students scored a Credit (13/20) or better. No students failed. For assignment 2, eight of 56 students scored a High Distinction, more than a quarter (15/56) scored a Distinction or better, approximately two thirds (38/56) scored a Credit or better, and again nobody failed. On the surface, it appears there was a deterioration in quality from assignment 1 to assignment 2. This is not the case. In fact, there were marked improvements, even considering two factors likely to depress the marks: first, the intrinsic difficulty of theories of group behaviour (the whole is always more than the sum of its parts); and second, we did not, as for assignment 1, spend four tutorial sessions using the assignment specifically as the springboard for learning. The reason why the distributions are lower overall is because Pauline and I operated according to graded progression – our expectations were higher for assignment 2 and we marked accordingly. Thus, it is not possible to directly compare specific marks for specific criteria in the two assignments. We raised our expectations both in terms of quantity and quality: we now expected students to provide a well-thought out theory displaying keen insight, which was logically and systematically developed and satisfied specified word length requirements. There were a small number of students receiving Passes for theory development in assignment 1 who wrote rather brief theories. In assignment 2 we expected students to expand and develop their ideas. Part of our policy of graded progression, and hence, easier marking for assignment 1, was influenced by our

desire to provide encouragement and self-confidence to students during the critical early period of their university career (see chapter eight on the social context of learning).

4.4.3 Concepts, Assumptions and Propositions

Concepts

My favoured strategy of dealing with 'theory novices' struggling with the concept of 'concepts' was to ask them to identify all the important words in their theory, and, having done so, to underline them. If left at this point, however, the following problem arose. Students would identify far too many concepts without distinguishing which ones were more important. The next step was to ask students to select those concepts which, if eliminated, would cause the theory not to make sense. These were the major concepts. Even so, in assignment 1 a significant number of students identified far too many concepts. The extreme example was a catalogue of 30 concepts in a 500 word theory! This problem could be rectified easily with most students once they tackled their propositions. Any concept that was not included in the key propositions was, by definition, not a major concept, since we had defined propositions as showing the causal relationships between concepts. If the problem persisted, it was because students were identifying too many key propositions (how many key propositions can one have in a 500-750 word theory?). This issue was tackled by returning students to basics: provide me with a one sentence answer/explanation to the question which your theory attempts to answer. I also encouraged students loathe to relinquish their preciously

identified concepts to distinguish between major and minor concepts. It was a form of graded progression. By the time we reached assignment 2 we expected that satisfactory answers would identify correctly most major concepts, highlighting them in their theory, and would not include too many minor concepts. Better answers would distinguish clearly between major and minor concepts and would also show which concepts could be grouped together. The best answers would do all these things in addition to providing a clear definition of concepts in a brief explanatory paragraph. For instance, one student in assignment 2 identified 'status' as a key concept, but showed how a number of minor concepts – age, experience, position and leadership – were all factors in establishing status. Once students became familiar with the approach, the situation improved – considerably in assignment 2.

Propositions

One major concern related to the final form of the theory's key proposition or propositions. Pauline taught students how to express their key proposition in mathematical form. For example, one student in the second assignment developed a theory to explain an observed group interaction on a labouring site. His key propositional statement was that the status of the individuals, combined with the norms of the trade created certain distinct alliances. His three key concepts were: status, norms and alliances. Pauline would teach students to write this in mathematical form:

STATUS + NORMS = ALLIANCES

I would teach students in the following way. As a first step, have students identify the key sentences in their theory. Second, underline the key concepts in those sentences. Third, remembering that a proposition demonstrates the causal relationship between concepts, attempt to extract a proposition in sentence form by relating the concepts to each other. I would then repeat the procedure a second time by demonstrating how to extract the mathematical proposition from the concepts (like Pauline). Not only did I demonstrate both approaches to students, but I also made it clear that either or both forms were acceptable in assignments. Thus, the student who wrote the above assignment did, in fact, write his key proposition in both sentence form and mathematical form. I did it in this way because my teaching experiences over the years in a variety of forums had taught me that students are often deterred by mathematical equations and it was more effective to teach them English language sentences before launching into mathematical sentences. It is precisely the approach that most people take these days in teaching mathematics to young children. Another perceived advantage was, that if correctly identified, the proposition(s) were an effective and systematic tool for linking the part 3 self factors to the overall theory. As in the instance above, over time we discovered that this outcome was most effectively achieved with most students by using concepts. That is, by having students explore their chosen concepts as a means to tap into their assumptions. It is in itself a telling fact that we choose to use certain concepts rather than others in explaining

behaviour and our choice of concepts tell us a lot about our assumptions of the world and human behaviour. For example, taking the above scenario from the Open Learning modules:

> Imagine you are working in a welfare agency. You are talking to a 16 year old youth who is in trouble with the police again. He has stolen a video player. You want to help him. But he refuses to talk with you.
> (Ovington 1993a, p. 3)

Suppose you choose to explain why he stole the video player. A 'traditional' developmental psychologist might use concepts like 'development of social conscience' or 'lack of impulse control' as part of their explanation. A sociologist, on the other hand, might refer to concepts like 'poverty', 'resistance', 'power', or 'class' as part of their explanation. The differences in choice of concepts tells us a lot about the underlying assumptions and world views of the people using these concepts.

You will note that I used the expression "if correctly identified" relating to propositions. This also presented an interesting pedagogical challenge. Teaching and consultation sessions indicated three broad strategies for theory development for both assignments 1 and 2 over both years, 1994 and 1995. First, was the *structured* approach. Here students focused on a single clear question. They did this first by identifying clearly and precisely which aspect of the interaction they wanted to explain. We taught them to do this by asking themselves questions about what needed to be explained, since in any interaction there may be a number of issues worthy of explanation. Pauline asked students to identify a clear and

precise question at the beginning of their theory (at least in the final draft). Discussions with Pauline after the first assignment also led me to adopt this approach. Perhaps their initial answer was a simple one sentence statement (sometimes it was two or three). Usually, this sentence/s served as the basis for the key proposition/s. They then built their theory around this/these sentences, often in a series of logical and sequential steps. For instance, one student in assignment 1 describes a scene in central South Africa just before the turn of the century between two brothers, one of whom, Garrick, is missing his lower right leg due to a shooting accident in which his brother Sean played a negligent role. Garrick's silent hate grows over the years and 15 years later they go shooting together. A hate-filled Garrick aims his shotgun at Sean but cannot go through with it. Why? The student began with a clear statement:

> Because Garrick was a weak man in a world where men are not supposed to be weak, he considered himself a failure.

This led to as series of logical and sequential statements.

> Because of his low self-esteem, Garrick blamed Sean, so he grew to hate his brother.
> With the feeling of growing hate inside him, the tension built up to a point where he could not cope.
> He was not able to cope with the growing hate inside him. He eventually lost control of his actions.
> When he could no longer control himself, he was forced to react against what he thought was the cause of his problems.
> From the reaction came even greater awareness of his own weak character.

The structured approach to theory development was basically proposition-driven: pose a question, answer it; the answer becomes the key proposition and the rest of theory grows around it. Having developed a theory in this structured style, they

then proceeded to identify the constituent parts: concepts, assumptions and propositions. In these cases the original sentence/s remained the key proposition. This strategy in itself suggests nothing about the merit of the final outcome. It is theoretically possible, and indeed occurred in practice at times, that students could be so fixed and rigid in their views of the situation that little critical thinking actually took place.

More often than not, as students worked their way through the process, which had begun as a structured one with a clear initial question and 'answer', they discovered all sorts of interesting things they hadn't thought about before and the final draft key proposition/s might be entirely different to that from which they began, or the original sentence might be one of only three key propositions. This I refer to as a *semi-structured* approach, beginning as it does with a clear structure before launching out into the world of uncertainty.

The third approach was *unstructured*. Here students would not begin with a single clear question – it might be a fuzzy notion of what required explanation. They would then explore the interaction in stream of consciousness style, pouring it all out; returning later to refine, having now become clearer on what they wanted to explain. Their theories grew organically. In many respects, though this might seem a more undisciplined approach, it is actually more creative and does not necessarily mean absence of discipline. The discipline was simply exercised at a

later phase of the process. This approach is consistent with that used by many contemporary novelists (see Grenville and Woolfe 1993).

Since these emerged as key learning strategies, over time they also became key pedagogical strategies. Sometimes it wasn't clear which came first, the teaching or the learning.

There was no necessary connection between which of the approaches students used – and some students used more than one for the first two assignments – and the sequence in which they identified the constituent parts of theories: concepts, assumptions and propositions. Some, as I suggested above, found it easier first to identify key words as a basis for concepts, then link these key concepts causally into a proposition. Others found it easier first to identify key sentence/s as a basis for formulating propositional statements, then unearthing the individual concepts from within. No student known to us found it easier to identify the assumptions first. Likewise, we knew of no cases where students began their theories with an explicit set of assumptions. I discuss the issue of pedagogical sequence below.

On a couple of occasions class sessions and consultation records revealed that students seemed to "have it right", then "dug themselves into a hole" and two weeks later were confused. One such student told me that she had wanted to come and see me, but knew she had to, for her own learning, work through the hole before she was convinced she couldn't do it.

By 1995 I was raising another concern with Pauline; not a concern that had been raised explicitly by students, but one to which my own critical reflections had led. That is, we were teaching propositions as a linear left brain activity, something like the form:

$$a + b + c = d$$

where each letter signifies a different concept. I had always been uneasy with this approach, since from my perspective, it did not always capture the complexity and multiplicity of theoretical activity. For instance, the following represent alternatives:

a   +   b   ➔   c   ➔   d

            ↑

            e

       a

   ↗   ↘

d   b   ←   e

  ↖ c ↙   ↑

              f
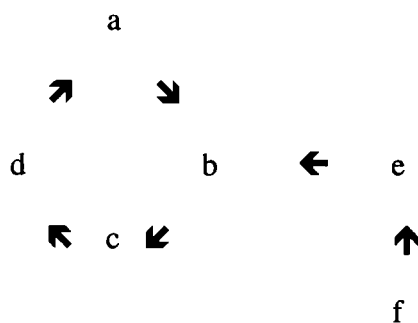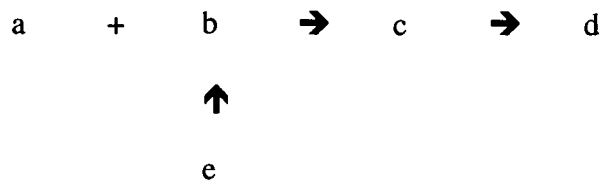
And even these two might be regarded as relatively simple causal chains, not to mention the immense philosophical difficulties involved in the concept of causation itself. However, after discussion, Pauline and I resolved that this was an

introductory subject whose primary aim was not to teach the nuances and intricacies of theories of causation. I had been encouraging students to explore visually their causal chains and I continued to do so. It was yet another learning strategy that students could draw upon if they so desired.

As with concepts, we expected graded progression. Satisfactory answers would identify correctly either the key proposition (if one) or some of the key propositions in sentence form. Better answers would identify most. Best answers would identify all and would present them in both sentence form and equation form. In assignment 2 we became stricter about ensuring that propositions demonstrated a clear causal relationship between major concepts.

Assumptions

The issue of stripping back assumptions to the most basic level presented formidable difficulties for most students in the beginning. After a time, almost all could understand the process when done by the teacher, but still experienced difficulty in performing the task themselves. It was not until the second assignment that many students began to master this task. I shall provide an example from a student assignment. "In Australian society some independence is expected after 18, generally." This assumption was *not* wrong; it was correctly identified within the context of the student's theory. But, underlying it, is a much broader assumption about human behaviour, viz, that culture is important in shaping human behaviour. The issue is one of specificity. We tried to teach

students to identify initially the specific assumptions of their theory, then strip

these back to more general assumptions about human behaviour, since it is these

general assumptions, applicable to a wide variety of situations, which would be

most useful in practice. We did this by our favoured technique of probing. The

following captures the flavour of our pedagogical approach:

So, you think this is important in Australian society? What do you mean by independence? (concept clarification)
Oh, independence. Well, it means that people think you should try and support yourself, you know, get a job, pay your own way, that sort of thing.
What about other cultures? Does turning 18 always mean independence?
Maybe in Asia they still live with their families, even after they get married.
So, you're suggesting there might be a difference here?
Yeah, there's a difference.
What's the source of the difference?
Different cultures, I suppose.
So, you're saying culture is important?
Yeah.
In this case you have suggested that culture is important for expectations about independence. Is that right?
Yeah, that's right.
So let's reframe your assumption, let's make it a little more general. Instead of saying, "in Australian society", let's talk about the general concept of culture, let's say that "culture is important", to use your example, for expectations about independence. Is that the only thing that culture determines?
No.
What else then?
Well, it's important for lots of things.
Give me some examples.
Gee, I dunno. Well, for the type of clothes you wear, the things you eat, your ideas about certain things...
Stop there for a minute. Let's take the first two. You've said culture is important for determining things like food, clothing, we'll leave thoughts for a minute. What general term could you use to describe things like the clothes people wear, the food they eat?
I'm not sure.
Let me put this another way. What people wear, what people eat, all the various cultural rituals people perform, are things they *do*, action things. Once I start talking about action or things people do, what am I talking about?
I don't quite get the drift.

OK. Let's go back. The third thing you said culture is important in determining is your ideas about certain things. Phrase that general idea in a general assumption: "culture is important for..."
Culture is important for how you think about things.
Right. Or to phrase it more succinctly, culture influences thought.

Using this strategy, we get students to move beyond the specific assumptions of their particular interaction and theory to general assumptions about human behaviour. In one sense, the task of stripping back assumptions is a form of deconstruction (see Solas 1994). Note that if students do not strip back assumptions, they often catalogue up to eight assumptions which can be reduced to three.

Some students experienced initial difficulties in identifying assumptions since they focused on the assumptions of participants in the interaction, rather than on the theorist (themselves) attempting to explain the interaction. My suspicion, confirmed in at least two instances by students themselves, was that on at least some of these occasions the confusion occurred because the student chose themselves as one of the participants in the interaction, meaning that the participant and the theorist were the same person. This problem did not emerge in Pauline's group since she explicitly told students not to choose themselves. Her rationale was that it was very difficult to theorize about self because of personal involvement. I agreed, but had discovered from previous years through other student feedback that some people do use self for interactions and if told they cannot, simply change the name of self to other. I also discovered that although the disadvantage of using self was, as Pauline suggested, a 'clouding' of issues,

there was a compensating advantage, viz, people are highly motivated to 'work out' themselves.

Many students initially had problems in distinguishing propositions from assumptions. This problem arose when students remained with the more specific-style assumptions originally generated, such as the one identified above: "In Australian society some independence is expected after 18, generally." However, as assumptions became more general, so the difference between the two increased. The real task was getting students to strip back assumptions to these more general levels. My argument is that assumptions are usually more general than propositions. But all propositions can ultimately be stripped back to general assumptions.

As with all aspects of the subject, we expected graded progression. By assignment 2 satisfactory answers would correctly identify at least some of the important assumptions (even if not stripped back). Better answers would identify most key assumptions and most would be stripped back. The best answers would identify all key assumptions and all would be stripped back.

Pedagogical Sequence

As I explained to students, the pedagogical sequence initially adopted by Pauline and I in teaching concepts, assumptions and propositions was a function of our different backgrounds and experiences; chiefly, Pauline was a social worker, I was

a teacher. The crux of the difference was that once students had formed their theory, Pauline tended to show students how to identify assumptions before propositions. Pauline proceeded with the sequence: concepts, assumptions, then propositions; I began with concepts, then proceeded to propositions before assumptions. Pauline's sequence is precisely that which one would find in the literature with finished products: assumptions are identified before theoretical propositions. Indeed, this was Pauline's rationale for doing it in this way. However, my rationale was an educational/pedagogical one: I believed that it was more difficult to ask students to identify their major assumptions before they had formulated their key theoretical proposition/s. The impetus for this belief came from teaching the 1994 Open Learning students doing this subject in the one week February workshop, all of whom found it easier to do in this sequence. Consequently, I taught students to identify propositions before assumptions. Indeed, initially I encouraged students to derive their assumptions from their propositions. To return to the example above of the student in the second assignment developing a theory to explain an observed group interaction on a labouring site: his key propositional statement was that the status of the individuals, combined with the norms of the trade created certain distinct alliances. I would then probe students to explore the assumptions underlying this proposition. I would do this by getting them to examine the key concepts in the proposition, in this case, status, norms and alliances. My rationale for this approach was that if correctly identified, the key propositions would reveal the overall theory's major assumptions and that this approach is pedagogically easier

and more systematic. However, one hiccup emerged briefly early in the first semester of 1994 (it had surfaced the previous year, *my* first year of teaching the subject, but it was not until 1994 that Pauline and I were starting to get a better handle on more fine-grained techniques for teaching this material). This was that many students assumed a perfect one to one correspondence between propositions and assumptions. So, for instance, if they identified only one key proposition they reckoned on their being only one assumption, if two propositions, two assumptions, and so on. As time went on, we discovered that students most easily identified assumptions by stripping back the concepts they had chosen to use, rather than the propositions. After much discussion, both Pauline and I reached this point in 1995. In the above example, the student identified three major assumptions: status affects relationships; status affects power distribution; group norms shape individual behaviour. He further stripped back these three assumptions to one giant meta assumption: environment affects behaviour.

To summarize: there were initially two differences in the way that Pauline and I taught concepts, assumptions and propositions. First, was the sequence: for Pauline – concepts, assumptions, propositions, in that order; for me – concepts, propositions, assumptions, in that order. Pauline changed her sequence on pedagogical grounds in 1995. Second, I initially taught students to identify their assumptions from their propositions. Pauline taught students to identify assumptions from their concepts. By 1995, I likewise, had changed tactics and adopted Pauline's approach.

I pointed out to students in my Wednesday group's taped discussion that when I first became aware of student confusion over pedagogical differences (during the Thursday tutorial session on 12 May 1994), I immediately documented them based on student feedback, went to Pauline and discussed the issue so we were entirely clear as to these differences and each of us followed it up with our respective tutorial groups. In fact, one student in the Thursday group had suggested that what Pauline claimed as propositions, I taught as assumptions and vice versa. After explaining my understanding during this class I received a phone call the following day (13/5/94) from the same student apologizing for the misunderstanding. She had checked with her friends in Pauline's group and the differences between us were precisely the two noted above. However, it did highlight for Pauline and I the crucial nature of communicating detailed pedagogical strategies on a regular basis. Students in the Wednesday group then agreed it was good having the Open Learning modules to clarify the issue. Although I had written these materials, Pauline read the draft and provided feedback before they were finalised. In fact, Pauline decided that she would change certain aspects of her pedagogy on the basis of the modules.

The usefulness of the Open Learning materials was demonstrated in the following incident. On October 28 in the final week of second semester, I arranged to have informal discussions with two WS1004 students who had not completed WS1002, which had been designed as a prerequisite. Initially, both students independently

told me chirpily that it was not a problem doing WS1004 without having done WS1002. However, both students had devised strategies to overcome early difficulties. One student, on the recommendation of other students, came to see me to get the Open Learning modules, which, by now, were no longer on closed reserve in the library. She particularly read module 1, unit 1 on theory development and the structure of theories. The other student also experienced difficulties with the same subject matter and borrowed these photocopied materials as well as class notes from another student. Both said they experienced few problems once they had obtained this material.

One of the most powerful demonstrations of student learning in terms of the issue of pedagogical sequence was provided the following year in late March when one of the 1994 cohort explained to me how she was assisting three new first years to tackle theory construction: "Do your theory first, then do your concepts, then your propositions, and your assumptions last. Then you finish back in a full circle with your theory."

Another difference that became apparent as the semester proceeded concerned the presentation of theories and their constituent parts. This difference was not noted by students at all; it was a difference I observed when checking through some assignments from Pauline's class. Pauline tended to like a free flowing theory in which the key concepts, assumptions and propositions were identified or flagged *within* the theory. She particularly liked concepts to be flagged at the beginning. I

also liked a free flowing prose-style theory, but preferred to have the concepts, assumptions and propositions set out clearly and *separately* at the *end* of the theory. Pauline and I discussed the issue after the first assignment in order to achieve some uniformity; though it had not been identified by students as a problem, it could possibly be so in the future. Pauline agreed that she did not mind concepts, assumptions and propositions being set out separately at the end, provided at least the concepts were also done in integrated fashion. Her rationale, with which I agreed, was that concepts were like cogs in a machine and by encouraging students to integrate their concepts within their theories, students could see clearly the embedded nature of concepts; they are not simply words that can be extrapolated from theories in isolation without significant excess baggage from the domain of worldview assumptions, etc. I was also happy for all the constituent parts of theories to be integrated, but I also liked them in tabulated form separately. My rationale was a pedagogical one. I wanted to ensure that students really had identified them. Note that the issue was not whether the constituent parts of theories should be embedded or not; it was whether they should be tabulated separately as well. One issue we both became clear about over time was that a simple catalogue of concepts, even if major, was not sufficient. Students needed to include an explanatory paragraph for each major concept.

Having said all this, I hasten to add that the TEVAL data did not bear out the problem. In the open-ended question concerning improvements, only one respondent (for Pauline's TEVAL) suggested that sometimes lecturers' assignment

criteria differ slightly and that this should be addressed. And ratings for the standard bank item, "The lecturer made assessment requirements clear", were 1.5 and 1.4 for myself and Pauline respectively compared to the university average of 2.0. All except for one student in each TEVAL agreed with this statement. Pauline's respondent disagreed, mine strongly disagreed.

