Teacher identity in university classrooms:

Reflexivity and professional learning

Jane Pearce

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Being a report of an investigation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University
I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any institution.

Signed .................................
TEACHER IDENTITY IN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS: REFLEXIVITY AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

JANE PEARCE

Abstract

Many academics become teachers without the help of formal professional learning. This study explores how a small group of academics have done this. The research aims to uncover the informal, experiential means whereby participants have constructed the knowledge about teaching and learning that underpins their pedagogies. The research begins with the assumption that three key elements play a major role in supporting academics’ informal learning about teaching. These are a person’s previous experiences of learning, their experience of being part of a particular academic environment and their personal or ‘private’ theories about teaching and learning, which are experientially based.

Life narratives were collected from a small group of university teachers who participated in qualitative interviews and provided written evidence of their experiences, practices and philosophies of teaching. The research uses an ethnographic, interpretive approach to collect and analyse data in which participants’ voices are foregrounded. The researcher’s life narratives also form part of the final thesis, demonstrating an ‘engaged’ approach to research and providing explicit evidence of the researcher’s positioning in relation to the subject matter of the thesis.

The research reveals the importance for participants of a ‘teaching self’ or consistent identity that develops in early life and continues through to the adult professional context. This identity forms a basis for participants’ teaching practices.
The challenges experienced by participants when institutional practices do not support or help maintain this identity are discussed, as are the processes whereby participants seek out like-minded colleagues with whom to engage in ‘professional conversations’ about teaching. The research reveals strong connections between participants’ sense of ‘self’ and the principles underpinning their pedagogies, and the thesis concludes with some suggestions about how the concept of the ‘teaching self’ might be used to support all teachers engaged in professional learning. Finally, the research advocates ‘reflexivity’ on the part of teachers, whereby a critical awareness of biography helps locate practice in the cultural and social environment in which it develops.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<p>| CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2 | REVIEW OF LITERATURE | 7 |
| CHAPTER 3 | PART ONE: METHODOLOGY | 44 |
| | PART TWO: DESIGN | 61 |
| CHAPTER 4 | CRITICAL MOMENTS IN A TEACHING BIOGRAPHY | 80 |
| CHAPTER 5 | “THE WORLD WAS THIS STRANGE PLACE OF POSSIBILITY” | 103 |
| | EARLY LEARNING | |
| CHAPTER 6 | LEARNING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE | 143 |
| CHAPTER 7 | “ON THE BACK FOOT” | |
| | THE STRUGGLE TO TEACH IN THE UNIVERSITY | 167 |
| CHAPTER 8 | PUBLIC THEORY AND PERSONAL PEDAGOGY | 209 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>&quot;The whole point of theorising is to live differently&quot; Using Private Theories</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teacher Identity in University Classrooms: Reflexivity and Professional Learning</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Biographical Sketches</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Question Cues/Prompts</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Participants’ Idiosyncratic and Metaphorical Descriptions of Their Teaching</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

TABLE 3.1
RESEARCH IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES: DIMENSIONS OF CHOICE
PEARCE’S INTERPRETATION 58

TABLE 5.1
POSSIBILITIES FOR TEACHERS’ WORK 137

TABLE 7.1
PARTICIPANTS’ DOMAIN- AND DISCIPLINE-ASSOCIATIONS 171

TABLE 7.2
LOCAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ISOLATION AS A CONTINUUM 190

FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1
ADVENTITIOUS LEARNING 11

FIGURE 7.1
DISTANCE FROM THE ‘CENTRE’ BY STATUS 198

FIGURE 7.2
DISTANCE FROM THE ‘CENTRE’ BY YEARS AS A UNIVERSITY TEACHER 198
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Finally, the loving support and patience of my partner Christopher and my children Sophie and Johnny over the past seven years has been invaluable.
This is a dissertation about university teachers, written by a university teacher. It is an exploration of why a small group of academics teach the way they do. It explores their motivation, their struggles and achievements, their philosophies and desires. The research has grown from my own experiences as a teacher in universities and has been designed to explore some ideas that had been taking shape in my own mind for several years.

Telling other people’s stories is one focus of the dissertation. I have also set stories of my own alongside them, as reference points for the stories of others. My research methods, my choice of questions, my selection and editing of the responses, my interpretation and analysis have all been influenced by the person, teacher and researcher that I am. My position as a researcher and teacher can be read in the stories. These stories are also the results of my research, which involved talking to academics and reading about teaching in universities. The process of critical reflection as research influenced my thoughts on my own teaching.
Teaching in a university was never in my career plan. I qualified as a high school teacher and taught for 12 years before, almost by accident, joining a university department of education. I love teaching and continue to find it a fascinating and enriching activity. My work as an academic has always been filtered through the lens of ‘teacher’, sometimes to the detriment of my ‘researcher’ side. I remember the shock that came with the first realisation that the two roles might be in conflict. Early in my academic career, the then Dean of Education tried to make me understand the need to publish. “Never forget,” she said, “that when it comes to priorities your research comes here,” raising her hand to her shoulder, “and students come here,” bringing her hand to knee level. My chosen compromise has therefore been to research and write about teaching. One reason why I have researched other university teachers is to discover whether I am alone amongst academics in this engagement with teaching. I’m not. But people laugh when I explain that my research topic is about how university teachers learn about teaching. “Oh! I didn’t realise that they did!” This research focuses on a small group of academics who both share an engagement with teaching and have become successful teachers.

I have adopted a framework suggested by another project to help shape this present enquiry. This earlier project, the Flexible Learning Initiatives Project (FLIP), was one of a number of nation-wide, government-funded professional development initiatives designed to support the development of innovative teaching and learning strategies in universities across the United Kingdom (UK). I was coordinator of the project team at Liverpool University, where members of the academic staff of the faculty of education worked with academic staff from four other faculties in the university to improve the effectiveness of group-based
teaching and learning. In each faculty, the intention was to bring about changes to existing teaching and learning practices. One unexpected outcome from this project suggested a conceptual framework for my current research.

The earlier project began with an assumption that there would be shared understandings among all participants about teaching and learning that would form a common basis from which to begin the professional development work. However as the project developed, it became clear that this assumption was not supported. Every participant brought with them their own set of beliefs and experiences about teaching and learning, which underpinned their pedagogy and created barriers to change. When these beliefs were in conflict with the beliefs on which the professional development project was based, the process of professional development was compromised. Thus the intended professional learning did not take place unless the beliefs of participants could be reconciled in some way with those of the project team members. This realisation, coupled with the discovery of the diversity of understandings among the participating academics about their work as teachers, was one of the most fascinating and fruitful outcomes of the project (Stewart, 1994; Pearce, Stewart, Garrigan and Ferguson, 1996; see also Chapter 6).

After examining some of the factors that influenced the development of these diverse orientations and understandings, three insights into where and how participants had learned about teaching came to light. Although participants had received little or no formal professional development in teaching, they nevertheless had informally built up a considerable body of understanding about this aspect of their work. Moreover, there was evidence that two distinct influences were particularly important in this process: previous experiences of learning and the experience of being part of a particular academic environment. Furthermore,
participants had developed personal theories relating to the process of teaching and learning that drew on these two sets of influences as well as on other factors, such as notions about equity, understanding of student learning styles and cognitive processes, ideas about creativity, the importance of generic skills such as the ability to communicate, and so on. These hidden understandings were rarely articulated by participants, and only emerged implicitly during discussions about practice. Participants were therefore not reflexively aware of the existing understandings on which their pedagogy was constructed (Pearce et al., 1996). The implicit nature of these understandings was highlighted by the lack of a shared language about teaching and learning, meaning that individuals’ insights and concerns were often difficult to interpret. Participants had learned to teach through *ad hoc*, circumstantial and idiosyncratic means that only became apparent to members of the professional development team through observation and discussion over a long period of time.

In the present research I plan to pick up where the FLIP left off by exploring these processes in depth.

My discovery of this rich vein of understanding and knowledge inspired the doctoral research. It focuses on the informal and experiential means whereby academics who are successful teachers construct the knowledge about teaching and learning that underpins their pedagogies. Using a series of in-depth, open-ended interviews I focus, first, on early experiences of learning, then on the experience of being part of a particular academic environment and finally on the personal theories that underpin their teaching. The evidence collected in interviews is supplemented by observations of teaching and document analysis. I hope that this evidence will lead to a fuller understanding of how these three aspects of a teacher’s biography come together to inform their pedagogies. They also suggest ways to make more
visible this hidden process so that academics may become more reflexively aware of why they do what they do in the university classroom.

The usefulness of these three aspects of experience to provide a framework for exploring informal professional learning has been confirmed by a reading of Brookfield’s work, in which he suggests that teachers make use of “four distinct lenses” (1995, p. 28) to critically reflect on their practice. Three of these four lenses; “our autobiographies as learners and teachers,” our “colleagues’ experiences” and “the theoretical literature” (1995, p. 30); closely resemble the three areas described above (see Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion) and, taken together, these three broad areas have provided a framework for the whole study. This framework not only informs the development of the research questions and the structure of the main body of this thesis, it is also reflected in the choice of literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and informs the structure of the main body of the dissertation.

Chapters 4, 6 and 8 of the thesis are autobiographical. They explore, firstly, my own socialisation as a teacher through early learning; secondly, aspects of my enculturation as an academic through experiences in professional and institutional settings; and thirdly, my use of a specific theory (postcolonialism) to understand and inform my own teaching. These chapters have been included as examples to provide alternative interpretations of each element of the framework and also as a way of making explicit my own positioning in relation to the research. The research framework I use is one which acknowledges my continuing presence as the researcher, an individual whose multiple subjectivities have an influence not just on the conduct of the research but also on the shaping and interpreting of events and data. I therefore see the inclusion of the autobiographical chapters as essential to the process of making my presence clear. The autobiographical chapters also
provide comparisons with those that focus on participants’ biographies, in which the three themes of the research are explored from the perspectives of the research participants. The relevance of participants’ personal histories to their work as teachers is explored in Chapter 5. Chapter 7 explores the role that the wider institutional context, including participants’ colleagues, has had in their development as teachers. Finally, in Chapter 9, participants’ use of public and private theories is discussed.

I began this research expecting to find a strong relationship between participants’ early experiences as learners and their orientation to the processes of teaching and learning they developed as professionals. I expected this orientation to be enhanced, even strengthened, by participants’ experiences as learners in professional settings. I also anticipated that participants would have well-developed private theories that drew directly from lived experience and that underpinned their practices and that overall each participants’ work as a teacher would reflect clearly identifiable connections between all three elements. In recording and reflecting on the directions that the research led me, I hope to do justice to the complex and nuanced experiences that participants shared so openly and generously.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One of the participants in this research is a qualified adult and tertiary teacher and another is a qualified primary teacher. While the others have been involved in elements of professional development during their career, this has been, at best, an uneven involvement. So how have they learned to teach as well as they do? The ways in which university teachers come to understandings of teaching have not been widely discussed in staff development literature (Jones, 1994; Rowland, 2000). This learning has been described as “largely informal” or “on-the-job”: a form of experiential learning that is by its nature implicit (Taylor, 1999, p. 118). In this sense, learning to teach in a university is typical of the processes of informal adult learning or ‘lifelong learning’ (Candy, Crebert and O’Leary, 1994; Burns, 1995; Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998). Adults learn in every imaginable context, drawing widely from life experience as they develop skills and increase their understanding of the world in which they live and work (Candy, Crebert and O’Leary, 1994; Edwards, 1997; Foley 2000). While some of this learning is “adventitious”, much is either the result of the “deliberate and intentional efforts of learners themselves” or “consciously mediated by a variety of agencies” (Candy,
Crebert and O’Leary, 1994, pp. 15-16). Ideas about ‘adventitious’ learning and those about learning that occurs by the deliberate efforts of the learners themselves are both relevant to this study. The specific focus of the study is professional learning, and a significant element in this type of learning, ‘reflective practice,’ (Schön 1983; 1987) is another relevant concept. I have therefore drawn on the generic concept of ‘lifelong learning’ as well as ideas about ‘reflective practice’ to develop a conceptual framework for this study, and this is where I begin this review of literature.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Research into the processes of lifelong learning uses constructivist and sociocultural perspectives on learning (Rogoff 1990; Biggs and Moore, 1993; Billett, 1998; Bonk and Kim, 1998), ideas about experiential learning (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993; Kolb, 1984), and the concept of self-directed learning (Candy 1991; Tennant and Pogson, 1995) to explain how adults learn outside formal frameworks as well as within them. These perspectives provide one starting point for exploring the professional learning that has occurred for participants in this research.1 Since most lack formal education as teachers, lifelong learning, with its focus on the learning that takes place in ‘real’ situations — the classroom, lecture theatre, seminar room and corridor — provides a frame for exploring the nature of the teachers’ informal professional learning. This “social knowledge,” based on interactions with colleagues and on experiences of “institutional rules and norms,” is a key element in academics’ informal professional learning (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995, p. 99).

1 In fact, the ideas apply at two levels to the research participants, since they are both teachers working with adult learners and lifelong learners themselves.
In the following research I particularly focus on the processes of experiential learning and social interaction through which participants actively construct their own knowledge about teaching (Biggs and Moore, 1993). The “3P model” of learning provides a framework for examining ways in which learning takes place, with what I have here called ‘personal learning’ and ‘professional learning’ forming the two presage factors that inform the process element in the Biggs and Moore (1993) model.

The concept of reflective practice (Schön, 1983, 1987; Brookfield, 1995; Parker, 1997; Brockbank and McGill, 1998) provides another starting point for framing both the research and the literature review. The concept of reflective practice was used widely by Dewey and later brought to the notice of educators by Schön, and has since become a significant feature of educational discourse (Richardson, 1990). It can be seen as both a response to and an alternative to competency notions of teacher education, which cast the teacher as technician rather than thinker and decision maker (Richardson, 1990). To engage in reflective practice can involve a range of processes, including using theory to direct practice; drawing on existing knowledge of ‘good’ practice to inform practice; and using “reflection as the reorganization or reconstruction of experience” (Grimmett, MacKinnon, Erickson and Reicken, 1990, p. 26, original emphasis) to transform practice. The latter process involves a synthesis of revisiting and rethinking unusual events in teaching, reflecting on oneself as a teacher, and reflecting on one’s taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching, a process of “[r]econstructing self-as-teacher” (Grimmett et al., 1990, p. 29). Encouraging students to become reflective practitioners has become increasingly a core goal of initial teacher education programmes (Clift, Houston and Pugach, 1990; Pollard 2002).
More recent discussion of the theory and practice of reflective practice has a stronger focus on its critical dimension as a means to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about practice and initiate change (Brookfield, 1995; Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997; Parker, 1997; Brockbank and McGill, 1998). This focus emerges from an understanding of the danger that when reflective practice takes place “within a mainstreamed practice,” it will lose its “critical edge” (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997, p. 170). The reflection on taken-for-granted assumptions or “[r]eflection–outside-action” (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997, p. 170, original emphasis), which is critically reflective practice, should be a feature of continuing teacher development (Brookfield, 1995; Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996; Parker, 1997). One way in which teachers might be able to view their practice critically (metaphorically this is like trying to see the back of your own head) would involve “standing outside [them]selves and viewing what [they] do through four distinct lenses” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 28). The lenses are “our autobiographies as learners and teachers”, “our students’ eyes”, “our colleagues’ experiences” and “theoretical literature” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 30). So critically reflective teachers don’t adopt a single viewpoint, rather they attempt to create a complex picture of their practice, viewed from several perspectives.

If these lenses are significant tools for teachers to examine hidden assumptions about their own teaching, their usefulness as research tools for examining the ways other people ‘see’ themselves as teachers would appear to be considerable. The lenses echo Grimmett et al. (1990), as follows: the autobiographical lens echoes the idea of reflection as “the reorganization or reconstruction of experience;” the collegial lens echoes the idea of reflection as drawing on existing knowledge of ‘good’ practice to inform one’s own teaching; and
the theoretical lens echoes the idea of reflection as using theory to direct practice. Brookfield’s “critically reflective lenses” therefore encapsulate a range of ideas about the “process of learning and change” in teaching, and mesh with features of lifelong learning to form a three-part framework for my research into teachers’ adventitious learning. The first two elements, teachers’ autobiographies and the experience of being part of an academic environment (and subject to collegial and institutional discourses), have been developed out of two of the four ‘lenses’ (teachers’ own experiences as learners and teachers, and discussions with colleagues). Two key elements of lifelong learning (learning from previous experience and learning in professional contexts) further inform this framework. A third lens, Brookfield’s “theoretical literature,” indicates the third focus (which is expanded into an examination of the influence of theoretical perspectives on participants’ learning).

**Figure 2.1 Adventitious Learning**
It should be noted that to treat any one of the themes as a discrete element is problematic, given that the whole process of reflective practice is a “practice of generating theory” (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997, p. 145). “Learning about teaching is a complex process, involving a mixture of solitary reflection, reading and discussion with colleagues” (Foley, 2000, p. 58). We shall see that these three themes interweave, through the medium of reflection on experiences of teaching and learning, in varied and, indeed, complex ways in the literature and in participants’ experiences.

**STRUCTURE OF THE REVIEW**

This review is structured to take into account my research focus on the three elements of ‘adventitious’ learning shown on the left of Figure 1. My goal is to select and discuss literature relevant to these three themes in order to refine and clarify the conceptual basis for the study that follows. The literature has been chosen to inform these three broad questions.

- What connections have been made in the literature between personal experience and the process of becoming a teacher, and how can this focus help us understand the process?
- How might the experience of being part of a particular academic environment influence professional learning?
- What is the scope of “theoretical literature” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 30) available to university teachers, and how might this influence teachers’ practices?
Although these themes are dealt with as distinct influences on teachers, I am aware of how they overlap and intermingle in people’s minds and actions. For example when writing about how they teach, about the practice or the technologies of teaching, teachers often slip into writing about personal things: their feelings about their work, about their relationships with students or with the subject, or about personal goals and achievements. Similarly, a writer’s personal experiences will often resonate throughout their theoretical discussions, and teachers’ personal views will lead them to form alliances with some colleagues and not with others, and limit their exposure to competing views or approaches. In teachers’ thinking and practice, the strands interweave to provide a composite picture in which no single feature is more ‘true’ than another. I am aware of the limitations of treating each strand separately in this review. I nevertheless hope to communicate a sense of the complexity of the processes I explore.
TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES: GETTING PERSONAL

What connections have been made in the literature between personal experience and the process of becoming a teacher, and how can this focus help us understand the process?

The ways in which teachers’ lives beyond the classroom intersect with their work in the classroom have been documented in works of fiction, in biography, autobiography and other forms of personal reflection, as well as in research. The presence of powerful characterisations of teachers in fiction and other popular literature suggests a lasting fascination with teachers as people. The view that good teachers have striking personal qualities and are exciting, powerful and charismatic individuals is common in popular fiction. Most school teachers in novels and films are people of passion, charisma and total commitment to their students or their calling, whose work (often against the grain of accepted practice) transforms the lives of their students often in ways the teachers themselves cannot predict. While the violent and contemptible sadists have their place: Charles’ Dickens’ Gradgrind and Wackford Squeers and Jane Eyre’s teacher come to mind; the majority are more humane. One thinks of Miss Jean Brodie, charismatic but misguided and tragically unaware of her compelling influence on her students (Spark, 1965); Mr. Chips, the wise and kindly mentor and model for young teachers (Hilton, 1934); teacher-hero Edward Braithwaite in the autobiographical narrative To Sir With Love (Braithwaite, 1959); John Keating, the inspirational teacher in Dead Poets Society. Fictional models of university teachers however are less encouraging. With alcoholics (Russell, 1991), sexual predators (Bradbury, 1975; Coetzee, 1999), and the chronically absent minded (Nabokov, 1983) as examples, the picture is depressing.
These popular texts all demonstrate the intimate connections between the person, the teacher and the teaching, and reflect shared perceptions of the kinds of people teachers might be.

Academic literature also exists which focuses on real teachers’ stories about their teaching. These personal narratives try to capture the writers’ motivations and describe their practice in relation to their thinking and in terms of their personal engagement. While the texts are not overtly theoretical, they do demonstrate the importance of research into teacher thinking and teacher knowledge by asking what teachers know and how this is related to what they do (Ben-Peretz, 1995).

The value of story telling as a means of better understanding teachers’ personal and professional lives, and as a teaching and learning tool, is becoming more widely recognised (Ball and Goodson, 1985; Schwartz and Webb, 1993; Ben-Peretz, 1995; Thomas, 1995; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Ballantyne, Bain and Packer, 1997). There is a distinction within the genre of teachers’ stories between accounts and analyses of classroom events or ‘problems’ (Busher, Clarke and Taggart, 1988; Schwartz and Webb, 1993; Ballantyne, Bain and Packer, 1997; Johnston, 1998), of career trajectories (Ball and Goodson, 1985; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996) and life histories, which seek to locate practice within a much wider personal context (Connell, 1985; Thomas, 1995).

The value of life histories in researching teacher knowledge lies in their basis in “the subjective reality of the individual” (Woods, 1987, p. 124). The use of life histories “both respects the uniqueness of individuals and promotes identification of commonalities among them” since they are “concerned with the whole person, within whole contexts” (Woods, 1987, p. 124). Using life histories allows teachers to learn about their own and other teachers’ construction of personal professional
knowledge (Ben-Peretz, 1995; A"Kerlind, 2003) and provides a means of examining the assumptions on which that knowledge is based (Thomas, 1995; Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001).

By using life histories as the basis for constructing their own professional knowledge, teachers have the potential to deconstruct “the intellectual pretensions of university-based, scientific knowledge as a basis for teacher professionalism” (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996, p. 12). This potentially empowering function of personal stories as a means of knowledge generation for teachers rests on the distinction between propositional knowledge (‘owned’ by teacher educators and transmitted to students in a hierarchical relationship) and experiential knowledge (used when the existing propositional knowledge is inadequate). Such experiential knowledge “is the basis for much of the behaviour and values which inform the practice of teaching” (Thomas, 1995, p. 13). Not only are teachers’ stories vehicles for bringing out aspects of experiential knowledge, they also allow teachers a ‘voice’ by offering stories about teaching which provide a counterbalance to the more powerful discourses of academics or policy makers (Thomas, 1995). In the case of academics who have not encountered propositional knowledge about teaching, it may be assumed that experiential knowledge has a significant role in informing their practice.

Teachers’ stories are often made up of two elements: accounts that detail and analyse particular incidents in a teachers’ life and life histories that focus on the person who becomes the teacher. The importance of the life history is that it enables the itemised, everyday accounts to be contextualised in terms of the teacher’s personal qualities, personal theories (educational, political, ethical) and life experiences. Life histories are often extremely powerful. The “groundedness” of
personal stories provides a strong contrast to the “painless generalisations” (Thomas, 1995, p. xiv) found in much literature about teaching and learning. There are vivid and often emotionally charged accounts of teachers’ lives (for example Ashton-Warner, 1963), which not only exemplify this groundedness but also reflect the idea that good teaching is associated with personal characteristics — with the “identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10) as well as (or more than) with technical skill. While it is difficult to find similarities among good teachers, one common trait is a “strong sense of personal identity [which] infuses their work” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10).

Life stories also allow the expression of teachers’ feelings about their work. “Real teachers … are much more than a bundle of skills” and whatever values underpin their approaches to teaching “these teachers are passionate about them” (Foley, 2000, p. 31). Teachers’ autobiographies and biographies confirm that “good, great, excellent, real teachers … are those with honesty, compassion, humour and passion,” and that in order to become real teachers “we should be ourselves” (Foley, 2000, p. 52). There is even the suggestion that passion “should take its place beside such terms as ‘relevance’ and ‘rigour’ as we continue to improve the discipline of teacher education” (Loughran and Russell, 1997, p. 229). The teacher’s passion is what stands out when considering what makes the most difference to the quality of student learning; “the discovery of passion can mean the discovery of [teachers’] …dynamic and positive influence” (Fried, 1995, p. 16).

The literature discussed above focuses strongly on the personal and emotional rather than the intellectual and technical aspects of being a teacher. This is not to say that they are not connected. Rather, the techniques we choose (when we can choose them instead of having them imposed) come from our personal
experience. For one thing, “[r]ecalling emotionally charged dimensions of our autobiographies as learners helps us understand why we gravitate toward certain ways of doing things and why we avoid certain others” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 32). For another, “as we learn more about who we are, we can learn techniques that reveal rather than conceal the personhood from which good teaching comes” (Palmer, 1998, p. 24). This suggests a feedback loop, which links the personal and the practice. As a result, practice changes as the person develops and practical experience feeds personal development. This process of changing practice goes beyond skill acquisition. By charting “the inner landscape of the teaching self” (Palmer, 1998, p. 4), instead of asking the what, how or why questions about teaching technologies, it is possible to achieve new understandings of how teachers acquire technique. These enquiries involve examining the interweaving of the intellectual, the emotional and the spiritual in the lives of teachers, and have “as much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and our fears, as with our strengths and potentials” (Palmer, 1998, p. 13).

Life histories reflect their subjects’ epistemologies: the way they understand the teaching and learning process. The literature discussed above suggests that by understanding their own life history, teachers are able to uncover and possibly confront the beliefs and assumptions they bring to their understanding of teaching and learning (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 23). But what is the role of life history beyond personal critique and analysis? Can learning about another person’s experiences be a tool for professional development, allowing us to reflect more productively on our own experiences in the light of other people’s? Professional development activities that reflect the particular epistemologies of the professionals involved (both as providers and as participants) can be associated with one of three
paradigms: the positivistic, the interpretive and the critical (Jones, 1994). The examples of life histories we have looked at already fit best into an interpretive rationale. Here, knowledge is contextualised, with an assumption that readers will interpret the stories in different ways depending on their own subjectivity. Learning about another person’s experiences can allow us to reflect on our own in the light of this. We make connections, discover resonances, re-interpret our own experiences in a more informed way by knowing what others have done. Life histories do not fall within a positivistic rationale because they are context-specific and explore experiences that are individual and not generalisable (Thomas, 1995; Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996). In this sense their usefulness is limited by the capacity of others to reflect on the ways their subjectivity is reflected in their personal histories.

However, to ignore “the personal dimensions of teaching” would not only give “an oddly inhuman account of this most human of jobs,” it would also minimise our awareness of the social processes of teaching, where for example “gender relations [are] as important as class relations in the shaping of education and the lives of teachers” (Connell, 1985, p. 4). Thus life stories can potentially fall within the critical paradigm, whereby processes of teaching and learning are seen as inherently political and “[c]lassrooms … are sites in which the dynamics of the power relationship have become enshrined in conventional practices” (Jones, 1994, p. 174).