Another kind of overall problem was voiced on many occasions by students in both classes and consultation sessions, viz, they read the modules, listen to the lecture, participate in the tutorials, and they understand. But, when they attempt to apply their understanding to their own interaction/theory, they cannot. We tackled this hiatus between understanding and application, which is common in many intellectual endeavours, in two ways. First, we attempted to supply more and varied learning media to cope with different learning strategies (e.g. lectures; videotaped lectures for student borrowing; a range of experientials and practical exercises in tutorials, including opportunities to work in groups on assignment-related material; consultation sessions, both individual and group; Open Learning modules; and we were in the process of developing the case-based CD-Rom package and video vignettes). Second, we persevered, finding that if we did so and gave students ample opportunities to work through their difficulties by practising, they were beginning to master the material by the time they completed assignment 2.

Below are the break up data for concepts, assumptions and propositions in assignments 1 and 2. Basically, we allocated three marks to each aspect and left the extra mark as a 'floating' qualitative measure.

Table 9.2:
Concepts, Assumptions and Propositions Marks – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 10	Ass 1	Ass 2
10	3	1
9	12	7
8	18	7
7	18	18
6	7	15
5	3	8
4	-	
3	1	
2		
1		
0		

The most pleasing aspect of this part of the assignments is that only one student failed in assignment 1 and none in assignment 2. We awarded almost a quarter of the cohort (15/62) High Distinctions in assignment 1, with three scoring perfect marks, just over a half (33/62) Distinctions, 51 students a Credit or better, and of the 10 Pass students, seven were at the top of this range (6/10). As with all criteria in assignment 2, our expectations were considerably higher, so direct comparisons between raw scores is not possible. For assignment 2, we scored eight High Distinctions, with one perfect 10, more than a quarter (15/56) scored Distinctions or better, more than half (33/56) scored Credit or better, and none failed. Again, two thirds of the Pass level students were at the top of the range.

4.4.4 Issues Specific to Assignment 2

A final set of problems were specific to assignment 2. Assignment 2 differed from assignment 1 only in the number of people in the interaction. The first one was a dyad, the second one a group consisting of at least three people. During the teaching sessions we had provided students with a particular definition of a 'group' drawn from a 'classic' in the literature:

> A group consists of three or more people who interact frequently according to established and enduring patterns, ... who define themselves as members of a group and expect certain behaviours from other members that they don't expect from outsiders, ... and who are defined by fellow members and non-members as belonging to a group on the basis of some shared characteristic.
> (Olmsted 1959, p. 22)

We then examined each of the significant criterion comprising this definition. Very occasionally – it had happened in previous years – one or two students would choose an interaction that did not satisfy these criteria. The main offending item was usually the criterion of interaction, viz, a definite pattern of interaction understood by members and persisting over time. So, for instance, any body who chose a collective of people waiting at a bus stop would not satisfy the above definition, since there is no definite pattern of interaction. Some people may never speak to anyone else, others may sometimes speak to certain people, and yet others may usually speak to certain people but not others. We had a cogent rationale for this; viz, that only when such criteria were present, particularly the persistent and enduring interaction, could certain key features of group dynamics arise. For example, leadership, status, roles, etc. Note that the 'offenders' were, without

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exception, people who had missed the relevant classes and who had not read the Open Learning modules.

A second type of problem was slightly more widespread and not restricted to the minority of non-attenders. It was this: some students provided a theory of the *content* of the group interaction rather than the actual group *process/interaction/dynamic*. For instance, one student might have chosen a group of students working cooperatively on a student assignment on disability issues, but instead of developing a theory to explain what was happening in the interaction of the members, they developed a theory of disability. Students who attended consultation sessions self-rectified this problem – only two students. This problem also emerged with the Open Learning students.

A third type of problem was rare with our internal cohort, but surfaced with a number of Open Learning students; that is, focusing exclusively on developing a theory of the *individuals*, rather than the group dynamic.

Initially, a significant number of students experienced difficulties in formulating theories of group interactions. My favourite tack proved successful with most students. Begin with the key concept of norms – all groups operate according to a set of group norms, whether implicit or otherwise. Choosing one or more of selected group interactions in tutorials and with students' own interactions in consultation sessions, have students brainstorm and discuss what these norms

might be. Careful probing leads to exploration of other key concepts. For example: "who is influential in shaping and maintaining these norms?" This leads naturally into key concepts of leadership, status and power, and associated theories of leadership behaviour. The next probe might be: "who is conforming to these norms?", leading to the concept of conformity. Similar probes ("What shapes conformity/non-conformity?"; "how do the group's norms impact on people's roles?") result in discussion of other key concepts addressed in teaching sessions and the literature: roles, alliances, collusions and hidden agendas. Informal student feedback indicated this was considered to be an extremely useful framework for theory development. Note that not only did this facilitate development of their actual theory, but it also allowed students to integrate teaching materials and the literature. In fact, in certain respects, assignment 2 was easier than assignment 1: it was easier to develop the theory since we provided the conceptual tools, thus making it easier to identify the concepts, as well as easier to integrate literature and classwork material. The greater difficulty lay in dealing with a three way dynamic rather than a dyad, a dynamic which has something more than an additive effect.

However, one should beware of assuming that this was the preferred strategy for all students. Compare it with the three strategies for theory development that I outlined above: the *structured*, which was basically proposition-driven; the *semi-structured*; and the *unstructured*. The approach just described offers a fourth alternative. It is also a *structured* approach, but it is *concept-driven* (group norms). We might think of these approaches as 'problem-solving heuristics'. They are not

recipes. For instance, a concept-driven structured approach would not necessarily work as well for dyadic interactions. As we discovered students' preferred learning strategies, we made them publicly available so that all students could draw on approaches which worked for them. Of course some students working collaboratively discovered these things for themselves.

I noted in chapter six that by the time we marked assignment 2 Pauline commented in one of our reflection meetings that we were a "victim of our own processes and successes." A quality product demands resource intensive input. As we learned to teach the subject more effectively, students did the assignments better, and in much more detail, thus increasing the marking workload. We particularly noticed the difference between assignments 1 and 2. Theoretically, there was a 1,500 word limit for assignment 2. However, we did not take the usual step of penalizing, or threatening to penalize, those who exceeded the word length. One important criterion in assessment was written expression, presentation of ideas (logic, reasoning) and this was weighted at 20% for all three assignments. What we did penalize (and threaten to penalize) were failures in these domains. So, if a student was unnecessarily verbose, they were penalized under these criteria. But if a student wrote a concise well developed theory high on presentation skills (as defined above) we did not penalize them. We thought this reasonable since sophisticated theories of group interactions are extremely difficult to develop in a few hundred words, and by the time we got to assignment 2 there were a handful

of students who were developing sophisticated theories indeed. In fact, the assignment which I graded as best was a tightly-written 3,000 word piece.

The weighty marking load was of prime concern to us since we considered student feedback vital in directing student learning and did not want to short-circuit this process. On 29 May during week 12 of semester, Pauline and I met to discuss this issue specifically. We considered three possibilities. First, dealing with theories and their constituent parts in assignment 1 and self factors in assignment 2. We quickly dismissed it since we felt the educational logic concerning social construction of knowledge was eroded by separating theory from self. Second, eliminate assignment 2 or combine the first two assignments. We also rejected this idea since we felt the material was challenging for first years, and theory construction and analysis required repetition and practice, practice which would be halved by such a move. Experience told us that students needed two formal attempts at this endeavour. Further, it was sound pedagogy to have the progression from a dyad to a group, since the latter entailed additional theoretical considerations that do not emerge in dyadic interactions. This perceived need for repetition and practice and the resource intensive nature of it in terms of teacher input was a major catalyst for developing the CD-Rom package as part of the CAUT grant. The third alternative we considered was to eliminate assignment 3 and move it to the new subject, *WS1004: Understanding Professional Helping*. Assignment 3 is the logical culmination of assignments 1 and 2 in terms of social work practice. Previously, in the former curriculum there was nowhere to follow

up with an assessment like assignment 3. We reasoned that WS1002 could become the theoretical teething ground where we provided students with the conceptual and analytic tools for thinking about human interaction. WS1004 could be the applied culmination where students could draw upon these tools for real life practice situations; though we were aware that this distinction could not be pressed too strongly (see chapters one to three). Consequently, after raising the issue with students in the final week taped group discussion evaluation session, we decided to eliminate assignment 3 and to increase the word lengths for assignments 1 and 2. Previously, both assignments 1 and 2 were 1,000-1,500 words. In 1995 we increased this to 1,500 words for assignment 1 and 2,000 words for assignment 2.

4.4.5 Integration of Literature – Parts 2 and 3

One specific assessment criterion in both parts 2 and 3 of assignments 1 and 2, and in both parts 1 and 2 of assignment 3, asked students to integrate readings, study materials and classroom learnings into their assignments. Tutorials and consultation sessions indicated that a number of students were experiencing difficulties. There were two types of difficulties. First, the quantitative dimension: were students integrating literature, and if so, how much? Second, the qualitative dimension: were students integrating literature in a relevant way which demonstrated sound thought – a logical and systematic development of ideas. Occasionally, in a knee jerk reaction from assignment 1 feedback, students would assault you with a barrage of literature hanging off every other utterance. The first problem was more evident, perhaps surprisingly, in assignment 2. I say

surprisingly, since one would usually expect students to encounter more difficulties in their first attempt. The reason, I believe, based on observations and discussions in both tutorials and consultation sessions, was because for assignment 1 there were two discrete and distinct theories presented in both the readings and classes, Symbolic Interaction Theory and General Systems Theory – a logical thing to do since this part of the course was concerned with theories and theory development – whereas for assignment 2 concerning group behaviour, the material included both communication and group behaviour, but rather than presenting students with discrete theories, we presented them with frameworks for analyzing communicative and group behaviour, frameworks anchored in certain key concepts.

But this situation was quickly resolved when you returned students to the original formulation of their theories (see above), since they often did so by using key group work concepts drawn from teaching materials and the literature. It seemed that a significant number of students were still not comfortable unless they had a discrete theory which they could wed with their own. However, integrating the literature was a major problem with Open Learning students, for whom it was considerably more difficult to redirect at short notice (see data below).

Table 9.3:
Integrating the Literature – Assignments 1 and 2

Max =	Ass 1		Ass 2	
10	*Pt 2*	*Pt 3*	*Pt 2*	*Pt 3*
10	5	1	2	-
9	10	2	7	3
8	9	9	6	5
7	12	5	18	16
6	4	6	7	12
5	10	6	9	7
4	2	9	7	10
3	2	1		3
2	1	4		
1	-	-		
0	7	19		

Note that of all the criteria, integrating the literature in assignment 1 was the one which most clearly discriminated between student performance, with the full range of marks used from zero to 10. For part 2 in assignment 1, almost a quarter of the students (15/62) rated a High Distinction, with five scoring perfect marks, well over a third (24/62) scored a Distinction or better, well over a half (36/62) scored a Credit or better, and well over three quarters (50/62) scored a Pass or better. Approximately 20% (12/62) of students failed this criterion with seven scoring zero for failing to integrate any material whatsoever. Open Learning data are not comparable for assignment 1, since for Open learning students this piece of assessment was completed during the one week workshop in February and did not count towards the overall subject grade.

The situation was much worse in part 3 where students were required to integrate material relating to self. Despite the obvious emphasis of self in the subject and even specific readings devoted to Symbolic Interactionism and Cooley's notion of

the 'looking glass self', not to mention a one hour tutorial session specifically devoted to the issue of integration, students were extraordinarily reluctant to integrate this material. Again the range was enormous with this time only three students scoring a High Distinction, one of whom scored a perfect 10, 12 students scored a Distinction or better, only just over a quarter (17/62) scored a Credit or better, and just under a half (29/62) scored a Pass or better. More than half (33/62) students failed, with almost one third of the cohort (19/62) scoring zero for failing to integrate a single shred of material!

Fortunately, our pedagogical strategies were effective, and assignment 2 revealed marked improvements in both parts, especially given that our expectations were, as for all other criteria, considerably greater. Another strategy not mentioned above and which was triggered by the poor performance in this criterion in assignment 1, was the self-assessment sheets where students were asked to self-evaluate specifically for each specific criterion, ranking their efforts either 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'. In fact, we believe this single strategy to be instrumental in improving performance, since almost one third of the students (19/62) in assignment 1 failed to integrate any material whatsoever. Once students were asked to self-evaluate themselves specifically on integrating the literature, it was difficult to see how they could fail to address the issue altogether; they may still perform poorly, but at least the criterion would be attempted. Although we also despatched the self-assessment sheets to Open Learning students, there were two salient differences in their case. First, they had done assignment 1 during the workshop

week on a practice/learning basis – it did not count towards their final grade; and second, we were not able to intensively remind these students on a weekly basis of the importance of addressing this criterion.

For integrating the literature in part 2 (theory development) of assignment 2, nine internal students scored a High Distinction, with two perfect 10s, more than a quarter (15/56) scored a Distinction or better, well over a half (33/56) scored a Credit or better, and 49 of 56 students passed. This time only seven students failed compared to 12 in assignment 1, and all seven just failed, scoring 4/10. This compared with seven students who scored zero in assignment 1. Seventeen of 49 Open learning students failed this criterion in assignment 2. We had also introduced self-assessment for Open Learning students and close scrutiny of the data reveals that this was probably effective in dealing with the quantitative problem, viz, students failing to integrate any material whatsoever, since only two of the 17 students scored zero. The improvement was even more dramatic in part 3 (self); though again, it was evident that integrating the literature in part 3 (self) was a considerably more difficult task than integrating literature in part 2 (theory development). Again, three students scored a High Distinction, eight of 56 students scored a Distinction or better, almost half the students (24/56) scored a Credit or better (compared to 17/62 in assignment 1 – and this is allowing for increased expectations and consequent harder marking!), and less than a quarter failed (13/56) compared to more than a half (33/62) in assignment 1. Notably, of the 13 who failed, 10 scored 4/10 and three scored 3/10, unlike the 19 students in assignment 1

who scored zero. Open Learning students performed extremely poorly on this criterion with 29 of 49 students failing. Of these, eight scored zero, indicating that the self-assessment sheets were not entirely effective in dealing with the problem. But closer inspection of the data reveals a clear reason. With internal students we could remind them every week to complete the self-assessment sheets prior to assignment submission. Many Open Learning students did not complete the self-assessment sheet, and not one of the eight students who scored zero in part 3 did in fact do so.

The chief reason for failures was the quantitative problem: either students did not integrate any literature at all, or very little. The qualitative problem was resolved more slowly with internal students. Again though, the most successful strategy was to have students examine major concepts from the literature and teaching sessions and try and relate these to their own concepts. If there was overlap, the task was made easier. If not, probe? Why have you chosen to use these concepts in your theory? Why do you think Mead used the concept of self in the way he did? One of the reasons that concepts can be used in this way is that once you begin to probe, you discover that concepts are nested within an intricate web of background assumptions and world views.

4.4.6 Overall Grades for Part 2

The following table details overall grades for part 2 of assignments 1 and 2.

Table 9.4:
Overall Grades, Part 2 – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 40	Ass 1	Ass 2
40	-	-
39	-	-
38	-	-
37	1	2
36	3	1
35	5	2
34	5	4
33	2	3
32	8	-
31	5	1
30	4	9
29	2	3
28	2	4
27	4	4
26	3	3
25	6	3
24	3	4
23	-	3
22	6	5
21	-	2
20	2	2
19	1	1

Overall, part 2 was done well in both assignments 1 and 2. Particularly given the potentially greater difficulty of assignment 2 and our increased expectations and consequent harder marking, assignment 2 was done very well indeed. In assignment 1, we awarded four High Distinctions (36/40) for part 2, well over a third of students scored a Distinction (32/40) or better, just under three quarters (44/62) scored a Credit (26/40) or better, and only one student narrowly failed (19/40).

In assignment 2, we awarded three High Distinctions for part 2 (theory development), 12 students scored a Distinction or better, well over half (36/56) scored a Credit or better, and again, only one student failed narrowly (19/40). In

both assignments, these students, who were different students, passed both the theory section and the concepts, assumptions and propositions section; they failed solely on the basis of failing the criterion relating to integrating the literature.

4.4.7   Identifying Self Factors

In the last chapter I referred to student assignments in discussing the use of self as a pedagogical tool. Specifically, I referred to part three of assignments 1 and 2 as well as assignment 3. I shall repeat some of this information here in order to facilitate comparisons between the various parts both within and across assignments. Part three of assignments 1 and 2 asked students to identify self factors, things about themselves which were important in developing their specific theories. During teaching we emphasized two broad sets of factors. The first were structural factors such as race, culture, gender, age, sexuality, disability, history, geography and so on.   The second were more personal factors: individual experiences, beliefs and ideas; though we were careful to stress the close interconnections between the two.   For instance, one's beliefs and ideas were shaped by factors such as culture and gender, though one's beliefs and ideas could also be important in shaping and reinterpreting these structural factors.

The single biggest problem in this area emerged in assignment 1, but fortunately had abated considerably by assignment 2.   It was revealed in student work samples, both drafts and assignments.   It was this: rather than identifying self factors as such, students continued to develop their theories.   For example: a

student might have developed a theory to explain why a man in a relationship had got angry and struck his wife. They may have used key structural concepts such as gender as part of their explanation. But in part 3, instead of identifying a self factor relating to their own gendered experiences, whether male or female, they further developed the gendered explanation by introducing new concepts such as poverty without reference to self at all. Informal discussion indicates that this confusion probably arose because students felt, that unlike their other university assignments, they had scope to develop their own subjective theories of the chosen interactions (which they did). This sense of subjectivity or 'selfness' led them to believe they were in fact discussing self factors because they were providing their very own theory of the interaction. In other words, there was still confusion about the distinction between theory generation and development and the *reasons* for generating and developing particular theories.

A second problem in assignment 1, which had also abated significantly by assignment 2, was the quantity of material presented in this section, a circumstance which sometimes affected the structural balance of the assignment, since both parts 2 and 3 (theory and self factors) were weighted of equal value, but often students wrote significantly more in part 2. It took time and perseverance to get many students to think in this way, but persist we did, since the social construction of knowledge was pivotal to our subject's aims. Part of this difficulty can be attributed to previous educational experiences, data we had from the original background questionnaire. So much of our educational system is designed to

foster surface learning where students are asked to recall 'factual' information. No book in any university library in the world could have provided the 'answer' to part 3 of assignments 1 and 2. Students had to think, and think deeply! Refer to chapter eight for specific examples from student work.

By the time we reached assignment 2, we expected satisfactory students to be able to identify at least two self factors, and to demonstrate that these were, if not the most relevant, at least relevant. In short, two relevant self factors. Better answers would identify most of the relevant self factors, and the best ones would appear to identify all the key self factors (I say appear because we could never know this).

Table 9.5:
Identifying Self Factors – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 15	Ass 1	Ass 2
15	-	-
14	18	7
13	12	10
12	15	10
11	5	6
10	5	8
9	1	8
8	2	5
7	4	1
6	-	1
5	-	

We were delighted with how students performed in this aspect of the assignment. Admittedly we were much more lenient in assignment 1, but still, in order to score highly students had to identify a significant number of *relevant* factors and include no irrelevant or marginal factors (which reduced the grade). It seemed that

students warmed to this exercise, particularly after the usual tertiary padlocks on this type of activity, and once the fetters were released the torrents flowed. In assignment 1, almost one third of all students (18/62) scored a High Distinction (14/15), almost three quarters (45/62) scored a Distinction (12/15) or better, and all but seven students scored a Credit (10/15). Four students marginally failed (7/15). In assignment 2, we graded seven students at High Distinction, almost half the students (27/56) at Distinction or better, 41 students at Credit or better, and only two students failed, one with 7/15, the other with 6/15. Again, the overall distributions (lower in assignment 2) can be explained by our policy of graded progression.

4.4.8   Linking Self Explicitly to Theory

This was a difficult task for many students. In assignment 1 all students were able to *identify* at least one self factor, many students more. But the more challenging task was to *link* these identified self factors to the developed theory in a logical and systematic way. Even in assignment 2 a significant number of students were still experiencing difficulties doing this consistently – sometimes linking clearly, at other times tenuously or not clearly. However, many students were performing this task satisfactorily by assignment 2, and the best students were doing it superbly (see chapter eight for examples).

My original pedagogical tack had been to tell people to use their key propositions as the basis for systematically ensuring that self factors were linked to their theory.

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I did not instruct students to necessarily perform the task in this way – though they were free to do so – I simply suggested this strategy as a self-checking exercise. One student stated that she used her concepts in this way. It was also possible to use assumptions in such a manner. Indeed, in many ways, assumptions were likely to provide a much keener insight into self factors than either of the other two constituents of theories. But because in the beginning students found it more difficult to identify assumptions, I did not steer them in this direction. The most effective pedagogical strategy seemed to be to provide students with a smorgasbord of strategies and self-checking devices and allow them to pursue that which suited their needs best. One reason why I did not necessarily want students to use slavishly either concepts or propositions, or assumptions for that matter, as tools for linking self factors to developed theories, is because such a strategy hinges on correct identification of the theory's constituent parts: concepts, assumptions and propositions.