Life histories have been used as a critical tool by teachers who wish to explore pedagogies that interrupt the hegemonic practices of the classroom, such as feminist and anti-racist pedagogies (Luke and Gore, 1992; hooks, 1994; Maher and Tetreault, 1994; Mayberry and Rose, 1999). Here, the use of autobiography leads from the discovery of “some of the roots of our own passion, for instance, our longings for the women-centred education we did not have” (Maher and Tetreault, 1994, p. 12)
to the development of a goal to transform the pedagogical practices of institutions so that the needs of all students might be better recognised (Hooks, 1994; Maher and Tetreault, 1994). Here, gender and/or race are central in shaping university teachers’ working lives, and the experience of studying or teaching in institutions in which their experiences, ways of thinking, styles of interaction and communication were ignored, leads directly to a desire for change. In Bell Hooks’ case, the link between her experiences as a black woman teaching in institutions dominated by a white male culture and where many teachers “were not excited about teaching” (hooks, 1994, p. 4) and her passionate personal engagement with teaching is clear. For her, teaching “is about service,” “a mission,” learning is “a revolution,” and education “the practice of freedom” (p. 2). In these examples, answers to questions about what, how and why to teach arise as much from a process of critical self-reflection as from watching other people teach or from being taught how to teach.2

When identifying where teachers’ thinking and practice originates, their past experiences, revealed in their life stories, are significant and fascinating sources of information. Personal accounts, which have a role in helping teachers “see [them]selves more clearly” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 33), also have the potential for others to see the teacher within more clearly. Using personal accounts as a way to understand how and why teachers think and act also reflects the importance of experience in informal learning (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993) and acknowledges the importance of the early socialisation of individuals as learners for their later construction of knowledge about the teaching process, whereby “teachers often

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2 The connection between teachers’ life experiences and their goals and desires as teachers is obvious here, but it is interesting that what is thought of as significant by some is invisible to others. Gender is one aspect of personal identity that is critical for some, yet both Startup (1979), with his explicit characterisation of the university teacher as male, and Becher (1989), who assumes this characterisation, render this aspect invisible.
engage in mimicry of existing practices rather than involving themselves in reflective consideration of what might be more appropriate” (Hatton, 1998, p. 7; see also Calderhead, 1988). Further, since teaching takes place in social contexts, it is important to convey not only “the sense of biography, the way things hang together and take shape (and sometimes fall out of shape) in teachers’ lives,” but also consider the interplay between “the personal life history, the institutional life of the school, and large scale social structures and dynamics” (Connell, 1985, p. 3). Life histories enable us to understand teachers as individuals whose working lives are shaped in an arena that extends beyond the boundaries of their place of work. By exploring teachers’ life stories, we can trace how “the foundations of … practice have been laid in [their] autobiographies as learners … and teachers” (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 31-32). These connections form the core of my research.
THE WIDER CONTEXT: INTERACTIONS WITH COLLEAGUES AND THE UNIVERSITY

How might the experience of being part of a particular academic environment influence professional learning?

We have seen the importance of the autobiographical lens in uncovering the foundations of teachers’ practice, but to use this lens exclusively has its limitations. There is a danger of becoming unable to see beyond the perspective of the self, and it is important to reflexively explore other ways of looking at practice if we are to gain a fuller picture. Interactions with colleagues provide opportunities to unravel this “shroud of silence in which our practice is wrapped” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 35). Discussion with colleagues helps teachers share experiences and assists learning when colleagues are able to suggest solutions to shared problems. But whether or not teachers discuss their teaching or take note of colleagues’ advice, their practice is nevertheless influenced by the cultural and political context in which they work (Giroux, 1988; Parker, 1997; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997; Hatton, 1998).

Indeed, it has been argued that a coherent self-identity is characterised by an individual’s ability to integrate experiences in the outside world into an “ongoing ‘story’ about the self” (Giddens, 1991).

The importance of examining how the wider environment in which teaching takes place might contribute to the ways in which university teachers position themselves or understand their roles is further indicated by the view that knowledge is constructed in social and cultural contexts. The sociocultural perspective on learning (Billett, 1998; Biggs and Moore, 1993; Bandura, 1986) emphasises the significance of learning by observing others model certain kinds of behaviour. Not
only will teachers learn by asking colleagues or observing other teachers (or by reading other teachers’ life histories). As members of a specific working culture, they will find both encouragement and discouragement for particular thinking and action depending on whether the culture promotes or models a particular approach. Research conducted by Blackburn and Lawrence across 4 different higher education sites in the US suggested that “institutional variables interact with individual characteristics and result in differences in teaching” (1995, p. 195). The overarching social, cultural and political climate in which academics work gives rise to ideas about academic life and about what it is to be a teacher in a university. These ideas are further mediated by the institutional cultures in which they are current, which will both open up and limit possibilities for thinking and action. The following discussion will map some of the discourses about academic life and university teaching to provide a context for examining this aspect of presage. The first section explores some discourses about the importance of teaching in universities.

The relative importance of teaching in the university

Literature that explores academic work and university culture does not always focus explicitly on teaching, though it may still reveal implicitly how ideas about teaching are constructed and shared by academics. Aspects of the institutional context have a direct influence on the teaching that takes place there (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995). The importance of teaching in relation to other aspects of academic work may be seen in such things as the amount of time spent in preparing academics for their teaching, the reliance by academics on traditional or innovative teaching methods, and the willingness of academics to change their approach when they encounter difficulties in their teaching (Startup, 1979). A cultural analysis of
institutions may also uncover understandings about the importance of teaching. Becher’s (1989) study of the cultures of different academic disciplines reveals a hierarchy among academic disciplines, where those characterised as “hard pure” (for example physics) are most highly regarded in universities and those in the “soft applied” (such as education) category are least well regarded. This hierarchical arrangement results in elitist cultural practices whereby “it’s part of the status hierarchy that we don’t talk to people who have to deal with reality” and contributes to the portrayal of the academic as detached and isolated from the real world (Becher, 1989, p. 75). The placing of the discipline of education in the soft applied, least prestigious, corner of Becher’s hierarchy, combined with academics’ tendency to avoid engagement with social action, would seem to reinforce the stereotypically low status of both the discipline and, by association, of teaching itself.

However such local disciplinary distinctions, where they exist, need to be understood in relation to the wider institutional context. The importance of teaching as a core activity for academics can vary according to the type of institution in which academics work (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995) and the focus of their professional learning. There are indications that where academics feel they have been well prepared to teach they are more likely to have a positive orientation towards teaching, while a highly significant predictor of a preference for research rather than teaching is the possession of a doctorate (Forest, 1997, pp. 15-16). If, as Forest’s (1997) study of academics in fifteen countries suggests, institutions are more likely to incorporate training in research than training in teaching into their graduate programs, it is not surprising that this study also reveals a preference among academics for research over teaching. Research such as this may reveal as much about institutional orientations as about the personal goals and desires of
university teachers; indeed, studies conducted in the United States (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995) and in Australia (Sheehan and Welch, 1996) indicate not only that a majority of academics see their role primarily as to teach but also that a majority see themselves as highly competent teachers. Personal factors such as academics’ gender and age are also significant (Forest, 1997). So an individual academic attempting to define her or his role and develop expertise in teaching may well be subject to complex and possibly competing discourses at institutional, disciplinary and personal levels. What this means for participants in the present study is explored in Chapter 7.

This literature suggests that within universities teaching is not necessarily seen as a core activity for academics and that academics face many demands on their time from other areas. Academics do not necessarily embrace their teaching role with enthusiasm. When they do, there is the suggestion that the role lacks clear definition. Institutional factors are significant, and there is a suggestion of a positive correlation between institutional commitment to teacher development and a positive orientation to teaching by academics. Research into how university teachers see their role as teachers, how they fulfil this role, what are their aspirations and desires, and what experiences and ideas have influenced their development as teachers has been “sparse” (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995). Taylor (1999) points to a lack of professional identity that prevents academics from fully realising their roles as teachers. This lack of clarity is further compromised by changes in the nature of academic work that continue to affect universities and academics. I now examine changes in the way that academic work has been conceptualised and the effect these changes have had on university teaching.
Changing academic work

The decade from 1990 to 2000 saw unprecedented changes in higher education around the world, and many conflicts in perceptions of what academic practices should be (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995; Smyth, 1995; Slaughter, 1998; Coady, 2000). These changes in perceptions and practices have also had a considerable impact on the ways that academics are able to teach (Vidovich and Currie, 1998). For example increasing accountability, exemplified in the way that student evaluations of teaching are used to measure student satisfaction, has the potential to change teaching practices to provide students with what they want in order to avoid negative evaluations (Vidovich and Currie, 1998, p. 201). Decreasing autonomy and a “reduced sense of ownership” are also consequences of increased “interference with teaching,” and lead to the sense that academics are being watched over all the time (Vidovich and Currie, 1998, p. 204). Academics are under pressure from economic and political arenas to shift into different working practices. It is a concern both that these changes are “largely unexamined, and certainly unopposed,” and that people from outside the university are “increasingly coming to shape (academic) work” (Smyth, 1995, p. 1). Academics are thus finding their work changing dramatically, not least because of the intrusion of market forces into what were hitherto professional decisions (Smyth, 1995, p. 6).

As early as 1974 Braverman saw that while academics retained “technical control” over their work, they were “losing ideological control” (Smyth, 1995, p. 7). Some of the changes in the university teachers’ role have been likened to those experienced by a craft worker moving from small to large scale production, as lectures, seminar groups and tutorial groups become larger (Miller, 1995, p. 54). While these changes have not necessarily led to deskillling and degradation in
teaching, nevertheless an increased “commodification and compartmentalization of knowledge” has occurred as a result, along with greater reliance on technology, fewer opportunities to engage in small group teaching and the loss of ideological control of academic work (Miller, 1995, pp. 54-57).

An analysis of the consequences of these changes that takes a different approach has used the metaphors of “monastic” and “domestic” universities as a basis for discussion (Campion and Renner, 1995). From the earlier “military-monastic” model of a “wild, extravagant and untamed” university has emerged a tamer university recognised for its frugality, careful organisation and cautiousness; this university is “packaged, safe, without risk and without waste” (Campion and Renner, 1995, pp. 75-77). In a culture which only demands the “efficiency and quality” of its institutions (Campion and Renner, 1995, pp. 76-82), there is little scope for a return to the “wonder and terror” of the university experience. The commitments to honour the contradictory demands of the two sets of ideologies have had negative consequences for academics, leaving them “torn apart, and as a result effectively silenced” (Campion and Renner, 1995, p. 77).

What consequences might this shift in ideology have for university pedagogies? We later examine literature that addresses changes in the nature of university work by exploring some positive opportunities for re-thinking teaching and learning in universities. One focus of this literature is learner-centred teaching, an approach that might seem more akin to the “safe” domestic university than to the wild monastic version. It could be argued that students might well prefer a safe, risk-free “domestic” university to the “untamed” monastic model, and might thrive more in a nurturing environment free from the “terror” that characterised the monastic university. So are Campion and Renner’s concerns misplaced, and is the
shift to a domestic model actually better for students as learners? Not necessarily. It would be mistaken to equate learner-centredness with the tameness of the domestic university that Campion and Renner describe. The discourse of “frugality” that characterises the domestic university works against, not in favour of, learner-centred pedagogies when these imply more, not less, emphasis on individual students’ needs. It is easier to exercise frugality when everyone can be taught in the same way. On the other hand, neither does an emotionally “safe” or nurturing environment necessarily preclude intellectual wildness or extravagance. We see later that participants in the research are themselves struggling with ways to take care of students while at the same time engaging them in intellectually risky pursuits. The presence of these tensions thus impacts in interesting ways on participants’ teaching.

The discourses in the literature discussed so far frame the changes in the nature of academic labour negatively. This literature depicts a culture in which higher education increasingly serves specific political ends, in which industrial models of work are increasingly being applied to universities, and in which academics are increasingly under pressure to relinquish aspects of their work that they hold dear, such as intellectual autonomy (Campion and Renner, 1995). This focus on negative consequences indicates that academics are struggling with the changes they face. Academics’ decreasing independence coupled with the increasing demands for greater productivity that have come about as universities become subject to political and economic pressures appear particularly problematic in relation to teaching in universities. In the ‘new’ university, ideas about teaching

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3 Demands for greater productivity include the trend for fewer staff teaching greatly increasing numbers of students (Lawnham, 2002). The ratio of teacher to student in Australian universities has grown from about 1:12 in the 1980s to about 1:26 in 2004 (Massaro, 2004).
begin to be based on managerial principles such as how to achieve efficiency, student satisfaction and productivity, rather than on educational principles such as how learning takes place, what is appropriate knowledge and how best to meet students’ needs.

Whether or not academics feel ideologically compromised by the intrusion of market forces into what were hitherto professional decisions that Smyth (1995) describes, the potential for academics to learn about teaching from the broader institutional context would appear to be compromised nevertheless. The potential for the changes described in the literature to affect how and what teachers can learn about their work in a social and cultural context will be considerable, particularly if they are not merely piecemeal changes but represent fundamental ideological shifts. The idea that university teaching is being “dumbed down” as a consequence not only of changes in the workplace but also of changes in the students is illustrative of one significant shift in perceptions of university teaching. This is a popular view frequently reported as a “hunch” on the part of academics (see for example Morris, 2004, p. 17). While not necessarily supported by evidence, it nevertheless contributes to a developing narrative that university teaching is becoming much more of a ‘problem’.

These characterisations of the changing nature of academic work highlight a conflict for academics between their new role as entrepreneurs and their old role as educators (Slaughter and Leslie, 1995, p. 112). They point to a crisis of confidence in universities as “cultural authority is now projected on to the market” where “a bereft humanity seems to be condemned . . . to organise all its affairs within the general parameters of capitalism” (Winter, 1995, p. 129; original emphasis). This literature suggests that academic work appears to be at a turning point. Whereas in
Western societies there was once a reliance on “expert authority,” and in particular on educators and intellectuals, to identify what was culturally or morally appropriate, the new source of cultural authority is “the market” where “the good is equated with the profitable” (Winter, 1995, p. 129). Practical demands, such as politics and economics, are now articulating with more traditional forms of academic work. Academics can no longer be insulated from worldly influences, and academic freedom can no longer “mean independence from practical responsibilities” (Newman, 1982, quoted in Winter, 1995, p. 131). So how might academics respond to these new practical responsibilities?

Increasing practical pressures do not necessarily mean the end of intellectual life in universities. While these pressures do pose the risk of potentially reducing the role of teacher from “parent or cultural crusader” to “purveyor of commodities within a knowledge supermarket,” they also offer opportunities for innovation and the shedding of “some of the oppressive practices enshrined in higher education’s traditional forms” (Winter, 1995, p. 134). In fact, there is now an opportunity for making a closer connection between theory and practice. The threat to the integrity of intellectual life posed by the practical concerns of the market can be met by the use of theory, not as abstraction, but as “intellectual critique, political challenge and a moment in the development of practice” (Winter, 1995, pp. 139-140, my emphasis). The fact that the work of academics can no longer be insulated from worldly practices, rather than signalling the end to intellectual life as we have known it, provides significant opportunities for a reconfiguration of the role of academics “in a historical process which it would be futile to ignore” (Winter, 1995, p. 141).
A possible response: being an intellectual

What we understand by the term ‘intellectual’ is significant in our understanding of academic life (Winter, 1995). It has also been argued that it is essential that all teachers (including teachers in schools) see themselves, and be seen by others, as intellectuals (Giroux, 1988). While it may be that university academics are self-evidently intellectuals, by nature of their engagement with the intellectual pursuits associated with their specialties, Giroux's discussion of the nature and role of the teacher-as-intellectual is useful in suggesting a further dimension to the ways in which the work of academics-as-teachers might be understood.

For Giroux, intellectuals are “mediators, legitimators, and producers of ideas and social practices” (Giroux, 1988, p. 151), and have a role outside as well as inside the university. His ideas about the role of the intellectual begin with a reference to critical education theory, which emerged as “a critical response to what can be loosely termed the ideology of traditional practice” (Giroux, 1988, p. xxxix). A key goal of critical educational theory, for Giroux, is “to provide the theoretical basis for teachers … to view and experience the nature of teachers’ work in a critical and potentially transformative way” (Giroux, 1988, p. xxxii). For Giroux, the notion of the transformative intellectual is of central importance.

Giroux’s notion of the intellectual is developed from Gramsci, who distinguishes the “conservative” from the “radical” form of intellectual life (Joll, 1997). According to Giroux, it is significant that for Gramsci the individual’s

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4 One reason for Giroux’s interest in conceptualising the intellectual is in order to identify ways in which public school teachers might be seen as legitimately participating in the process of “critically examining the nature and process of educational reform” (Giroux, 1988, p. 121). It is interesting that the marginalisation of teachers during a period of educational reform in schools, which Giroux discussed in 1988, mirrors so well the processes of marginalisation experienced by university academics more recently and explored in Coady (2000) and Smyth (1995). The extent to which academics in this study have been similarly affected is explored in Chapter 7.
position in relation to key social groupings is what distinguishes these two forms of intellectual life. The “conservative” intellectual operates within the status quo and provides “the ruling classes with rationales for economic, political and ethical formations” (Giroux, 1988, p. 151). In contrast, the radical intellectual provides leadership for the working class. As members of influential and well-established academic institutions, university teachers would appear, in Gramsci’s frame of reference, to be members of the group of “conservative” intellectuals. However, Giroux’s transformative intellectual may “emerge from and work with any number of groups which resist the suffocating knowledge and practices that constitute their social formation” (Giroux, 1988, p. 151).

Giroux’s transformative intellectual has key elements in common with Gramsci’s “new” intellectual, whose role is no longer that of a member of the intellectual élite concerned merely with having a “momentary” effect on feelings and passions but instead begins to live what is essentially a practical way of life which “… can no longer consist in eloquence … but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader” (Gramsci, quoted in Joll, 1977, p. 93). For Gramsci, intellectuals have a duty to become active in providing leadership for the revolutionary class, and both Giroux and Gramsci posit an active role for intellectuals. As far as these ideas are applicable to the role of teachers (both in schools and in universities), I suggest these conceptualisations of the intellectual not only provide a definition of what the teacher’s role should be, but also work the other way to imply that caught within the role of the intellectual is that of the teacher (Gramsci’s “constructor, organizer, permanent persuader”).

It is interesting to view demands that intellectuals be resistant, active and revolutionary in the context of current changes in the nature of university life and
the threat to intellectual freedoms that many academics are facing. Giroux highlights the paradox that radical university intellectuals, employed by institutions that have a core role in producing and reproducing the dominant culture, find themselves in. He also cites the processes of legitimation of intellectual activity which are part of academic life, such as conditions of employment requiring academics to publish in academic journals — publications which are monitored by academics, published by academics and read by academics, as major barriers to living a transformative intellectual life. Giroux directs transformative intellectuals to “engage in projects which address their own critical role not only . . . in order to fight against conservative intellectuals” but also to “broaden the theoretical and political movement outside the university” (Giroux, 1988, p. 153). The transformative intellectual, in other words, potentially incorporates both the conservative and radical intellectuals in one. He or she is an intellectual who, while located in an institution which legitimates the knowledges which characterise dominant power relations in the society, at the same time is able, in Gramscian terms, to provide the means whereby hegemonic practices can be challenged and resisted and oppositional voices can be heard (Giroux, 1988, p. 151; pp. 156-157).

In the context of discussions about the changing nature of universities, Winter suggests that in redefining the role of academics it will be essential to appeal to conceptions of the intellectual such as those proposed by Gramsci (discussed above) and Gouldner (who emphasised the need for a culture of critical discourse) (Winter, 1995, p. 140). Given that academic work is increasingly a process of production, affected by political and economic concerns and having as its key role a contribution to a market economy, many traditional notions of what it is to be a university academic are at risk. In particular, the diminution of academics’
ideological control of their work and the growth of the domestic university present serious challenges to aspirations which academics might have to retaining roles as a nation’s intellectuals.

These discussions provide a fascinating backdrop for a further investigation of the ways in which participants in this study conceptualise their roles as university teachers. Since Gramsci’s and Giroux’s ideas are at least widely available to an academic audience, I am interested in finding out the extent to which these ideas have been influential and been accepted either implicitly or explicitly as integral to the work of the university teacher. Further, it is also important to acknowledge the social conditions that gave rise to Gramsci’s and Giroux’s thinking on this issue. Both were writing at a time of political and social change: Gramsci with the rise of Italian fascism in the 1930s and Giroux when teachers in the United States were adjusting to Reagan’s ‘New Right’ economic and education policies. Whether at a time of political extremism, or simply during a period of significant change in the form and nature of schooling, in both cases there was a necessity to challenge certainties and redefine existing concepts in the light of new demands and experiences. Given the changes to academic life documented in the literature discussed above, it would appear that there now exists the same need for challenge and redefinition of the roles of academics. As intellectuals, academics would seem well placed to initiate this process. We have already seen that the threat to the integrity of intellectual life might be met by the use of theory, and it is to the possibilities presented by theory that we now turn.
What is the scope of “theoretical literature” available to university teachers, and how might this influence teachers’ practices?

There is a large body of literature dealing specifically with the practice of teaching in universities. This literature does not explicitly explore who university teachers are, how they are motivated, or what they think about their work, but focuses on good practice in university teaching. There is great variety, ranging from what could be called ‘applied’ or ‘hands on’ literature, to explicitly theorised discussions about specific aspects of teaching and learning. Examples of the latter are the work of Boud and others on independent learning and experiential learning (1988, 1993), Brookfield’s work (1988, 1991, 1995) on the role of facilitation and critically reflective practice, and the work of Martin (1999) and Prosser and Trigwell (2000) that draws widely on research into students’ learning in higher education. Usher, Bryant and Johnston’s work (1997) draws on critical frameworks such as postmodernism, critical pedagogy and feminism to challenge conventional thinking about teaching practices in adult education.

Facilitating adult learning

There are a number of interesting features of the theoretical literature. One is that while the work of these writers is clearly relevant to university teaching (Brookfield and Boud both draw widely on their own experiences as university teachers in their writing), the key principles discussed are derived from work in the wider area of adult learning, not specifically university teaching. Literature about the theory and practice of educating adults is extensive. Much of the literature places the student at
the centre of the learning process, suggesting that approaches to the education of adult students focus on those students’ particular learning orientations and learning needs. Successful teachers of adults aim to establish a collaborative, respectful environment in which they would be involved in the learning process along with the student (Rogers, 1983; Knowles, 1984). Much current praxis in the field of adult education is based around concepts such as self-directed learning (Boud, 1988; Candy, 1991), collaborative learning (Jaques, 1991), and the tutor as facilitator engaged in self-evaluation and critical reflection (Schön, 1987; Brookfield, 1988).

Other examples of praxis draw from the concept of cognitive apprenticeship, which in turn draws on practices in workplace learning. Sociocultural dimensions of learning, using the concepts of scaffolding, modelling, fading and coaching are examples of teaching and learning methods deriving from vocational apprenticeships and applied to learning in the academic environment (Rogoff, 1990; Billett, 1998; Bonk and Kim, 1998). While not all are specifically related to university teaching, given the adult status of university students, these theories are nevertheless relevant for university teachers. Two questions arise. How do these theoretical approaches ‘sit’ with the ways in which academics traditionally have been constructed (by themselves and others) as for example, ‘expert’ and ‘authoritative’, and with associated (and often taken-for-granted) academic teaching practices such as lecturing?

Current theories about teaching adults have a focus on the importance of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in teachers of adults. For example, much of the writing about the teacher’s role in adult education implies the need for a personal commitment to the teaching and learning process (Freire, 1987; hooks, 1994; McWilliam and Jones, 1996). Also, since current theories of adult education
privilege the student as an individual, with a life history and a degree of empowerment which sets her apart from the school student (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997, p. 95), there is also an implication that teachers of adults need to take account of students’ different personal histories in order to teach effectively. Both these approaches carry messages about the contemporary role of the teacher that, though they might conflict with earlier learning about teaching, nevertheless these ideas may be influential for academics as they develop personal theories about teaching and learning.

Underpinning the literature discussed above is the notion that successful teaching requires a theoretical basis from which to develop pedagogy (Rowland, 2000). When one looks at the range of approaches across this whole area of literature, from ‘applied’ to ‘theoretical’, a distinction emerges between seeing teachers as technicians, requiring no more than a tool box of strategies in order to do their job well, and teachers as professionals capable of drawing on a range of theories to support their decision-making about a highly complex and ever-changing task.

**University teaching: Responding to change**

Recent changes in the ways that universities in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom are financed and structured have resulted in the increasingly entrepreneurial character of universities (Biggs, 1999; Taylor, 1999; Currie, Thiele & Harris, 2002). Because of these changes academics are becoming more accountable, and are expected to be able to adapt successfully to constantly evolving roles (Taylor, 1999; Barrett, 2003). Brockbank and McGill argue that while once it was assumed that university teaching, unlike school teaching, was a fairly simple matter...
as long as academics knew what they were talking about (and could talk about it),
traditional approaches are increasingly under scrutiny as the demand for high quality
teaching in universities is increasing in a competitive environment (Brockbank and
McGill, 1998). The presence of a larger and more diverse student university
population, another consequence of the changing university, has also fuelled the
challenge to traditional approaches to university teaching. In response to the new
demands being made on academics, an extensive range of what might be called
‘professional development’ literature is now available to support academics’
development as teachers. This literature has looked to the existing knowledge base
on teaching and learning, drawing on research into student learning in both school
and adult learning contexts, to develop more diverse approaches to teaching
increasingly diverse university students (Biggs, 1999).

One key focus in this literature is related to ideas about how students learn,
with general agreement expressed that, to be successful, university teachers should
engage in processes that support student learning (Biggs, 1999; Laurillard, 2002;
Trigwell and Shale, 2004).Because an environment that enables students to create
or construct their own understandings encourages deep learning, a ‘constructivist’
perspective on learning, emphasising the personal nature of meaning making, has
been particularly influential. ‘Traditional’ university teaching practices, such as
teacher-dominated lectures, tutor-led tutorial discussions and assessment by
examinations, do not necessarily engage students in a range of strategies for
developing learning skills (Biggs, 1999; Weimer, 2003). The particular focus in
much ‘professional development’ literature is on what teachers might do to optimise
their students’ learning based on these two broad concepts: strategies that
encourage a degree of independence in learning, where “students are free to focus
on the task,” and those which encourage collaboration with peers and teachers are both important in developing a deep engagement with learning (Biggs, 1999, p. 13). These approaches represent a radically different direction for university teaching than the ‘transmission’ approach widely accepted as the norm in university settings (Biggs, 1999), and suggest that university teachers who are at least somewhat familiar with relevant educational theories are best prepared to manage the changing demands of their workplace.

In Chapter 9, I consider whether participants in my study make use of theoretical perspectives. One study that touches on a similar question uses academics’ stories about their everyday teaching experiences (Ballantyne, Bain and Packer, 1997). This study was commissioned “in order to promote academic reflection and discourse on the quality of teaching,” and was designed to be “driven by the experience and insight of academics . . . engaged in effective teaching . . . rather than by the imposition of any theoretical or philosophical stance” (xiii). It is interesting that although the writers distance themselves from the imposition of any theoretical or philosophical stance, nevertheless there are clear messages to be drawn from these participants’ stories about the validity (for their practice) of many theoretical positions prominent in specialist literature about teaching and learning in higher education. For example, the repeated appearance of such themes as self-motivation, independent learning, the development of critical thinking, experiential learning, self-directed learning and problem-based learning suggests that work done elsewhere by theoreticians has had a significant influence on the work of these university teachers (Ballantyne, Bain and Packer, 1997).

The role of reflective practice is a feature discussed in many of the stories collected for their study. A number of participants speak of their interest in and the
need for research into teaching, and participants also identify clearly the need to theorise when making strategic decisions (see for example the accounts given in chapters 7, 8, 13, 29, and 41 of Ballantyne, Bain and Packer, 1997). Participants also demonstrate the operation of numerous personal theories about teaching and learning.

The authors of this study focus on the process of collecting the experiences of effective teachers, explicitly distancing themselves from discussion of theoretical or philosophical considerations (which incidentally overlooks the point that even the concept of ‘effective teachers’ is philosophically interesting). However in spite of the authors’ position on this, many of the participants demonstrate an explicit and enthusiastic engagement with theoretical issues. Whether these teachers make explicit use of particular theoretical perspectives to inform their pedagogies is not clear in the study, yet there is strong evidence that these teachers are implicitly drawing on a range of theories to better understand, support and improve their praxis.

**Teaching at the borders and critical pedagogy**

There are also theoretical frameworks from outside educational discourse that influence teachers’ thinking. I write in Chapter 6 about how ideas about the architect as artist/hero permeated discourse about teaching and learning in one particular School of Architecture, in contrast to discourses about democracy and social justice that were implicit in the decisions made about teaching and learning processes in one particular School of Education. In Chapter 8, I explore the use of postcolonial theory in reflecting on issues of inclusivity in teaching. The idea that teachers might draw on theory from outside the discourses of teaching and learning
is developed in literature in which the teaching process is framed as part of wider social or political processes.

Critical theorists and postmodernists claim that teaching is a value-laden, socially critical process, and draw on critical frameworks such as postmodernism, critical pedagogy and feminism to challenge conventional thinking about teaching practices in adult education (Gibson, 1986; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997). Even at the basic level of selection of information, the decisions made by teachers about which information to include and which to omit implies a decision-making process that can be contested on social grounds. Choices about who to allow to speak in tutorials, about who should assess students’ work and how, and about the organisation of discussion groups (mixed gender or not?) all potentially involve a socially critical awareness. Radical pedagogies, such as critical pedagogy and border pedagogy (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1995), focus on issues such as the power relations within educational institutions and the limiting effects these have on students’ access to knowledge. Feminist pedagogy is an example where teachers’ socially critical awareness has led to the cross-fertilisation of theories from within and without teaching and learning discourses and the development of new praxis (Lather, 1990; hooks, 1994; Maher and Tetreault, 1994; Mayberry and Rose, 1999). Feminist teachers “have begun to articulate educational aims and criteria with these newer students in mind, to integrate women’s and multicultural content into their curriculum, and to experiment with new, sometimes risky, pedagogical approaches” (Maher and Tetreault, 1994, p. 2). Of course teachers may adopt a feminist position whether or not they were teaching about feminism, but an interesting line of enquiry

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5 The privileging of non-Aboriginal history over Aboriginal history in Australian educational institutions is one obvious example.
would be to explore the connections between the theories relating to an individual’s academic specialism and their praxis. For example, to what extent does an environmentalist aim to develop theories of teaching and learning that are in tune with his or her views of the world, and how might this ambition affect her or his pedagogy?

It is also possible that academics develop informal theories about teaching and learning, drawn from aspects of their personal lives. Experiences from outside education, personal values, political views, gender, cultural background, class — all might be influential in the development of participants’ theoretical positionings. So, an individual’s political convictions or experiences of class oppression might influence them to develop theories about the emancipatory potential of education (Freire, 1987). Or personal values or cultural background might lead to a commitment to achieving better social justice for students (hooks, 1994; Sturman, 1997), which in turn might lead to reflections on the power relationships played out in the classroom (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997). Or one’s experiences of being marginalised for reasons of gender or sexuality might lead to the desire to challenge the ways in which gendered subjectivities are reproduced in the classroom (Davies, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

We have seen that educational theory has a significant influence on educational practice. However, teachers often claim they have no interest in and no use for theory, seeing themselves as practitioners for whom educational theory is an irrelevance (Garrigan and Pearce, 1996). But even when teachers position themselves as being anti-theory or a-theoretical, it is important to take account of the differences between “theories-in-use”, or “what a person does” (which are often based on tacitly understood assumptions) and “espoused theories,” or “those which
justify behaviour’ (and which may not be the same as the person’s theories-in-use) (Day, 1981, p. 11). So even if teachers do not espouse theories, nevertheless their practice will be based on a set of tacitly understood assumptions which hang together like an ‘espoused’ theory. So how do academics develop personal theories about teaching and learning? Do university teachers have clear ideas about the kind of teachers they want to be and about what kind of learning they want students to engage in, and are these ideas articulated in terms of identifiable theories? If they don’t draw on educational theories, do teachers look further afield for theoretical frameworks? Are there any relationships between informal theories and participants’ personal lives, subjectivities or positionings? Explorations of participants’ understanding of, access to and use of theories, including any patterns suggesting relationships between participants’ personal theories and the other influences discussed above, their personal histories as learners and the academic environment, are found in Chapter 9.
CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

If ….. we want to grow as teachers ….. we must talk to each other about our inner lives (Palmer, 1998, p. 12).

The reflexive project of the self … consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives … (Giddens, 1991, p. 5).

PART 1: METHODOLOGY

This research aims to uncover in better detail the implicit understandings on which academics construct their pedagogy. To do this, the research focuses on three broad elements: academics’ previous experiences of learning, their experiences of being part of a particular academic environment, and the personal theories that underpin their practices. I have already pointed out in Chapter 1 that, in the case of academics participating in the FLIP, these understandings were rarely articulated and only emerged implicitly during discussions about practice. I have designed this research in an attempt to make these hidden understandings more explicit, with the purpose of the research suggesting the research process. In order to encourage my
new research participants to articulate their understandings, I invited them to engage reflexively with their biographies by inviting them to examine how they had been “acted upon” (Giddens, 1991) as they developed their praxis. I then used their biographies as a means to understand how they constructed their knowledge about teaching that underpins their pedagogies.

My early thinking about how I would do this was inspired by bell hooks’ (1994) descriptions of a pedagogy in which excitement and passion (as opposed to boredom and apathy) are generated in classrooms through recognising the contribution of every person there. This is a pedagogy that relies on “collective effort” to “generate excitement;” it is an “engaged” pedagogy that “values student expression” and in which not only students but also teachers “grow and are empowered by the process” (hooks 1994, pp. 20-21). It made me wonder what ‘engaged’ research could be like. I decided then that I wanted to design a project in which the researcher and participants might work collectively in a process which valued participant expression, and in which the participants as well as the researcher could grow and become empowered by the process. This ‘engaged research,’ which draws also on the tradition of participatory research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003), would seek to:

- provide opportunities for participants’ voices to be heard;
- attempt to bring positive outcomes for the participants as they move towards better understandings of their own identities as teachers;
- involve participants as much as possible in the overall direction of the research by using semi-structured interviews and a flexible design to allow for the exploration of differing perspectives;
- build up a richly detailed understanding of each contributor by focusing on a small number of participants rather than sampling across a wide range.
In tracing the process of developing these first thoughts into my current thinking, I will explain how I explored the many possibilities available. Part of the process involved looking for ways to name what I felt or sensed was the way I wanted to do the research. I also wanted to find a methodological frame which would not only enable me to conduct valid and worthwhile research, but would also provide enough enjoyment of the process to ensure a continued commitment to the research over several years.

**Finding a Paradigm**

My interest in “[p]ersonal contact and insight, with the researcher getting close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study” (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 46) and my preferences for research that “deals with words rather than numbers” and involves “naturally occurring data” (Silverman, 2001, p. 38) mark me out as a qualitative researcher. However, I agree with Lather when she argues that the quantitative/qualitative distinction is “a discourse at the level of method, not paradigm,” preferring the distinction between positivist and postpositivist as a means of representing the alternative paradigms available to researchers (Lather, 1991a, p. 9). It is this distinction then, rather than that between quantitative and qualitative research, which informs the following discussion of methodology, in the sense that it will be a discussion of the different paradigms or frames (Lather, 1991a) for research. Questions about the purpose of the research, the nature of the research and the appropriateness of the methods are all significant in a discussion of methodology.
I now outline the current methodological debates as they relate to my research and to show how I came to position myself as a researcher. The approaches available to me as a researcher in education could be represented by two broad possibilities: positivist and postpositivist research. Within the postpositivist paradigm, there are two further distinctions: between interpretive research and critical research, and a third strand: postmodern research (Lather, 1991a; Sarantakos, 1993; Neuman, 2000). Researchers in the social or human sciences have a diverse and eclectic range of methodological possibilities to explore. However, since the research process is not neutral, hidden behind these methodological distinctions are epistemological and political positions, which researchers themselves should be aware of and which should be made explicit in the research design (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997).

A researcher’s methodological choices are based on personal preferences and style as well as on the researcher’s position on ontology (what exists or the nature of the world) and epistemology (what it is possible to know, and how it is possible to know these things) (Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997). The ontology and epistemology on which a particular piece of research is based are “often taken for granted and not regarded as worthy of consideration” even though all research is “embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world (an ontology) and ways of knowing that world (an epistemology)” (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997, pp.173-176). Since questions of epistemology include both considerations of the methods through which new knowledge claims are arrived at and ideas about the positioning of the researcher, these have a particular bearing on the research process.
ONTOSLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY: POSITIVISM AND POSTPOSITIVISM

As a way of knowing the world, positivism became the dominant research paradigm in the human sciences in the nineteenth century when Comte attempted to apply scientific methods to the study of society (Lather, 1991a). Positivist research is based on a number of epistemological assumptions, including that the world is knowable objectively, that empiricism is a reliable method of collecting data, and that it is possible to be a disinterested observer (Lather, 1991a; Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). The positivist approach to social research overlooks the point that knowledge cannot be abstracted from the specific time and place in which it was made, and thus it sees no need for reflexivity in research (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). While the term ‘positivist’ can be (and often is) used interchangeably with ‘quantitative’ when naming research, I agree with Lather that the quantitative/qualitative distinction is one of method rather than of paradigm. Lather’s preferred paradigmatic distinction is between positivist and postpositivist research, indicating the significance of epistemological considerations when identifying the kind of research we are engaged in (Lather, 1991a).

While it has been claimed by some that the positivist paradigm remains hegemonic in research in education (Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Symes & Preston, 1997; Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997), a number of postpositivist paradigms, adopting different epistemological positions, are increasingly taken seriously by social researchers. Postpositivist enquiry questions assumptions that there are objective truths that can be determined by research, and that knowledge can be impersonal, rational and value-neutral (Neuman, 2000). Postpositivist research allows that
epistemology “is itself culturally-specific, historically located and value-laden” (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 176). Thus, postpositivist enquiry focuses on the ideas that social realities are constructed, and that social processes can only be interpreted by research, not discovered.

Postpositivist enquiry therefore ‘fits’ the particular focus of my own research, which deals with participants’ memories and interpretations of events that I as researcher cannot observe. Since it acknowledges that epistemology is culture-, value- and history-specific, it also allows (actually, expects) me to be open about my political and theoretical positioning in relation to the concepts with which the research is concerned; this paradigm acknowledges that the researcher can never be “hidden” (Neuman, 2000). It also allows me to focus on the things which interest me — the richly diverse experiences of my participants — and legitimates my preference for a small scale, in-depth study, since a larger-scale study would not by virtue of its size throw up more reliable ‘truths’. The postpositivist frame therefore is not only suggested by my personal orientation towards the research process. It also enables me to develop methods that are in keeping with this orientation. By gathering descriptive data and presenting it in participants’ own words, I can try to capture their experiences as closely as possible and locate them as significant individuals at the centre of the research process (Sarantakos, 1993).

**Ontology and epistemology: Hermeneutics and interpretation**

Lather (1991a, 1991b) identifies several positions that postpositivist social researchers might take up. Hermeneutic/interpretive epistemology is particularly influential in social and educational research, since it “focuses on human action and assumes that all human action is meaningful and hence to be interpreted and
understood” (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 181). Hermeneutic/interpretive research then is concerned with understanding the social world: with understanding “everyday lived experience” (Neuman, 2000, p. 70) and “the meanings that construct and are constructed by interactive human behaviour” (Usher, Bryant & Johnston 1997, p. 181). Hermeneutic research involves interpreting meaning that is “embedded within text” (Neuman, 2000, p. 70), such ‘text’ comprising conversations and actions as well as written words (Neuman, 2000, p. 85). There are several implications of this epistemology for researchers. Firstly, an important one (particularly for me, looking for ‘engaged’ research) is the recognition that, since the way we know the world is through interpreting it, both the subject (researcher) and the object (researched) are jointly engaged in acts of interpretation (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). This epistemological position makes it impossible to separate the researcher and researched as subject and object, rather they are co-constituting and co-constituted (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). A second implication is that interpretation is always partial, in that it is always relative to one’s existing interpretive framework, and hence what Gadamer calls our “pre-understandings” provide the conditions (including the limitations) under which we experience the world (Gadamer 1975, quoted in Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 182). Further, the “hermeneutic circle” of interpretation, where to interpret part of something depends on interpreting the whole, but to interpret the whole depends on interpreting the parts, means that “knowledge formation always arises from what is already known,” and is therefore not linear but “circular, iterative, spiral” (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 182). Hermeneutic interpretation always takes place within the specific context of related assumptions, beliefs and practices, “of which
both the subjects and objects of the research are never fully aware” Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 182).

Hermeneutic epistemology suggests that the quest for disinterestedness in a researcher is misguided, since our pre-understandings of the world frame how we interpret it. It is not possible for a researcher to come to a purely objective ‘view’ of how the world is. Rather, researchers ‘read’ the world to “discover meaning” embedded there (Neuman, 2000, p. 70). However, it is possible for researchers, through the research process, to challenge and de-stabilise their pre-understandings, since it is “precisely through the interplay between one’s interpretive framework … and that which one seeks to understand that knowledge is developed” (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 184). Thus by acknowledging our pre-understandings we can put them to work to become more open-minded researchers. So in relation to my own research, every decision I have taken has been framed by my particular interpretive framework. This includes how I have chosen research participants, how I have communicated with them, what I have asked them and how I have framed the analysis. The researcher is never a neutral presence, represented by a third person singular pronoun, but an active ‘I’ who frames, filters and shapes the process explicitly – which is one reason why autobiographical elements feature prominently here. The hermeneutic/interpretive framework points to a reflexive, self-conscious researcher, and the need for me to disclose the pre-understandings that have framed this research (see Chapters 4, 6 and 8).

**Ontology and Epistemology: The Critical Research Frame**

From an epistemological perspective, the critical research frame develops from the interpretive frame, and my research combines elements of both. From both
perspectives knowledge is seen as interested, not neutral. In that sense critical research belongs within the postpositivist frame, yet by bringing in a critical element moves away from the fully subjective position of interpretive research. To adopt a critical position is to not just acknowledge researcher subjectivity but also to build it in to the research process by using the researcher’s subject position reflexively. The critical position enables research to move beyond knowledge-generation, since it includes the critique of existing ideological or institutional operations with a view to changing the world. Critical social research differs from the interpretive frame rather more in the kinds of questions asked and the purpose of the research than in the techniques used (Neuman, 2000). My aim to “uncover and demystify ordinary events” (Neuman, 2000, p. 76) places my research in the critical framework. A critical researcher, then, will be explicit about their original position and document “where their research took them as investigators and political actors” (Fine, in Apple, 1996, p. ix). However, the interpretive approach, which gives voice to the researched, is a reminder to researchers to ask how it is possible to do critical qualitative research in a way which is not only “disciplined” but also “caring” (Apple, 1996, p. xi). Within a critical research frame, the researcher’s political position becomes a central and explicit element in the design and conduct of the research.

In designing a research project, requiring the selection of a particular method from a vast range of possibilities, the personal histories, convictions and positioning of the researcher her/himself are significant. In my case, issues connected with my gender, my positioning as a teacher in my own right, my concern to support the emotional safety as well as the professional integrity of the people researched in this study, and my views about the exercise of power and oppression in all human
relationships (including those between researcher and researched) all imply a particular value-position.

Some variants of the relationship between the researcher and the researched are broken down by Fine and related to three sets of political research positions: “ventriloquy,” “voices” and “activism” (1994, in Apple, 1996). The position of a researcher who practises “ventriloquy” is that research is neutral, and that the researcher is a “vehicle for transmission” of the actions or views of the researched. For the ventriloquist researcher, the goal of research is to (neutrally) present information. The myth that researcher neutrality is possible has already been discussed. The processes of choosing research participants, identifying a research focus and selecting what actions or views to report are decisive acts made from a particular research position. The “voices” position acknowledges this. When the researcher takes on the “voices” position, the experiences of others are given centre stage while the research provides a vehicle for these voices to be heard. The “activist” position places the researcher more centrally in the research process. Researchers who practise “activism” will not only be explicit about the way their political stance frames the texts that are produced but will also work to “disrupt and transform existing ideological and/or institutional arrangements” (Fine, 1994, in Apple, 1996, p. ix).

I stated earlier my intention to conduct research that would allow participants’ voices to be heard. I have also discussed the concept of ‘engaged’ research, in which both researcher and researched are jointly engaged in the research process. There is a potential conflict in these two goals; my joint engagement limits the possibility for me to give voice to participants since, as a researcher, I have agency and make choices which come from my own political, personal and professional
positions. The notion that interviewers are “unavoidably implicated in creating
meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002)
suggests the limitations for researchers wishing to “give voice” to their participants.
One way to address this problem is to ask the question “for what and for whom is
‘our’ research?” In the researcher/researched relationship, as in all other human
relationships, there are “multiple axes of power and multiple relationships of
domination and subordination” (Apple, 1996, p. xi). By considering how,
specifically, political issues relate to my research I am better able to identify the
interesting and fluid power relations that exist between me, as researcher, and ‘my’
participants. On one hand, participants are not in a dependent or subordinate
position to me, and this near-equivalent relationship makes me feel more
comfortable about asking searching questions. However, I do exert power in that I
control the research process, have access to information about the personal lives of
participants and have the power to misrepresent them. I have to question how
appropriate it is to speak for others, even when I have much in common with the
participants. In attempting to give voice to participants, how can I be certain that
the ‘voice’ is not my own? For their part, participants also have the power to
mislead, or withhold information if they want to, or to withdraw from the project. I
return to these questions later when I examine the interview process, as this is the
arena in which these contradictions are crucially brought into play.

Other political issues relate to research goals. My positioning within a critical
research frame leads me to want to expose injustices and challenge what is taken for
granted. The first step towards achieving this is to ‘give voice’ to participants (while
working within an interpretive frame). But there are questions about the validity as
well as the value of these attempts. Three key questions emerge. What might
research involving individuals who already hold positions of (relative) power achieve, and how might it advance the emancipatory project? What value is it to give voice to people (university teachers) who (arguably) already have a voice and use it every day? And how can I uncover what is taken for granted in a context I am so familiar with? How can I take up a position that will enable me to see afresh?

To answer the first, how research that involves people with power might advance the emancipatory project, anecdotal evidence gathered during many conversations with students at university suggests that learners might gain from research into how successful teachers construct their understandings about teaching. I have explained to many students that I was researching how university teachers learn to teach, and the most common reaction has been, “Oh, I didn’t know they did!” Students have encouraged me, saying, “That’s a really important thing to research,” or, “It’s badly needed,” or, “It’s very important — get it out as soon as you can!” So for learners, this is potentially emancipatory research. The second question was about the value of giving voice to people who already have one. Anecdotal evidence collected from colleagues in the university shows that many university teachers feel they have no voice. These are people who are struggling, silenced, marginalised, and unhappy because their work as teachers is made more difficult because of punishing institutional constraints linked to increasing competition and accountability. If the research can uncover some of the practices that lead to these feelings, it is both a means of giving voice to people who feel they have none and is potentially emancipatory. Finally I asked how I might uncover what is taken for granted in a context I am so familiar with. How can I take up a position that will enable me to see afresh when I am so embedded in the environment I am researching? I discuss this aspect of researcher positioning later.
in the chapter, but for now, and in relation to another political question, for me my familiarity with the research context gives the research legitimacy. My shared membership with the group of people I am researching gives me a unique right to comment and ‘give voice to’ the research participants. I also suggest that this co-membership has made it easier for participants to speak openly — because I understand many of their frustrations.

I have so far drawn freely on interpretive and critical frames in this discussion of methodological frameworks. Since an important aspect of my research is to understand and interpret participants’ reasons for teaching as they do, the research falls in the interpretive paradigm, which explores “the way [people] construct their lives and the meanings they attach to them” (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 37). Not only is the research intended to identify how participants learned to teach, I am also interested in teaching as a social process and in critically exploring how participants relate to the larger social and institutional contexts in which they work. This gives my research, in terms of its intention, a critical perspective. Before moving on to consider how these frames have informed the research process, I include a brief discussion of the postmodern research frame.

**INCORPORATING THE POSTMODERN FRAME**

In the context of critical social science, “methodology is viewed as inherently political, as inescapably tied to issues of power and legitimacy” (Lather, 1991a, p. 12). But within a postmodern frame of reference, “no discourse is innocent of the will to power” (Lather, 1991a, p. 13). Not only that, in the postmodern frame, ontology is foregrounded in a way which potentially changes the way we understand and conduct research, suggesting that in research we first need a “shifting of the
way the world is seen and the construction of a new world to investigate” (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997, p. 204).

There is a degree of resistance to postmodern and poststructuralist approaches (concepts which overlap and are sometimes interchangeable in the texts) from within the educational research community (Stronach & MacLure, 1997). This resistance can be seen in a number of “strategies of containment,” among which are the reduction of postmodernism or poststructuralism to “the status of some additional insights, tools or strategies” and the separation of “the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’ postmodernism” (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, pp. 8-9). While researchers are increasingly engaging with postmodernism by using its “productive” possibilities they still hold back from engaging with the “dangerous” possibilities that “might open (on to) the abyss” (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, pp. 8-9). I agree with Hargreaves (1994) and Parker (1997) that it is important to take seriously the accusations against postmodernism of nihilism and relativism in which “anything goes” (Parker, 1997, p. 5).

Finding how to retain activism and emancipation as research goals alongside the relativity of postmodernism is a challenge. I write in Chapter 4 of how my world view leads me towards emancipatory goals for teaching, seeing education as potentially transformative and life changing. This in turn leads me to look for a purpose in conducting research which goes beyond extending knowledge, to include exploring how we can change the world through knowledge. This purpose points to a research framework that allows both ‘voice’ and ‘activism’ and insofar as postmodern frames reveal new ways of engaging with these concepts I will gladly embrace them. Lather addresses this issue in relation to her own work by
separating out the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’ postmodernism. She expresses a
fascination with the implications of the postmodern goal of deconstruction for her
### Table 3.1

**Research in the Human Sciences: Dimensions of Choice**

*Pearce’s interpretation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research frame</th>
<th>Epistemology/ontology</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Research goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positivist</strong></td>
<td>• It is possible to know what is ‘out there’</td>
<td>• Power invisible</td>
<td>• Goal of research to know, predict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Researcher is objective observer</td>
<td>• Researcher at the centre</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The world is orderly &amp; predictable</td>
<td>• Personal distance between researcher and the researched</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Ventriloquy’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>**Postpositivist —</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It is only possible to represent aspects of social reality</td>
<td>• Enabling the ‘voices’ of others is the central focus</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Researcher is subjective observer</td>
<td>• Allows engagement with other people’s lives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The world is open to interpretation</td>
<td>• ‘Voices’</td>
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<tr>
<td>**Postpositivist —</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ideology is all-pervasive.</td>
<td>• Knowledge implies action</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Researcher is critical observer</td>
<td>• Researcher political actor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The world is characterised by inequalities</td>
<td>• Desire for change</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Activism’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Poststructural/</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>postmodern**</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Language both carries &amp; creates a culture’s epistemological codes</td>
<td>• No discourse is innocent of the will to power</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on discourse</td>
<td>• All research is an enactment of power relations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The world is uncertain</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Goal of research to deconstruct; to question assumptions which are taken to be self-evident</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

emancipatory work and clearly sets postmodernism’s nihilism against the
“postmodernism of resistance” (Lather, 1991a).

A postmodern research frame draws on the (modern) interpretive and critical frames
discussed earlier (see Table 3.1). The subjective researcher working within
researched, a postmodern frame is openly anti-hierarchical and explores the
“multiple sites from which the world is spoken” (Lather, 1991a, p. 32). Many of the
carens of postmodern thinkers, such as the need to acknowledge the subjectivity
and socio-cultural location of the researcher, the need for self-reflexivity in research,
and the dependence of knowledge on socio-cultural practices are echoes of the
carens of critical theorists to unmask the beliefs and practices which limit the
practice of freedom and democracy (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). Within a
critical research frame, ideology is all-pervasive. Within a postmodern frame, social
reality is represented and created by a series of discourses (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

These aspects of the postmodern approach, along with the focus on
participatory and anti-hierarchical processes that makes it possible to “question the
assumptions which a discipline or field takes to be self-evident” (Stronach &
MacLure, 1997, p. 3), feel comfortable and familiar. However, while postmodern
frames both interest me and challenge my thinking as a researcher, there are
problems. The very challenges they make to methodology’s “hope for certainty”
(Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p. 4) undermine my attempts to establish a nameable
methodological framework. I need to explain my methodological framework
because it is necessary for participants to understand the process.