Table 9.6:
Linking Self Factors to Theory – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 15	Ass 1	Ass 2
15	1	1
14	5	4
13	7	6
12	17	9
11	6	4
10	10	11
9	6	8
8	3	11
7	5	-
6	1	2
5	-	
4	1	

For assignment 1, we graded six students at High Distinction, including a perfect 15, almost half (30/62) at Distinction or better, approximately three quarters (46/62) at Credit or better, and seven students failed, five marginally with 7/15. In assignment 2, we awarded five students a High Distinction, including another perfect 15, more than a third of students (20/56) scored a Distinction or better, 35 students scored a Credit or better, and this time only two students failed, both at 6/15.

4.4.9 Overall Grades for Part 3

The following data reveal that although in assignment 1 students usually performed better on part 2 (theory development) than part 3 (self), part 3 was still done very well overall. Interestingly, there was little difference in overall distributions between parts 2 and 3 for assignment 2, indicating that students were on the improve (since the part 3 distributions rose to match the part 2, and this was even with the increased expectations and harder marking).

Table 9.7:
Overall Grades, Part 3 – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 40	Ass 1	Ass 2
40	-	-
39	1	-
38	-	1
37	1	2
36	-	-
35	1	2
34	3	3
33	2	1
32	6	3
31	4	5
30	1	5
29	2	1
28	6	5
27	6	3
26	9	4
25	2	5
24	1	3
23	1	3
22	5	2
21	4	1
20	1	4
19	-	2
18	5	-
17	-	-
16	-	1
15	1	

In assignment 1, two students scored a High Distinction for part 3, one of whom scored 39, almost a quarter of students (14/62) scored a Distinction or better, just over two thirds (42/62) of students scored a Credit or better. Six students failed, five scoring 18/40 and one 15/40. Two of these failed solely due to deficiencies in integrating the literature, having passed both other components; another failed because she scored poorly on the linkage component and zero for integration; two marginally failed all three components; and the final student failed all three components, but one of them badly, the linkage of self to theory.

In assignment 2, three students scored a High Distinction, 12 a Distinction or more, well over a half (35/56) scored a Credit or better, and 53 passed. Only three students failed part 3 in assignment 2, a reduction from six students in assignment 1. Of these, two failed marginally (19/40), the other scored 16/40. One of these failed only because they failed the integration of literature component, having passed both other components, another performed poorly on all three components, and the third was marginal on all three components.

In assignment 1, there were greater gaps in student performances for parts 2 (theory development) and part 3 (self) with 37 students performing better in part 2, seven scoring the same, and 18 scoring higher marks in part 3. By assignment 2, this had evened out with 23 scoring higher marks in part 2, 24 scoring better in part 3 and nine scoring the same. This levelling in overall distributions between the two major parts of assignments 1 and 2 was also reflected in individual student grades. In assignment 1, of the 37 students performing better in part 2, for approximately half these (18/37) the gap was 5 marks (12.5%) or greater and for six of these the gap was 10 marks (25%) or greater, reaching a maximum difference of 12 marks (30%). Of the 18 students scoring higher in part 3, the corresponding figures were only five students scoring five marks or higher, and of these, only two scoring 10 marks or greater, with the maximum difference being 13 (32.5%). By assignment 2, students were writing assignments of much more even quality and no student had a difference of more than nine marks (22.5%) between parts 2 and 3. Of the 23 students scoring higher marks in part 2, only

seven had a difference of five marks (12.5%) or more, and of the 24 students scoring better in part 3, only one student had a difference of six and two a difference of five.

This data indicates that initially students experienced greater difficulty in part 3, *social construction of knowledge*, compared to part 2, *theory development*. But as the semester progressed and as we focused on emerging student difficulties, this situation changed as students improved their abilities to link self factors to their developed theories.

4.4.10 Expression and Presentation

We did not fail any students on this criterion in either assignments 1 or 2. With hindsight, I am inclined to think that this was not without some generosity on our part, particularly in the case of assignment 1, where our general policy was: if in doubt, award a Pass. Common weaknesses identified, with mostly, improvements from assignment 1 to 2 were: ideas not developed in a systematic and logical fashion, including repetition; clumsy sentence structure.

Table 9.8:
Expression and Presentation – Assignments 1 and 2

Max = 20	Ass 1	Ass 2
20	-	1
19	-	1
18	4	3
17	6	2
16	13	5
15	7	8
14	4	12
13	12	9
12	9	7
11	2	4
10	5	4

In assignment 1, we awarded four High Distinctions, over a third of the students (23/62) a Distinction or better, and approximately three quarters (46/62) a Credit or better. In assignment 2, we scored five High Distinctions, with Pauline rating one student a perfect 20, 12 students a Distinction or better, and more than two thirds of students (41/56) a Credit or better. Again, no one failed. These figures give some indication of our policy of graded progression. One can assume that of all the criteria, written expression and presentation are the most likely to remain constant. Yet we awarded approximately only half as many Distinctions or better (12 compared to 23) in assignment 2 where, if anything, one might have expected an improvement. Indeed, there was a slight improvement, but it was hidden by our policy of graded progression.

4.4.11 Overall Grades for Assignments 1 and 2

The following table details grade distributions for assignment 1.

Table 9.9:
Grade Distribution – Assignment 1

	Gary		Pauline		TOTAL	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*	*Total*	*%*
HD	0	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*
D	9	*24.3*	7	*26.9*	16	*25.4*
C	18	*48.7*	11	*42.3*	29	*46.0*
P	9	*24.3*	7	*26.9*	16	*25.4*
Resubmit	1	*2.7*	1	*3.9*	2	*3.2*
Total	37	*100*	26	*100*	63	*100*

Pauline and I were extremely pleased with the outcome of assignment 1, particularly since we had invested so much time in the week 2 to week 5 tutorial sessions using the assignment 1 piece as a framework for directing student learning. Although no High Distinctions were awarded, this is a function of two things. First, Pauline and I set very high standards at this level. Second, the criteria system makes it exceedingly difficult to score High Distinctions, since you must effectively score a High Distinction, or close to it, for all seven major criteria. Two students were just one mark below a High Distinction (89) and another scored 87. But the more telling statistic is that approximately 25% of students scored a Distinction (16/63), a very fine performance indeed in this, their first assignment tackling the challenging issues of theory construction and the social construction of knowledge. Almost three quarters of the students (45/63) scored a Credit or better, and only two students failed to meet minimum requirements and were asked to resubmit. Both did so and achieved the minimum standard at their second attempt. There were no major differences in Pauline's and my distributions, with the small exception of my slightly higher proportion of Credits, a function perhaps of my

previously mentioned policy of 'when in doubt'. Indeed, six of the 18 Credits I awarded received the bare minimum of 65%.

It is instructive to compare this data with that of Open Learning students. Traditionally, Open Learning students have performed better in this subject. Two factors have been identified as salient. First, they are usually older and have richer life experiences to draw upon. Second, they are far more likely to be working in the field and thus are more likely to have spent considerably more time reflecting on theoretical and practical issues. This year, however, we taught the internal students in the most intensive manner yet (for example, structuring the first part of the tutorial program around assessment requirements for assignment 1). This evidently had a significant impact if we compare the two sets of grades, particularly if we consider that, by agreement, we were slightly more lenient in our expectations of Open Learning students given that they had not the same intensive face to face contact.

Table 9.10:
Grade Distribution – Assignment 1: Comparison with Open Learning

	Internal		Open Learning	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*
HD	0	*0*	0	*0*
D	16	*25.4*	10	*19.2*
C	29	*46.0*	23	*44.2*
P	16	*25.4*	17	*32.7*
Resubmit	2	*3.2*	2	*3.9*
Total	63	*100*	52	*100*

The Distinction range is where the most significant difference occurs (25.4% compared to 19.2%). The High Distinction, Pass and Resubmit proportions are almost identical, with Open Learning students gaining a higher proportion of Passes (to compensate for the lower proportion of Distinctions). Assignment 2 grade distributions follow.

Table 9.11:
Grade Distribution – Assignment 2

	Gary		Pauline		TOTAL	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
HD	1	3.0	1	3.7	2	3.3
D	2	6.0	6	22.2	8	13.3
C	13	39.4	11	40.7	24	40.0
P	16	48.5	8	29.6	24	40.0
Resubmit	1	3.0	1	3.7	2	3.3
Total	33	99.9	27	99.9	60	99.9

Again, we were more than pleased with the outcome of assignment 2. This time two students were awarded a High Distinction. One of them, scoring 93, was a student of mine whose work I marked. This was the only High Distinction I ever awarded in any assignment in this subject for either internal or Open Learning students over a three year period. Both the High Distinctions were simply outstanding. Almost 17% of students (10/60) scored a Distinction or better, despite our increased expectations and the increased difficulty of the assignment. Well over half the students (34/60) scored a Credit or better. Two students were required to submit. Neither did. One was the 'absent' student, the other 'vanished' after submitting assignment 2.

Pauline's proportions remain quite constant over assignments 1 and 2, despite the fact that we marked significantly harder in the second assignment. This indicates an overall significant improvement. I awarded far less Distinctions than Pauline in this assignment and this slack was taken up in the far higher proportion of Passes I awarded. This difference can be attributed to two factors. First, it was simply the case that the students whose papers Pauline marked performed better overall on this assignment. (Note that two of Pauline's Distinctions were, in fact, my students.) This could be checked by our quality control measures noted above. It is a moot point why this might be the case. Second, if we examine the raw scores we discover that the difference is not as acute as it first appears. In the Distinction range, the two Distinctions I awarded were in the top half of the range, with one fractionally below a High Distinction. Pauline also awarded one Distinction at this level (89), but the other five were all in the bottom half of the range (80-85). Additionally, I awarded three Credits fractionally below a Distinction, Pauline awarded none in this range, and I awarded seven Credits at the top of the range (75-79) compared to Pauline's three. Thus, if we look at the 75-85 range (high Credits to mid Distinctions), Pauline and I awarded almost identical numbers. At the bottom of the Credit range (65-67) Pauline awarded three low Credits (two of these a bare Credit at 65), while I awarded just one, a bare 65. In the Pass range, seven of the papers Pauline marked were in the bottom half of the range (58 or less) and only one scored 60, well short of a Credit. However, 10 of my 16 Passes scored 60 or more with seven students scoring fractionally below a Credit. It

seemed Pauline and I had reversed our policies: when in doubt, I was awarding the lower grade, Pauline the higher.

The following data, once again, compares Open Learning students with the internal cohort.

Table 9.12:
Grade Distribution – Assignment 2: Comparison with Open Learning

	Internal		Open Learning	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*
HD	2	*3.3*	1	*2.0*
D	8	*13.3*	9	*18.0*
C	24	*40.0*	14	*28.0*
P	24	*40.0*	26	*52.0*
Resubmit	2	*3.3*	0	*0.0*
Total	60	*99.9*	50	*100*

There was not a significant difference at the top end of the scale (Distinction and above); though this portrait changes if we examine the raw scores, since only three of the 14 Credits for Open Learning students were in the top of the range (75-79) compared to almost half (10/24) with internal students. This means that exactly one third of all internal students (20/60) scored 75 or better compared to 26% (13/50) for Open Learning students. But the real difference occurs at the lower end of the scale (Passes and Credits), with equal numbers of Passes and Credits for internal students, but almost twice as many Passes as Credits for Open Learning students. These results tally with Pauline's and my conviction that for education in general at all levels, good teaching has a far greater impact for the struggling or average student. Good students seem to do well irrespective of the teaching

quality. There is no doubt that the teaching was of a higher quality for internal students if only because we had face-to-face contact on a continuing basis through weekly lectures and tutorials and, for many students, consultation sessions. Open Learning students attended a one week workshop at the beginning of semester and all further contact, if any, was by phone. The exception was a one day on-site visit I did with Open Learning students from Mackay. It is not insignificant that four of the top seven Open Learning students were from Mackay.

4.5   Assignment 3

4.5.1   Description of Person/Event

There were few problems in this part. Indeed, this aspect of the assignment was done extremely well; though in all fairness, intellectually, this was the least demanding aspect of the assignment. The only minor problem noted – and it was not widespread – was choice of some details which were not clearly relevant given the justification for choice or the later choice of assistance.

Table 9.13:
Description of Person/Event – Assignment 3

Max = 10	
10	1
9	15
8	29
7	9
6	2
5	-

Of the 56 assignments for which breakup data is available, only 11 students scored less than a Distinction (8 out of 10 – nine scored 7 and two scored 6). Of those

scoring a Distinction or better, 16 scored a High Distinction (9/10) with one student scoring a perfect 10!

4.5.2 Justification for Choice of Details

In assignments 1 and 2 students were explicitly asked to identify the self factors that had led them to developing the particular theory they had. In assignment 3, which was different to the previous two, they were asked in part 1 to indicate *why* they had chosen to present the details they had about the person and event (who and which was to come from either assignment 1 or 2), and in part 2 they were asked to give reasons for their chosen form of assistance. Pauline's view was that the 'why' in part 1 and the reasons in part 2 did *not* need to include reference to self factors since "we've done that in the first two assignments and people know self is involved, we don't have to write it up anymore. That's taken for granted, so we don't have to do that" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 6). This was a genuine confusion on students' part since I had originally told my students that although they didn't need to address the issue as explicitly as in the first two assignments, they would have to refer to it, since it is impossible to talk about justifying assistance for others without reference to self. The confusion is evident in the following exchange from one taped group discussion:

> I think it's a problem. It would be good if the tutes were devised between the two of you. You could both mark your own tute groups – it can be interpreted different by different people.
> Although there's got to be some relationship between the two. You can't do it that way because there's problems.
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, pp. 8-11, 13-14)

When we discovered the confusion, in the final week of semester, I addressed the issue with my three tutorial groups and assured them that whatever way they did it, they would not be penalized.

Table 9.14:
Justification for Choice of Details – Assignment 3

20	-
19	3
18	5
17	6
16	7
15	10
14	2
13	8
12	7
11	1
10	6
9	-
8	1

Despite these hiccups, this aspect of the assignment, while intellectually more challenging than simply describing details, was done very well indeed. Eight students scored a High Distinction (18/20) and 21 scored a Distinction (16/20) or higher. More than half (31 of 56) received 15 or marks from a possible 20. Indeed, 41 students rated at Credit level (65%) or higher. Those 15 students receiving a Pass or less mostly did so because their justification slipped into 'implied mode' too often and, while often potentially sound, was insufficiently explicit. A second debilitating factor was that a handful of students did not 'weight' their efforts in terms of the assignment weighting. i.e. this section was worth twice as many marks as the description section, yet these students devoted more energy to the description. Only one of 56 students failed this part (the

student who, unfortunately, due to financial circumstances, was forced to work and missed most classes after the first few weeks).

4.5.3   Integration of Literature – Part 1

Overall, students were beginning by now to perform this task at a very high level.

Table 9.15:
Integration of Literature – Assignment 3

Max = 10	
10	1
9	6
8	13
7	16
6	8
5	7
4	-
3	3
2	-
1	-
0	2

Seven students scored a High Distinction, 20 of the 56 students scored 8 or more from a possible 10 (Distinction) and more than half (36/56) scored Credit (7/10) or higher. Five students failed this criterion, with two not integrating a single shred. Apart from not integrating any materials whatsoever – clear grounds for failure – other weaknesses were: integration not always clear, explicit and perceptibly relevant; material 'tacked on' rather than integrated.

4.5.4   Overall Grades for Part 1

The following table details overall grades for part 1 of assignment 3.

Table 9.16:
Overall Grades, Part 1 – Assignment 3

Max = 40	
40	-
39	-
38	2
37	1
36	2
35	3
34	3
33	3
32	7
31	3
30	7
29	1
28	3
27	1
26	6
25	4
24	2
23	2
22	3
21	1
20	-
19	1
18	-
17	-
16	1

Overall, part 1 was done extremely well. Five students scored a High Distinction (36/40 or better – two students scored 38!), more than a third (21/56) scored a Distinction or better (32/40), more than half the students (31 of 56) scored 30 or better, 42 scored a Credit or better (26/40), and only two students failed (19/40 and 16/40), chiefly because they failed to integrate literature, though the lowest ranked student also failed the justification section. This was the student noted above who was unable to attend classes. Because I did not take control of borrowing videotaped lectures until 1995, I had no way of knowing whether this student sought this avenue. She did not visit me for consultation sessions and made only one phone call towards the end of semester to inform me of her situation.

4.5.5   Description of Assistance

We were very pleased with this aspect of the assignment because it required students to 'step into the world' of the other person, the one chosen from the assignment 1 or 2 interaction. The question did *not* ask students to describe the type of assistance they personally considered to be the most appropriate, but the assistance that the other person themselves considered most appropriate. This is a fundamental difference and strikes at the core of both Pauline's and my beliefs about the nature of social work practice.

Table 9.17:
Description of Assistance – Assignment 3

Max = 10	
10	-
9	9
8	19
7	17
6	8
5	1
4	1
3	-
2	-
1	-
0	1

Nine of 56 students scored a High Distinction (9/10), exactly half (28/56) scored a Distinction (8/10) or better, 45 of 56 students scored a Credit or better (7/10), and only two students failed, one of whom was the absent student noted above. The 11 students scoring a Pass or less (and eight of these scored 6/10) were graded lower because at times they 'slipped out of the other's shoes', too often for one of the students who failed this section; and a small handful of students devoted too much

energy to describing (and justifying) forms of assistance they felt were *not* appropriate. The other failing student, the absent one, scored zero because she basically did not fulfil the requirements of part 2 at all.

4.5.6   *Justification of Assistance*

In many ways this was the most challenging part of the assignment since it required two major steps, an empathic one and a cognitive one. First, it required students to step into the world of other, second it required them not simply to describe this experience of other, but to justify it. Considering the difficulties involved, this aspect of the assignment was done very well indeed.

Table 9.18:
Reasons for Assistance – Assignment 3

20	-
19	1
18	7
17	5
16	4
15	9
14	4
13	9
12	7
11	2
10	5
9	-
8	2
7	-
6	-
5	-
4	-
3	-
2	-
1	-
0	1

Eight students of 56 scored a High Distinction (9/10) for this part, 17 scored a Distinction or better (16/20), over two thirds (39/56) scored a Credit (13/20) or better, and only three students failed (two scored 8/20 and the 'absent' student scored zero). Common weaknesses for the 17 students scoring a Pass or less were the following: inclusion of irrelevant material, some of which should have been included in part 1; lack of a well-thought out and systematically developed rationale for the assistance; 'thinly' developed justification section – often less material than the description – giving poor structural balance; not always justifying in terms of the other's world.

4.5.7 Integration of Literature – Part 2

This was the aspect of the assignment done least well. This is a relative judgement, however, and overall it was done well, especially compared to the Open Learning students.

Table 9.19:
Integration of Literature – Assignment 3

Max = 10	
10	-
9	3
8	5
7	15
6	11
5	9
4	4
3	6
2	-
1	-
0	3

Three students scored a High Distinction (9/10), eight or more scored a Distinction (8/10), almost half the students (23/56) scored a Credit (7/10) and 43 passed. Thirteen students did fail, however (four scored 4, six scored 3 and three students zero). Again, despite gentle prodding and encouragement, students demonstrated an aversion for drawing on literature and integrating this with their personal theories. This is redolent of Sibeon's (1991) chapter one observations about the perennial social work aversion for theory drawn from the social sciences.

4.5.8   Overall Grades for Part 2

Though not done as well as part 1 – not surprising, since part 2 was more challenging – part 2, nonetheless, was done very well.

Table 9.20:
Overall Grades, Part 2 – Assignment 3

Max = 40	
40	-
39	-
38	-
37	-
36	3
35	2
34	3
33	3
32	3
31	1
30	4
29	4
28	4
27	3
26	5
25	2
24	5
23	4
22	1
21	2
20	1
19	2
18	1
17	1
16	1
0	1

Three students scored a High Distinction (36/40) compared with five in part 1, a quarter of the students (14/56) scored a Distinction (32/40) or better (compare 21), well over half (35/56) scored a Credit (26/40) or better (compare 42), and six students failed (compare two). Two of these students failed because, although they passed both the description and justification, they scored zero for integrating literature. Another failed because of poor justification; another due to both poor justification and integration; a third because of poor description and integration; and the final one, the 'absent' student, because she effectively did not fulfil the requirements for part 2 at all. Thirty six students scored more highly in part 1,

eight scored the same, and 12 students performed better in part 2 than in part 1. Of those performing better in part 2, mostly it was a single mark or two; two students scored three more marks and one student four more. However, the gaps were much greater for those students performing better in part 1, with 10 students scoring at least five more marks out of 40 (12.5%); with the biggest gap being 17 marks (42.5%). This difference between the two parts of the assignment is a reflection, I believe, of the degree of difficulty.

4.5.9 Expression and Presentation

This aspect of the assignment was also done well. This is not surprising, since there is a clear relationship between being able to express and present your ideas in clear and logical fashion and the final output.

Table 9.21:
Expression and Presentation – Assignment 3

20	1
19	-
18	2
17	6
16	8
15	8
14	8
13	10
12	9
11	2
10	1
9	-
8	1

We graded three students at High Distinction (18/20), 17 at Distinction (16/20) or better, 43 at Credit or better, and only one student failed. This student was a second language learner. Those 13 students receiving a Pass or less evinced similar types of weaknesses as in previous assignments – the pleasing aspect being that there were now less of these students: ideas not developed in a systematic and logical fashion, including repetition; clumsy sentence structure.

4.5.10 Overall Grades for Assignment 3

The following table details grade distributions for assignment 3.