In spite of these constraints, the awareness that my research might move into
other possible spaces within a postmodern frame has been increasingly important in
suggesting perspectives for the enquiry, and in particular for the analysis. There are
precedents for using aspects of a postmodern stance for a part of a research project (Stronach & MacLure, 1997). For this research, a postmodern frame demands the clear foregrounding of the researcher throughout the process (Neuman, 2000, p. 84) and alerts me to trace my own multiple subjectivities as well as those of the researched (see Chapters 4, 6 and 8). A postmodern frame also enables me to work across or outside specific research ‘paradigms’ or frames, using ‘bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Hence I will be using the discourses of hermeneutic, critical and postmodern research frames within the dissertation. Foucauldian notions of institutional power and self-discipline (McHoul & Grace, 1993) have been applied when discussing participants’ stories. Finally, I have taken seriously the postmodern focus on language as the means whereby we ‘know’ the world (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). My analysis of interview texts consists in part of looking for the “intertextual traces” of the unspoken (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p. 7), including the analysis of discursive practices as a means of uncovering power relations and achieving an emancipatory goal. In Part 2 of the chapter I discuss the impact of these diverse methodologies on the design and conduct of the research.
PART 2: DESIGN

The design of the research has been informed by the idea of ‘bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) that suggests the value of adopting a range of strategies and methods for the collection and analysis of different empirical materials. The methods I have used to collect the data were selected to ‘fit’ the kind of research I wanted to do and felt committed to, felt comfortable with (politically and ethically), and believed would provide the reflective, detailed, personal answers I was looking for. I therefore used both “naturally occurring data” such as my observations as a university teacher, and interview transcripts that became “artifact[s] of a research setting” (Silverman, 2001, p. 286).

The research focuses on the informal and experiential means whereby academics construct the knowledge about teaching and learning that underpins their pedagogies. The research begins with my hunches (developed during previous research) that three key elements play a major role in supporting academics’ informal learning about teaching. These are:

1. previous experiences of learning;
2. experience of being part of a particular academic environment; and
3. personal or ‘private’ theories about teaching and learning that are experientially based.

I was therefore interested in events in participants’ lives, and I was interested in the connections between these and their thinking about pedagogy. I was also interested in participants’ reflections on their learning. I believed that face-to-face interviews allowed a deeper exploration of the ideas I was interested in. I was also looking forward to the interpersonal exchanges, which this method makes possible, and I hoped to be able to develop close relationships with participants. I wanted
the research to be productive for participants as well as for me, and I hoped they would enjoy talking about teaching in a focused way during longish interviews (one to two hours), conducted several times over a period of months or even years.⁶ I wanted there to be benefits for these people in return for their anticipated generosity. I saw myself potentially as a mentor/counsellor of sorts in this process, guiding reflections so that people would be more able to “be themselves” as teachers (Palmer, 1998, p. 12). I also wanted the experience to be authentic for all of us, which for me meant that I had to be a real presence in the research (not the third person researcher) as an attentive audience for their reflections. I wanted to have conversations and develop relationships.

The considerations I had in mind when collecting data are characteristic of qualitative inquiry. They included:

- an awareness of the context-specific nature of the findings;
- the study of a small number of participants;
- the collection of qualitative (oral and written) not quantitative (numerical or statistical) data;
- a focus on personal contact and close involvement of the researcher with the researched;
- the collection of detailed, ‘thick’ descriptions;
- a flexible research design, which enables a change in focus as the research develops. (Sarantakos 1993, p. 46)

These approaches relate not just to research design but also to the approaches taken to methods of data collection and data analysis; the “research problems, research design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches should . . . all

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⁶ A constant complaint in the department in which I teach is that we never have time to talk to one another about our teaching except in snatched moments in corridors and car parks. I welcomed the idea that the research would provide a justification for me to engage in some in-depth conversations.
imply one another” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 11). These broad characteristics provide a framework for discussing how I designed and conducted the research.

THE CONTEXT-SPECIFIC NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

I intended to design this study in a way that would enable me to be responsive both to the context I was working in and to the themes and ideas that would emerge. I have found it useful to adopt ethnographic methods, even though this is not a true ethnography. Doing this has enabled me to foreground the context-specific nature of the research, acknowledging that “social action and human experience are … highly contextualised” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 25). It has also enabled me to acknowledge and utilise my presence in the research, as well as my membership of the culture I am researching, by including myself as a ‘participant observer’ (Sarantakos, 1993, pp. 230-231).

Ethnography in its classic form is an anthropological method used to research other peoples and other cultures (Sarantakos, 1993; Neuman, 2000). Ethnography can be simply descriptive — what is this culture like? How does it operate? What are its characteristic practices? — or critical, consisting of an analysis of the relationships between social practices and overarching organisational principles (Lather, 1991b; Scheper-Hughes, 1993; Carspecken, 1996). The usual ethnographic method involves data collection through participant observation and interviewing. The data is collected while the researcher lives with people being studied, as a ‘participant observer’ (Neuman, 2000).

I have drawn freely on the concept of ‘participant observer’ in designing this research project, since as a university teacher I am more intimately acquainted with the culture I am observing than is characteristic of traditional ethnography. I have
already described how my experiences in the earlier FLIP project provided the initial conceptual framework for this research. This earlier experience (see Chapters 1 and 6) also suggested the value of an ethnographic approach within educational research. In the earlier project, my role resembled that of the teacher/facilitator in a cognitive apprenticeship relationship (Rogoff, 1990; Bonk & Kim, 1998). I was ‘modelling’, ‘scaffolding’, ‘coaching’, and attempting to ‘fade’ as the new approaches became grafted onto the existing teaching and learning practices. Being absorbed in these roles, which were integral to the action research process, I failed to be aware that I was also in a role as a participant observer, and that I could just as well have been conducting ethnography. So while the intention had been to conduct an action research project, it fell out that I was also (without intending to) conducting ethnography. Had I understood this from the beginning, I have no doubt we would have approached the action research part of the project from a wholly different perspective, since (as I have discussed) our failure to take cultural aspects into account hampered the action research process from start to finish. Though at the time I failed to recognise the alternative research potential in that situation — here was an ethnographic research project destined never to develop — nevertheless it contained the seeds of this one, in which I have become an ethnographer within and of ‘my’ own culture.

As an observer of an institutional culture of which I am already a member, I avoid the potentially oppressive practices associated with the ethnocentrism of an observer of a culture that is different from their own. In this case, my co-membership gives me credibility and acceptability as a researcher. However, what proves a benefit on one hand presents a problem on the other, since my co-membership makes it difficult for me to achieve a critical distance from the research
site. Observing a culture of which I am a member reduces considerably the potential for fresh insights, as much of the culture that would seem strange to an outsider will escape my attention. I have taken steps to respond to this problem, for example by talking to people other than university teachers (such as students, school teachers, family members and friends working in other fields) about the research and by recording their reactions. I am aware of the need to problematise commonsense attitudes and to try to see the familiar as if it were strange (S. Ball, personal communication, 13 Aug. 1999). In this sense, my reflexivity as a researcher will be constantly in play.

**Selection of Participants**

The research questions as well as the research process suggested that “purposive sampling” (Neuman, 2000) was an appropriate strategy for selecting participants. My aim was to work closely and in depth with a small number of participants, selecting individuals with a “specific purpose in mind” and in order to be able to conduct an “in-depth investigation” (Neuman, 2000). Participants represented “cases that are especially informative” (Neuman, 2000). I had two broad criteria for selection of participants. The first was success in teaching that had been recognised through institutional processes such as the winning of awards or promotion based on teaching achievements (rather than on research). The second was a willingness to talk at length about their teaching. For ease of access I worked with only seven people, three men and four women (though not chosen to be representative of their gender), teaching in the same university. Each was based in a different discipline area (although ‘discipline area’ proved a problematic concept for this group of academics, as will be discussed in Chapter 7).
I was looking for people who were known to be successful teachers. I had initially considered talking to both successful and unsuccessful teachers, with a view of attempting a comparison, but quickly abandoned the idea as being potentially unethical (how could I openly recruit unsuccessful teachers unless I explained that this was why they had been selected?) and lacking value (what would be gained from talking to unsuccessful teachers that would be useful for others?). I used flexible criteria for identifying ‘success’ in teaching. A person’s success in teaching might not be recognised simply through the winning of awards, since this alone does not imply that a person is able to reflect critically on their work. It could also be seen in their promotion for achievements in teaching rather than research, an expressed commitment to researching in teaching rather than in the person’s discipline area, or ‘on-the-grape-vine’ knowledge that so-and-so was a great teacher. Sometimes there were serendipitous discussions in corridors and cafés that indicated a person’s openness to reflecting on the problems of their teaching role. Once, someone told me about the reactions of colleagues when he had described himself as a “Socratic gadfly” in a departmental meeting about new teaching arrangements. Another person used the metaphor of “the bleeding teacher” in a discussion about how to manage students’ needs. These insights into teachers’ thinking about their teaching were too intriguing to ignore, and both people were eventually to become involved in the research. Brief biographical notes on each participant appear in Appendix I. A description of the setting appears in Chapter 7.

As the project developed, it became very clear that the conversations with people with whom I had already developed a close relationship were much more interesting, richer and more revealing than those I had with people who knew me less well. I understand from this that it is unfair, unrealistic and unethical to expect
people to disclose personal information unless there is already a personal relationship that supports disclosure. It was this aspect that led me to involve people I knew even slightly, instead of inviting strangers to participate. There is a problem for the researcher in that personal connection leads to less distance, and it becomes more difficult to be critical, but the benefits of increased engagement and openness outweighed for me the disadvantages of familiarity with the participants. This is a further reminder of the importance of researcher reflexivity.

The selection of participants was also dependent on who was prepared to commit themselves to a project that would involve a considerable amount of time and would certainly require a preparedness to disclose aspects of their personal lives that might be difficult or even painful.

**Collecting qualitative data: the interview**

I have used face-to-face, open-ended and semi-structured interviews (Sarantakos, 1993; Carspecken, 1996; Gillham, 2000) as the principal method of data collection. In addition, I have observed participants teach or give presentations and, with permission, drawn on written materials provided by participants including published papers related to teaching, course guides and teaching portfolios.

There are a number of reasons why I chose semi-structured interviews, as opposed to structured interviews or questionnaires. First, they allowed me to shape the discussion to some extent while also giving participants greater freedom to direct its progress. The use of open questions facilitates this. Using this approach, the researcher is more likely to obtain unexpected responses. The approach also allows participants to focus on what is really important to them, rather than limit
the issues discussed to what the researcher believes to be important.\footnote{For example, in identifying what is most important to the participant in an interview, it is worth noting their first response to a question (S. Ball, personal communication, 13 Aug. 1999).} This for me was a major reason to use semi-structured interviews as a “framing device” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 29) – the opening up of new possibilities. I was also interested in the potential of the interview for jointly developing new insights (Tripp, 1983), and to this end used the concept of the “active interview” in which interviewer and interviewee are jointly engaged in meaning making (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, 2002).

Feminist research also makes much use of semi-structured interviews because of the possibilities for openness, and hence the possibility for giving voice to participants. It is argued that the interview is particularly suited to female researchers because it draws on skills in the traditional female role (Reinharz, 1992). The concept of ‘soft’ interviews (Sarantakos, 1993) was also important, where participants are guided through the interview process without putting pressure on them to answer when questions might be painful or distressing. I was aware that sensitive questions might be more difficult to answer in the interviewer’s presence and made such questions optional. As it happened, no one took up the option of not answering such questions, even though the discussions often strayed into sensitive territory.

The interviewer’s understanding of her role and of the implications this has for the kind of data collected (which is related to the interviewee’s level of anxiety and feelings of safety) is essential. I drew on the practices of “receptive” interviewers, in which the researcher’s role is that of the “empathic listener” rather than the person who asks questions (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 186). I understood an
interview to be a cooperative process and an “active, meaning-making occasion” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002, p. 117). While I organised the interviews to enable a focus on issues that I wanted to explore, the questions used were little more than prompts or cues to open up opportunities for talk (see Appendix II). I saw my role as an active listener and tried to make my presence as unobtrusive as possible by using minimal verbal interventions. I found that usually I would only need to ask the first question to generate a conversation that shaped itself, often taking in the other concepts I had planned to include. I saw the concepts that appeared spontaneously in the interviews as being as important as those that arose from prompts. To encourage this, I followed Gillham’s (2000) suggestion that a research interviewer needs to listen well and say little and drew on Carspecken’s typology of interview responses, in which he warns against interviewing in a “leading” manner. Instead, the use of “bland encouragements,” “low inference paraphrasing,” “nonleading leads” and “active listening” are suggested in order to facilitate disclosure and avoid leading participants into assenting to statements or views they do not in fact agree with (1996, pp. 158-162). I therefore used extremely gentle interventions, from nods and smiles at the lowest level, through verbal encouragements (“I see,” “Yes,” and “Can you tell me more?”) through to checking understanding by paraphrasing (“So what you seem to be saying is …” and “Have I got this right?”). The interview transcript was a valuable tool for checking how much talking I actually did! I include discussions of instances where the interview-conversations took unexpected directions in Chapters 5, 7 and 9.

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8 I was interested in whether the teachers ever made their pedagogy explicit to their students, or discussed their pedagogy with them. Rather than ask a leading question to this effect (which would not necessarily reveal the importance of this for the teachers’ practice) I would use ‘nonleading leads’. For example, I asked participants to tell me about how they would like to change their teaching, and why. I judged that this would provide an opportunity for teachers to mention discussions with students if this was important. If this aspect did arise in the conversation, I would then pursue it.
I was concerned to preserve participants’ rights to control the information I had collected about them, in keeping with an emancipatory approach to research (Lather, 1991b). The interviews were taped and transcribed by me. Transcriptions were then sent to participants for their approval. I invited them to amend, edit or comment as they wished, in spite of the possible risk of thereby achieving a skewed picture. At every further stage of the research process, participants have had access to all writing that is based on information they have provided and their agreement to make this information public has been sought, and in fact no one has offered any amendments or requested changes. The only comments I received were to provide additional clarification or were further reflective comments on the interviews. The question cues/prompts appear in Appendix II.

THE PERSONAL CONTACT AND CLOSE INVOLVEMENT OF THE RESEARCHER WITH THE RESEARCHED

I have already discussed my decision to work with people whom I knew well. Every participant in the research was on the staff of the institution where I was working when I conducted the research. I had prior personal contacts with six of the seven participants. The other person I came to know better as part of the research process. As the research progressed, I found that the process continued beyond the formal data collection period. I would bump into participants regularly, and our conversation would often pick up from where the last interview had left off. I was able to maintain a sense of how participants’ thinking was moving on as a result of our work together. Some participants continued to email me with new ideas or insights. Others would update me on issues or problems we had discussed. Thus
the research process triggered a closer association between us, and in particular it opened up many possibilities for talking about teaching.

Throughout the period of data collection (and beyond), I kept a research journal to record ‘thick’ descriptions (Neuman, 2000) of naturally occurring data (Silverman, 2001) such as conversations, records of meetings and reflections. I have included the following extract from the research journal to give a sense of my ‘personal contact and close involvement’ with participants.

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I am on the telephone to Lindsey, setting up the first interview. We have had many corridor/coffee room conversations in the past about teaching and the institution we both work in. I know she enjoys talking about teaching, and I see her as a person who is reflective about her practice – by which I mean that she thinks about it all the time and is always changing and re-working to make it better. I have the impression that she employs an experiential learning/action learning framework when thinking about her practice. She is well known as an excellent teacher both within and outside her department. (Six months before she won one of the university’s prestigious Vice Chancellor’s Excellence in Teaching Awards.) I tell her all this when I speak on the telephone. She already knows about my research and has expressed an interest and a willingness to help. This is the first time I have asked her formally to be involved. She’s delighted to be considered a teacher worth researching. With much difficulty we manage to fix a time. She wants to come to my office — says it will be less distracting to be away from telephone calls and visits from students. I agree to this. I don’t tell her in advance what the specific questions are, just the focus of the interview. I say I will supply refreshments for an interview that may take two hours. We both express the hope that nothing will happen to prevent us from meeting. I put down the phone and feel pleased and reassured. I think about what a warm and generous person Lindsey is. She agreed without hesitation and said how flattered she was to be asked. I am very excited about talking to her.
We are sitting in my office, the door closed, the fan on and the phone off the book. I have inserted fresh batteries, and have a good supply of spares. The tape recorder is working (I have just tested it) and I have pushed it across the table as close as possible to Lindsey without it being in the way. I hope the noise of the fan isn’t so loud that it drowns out our voices in the recording. Lindsey has the remains of a nasty chest cold and I offer her juice. I want to look after her – to match her generosity to me in some small way. She has prepared by completing the consent letter that I left with her a week ago. We begin our conversation.

It is some months after our first interview, and this is the last time we will be meeting. Next week Lindsey is going overseas for at least three years. Our final interview is overshadowed by her sense of excitement, but also regret that she has to leave her local projects unfinished until she returns. We are both subdued because she’s leaving, but I am also eager to collect as much as I can because it will be difficult to engage again at this level. When the interview ends we hug, and there are some tears. I give her a thank you gift of some chocolates and a card. I have not seen her since.

It surprises me that my engagement with these people has been so personal. It is impossible not to be present in the interview when the process leads to this intimate connection with people’s lives. But while this close connection may allow me to explore participants’ responses to the questions at a more personal level, it also leaves open to question my ability to be objective or critical. During the analysis process I have therefore experimented with different ways of approaching the research data in order to achieve a greater ‘distance’ from the people. These are discussed in the later section on data analysis.
‘Thick’ Descriptions

Part of the role of the participant observer is to collect preliminary data, which is then used to inform and direct the more focused study (Carspecken, 1993). This requires the collection of ‘thick’ descriptions, in which more and more data is collected about less and less and the field of inquiry is gradually narrowed down until ‘saturation’ is achieved (S. Ball, personal communication, 13 Aug. 1999; Neuman, 2000). In this case, I began collecting ‘thick’ descriptions from observations made during the earlier research in the FLIP project, and these have been used to identify the key conceptual issues for this research (see Chapters 1 and 6). I have continued making descriptions of aspects of university teaching throughout this research, drawing on observations of teachers in action, discussions with students, ‘professional development’ events and conferences and presentations on university teaching. As I observed, read, made notes and kept reflective journals, my engagement with the process grew to the extent that it became impossible to tell where my research ended and my work as an academic began. I have been able to use the research notes and observations to inform my teaching, and my teaching experiences have been woven into my research notes.

I have used some of the significant ‘thick’ descriptions as the basis of the three autobiographical chapters (Chapters 4, 6 and 8). These reflexive accounts also perform a function as the researcher’s position statements, enabling me to be an explicit presence throughout the dissertation, and allowing readers to gauge the credibility of my analysis.
FLEXIBLE RESEARCH DESIGN

I referred earlier to my intention to design this study using flexible models or patterns that would allow for changes in light of participants’ contributions. When conducting the interviews, I found that conversations developed their own shape and went in unanticipated directions. I used the concept of the “active interview” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002; 1995) to respond flexibly to the direction each participant took. It was often necessary to change the focus of the interview in order to reflect this. It was important to be aware that participants had experiences and views that were different from my own. To avoid my own understandings misdirecting the interview, I had to be aware of the need for continuous reconstruction of meanings. As an “active” interviewer, I saw my role as “activating narrative production” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002, p. 121: original emphasis). I used a responsive approach to the interview process. This allowed me to accept unexpected developments, suggest directions and invite elaboration in order to “activate” the production of narrative. Overall, the structure of the project into three distinct phases made it possible to feed ideas that emerged from the first phase into the second, and then into the third. While the original focus remained, subtle changes did occur which helped me to link my inquiry more cohesively across the phases.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collection method both constrains and enables the kind of data that can be collected and also the kind of analysis that is possible. Because one of my aims was to provide opportunities for participants’ voices to be heard I relied extensively on
participants’ own words and their own experiences as the basis for discussion. I therefore expected my data to be wide-ranging and to take me up unexpected pathways. I used participants’ words and experiences as the basis for interpretation and therefore needed to allow the ideas to “well up” from the data (S. Ball, personal communication, 13 Aug. 1999). As far as possible I intended to allow the data to speak for themselves. That being so, my approach to analysis was dependent on the data that emerged. I chose from a range of analytical methods according to what is best suited to the data that was being handled.

Data collection and analysis are interconnected, since analysis and interpretation occur not only after data collection but also throughout the research process, informing each stage (Carspecken, 1996; Neuman, 2000). This process, of “reconstructing meanings” is “hermeneutic,” with “no hard and fast rules,” but which is nevertheless possible since “the researcher is a communicative being and can imagine herself within the situation being analysed, . . . a ‘virtual participant’ ” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 98). In this sense “analysis is less a distinct final stage of research than a dimension of research that stretches across all stages (Neuman, 2000, p. 419).

The approach taken to data analysis should ideally be linked to the research design and methods of data collection; the “research problems, research design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches should … all imply one another” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 11). In the case of this research project, the need for flexibility, which demanded the use of ‘semi-structured’ interviews for data collection, also applied to the process of data analysis. I therefore began writing about data as early as possible, developing a system for analysis after each interview and continuing to “ask questions of the data” as I worked through it (Neuman,
I did not anticipate the emergence of particular themes or patterns by pre-coding, since this would not have enabled me to take account of possible “narrative shifting” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 55) as the interviews progressed. This process of continuous identification of key themes helped focus the subsequent research; data collection and data analysis went on hand in hand, the one informing and supporting the other.

Views such as Neuman’s (2000), that a flexible approach to coding is desirable in qualitative research since data in the form of words “are relatively imprecise, diffuse, and context-based, and can have more than one meaning” (Neuman, 2000, p. 419), supported my decision to conduct the analysis ‘by hand’. I decided that without the help of analytical tools, such as NUD*IST software, I would be able to open up more possibilities for flexible analysis and interpretation. This decision meant that I could take into account the shifts in narrative as the interview unfolded (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, pp. 56-57). I was also able to catch the changing mood of the interviews, signalled by moments of silence, hesitation, laughter, whispering, emphatic declarations and so on. Often, these kinds of “interactional ingredients” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002) conveyed messages that were as important as the words. At times they would provide a powerful emphatic underscoring of the verbal message; at others they could undermine or contradict what the words seemed to say.

I developed a system for coding data based loosely on “open” then “axial” and finally “selective” coding (Neuman, 2000, pp. 421-423). Initial coding was based around a search in the transcripts and supporting data (written material provided by participants and my own observation notes) for patterns and broad themes relevant to each individual. The theme of the teacher influence (both
negative and positive) emerged at this stage. Exploring this broad theme using axial coding, I searched for the qualities these significant teachers had in common for the whole participant group and found that participants valued a range of different qualities in their teachers. Having elaborated on the initial theme in this way, I then returned to the data to select the best examples for discussion and analysis of the qualities that significant teachers possessed. My goal was to “organize a large quantity of specific details into a coherent picture, model or set of interlocked concepts” (Neuman, 2000, p. 419).

The cyclical nature of analysis in qualitative research makes it difficult to be definitive in laying out analysis methods (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 10). The diverse and eclectic nature of qualitative research is well documented, for example Carspecken (1996), Coffey and Atkinson (1996), Sarantakos (1993). This diversity is found not only in the variety of data collection processes adopted by qualitative researchers but also in the methods used for analysis of data. The idea of ‘bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) characterises this well. The choice of analytical (or interpretative) procedures depends on the nature of the emerging data. In response to the changing nature of the data as it emerged I used a range of approaches to interpretation. These included identification of common and contrasting threads of experience; analysis and recreation of biographical narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995; Oehs and Capps, 2002); discourse analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Gee, 1999); and metaphor analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981; Parker, 1997).

This description of the coding process, drawing on Neuman’s (2000) descriptions of qualitative analysis, loosely explains the techniques used but does not convey the sense of creativity and discovery I learned to associate with analysis. For Wolcott, cited in Coffey and Atkinson (1996), there is a process coming after
analysis (that involves “systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships”) which he calls ‘interpretation’: this is “the threshold in thinking and writing … at which the researcher transcends factual data and cautious analysis and begins to probe into what is to be made of them.” Interpretation is “freewheeling, casual, unbounded, aesthetically satisfying, idealistic, generative, and impassioned” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 9). I leaned toward this notion of ‘interpretation’ when analysing the research data.

As the analysis proceeded I began to adopt a ‘freewheeling’ approach, which helped me achieve a richer, more complex understanding of the data. I mentioned earlier the problem of achieving critical distance when I had become so personally connected with participants. One approach I used to address this was to read and re-read interview transcripts in a different order each time. I found that if I started with participant A, when I moved on to B my reading of her transcript would be coloured by what I had been most struck by in A’s interview and I would risk losing sight of the essence of B’s thinking. Sitting down some time later, I would begin with B, then move back to A and find new themes coming out there, reflecting the ideas I had picked up in B’s interview. I therefore used different sequences when analysing, so that I would approach each transcript several times and set each person against someone different on each occasion. This enabled me to both remain alert and sensitive to each person’s individual thinking while also helping me to catch the resonances of slighter themes as they emerged more strongly in the next person’s thinking. For example it wasn’t until I started reading transcripts from the first phase in a different order that I spotted an emerging theme of early involvement in sport. I thus developed a process of intra-phase and inter-phase
analysis to build up a sense of each person’s stories across the research as a whole as well as in terms of each separate phase.

Ultimately the goal of my analysis was to show how what was said related to the experiences and the lives being studied (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) as a way to then “produce explanations … which have a wider resonance” (Mason, 1996, in Silverman, 2001, p. 249). I hope my research both reflects the lives and experiences of the participants and also has resonance for other teachers who may read it and who will be inspired to reflexively explore their own identities as teachers.
CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL MOMENTS IN A TEACHING BIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Teaching biographies can reveal not only the person (Palmer, 1998) behind the teacher but also the values beneath the practices that teachers profess (Thomas, 1995). Biographies have a role in uncovering the beliefs and assumptions that teachers bring to their understanding of teaching processes (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001) and in heightening awareness of the social processes that help shape teachers’ lives (Connell, 1985). There is therefore a role for biography as a critical tool in exploring and interrupting hegemonic teaching practices (Luke and Gore, 1992; hooks, 1994; Jones, 1994; Maher and Tetreault, 1994; Mayberry and Rose, 1999). In the following chapters, in which I explore my own and the research participants’ teaching biographies, I use biography to reveal the person, to uncover the values and beliefs that inform that person’s practice and as a critical tool to explore those practices.

I include elements of my autobiography as a counterpoint to the biographies of the participants in the research. I focus on the same three broad research topics
(early learning, professional learning and theory use) for both autobiographical and biographical chapters; the discussion initiated in the autobiographical chapters is then developed via participants’ biographies. The autobiography also highlights the interpretive role of the individual in selecting or omitting events in the biographical narrative. My experiences have led me to view teaching from a critical perspective. I therefore use a critical perspective to explore incidents in my past that I choose specifically to foreground the interplay between my own life history and the “large scale social structures and dynamics” (Connell, 1985, p. 3) within which teaching takes place. The autobiographical chapters allow me to show how a consistent interpretive framework (in this case a critical perspective) might be applied to a life narrative. These chapters also serve to foreground my research position by uncovering the beliefs and values that shape my interpretation of participants’ life narratives.

This first chapter of my autobiography has a focus on the interplay between my gender, my social class and my emerging identity as a teacher. In Chapter 6, the second autobiographical chapter, I focus primarily on the impact that institutional structures have had on my professional learning. Finally in Chapter 8, I explore the dynamics of institutional power and race that are played out in a critical incident in my teaching.

SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN THE CLASSROOM

In my third year in school, aged about seven, I first began to take notice of what was happening around me in my class. I remember sitting right at the back, next to Janine, in a hard chair at a hard desk. We hardly moved from that spot for the whole year, for we were ‘top’ in our class. Me, Janine, Roy T. and Anthony. I
remember them — or ‘us’ — best. In front of us, the rows of desks snaked up to the front of the room, across and down to the back, then up to the front again. And right at the front, diagonally opposite us and right next to the door (so they could be sent out easily) and right under the teacher’s desk (so she could keep an eye on them) sat the boys who were ‘bottom’ in our class: Roy S. and Gordon. I don’t remember anyone in the middle, only us, at the top, and Roy S. and Gordon, at the bottom.

Roy S. and Gordon, the boys at the bottom of our class, probably remember that class too. They were constantly the objects of the teacher’s wrath, constantly held up as examples of naughtiness, constantly in trouble. Constantly in tears too: unable to read, unable to do anything right or be anything good. Their little bewildered faces stare out of the class photograph, and already there’s a hardening round the edges of their features. But even at the time it was clear to me that Roy S. and Gordon were important. In a class in which the iron hand of the enlightenment assigned a place for everything and everyone, in which we were compelled to be orderly and categorical, by being who they were they defined who I was. I was their ‘other’: everything they were not. I was top but, since I knew from their experiences what it would be like if ever I stopped being top, I knew I had to make sure I carried on being everything they were not. I dared not do anything else.

For most of that year we stayed where we were, in our allotted places. Then one Monday a new teacher was standing at the front. She was young, mobile, smiling, pretty: a student teacher. Miss Cheshire.

Miss Cheshire started moving us around. First she broke up the rows of desks and sat us in big groups. We sat next to all sorts of different people, so no one could be ‘top’ or ‘bottom’. Then when she read us stories we all left our desks
and sat in a huddle at Miss Cheshire’s feet. She read to us from the Sam Pig Storybook, about naughty little Sam Pig and his patient and clever sister Ann. Ann Pig loved her naughty little, fat little brother, and once made him a waistcoat, sewing on raindrops for buttons. Clever little Ann Pig. How do you sew raindrops on a waistcoat? What Roy S. and Gordon would have made of Ann Pig I can’t imagine, but I loved her. I wanted to be patient and clever like her, and I too had a naughty little brother whom I loved. So I wanted to be able to do something as wonderful for him as sewing on raindrops for buttons. Imagine being able to capture those glistening drops before they ran away to water down the front of the waistcoat.

But if anyone could capture raindrops in real life it was Miss Cheshire, for in her class it no longer mattered who was top and who was bottom; all that mattered was us, sitting there in the sunshine from the window, knowing that she loved all of us and believed every one of us could do the impossible.

Then one day Miss Cheshire told us she had to go back to her college.

We never saw her after that.

And I was top again.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Looking back I can see how easy it was for me to become a teacher, an academic and (even) a qualitative researcher. With a father and grandfather both teachers, the world of school was just like home to me. Reading, disputing, finding things out were what we did at home. Because I was so comfortable in the school culture I did well, was liked by the teachers, and so made to feel even more comfortable. I was singled out for special treatment and paraded in front of the audience at school concerts because I was clever and could be relied on to do the right thing. My
father was friendly with my primary school principal, so when one day my own friends and I needed to see Mr. Williams in his office I was naturally the one who felt comfortable knocking on his door.

Thinking about my life in school, I wonder if I identified more with the teachers than with the other children. This may account for the fact that I remember most clearly the children who fitted in least well to the school culture: my ‘others’, so to speak. Those children, who took up so much of the teachers’ time (which is perhaps why I remember them so clearly), were unlike the majority of the class members. The ‘invisible’ (to the teachers) majority children were average, well behaved, but unremarkable and hence blurred in my memory. I do vividly remember feeling very sorry for the children at the bottom of the pile, who were so different from me, and who had such a hard time of it at school. Although I, along with the rest of the class, was constantly being invited to see them through the teachers’ eyes, I still felt the unfairness of the treatment they received, not just at school but at home too. There seemed to me to be injustice there, and violence of every kind done to those children. I could not imagine what it must have been like to be Roy S. or Gordon. I just knew it must have been painful.

My own engagement with education was as comfortable as it was possible to be. It closely mirrored many aspects of my home life, since both valued and promoted the humanist (and also Christian) discourses of care for others and moral responsibility, alongside the Enlightenment ideals of pursuit of knowledge, rationality, order and control. However, looking back (and, if you like, beginning the story again) I now see that in many senses both home and school were sites of colonisation. Certainly I now see that both places were sites of colonisation for me as a female, since in both places I was encouraged to be male rather than female in
my intellectual habits and ambitions. Furthermore, the historical role models I was presented with at school were (apart from Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale, Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, queens Elizabeth and Victoria) male. I can remember very little in my formal education that privileged girls or women.

**Gendered Subjectivities**

One of the most influential adults of my childhood was my father’s father. A man of great compassion (for many years a devoted nursing volunteer in the local hospital) and humility (he taught himself to speak four languages but never told anyone) and from extremely humble origins (his own father was a ship’s carpenter who in times of hardship would rely on tips earned as a porter at the docks in Liverpool to feed a family of nine children) he became at the age of 55 the first member of his family to graduate from university. He loved discussion and debate. I recall vividly his weekly visits when he and I would engage in earnest and sometimes heated debate — about right and wrong, the meanings of poems, the nature of truth, the existence of gods — while the rest of the family looked on. It was here that I first watched another person use language precisely, think in a precise and rational way, and defend a viewpoint in debate. Out of the audience of adults only my father ever joined in the discussion, sometimes in my defence, sometimes not. My grandmother’s involvement consisted of attempts to stop my grandfather from “arguing with” (“upsetting”) me, while my mother was an interested but always silent non-participant. (It is with sadness that I now remember how both my grandmother and my mother would describe themselves as “not very intelligent.”) Thus my male relatives nurtured my rationality, objectivity and order, while the women in the family either attempted a futile resistance or
quietly encouraged the process. Of course in the world of the classroom, even in primary school (but more so as I moved along to grammar school and university), this early training in disputation enabled me to feel at home. The formal learning process became more male-dominated as I moved up the ladder (a masculine metaphor however you look at it), until at university only three out of fourteen teachers in my (English Literature) department were women. Comments by teachers about my “potential for scholarship,” my ability to express myself with clarity, my considerable knowledge about the subjects I studied, etc., etc., signal a successful initiation into a world of reason. I became the first female in my family (and the only one of my generation) to have a university degree.

Yet far and away the most significant adult of my early life was my mother. An onlooker during the debates, her wisdom and compassion came to the fore in every other aspect of my life for it was she who gave advice about living my daily life and she who taught me most about who I was, about how other people thought and felt, about the life of the emotions, about passion and compassion, about the value of negotiation and compromise.

I now know my mother’s teaching to be invaluable, and recognise that what I learnt from her was the most significant learning of my life. I regret not having been able to activate these understandings much earlier. When at university I discovered other people who were even better at rationality, objectivity and order than I was, all I recognised in myself was a deficiency rather than a difference. I would have liked to have been able to challenge the dominant processes in what I remember as a forum for intellectual muscle flexing, the tutorial, by suggesting some different, more collaborative approaches. These might have made it possible for me to ask questions rather than struggle to answer them, admit to ignorance rather than
feign knowledge, explore some unconventional readings of the texts rather than accept the canonical view. But the skills that might have enabled me to do this seemed neither valued nor even appropriate in that context. I question now the valorisation of mind over feelings that my formal, visible, public education represented, but I have to admit that I didn’t even realise that another kind of learning had been happening as I was taught to be female by example and by identification. At the time, all I saw was that I was more or less successful as I operated on masculine terms in a masculine environment. Now in retrospect I see myself as shifting across a number of positionings as I operated as a woman in a male world, in which maleness was valorised, in which my most powerful influence was female, yet where my femaleness counted for little except as a foil for maleness.

TEACHING AS COLONISATION

Maureen’s story

Even more powerful in school than the normalisation of masculine attributes were the processes whereby teaching became an act (or a series of acts) of colonisation for students who were ‘different’ in their orientation to school (who for example didn’t look after their pencils and books, weren’t eager to please the teacher, weren’t punctual), or who failed to match up to the expectations. I can see now how I was made complicit in this process since I wasn’t ‘different’. On the contrary, I had all the necessary and valued attributes to be seen as successful, and could therefore be held up as an ‘example’ (just like one might be asked to hold up a piece of work to show the rest of the class what to do). The process of colonisation involved an attempt to mould students until they matched up to the ideal. Until you matched up to this template you were in some way deficient. In fact there now seem many
parallels between the life and work of the teachers in my early years of schooling and the lives of the Christian missionaries we learnt about. Both groups were dedicated to the ‘betterment’ of the individuals in their care, and neither group (it appeared) doubted that what they were doing was in the best interests of their ‘flock’.

My identification with the teachers was to receive public confirmation when, as an older child, I began to be asked to help teach other children who were having learning difficulties of one kind or another. At first it was on an ad hoc basis with classmates, but in the final year of primary school I began to help a child in a different class who could not read. Maureen was about three years younger than I was. She was the youngest of three sisters, all of whom were known in school for their lack of scholasticism. Jackie, the eldest, was in my class at the time, and was withdrawn, unfriendly, silent. Jeannie, a year younger, had for a while been accorded heroine status in the school after an accident (which we had all witnessed) when the school bus reversed over her leg and broke it in several places. Jeannie now walked with a pronounced limp, which made her seem even more sullen, vulnerable and troubled than she had been before. Maureen, my pupil, was a contrast to her two ‘difficult’ sisters. She was sweet: friendly, pretty, chatty and sociable, and delighted to be singled out for special treatment. I sensed her need for friendship, her isolation from her two sisters (who showed no signs of wanting to be associated with their little sister, never mind look after her) and I quickly became enthusiastic and very committed to making a difference for Maureen. I would go and listen to her read in class most days, and increasingly I spent time with her at lunchtimes too. I loved ‘helping’; and the more she told me about her life the more I wanted to help. I developed a fascination for Maureen, sensing how
different her life was from mine, and began more and more to see her as a victim who needed to be rescued (by me). I relished my role as a saviour. Then one day Maureen invited me to her house for tea.

She lived five minutes’ walk away from me. There was her mother, in the grease-splattered kitchen. She was cooking chips for our tea. It looked as if they ate nothing else. The grease ran down the chip pan and covered the stove. It had formed a solid layer on the kitchen wall behind the cooker. It had splashed on the floor and been trodden in and was now integral with the floor covering. The sink was overflowing with unwashed dishes. There was little furniture in the living room, and what was there was broken and filthy. The house had an unpleasantly pungent smell. Maureen’s mother had Jackie’s look of painful resignation, but was watchful, as if she expected at any time to be hurt. She was very thin, unkempt. She looked too young. She greeted me deferentially and apologised for the mess. I was a ten-year-old child.

After the tea I went home in shock. I had never imagined that people could live like that. The contrast between my clean, bright, warm, comforting house, and the arms of my warm, comforting, smiling mother, and what Maureen had, could not have been greater. I was devastated, outraged, felt helpless, then determined. It was wrong that someone should have to live like that! It would be my responsibility in life to make things better for people like Maureen; to help others have the things I had.

So it seems now that this was the point at which I began my own emancipatory project in education, which is still going on although the zeal is tempered with experience and a strong dose of critical theory. Ironically (and, one might say, as was only to be expected) shortly after this experience, which changed
forever the way I understood the world, I abandoned Maureen. I went to grammar school. It became difficult to find time to meet, and I lost contact with her. I hope the adolescent might be forgiven for failing to recognise the interplay of power and privilege that infected my friendship with Maureen, but as an adult I find the memory sobering and difficult. As a result of my privileged position, which not only enabled me to succeed at school and therefore be cast as ‘saviour’ of Maureen (and other ‘others’ like her), I had the power which she didn’t have to escape when things became difficult and to move out of her life. I now see that my privilege was what made her oppression; only because of my privilege could I engage in her life, and she would never have been in a position to engage in mine in that invasive way. Whereas I did know that I compounded her oppression by withdrawing my support, what I didn’t think of until much later is that the greater act of oppression was perhaps to offer support and friendship in the first place, for this held out a promise of what might have been but never could be for her.

I now believe that Maureen taught me more than I ever taught her, for she revealed to me new perspectives of my identity. I look back and catch myself in the act of being subjectified as ‘normal’, becoming the ‘other’ to Maureen and her sisters. Without them, would I be who I am now? How might I see myself were it not for the lens of Maureen’s life?

VALUES IN THE CLASSROOM

The school teacher

It is now many years since I lived through this experience, and in the meantime of course I became a teacher. My decision to become a teacher was not unconnected with my relationship with Maureen and an associated desire to make things better
for people like her. Thus, I consciously began to look for an identity as a teacher who genuinely had students’ interests at heart, developed close and supportive relationships with them, and encouraged them to assume as much control of their learning as possible. This ambition was supported and legitimised by some of the educational philosophies I encountered. Postman and Weingartner (1971) encouraged my inclination towards resistance, and I found the idea of Socrates’ dialectical method, whereby education became a series of conversations with the student on near-equal terms with the master, thrilling. My postgraduate teacher training led me to value freedom of expression, creativity and experiential learning, yet showed me nothing of the political or social realities which enabled me to participate in academic life, unhindered by concerns about where my next meal was coming from, while many of the students I began to meet in schools had lives which were mirror images of Maureen’s.

It was a small step from all this to the construction of myself as a radical teacher, challenging the conservatism of the school staffroom and seeking out new and more egalitarian relationships with my students while promoting the transformative and life changing potential of education. Yet while on the one hand I grew increasingly suspicious of the all-knowing, authoritarian model of the teacher (being too aware of the limitations of my own knowledge) and became resistant to the pressure to impose an arbitrary system of control on my students, on the other most of my early learning on-the-job actually related to discovering ways to exercise power effectively. This in retrospect (see Chapter 6) came down to trying to learn how to do what other people did when they exercised power. This was a major focus at first, but once I had acquired the aura of experience students rarely questioned my legitimacy, partly I suspect because I was seen to be on their side.
Perhaps for this reason I saw no need to question my own legitimacy either. So as long as I believed that I was genuinely allowing students to have more control of their learning, the extent to which I was reproducing and exploiting existing power relations in the classroom remained invisible to me. While my own leanings were increasingly towards helping students gain greater independence in learning, I continued to act on the assumption that as a teacher I had legitimate power to decide what was good for my students. In spite of many radical leanings, for many years I failed to recognise the process whereby I was subjectified as a teacher by discourses that equate good teaching with the exercise of control.

The success of the relationships I had with my students appeared to me then a consequence of my egalitarian practices, which encouraged the exercise of autonomy and independence in students. Now I see that something else was happening: the power relations that subjectified me as a school student were also in play. This was a re-working of that missionary/evangelistic impetus to make us, the students, as like them, the teachers, as possible. While I believed that as a teacher my orientation towards my students was significantly different from that of the majority of my teaching colleagues – in fact I still believe it was – nevertheless my motivation was still to make my students as like me as possible. I didn’t consider that I could be helping to make students become more like themselves.

You will remember that my early training in the home to be an intellectual focused on the development of ‘masculine’ attributes such as analytical thinking and logical discussion. I remember as a young teacher believing I was enacting feminist principles by showing girl students other ways of being girls, and being very affected by the desire to ‘rescue’ a group of girls who, while they were ‘quite bright’, had rejected the liberal feminist ideas of the time that girls (especially those who were
‘quite bright’) should gain qualifications and pursue careers. They spoke to me of their fascination for boys and motorbikes, and I remember trying earnestly to re-orient them to thinking about Shakespeare, Emily Brontë, their studies, and their futures. I told them, “Be like me. Be a different kind of girl than the one you are,” instead of asking, “How is it that you have come to think like this?” and not realising that I could also have been asking that question of myself.

Maureen was the first person who showed me ‘difference’, but I had yet to gain a sense of my own, by and large, non-difference: had yet to see my comfortable fit with most of the dominant values of the schools in which I taught. It is ironic that my early encounters with the culture of schools as a teacher only confirmed my notion that I actually was ‘different’. By virtue of my gender I was often aware of being seen as different. I remember being ‘othered’ by fellow (maths and male) teacher education students at our first tutorial. “Oh yes, you look as though you teach drama. Very arty, with those curls and long skirts.” When one of my (male) tutors hinted at my difference when he noted that my class seemed to be working quite well in spite of my ‘unobtrusiveness’ in the (very noisy) drama classroom, I didn’t know if I should interpret this as a compliment, a criticism, or incomprehension on his part. After some thought I chose the last interpretation and took it as a further indication of my success as a radical, student-centred, ‘different’ teacher, allowing my students to celebrate their creativity in an atmosphere of freedom which challenged the culture of order and control promoted by the school.⁹

Had I been able to reflect more critically, I would have been aware of the contradictions inherent in the demand that we allow freedom of student expression in this school’s culture of control and this, in turn, might have taught me to look more searchingly at how I was learning to behave. At the time I read this comment simply as an indication of my own deficiencies as a teacher.

⁹
University teaching

I have had a happy and exhilarating career as a teacher. I get on well with students. I like students, enjoy supporting them, talking to them, sharing ideas with them, learning alongside them. I have taught students of all ages and of diverse cultural and class backgrounds. I get good feedback from students about my teaching. It seems that students rarely resist my methods; I can count on one hand those who have openly challenged my approach. The catalogue of experiences from which I have learnt to be (as I see it) a ‘better’ teacher is long, and includes vivid memories of individual students, moments of revelation, moments when the ground was suddenly dashed from under my feet, times of achievement and great fulfilment, and times of extreme discomfort and stress. It is an unfinished journey: a process of becoming (even though I began teaching nearly thirty years ago) the best teacher I can be. When you’re in the thick of it, when you feel that students are with you, when learning is happening and you feel, on the whole and at the end of the day and all in all, exhilarated by the dynamics of learning and communicating with students, it’s confronting when you suddenly realise that the values underpinning your own pedagogy are not shared by everyone.

After ten years spent teaching in high schools, I was appointed as lecturer in a University School of Education. At first it surprised me that I could feel at home in a university. My early adult life as a high school teacher and part-time literacy tutor had found me dealing with the emotionally charged lives of adolescents and supporting students who frequently found learning very difficult. I initially felt fraudulent and out of place in the rarefied atmosphere of intellectual rigour in the university. However the nature of the work of a department of education had a different character from the English and philosophy departments I had known as
an undergraduate, and it turned out that my professional expertise was not just in short supply here but also highly valued. I had freedom to develop the radical approaches to the practice of teaching that interested me, and from a modest beginning (drama workshops every Monday morning for the English students), within two years I was a member of a team introducing group-based independent learning to students in the compulsory core unit in education studies.

There was an energy and optimism about this experience that I found intoxicating. Here I was, finally able to do something that was really different. The praxis which I had been developing, based on principles of equity, collaboration and respect for the learner, and polished in high school classrooms and the front rooms of adult literacy students, was now being welcomed with relief by students more familiar with a more authoritative, formal and competitive classroom culture. What was particularly memorable about this time was the sense of collaboration generated between and among students and the staff team I was part of, as if we were engaged in more than just helping students complete the course. There was a sense of community endeavour, of shared conversations about learning, of working together to make things different, of welcoming change even though it could be messy. There was an element of evangelism in this too. I saw my own students as willing disciples, spreading the word about empowerment through learning in the schools where they would eventually teach. Missionary work again. In particular I recall experiences such as participating in new forms of group learning and being in student-led tutorials as a participant rather than an assessor. It was exciting to be beginning to work with students to blur the edges between teacher and student.
The Liverpool Experiment

We were part of a wider process of rethinking the practice of university teaching and learning in the UK. I was one of a team of teachers from the School of Education at Liverpool University to make a bid for funding from the national Higher Education grant-awarding body to support the extension of our work to other professional schools in the university. As a group we felt there was the potential to make a big impact. We foresaw few problems as we checked off the necessary conditions for a successful project. Enough time? We’ll use buy-out money when things get tough. Clear goals? We’ll build in regular meetings and each take a partner to work alongside during the early stages. Expertise? There was plenty of experience at least, and probably more expertise in teaching and learning than might be found elsewhere in the university. Efficient organisation? The phases had been planned to the last detail . . . and so on. Our collective commitment and group cohesion were remarkable. Everyone was energised by the potential of this project to make a difference, and what’s more we had a number of very interested professional schools looking for involvement.

A more detailed discussion of this experience is found in Chapter 6. I mention it here to illustrate that everyone does not share the values that underpin your own pedagogy, for the main barriers to progress came not from the tutors’ lack of experience or expertise but from the very different orientations they had collectively developed towards the processes of teaching and learning. Our approach was based on themes of equity, tutor power and student rights, which broke down into specific issues of gender, race, and cultural diversity, and further into notions about ability, what is learning, what is teaching, what is achievement, and so on. Tutors’ resistance to the project, shown by a desire to revert to familiar
styles of interaction and by different understandings of inequities and diversity, was indicative of how much their core values differed from ours. Where we valued student autonomy in learning and developed strengths in a teacher-as-facilitator role in order to achieve this, the tutors we worked with valued their roles as experts with deep specialised knowledge of relevant theory and practice. While we believed that the teaching and learning process should be democratic, other tutors nurtured and favoured students’ uniqueness, creativity and idiosyncratic behaviour, and fostered a competitive ethos. We were mistaken to begin with an assumption that participants would share our understandings of what was good practice in teaching and learning.

**Teaching as Colonisation (2)**

I wrote earlier about the ways in which the culture of my family and the culture of the primary and high schools I attended were barely differentiated. Not only did this process of enculturation make it easy for me to adjust to the culture of schools, it also helped make me the teacher I have become. This process of enculturation has continued in my professional life; there is evidence of the process at work where I have described the satisfaction of identifying with like minds in the School of Education. But it was only through exposure to interrogation by other academics (architecture tutors) from their position of cultural difference that I finally began to see for myself my own cultural specificity. With a slow dawning, what had been invisible (my having been constructed in a particular way) became a bright glare. What had seemed to me to be simply common sense was revealed as the product of over thirty years of socialisation and enculturation.

In retrospect the quality of my experiences, as both learner and teacher, appeared seamless up to this point. One flowed naturally into the other. I readily
saw connections, how each teaching event seemed to have occurred simply to illuminate the previous ones, how the paths appeared smooth and straight. How far had my limited vision prevented me from seeing both possibilities and dangers — detours, forks in the road, potholes and “Road Closed” signs? It is impossible to know whether the patterns are imposed retrospectively; yet in the comparatively recent ‘Liverpool Experiment,’ the same script was played out. I have critiqued my desire to help students, to be just, to be gentle, to create safety in learning as an aspect of the colonial/missionary script, which is enacted in my teaching practices when I try to make people think, feel, and act like I do. I am led to question how well this script can accommodate the ‘other’, not just another who is demonstrably very different from me in class and educational background (Maureen) but even those others (other university tutors) who are more like me than not in race, class, educational background, culture and gender.

A fascinating question arises. If the difference between tutors in other schools in the university and us was negligible in terms of more surface social and cultural dimensions, then where were the origins of this difference?

If we see that ‘culture’ is not just linked to ethnicity, religion, family history, class but is also present in institutions, classrooms, and among people who develop shared practices, patterns of behaviour, and understandings about how to think, behave, interact, then this is where difference can be detected. Arguably, any group of people engaged in regular contact with one another will institutionalise their members similarly. So just as, when a teacher, I encountered students who had not experienced the same precise and deliberate preparation for schooling that I had, I had no way of relating to them other than to encourage them to become better orientated in the ways I valued. So as one academic interacting with others whose
culture was different from mine, and not knowing where they were positioned, the process became a form of colonisation. “They” were the ones having to do most of the connecting, the cross-cultural negotiation, and the adaptation to my/our ways of being. I will discuss in detail in Chapter 8 the links between the process of education and the process of colonisation where the coloniser is seen as educator. Leela Gandhi describes the process as the “colonial ‘civilising mission’ which is fashioned . . . as a form of tutelage . . . concerned with bringing the colonised to maturity” (1998, p. 32). It is enough here to indicate my understanding that, similarly, the educator can be seen as coloniser.

**THE REFLEXIVE TEACHER**

In this chapter I have explored aspects of the informal and experiential means whereby I have constructed the knowledge about teaching and learning that underpins my pedagogy, as I now understand it. The experiences I have selected relate specifically to the development of this pedagogy. They are drawn from family settings, and from school and university settings where I have experienced being a learner and being a teacher. I have presented a limited range of ideas and experiences, and the narrative has been mediated through particular sets of lenses that make most sense to me at the time of writing. As Kolb (1984) suggests, experiential learning occurs when reflection on experience is developed into new conceptual constructs, which in turn enable a different perspective with which to reflect on experience. Hence it is possible to constantly revisit and rethink experiences in the light of new ones. I have re-evaluated my understanding of my association with Maureen in the light of later learning and associated concept formation. In another sense of the word, I have used the lenses of early learning,
student response, conversations with colleagues and theoretical literature to reflect critically (Brookfield, 1995) on these experiences. But reflections on the narrative are also mediated through particular ideological lenses, in my case a socially critical perspective. I also present the incidents from ‘my’ perspective, and in selecting reflexively from a lifetime of experiences I can present a consistent picture of who I am. The process of representing life narratives is therefore part of the process of maintaining one’s identity, and an understanding of biography is therefore a means of understanding identity.