Table 9.22:
Grade Distribution – Assignment 3

	Gary		Pauline		TOTAL	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*	*Total*	*%*
HD	0	*0*	2	*13.3*	2	*3.5*
D	7	*16.7*	5	*33.3*	12	*21.1*
C	20	*47.6*	5	*33.3*	25	*43.9*
P	14	*33.3*	2	*13.3*	16	*28.1*
Resubmit	1	*2.4*	1	*6.7*	2	*3.5*
Total	42	*100*	15	*99.9*	57	*100.1*

Again, overall grades were very pleasing. Fifty seven final grades were obtained (although break up data is available for only 56). Two students scored an elusive High Distinction and almost a quarter of students (14/57) scored a Distinction or better. More than two thirds of students scored a Credit or better (39/57). Again, two students were requested to submit. One of these was the 'absent' student, who, despite not having surfaced since early in the semester was still submitting assessment. It is noteworthy that when she handed in the final assignment she had still not collected her Resubmit effort from assignment 2. The second Resubmit

student, who was only marginally below the Pass mark, did not, in fact, resubmit, since he had passed the subject overall.

As with assignment 2, there were some significant differences in Pauline's and my distributions. Almost half of Pauline's students (7/15) received a Distinction, and only three of 15 students (20%) received less than a Credit. Indeed, Pauline's students performed exceptionally well in this assignment. I could not be displeased since almost two thirds of my students (27/42) had received a Credit or higher, a figure considerably higher than might be expected compared to other first year subjects in the department. But again, close scrutiny of the raw scores reveals that the difference is not as great as appears at first glance. Pauline awarded two High Distinctions, I awarded none, yet I graded four students fractionally below a High Distinction (two at 89 and two at 88). Only one of Pauline's five Distinctions scored in the top half of the range at 86. In the Credit range as well, I scored 11 of my 20 Credits in the top half of the 65-79 range, with six scoring between 75 and 80 compared to only one of Pauline's five Credits. Both Pauline's Passes scored in the 50s, while more than half of my 14 Passes (8/14) scored in the top of the range (in the 60s). Comparison with Open Learning students is revealing.

Table 9.23:
Grade Distribution – Assignment 3: Comparison with Open Learning

	Internal		Open Learning	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*
HD	2	*3.5*	0	*0*
D	12	*21.1*	7	*14.9*
C	25	*43.9*	19	*40.4*
P	16	*28.1*	21	*44.7*
Resubmit	2	*3.5*	0	*0*
Total	57	*100.1*	47	*100*

Assignment 3 was the one where the most significant differences occurred between internal and Open Learning students at the higher range. Approximately a quarter of internal students (14/57) scored a Distinction or better compared to 15% (7/47) of Open Learning students. Over two thirds of internal students (39/57) scored a Credit or better compared to just over 55% (26/47) Open Learning students. Again, however, unlike with the internal cohort, no Open Learning students were required to resubmit.

4.6   Comparison of Pauline's and Gary's Marking

Below follows a tabular comparison of Pauline's and my marking for all three assignments.

Table 9.24:
Grade Distribution – All Assignments: Internal

	Gary		Pauline		TOTAL	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*	*Total*	*%*
HD	1	*0.9*	3	*4.4*	4	*2.2*
D	18	*16.1*	18	*26.5*	36	*20.0*
C	51	*45.6*	27	*39.7*	78	*43.3*
P	39	*34.8*	17	*25.0*	56	*31.1*
Resubmit	3	*2.7*	3	*4.4*	6	*3.3*
Total	112	*100.1*	68	*100*	180	*99.9*

A very small percentage of students achieved a High Distinction, with Pauline awarding three (two to the same student in assignments 2 and 3) and me awarding just one. Indeed, this was the only piece of work for which I ever awarded a High Distinction in three years of marking this subject. When you consider that there were three assignments for each student in each year and that in 1994, the focus of the present study, there were both internal and Open Learning students, you will realize just how extraordinarily difficult it was to gain a High Distinction for an individual assignment. I marked 112 internal assignments in 1994 and 74 Open Learning assignments, a total of 186 assignments. Additionally, I marked 89 assignments in 1995 (we reduced the number of pieces from three to two) and 30 in 1993 (a much smaller cohort, since the subject was available only to Community Welfare students). This made a grand total of 231 assignments I marked in a three year period for this subject and I awarded only one High Distinction. Pauline was scarcely more prolific. She awarded no High Distinctions for any of the five assignments marked in the 1993 and 1995 cohorts. She did, however, award one for assignment 2 and two for assignment three, a total of three for the cohort who are the focus of this study. Additionally, she awarded a High Distinction to an Open Learning student in assignment 2.

To summarize, in a three year span, Pauline awarded four High Distinctions, I awarded one for individual assignments. Overall subject grade was a different matter and I shall explain that below. Twenty percent of all assignments marked received a Distinction, with Pauline and I awarding 18 apiece; though this represented different proportions. More than 40% of all assignments marked received Credits. This meant that almost two thirds of all assignments marked received a Credit or better. This was a performance that delighted Pauline and I. Only just over 3% of all assignments marked (6/180) failed to meet minimum requirements, two of which were subsequently resubmitted to achieve a passing grade.

While marking always contains a subjective element, these differences in Pauline's and my distributions cannot be explained solely, or even largely, by marker idiosyncrasies. Our quality control checks rule this out as a complete or even major explanation. There are at least two alternative explanations, a teaching explanation and a learning one. First, Pauline simply taught the students more effectively than I did (though one should remember that 22 of the 68 pieces of work marked by Pauline belonged to my students). Second, Pauline's students on the whole had greater capacities for this type of learning. A third alternative involves both these aspects as partial explanations. I concede that given her greater experience in teaching this subject, and particularly since Pauline conceived the original subject, she may well have taught the subject better than I

did. My perception was that I improved in each of the three years I taught the subject. Interestingly, Pauline felt the same about my improvement. Overall, in final TEVALs, students did rate Pauline's teaching as marginally more effective than mine, but we are talking about degrees of excellence (6.5 and 6.7). The second explanation about student quality is probably closer to reality (or at least my ego wants to believe this!). One could correlate with grades in other first semester subjects, though such correlation would not provide definitive answers since this subject is considered by both students and ourselves to be somewhat different from other first year subjects undertaken by the cohort. Even correlating WS1002 grades with WS1004, the twin subject designed to follow on from WS1002 would not provide definitive evidence for at least two reasons. First, since it is a second semester subject there could be maturation effects and one cannot assume uniformity in student intellectual development. Particularly, the learning curve from first to second semester is probably the most exponential in a student's entire academic career at tertiary level. Second, while WS1004 was designed by Pauline with WS1002 in mind as a prerequisite, it is a different subject and again, one cannot assume isomorphism in skills assessed. But there is one obvious piece of data which can shed oblique light on the issue. Pauline, remember, had only one tutorial group. I had three. One can assume that my teaching quality did not vary markedly from one group to another, yet the grades did so. Scrutinizing overall grades by tutorial groups is instructive. I shall tabulate this information below. Before providing the break up of final grades by tutorial

group, however, I must first provide the distribution of final grades for the entire cohort and explain the procedures followed to determine these final grades.

4.7 Overall Grades for WS1002

The following table details the grade distribution for final grades achieved by the internal cohort.

Table 9.25:
Grade Distribution – Final Grades for WS1002: Internal

·	Total	%
HD	5	7.5
D	7	10.4
C	26	38.8
P	18	26.9
RW	6	9.0
X	1	1.5
NS	2	3.0
CS	2	3.0
Total	67	100.1

* Explanation of symbols previously unused:

RW: Result withheld: awarded in situations where the student has not been able to submit all work prior to the Departmental Examiner's Meeting.

X: A Fail grade where the student has not submitted all work.

NS: A Fail grade where the student has submitted no work whatsoever.

CS: A non-fail grade where a student has withdrawn from the subject prior to the 'without penalty' date.

4.7.1 Procedures for Determining Final Grades

Note that "all student marks assigned by lecturers are reviewed by academic staff at two levels: Departmental Examiners' Meetings; and Faculty Examiners' Meetings" (JCU 1994a, p. 5). For WS1002 in 1994 all grades remained as awarded by Pauline and I at both departmental and faculty levels.

For Distinction, Credit and Pass grades we applied the following procedure. We recalibrated student marks for individual assignments (which were originally marked out of 100) to provide a score out of 30 for assignments 1 and 2, and 40 for assignment 3. We then summed these three figures and awarded Passes at 50%, Credits at 65% and Distinctions at 80%. We also looked at clusters to see if there were any 'natural' breaks in the cohort. For example, sometimes a small cluster of students might score either 79 or 80, with a small gap of three marks down to the next student at 76. Given the vagaries and subjectivity of marking, it would have been arbitrary to abruptly use 80 as the cut off for Distinctions. We would argue that in such cases the 79 more properly belonged with the Distinction students. We always plotted all final raw scores on a single axis resembling a one dimensional scattergram, so we could see clearly where the natural clusters lay. We also looked carefully at how the final score was achieved. For instance, if the 79 came about as the result of two pieces of work which were at Distinction level or better, particularly if these were assignments 2 and 3 (remember: we marked assignment 1 more easily), we thought very carefully about awarding a Distinction grade irrespective of the clusters. Indeed, this is precisely what happened with the

1994 cohort. Two students scored 79; they were at the top of a cluster of 13 students descending in one mark increments down to 73. This cluster was separated by three marks from the one above, a cluster of six students scoring between 82 and 84. On criteria of both raw score and natural clusters, the students scoring 79 should have been awarded overall grades of Credit. However, we awarded a Distinction to one of these students scoring 79 on the following grounds. First, she had scored two individual Distinctions and one Credit compared to the other student's two Credits and one Distinction. Second, she received her Credit in the first assignment and progressively improved for each assignment thereafter, despite the fact that we were marking harder. The other student received a high mark of 85 for her first assignment and could not repeat the performance. Third, the major weakness in the first assignment, which was otherwise mostly at Distinction level, of the student to whom we awarded an overall Distinction, was that she scored zero from 10 in integrating the literature in part 3.

We awarded five High Distinctions overall. This requires explanation, since we awarded only four High Distinctions for individual assignments to three different students. Obviously, if we stipulated that in order to receive a final grade of High Distinction a student had to score a minimum of 90 across the three assignments, a High Distinction would have been an extremely rare event indeed. In fact, only one would ever have been awarded in the entire history of the subject, and ironically, that would have been in this year. We always felt this would be unfair,

since our subject would be totally out of kilter with all subjects across the university. But we did not want to compromise our standards – we wanted to push students, always encouraging and supporting, but always pushing them to their intellectual limits. What we agreed upon was this. As above, we would look first at natural clusters and second at signs of progression or improvement over the subject. Thirdly, we would scrutinize closely individual assignment grades and marks to see if a student had maintained a consistently high standard – in the high eighties for example – or if they had scored one or more individual High Distinctions. Using the cluster criterion, there was a small batch of five students scoring between 87 and 90 (two 87s, two 88s, one 90) who were three clear marks ahead of the next cluster (a group of six scoring from 82 to 84). This group had separated themselves clearly. Looking at a criterion of raw score in conjunction with clusters, it might be argued, however, that the student scoring 90 (87, 93, 89) clearly belonged in a separate grade range and should have been the only student to be awarded a High Distinction. But then we scrutinized carefully how these five students achieved their overall final raw score in the high 80s. One student, at the bottom of this cluster of five, achieved her raw score of 87 with two High Distinctions (91 and 90) and a Distinction (80), the latter in the first assignment. She had clearly improved from assignment 1 onwards. But more importantly, she was the only student in the history of the subject to receive two High Distinctions for individual assignments. Indeed, she scored two of only five High Distinctions awarded between 1993 and 1995 inclusive to both internal and Open Learning students! Not to award this student a High Distinction would have been a travesty

of justice. But if we awarded her a High Distinction, along with the student with a raw score of 90, what about the other three students, none of whom received a single High Distinction, but two of whom had scored an overall raw score of 88, higher than her? The two students scoring 88 overall did so with the following marks for assignments 1, 2 and 3 respectively: 89, 89, 86; and 89, 86, 88). The third student, scoring 87, did so with 82, 89 and 88. After much deliberation, we decided to award all five students a High Distinction. Our explicit criteria were as follows. In order to achieve a High Distinction overall in 1994, a student had to satisfy the following minimum requirements:

- A minimum overall raw score of 87.

- A minimum of Distinction for each assignment.

- A minimum of 88 for at least two assignments.

When we looked at overall student results we were extremely pleased. These results look even more impressive when set against the baseline questionnaire. Note particularly that one third of respondents had negative attitudes towards learning and that two thirds of respondents identified negative study habits with about 20% describing their study habits as "shocking", "very bad", "terrible", "very poor". Potentially, attitudes to learning and study habits exert a significant impact on student outcomes. Yet, despite these initial 'handicaps', students overall performed at a much higher level than would be suggested by their attitudes to learning and study habits.

We felt that five students had performed at a very high level indeed and were worthy of a High Distinction. In 1995, using similar criteria, we awarded only two High Distinctions from a cohort of 65, and in 1993, one High Distinction from a cohort of 24. Almost 18% of students (12/67) scored a Distinction and almost 57% (38/67) scored a Credit or better. At the time of the Departmental Examiners' Meeting, almost 84% of students originally enrolled (56/67) had passed the subject. This figure actually underscores student outcomes, since the two CS students had withdrawn from the subject before the penalty date and neither submitted any work. Both saw me prior to withdrawal. Both withdrew for personal reasons unrelated to university studies. The other nine students scored either RW (6), NS (2) or X (1). One NS student was never sighted at any stage of the subject and was not even registered in a tutorial group. To this day, we do not know who she was or is. The second NS student was an irregular attender throughout the semester. Indeed, this was the third time this student had enrolled in the subject, the most recent being the previous year. The student was of indigenous origin and in our estimation had the ability to pass the subject. Unfortunately, a vast array of personal problems always seemed to intervene. The X student submitted the first assignment, scored a Pass and vanished from all enrolled subjects shortly after the first assignment. He never even collected the first assignment. The six RW students were all eventually failed. One of these students actually submitted all three assignments, scoring a Credit in the first, but Resubmits for assignments 2 and 3. She was the student referred to above who, for a variety of personal and financial reasons was unable to attend classes after the

first few weeks. I waited patiently for her to contact me again; she never did. Three others had submitted assignments 1 and 2, one receiving Credits for both assignments, one two Passes, and the third a Pass and a Resubmit. The first student, receiving two Credits, was a surprise. She had been a regular attender throughout the semester and was achieving well. She simply did not hand in assignment 3 and vanished off the face of the earth. The second student, achieving two Passes was grappling with university life and needed some time to reassess her position. She had also attended most of the semester. We granted her a very generous extension for assignment 3 (at the end of semester 2), but we never heard from her again. The third of these students failed to resubmit assignment 2 and did not hand in assignment 3 at all. She was one of Pauline's students who was facing personal difficulties, but despite numerous promises and threats to complete the work and some very generous extensions (again, until the end of second semester), she failed to fulfil requirements. She had also been a highly erratic attender, a non-existent one in the second half of semester. Two other RW students submitted assignment 1, one receiving a Credit, the other a Pass. Both were experiencing a variety of personal difficulties. The first vanished without trace shortly after submitting assignment 1, the second made arrangements to complete the allotted work by the end of semester two. Again, a vanishing trick. The number of students scoring a non-passing grade (11/67) represents an attrition rate of 16.4%. This is more than favourable with attrition rates across the sector. The Department of Education, Employment and Training's (1993) *National Report on Australia's Higher Education Sector*, which looks at historical data since 1939, notes that

student drop-out rates have been as high for as long as reliable records have been kept in Australia. Coaldrake (1998, p. 128) points out that "the allocation of Commonwealth funding allows for one-quarter of an incoming group of full-time students to drop out each year" and that "in fact, attrition rates are often higher than this, and are at their highest in the first year of study."

4.7.2   Final Grades – Comparing Tutorial Groups

Before I compare overall grades with the Open Learning cohort I want to return to the break up of final grades by tutorial group referred to above.

Table 9.26:
Grade Distribution – Final Grades: Break up by Tutorial Group

| | Gary's Groups | | | | | | Pauline's Group | | TOTAL | |
| | Tue 12-2 | | Wed 12-2 | | Thurs 3-5 | | Wed 3-5 | | | |
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
HD	-	-	2	11.8	1	7.1	2	12.5	5	7.5
D	1	5.3	1	5.9	1	7.1	4	25.0	7	10.4
C	6	31.6	9	52.9	5	35.7	6	37.5	26	38.8
P	9	47.4	2	11.8	5	35.7	2	12.5	18	26.9
RW	2	10.5	2	11.8	-	-	2	12.5	6	9.0
X	-	-	1	5.9	-	-	-	-	1	1.5
NS	-	-	-	-	1	7.1	-	-	2*	3.0
CS	1	5.3	-	-	1	7.1	-	-	2	3.0
Total	19	100.1	17	100.1	14	99.8	16	100.0	67	100.1

* One NS student was never assigned a tutorial group, so numbers in the horizontal total column only tally to 66.

I spoke above of the differences between Pauline's and my final distributions. Overall, Pauline's students performed better. I explored tentative explanations in

terms of teaching quality and student ability. The above data indicates that an explanation *solely* in terms of teaching quality is inadequate. When we compare my Wednesday group with Pauline's group (also Wednesday) the differences flatten out. Both groups had two High Distinctions (one 88 and one 87 in each group). Pauline's group did have four Distinctions compared to my one, but of the three Credit students marginally below a Distinction at 78-79, two were in my Wednesday group and none in Pauline's. Both tutorial groups had 12 students who scored Credit or better. Both had two Passes and two RWs. In short, Wednesday seemed the day to be learning WS1002 in 1994. Nine of the top 12 students (Distinction or better), including four of the five High Distinctions, and 11 of the top 15 students came from these two groups. The Tuesday group was clearly the weakest of the four groups. Despite the fact that it was the largest group (19 students), it contained only one of the top 12 students (Distinction or better) and was the only group without a student awarded a High Distinction.

4.7.3 Final Grades – Comparing Open Learning Students

Comparing final grades for the internal cohort with Open Learning is instructive. These are detailed below.

Table 9.27:
Grade Distribution – Final Grades: Comparison with Open Learning

	Internal		Open Learning	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*
HD	5	*7.5*	0	*0.0*
D	7	*10.4*	7	*12.7*
C	26	*38.8*	19	*34.5*
P	18	*26.9*	21	*38.2*
RW	6	*9.0*	3	*5.5*
X	1	*1.5*	1	*1.8*
NS	2	*3.0*	4	*7.3*
CS	2	*3.0*	0	*0.0*
Total	67	*100.1*	55	*100*

The most significant difference occurs at the top of the range where no Open Learning students were awarded a High Distinction compared to five internal students (7.5%). Almost 13% (7/55) of Open Learning students scored a Distinction or better compared to almost 18% (12/67)of internal students. The significant differences continued down into the middle of the scale with well over a half of internal students, approximately 57% (38/67) scoring a Credit or better compared to less than a half of Open Learning students (47% or 26/55). There is no doubt that, overall, internal students performed significantly better than Open Learning students. This is noteworthy since, as noted above, Open Learning students have traditionally performed better in this subject.

4.7.4   Final Grades – Degree Program, Age and Gender

Finally, I want to examine briefly the data by degree program, age and gender and the interaction between age and gender. Since only 75% of students responded to the initial baseline questionnaire, which included an optional question about age, and since questionnaires were anonymous, strictly speaking, one cannot break

down final result data by age. However, 11 of the top twelve students, to whom the following analysis refers, responded to the questionnaire and 10 of these completed their names, ages and degree programs. An eleventh student completing the questionnaire shared her age in private. Only one of the top 12 students did not complete the questionnaire. Her gender and degree program is available from other sources and I have guessed her age within a five year margin. Thus, the following is a truncated analysis looking only at the top 12 students – those scoring a Distinction or better.

Table 9.28:
Grade Distribution – Final Grades: Break up by Degree Program, Gender and Age for Top 12 Students

Age	BSW		BCW		OTHER		TOTAL	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
17-19	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
20-29	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2
30-39	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
40-50	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	6
Total	1	5	0	4	0	2	1	11
	6		4		2		12	

Note: these figures do not match perfectly with the baseline data (see chapter three). That is because only 67% of initial enrolments and 79% of students completing filled in the questionnaire. For instance, baseline data indicate eight women between the ages of 40 and 50 filled in the questionnaire, yet the cohort contained 12 women in this age bracket.

Eleven of the top 12 students were female. The sole male student was, in fact, the top student. Even allowing for official enrolment figures (females = 78%, males =

22%), females were disproportionately represented in the top 12 students (91.7% versus 8.3%). The second ranked male was 20th. BSW students accounted for six of the top 12 students and three of the top five (the High Distinctions), including the top student overall (the male referred to above). BCW accounted for four of the top 12 students and two of the top five. One B.Psych. student and one BA student finished in the top 12 with Distinctions. The BA student ultimately transferred to a BCW degree. Adjusting for baseline figures, this was reasonably consistent with overall enrolments. BSW were slightly under-represented and BCW and "Other" were slightly over-represented.