I have gathered experiences that constitute significant aspects of my biography, or the “ongoing ‘story’ about the self” that reflects a “stable sense of self-identity” (Giddens, 1991, p. 54). Although a number of different lenses have been used to view the life narrative, the experiences have been deliberately chosen to convey a coherent self-identity. Understanding self-identity involves a “reflexive awareness” of the self (Giddens, 1991, p. 52). This reflexive awareness is “constituted vis-à-vis others in terms of similarity and difference” and individual identity “is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people” (Jenkins, 1996, pp. 29 & 20). Hence an important aspect of understanding self-identity is the understanding of where one ‘fits’ in relation to other people (such as, in my example, other women, other students and other teachers). A reflexive awareness of the social world also includes an understanding of how one’s own and other people’s life histories are situated in social, historical, cultural, political contexts. It is essential to examine the interplay between our cultural practices, our beliefs and values and our personal history: the processes by which we have been constituted and the way in which we operate our day-to-day lives: in order to make
visible the taken-for-granted cultural practices that underpin our thinking and praxis (Shea, 1996; Giroux, 1995).

During our work in Liverpool we had failed to understand and take account of this interplay between our cultural practices, our beliefs and values and our personal history. We assumed a present without a history for everyone involved, a history during which a set of taken for granted understandings about the nature of teaching and learning and about our identities as teachers had grown. These are like the understandings described by Elizabeth Hatton (1998) whereby new teachers come into schools with “understandings of their future work” already shaped both “implicitly and explicitly” by their experiences as learners in schools and which work alongside other learning derived from subsequent training (Hatton, 1998, pp. 6-7). In selecting fragments from my own life history for this chapter, I have tried to capture moments that illustrate how I have been constituted as a teacher with a consistent teaching identity. I am now interested to know whether the participants in my research are engaged in similar processes, and one of my goals is to work with them to capture some of these critical moments in their own biographies.

I have contextualised the research processes I am about to engage in by critically analysing my biography in the same way I plan to analyse participants’ biographies. This research is based on the assumption that by analysing personal histories it is possible to identify the tacit beliefs and values that inform the way in which we practice in our daily lives. Rather than write an autobiography which describes events in a linear fashion I have focused on capturing the cross currents, the moments when I can catch myself in the act of being constituted in one way or another: as female, as middle class, as a product of Enlightenment thinking, as powerful, as coloniser. I intend to adopt a similar procedure when presenting
participants’ life stories. I have at times used idiomatic and conversational language in an attempt to convey the specificity of these experiences, and I intend to continue to move between formal and colloquial language when presenting the life stories of my participants. Just as my biography is mediated by the specific lenses that I use to understand it, when working with participants I can only engage with a limited range of ideas and experiences. Not only will participants select incidents and reflect on these in a way that is mediated through particular sets of lenses. My understanding of what participants tell me and my selection of information will be similarly mediated. I therefore recognise the limitations of a biographical approach such as those that Weiner details, and aim to do no more than present a number of glimpses of participants’ lives which should be “read as a conscious selection written for a particular purpose, which can be challenged on the grounds of interpretation rather than on the basis of falsification of a fixed ‘truth’ ” (Weiner, 1994, p. 11).

My decisions about how and why to conduct this research are also mediated by my biography. I relate strongly to bell hooks’ notion of an ‘engaged’ pedagogy which “values student expression” and in which not only students but also teachers “grow, and are empowered by the process” (hooks, 1994, pp. 20-21). My intention here is to conduct a research project in which the researcher and participants work collectively in a process which values participant expression, and in which participants as well as researcher grow and are empowered by the process. This will be ‘engaged research’, which aims to present teaching as a fully human activity — with emotions, mess, personal low points as well as triumphs. Reflecting on the life story I have just told, I think this makes sense.
CHAPTER 5

“The world was this strange place of possibility”

EARLY LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I analysed those moments in my early learning that I interpret as being significant both in shaping my present identity as a teacher and in developing the ideology that underpins my present pedagogy. I now turn to participants’ experiences and begin to build an understanding of the life experiences that have led participants to adopt particular pedagogical practices by identifying and analysing similar moments in their histories. These early experiences of learning provide a context for understanding what comes later in their lives. These are the “foundations of … practice” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 31) and are the first stage in the exploration of participants’ teaching biographies that continues through all three phases (see Chapter 3) of the research.
The importance of biography as a basis for understanding teacher knowledge was discussed in Chapter 2. Biography can help identify the reasons why teachers tend towards certain ways of doing things and avoid others (Brookfield, 1995, p. 32); it can help uncover the beliefs and assumptions that teachers bring to their work (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 23); and it can help teachers develop practices that are better “in tune” with who they are (Parker, 1998, p. 24). This emphasis on teachers being “in tune” with who they are connects with the idea of identity: a sense of self. The importance of biography as a means of exploring the teacher’s self follows Giddens who explores the connection between biography and self-identity. For Giddens, a person’s “stable sense of self-identity” is reflected in their autobiography: in Giddens’ words an “ongoing ‘story’ about the self” (1991, p. 54). Therefore by exploring a person’s autobiography it is possible to identify the continuous ‘self’ reflected there. Since self-identity is an ongoing process, consisting of “the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (Giddens, 1991, p. 5), a focus on early learning allows only a partial biography to be produced.

However, by understanding something of these early learning experiences we may then better understand and take account of the interpretive role of the individual as he or she selects particular experiences to report. Following Giddens again, self-identity is “the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography” (1991, p. 53, original emphasis). Each person’s biography therefore provides an insight into what their interpretive positions might be; in this research, accounts of early learning provide an interpretive framework for analysis of experiences throughout the biography. The analysis in the chapters that explore participants’ experiences (Chapters 5, 7 and 9) moves back and forth between all
three phases of the research as each person’s biographical narrative takes shape and as each person’s interpretive role becomes clearer.

Chapter 5 now begins with a focus on the stories of three of the seven participants: Hamish, Pippa and Doris. These participants stood out as having particularly coherent and cohesive stories. They are chosen to give a sense of the diversity and richness of the individual narratives, with an emphasis on idiosyncratic aspects of participants’ stories. The chapter then moves to a focus on some common patterns that emerge across all seven participants’ narratives, as they explore ideas about what it is to be a teacher based on their experiences as learners.¹⁰

**DISCOVERING EARLY EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING**

Using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix II), I began by asking participants to talk about their most outstanding memories of the experiences they had had as learners, encouraging them to go back as far as school days or earlier, then move forward to more recent experiences. I suggested they focus on memories of good experiences first. Then if participants were happy to, we turned to experiences that were difficult or even painful. I then invited people to reflect on why these experiences were good or bad, and to focus on the extent to which they were now aware of these personal experiences when making decisions about their own teaching. If the question had not already been answered, I then asked how much their past experiences of learning had influenced their decisions to become teachers. I then asked participants to talk about their teachers. I was interested to know whether any teachers stood out as good teaching role models, who represented the

¹⁰ A biographical sketch of each participant is provided in Appendix I.
kind of teacher that participants felt they now were or would like to be. Conversely, I wondered if there were any negative role models – people with a style or approach that participants would never knowingly copy. Finally, in light of the ideas about teaching and learning that we had talked about, I asked participants to think about what kind of teacher they thought they were, whether they would like to become a different kind of teacher, and if so how they would like to change. The final question prefigured the focus of the following interview, when I asked about how the people and practices or the ‘culture’ that framed each participant’s current teaching situation influenced their own work.

The questions brought out rich and detailed responses, and participants readily recalled early experiences of learning in family, social or school settings. Using semi-structured interviews (Gillham, 2000; Carspecken, 1996; Sarantakos, 1993) and taking the position of an active interviewer (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002; 1995), I was able to allow participants’ thinking to flow with little interruption from me. Apart from making sure that everyone was given the chance to respond to each of the focus areas, I allowed participants to talk freely within the broad framework suggested by the questions. I wanted to allow participants enough space to select incidents that were important to them, so tried hard not to lead or suggest the kind of answer I wanted. Later, when I read the transcripts, I was interested to recognise that sometimes it was a while before the interview started to flow. Some people appeared to be waiting for clues from me about what I wanted to hear from them, saying “is that what you want?” or words to that effect. I resisted giving clues, and always, eventually, participants found their own story threads. In selecting a focus for the following discussion I have made an assumption that people’s first or
unprompted responses have special significance, since these responses contain the clearest indications of what is most important to them.\(^{11}\)

I begin by setting Hamish’s story alongside Pippa’s, because their experiences at first glance appear very different. Hamish emphasises the vivid and colourful aspects of his experiences, whereas Pippa shows a down-to-earth, modest pragmatism in her choice of memories. Doris’s story follows, chosen because Doris at the start explicitly acknowledged a connection between “who we are” and the kind of teacher we might become. It is interesting to see how these connections emerge as she interprets her own story. Hamish, Pippa and Doris tell very different stories, and to highlight this I have attached a personal metaphor to each. Other participants told stories that were equally rich and varied, and when later in the chapter I compare participants’ ideas about teachers and teaching, I again use metaphors to convey this variety.

**Hamish and Pippa: Explorer and Artisan**

Hamish remembers the day that he learned that a single word could have more than one meaning. This memory comes from a time in his life when he was unable to tie his own shoelaces and was still having an afternoon nap. He thinks that he couldn’t have been much more than two years old. The clarity of his memory is striking. He remembers, “reflecting on my own thinking . . . about an issue, a problem.” Woken from sleep and told that he was “just going round the block,” he envisaged “travelling round this huge play (child’s building) block.” His initial disappointment (“I was terribly upset”) to discover that the ‘block’ was something else, something that they just went on a drive around, turned into incredible excitement as he

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\(^{11}\) I use double quotation marks or indented, single-spaced text in smaller font to indicate quotations from the interview transcripts and field notes.
realised not just that he now “had these two things” but also that “it was as if there was this third reality which was my mental reality.” This memory comes to him often, and always “feels good,” reminding him that “the world [is] this strange place of possibility.” Another early memory, this time from around the age of three, is of “enjoying getting lost from my parents” when the family was living in France. He would never want to go home: “I wanted to still be on this great adventure” and when the police picked him up he would tell them he lived in Europe, “the place of my adventure.” Reflecting on these memories, Hamish thinks of “the importance of context and of frames of reference . . . and of how enjoyable playing around with different frames of reference have been.” He identified this pleasure early in the interview and was to return to it frequently.

An aspect of his pleasure in experimentation is developed when he recounts early school experiences of messy play with paints and edible paste . . .

. . . which was really nice. You would know that you were not meant to eat it. You would also know somehow that it wasn’t going to kill you, so you’d eat it just to be bad.

As well as eating paste, “being bad” involved exploring or questioning social practices that led to the exclusion of ‘difference’ in some of the schools he attended, where he learnt that there was “something funny” about being black and wondered why a Native American boy’s family was “talked about” by the teachers. Hamish was to find that “being bad” had its privileges, since he was often kept at a desk by the teacher’s side and became “quite interested in how teachers spoke of different students in different ways because of certain kinds of categories.” Although he was a “strange little beast” who did “misbehave,” he was also “quite the teacher pleaser.” It was at school, and close to the teacher, where he felt “the most safe,”
although the teacher did not always provide the safety he sought. His Year 3 teacher, Ms C., was thought to be “quite cross” by the class, and being in the classroom was “a very difficult thing for her.” Hamish remembers that once he had a “perfectly marvellous” alternative answer to a question but didn’t want to state it in front of the class, knowing it would not be acceptable. As it was, when he told Ms C. privately about his alternative answer, he was rebuffed because she didn’t understand his reasoning. This “devastating little moment” showed him that “it could be that I knew things or was able to think through things in more effective ways than the teacher” and “authority … really didn’t stand as authority.” But it also meant that from now on he would be aware that there were many possible paths he could take, and decisions to make, some acceptable to the status quo and others not. The problem was, “who’s to say, who’s to say?” among all these possibilities.

Hamish was lucky to know wonderful teachers, who were “radical” and “quite revolutionary,” wanting to provide students with “life information” and to hear what the students thought. One young woman caused “quite a turmoil” when she challenged the conservative authorities in the school by one day arriving at work dressed in a pants suit. Another, with whom Hamish was “completely in love,” took “joy in teaching” and for Hamish “wasn’t a teacher” because it “wasn’t miserable and boring” in her class. She played music in the classroom and saw students as individual learners who should be allowed to “learn how they can and how they will.” This teacher “could be the reason why to this day I love putting different kinds of things into my teaching. Seems quite natural to do.” However his abiding sense of what it was to be a teacher was formed by such things as Ms B’s “hard hand on my cheek or my shoulder,” his sense of the “low status quality of it,”
the disrespect shown to teachers by students and the “painful, burdensome” nature of the job. Hamish “never wanted to be a teacher.” “I thought it would have been the most horrible job in the universe.”

But Hamish did become a teacher, and moreover now teaches in a university department of education, although he claims, “I still don’t want to be a teacher . . . it’s the learning, that’s what excites me.” As he tells it, the process of becoming a teacher seems at the same time both accidental and inevitable. The kinds of questions that excited and challenged him as a child, busy exploring new frames of reference and new ways of seeing the world, popped up again when as a graduate student of chemistry (aspects of which he had grown to hate), he was deciding where his life should take him. Wanting to explore questions such as “what does it mean to be human?” and “what is ‘it’ about?” led him to search for “something useful” to do, that “somehow mattered beyond a very close frame of reference.” His search took him from psychology to nursing then to social work before one of his teachers took him aside and said, “Your soul is aching, you are in crisis . . . you are in crisis because you do not have a program that is appropriate for you” and started telling Hamish about what “the people in education” were doing. Hamish picks up the story:

And when he said education I thought God, no way, no way on earth. I didn’t even want to talk with them. But he pushed so hard that I made an appointment with one of these people over there. And then when I spoke with him, I realised these people are doing exactly what I have always done in my life. And so that was that fit, that complete match. But that’s when I had to face up to the realisation that I was a teacher, and that I had never stopped teaching.
Hamish ended up in the place where as a child he had felt both very safe and very challenged. His struggle to accept that education was “that complete match” for him is graphic: “no way on earth. I didn’t even want to talk with them” but “he pushed so hard” that Hamish gave in, and the sense of relief at finally finding where he was heading all his life is powerfully conveyed in “that fit, that compete match.” This is the imagery of falling in love. He had found his perfect match in life as a teacher.

Although Hamish’s first memories are of a time when he was at home with his parents, his parents themselves are not mentioned as being significant in his early learning. For other participants, family members themselves are important early influences. Sometimes the influence is present as a clear undercurrent flowing through a person’s memories. For Pippa, there was . . .

. . . just this expectation that you would do well so you did well. There was always the understanding that . . . once you got to go to grammar school that I would go to university.

Pippa’s parents had both gone to grammar school and would have gone to university were it not for the war, so education was always encouraged in her family as a means of “achieving your potential.” Books have “always been part of” her life and she recalls that between the ages of six and ten she must have been an avid reader because she can to this day remember the layout of the local library in her home town. As a high school student, she was never allowed to go out until homework was finished. Coming from a family where formal education was valued, her transition from school to university was unproblematic. Her parents’ full support made it easy, unlike in the case of her present partner who grew up in a small rural community where there was clear resistance from family members to the
idea that he would go to university. For him, now a PhD and associate professor, it was a social, not intellectual, struggle to go to university. For Pippa, it was not a struggle at all.

Pippa drew largely on high school experiences when describing her significant learning. She “felt comfortable” in the school environment and remembers the experience with obvious pleasure. Her school was small, so students became “a pretty cohesive group.” There was “a good rapport” with teachers, and students came to know them “in a semi-social context” through events such as theatre visits. Pippa shone in maths and science but also enjoyed English and drama and still liked the teachers who taught the subjects she wasn’t very good at “as people.” Throughout school she experienced unusually close relationships with teachers, most of whom were “people you had respect for.” She remembers her maths teachers with particular fondness. Her mother later became friendly with this teacher, and kept in contact with her and other teachers after Pippa had left the school.

One of Pippa’s most significant memories is of the maths lessons, when “I was always the one who had to ask the questions because I could understand what was happening.” She would be “put up” before the lesson by the other students to ask questions for them, as they “wouldn’t dare.” The problem with her maths teacher was that she was so good at maths that she “couldn’t understand why they (the students) couldn’t understand.” Pippa was taught physics by the same teacher, who wasn’t as good at physics as she was at maths but, consequently, was a far better physics teacher than she was a maths teacher. From this experience, Pippa “recognised quite early on that in order to be a good teacher you’ve got to understand why students couldn’t understand.” Not only was she beginning to
form ideas about effective teaching, which she would make use of when becoming a
teacher herself, her go-between role in maths lessons prefigured the tutoring role
which she was to take on later.

Pippa’s feelings of being at ease in the classroom, to the extent that she was
often helping other students to learn, as well as her close relationships with the
teachers, would seem to suggest that becoming a teacher would be a natural step for
her. As it happened, she got into tutoring “quite by chance” when her young son
cought measles and passed them on to her husband, who at the time was lecturing at
a university in Australia. He became quite ill. The measles unfortunately coincided
with a major influx of examination marking, so Pippa “sat down and just did it” for
him, whereupon she was invited to become a tutor for the following year. More
than twenty years later she is still teaching at the same university.

Pippa says that the models for her own teaching come from her university
experiences rather than from school. With a first degree in physics, she had the
unusual experience of studying for a second degree in maths and computer science
while tutoring at the same time. She “caused chaos” when “there was one hour
when I’d be sitting in with the students in the lecture, and the next hour I’d be
tutoring those same students in a different topic.” The students (but not Pippa)
“found it very difficult” to start with! She was greatly influenced by a number of the
lecturers who taught her then and by tutors with whom she worked. As a learner
herself, she was able to immediately identify the approaches that worked best to
support her learning. At the same time she was taking tutorials and team teaching
in classes where students used self-paced study materials, and where much of the
tutor involvement was one-to-one, “working out what the individual student’s
problem was rather than the class as a whole.” She still applies these approaches to much of her teaching today.

As was pointed out to her by a local high school teacher, who sat in on one of her courses, she now “teaches” rather than lectures the students. She uses question and answer techniques even with large groups and avoids the unhelpful style she experienced at her first university, which was “one to many, and the lecturer would basically start writing at the board and that would be it until the end.” Her current preferred teaching method, using question and answer techniques, appears to link back directly to her classroom experiences when she would be “asked by the others to ask the questions.” She would not like to be the sort of teacher who “doesn’t understand why the students don’t understand.” Her awareness of her own spelling “block” makes it easy for her to accept that some students will have a number “block,” which is her responsibility to “unblock.”

There are some areas for which people are going to have blocks, and sometimes you’ve got to almost find out the reason for the block before you can unblock.

She also talks of the need to “have some understanding for the student” and to “be aware of the response you’re getting,” which is possibly

...something that comes with bringing up children. You tend to think not just about yourself — as a parent you tend to be responding to the needs, I think, without consciously thinking about it, so possibly since the formative time of my teaching here was when my children were young I was recognising the students’ needs.

Pippa, who “went into teaching by the seat of my pants,” finds that educational theory “leaves me quite cold.” But she explicitly positions herself as a
teacher, not as a mathematician (“I feel insignificant with mathematicians”), to the extent that all her published research is in the area of mathematics teaching. In describing herself as someone who is “responsive” to students and whose “interests do lie with the way students learn,” Pippa emphasises her interest in the learning process. She is a teacher who has developed a professional praxis by combining informal observation of other teachers with reflection on what works and what doesn’t work for herself as a learner. Pippa goes beyond a “seat of the pants” approach, since she has developed underpinning principles or theories to guide her practice. The extent to which she expressed surprise at uncovering that there were principles underpinning her teaching demonstrates how much of this knowledge is tacit or unconscious. She was gratified when I pointed out that she was, in fact, using ‘theory’, and I felt pleased to tell her.

Hamish and Pippa have very different stories and very different orientations to teaching. Pippa is self-effacing about her achievements, attributing her success to her family’s expectation that she would “do well” and naming the measles, rather than professional goals, as the impetus behind her career move into teaching. She also emphasises her reluctance to play the intermediary between her fellow students and the mathematics teacher when she says, “I’d be sort of ‘put up’ to ask,” although reading between the lines it seems that her role was very important. Her pragmatism leaps out in the graphic image of the teacher “unblocking” whatever is in the path of a student’s understanding. The connotations of plumbing that the word carries suggest a process that is concrete, active and practical. When this is set against Pippa’s desire to be a “responsive teacher,” a more developed image emerges of someone who deals directly with each student’s thinking in a process that seems more like healing than plumbing. Her identification with the practicality of teaching
is further mirrored in her rejection of educational theory when she says, “you’ve just got to get down to their level.”

In contrast to Pippa’s down-to-earth, modest pragmatism, Hamish’s descriptions of learning, teaching and his teachers are vivid and colourful. His early love of “playing around” and risk taking, such as when he ate the paste, “which you knew wouldn’t kill you” just to “be bad,” is reflected in his later love for teachers who took professional risks. There was “hip” Miss Lancaster of the lime green pants suit, who discussed the dangers of drug abuse with her elementary school class and would devote a whole Friday afternoon to open discussion with the class. For Hamish, “she was what a teaching professional was — her job was something she did with her life.” Young, blonde Anita Springer was another radical teacher, who was “as groovy as could be in many, many ways.” She “took joy in the teaching” and allowed students to choose their own activities rather than impose a curriculum on learners whom she saw as “individuals.” Teachers could make Hamish “feel safe.” Teachers could be “quite revolutionary” and show him a “new world.” They could present him with “new possibilities” and be “rich in knowledge,” and for these reasons Hamish often wanted to sit close by them in class. Teaching for him is exploration, since

. . . there’s every question open to me . . . I don’t see why anyone should have to feel as if certain lines of questions or areas of interest should ever be closed down. So the booby prize for me being in education is that the world is eternally open for me.

You may recall that, quite by chance, ‘blocks’ have been important in both Hamish’s and Pippa’s interviews. Hamish has two blocks, “a block you could play with and then a block that you could drive around.” Pippa’s ‘block’ is a third kind –
a mental block that you have to remove so that students can understand. These three different blocks are curiously fitting metaphors for the teaching ‘self’ that each person has evoked. Hamish’s blocks opened up different spaces for his own play and exploration, just as in his teaching he hopes to metaphorically open up new worlds and new frames of reference for his students. Pippa’s block is itself metaphorical but almost as concrete as Hamish’s blocks — a barrier to understanding, which it is her job to shift out of the way, and which represents powerfully the hands-on, practical nature of the approach she takes to her teaching. It is curious that the same word can illustrate so vividly each person’s unique way of thinking about his or her work as teachers.

**DORIS: TEACHING AS A CELEBRATION**

For Doris, that fact that “the way we teach is so bound up with who we are and our personalities” makes it difficult to learn how to be a teacher. Doris often returned to this connection between “who we are” and the kind of teacher we might become. Doris’s teaching is something she “loves to do;” it is a vocation rather than a career for her. Given her belief in the intimate connection between the person and the teacher, it is interesting to see these connections being made in her own story.

Doris’s earliest learning happened at home not at school. She didn’t learn very much at primary school, partly because she had already learned the important things at home. Among these important things were “the importance of touch . . . the importance of being cradled . . . and the importance of being loved.” Learning the importance of being loved

. . . is an integral part of being a teacher, being a good teacher. Because if you have an overwhelming sense of being loved, then you have self-
confidence. And you go out into the world in an engaging way, expecting positive feedback.

This “engagement,” where you don’t have to worry about how you look or what you do, is “really crucial if you’re a teacher.”

As a child, Doris learned much from the natural world. The first thing she remembers learning was the colours of the rainbow. Later, her dog was to prove a significant teacher, from whom she learned about empathy, “being there,” how to be a companion, and “enthusiasm and forgiveness.” Doris learned about beauty by watching the birds in the large metropolitan city where she was brought up. A partridge, which distracted her away from its young by pretending it was injured, taught her courage, and by watching the birds survive in winter she learned about resilience. From her brother, who would “share his wonderings” with her, she learned about intellectual play and curiosity, and when her brother started school and she was left at home she learned that “solitude is a teacher of imagined worlds.”

When Doris went to school herself, her two most memorable experiences of learning in the early years were when the teacher used to feed a squirrel that came to the classroom every day, and when the teacher used to get the students to polish the floor with rags; experiences that she remembers as “joyful” and “interactive.”

Doris remembers learning from ordinary and every day experiences, although some memories reveal more extraordinary aspects of her story. She says that her main motivation to learn came from her family, and she revelled in the philosophical discussions they would have at dinner. Doris remembers when she was about six puzzling over her father’s question at the start of dinner, “How do you know that you’re not dreaming a dream – that you’re not dreaming?” Her fascination with philosophical questions led her at the age of nine to read Descartes, and she later
“fell in love with philosophy, with the whole project of philosophy whereby you were trying to think through questions that matter and you were trying to lead a self-reflective life.” Later, as a PhD student reading Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, she discovered that reading was “almost a meditation, an intellectual meditation, and it was really trying to think through something in depth, rather than simply amassing a whole lot of information.”

This was when she learned that “it’s the process that counts, not the product” when reading the book with a group of other students. After a whole year spent reading through the book together, the group tried to summarise what they’d learnt. They couldn’t, so they decided to start again. At the end of the following year, when once again they found they couldn’t summarise the book, that’s when it “twigged that it didn’t matter, that that was the whole point.” Her experience of reading Hegel made her appreciate that dialectical method is “a highly iconoclastic, playful, transitional process where things dissolve on their own terms rather than from things imported from outside.” Now, as a teacher, Doris herself is interested in promoting “deep learning” by “paying attention” to what is really happening in her tutorials. Her concern to focus on what is going on in her classes rather than on exhibiting her own knowledge is reflected in her dislike of teachers who are “dogmatic and believe, you know, that unless you’ve read Foucault you haven’t got the truth.” She wishes there was more respect in institutions for “the many paths to deep learning.”