Age and its interaction with gender was the most interesting statistic to emerge. Despite the fact that students under 30 accounted for more than half the cohort, only one third (4) of the top 12 students belonged in this age bracket, and only one of these was under 25. Only one student in the 17-19 bracket scored a Distinction; none scored a High Distinction. This was also despite the fact that the 17-19 age bracket was the largest one, larger than all other five year brackets from 20 upwards. Two students under 30 did score a High Distinction. Both were BSW students, one a 28 year old female, the other the top-ranked 25 year old male. Further, of the 12 students (all women) aged 40 and over, half (6/12) were in the top 12 (three High Distinctions and three Distinctions), four received Credits, the lowest of these being 69, one received a Pass (the highest possible at 64) and the other student withdrew from the subject. Indeed, women over 40 were clearly the best performers in WS1002 in 1994. This, I might add, was consistent with results

from previous years. Even allowing for the greater numbers of females (usually 4:1 in most social work and community welfare subjects during the time I was at James Cook University), and the relatively higher proportion of mature age students in the social work and community welfare degree programs, mature age women were disproportionately represented in the higher grades.

4.7.5 Final Grades – Degree Program, Age and Gender: Comparing PY1003

It is interesting to compare this gender and age data with PY1003, for which I taught all three tutorial groups in second semester. The cohort, while similar, was far from identical. Only seven of the top 12 WS1002 students were enrolled in PY1003 and there were a number of students doing PY1003 who had not completed WS1002. Nonetheless, it gives a broad indication of factors related to gender and age. Fifty students were enrolled in PY1003.

Table 9.29:
Grade Distribution – Final Grades: Break up by Degree Program, Gender and Age for Top 10 Students in PY1003

	BSW		BCW		B.A		TOTAL	
Age	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
17-19	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
20-29	2	2	0	1	1	0	3	3
30-39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
40-50	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total	2	4	0	3	1	0	3	7
	6		3		1		10	

Note: The B.Psych students enrolled in WS1002 did not study PY1003, which is a subject tailored specifically for social work and community welfare students.

Two High Distinctions were awarded and eight Distinctions. Three of the five High Distinctions from WS1002 were enrolled and all received Distinctions. Four of the seven WS1002 Distinctions were enrolled, receiving two Distinctions and two Credits. In short, five of the top 12 students from WS1002 were five of the top 10 students in PY1003. The other two top students from WS1002 received Credits in PY1003. There were some differences in degree program in the top grades for PY1003. Six were BSW students, three were BCW students and one was a BA student, indicating marginally greater consistency with baseline enrolment figures than WS1002. At the High Distinction level one student, a male, was a BSW student, and the other, a female, was a BCW student. There were some differences with age and gender. Males appeared to do better at PY1003 – three of the top 10 compared to one of the top 12 in WS1002. But this statistic is deceptive, since the only male who finished in the top 12 in WS1002 also finished in the top 10 in PY1003, but the other two male top 10 finishers in PY1003 were not enrolled in WS1002. Might either of these students have scored a Distinction or better had they been enrolled in WS1002? This can be answered definitively in the case of one student who enrolled in WS1002 in 1995 and finished equal top as one of only two students awarded a High Distinction. He also received a High Distinction for PY1003. Age was a different matter. Eight of the top 10 students were under 30 (compare 4 of 12 for WS1002) and both the High Distinction students were in their late twenties. What might account for this significant difference? Student feedback and observation suggest a straightforward

answer. Half the assessment for PY1003 – and I had no control over this – was an end of semester exam.

This might explain why older students did not perform so well in PY1003, but it does not explain why mature age students performed better overall in WS1002. One possible avenue of enquiry is opened up by the work of Kitchener and King (1990). While I am wary of Kitchener and King's 'reflective judgment model' (see chapter three), anchored as it is in a totalizing metaphysics with essentialist and teleological trimmings, their claim that learners who overcome 'distortions' in epistemic assumptions are limited by age and education does bear scrutiny. Their data suggest a progression through various stages where more sophisticated learners "accept that there are many problems for which there are no absolutely true answers. The task for these problem solvers is to construct a solution that is justifiable after considering alternative evidence and interpretations" (p. 174). Note that "to develop an awareness of alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting upon the environment" is one of our six subject objectives. Kitchener and King (1990, p. 174) argue further that "in this complex world, where so many of the problems adults face involve uncertainty or are ill structured, we would argue that the latter meaning perspective is more adaptive, more essential, and more consistent with the stated mission of colleges and universities." What is interesting is that their research indicates that this second meaning perspective, examining alternatives, does not develop until the late twenties, early thirties, and that it is usually tied to participation in advanced education. "Since our data also

suggest that those of the same age without higher education score more similarly to younger subjects of the same educational level, we believe that education does make a difference" (Kitchener and King 1990, p. 174). In short, they are arguing that there is an age-related ceiling on 'epistemological development' until the late 20s, early 30s, but in order to power your way through the ceiling, higher education is important. I might add that the nature and the quality of the higher education is likely to be a vital ingredient. This explanation is certainly *consistent* with our data, provided one accepts that WS1002 is about 'epistemological development'. But for Kitchener and King's research to be more productive, they need to broaden their sample and rather than filtering all data through a Habermasian percolator, be more amenable to alternative interpretations that challenge their rigid, preconceived notions about critically reflective thinking. Even were one to accept Kitchener and King's teleological model, it is far from clear that their explanation provides an accurate account of the age-related factors in our data. What one *is* entitled to conclude from our data is that if you were a woman over 40 you were far more likely to do well in WS1002 than any other group of students. Why this might be so remains an open question.

A number of other assessment issues were raised in the taped group discussions and I shall address them briefly here. One important issue concerns feedback, the other resubmission of work not satisfying minimum standards.

4.8   Assignment Feedback

> Feedback, or 'knowledge of results', is the life-blood of learning.
> (Rowntree 1977, p. 24)

Both Meyers (1987), writing specifically of 'critical thinking', and Ramsden (1992) stress the critical nature of feedback. "It is impossible to overstate the role of effective feedback on students' progress in any discussion of effective teaching and assessment" (Ramsden 1992, p. 193). Ramsden cites the work of Entwistle and colleagues who were investigating first year engineering students in Scottish higher education. The major finding from this study was that "an important contributory cause of student failure was an almost complete absence of feedback on progress during the first term of their studies" (Ramsden 1992, p. 193). Given this state of affairs one might expect feedback plays a central role in higher education. Wrong. Ainley and Long (1995) completed a report on the 1994 Course Experience Questionnaire, the year in which this study was primarily conducted. The Course Experience Questionnaire is an annual national survey of graduates. The results for that year – and they are consistent with previous years – showed that almost half of first time graduates report that feedback was mostly in terms of marks and grades. Around 40% feel that staff do not put a lot of time into commenting on their work. Almost one-third disagree with the statement that "Teaching staff normally gave me helpful feedback on how I was going". This is a sad state of affairs, but given my previous comments about the social and political context of education, it would be misguided to attribute this sorry state entirely to the negligence and ineptitude of individual teachers. Recalling the discussion in

previous chapters, such aspects of teaching are influenced by the institutional environment, an environment, which we know from chapter one, is asking higher education teachers to do more with less.

Rowntree (1977) remarks that "inadequate feedback can indicate that the assessment is serving the interests of people other than the students", pointing out that "people who fail a driving test are given more information about their faults and where improvement is needed than are students who do poorly in the educational examinations...at the end of their school careers" (p. 25). The New South Wales Higher School Certificate, which I sat in 1974, is a prime example. In those days the final exam was weighted at 100% of students' marks and the only feedback students received was a grade and a decile ranking for each subject as well as an overall decile band ranking. Clearly, the HSC was not designed to steer students' learning. The assessment, unashamedly, had nothing to do with the interests of students; its sole purpose was to act as a funnel for selection into higher education. Some years later in 1980 when I was studying Psychology I at Sydney University I encountered a similar thing. Here examinations were weighted at only 60% (though there were three class tests weighted at a total of 12%), but they were staggered over three terms – one exam at the end of each term worth 20%. One third of each exam was devoted to 30 multiple choice questions, the other two thirds to two essays. Again, you were provided with a grade (not a mark) for each exam and if you so chose could find out a grade for each of the three component parts. After the first exam I tried to get more specific feedback on the multiple

choice questions – a grade alone didn't really tell me much – but I was informed

that this was not possible because there was a common bank of items used each

year for comparative purposes across cohorts. This struck me as extremely ironic.

One of Psychology's key disciplinary areas is learning theory and Skinner's rats

and pigeons were said to learn better with immediate feedback (reinforcement). It

seemed we were getting worse treatment than the rats. And the reason –

commitment to 'psychometric excellence'.

The first step in ensuring adequate feedback which can steer learning is to stagger

assessment tasks over the assessment. This serves at least two purposes. First, it

means students don't feel they are 'putting all their eggs in one basket'. Having a

100% exam, or even written assignment at the end of term places immense

pressure on students. Second, it enables students to gain feedback earlier during

the term or semester so that they can make appropriate responses to remedy any

problems. The importance of both these aspects for students in demonstrated

powerfully in the following comment.

> Yeah, you get more feedback.
> Yeah, I think that 30% for each one was good compared with like our other
> subject which was 60%. That was too much and this idea of feedback is really
> giving us a good direction of where we are going.
> I like the way you get the assignment back with all the comments and stuff on
> it so if you've stuffed up you can improve it.
> Yeah. Like with sociology it's just like a mark and that's it. You don't where
> you went wrong and all that. With the second one I sat there with the
> assignment and saw I did that with the first one, what do I have to do to make it
> better.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, p. 3)

We set three assessment tasks due at the end of weeks 7, 10 and 14. But one must not forget that, while important, feedback on student progress should not be restricted to comments on completed assignments. Because we structured tutorials in weeks 2 to 5 around assessment requirements and had students partially complete assignments for tutorial work, we were able to provide continuous feedback. Further, both Pauline and I were prepared to discuss student drafts during consultation hours, and as a further measure we introduced a policy from the second assignment onwards of having students fill in their own self-evaluation sheets. The continuous nature of the feedback is captured in the following student comment: "None of them were easy to start with and they all took a lot of thought, but ... there were signposts all the way, lectures, tutes and consultation to see if you were following" (Transcript 1/6/94a, p. 12). Note that our philosophy is quite a different one, an unfortunately too common one if student comments are any guide, from that which sees assignments as some type of clandestine test of student learning in which students are expected to complete assignments by *themselves* without consulting other students (this is cheating) and without receiving too much guidance from staff (again a mild form of cheating).

Continuous and prompt feedback is important. Even with assignments Pauline and I attempted to return them to students within two weeks of the due date. We felt this was important, not least because learning theory suggests that 'immediate reinforcement' is important for shaping learning (Honig and Staddon 1977).

Indeed, this prompt return was much appreciated by students, some of whom provided an explicit rationale for their appreciation.

> It's really great to get back one assignment before you start the next one, then you can look at that and you know, you feel you know where your weaknesses are, but once you see that in writing in the notes you know definitely where your weaknesses are and where your better ideas are. When you do the next assignment you really know what you have to work at. ... So that's really vital to get the feedback before you start the assignment.
> (Transcript 31/5/94, p. 9)

And for those that think this is a trite commonplace, I should point out that I lost count of the number of times during my undergraduate degree when I handed in an assignment for a specific subject before the lecturer or tutor had returned my previous assignment from the same subject. Assessment, and related feedback, if used correctly, can be one of the most powerful forces shaping vital student learning. This circumstance is beautifully illustrated by the following exchange:

> I think one of the best things in this subject is the fact that the assessment we're doing is not regurgitating how well you can research in the library.
> Yeah (many students agree).
> Which to me is, I found has been more difficult, but in the long run it's more rewarding.
> It's more interesting and helpful.
> Yeah.
> And like when you're there doing an assignment you're 100% there doing an assignment, trying to figure it out and work it through and all the rest of it. With the others you've got like all these bits of information you think, 'oh yeah, I'll put that second and that third'.
> Yeah, we're using our mind more.
> Absolutely.
> You can't really do without it.
> But it wouldn't work in this particular subject or I don't think that it would be as valuable.
> Oh no, we'd only be learning theory, we wouldn't be learning anything else.
> Exactly. We'd know everyone's theory off by heart, but I mean...
> This is a nice combination.
> Yeah.
> You, and the theory and the practical.

Yep.
(Transcript 1/6/94b, pp. 24-25)

The following exchange earlier in the discussion endorses this perspective and

lends yet another angle by underscoring the powerful learning about social

construction of knowledge and the role of self in this process. The second student

refers to another student's assignment 1 interaction which was being used in a

tutorial:

> It's different because you made us look at ourselves rather than writing an
> essay out of a whole lot of books. They weren't the key, the key was doing it
> yourself.
> And condensing it. That's another part of it that I've found, is that you can
> interpret interactions, but you can go on for pages and pages and pages. It's
> bringing it down to the crux of the problem. That's often the hardest thing.
> People who look at it can get two different views. What was the one we had
> here? Madonna and the one about the (noise) and the husband and the wife,
> and you could almost visibly see people splitting off into whether they
> supported the girl or the husband. And I remember straight away thinking,
> 'OK, this is interesting. We've all immediately split off into groups of who
> supported the male and who supported the female'. It was a prime example of
> everything that we've learnt.
> (Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 15)

TEVALs endorsed these perspectives. One of my optional bank items, "The

lecturer gives adequate feedback on written work", yielded a rating of 1.3

compared to the university average of 2.5. While this rating is excellent by

university standards, it is only average by my own standards, surprising for me,

since I consider it to be one of my single greatest teaching strengths. Indeed,

Pauline in her submission to the University Teaching Committee as part of my

nomination for a Teaching Excellence Award in 1993 commented that my

"approach to assessment of students, has been and is, that assessment is a powerful

means for reinforcing and redirecting learning. His preparedness to provide detailed feedback on student assignments reflects his belief in the importance of feedback and the nature of his relationship with students." Closer scrutiny of the data, however, explains the rating of 1.3. We asked students to indicate on TEVALs whether they had the lecturer being evaluated for lectures only (L) or for lectures plus tutorials (L + T). My overall rating was dragged down by Pauline's students whose written work I did not mark and who responded to this question with "Uncertain" or "Not Applicable". Eliminating these responses yields a rating of 1.1. I always systematically address and comment on each of the detailed assessment criterion and perusal of my overall comments at the end of assignments, excluding comments and feedback in the body of the essay, indicates a range of 100 to 500 words of feedback with an average of 180-200 words. Only one internal student commented on this. In fact, this was the student's major comment: "I particularly appreciated the full page comment on my assignment. No other lecturer takes the time to do this." Open Learning students were, fortunately, more aware of this (for Open Learning students the amount of feedback is even greater with a range of 250-750 words and an average of 500 words) and a significant number of students commented on this aspect of my teaching in the open-ended question related to teaching strengths. "Another excellent point is that he gives a lot of feedback when he marks assignments." "Feedback on assignments excellent."

This is supported by Rowntree (1977, p. 26) who emphasizes that "research has confirmed...that students who are given individualized verbal comments on their work, incorporating suggestions for improvement, do tend to 'improve' significantly more than students who are given standard comments (e.g. 'poor', 'average', 'good', 'excellent') or grades." I have always considered feedback essential to directing and improving student learning. This applies equally to 'good' students as it does to those struggling. One of the most disappointing aspects of my own undergraduate days was that markers rarely gave feedback, either oral or written, providing explicit and specific advice as to how the work could be improved. We all know that even if you produce a High Distinction piece of work there is always some aspect that can be worked on. Consequently, I was diligent in providing adequate feedback which students could use constructively to improve their work. The above data indicates that at least some students appreciated this. I shall provide some examples of the sorts of comments I wrote on assignments, noting that written assignment feedback was simply one form of feedback. I also gave ample oral feedback on individual drafts in consultation sessions and in tutorials I continually provided feedback on assignments. The comments I have chosen represent a cross-section of assignment quality and are drawn from all three assignments. They are only from the 'general' overall comment written at the end of the assignment. I have not included the many specific comments made throughout the assignment. In a sense, the general comment summarizes the specific details from the comments raised throughout the assignment. The first is from a student who scored a Distinction of 89, the equal

top mark in assignment 1. Note the comments indicate what the student needed to do to gain a High Distinction as well as identify what the student did well. Also note the comments systematically address each of the assessment criterion. I have removed all reference to individual student names.

> You have written a comprehensive and cogent theory which demonstrates keen observation and insight. You have also done a very good job of identifying concepts, propositions and assumptions; though I would be inclined to add *power* to your concepts, am not entirely certain about your third proposition, and would 'strip back' slightly your last two assumptions. Integration of literature and lecture/prac material is excellent – a perfect score for that one.
>
> In part 3 you identify many significant self factors and mostly link these very well and explicitly to your theory. Good. You also manage, once again, to achieve effective integration of relevant literature and teaching material. Well done.
>
> Setting out and presentation was excellent – very 'reader friendly'. Written expression was mostly sound, though there were occasional lapses [identified in the text]. I felt that sections of part 3 lost their flow at times.
>
> Nonetheless, overall, you have produced an excellent of piece of work – comprehensive, systematic and thoughtful. Well done!
>
> P.S. Pauline and I both had an assignment which we regarded as borderline D/HD. We swapped, agreed they were of identical quality and decided to grade them right at the top of the Distinction range, just one mark short of a HD. Identification of concepts, assumptions and propositions; and written expression were the two sections which dragged you just below.

This student scored a Credit at the top of the range, 79, for assignment 2.

> You have developed quite a good theory of your chosen interaction. You could have strengthened your theory further by clearly articulating the group's norms and explaining certain key relationships between concepts (e.g. status, leadership; and status, power and communication). Identification of concepts was quite good, assumptions good and propositions reasonable. On the whole, part 2 was a very solid Credit.
>
> I really liked the way you set out part 3. Identification of self factors was excellent – very comprehensive and thoughtful. You also did a very good job of linking these factors to your theory. These two parts were done at High Distinction level. Unfortunately, your integration of relevant material into part 3 was only reasonable – a Pass – really done clearly only in the second of the six sections of part 3. This depressed your mark for part 3, though it was still a solid Distinction.

Written expression and presentation was good; though you have a tendency to misuse commas (instead of full stops and semicolons).
Overall, I think you've done a good job. I have graded the assignment as a very high Credit, just one mark below a Distinction.

Note that a high Credit can be achieved in a number of ways: a student could perform at a consistent level on all criteria, or they could, as with this student, range from a High Distinction to a Pass. It is essential that students receive this feedback, if not in written form, at least verbally. Rowntree (1977) argues that grades act like *averages*. "They smooth out and conceal irregularities and variabilty" (p. 70).

The third student scored a solid Credit of 70 for assignment 1.

On the whole this was a solid first up effort. I thought your theory was good – thoughtful and well developed. Your propositions were excellent but they weren't always drawn from your theory. Because you included information in your propositions that were not part of your original theory, it was not clear initially that some of your concepts were key ones. Assumptions were stripped back well, though it was not clear that some were in fact key to the theory you actually developed. You made some attempt to integrate General Systems Theory into your theory. This could have been developed a little further [explained in the text].
In part 3 you identify some significant self factors. Good. Initially you also link these successfully to your theory, though this falls away towards the end. Unfortunately, you do not integrate any literature, lecture or prac material in part 3.
Written expression and presentation is sound. On the whole, a solid effort. If you can integrate relevant literature etc. next time, your grade will improve.

This student scored a pass of 59 for assignment 3.

You provide a good description of the person and the event and do quite a good job of justifying your choice of details. The major problem with this section concerned written expression and presentation. Structurally, you haven't organized your material ideally. You present an initial description, move on to justification, then return to description via Ellis' perceiving/thinking/feeling/

acting complex. This also spoils integration of relevant material since it is 'tacked on' rather than integrated. There is also a bit of 'padding' and repetition in this section. This spoils the power and focus of your work. Having said this, part 1 was still clearly worth a Credit.

Part 2 was not nearly as strong – not thought out and developed as well. You provide quite a good description of assistance but justification is only reasonable – two of the rationales are not clear [identified in the text]. You could have used the P/T/F/A complex to justify your chosen assistance. Integration was non-existent so this dragged your mark right down.

Overall, a clear Pass, but I felt you could easily have got a Credit by working more on part 2.

4.9   Resubmission

Another assessment-related issue concerns our resubmission policy where students were able to resubmit unsatisfactory assignments (as many times as they wished) with the proviso that a maximum mark of 50% was obtainable. There were six assignments graded as Resubmits for WS1002 internal students in 1994; two for each assignment. Both the assignment 1 students resubmitted and gained a passing grade on the second attempt. None of the other four assignments were resubmitted; one because the student, who scored only marginally below 50 in assignment 3, had already passed the subject. But as the below transcript data indicates, the 'safety net' was appreciated and in some years was used more extensively. For instance, in 1993 we had an indigenous student who submitted six pieces of work to pass the course – assignment 1 three times, assignment 2 twice and assignment 3 once.

My Wednesday group commented favourably on the resubmission policy:

> Actually that's what so reassuring about this is that you know it's a safety net type of thing.
> Yeah. Exactly.

If you like, can get into a course, then you should be able to pass, so at least they should help you get through, like we're being helped through here by being able to resubmit and stuff like that.
(Transcript 1/6/94b, p. 23)

CONCLUSION

I began by asking what assessment is and what its purposes are. Following Ramsden, I outlined three major functions of assessment. First, helping students to learn. Second, reporting on student progress. Third, making decisions about teaching. The above data analysis indicates how each of these functions was important in WS1002. Particularly, we used assessment tasks as a key pedagogical strategy for shaping student learning. The first four tutorial sessions were structured around assessment requirements for assignment 1 – an intervention triggered by previous experiences with the subject, and feedback, both formal and informal, after the opening lecture. This demonstrates the inextricable link between the three functions: *decisions about teaching* are made on the basis of *student learning*, which includes diagnosing problems and misunderstandings and making evaluative judgements on these. Accurate *reporting* springs from "faithful diagnosis of students' understandings" (Ramsden 1992, p. 213).