Doris’s own story reflects “many paths to deep learning,” both ordinary and extraordinary. A theme that underpins all her experiences is the importance of “community,” created by students and teachers, where learning is “interactive and cooperative” and where it’s “easy to look at someone and talk.” In her small high school, students became a “community of learners” who became so relaxed with one
another that it became possible to ask “the stupid questions.” Doris believes that a “supportive environment” and “that sort of companionship” is invaluable for learners, who will also “blossom” when the teacher is “there for them.” As a student at university, Doris chose courses on the basis of who taught them rather than because she liked the subject, because “if you have a good teacher they can be teaching you anything and it comes alive.” All the teachers she chose “really gave of themselves.” For Doris, being “there” for the students involves “paying attention,” inviting students into her home “because they see a whole different part of you,” and even “falling in love.”

The ability to fall in love is really a necessity for really learning. All the teachers that I had I kind of fell in love with a bit. And when I have students I fall in love with them a bit too.

Doris’s account of her learning focused on intellectual, emotional and physical experiences. She says that good teaching is “paying attention” — a deceptively simple phrase, which fits Doris’s evocation of learning from ordinary things while revealing her subtle and complex sensitivity to how her students are thinking, feeling and being. We see in Chapter 9 how as a teacher she now engages not only with students’ intellectual learning, but pays attention to their emotional and physical learning as well.

These three biographies convey something of the diversity of experiences that all participants evoked in their responses to the first phase of questions. However underneath the apparent idiosyncrasy of each person’s experiences there are interesting patterns. I now explore some common patterns that emerged across all seven participants’ narratives as they explored ideas about what it is to be a teacher, why they became teachers and the kind of teachers they would like to be.
TEACHERS: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Only Hamish recalled his teachers in vivid colour, but everyone remembered people who had taught them important things. Not all these people were teachers however. You will remember the radical Misses Lancaster and Springer in Hamish’s story. Pippa remembered her maths teacher both as a person she could respect and as a person who showed her the importance for teachers of understanding why students weren’t learning, but Doris vividly recalled the things she learnt from her brother and her father.

For Lindsey, the nuns in her primary school, who loved her and showed her that everything was possible, were memorable teachers who remain highly influential role models. She took her “love of learning” from the nuns and thrived in an environment where “if we wanted to do something, then the nuns told us that we could do it.” Lindsey enjoyed a loving, supportive classroom atmosphere, generated by “the love of the nuns and their support,” and speaks of her pleasure in being “part of a loving, caring team” in her primary school. Later influential teachers were an English teacher “who was so straight down the line” and a professional mentor who “set me up for success by being so tough.” Since becoming a university teacher, there has been no single role model, just “bits of people . . . a few models of good, shining lights . . . people that have respected me and given me the confidence to try things that I wouldn’t have tried before.” For Lindsey, “linking back to my successes at school has played a major role in what I’m doing here . . . I’d like to play more with that area.”

Adam had “wonderful” teachers at school, but his most influential teachers were those he met as a university student. As a youngster, his family, and not his
schools, “bequeathed” him “knowledge,” which was seen in the family as a “cherished possession.” His father was “a book learner” and his mother was “very smart,” and between them they encouraged a family atmosphere of “the celebration of the wonder of things . . . of knowing and understanding.” Like Doris, Adam remembers discussions round the dinner table where “I must have been appalling as a kid because I always wanted to have my say.” Adam’s “outstanding” teachers were at university, where just one person showed him the “bleeding, strife-ridden, dramatic, changing, dynamic” nature of the subject that Adam now loves and teaches. This particular teacher, “not an ordinary person but an outstanding performer . . . blew me out of the water” with his performances and skill in “timing and engagement and the use of repetition.” The atmosphere in this teacher’s lectures was “electric,” the experiences “intense.” From this person, along with a few others who were “extraordinary performers,” Adam learnt the sense of “showmanship, theatricality” that he uses consciously in his teaching.

Ed thought first of his mother, herself an early childhood teacher, when asked about significant memories of learning. “One of her first principles . . . was to always treat even the littlest of littlies as full people. With respect.” He sees this as “being connected even to a pig-headed refusal on my part to treat university students as though they are not adults.” Ed remembers his parents being much more significant in his learning than his teachers in school. “I believed in education because my parents did and so I had a sense that there was something there even when I couldn’t see what it was.” This belief carried him through the times when teachers “were not particularly inspiring” because he knew that this “didn’t mean nothing worthwhile was happening.” He did not think that the teacher’s job was to entertain him and looked instead for a focus on the “process of learning rather than
a particular quantum of information or knowledge as being the issue.” Later, he
worked over a long period of time with one particular teacher at university, who
eventually became his PhD supervisor. This person was influential not only because
of their long association but also because his attitude mirrored the approach that
Ed’s parents had had towards learning. “His attitude was very open and he was
willing to let me follow tracks that he wasn’t particularly interested in himself.”

Justine’s early learning experiences differ markedly from those of the other
participants. She was categorised as “ineducable” at the age of five and a half. She
portrays herself as a small child marginalised and isolated at school by her
classmates, who called her ‘Dummy’, and not surprisingly she “didn’t like school
very much.” When the kindergarten headmaster said Justine couldn’t start school
until she was able to speak properly her mother took over, and at home the two of
them “played school, and she made these flashcards . . . and after three weeks my
mother was about to give up and then I said my third word, which was window.”
After this, Justine made such good progress that she was soon allowed to attend the
school, but her mother continued to be “a very big influence” in her learning. Her
mother “always believed in me, and she still always believes in me.” Justine recalls
how much she learnt on many long journeys between Adelaide and Perth when her
mother would teach something (like “all the capital cities of all the countries of the
world”) and then would test Justine and her sister.

Justine’s first “favourite teacher” was someone who “treated everybody really
equally in the class . . . I don’t think she ever had a favourite in the class.” This
teacher was “a natural teacher.” However Justine’s most successful experience of
learning came when she began to learn the piano. She describes moving rapidly
through a series of piano teachers, moving from one to another as she “grew out”
of each teacher, until she “actually reached a stage when I didn’t need a teacher any more and I had broken through.” Her most memorable relationships with teachers were those she built up with her piano teachers. School became a secondary concern after her music, to the extent that she would make subject choices that enabled her to make her music lessons her priority. These experiences led her to develop a fascination for her own learning processes, and “it’s been my music, my piano education, that’s been a large part of making the sort of teacher that I am.” Justine appeared to thrive most when she was in a close, familiar teacher-learner relationship.

Everyone was able to relate at least one positive, happy and memorable relationship with a significant teacher, although this relationship was not necessarily a formal, professional one. Parental and family influences have been markedly important. These influences are often deliberate (such as when Justine and her mother played school) and explicitly stated (Doris’s and Adam’s family discussions round the dinner table, Ed’s absorption of his parents’ belief in education, Pippa’s parents’ belief in her). ‘Real’ teachers have also played significant, positive roles. Some were in school (Lindsey’s nuns, Hamish’s radical grade three teacher). Others were at university; Adam, Pippa and Ed are explicit about using teachers who taught them at university as role models in their own teaching. As Adam says, “I can remember what it’s like to be in the audience.”

Participants remember what teachers did to help them learn and now model their own teaching on teachers who were successful for them. There are also (unfortunately) the bad and the ugly teachers, whose undesirable practices are set against those that participants try to adopt. Lindsey would never want to “replicate sarcasm,” and would “never replicate not knowing my area and not having respect
for students and from students.” Set against this, Lindsey values “honesty” on the part of the teacher and “creating a sense of belonging.” For Adam, “frightening students,” that “jolly terrorising of students,” and leaving students “hung out to dry” is “just pathetic.” Instead, he emphasises his sense of responsibility to students. What makes Doris “really mad” is when “teachers make people believe they’re stupid.” She also dislikes “the use of jargon as a pretence … a cover up … a thing to make you appear more intelligent than you are.” Similarly, Ed is “resistant to authoritarian models of knowledge where the teacher is imagined as having to have the answers.” Each participant’s story reveals a conscious shaping of their current practice based on both positive and negative models provided by former teachers. The typical role model that emerges is that of the humanist teacher (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1983) whose principal concern is for the welfare of the students in their care.

SO WHY ARE YOU A TEACHER?

Curiously, nobody that I interviewed had planned to have a career in university teaching. Sometimes people became teachers because the fit was just right. You will remember Hamish describing “that fit, that complete match,” when he “had to face up to the realisation that I was a teacher, and that I had never stopped teaching.” Although Lindsey “fell into teaching,” it became “a career that I love.” However “I will get out of it as soon as I don’t (love it). I have always said that.” Adam never saw himself being a teacher, and now prefers to think of himself as an academic. He’s an “old fashioned believer that university’s about teaching in an atmosphere of research.”
The atmosphere of enquiry and curiosity, critical thinking, trying to understand . . . all those things. Critical thinking, research, iconoclasm, it’s something that’s critical to university teaching.

However, Adam became an academic because he couldn’t help himself. “I couldn’t not keep going. It just fell into place for me. And I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

For Doris, teaching is “a vocation,” not part of a career or “a part of anything else.” It is “a gift,” something she “loves to do.” Ed looking back on his life can identify a career “trajectory” that brought him to university teaching, although he had not consciously planned the route. Becoming a teacher simply enabled him to continue doing something that he loved. There was never a moment when he “decided instantly or decided at a clear point that I would become a university teacher,” though his family was “very much oriented to social service occupations.” However, “the focus on university level teaching became clear almost as soon as I hit university. And instantly at university I felt at home. And I enjoyed the nature of the interactions I was having with people and instantly felt an equality and levelling that appealed to me.” He adds:

Probably what made me become a teacher is just that I really loved what I was doing so much at that point that I just wanted to keep following it and teaching openings did come up. So I went into it out of really just loving the subject, loving the exploration of it, enjoying the process so much and feeling immediately self-fulfilled and being able to share it with people who were also interested.

Ed uses similar imagery when talking about his specialist area, which is Indonesia. Having been born and brought up in South East Asia, it wasn’t until he returned to the United States to attend high school that he realised his career focus.
should be on “understanding Indonesia,” a place that “had marked me so deeply … had moulded me” and yet about which he found in the United States “there was no understanding, no capacity to relate to anybody.” On researching his first paper on the topic that has since become his whole career focus, he recalls feeling that “what I was reading about was immediately complementing a grounded experience which had been foundational in my psyche.” For Ed, being a university teacher enables him both to work in a place where he instantly felt “at home” while also allowing him to carry on discovering the place that had been his actual childhood home.

The idea that becoming a teacher is like finding yourself at home is a strong theme in the stories. Sometimes, however, you become a teacher just by chance. For Justine, becoming a teacher was something she had never considered — it was “a complete shift.” And Pippa would not have become a teacher if not for the measles.

**WHAT KIND OF TEACHER DO YOU WANT TO BE?**

While each person’s story is unique: since each person’s experiences are unique: repeated, strong themes also appeared in the stories about the kind of teacher that it is desirable to be. I have grouped these ideas around four broad themes:

- being ‘real’;
- being excited by learning;
- taking risks and being iconoclastic;
- teaching to inform and challenge/discomfort.

I have used participants’ own words when naming them.
“A real person . . . engaged”

The importance of being a real person when you are a teacher, interacting and engaging with students in a series of real relationships, is a strikingly common theme in the stories. For some people it is possible to trace the desire to develop a public ‘persona’ in their teaching, as a way of reflecting the ‘real’ person beneath. Other people simply stress the desire for authenticity in their teaching: a desire to be true to themselves.

Pippa exemplifies the way the public ‘persona’ can reflect the ‘real’ person when she talks of teaching being like parenting. Here, the parenting role she brings to her teaching “responding to the (students’) needs” reflects her desire to develop close and supportive relationships with her students. Adam is consciously developing specific skills around the idea of becoming a better performer. He models himself on other teachers, valuing and emulating their performance skills such as “timing,” “having strategies,” being “interesting.” He talks playfully about using “a cheap gimmick,” props such as pies, beer and chocolate to get a complex point across, and about his enjoyment of the jokes that students have played on him in lectures.

At the same time Adam talks seriously about feeling “a real empathy . . . a real responsibility” towards students even though “I’m not a highly respectable person in most respects.” He sees things “in a slightly odd way at times, and I like to communicate that.” In focusing on strategies for “showmanship,” he is also aware of the tension between “putting on a show where it’s only entertainment” and focusing on the subject material, which is where the “enrichment” comes from. “It’s a real balance trying to make it clear when it’s you and when it’s the material.”
Ultimately for Adam, “you’ve got to share something of yourself, otherwise it’s a glass wall — opaque even.” You also have to engage with students.

I think the nicest thing a student ever said to me was, “You’re trying to read us all the time aren’t you?” Then I realised yes, that’s what you have to do, you have to read the students to see what they’re getting. And that’s part of engagement, looking at them, trying to read them.

“Engagement” is a repeated theme in Doris’s story. She wants her students to see in her the real person “that brushes their teeth.” Although over the years she has learnt “tricks . . . gimmicks” to use in her teaching, she often doesn’t use them. It’s more important to “share with students how you’re feeling about the tutorial” and to be “responsive to the group and to your own needs.” She values “engagement,” “intimacy” and “passion” in teaching and “falls in love a bit” with her students. Doris likens teaching to “paying attention.” Similarly, it is impossible for Ed to teach “without engaging all of me.” Central for him is the ability to “engage each individual’s line of thinking” and “to have that sense of individual touch with students.” For Ed, “my pleasures are so firmly with people, I prefer dealing with human beings face to face and that is what matters to me.” Ed finds himself gaining most pleasure from “the transactive, immediate teaching moments” in his work.

Other people also highlight the importance of interpersonal and emotional elements in teaching. For Lindsey, interpersonal elements are prior to intellectual engagement. “If you can’t connect with the student, it’s very hard to connect just (using) content.” Lindsey’s core aim is “to touch everyone in the class in some regards.” Engagement with students is also a core theme for Justine. It’s important for her to get to know students, to “get to know them as learners.” Justine really
wants “that kind of personal interaction” in her teaching, where she can see students improve.

“\textit{It's learning, that's what excites me}”

One characteristic of people’s stories is that they remember teachers for the things they learnt from them, as much as for their outstanding personal presence. Often the teacher’s personal qualities created the conditions in which learning could be effective, but memorable teachers were invariably those who promoted learning. For participants, it is important to be a teacher who focuses on learning. Encouraging learning is a core process for Lindsey. “I actually focus on the learning and not so much on the teaching … the learning is what I’m after … people can’t get that if they don’t feel as if they’re being valued.” For Hamish “it’s learning, that’s what excites me.” Ed points to his focus on the learning process.

I do see a lot of the teaching process as trying to release students from the imagination that there can be a kind of mastery in content terms. In the process of my teaching, I am trying to get them to focus on the process of learning as the major issue and to be open and taking charge of it by determining their own agenda.

Encouraging independence is an important element in this process for Justine, whose most successful learning took place when her own piano teacher worked explicitly to encourage Justine’s own development as an independent learner. For Justine, it’s important to be able to understand how learning takes place in order to be a successful teacher.

The empowerment of students is paramount among Adam’s goals. He tries to achieve this by “making (students) more intellectual,” by “teaching them to
beware of people offering glib solutions” and to “value the process of knowing and learning.” Adam is the only person to mention the tension he feels between allowing the subject to “speak” for itself and interceding as a person himself in the learning process. Adam’s hierarchy of learning experiences begins with students struggling alone with new and difficult concepts. The second richest learning experience for students is “talking with their friends about it, their own discussions,” which he remembers was “the best thing I did in graduate school.” This is “sharing the ideas … practising saying the words and using the language and using the diagrams,” and is why “study groups are so important” because it’s only when you teach someone else that you “really learn.” He places Adam the lecturer in third position in this hierarchy.

Others actively promote the social processes that support learning. Involvement in team sports has given Lindsey a strong commitment to teamwork, which carries through to her work in the classroom where she tries to encourage “that team building.” Doris similarly encourages peer learning, since “they learn a lot from each other and you’ve got to allow them to learn from each other.” Doris expresses the mixture of pleasure and regret that she feels when students go off to continue their discussions without her. She recognises that the group process has value, but would also like to be a part of it.

“Iconoclastic,” “visionary,” “crazy, exciting and out there”

For the participants in this study, being a teacher means being both ordinary and extraordinary. At the same time as they are working in humble, everyday, down to earth modes, they are also taking risks, struggling against conventions, and challenging accepted ways of thinking and being. The language used to describe the
things that participants have valued in their own teachers, and which describes their desires for their own teaching lives, reveals a series of contradictory metaphors both everyday and extraordinary. These metaphors play upon each other to convey a sense of the dynamism and vitality of the teachers’ work (Table 5.1). A powerful theme in many people’s stories is that of the teacher as visionary, enabling new perceptions and showing new possibilities, and mould breaker, making issues of things that students don’t want to think about. The desire to open up new lines of enquiry is part of an anti-conservative theme that runs through several stories, in particular Adam’s, Hamish’s, Ed’s and Lindsey’s.

Lindsey quotes the old adage “rules are for fools and wise people break them.” In her experience, “we sometimes hide behind our rules and don’t bend them as much as we could.” Lindsey says it is important for teachers to be visionary in their thinking.

I think having a vision and taking a risk and looking ahead of where we actually are is important. Not just replicating what’s happening now but actually saying look, if we want better these are some possibilities.

Iconoclasm and having vision are for Adam “critical to university teaching.”

Teaching, it’s — letting you see the world in a new way . . . it’s the underlying desire to communicate, to inform, to enrich, to discomfort . . . to help them see the world in different ways, I wouldn’t want to give them one way. And I wouldn’t want to blinker them.

Ed has been exploring “dangerous ground” since he was a PhD student “setting up to consciously make an issue of things that most people didn’t want to think
about.” Ed has always felt he had a “mission” to “try to broaden cross-cultural knowledges and highlight awareness of the way perceptions are moulded.” Hamish values the fact that in his work “there’s every question open to me…and I don’t see why anyone should have to feel that certain lines of questions or areas of interest should ever be closed down.” Sometimes people’s mould-breaking visions were simple. While Pippa would like students to see mathematics in a new way, it would be as a “friendly, useful tool.” For Justine “it’s important to be able to change, be flexible, not just follow prescription.”

“To inform, to enrich, to discomfort”

Adam refers to a tension between maintaining safe spaces in which students can feel comfortable and flourish, and providing a sufficient level of challenge for students to enable them to learn new things. Providing a challenge is about valuing “that awkward feeling when you’re confused” because “that’s when you’re about to learn something new.” However it is important to stop yourself from “frightening the dickens out of (students) with wild and crazy epistemological points.” Ultimately, although, “there’s times that this is going to be awful, you’re gonna hate this” this is “all right, and we’ll get there in the end.” This process of keeping students safe while watching them struggle is, in Adam’s words, “a balancing act.” Adam, who “can remember what it’s like to be in the audience,” tries to imagine “what if I was a student, I would like my lecturer to be,” and feels “a real empathy with my customers, my students.”

Overall, there was a greater emphasis on providing safe spaces than on creating uncomfortable ones. For Lindsey, “belonging in the community I think is vital” for successful learning. One of her goals in her university classrooms is to
recreate the sense of belonging she had at primary school. The support that she has received from teachers in the past, and their belief in her abilities, have been important in developing her confidence and making her feel able to explore new things. Apart from her “so tough” mentor, who “could have done it nicer” (but who was still a “good role model”), Lindsey’s most successful learning has been in warm, caring, safe environments. Putting the students first in the teaching and learning process is one of Lindsey’s core principles. “I think if you’re honest and students have a voice in your classroom and if you encourage that team sort of thing, then it’s a happy threesome.” She also believes in her students. “I sort of start with the premise that all my students are going to learn and they’re all going to be successful.” For her, this is associated with the recognition of the importance of allowing “everyone to have a voice.”

For Justine, knowing her students is vital and increasingly difficult because of large classes and a more instrumental way of thinking about what universities do. She would like to initiate a “sort of pastoral care system” and “nurture” the students. Justine has also experimented with the idea of developing students’ emotional literacy skills, in order to create a safer, more collaborative environment for learning. At the core of the process of putting students first is the notion of respect. “Respect for others, open, honest communication” is a priority for Lindsey, while Adam emphasises “empathy for students” and Ed learnt from his mother to treat students “with respect.”

**CONCLUSION**

This phase of the research was designed to explore the importance of participants’ early experiences as learners as the basis for later exploration of their construction
of knowledge about the teaching process. As Hatton (1998, p. 7) points out, this influence can be so strong that it leads teachers to “engage in mimicry of existing practices rather than involving themselves in reflective consideration of what might be more appropriate.” Looking at individuals’ autobiographies as learners is one of Brookfield’s (1995) ‘critically reflective lenses’, whereby teachers come to a better understanding of the influences that have shaped their professional development.

Past experiences of learning certainly play a role in the process of becoming teachers for the participants in this research. Everyone remembered a teacher or two who had been a significant influence on them, both indirectly or directly in their decisions to become teachers, and also in providing positive or inspirational models for teaching. Doris, Hamish and Adam in particular speak of actively seeking out teachers who would provide the inspiration, intellectual challenge or answers they were looking for. Each participant was also able to identify teachers they did not want to copy. Among the latter, two main types of teachers stood out. There were those who did not teach successfully, such as Pippa’s mathematics teacher, and those who showed a lack of respect or empathy for students — aspects of “that jolly terrorising of students” that Adam was critical of. As they reflected on their learning, participants were able to identify some constituents of positive and negative learning experiences and pinpoint some of the idiosyncratic features that made a particular learning situation particularly important for them.

That being so, it seems they do more than merely engage in unreflective mimicry when modelling their teaching on that of former teachers. Positive models were chosen for positive reasons; the respect they showed for students, the love they showed for their students, their radicalism, their capacity to inspire, their “outstanding” abilities as performers or creative thinkers, their ability to “be
engaged”. I can only speculate on whether participants were unusually fortunate in encountering exceptional teachers. Certainly there were comparatively few inspirational teachers in the lives of any of the participants, with everyone experiencing dull, negative or even psychologically damaging patches in their learning histories as the result of their teachers’ behaviours.

One notable common factor was having a family background that provided an environment in which learning could flourish. For some participants, parents and other family members provided an essential support for learning. They did this not only by “believing in” their children but also by providing rich and significant learning experiences, encouraging discussion, modelling creative thinking and providing intellectual challenge. This fertile environment seems to have set up high expectations on the part of participants. Many report that school was a much less engaging place for learning than the family dinner table. Perhaps experiencing such high levels of stimulation was significant in leading participants to look more keenly and critically for something similar in formal learning settings. Even when family members themselves were less significant than teachers in a person’s memories of learning, their family’s social situation could still provide a rich environment for learning. Hamish’s father’s job took the family to Europe and then to a range of different cities in the United States where Hamish experienced both colour and indigenousness through his peers. This in turn was significant in forming his desire to “explore possibilities” in his work as a teacher. Cross-cultural experiences also featured in other people’s histories, with four having migrated to Australia and two others having studied overseas (Adam in the United States and Justine in Denmark).

Hatton’s (1998, p. 7) use of the word “mimicry” warns of the limitations for teachers who draw too readily on models of existing practices for their professional
learning. The evidence produced in this research suggests that to model oneself on one’s past teachers is not necessarily limiting. It depends on the models, and memorable teachers for these participants are notably radical, unusual and challenging. Participants have valued the very diverse approaches that their own teachers have taken, and are now experimenting widely themselves. The range of possibilities for teachers’ work is captured in the metaphors and imagery used by participants and included in Table 5.1 below.

At one level the table simply shows the diversity of teacher’s work represented by key metaphors used by participants to describe teachers who have influenced them and their own practices. But rather than provide boundaries to limit the possibilities of what teachers can do, as Hatton warns, by their very diversity and complexity the metaphors in fact open up possibilities for exploration of practice. When organised in a typology, as they have been here, some of the contradictions in how participants have imagined teachers’ work are highlighted.

**TABLE 5.1 POSSIBILITIES FOR TEACHERS’ WORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching is performance</th>
<th>Teaching is exploration</th>
<th>Teaching involves providing challenges</th>
<th>Teaching involves nurturing</th>
<th>Teaching is ordinary</th>
<th>Teaching is a struggle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dramatic</td>
<td>an explorer</td>
<td>combative</td>
<td>a healer</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>a failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative</td>
<td>a door-opener</td>
<td>iconoclastic</td>
<td>responsive</td>
<td>humble</td>
<td>struggling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playful</td>
<td>an unblocker</td>
<td>crazy</td>
<td>a parent</td>
<td>teeth-brushing</td>
<td>in crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vivid</td>
<td></td>
<td>not</td>
<td>open</td>
<td></td>
<td>challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a performer</td>
<td></td>
<td>respectable</td>
<td>loving</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>strange</td>
<td>belonging</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A teacher can be at different times a performer; occupying centre-stage and the full focus of students’ attention; and an opener of doors, where students are invited to take part in a journey of exploration where learning takes place in a
collaborative relationship. To contrast the idea that teachers should be challenging and possibly rather eccentric with the image of the nurturing, approachable teacher is not to suggest that there is a choice between the two. It is possible for a teacher to be both. The contrasting images of teaching as an ordinary, mundane activity and as a risky, difficult and frightening thing to do reveal the unpredictability of the job. Thus the metaphors used suggest not that these are alternative ways to imagine teaching (if not this, then that), but rather indicate the potential for multiple variations of their role as teachers shift across the different categories.

On one hand, participants themselves rarely fall clearly into one or other of the types suggested here, and often reveal contradictions in the way they describe what they do. However at the same time participants do express affinity with a particular approach, to the extent that it is possible to identify, say, Adam as teacher-performer, or Pippa as teacher-parent. This close identification with particular approaches indicates the presence of a “teaching self.”

The “teaching self”

The emergence of a “teaching self” (Palmer, 1998, p. 4), whereby each person expresses a clear, personal teaching identity, is a significant outcome of the research so far, something I was neither expecting nor even looking for. This “self” appears to be consistent throughout a person’s history, but is not necessarily something of which they are consciously aware.

The link between present identity and past experience is described as follows by Bullough and Gitlin.

To know the past is to know oneself as an individual and as a representative of a socio-historical moment in time. We are born into a
particular family, holding particular values, within a particular social, economic, religious and political context that brings with it … ways of making sense of experience and making it meaningful. (2001, p. 23)

Knowing oneself therefore involves a reflexive awareness of where we have come from. Giddens talks of the reflexive process that accompanies the development of self-identity. Self-identity has continuity, which is “a product of the person’s reflexive beliefs about their own biography” (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). The coherence and consistency of participants’ biographies (in particular the way their biographies are interpreted) clearly indicate this continuity of identity, and I would argue that the evidence presented in this chapter throws as much light on how participants developed a teaching identity as on how they learned to teach.