Again drawing on Ramsden, I next offered a set of assessment guidelines for fostering deep learning approaches and evaluated to what extent WS1002 assessment satisfied these guidelines. I concluded that overall WS1002 assessment tasks and requirements were designed to foster deep learning in students, particularly thinking critically about action, and that there was a close union

between subject objectives and assessment tasks. This paved the way for a detailed examination of how well students actually performed on these tasks? I prefaced this discussion with a detailed explanation of marking and grading procedures and quality control measures. In terms of both the subject's overall aim and its specific objectives, student assignments revealed considerable success, particularly, though not exclusively, among mature aged women. Using assessment tasks to direct student learning emerged as pivotal in this quest.

The role of assessment in shaping effective student learning can be summed up trenchantly in the following student exchange:

> I found the assessment in this very, not easy, but approachable.
> If you look at the assessment in other subjects, I mean some of them you don't have to turn up to the lectures and you get the notes and you get the exams beforehand and really, if you've got a good brain you get yourself organized you can pass really. It has no practicality and you walk away and you think, 'thank God that's over.' That's basically what it boils down to really. But at least with this, well I found it anyway after doing the three of them, that it gave you an insight and it helped me to understand and to come to terms too. Not just the theory.
> I think that comes back to a lot of life's experiences, and you've had a lot of experience out there in the real world. A lot of us don't have that experience and we haven't had the exposure to it and so I wouldn't say that the assignment wasn't really that easy, it took a lot of thought and there was a lot of work involved in it.
> I wasn't saying easy. I was saying practical, and I can see the benefit in doing it, whereas in some assessment in some of this place is just up the creek, you know I really do. I do it because I've got to.
> Well it makes you think and reflect back on yourself, like through this subject I think that I've learnt so much about myself – as well as values and things like that.
> A new perception of social work as well. A better perception.
> (Transcript 1/6/94a, pp. 10-11)

It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little.
Do what you can.
(Sydney Smith 1987, no page numbers)

Instead of seeing the rug being pulled from under us, we can learn to dance on a shifting carpet.
(Thomas Crum 1987, no page numbers)

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION – 'QUALITY TEACHING'

In recent years technocratic discourse has prevailed in Australian higher education: the sector is facing a 'crisis', we are told, and the response has been squeals for 'quality', culminating in the Quality Assurance reviews. Teaching has been identified as a key ingredient in the quality process. Attempts to define quality and to specify how it is to be measured reveals that far from being a neutral concept, quality is anchored within a broader theory of education, including notions of teaching and learning, and knowledge itself. How people use the term quality depends on their educational theory. One key finding to emerge, however, is that teaching is not a unitary phenomenon and there is both a generic component and a context-specific component related to disciplinary practice. In the context of social work education the major discipline-specific contextual variable is the theory/practice problematic. Examination of this reveals something of a 'crisis' in social work education, a disciplinary crisis mirroring the broader institutional crisis of quality. Throughout the century the social work profession has demonstrated

that it cannot agree on what 'theory' is, what 'practice' is, nor the relationship between them. Payne (1990; 1991) argues that these disputes can be viewed as attempts by the different interest groups to influence the definition of the nature of social work and social work education, representing stances about the dominance of managerial and political control, practitioner control, or of academic control. As with 'quality', 'theory/practice' emerges as a highly political and embedded concept. Shallow digging unearths similar contested terrain – conceptual, theoretical and epistemological. Underlying both sets of issues are broader concerns about knowledge, education, teaching and learning.

This thesis takes as its central concern the question of how we best teach social work students (more specifically, beginning social work students) to grapple with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice? Or more specifically, how do we best teach students to think theoretically and critically about action? As the previous paragraph indicates, an 'answer' to this question must be navigated by a circuitous route which explores key educational and philosophical terrain. What do we mean by theory/practice relationships? What is knowledge? What do we mean by 'best teaching'? What is the relationship between teaching and learning?

The discussion in the next three sections does not offer new information or insights. Rather, it attempts to crystallize the previous nine chapters by highlighting the key issues to arise. It uses as its springboard the conclusion sections of each of the nine chapters, conclusions which attempted to draw together the threads of each chapter. I have divided this discussion into three major

sections. The first is *Theory*, which embraces chapter two (knowledge) and chapter three (education). Chapter one also fits within this rubric but is largely dealt with in this introduction. The second section, which is a 'framing' section, I have labelled *Methodology, Context and Process*. This corresponds to chapters four to six. The three subsections all take their headings from the overall section title. The third and final section, which I have titled, *The Findings*, also consists of three parts corresponding to chapters seven to nine: case-based pedagogy and theory/practice links; the social context of learning and the use of self; assessment – evaluating and directing student learning. Having cobbled together the major issues from the first nine chapters, I am then in a position to conclude the chapter and the thesis by mapping out the study's limitations and potential trajectories for future teaching and research.

I.   THEORY

I draw on Habermas' tripartite classification of knowledge and human interests – positivism, interpretivism and critical education science – as a heuristic device for organizing my discussion of both knowledge and educational paradigms. In discussing knowledge, I use the labels positivism/post-positivism, hermeneutics, and critical theory, which broadly correspond to the above terms. In discussing educational paradigms I insert conceptions of social work education within this tripartite frame drawing on Solas' (1994) framework for social work education. Solas distinguishes between 'classical constructions' of classroom practice (positivist) and two contemporary variants, 'neoclassical constructions' (postpositivist and interpretive), and 'radical constructions' (largely critical). His

distinction is partly grounded in historical periods. As with chapter two, I also explore a fourth paradigm, poststructuralism, particularly the notion of 'dialogue'.

Having traced the concepts of 'knowledge' and 'education' via this paradigmatic course, I then sketch the theoretical framework for the thesis by drawing on Hobson's (1992) adaptation of Moore's (1974) five major components of educational paradigms: *aim* of education; view of *knowledge*; the nature of the *person*; views on *teaching* and *learning*; and *social* and *political* context of education. Four other key issues are subsumed within this framework: the *purpose* of social work, within the *aim* of education; *theory/practice* views, largely within *knowledge* and *person*; *critical reflection* and *reflective practice* fit within the theory/practice discussion as well as *teaching* and *learning*; and the notion of '*quality*' slots mainly within *teaching* and *learning*, and *social* and *political* context.

1.1 Aim of Social Work Education

I begin from a position that claims that before one decides what the aim of social work education is one must be clear about the purposes of social work. Throughout its history in Australia, Great Britain and the United States, there has been vast disagreement about the purposes of social work and hence, social work education. The contested positions can be crudely characterized in terms of social work's 'abiding internal dialectic' between personal and social change. My personal theoretical and ideological position is:

> That social work in Australia at this time *should* be about assisting those most disadvantaged, whether through gender, race, class, disability, sexual preference, or any other 'structural' or personal consideration, to access a

greater share of resources, both material and psychological, to enable them to live, as far as possible, given a world of limited resources and competing interests, a life which *they* find personally satisfying.

This is a *prescriptive* statement about what I think the purpose of social work *should* be. Some of the confusion about contested positions has been engendered by couching *prescriptive* statements in *descriptive* language.

My major *prescriptive* statement for social work education relates to the distinction between means and ends. Ends are linked to purposes, in this case, the purpose(s) of social work. Means are the methods that social workers use to achieve their stated purposes. Social workers *should* be able to specify their purposes (whatever these might be at the time) and the means for attaining them. They should also be able to defend both notions. This leads to an obvious corollary for social work education: the major task of the social work educator should be to facilitate students articulating their purposes, their means for attaining them and being able to justify both purposes and means. This can be expressed in terms of theory and practice or knowledge and action. In other words, the key task of the social work educator should be to facilitate students grappling with theory/practice relationships. This explains the aim of this thesis: to explore how we might 'best' teach or facilitate this process.

Once we speak of theory/practice we are inevitably immersed in issues relating to knowledge.

1.2 View of Knowledge

I conceive knowledge acquisition and development to be an active enterprise, an historically-grounded social practice mediated by language and imbued with power relations. I reject a foundationalist epistemology which posits the existence of secure foundations for knowledge and an enduring and essential human nature (the foundational subject) whose rationality is the conduit for guaranteeing 'knowledge security'. Specifically, I reject three fundamental tenets of modernist theories: totalization, teleology and essentialism, eschewing attempts to explain the *whole* human condition or the condition of whole societies, conceptualized as having an *essence* or true nature, as heading towards some *ultimate utopian goal.* I see 'truth' and 'human nature' as bound by culture, time and space. I also reject the relativist position adopted by postmodernists subscribing to a fragmentation vision, which I argue is simply a form of closet foundational, totalizing metaphysics. The key difference is that an overarching totalization is replaced by a plurality of such world views. Rather, I posit a perspectival or relational form of epistemology in which there are numerous competing perspectives, numerous standpoints, for organizing and interpreting the world. Each perspective has its set of norms, which may or may not overlap with others. We encounter other perspectives and as we do so we may be transformed by them. This constitutes an "ongoing dialogical combat of interpretations, of competing ways of interpreting and organizing one another. Rather than there being no truth, for this position there are many truths, in competition with one another" (Falzon 1998, p. 95). Each perspective is socially-constructed and historically-embedded and therefore open to change. This perspectival stance does not surrender foundations, but it attributes an anti-essentialist, provisional, indeterminate status to them. It is a foundation grounded

in difference. Such a foundation "takes as its starting and end points 'the responsibility to historicize, to examine each deployment of essence, each appeal to experience, each claim to identity in the complicated contextual frame in which it is made'" (Luke 1992, p. 48 citing Dianne Fuss). Closure is rejected at all levels: theoretical, social and political. There is no *a priori* bedrock. Rather, there are constantly moving tectonic plates which sometimes collide to produce intellectual earthquakes. But mostly, there is gentle jostling with the wax and wane of the tides. Because the ground that moves beneath our feet is composed of difference, the onus is on all of us to come clean with our norms and our positions in order to facilitate dialogue, to open up the space for the other. Dialogue has two senses, a 'thin' sense and a 'thick' sense. Dialogue in the thin sense is not a prescriptive, normative notion. "It involves a reciprocity, a two-way, back and forth movement or interplay between ourselves and the world" (Falzon 1998, p. 5). In other words, it is descriptive of social 'reality' as I see it filtered through my conceptual lenses. I acknowledge that this position itself is a product of a particular time and place and is liable to change under different circumstances. Dialogue in the thick sense is a prescriptive notion used in this context to refer to social work education. I argue that if we are serious about opening up the space for other we need to come clean with our positions. Note that the thick sense is not logically necessary for dialogue to occur. Dialogue will still occur in a thin sense because we as humans are located in a physical and social environment. This still holds even if the dialogue consists in ignoring another person, itself an active choice shaped by the other.

Praxis, which combines action and reflection in a continual feedback motion, is vital to these dynamic theory/practice relationships, since theory and practice are not really two separate entities. But there are different types of theories and different types of practice which are in a dialectical relationship with each other. The different types of practice are equally entangled in the question of the nature and purposes of social work. In social work, theory that is grounded in 'personal knowledge' and 'practice wisdoms' plays a significant role. The social worker is an active agent in any theory/practice link which is to be tackled as a form of *praxis*. This implies that one of the central tasks of the social work educator is to facilitate student awareness of 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions) and of ideological and value orientation. Reflection plays a key role in both these educational tasks and so does the moral dimension of praxis.

I adopt Falzon's interpretation of Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection. For Foucault, critical reflection is important to challenge, resist and question attachment to self-created norms stemming from modern forms of power inherent in 'expert' knowledge from the human sciences, an attachment that has been instrumental in engaging us as active participants in our own subordination. The ethical dimension consists in us utilizing critical reflection for the purpose of opening up the space for the other, of finding ways to make the existing dialogue more roomy.

The discussion of praxis and Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection enables me to sharpen my conception of the aim of social work education. The key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with theory/practice

links. This entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. The latter reflection involves a necessarily ethical perspective. Note that the assessment in WS1002, particularly assignments 1 and 2, is structured explicitly around these two dimensions. This is a *prescriptive* statement about how I think social work education *should* occur. Should social work education be conducted along these lines at least three purposes will be served. First, it will assist students in coming clean with their perspectives. Second, it will assist them in articulating the purposes of social work, their means for attaining them and their justification for purposes and means. Third, it will engage them in the ethico-critical process of dialogue.

1.3   Nature of the Person

'The self' plays a central role in critical reflection in particular and knowledge production in general. In an important sense, one cannot separate the nature of the person from knowledge. Epistemology and ontology blur. "The way we gain knowledge about the world, what comprises an adequate explanation, depends on the sort of beings that exist in the world: to put it another way, the object we are studying determines the knowledge we can have of it" Craib (1992, p. 18). I have already made it clear that I reject the foundational subject of modernist theories which presuppose an enduring, essential human nature. Rather, the 'subject' or the 'self' is produced through language and systems of meaning and power. Human nature is a product of culture, rather than cultures being different ways of expressing human nature. Human beings both create and recreate their social

conditions and are in turn shaped and reshaped by these social conditions. 'The self' (or selves) is not simply a cognitive/rational being. Holding particular theories, assumptions, values and ideologies, and so on, involves substantial input from other dimensions of self: the affective, the physical, the sexual, the social, the ethical, the spiritual. In other words, I am arguing for a holistic conception of self/selves. This implies a holistic view of education. This is both a *descriptive* claim and a *prescriptive* one. That is, I am suggesting that one *should* not educate from the neck up, nor can one.

1.4   Teaching and Learning

Scrutiny of the literature reveals conceptual sliding between 'quality teaching', 'good teaching', 'teaching excellence' and 'effective teaching'. Clearly, teaching is a contested concept. So is learning, and consequently, so is the relationship between them. As with all major concepts discussed so far, they take on their meaning from the role they play in a larger theoretical or paradigmatic structure. For example, the term 'effective teaching' has more of a product (outcome) orientation than a process one (Lally and Myhill 1994). This implies a particular relationship between teaching and learning, viz., that 'what the teacher does' is the crucial ingredient in 'what the student learns'. Teacher behaviour *may* be a necessary condition for student learning, but it is certainly not a sufficient condition. There is no 'pipeline' effect (Allan Luke 31/5/94). This is vital since the primary concern of this thesis is teaching. But despite the fact that 'mainlining teaching' is no guarantee of a 'learning high', teaching cannot be considered in isolation from learning. A range of complex variables feed into student learning processes and outcomes. Perhaps one useful way to view the matter is to adopt an

approach similar to Braskamp, Brandenburg and Ory (1984), who suggest a practical guide to defining excellence in teaching: an input-process-product model. *Inputs* are what teachers and students bring into the classroom (student characteristics; teacher characteristics; course characteristics). *Process* refers to what teachers and students do in the course (classroom atmosphere; teacher behaviours; student learning activities; course organization; evaluation procedures). *Product* refers to outcomes attributable to teaching (end-of-course learning, attitude change and skill acquisition; long-term learning, attitude change and skill acquisition). Focusing solely on 'product' leads to a student learning view of teaching evaluation and is inadequate since two other factors need to be taken into account in linking student learning to effective teachers: accurate measurement and results; and input factors, since these may strongly influence student learning (Lally and Myhill 1994). Consequently, a rich array of qualitative and quantitative input, process and outcome data is essential, bearing in mind that teaching evaluation must "be controlled by pedagogical principles rather than [measurement choices]" and that central to its reliability is that "any system of teacher assessment...must first and foremost be faithful to teaching" (Shulman 1988, p. 37).

If concepts are theoretically embedded, this has important implications for teaching and learning given the views I have outlined about the aim of social work education, views on knowledge and the nature of the person? At the broadest level I have argued that the key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with theory/practice links and that this entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two

dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. The latter reflection involves a necessarily ethical perspective. This position logically implies that the student is not a *tabula rasa*. Indeed, it suggests that the student comes equipped with heavy theoretical and experiential cargo and that the primary task of the educator is to assist students in excavating this cargo. There are three educational purposes. First, assisting students in coming clean with their perspectives. Second, assisting them in articulating the purposes of social work, their means for attaining them and their justification for purposes and means. Third, engaging them in the ethico-critical process of dialogue. Such an educational process has as an underlying aim to produce *self-directed* learners.

> A self-directed learner must be understood as one who is aware of the constraints on his efforts to learn, including the psycho-cultural assumptions involving reified power relationships embedded in institutionalized ideologies which influence one's habits of perception, thought and behaviour as one attempts to learn. A self-directed learner has access to alternative perspectives for understanding his or her situation and for giving meaning and direction to his or her life, has acquired sensitivity and competence in social interaction and has the skills and competencies required to master the productive tasks associated with controlling and manipulating the environment.
> (Mezirow 1981, p. 21)

Some writers would call this lifelong learning.

One of the central components of such an educational process is 'dialogue', the critical and ethical enterprise which has as its ultimate aim 'opening up the space for other'. This is the pedagogical challenge: to open up the space for competing positions to breathe in classroom environments, to enable difference to emerge, to enable, in Foucault's terms, 'subjugated knowledges' to surface. Dialogue is a meta-strategy, a guiding underlying principle. It is not a methodological

straitjacket. Methodological fiats are out of order since they represent closure, a potential curtailing of pedagogical trajectories. Single-strategy pedagogies are likely to be inappropriate for individual students let alone an entire diverse class. Not only are there individual differences in learning, but there are intra-individual differences. What strategies we employ at any given time will depend, amongst other things, on the nature of the learning task, motivation, purpose and assessment.

1.5 Social and Political Context of Social Work Education

I mapped the broad grid lines for the social and political context of education in general in discussing the socially-constructed and historically-embedded nature of knowledge which is a linguistically-mediated social practice imbued with power relations, and in the parallel 'construction' processes of human subjects. These general outlines are traced over in social work education by two related issues: the wrestle for control of social work turf, including social work education; and the corporate agenda, including the 'quality drive'.

There are three major interest groups seeking influence in social work, representing stances about the dominance of managerial and political control, practitioner control, or of academic control. The former group, which is assuming greater power to define the nature and purposes of social work and social work education, is pursuing a corporate agenda which is exemplified in processes such as the 'quality drive' and competency-based education. The wrestle for control of social work's professional turf has a significant bearing on the theory/practice issue. "Many conflicts about the application of theory to practice arise as part of the

struggles for influence over the definition of the nature of social work" (Payne 1990, p. 3). Further, Payne (1990, p. 4) argues, this debate "often neglects real differences in the nature of alternative kinds of theory and the possibility of different kinds of theory/practice relationships." The position taken in this thesis is that one cannot realistically avoid the burgeoning corporate agenda. It is part of a general trend towards public accountability which barely conceals an "instrumental economic rationality exemplified in the now dominant belief in the use of market forces to induce greater efficiency" (Peters 1992, p. 127). But one can harness the agenda so that quality assurance strategies and measures are geared towards a "quality improvement model" which can "be used to transform and generate new practices while at the same time meeting the external pressures of accountability" (Sachs 1994, p.22).

During my discussion of issues relating to both knowledge and education the related concepts of *critical thinking, reflection,* **critical reflection** and *reflective practice emerged.* As noted above, I adopt Foucault's brand of ethico-critical reflection for the purposes of this study. Framing the thesis in this way means that it is a study examining critically reflective practice at two levels of the teaching/learning interface. First, the critically reflective practice of primarily myself, but also my colleague, in teaching the subject *WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience.* Secondly, the critically reflective practice of students, given that the subject is designed, amongst other things, to facilitate beginning tertiary students grappling with the highly complex relationships between theory and practice, or more specifically, thinking theoretically and critically about action.

II. METHODOLOGY, CONTEXT AND PROCESS

2.1 Methodology – Action Research

This study adopts an action research approach. At the broadest level, I define this as research by higher education teachers themselves into their own teaching practice and into student learning. It consists of two components: action (change) and research (understanding) outcomes. It tends to be cyclic, participative, qualitative and critically reflective. Rigour is attained first, by using multiple cycles, with planning before action and critical analysis after it; and second, by vigorously seeking out disconfirming evidence from as many sources as possible within each cycle. Critical reflection is paramount.

I justify action research with four arguments:

1. Action research as a methodology and a concept is congruent with the theoretical and philosophical framework adopted in this study. Indeed, the methodology is a logical corollary of the conceptual framework.

2. Action research is the most flexible and responsive methodology for dealing with both short term and long term change in a world characterized increasingly by rapid technological, social and economic change.

3. Action research is the most appropriate methodology to use in complex and, at times, ambiguous situations such as the teaching/learning dynamic where the variables are so many and their interconnections so complex as to defy simple identification of a clearcut research question.

4. Action research, because of the focus on linking 'ideas-in-action', is the methodology best equipped to deal with the theory/practice/research link; a

crucial concern in the context of professional education in general and the present study in particular.

2.2   Context

The overall theoretical context is addressed in the opening three chapters. I extend this theoretical context by adapting Schwab's (1969) schema for understanding educational situations – teachers, students, subject matter and milieu. **Milieu** refers to the framing elements in North Queensland, James Cook University and the Department of Social Work and Community Welfare. *North Queensland* has a unique regional flavour, but its primary concerns (e.g. indigenous and environmental issues) have becoming increasingly important on both national and global scales. It is also a region characterized by high levels of need and demand for community human services and, by implication, for trained personnel to staff these services. Hence, there is a strong continuing need for social work education in North Queensland. At the time of this study, *James Cook University* was in the throes of Quality Assurance procedures, another key circumstance relating the region to the wider national and international scale. This also contextualizes the present study of a teaching/learning dynamic within a time when teaching and learning issues and research into them, is assuming increasing significance. *The Department of Social Work and Community Welfare* is a department with a complex history of program delivery, which, at the time of the study is in the process of streamlining and the subject is part of the implementation of a revamped curriculum structure for both the BSW and BCW degrees. It is a significant subject within this curriculum structure, since it is a core compulsory first year

subject for both degree programs which is conducted in first semester. In short, it is a key introduction to the students' chosen degree program.

At the time of the study the **teachers**, Pauline and myself, were relatively junior staff members in a department where 17 of the 23 members were at Lecturer level or below. Pauline was a Lecturer and I was an Associate Lecturer. Since that time Pauline has become an Associate Professor and Head of Department of Social Work and I have recently become Team Leader and Quality Improvement Specialist of a large international basic education project focusing on ethnic minority girls in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. At the time of the study we were both members of the Curriculum Review Committee, and both passionate and committed teachers who had been recipients of James Cook University Teaching Excellence Awards and who, at the end of the year in which the study was conducted, were awarded a National Teaching Development Grant to extend the work of the subject. Further, we both had diverse and varied backgrounds which included two distinctive features: extensive cross-cultural experiences and recurrent cycling in and out of theory/practice situations.

The cohort of **students** forming the basis of this study was socio-demographically consistent with previous departmental students, which, in turn, revealed similar university-wide trends, albeit more pronounced. As with the university as a whole, the majority of students were from North Queensland, and there were large numbers of mature age and female students; though far greater numbers of both categories in this cohort than in the university as a whole. The number of indigenous students was slightly higher than the university average, but lower than

previous years; largely a result of a move towards study for higher-salaried professions. Data on the cohort's teaching and learning experiences and expectations indicate two significant factors which have a bearing on this study. First, the social context of learning, particularly the personal qualities of teachers and the nature of the relationships developed with students, is perceived to be vital. Second, active learning techniques are considered key facilitators of learning.

The **subject** is about understanding human interaction and the forces which shape both human interaction and our understanding of it. This quest is characterized by an epistemological basis rooted in a form of social constructionism which is perspectival in nature and where language and power are integral features of knowledge acquisition and development. Encountering perspectives and being transformed by them is a hallmark of the subject. This is 'dialogue' in a thin sense. But we also stress dialogue in a thick sense, as a brand of ethico-critical reflection: identifying and coming clean with one's socially-constructed and historically-embedded perspectives as a prelude to opening up the space for other. This socially-constructed self is the hinge between theory and practice and integral to the subject is a form of praxis in which critical reflection on both self (critical self-reflection) and others assumes a vital role.

The type of theories we focus on in WS1002 are primarily personal theories. We do so for two reasons. First, because in social work, theories that are grounded in 'personal knowledge' and 'practice wisdoms' are an integral part of the social worker's arsenal (see chapter one). Second, because educationally, this is the clearest route into the world of the theories of others. We attempt to facilitate this

task by asking students to integrate the literature, by having them relate their own theories to theories derived from a variety of disciplines.

Essentially, we attempt to provide students with a framework for dealing with theoretical knowledge in a critical way. This involves looking at the role of theories and theory development, and how they are constructed, including the key role of 'self' in this process. There exist three major forums for direct teaching: first, lectures, which are characterized by case-based pedagogy in order to highlight the theory/practice nexus; second, tutorials, which are linked thematically to lectures, use assessment, experientials and audiovisual materials as integrative bases, and which are characterized by high levels of active learning; third, consultation sessions, which provide scope to explore both personal and academic issues.

2.3   Process

I contextualize the present study by locating it as a 'slice in time' of a much larger organic process that included seven other related subjects and/or projects. Taken together, these eight subjects/projects comprised, longitudinally, the subject, *Dimensions of Human Experience*, or its precursor subject, from 1993 to 1996 inclusive; and cross-sectionally, three of the eight subjects studied by the cohort in 1994. Additionally, I locate all eight subjects/projects within an action research framework consisting of a reconnaissance phase and four major cycles. The focus of this study is Major Cycle 1 consisting of six minor cycles. I pay particular attention to describing the critical issue of negotiating processes and roles at the beginning of the study and to the equally vital concern of ethical considerations.

Finally, I describe in detail the monitoring tools and data sources for all cycles. Drawing on Braskamp and colleagues' (1984) model of teaching excellence, I emphasize the importance of three sets of measures for evaluating teaching – *input, process* and *outcome*. I also stress the central role of the individual teacher across all three types of measures.

III.   THE FINDINGS

Data sources for this thesis indicate first, that Pauline and I are considered to be effective teachers by students and colleagues, and second, that student outcome data echoes this conclusion.   The salient issues become: why have students achieved so well in the subject WS1002?   Why are Pauline and I effective teachers?

I pursue these issues along a threefold tack which emerges from the data.   First, case-based pedagogy and its role in fostering theory/practice links; second, the social context of learning and the use of 'self' as a pedagogical tool; and third, the use of assessment for the dual purposes of navigating and evaluating student learning.

3.1   Case-Based Pedagogy and Theory/Practice Links

One of the more startling findings of this study is that a vast majority of students feel the single biggest improvement to the subject would be increasing the length of lectures from one to two hours, though not at the expense of tutorials.   This leads me to explore two related questions. First, why did students enjoy lectures so much?   Second, why did lectures appear to be effective for student learning?   A

number of reasons emerge covering both input variables (teacher and student characteristics) and process variables related to what 'happened' during lectures. I summarize these as lecturer personal qualities such as approachability and enthusiasm; individual attention and concern for students; pedagogical skills such as explanation and communication skills; and use of lecturers' personal experience and case studies.

Scrutinizing the data more closely leads me to conclude that Pauline and I have different emphases or trademarks. I am more the interactor who uses the lecture forum as a giant conversation, prodding and probing students to reflection. Pauline is the supreme raconteur, who uses her storytelling skills, drawing upon her personal and professional experiences, often via case studies, to highlight and explain the links between theory and practice in a way readily assimilated by students. This leads to a more detailed analysis of the role of case studies in our lecture program.

Using Barrow's taxonomy, who classifies use of case studies as a form of problem-based learning, I locate our approach in WS1002 during 1994 as Lecture-Based Cases, but note that our methods were refined and evolved over time to include approaches that were more student-directed such as Case Method in PY1003 and the beginning of WS1004, and Reiterative Problem-Based in the later stages of this subject as well as in the CAUT CD-Rom package. I briefly review the use of case methods during the last 20 years across a diverse range of fields from Medicine, Dentistry and Optometry, through Engineering, Architecture, Law and Management, to Teaching, Nursing and Social Work. The literature indicates

variable use from a single subject to an entire degree program. I note the limited use of case-based approaches in the social work literature, finding only one documented instance where an entire degree program is structured around cases in a problem-based approach. By reviewing the purposes of case methods I demonstrate how we used cases specifically in WS1002.

Data from numerous sources indicates that case studies in particular and lecturers' personal experiences played a key role in fostering students grappling with theory/practice links via a process of critical reflection, though I am careful to point out two limitations to this conclusion. First, we refer only to students' theory/practice efforts during 1994 in WS1002, and to a lesser extent in the second semester follow-on subjects, WS1004 and PY1003. Claims made about future practice are way beyond the scope of this study. Second, case studies were simply one of a number of strategies, albeit a powerful one, for fostering students' theory/practice grapplings via critical reflection. I close the chapter by examining the data for these other pedagogies and resources, including the use of experientials and audiovisual materials in tutorials; student consultation sessions; videotaped lectures; and Open Learning modules.

3.2   The Social Context of Learning and the Use of Self

The second major finding to emerge from the data relates to the social context of learning. Two dimensions emerge. First, personal relationships, particularly between staff and students; second, the use of self as a pedagogical tool. Input, process and outcome data, from the baseline questionnaires, student consultations, classroom observations, taped group discussions and TEVALs indicate that the

social context of learning, particularly the interaction and personal relationships between teacher and students, is perceived to be a key ingredient of effective learning. The literature largely confirms this assessment.

In exploring the use of self as a pedagogical tool in the subject WS1002, I begin from my previously cited notion that the key task of the social work educator is to facilitate students grappling with the theory/practice nexus and that this entails a form of *praxis* where critical reflection is pivotal. Critical reflection should be fostered along two dimensions: critical reflection of students' 'personal knowledge' (theories, concepts, assumptions), and critical reflection on students' ideologies and values. Both these dimensions necessarily involve self-reflection. First, I review the concept of 'self' as a theoretical entity. I briefly recap on Foucault's brand of 'ethico-critical reflection', then locate my philosophical position about self within contemporary theorizing in the field of psychology. I consider this important since the self is the major unit of analysis in the discipline. We discover gentle rumblings in the discipline's bedrock, but an earthquake is not nigh. Second, I explore ethical dilemmas in using self as a pedagogical tool. I note two potential objections: the ethics of potential collective social action, and the ethics of student psychological insecurity. I justify the first objection in terms of the aim of action research, change, and the goals of a non-teleological form of emancipatory education. After noting that Pauline and I have the expertise and skills to provide the appropriate support for students suffering from psychological insecurity, I deal with the second objection in three ways. First, by justifying the use of self as a pedagogical tool in terms of social work's mission. Second, by arguing that pedagogical choice is a function of prior questions about the role of

education. If your chief educational aim concerns development of self, as in ancient India, then it would be unethical not to use self as a pedagogical tool to achieve that aim. Third, I argue that self and self-reflection are features of late modernity and such selves are constituted in ethical spaces. Therefore, it would be an abrogation of our teaching responsibilities were we to neglect the use of self in pedagogy.

Finally, I examine student outcome data, student assignments, to assess how successfully students achieved WS1002 subject objectives relating to the notion of 'self'. I conclude that, after initial difficulties, the vast majority of student work demonstrate clear satisfaction of subject objectives relating to self.

3.3 Assessment – Evaluating and Directing Student Learning

Following Ramsden, I outline three major functions of assessment. First, helping students to learn. Second, reporting on student progress. Third, making decisions about teaching. Each of these functions was important in WS1002. Particularly, we used assessment tasks as a key pedagogical strategy for shaping student learning. The first four tutorial sessions were structured around assessment requirements for assignment 1 – an intervention triggered by previous experiences with the subject, and feedback, both formal and informal, after the opening lecture. This demonstrates the inextricable link between the three functions: *decisions about teaching* are made on the basis of *student learning*, which includes diagnosing problems and misunderstandings and making evaluative judgements on these. Accurate *reporting* springs from "faithful diagnosis of students' understandings" (Ramsden 1992, p. 213).

Again drawing on Ramsden, I next offer a set of assessment guidelines for fostering deep learning approaches and evaluate to what extent WS1002 assessment satisfied these guidelines. I conclude that overall WS1002 assessment tasks and requirements were designed to foster deep learning in students, particularly thinking critically about action, and that there was a close union between subject objectives and assessment tasks. This paves the way for a detailed examination of how well students actually performed on these tasks? I preface this discussion with a detailed explanation of marking and grading procedures and quality control measures. In terms of both the subject's overall aim and its specific objectives, student assignments reveal considerable success, particularly, though not exclusively, among mature aged women. Using assessment tasks to direct student learning emerges as pivotal in this quest.

IV.   LIMITATIONS

Introduction

There are two generic types of limitations that apply to this study. First, those intrinsic to the methodology of action research itself. Second, those which pertain to the operationalization of action research in this particular study.

4.1   Action Research – Generic Limitations

Causation and generalizability are the two most commonly touted limitations of action research. Unlike experimental studies, action research can lay no claim to causal explanations, in the sense of 'explaining' causal relationships between discrete variables. For instance, in the present study one cannot claim definitively

that the introduction of Lecture-Based Cases 'caused' an improvement in student learning. The data is clear that use of case studies in the lecture program was a significant contributing factor in student enjoyment of lectures and consequently of student desire to see lecture time increased. We cannot say, however, that the lectures were more effective than tutorials, the assignments or other student learning experiences outside the environment of this subject. But we can say that students themselves perceived lectures to be an effective learning forum and that this is a perception shared by the two lecturers. We hold this perception because of our experiences in both this subject over a number of years and teaching and lecturing experiences in other subjects. This is a long way from a casual claim. However, I stressed in chapter four that this is not as big a limitation as it appears for two reasons. First, in teaching/learning situations there are usually many variables which interact, often bi-directionally, in complex ways. In such scenarios, causal explanations, themselves extremely complex, are not likely to be helpful. Second, as my discussion on David Hume in chapter two revealed, causality is not as clearcut and straightforward as some proponents of experimental science would have us believe. On Hume's reckoning, most putative causal claims are little more than thinly disguised correlations. The debate continues into the modern age with the advent of quantum mechanics in which the notion of causality has been largely replaced by statistical probability.

Generalizability is a much more serious limitation. Strictly speaking, I can only make claims about the people and/or systems that are actually part of the research study. That is, the WS1002 internal cohort during Semester One of 1994 at the Townsville campus of James Cook University. I cannot assume that my findings

are applicable to other first year social work cohorts, let alone cohorts studying different degree programs. But as I pointed out in chapter four, at one level this may be an advantage. That is because situation specific knowledge or local relevance was the key to success in this study. What we needed to know was how best to go about teaching the particular subject WS1002 to this specific cohort of students during 1994. At the *action* level, generalizability is not necessarily a problem. At the *research* (understanding) level it is much more of an issue. Dick (1994a) remarks that if several studies in diverse settings give similar findings, this allows greater generalizability than a single study typically does. Recall that either Pauline or both of us taught a variant of the WS1002 subject over a number of years and that Pauline has since imported the subject to Bunbury where the students, while first year social work students, are either postgraduates or third year students, having completed the first prong – the social science one – of a 'two by two' program. Findings are similar for all three major areas discussed in this study: case-based pedagogy; the role of self; and using assessment to steer student learning. If anything, the importance of cases as a theory/practice hinge has strengthened. With the development and trialling of the CAUT CD-Rom package the subject has changed in two significant ways. First, is the move from Lecture-Based Cases to Reiterative Problem-Based learning, a move firmly in the direction of student-centred learning. Second, the original subject, rather than being an amputated limb, now forms the trunk of the entire degree program. This suggests that the three key findings from this study are applicable to a wide range of social work students irrespective of location or year.

4.2 Limitations Specific to this Study

I shall discuss these limitations under three headings: pedagogical, methodological and theoretical.

4.2.1 Pedagogical Limitations

The first type of limitation is pedagogical; though theoretical understanding of this pedagogy is equally important. It refers to the use of *cases,* which was central to WS1002 in 1994. Grossman makes a poignant point when she writes:

> What makes a case effective pedagogically depends to a large extent upon what we mean by learning from a case. As we advocate the use of case methods, we must come to understand the nature of learning from cases and how this learning is distinguished from what [practitioners] learn from other forms of...education.
> (Grossman 1992, p. 231)

In WS1002 the use of cases was not simply a different way to learn the same content. Rather, it was learning a different way of thinking about practice? Our overall general purpose was to have students critically reflect on practice. Or more specifically, to analyze and reflect upon personal theories developed to explain certain aspects of human interaction. But the question must remain – and we cannot answer it definitively from our research – would student learning have been more effective, as evinced in student assignments, had we not used cases for the above purposes? Comparing student efforts with Open Learning students pursuing the same subject at the same time, while suggestive, can never be definitive, since it is a different cohort and use of cases was one of many different variables for the two groups. At best we are entitled to conclude that case-based pedagogy was an effective tool for facilitating student learning of theory/practice links. We can make no definitive claims about *why* they were effective. I did present some

interesting oblique evidence from contemporary cognitive psychology relating to narrative modes of knowing, situated cognition, and cognitive flexibility in ill-structured domains. But the present research cannot answer crucial questions such as what prospective [social workers] actually learn, and do not learn, from different genres of cases" (Grossman 1992, p. 237).

4.2.2 Methodological Limitations

A second type of limitation is methodological. There are two aspects. First, in an ideal world the finished product of this thesis would have been circulated to a reference group from the 1994 WS1002 cohort for feedback, particularly on some of my interpretations of student perceptions. This was a logistical impossibility once I went to Vietnam and an enforced two year moratorium on the thesis began. By the time I began writing the thesis in September 1997, all the BCW cohort had graduated and the BSW cohort was about to graduate. Wings were spread and soon the cohort fanned out over the entire country.

The second methodological limitation is related. Originally, we had planned to track the cohort over the entire three or four years of their respective degree programs. There was also rash talk of following some of the cohort into practice. There is no doubt that longitudinal studies of such scope are sorely needed in social work. But our experiences with the WS1002 subject in first semester of 1994 and the WS1004 subject in second semester indicated that if I were to conduct a reasonably comprehensive piece of research within the bounds of a doctoral dissertation I could not possibly do the topic justice if I were to focus on more than a single semester of study. My choice was for depth of treatment. Breadth visited,

however, within this single semester subject because of its epistemological nature which meant that adequate coverage required a comprehensive treatment of epistemological, ontological and educational issues.

Nonetheless, strictly speaking, I am not entitled to make claims beyond the cohort's first year of study, and to a limited extent, up until the end of first semester in 1995, the cohort's second year of study.

4.2.3 Theoretical Limitations

The third type of limitation is theoretical in nature. Just as cases were a major form of pedagogy in WS1002, so the concept of *critical reflection* assumed crucial dimensions. But as I intimated in chapter three, critical reflection is not some neutral concept, some mechanical tool that can be exercised at will. Boud and Walker summarize the situation aptly:

> ...if reflection is regarded as universal it more easily lends itself to abuse than if it is construed as a cultural practice located in a particular time and place. Reflection might therefore take on a variety of forms or processes, dependent on a wide range of factors. Factors to be considered might include class, race, gender, and so on as well as many local forms of difference.
> (Boud and Walker 1998, p. 198)

Adopting Foucault's brand of ethic-critical reflection does not entirely sidestep the problem. We may have been committed to an "'historical interrogation of the present', to 'the responsibility to historicize, to examine each deployment of essence, each appeal to experience, each claim to identity in the complicated contextual frame in which it is made'" (Luke 1992, p. 48 citing Dianne Fuss), but effectively we used culturally loaded tools to do so. Even Foucault's ethico-critical reflection is a product of a particular time and place. We were hamstrung by the

perennial philosophical problem encountered whenever one wants to critique philosophical and methodological tools: we have only the very tools we want to critique as weapons in our arsenal: rationality, critical reflection and so on. How can one be sure that critique of critical reflection is not simply another inadvertent attempt to bolster sagging foundations? How can we be sure that we are really learning to dance on a shifting carpet? Under what conditions would I be willing to relinquish my cherished notion of critical reflection? When I crank into critically reflective overdrive my answer to this question is frightful in terms of doctoral dissertations. Almost five years after the completion of WS1002 in 1994 I am perhaps not entitled to conclude anything at all. If I am serious about critical reflection I might go so far as to say that the whole notion is a white western male middle class wank. Aboriginal societies seemed to do just fine for 50,000 years by accepting the cultural traditions of their forebears. Critical reflection was anathema. Similarly, many eastern philosophies emphasize that meditation and other devotional practices are the path to 'Enlightenment', not activities like critical reflection. This leads us back to Giddens' (1990) conception of reflexivity induced by ontological uncertainty as a defining characteristic of late modernity. This analysis provided justification for Barnett's claim that:

> Reflexivity is necessary if we are to gain critical control over our world and critical thought is a necessary element of reflexivity. Through such critical self-reflection, we become more fully human: we realize the personal potential for reflexivity that lies in language. And through critical self-reflection, we come to a fuller insight into our knowledge frameworks and their ideological underpinnings, which we might otherwise take for granted.
> (Barnett 1997, p. 45)

Sadly perhaps, in the type of world we live, critical reflection is important. We can no longer afford to accept at face value the traditions and practices of our

forebears. The world is changing so quickly that yesterday's practices may leave us shackled. Critical reflection is a culturally loaded concept, but it is one that has emerged to mirror the increasingly mono-cultural and global world in which we live. Still, all is not lost, and I shall return briefly to possibilities in the section below.

A second type of theoretical limitation refers to the so-called **'teaching crisis'.** Ramsden (22/10/97, p. 40) asserts that in 1996 "only about one in three of the 60,000 Australian graduates who responded to the Graduate Career's Council annual survey said they were satisfied with the quality of teaching they had experienced." Two key grievances identified by students were lack of lecturer clarity in explanation and ability to motivate (identified as strengths in our study). Ramsden asserts that while comprehensive data is not yet available for Britain, anecdotal evidence suggests similar teaching performance. "They, too, have not caught up with the challenge posed by mass higher education." Ramsden (22/10/97, p. 40) emphasizes the pivotal nature of quality teaching since "one irrefutable finding of research on university students is that bad teaching leads to poor learning." Baker and Bonnell (5/11/97, p. 42) respond to Ramsden by accusing him of invoking a "rhetoric of crisis" and suggesting that "for any survey to be of value the results need to be disaggregated and the motives and priorities of respondents need to be analyzed. Particularly in some vocational or professional faculties, students may be less concerned with the excitement levels generated by the teacher than with the acquisition of an economically useful credential." They point out that,

...the rhetoric of pedagogical crisis subsumes wildly disparate problems experienced by universities under the rubric of the 'teacher problem': the changing nature, status and function of different knowledge in our society; reductions in government funding; the shift from an elite to a mass educational system; perpetual restructuring; the lack of anything resembling a community consensus as to why education is important in complex liberal democracies. In the Ramsden universe, all of these issues apparently will be wished away if only we get the 'teacher problem' right.
(Baker and Bonnell 5/11/97, p. 42)

Baker and Bonner see "the category of the 'problem-teacher'" as "nothing more than an artefact produced by the techniques and procedures of regulation by which the higher education sector is governed" and suggest we invoke a new model, "the 'competent teacher', as providing the benchmark by which to consider the university teacher" (p. 42). This resonates with my chapter one discussion where I argued that the basic message in contemporary higher education in Australia is: do more, do it better, do it with less.

I agree with Baker and Bonnell that Ramsden individualizes the problem too much. His analysis smells of positivism. But likewise, Baker and Bonnell tend to underscore the role of individual teachers. In a CAUT-commissioned report titled *Recognizing and Rewarding Good Teaching in Australian Higher Education*, Ramsden and colleagues (1995) articulate a more useful position which locates the individual teacher within a wider historical and social matrix; though I would be reticent to claim that their analysis approaches Foucauldian depths. Ramsden and colleagues point out that good teaching is a product not just of individual teacher goodwill and commitment, but of an entire institutional ethos and that "there is a need to establish stronger confidence among academic staff in their institutions' commitment to supporting and rewarding good teaching" (p. vi). In chapter one I

outlined initiatives which seemed to indicate widespread government and institutional support for quality teaching: the inauguration of CAUT; the establishment of higher education centres (e.g. Griffith Institute of Higher Education); the National Priority Reserve Fund; and the Australian University Teaching Awards. All seems to augur well. Yet in mid 1994 Ramsden and colleagues in their above-cited report conducted a comprehensive survey to which 32 of the 36 universities comprising the Australian Unified National System responded in time to include their responses in the final report. Here follows one of the major conclusions of their study:

> ...many academics do not believe their institutions genuinely value good teaching and recognize the contributions of good teachers. There is widespread suspicion of universities' claims that they already do so through their existing policies and procedures. Staff believe that corporate action and demonstrated support are more important than rhetoric about rewarding university teaching. (Ramsden, Margetson, Martin and Clarke 1995, p. vi)

If we take seriously the chapter nine findings about the use of assessment to steer student learning, then we might expect the same applies to teaching: we can use 'assessment' to steer lecturer's teaching. Just as 'assessment defines the curriculum' for students, so it does for academic staff. One does not have to be a Foucauldian to see that if the rewards do not encourage university teaching – and Ramsden and colleague's sector-wide study indicate they do not – then we can hardly expect university teaching to improve. In Ramsden and colleagues (1995, p. vii) study, "staff made it clear" that if evaluating teaching "add[s] significantly to academics' workloads...they will be reluctant to accept it." Given the current climate in the university sector, it may still be unrealistic to expect others to conduct a piece of research like Pauline and I did. Our entire research program was centred around teaching. While such studies are much needed, I would be

reluctant to endorse a program which saw other research avenues stunted at its expense. Our research indicates that in order to improve student learning individual teachers have to make an enormous commitment to monitoring student progress and outcomes and changing teaching practices on the basis of this. A good university subject takes a long time to think through and develop. Note the 10 year time frame of this subject. It is a constantly evolving process where teachers never get it quite right because the variables change from year to year, partly due to the new cohort, and partly due to the wider structural conditions impacting on the teaching/learning interface.

The millenium university has to find a place for teachers, researchers, practitioners, administrators and community service, either as specialists or as generalists focusing on any combination of these roles. The solution is not the naïve knee-jerk reaction of the West Review (1998) where teaching is spotlighted, but amputated from research.

V.   FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Much of the following is implied in the above discussion on limitations. I shall crystallize it under eight headings: generalizability; longitudinal studies; member checks; case-based pedagogy; use of self; assessment; critical reflection; and the millenium university.

5.1   Generalizability

In order to generalize the findings from the present study to a wider sample of cohorts and settings, further research needs to be conducted in a diverse range of

settings and disciplines with equally diverse cohorts of students. Particular attention needs to be paid to the three key findings from this study relating to case-based pedagogy, use of self, and using assessment to steer student learning.

5.2 Longitudinal Studies

The present study focuses primarily on a single semester subject taught during the first semester of the first year of university. While this study is located as a 'slice in time' of a much larger process, this particular cohort was not tracked in systematic detail beyond the end of their first year of university study. Professional education in general and social work in particular suffers from a dearth of research studies examining the impact of students' university studies on their later practice. Such longitudinal studies tracing student development of critically reflective practice over time from beginning tertiary study until several years into practice and plotting these developments would be an invaluable asset for improving both social work education and social work practice.

5.3 'Member Checks'

Ideally, a study such as this would benefit from greater student input into the final written product. The aim would be to circulate drafts, have a representative student reference group comment on them and include this feedback, perhaps italicized, in the final version. A more postmodern thesis would 'speak in tongues' with multiple voices rendering multiple interpretations, multiple readings and multiple re-readings.

5.4   Case-Based Pedagogy

Future research needs to focus on the vital issue of **why** cases seem to be effective in bridging theory/practice links. What is it, exactly, that students remember about cases? How does this link with existing personal knowledge? What features of cases do students take into practice situations? Are there aspects of cases which hinder appropriate practice? Until we 'answer' such questions we will continue to stumble – as we did – in a sea of serendipidity.

5.5   Use of Self

I have outlined one particular way in which we used 'self' as a hinge to foster theory/practice links. How applicable is such an endeavour to other professional education ventures, particularly those whose focus is human interaction – teaching, nursing, psychology? Are there other means of using self as a pedagogical tool to foster student learning of theory/practice links? If so, what are they? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches?

5.6   Assessment

Our assessment evolved steadily from the original Ms J 'detached observation' exercises in which self was 'suspended' to one in which the development and deconstruction of students' personal theories took the dominant role. The medium for interactions changed from student choice of any media (book, magazine, film, video, radio, real life) to student choice of six video vignettes, then finally student choice of five CD-Rom cases. Overall assessment choice was largely teacher-directed. What impact would student-negotiated assessment have? Would there be any differences between students' critically reflective behaviour? What might

the nature of these differences be? What implications would this have for social work education and social work practice?

5.7 Critical Reflection

Boud and Walker (1998, p. 197) warn us that critical reflection is "steeped in particular cultural practices." What impact do factors such as culture, race, gender, age, class and local differences exert on critical reflection? We need more fine-grained analyses of such variables before we can readily promulgate critical reflection as an antidote for technicist, unthinking approaches to higher education.

5.8 The Millenium University

It is no longer realistic to expect higher education teachers to be super teachers, produce a string of publications each year, sit on committees like squawking hens protecting their potential progeny, administer and coordinate their own teaching subjects as well as being involved in departmental, wider university and community service activities. Under such conditions and expectations something has to give. And in the past it has often been teaching. It is a strange world where those who have jobs are being asked to work increasingly harder and longer to keep them, and those who do not find it increasingly harder to get one. The millenium university has to find a place for teachers, researchers, practitioners and administrators, either as specialists or as generalists focusing on any combination of these roles. This includes secondments to community organizations which enable university teachers and practitioners to cycle in and out of practice situations. In worst case scenarios across the country there are university teachers in education faculties who have not set foot in a classroom for 20 years! A quality

product demands quality resources and inputs. If we want quality teaching in universities we need to free up enough teachers from other duties to deliver the goods. This should not involve a separation of teaching and research. Some teachers at least need to be able to research their own teaching practices or to share their colleagues' disciplinary research into teaching as well as each others' research into various areas which inform the current, but shifting, 'state of the art' in a discipline's current best guesses in the knowledge stakes. Recent rumblings (e.g. Kemp 22/4/98) imply that technology is the answer to the 'teacher problem'. The present research indicates that technology alone is not the answer. Pauline and I developed an interactive multi media package consisting of both a CD-Rom of five case studies and a series of six video vignettes. Our research indicates that these have been immensely useful tools for student learning but that they are not *substitutes* for face-to-face-contact. Indeed, one of the major findings in our study is the importance of the social context of learning, particularly teacher-student relationships, as a key ingredient in student learning. This becomes even more urgent when one of the commonly touted 'lifelong learning' skills is communication and interpersonal skills. A quality product in universities requires careful planning at both departmental and institutional levels to ensure that each department and university has an adequate balance of teaching, research, practitioner, administrative and community service components. This extends to planning 'research programs' rather than the haphazard individual research efforts which characterize many departments across the country.

But above all, the millenium university will be a venue for mass education. We will need to find ways to cope with an increasingly diverse and large student body.

Technology will have a key role to play in this. But it can only be part of the story. When I resist the total move into cyber-space and sing the praises of the importance of personal relationships for effective learning, am I echoing the chant of Middle Age monks who resisted the technological innovation of the printing press? (Spender 1994). Or am I simply acknowledging that in a world characterized by rapid change 'the self' is the key to learning to dance on a shifting carpet?

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APPENDICES

1. **Baseline Questionnaire**

2. **Ethics Application Attachments**

   (a) **Methodology of Proposed Study**
   (b) **Student Consent Form**
   (c) **Instant Questionnaire**

3. (a) **Assessment Criteria Self-Evaluation Sheet – Assignment 2**
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5. (a) **TEVALs – Standard Items**
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APPENDIX 1: Baseline Questionnaire

Department of Social Work and Community Welfare

A Study on Learning and Teaching Experiences of Students in *Dimensions of Human Experience* (WS1002) and *Understanding Professional Helping* (WS1004)

Dr Pauline Meemeduma and Mr Gary Ovington, with the introduction of the new BSW/BCW curriculum in 1994, are currently undertaking a study on teaching/learning effectiveness in the subjects *Dimensions of Human Experience* and *Understanding Professional Helping*.

The study in 1994 will follow first year students in the subjects WS1002 (*Dimensions of Human Experience*) and WS1004 (*Understanding Professional Helping*).

The study will focus upon teaching effectiveness and its relationship to student learning. Students will be contacted throughout both subjects to obtain their feedback on teaching and learning in the two subjects.

It is the long term aim of the study to follow your learning and teaching experiences through the three or four years of your degree.

Participation in the study is voluntary – although we would appreciate your interest and time involvement in the study. There is no penalty for not participating in the study.

Information received during the study will only be accessible to the two researchers.

As a beginning component of the study students are requested to fill in an initial questionnaire. This questionnaire seeks background information on educational background, employment background, and teaching and learning experiences.

We would like you to identify yourself to enable an in-depth follow up interview to be conducted with 15-20 students. However, if you do not want to do this it is fine.

Again, thank you for your cooperation.

Dr Pauline Meemeduma
Room BH234
Phone 814892

Mr Gary Ovington
Room BH154
Room 814849

Teaching Evaluation Study
WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience

March 1994

Section 1

1. Name (optional):
2. Age: ......Years......Months
3. Semester address (optional):
4. Home location:
5. Where have you lived in the last 10 years?
   Place   Length of stay in years
6. Degree enrolled in (i.e. BSW or BCW):
7. First year applied to enter the degree.
8. Last year attended school.
9. Where did you last attend school? (town/city and state):
10. Types of study done since leaving school:

Year Started	Year Finished	Location	Institution	Topic Area of Study	Completed Yes	No

11. What is your marital status? (respond more than once if necessary; please circle response):

(a) Single	(b) With a partner	living with
		not living with
(c) Married	(d) Separated	
(e) Divorced	(f) Widowed	
(g) Other		

12. Do you have children?   NO   YES – if yes,
    Number of children in your care:
       Ages in your care   Ages not in your care
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.

13. What is your present accommodation?
    a. On campus college
    b. Shared rental with non-family members
    c. Rental with family
    d. Boarding in a family home
    e. Home ownership
    f. Other, please describe

14. What are your present sources of income? (you can respond more than once):
    a. Full Austudy only
    b. Full Austudy with help from parents
    c. Full Austudy with a job income
    d. Partial Austudy with help from parents
    e. Partial Austudy with a job income
    f. Paid employment only
        (i) Less than 20 hours a week
        (ii) 20-30 hours a week
        (iii) 31 hours a week or more
    g. Family support only
    h. Family support with a job income
    i. On a scholarship only
    j. On a scholarship with paid job
    k. Partner's financial support only
    l. Partner's financial support with own job
    m. Other

15. What types of paid work have you done since and including 1989?
    Full time   Part time

16. What types of unpaid labour have you done since and including 1989? (please indicate domestic labour, voluntary welfare work)

17. What type(s) of work does/did your father and mother do?
    Father   Mother

18. What type(s) of work do your siblings do?

19. What is the highest level of education your mother and father have achieved? (e.g. school certificate, year 9, year 4)
    Father   Mother

20. Have any of your brothers or sisters gone to university?
    Not applicable (no brothers or sisters)
    Yes – if yes,
        Went but did not complete   number......
        Went and completed   number......
    No – if no,
        Have your brothers and sisters done any further studies   after leaving school?
        No
        Yes – if yes, what type

21. What is your present annual income? (i.e. individual income):
    a. $000 – $9,999
    b. $10,000 – $19,999
    c. $20,000 – $29,999
    d. $30,000 – $39,999
    e. $40,000 – $49,999
    f. $50,000 - $59,999
    g. ≥ $60,000

22. What is your combined family income?
    a. $000 – $9,999
    b. $10,000 – $19,999
    c. $20,000 – $29,999
    d. $30,000 – $39,999
    e. $40,000 – $49,999
    f. $50,000 - $59,999
    g. ≥ $60,000

Section 2
1. What was school like for you?
2. What type of person did you consider was a good teacher when you went to school (what types of things did they do, how did they act or feel towards teaching)?
3. What type of person did you consider was a poor teacher when you went to school (what types of things did they do, how did they act or feel towards teaching)?
4. When you were at school how would you describe your attitude(s) to learning?
5. When you were at school how would you describe your study habits?
6. Since you have left school has your attitude to learning changed or stayed the same?
   If stayed the same –
   If changed, why? –
7. What were your reasons for applying to study Social Work or Community Welfare?
8. What did you think and feel when you knew you were accepted into the Social Work or Community Welfare program?
9. What do *you want* to learn when you are at university?
10. At this point in time what do you think you *will* learn in the
    a. Subject – *Dimensions of Human Experience*?
    b. In the BSW or BCW?
11. How do you think you learn best (what has to happen for you to understand and remember a topic area)?
12. What subjects do you find difficult or easy to learn?
    a. Difficult?
    b. Easy?

13. What circumstances or factors make it difficult or easy for you to learn?
    a. Difficult?
    b. Easy?
14. What, if anything, do you think might stop you either
    a. Completing your degree?
    b. Doing well in your studies?
15. What do you think or know about how teaching occurs at university?
16. What way do you think or know about how your work will be assessed at university?
17. What do you think of people who study at university?
18. What do people close/important to you think about you being at university?
19. What do you hope to do once you finish your degree (feel free to say you haven't thought that far)?
20. Any other comments you might have on coming to study at university?

APPENDIX 2: Ethics Application Attachments

APPENDIX 2a: Methodology of Proposed Study

The aims of the study are to describe, analyze and identify the relationship between student learning and teaching experiences in the BSW and BCW degree. Results from the study will facilitate developing new teaching strategies to enhance student learning and enjoyment in the two first year subjects.

The objectives of the study are therefore to:

1. Develop a socio-demographic profile of first year students in the BSW/BCW.
2. Describe and analyze students' teaching expectations.
3. Describe and analyze students' learning expectations.
4. To identify whether a possible relationship exists between student learning expectations and teaching expectations.
5. To monitor teaching strategies and content.
6. To identify whether a possible relationship exists between teaching strategies and content and learning strategies and learning effectiveness.
7. To monitor changes in teaching and learning strategies over the life of the subjects.
8. To provide recommendations for future teaching strategy and content changes.

Part 1
A student administered questionnaire will be distributed in a class of 65 first year students to be completed and returned one week later. The questionnaire will obtain socio-demographic information on students, as well as on the student's previous teaching and learning experiences and on the student's teaching/learning expectations.

Part 2
Weekly feedback monitoring sheets consisting of three questions will be distributed; to be filled in and returned to the researchers at the end of each lecture and tutorial.

Part 3
Weekly video recording of all the one hour lectures.

Diary notes by the staff member of each class indicating the objectives of the class, what aspects of the class seemed to work well and what didn't. These videos will be reviewed by the researchers (as the teaching staff) and by an outside educator to identify areas of teaching strengths and weaknesses. Each weekly video will be matched to the weekly lecture monitoring sheets from students.

Part 4
Two voluntary group meetings with 20 selected students to receive feedback on the subject. Students will be selected on the basis of variations in relation to gender, age, race and degree enrolment. A similar procedure will be used for the second semester subject.

APPENDIX 2b: Student Consent Form

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in "A Study on Learning and Teaching Experiences of Students in *Dimensions of Human Experience* (WS1002) and *Understanding Professional Helping* (WS1004)". I understand the nature and the purposes of the study and that there are no penalties for not participating in the study.

NAME: DATE:

APPENDIX 2c: Instant Questionnaire
WS1002: Dimensions of Human Experience

Lecture/Tutorial no:　　　　Date:

Do not sign your paper or give me any indication of identifying who wrote what. Please leave your piece of paper in the box as you leave the room.

A. The key point(s) I remember from today's lecture...

B. I found it difficult to understand about...

C. I found the teaching...

APPENDIX 3a: Assessment Criteria Self-Evaluation Sheet – Assignment 2

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Theory				
Concepts/ Assumptions/ Propositions				
Integration				
Self Factors- Identify				
Self Factors – Link				
Integration				
Presentation/ Expression				

COMMENTS:

APPENDIX 3b: Assessment Criteria Self-Evaluation Sheet – Assignment 3

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Description – Person/Event				
Reasons – Choice of Details				
Integration				
Description – Assistance				
Reasons – Assistance				
Integration				
Presentation/ Expression				

COMMENTS:

APPENDIX 4:
Taped Group Discussions – Standard Instructions

Introduction to the group meeting:

As you know, we are conducting a research study on WS1002 and WS1004. We would like to get your impressions of the subject WS1002 now you have nearly completed it. We want to hear your thoughts, both positive and negative. There are no repercussions for what you might want to say. We don't want to direct what you might want to talk about. Nor do we wish to take a leadership role. We would like you to deal with the topic as your own discussion. We will, though, answer questions and give our thoughts as a member of the group. We are taping the discussion. This tape will be transcribed. All names will be removed and pseudonyms given. A copy of the transcript will be available. We appreciate your time and energy in giving us feedback.

APPENDIX 5a: TEVALs – Standard Items

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

Evaluation of Teaching   Batch No:

Subject Code: Name of staff member being evaluated:

Class being evaluated:

<u>Section 1</u>
Please read each of the statements below and circle the number which corresponds most closely to your experiences with this staff member's performance in teaching this class. The term 'lecturer' is used throughout; it refers to all teaching staff from tutor to professor whether lecturing, tutoring or demonstrating.

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Uncertain 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5	Not Applicable 0

	S A	A	U	D	S D	N A
	1	2	3	4	5	0
1. Class sessions were organized to ensure maximum learning						
2. The objectives for each session were clear						
3. The lecturer's explanations were clear						
4. The lecturer seemed well prepared for each session						
5. The lecturer stimulated my interest in the subject						
6. The lecturer seemed willing to offer individual help						
7. The lecturer made assessment requirements clear						
8. There were enough opportunities to ask questions						
9. The lecturer motivated me to work hard.						

10. How would you rate this <u>subject</u>?

Very poor			Satisfactory			Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

<u>Section 2</u>
This question asks about the staff member's <u>overall effectiveness</u> as a university teacher, disregarding personality and the type of subject taught. Please compare the lecturer's performance with that of other teaching staff you know and provide a rating on the scale below.

11. All things considered, how would you rate this staff member's overall effectiveness as a <u>university teacher</u>?

Very poor			Satisfactory			Outstanding
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

<u>Section 3</u>
Qus. 12-23   Optional items (see appendix 5b).

<u>Section 4</u>   (<u>PLEASE PRINT</u> to preserve anonymity.
                The questionnaire will be returned to your lecturer/tutor after the exam period for perusal)

24. What are this staff member's strengths in teaching?
25. What improvements would you suggest?

APPENDIX 5b: TEVALs – Optional Items

Pauline
Section 3

	S A	A	U	D	S D	N A
	1	2	3	4	5	0
12. The lecturer is willing to assist me						
13. I have learned to think critically						
14. I have learned to apply principles from this class in new situations						
15. I have learned to make connections between this subject and others						
16. I have learned the relevance of this subject to my future profession						
17. I reconsidered many of my former viewpoints						
18. The lecturer makes good use of examples and illustrations						
19. The lecturer communicates his/her enthusiasm for the subject						
20. I like the assessment requirements						
21. Tutorial sessions helped me understand the lecture material						
22. I have received a good introduction to the field						
23. The lecturer emphasizes understanding as the basis for learning						

Gary
Section 3

	S A	A	U	D	S D	N A
	1	2	3	4	5	0
12. The lecturer welcomes student feedback on the classes						
13. The lecturer is approachable						
14. The lecturer is willing to assist me						
15. I have learned to think critically						
16. I have learned the relevance of this subject to my future profession						
17. I have developed interest in this subject						
18. The lecturer presents material in an interesting way						
19. The lecturer stretches my mind						
20. The lecturer appears confident						
21. The lecturer communicates his/her enthusiasm for the subject						
22. The lecturer gives adequate feedback on written work						
23. Assignments tie in with the course objectives						