Of the group as a whole Hamish and Doris present particularly well-developed teaching selves, and their interviews indicate a high level of reflexiveness awareness. They are both clearly aware of the kind of learner they are and draw very widely when naming influential people or experiences, such as when Hamish remembers “reflecting on my thinking” and Doris recalls “people carrying my fear so I’m fearless.” Hamish was early on attracted to radical, mould-breaking teachers, to the extent that when, as an adult looking for some direction he found academics working in this way, he was able to understand that “this is where I’d always been.” Doris has a long-time history of paying attention to learning and feeling the need to care for others. She sought these qualities in her own teachers, first learnt the importance of these things as a child and maintains a focus on “what’s really happening” in her classes. Lindsey also has lived with the idea of herself as a teacher for a long time so she has had many opportunities to develop her teaching self. Her “happy threesome” principle is drawn directly from her early learning
experiences at home and at school. Interestingly, the ‘teaching self’ is not necessarily without inherent contradictions. Adam describes his struggle to find a balance between focusing on the person and focusing on the subject matter, and between “frightening the dickens out of them” and behaving “responsibly” towards students, although each aspect is integral to how he wants to work.

I conclude with some observations on the limitations of the research process as a means of revealing the ‘teaching self’. There were clear differences in the interviews between people who chose to talk about memories that they often reflect on, and people who had difficulty recalling significant memories. Clearly, people chose what to say, and made their own decisions about what was and was not relevant. As Ed put it, in the interview he was engaging reflexively with his biography by “trying to track aspects of my own learning process that I can see in my own mind are connected” with the way he was teaching at the time. But occasions when people said, “I’ve thought about that a lot” (Hamish and Doris are particularly clear about what is important because they have reflected on their learning so much) were relatively rare. More frequently, interviews were punctuated by a phrase like “I suppose” or “I hadn’t really thought about it before,” which suggests that these people do not often reflect on their own learning in the context of their current work as teachers.

Connected with this is the point that I did not ask explicitly for people to describe their teaching selves to me. Instead, I have constructed these identities from the data collected. Metaphors are particularly powerful ways of indicating or tracing repeated ideas or approaches. In Pippa’s case, for example, there was little explicit evidence that she has thought deeply about the kind of teacher she is or would like to be. In fact she explicitly distanced herself from the idea that she is an
expert in this aspect of her work. For her, becoming a teacher just seemed to happen. But just because Pippa is less consciously aware of her ‘teaching self’ doesn’t mean that it is not there. In describing her work as “unblocking,” in saying she wants to be a “responsive teacher” and in her evocation of teaching as being akin to parenting she presented a clear and consistent series of images of herself as a teacher.

It is also important to recognise that each person constructed their ‘self’ for the purposes of this exercise, and therefore I cannot claim with certainty that what I present here is a complete or truthful picture. But there was supplementary information to suggest that this wasn’t a fantasy created for the purpose of the interviews. My encounters with these people outside the timeframe and context of the research led me to select them as participants because of what I already knew about them, and these prior impressions were borne out in the interviews. There were also consistencies across the three interview phases, as will be seen in later chapters. When the evidence was considered together, there seemed to be a clear, traceable link between participants’ earliest memories and involvement with learning and the way each person presented a ‘teaching self’. However, while some clear trajectories can be identified in hindsight, the events that combined to help people learn about teaching appear to be random rather than planned. This process of constructing a ‘teaching self’ involves a complex interweaving of several influences and goes beyond mere mimicry of observed practices, although this too has a role in the learning. This leaves open the question of what are the factors which have led these people to pick up on productive experiences and use them reflexively to help mould their own development. It is also interesting to speculate on the chance at the heart of the process.
Finally, the discussion raises interesting questions about how these findings might be utilised in formal professional learning contexts. The chancy nature of this learning has been noted. Is it possible to establish a more controlled process whereby academics are encouraged or assisted to develop an explicit sense of their ‘teaching self’? Or would the removal of the chance element compromise the process by making it too regimented? These questions will be revisited in the thesis conclusion. It is also clear that participants have learned much from other teachers. The next two chapters will focus further on the kinds of opportunities that academics can have to do this.
CHAPTER 6

LEARNING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

The discussion so far has focused on some of the ways that personal experiences of learning have helped shape each participant’s sense of who they are as teachers. While this ‘teaching self’ has developed through extremely diverse experiences, both within and outside educational institutions, its presence and its preservation are important for all participants. Participants began their careers as teachers with a sense of their own teaching selves and have since maintained a desire to be themselves as teachers.

The research now looks at what happens when participants begin to teach and become subject to influences from within the institutions in which they work. It focuses in particular on the influence of colleagues on participants’ continuing professional learning. A socio-cultural perspective on learning suggests that learning is embedded in specific social circumstances, with learners developing personal understandings of the world within particular social contexts (Billett, 1998; Bullough and Gitlin, 2001). Professional learning is particularly subject to the
institutional context (such as a school or university) in which it takes place, and where several different factors are in play.

The institutional context, often experienced as an all-pervasive ‘culture’, can exert a powerful ‘normalising’ influence on its individual members (hooks, 1994; Billett, 1998) by approving and supporting certain practices and limiting others. For their part, individual teachers can be significant players in shaping these contexts as they educate one another, particularly (but not necessarily) less-experienced colleagues (Wilkin, 1992). While individual teachers also have roles as actors in the creation of an institution’s broader social context (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001), the role of individuals in creating these contexts is not unproblematic. Institutions are not always sympathetic to individuals who do not comply with institutional norms. Tension often exists between institutional norms and individual desires to behave differently (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001). However, while the institution shapes individuals, it is also possible for individuals to help shape the institution they are part of (Taylor, 1999; Bullough and Gitlin, 2001). This interplay between individual desires and institutional contexts will provide a focus for, firstly, a discussion of my own experiences of professional learning and then, in the following chapter, an examination of participants’ experiences.

**Teacher Training**

My teacher training provided an interface between my private learning and the ongoing, institution-based professional learning that I have been involved in ever since. As a student teacher I encountered an approach to learning that confirmed the ideas I had unconsciously developed as a learner myself. The curriculum that we followed emphasised the importance of considering students’ needs and feelings
in the classroom. In addition it focused on creativity, experimentation, ‘student-centred’ learning and freedom of expression – a ‘liberal progressive’ approach (Kemmis, Cole and Suggett, 1998). Not only were these ideas about teaching and learning advocated for the classrooms where we would eventually teach, they also shaped our own curriculum as student teachers. I trained to teach English and drama. We rarely had lectures and tutorials, and instead went to relaxation sessions, held weekly improvisation classes, created posters, wrote poetry, talked and laughed a lot. Even when we looked at issues like marking and assessment we were encouraged to think differently, and we learned to focus on the student's needs before anything else. “If a child gives you a piece of work, see it as a gift,” we were told. For our own assessment, instead of writing essays we were asked to create teaching resources, and for the only time in my life I stayed up until dawn to complete an assignment. My model of an Elizabethan theatre was received with rapture by my tutor. I found this approach to teaching and learning most congenial.

**FIRST SCHOOL**

I was inspired by these ideas and methods. By the end of the teacher education year I was eager to put them into practice and felt confident about my abilities as a teacher. But when I did eventually find myself, a fully-fledged teacher, teaching in my own classroom, I discovered how ill prepared I was. I was appointed to a school in the outer, middle class suburbs of a northern English city. The school was brand new, opening for the first time that year. This was a ‘middle’ school, spanning the upper primary and lower secondary ages, and had been established on progressive principles. Each class was taught by teachers based in their ‘home’ classroom for the majority of subjects, and a cross-curricular approach to learning
was promoted. I was delighted to have secured a position in a school which seemed so in tune with my preferred approach to teaching. However, when the thirteen-year-old Jake Roberts celebrated the end of my first day’s teaching by deliberately falling off his chair, to great acclaim, I discovered a different slant on the school’s ‘progressive’ credentials. The school was open plan, and therefore everyone and everything were extremely visible and audible. Janet, the Senior Mistress, came in to quell the near-riot that had been simmering in the class all day, and afterwards, when everyone had gone home, Janet sat me down and explained a few things. Something I should know, she said, was that most children didn’t respond very well to gentle or reasonable tones. “Imagine you’re talking to a dog. You have to be very firm if you want a dog to sit. You say “Sit!” like that. Do the same when you’re talking to the children and they’ll soon do as you tell them.”

From that day I seemed to lurch from disaster to disaster. Nothing I had learned as a student of teaching seemed to make any sense here. I had to start again from scratch, and my colleagues took over my professional education. Some indeed were more than eager to show me how ‘it’ was done, and given the open layout of the classrooms, my learning needs stood out painfully. I soon realised that I would quickly have to conform to the dominant practices of the school if I was to survive, not just to keep the peace with colleagues but also to avoid conflict with students who read my liberal progressivism simply as a weakness. My re-training sometimes came in the form of helpful, specific advice but more often consisted of a basic form of ‘modelling’ where teachers from neighbouring classroom areas would just come into my classroom and ‘sort out’ (discipline) the class for me.

Understandably, if the noise from my class was too distracting to the next class (and often it was!) something had to be done. I not only accepted but also (at
first) welcomed these interventions. On these occasions I would closely observe what colleagues said and did so I could practice different teachers’ tones of voice, mimic their non-verbal signals and rehearse the words and phrases they used. This probably ensured my survival in the first term as I began to develop a communication style that made me sound and behave more like a ‘teacher’ in the classroom, but at times I would experience ‘out of the body’ moments when my intellect seemed to become detached from my body at the front of the class. I would look down on myself and wonder who the person standing in front of the class, saying those things and acting in that way, could be. It was not a person I recognised as myself.

As my sense of self became fragmented, I tried hard to keep hold of remnants of my original ideals. There were still some things I would not do and things I would not say. I refused to humiliate children and was reluctant to impose the harshest sanctions that were available to me to use. I realised that although colleagues, in order to help me, modelled their ways of being teachers, I was not made aware of ways I could develop my own ways of being a teacher. Attempting to develop a classroom self that I recognised as my own, I found other ways to resist. While trying my best to perform ‘normally’ in the classroom I would wear clothes that were not ‘normal’ — too tight, too baggy, too bright, too black — and was again in trouble. By the second year at the school, I had begun to achieve an uneasy balance between how I wanted to be in the classroom and how others wanted me to be, but while I have satisfying memories of doing rewarding work with the students that year I found that my colleagues’ original perceptions of my ineptitude were difficult to shift. I was happy to be able to move on.
These experiences are typically those of a beginning teacher, in that my first priority was “confirmation of self” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 12). However, in order to develop as a professional I had to “overcome provincialism,” that is, to challenge and re-evaluate the initial theories, my “private theories,” in the light of the realities of the classroom (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, pp. 12-13). Although I learned many valuable lessons about the basic work that teachers do from colleagues at this school, I had no opportunities to explore an alternative middle ground where I might have been able to balance the school’s expectations with my own theories. All I could do in that first school was try to be more like the other teachers were. One of the students in my first class, in trouble with Janet because she had been behaving badly for me, explained that it was difficult to behave well in my class because I had “no personality.” I can understand what she meant. I was rarely myself in that school, finding it nearly impossible to construct a professional identity that made sense to other members of the school community. In this professional context I had little option but to learn from my colleagues. While I did not necessarily learn the things I wanted to, which were those that would help me become the kind of teacher I wanted to be, nevertheless I did learn something of what it meant to be the kind of teacher the school seemed to want me to be.

Looking back at this experience I realise that there remain many unanswered questions about the relationships that existed between the school and individual teachers. Then it was tempting to see the institution as monolithic, presenting a simple dichotomy: you are either like us and acceptable, or unlike us and unacceptable. Now I realise that there might have been other teachers who placed themselves outside the dichotomy – who were behaving in unorthodox ways, or who were “reconstructing” the school’s dominant theories and practices (Bullough
and Gitlin, 2001, p. 13). At this distance I can consider two possibilities. One is that there was a deliberate policy of ‘educating’ me so certain colleagues were informally detailed to take responsibility for this process and expose me to the ‘normal’ practices. Another is that intervention in my education was more haphazard, and that it was only those people who saw my practices as problematic who took action of their own accord to intervene. It might amount to the same thing, since the need to preserve the status quo was probably felt more strongly by people who were intent on upholding it anyway.

My first experience of professional learning took place in an institutional context that allowed easy access to certain techniques and limited access to others. It was difficult to go against the grain in a situation such as this, even though from my year as a student of teaching I did bring with me the experience of alternative approaches. However this is not to say that I had learned nothing during my teacher education course. Although in this school I had to keep much of what I learned as a student of teaching in abeyance, I still possessed knowledge which allowed me in the long term to reconsider the orientations I had brought with me from my personal learning and re-construct frames within which I could work to develop a consistent teaching self. I found in my next school an environment that allowed me to do this more successfully.

**IN THE SECOND SCHOOL**

I was fortunate that in this school the teacher I wanted to be was someone the school recognised as a ‘teacher’. In other words, here I found like-minded colleagues who loved talking about their teaching and who had similar goals and philosophies to mine. My immediate colleagues were not representative of the
whole staff, but together we formed a large enough critical mass to find support and inspiration from one another. Having an identity in common with colleagues meant that my own sense of professional identity became stronger. My professional learning was much more effective in this school not just because of a shared philosophy, based around a ‘personal growth’ philosophy of English teaching (Jeffcoate, 1992), but also because of our collegial practices.

The English department was housed in its own building, which meant that it was easy to share ideas. We rarely closed our doors, so it was easy to know what was going on in other people’s classrooms. The closeness, which in the first school was to facilitate surveillance, in this school facilitated the sharing of knowledge. We would take each other’s classes, team-teach, swap lesson ideas, resources, organise joint projects or theatre visits. I recall much talk about teaching in recess breaks, when we were able to be open about not just what had gone well but also what had gone badly. We would help one another out if one of us was having a “discussion” with a difficult student. We shared students’ work, moderated each other’s marking and tacitly established our own behaviour management policy, which was less oppressive than that operating in the rest of the school. In this environment, the isolation and disengagement that often characterises teachers’ experiences (Jackson, 1968) was replaced by conscious efforts to “build community” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 17). Here, because everyone was doing it, I could see how my private theory and my public practice could mesh together.

Identity in a professional context grows over time and develops as the result of observing how other people behave in social settings. There is thus a focus on “the shared meanings” that people give to that behaviour, whereby people “make sense” of what they observe (Taylor, 1999, p. 43). In the first school, the “shared
meanings” given to my behaviour by colleagues were different from the “shared meanings” given by colleagues in the second school. A different sense was given to my behaviour in the second school, which made my performance and my continuing learning much more effective. I was able to develop in the ways that I wanted to and was able to learn more effectively from people who were making the same sort of sense of the situation that I was.

It is interesting that in spite of the greater collectivity of this environment, it was much easier for me to develop an individual teaching identity because the culture was supportive of that. However, I now question whether it was an individual identity I developed or identification with a like-minded group. It was fortunate for members of the group that as individuals we could collectively identify with the group’s philosophy and practices, and I would not suggest that the reason I felt comfortable as an individual was because the individual was valued *per se*. Neither would I suggest that the ‘culture’ of the English department reflected the milieu of the whole school, nor do I imagine that every teacher would feel as comfortable in that environment as I did. In fact there were colleagues from the same department who did not enjoy being part of the group I have been describing. It just happened that I did feel comfortable, and thus I learned how to be more myself.

**OTHER PEOPLE LEARN FROM COLLEAGUES: THE FLIP EXPERIENCE**

Gradually, and through a range of experiences such as this, the integrity of my teaching ‘self’ was strengthening. When I became a university teacher after twelve years’ teaching and tutoring, I knew more clearly how to become the kind of teacher I wanted to be. I now focus on some experiences of being this teacher in a
university setting, in the specific context of a professional development project —
the Flexible Learning Initiatives Project (FLIP).

My involvement in this project at a university in northern England provided
the original inspiration for this doctoral research. This experience was of the
initiation and implementation of ‘Flexible Learning’ initiatives in four professional
schools in the university, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of group-
based teaching and learning in those schools. In each case, the intention was to
bring about changes to existing teaching and learning practices. The project was
designed to introduce approaches to teaching and learning that had already been
successfully implemented in the university’s school of education. I was one of the
team of four academics from the school of education, whose task was to introduce
flexible learning methods to colleagues in the other schools (Pearce et al., 1996).

It’s important here to emphasise the nature of the relationship that existed
between the original project team members, who were all close colleagues from the
School of Education. We taught on an initial teacher education programme that
was grounded in a liberal progressive/socially critical curriculum (Kemmis, Cole and
Suggett, 1998), with a focus on how aspects of students’ experience such as gender,
race and social class are played out in the classroom. We both promoted and
practised a student-centred approach, a socially inclusive curriculum and student
autonomy in learning. These approaches formed the basis for the design of the
Flexible Learning project, and team members were selected on the basis of their
commitment to and experience of working in these ways. We had also had several
years’ experience together as colleagues, and our working relationships were
sufficiently close to have established a climate of mutual respect, trust and support.
This close relationship did not preclude a healthy level of debate and discussion
about one another’s ideas, however. We didn’t necessarily agree on everything, but our common sense of purpose united us and provided a clear focus around which discussion could take place. Our relationship was collaborative, not competitive; we valued the group highly, and we ascribed to democratic processes when making decisions.

The shared experience that formed the specific basis for the project was the development over several years of ‘syndicate group learning’, in which a small group of learners was given responsibility for organising and supporting each other’s learning with the help of a tutor (Pearce et al., 1996, p. 134). Our first project involved working with tutors in the School of Architecture, who wanted to introduce this form of learning into the first year architecture course. In many respects this was a ‘dream’ project. It had been generously funded and had been given the blessing of both university administration and the Heads of Schools of Education and Architecture. The project was structured around a naturalistic action research model (Stenhouse, 1983) whereby practitioners are encouraged to think about their practice and engage in an ongoing review of its effectiveness, with a view to initiating change. This review was supported by processes of reflective practice (Schön, 1987), such as written and audio journals, peer observation and a cycle of review meetings. Woven into this process of reflection was an element of formal professional learning, whereby the education team would provide support for tutors in introducing elements of syndicate group learning into the first year curriculum of Bachelor of Architecture students. Thus in the first year of the project the review process was initiated and used from the second year onwards as a basis for planning and implementing the new approaches. Our role was to provide
support for every aspect of the review, planning and implementation phases, as the need arose.

I will not explore the details of project design here, but instead will focus on some aspects of professional learning that are relevant to this current research and which emerged during the implementation phase of the project. The first aspect to note is the relationship between architecture team members. I have mentioned the close relationship that existed between the team from education. An even closer relationship existed among the architecture staff. The team leader from architecture was a senior lecturer with thirty years’ experience as an academic in the same school of architecture. The remaining team members were all graduate students who were supporting themselves financially through their PhD studies by working as tutors. All had been students in the same school, all had been taught by the senior academic who was the unofficial ‘team leader’, and all had gone straight into tutoring on completing their first degrees. Their experiences as learners had therefore been closely circumscribed by the practices of the institution in which they were now tutors, and the team as a whole shared many perspectives on teaching and learning in architecture. The tutors’ experiences of teaching had been circumscribed by the institutional context in which they had been learners.

The review and planning phase went smoothly, and by the end of the review year we had developed an agreed set of aims and plans for the implementation phase. Since the education team and the architecture staff who would be involved designed this collectively, we (the education team) expected that implementation would be smooth. However, as implementation progressed, we began to experience problems. Early in the second year it became evident that there was a high degree
of resistance on the part of the architecture staff to the ways of working that we were promoting. Four particular incidents that exemplify this are discussed below.

One instance was the ways in which decisions made by the whole project team could be reversed without the education members’ knowledge. This is one example noted in the journal I kept at the time:

F. (the senior team member) had finally agreed on Friday to set up the groups as we had agreed in the meeting. S. was on the phone to me today saying he’s done exactly what we agreed not to. It’s as if he’s doing it deliberately. Why is he resisting? (Pearce, n.d.)

This practice of unilaterally reversing a decision made in what we believed to have been a democratic forum was very different from the processes we were used to in education. For us, once a decision had been made at a meeting it could not be unmade until the next meeting. We assumed that the same principles would apply in architecture, not realising that while this practice had become part of the culture of practices in the School of Education it was not the way things were done in architecture. Now that we were discovering that decisions might be changed at will, the value of our weekly meetings began to look questionable and the principal means of communication adopted by the project team felt compromised. For our part we were resistant to abandoning our established practices, which were so culturally embedded that we were unable to imagine any other viable way of making decisions. We therefore interpreted the architects’ behaviours as resistance when they could equally have been seen as a way of re-asserting valued cultural practices.

Although in this case the resistance (as we saw it) had come from the most senior member of the architecture team, similar reactions occurred among the
younger tutors. I recorded the response of one of the graduate tutors to difficulties that occurred in the syndicate groups:

M’s. response today to the (two out of 90!) students who complained that the group had lost their way. He immediately reverted back to the ‘transmissive teacher’ mode — “Okay, listen to me and I’ll tell you what to do” — and this to the whole group of 90, most of whom were doing really well. He talked afterwards of abandoning the whole thing. He appears very apprehensive about the outcomes, and believes it’s not going well when actually it seems to us that students are making wonderful progress. (Pearce, n.d.)

The immediacy of M.’s response, as well as its nature (“reverting back to the ‘transmissive teacher’ mode”) and the note about his “apprehension” are all striking. M. appears to be longing to get back to his old, familiar role; familiar not just because this is the way he prefers to teach (he was at this time only in his second year of teaching) but also because this was what he was familiar with as a learner. The fact that he ascribed the same uncertainty to every student, when only two had approached him (and there was no evidence that these feelings were common – quite the contrary actually) suggests that he was projecting the kinds of anxieties he would have had as a student on to the whole group.

And the fact that he so quickly switched back to a more familiar teaching role, in spite of the substantial work we had been doing on developing tutors’ facilitation skills, reflected his deeply embedded notion of what it meant to be a teacher. The note about his “apprehension” also indicated the level of emotional unease associated with his discomfort in a new role.
Later in the process, more overt resistance took the form of attacks on our values:

C. said he felt what we were doing was “fascist.” We all felt very challenged by this — thought we were encouraging more democratic practices! We agreed that it appears to be simply a reflection of his unease with the new approaches, or are we evading the issue? (Pearce, n.d.)

This comment reflects the extent of misunderstanding that existed between the two groups of academics. While the attribution of political difference might be explained away as evidence simply of C.’s “unease with the new approaches,” nevertheless his use of such a strongly negative word as “fascist” to describe our practices reveals an extreme level of opposition and certainly hints at a fundamental (and mutual) failure to communicate and understand either side’s positions. By choosing this word, C. shows that he sees teaching and learning as inherently political activities and demonstrates the strength of his conviction that ‘his’ way of working is the right one. Given the extent of his opposition, demonstrated here by his strength of feeling, it is not surprising that C. found it nearly impossible to change his practices in the way we recommended.

My use above of the word “side” implies that each team’s position became increasingly entrenched as time went on. While this was the case, and we in education became increasingly challenged by the need to recognise and negotiate cultural differences, a split began to emerge within the architecture team itself as positions became more polarised.
S. is getting very upset. She was talking to R. about her difficulties with the (architecture) tutors. Says they have marginalised her, and that they believe she’s siding with us and isn’t interested in their problems with this. S. re-stated her total commitment to this project because of its potential for more equitable treatment of students. Concerned about the rights of students who don’t fit into the culture and fail because of it (for example M. her partner). (Pearce, n.d.)

Finally, as a result of these differences, the future of the whole project was at risk:

None of the (architecture) tutors, except S., seems willing to engage with any of the difficulties we’ve been finding. The response seems to be “Well it didn’t work, then, did it? We might as well get back to square one now.” Even R. (from the education team) was talking seriously about jacking it in today because everyone’s so demoralised. (Pearce, n.d.)

This extract shows how badly the growing resistance was affecting the progress of the project. At first we were at a loss to understand how was it that an apparently straightforward process of implementation could trigger such strong emotions and damaging interpersonal conflicts among people whose relationship started with apparently shared goals and purposes. However, as we reflected on the situation and tried to work out why things had gone so badly wrong, we found ourselves focusing more and more on the cultural differences that seemed to exist between ourselves and the tutors from architecture. We found that if we examined the factors in play at the institutional/individual nexus where professional learning takes place, some reasons for our difficulties could be identified.

Firstly, the initial design of the project relied on the assumption that academics are across the board a homogenous group in their orientation towards (and in their understanding of) teaching and learning processes. In assuming that it
was appropriate for the project to take a single approach to professional learning, we failed to problematise the possible diversity of values, orientation and understanding of the academics with whom we were working. Our original thinking had been that all we had to do to ensure positive outcomes for participants was to help tutors develop expertise in teaching in the way that we valued. We knew there had to be a gap between our expertise as educators and theirs, who were first and foremost architects. Perhaps, we thought, all we had to do was bridge that gap by helping architecture tutors acquire such things as facilitation skills and the ability to model and support collaborative learning.

This flaw in our assumption was then exposed when we began to realise that the processes of teaching and learning practised in architecture were based on markedly different values and beliefs than those on which our practice as educators was based. The architects privileged the unconventional, promoted challenge and debate not consensus, and valued competition not collaboration in order to produce brilliant and creative architects. The teaching and learning practices reflected these values closely. In particular there was a conscious mentoring of the ‘chosen few’ students who showed marked creative promise. These students were befriended by tutors and afforded certain privileges, such as contact with tutors at a social as well as a professional level. Competition was fostered through the use of the ‘crit.’, a regular and public examination of students’ design work, and rigorous examinations. The atmosphere of competitiveness was further promoted by the scarcity of resources, such as drawing boards and studio space, which were fought over rather than shared among students. Underpinning these practices was the notion of teacher as ‘guru’, whose role was to pass on his or her unique expertise, passions and wisdom in teacher-centred contexts such as lectures. All of these practices ran
counter to the principles behind the kind of group work that we wanted to introduce. In contrast to this, the reverse was the case in education. Here the use of course work instead of examinations, and the award of an ungraded qualification, reduced competitiveness. The focus was on sharing ideas and resources, on promoting peer support, and on the development of skills in negotiation, all developed via group projects and collaborative learning. By facilitating learning rather than teaching their specialisms, tutors supported the student-centred environment (Pearce et al., 1996, pp. 135-136). Given two such different ways of thinking, of course it was difficult to find a common ground.

It is interesting that differences emerged during the practice, not during the period of theorising. While architecture tutors welcomed the rhetoric of collaborative learning, difficulties emerged when it came to translate the rhetoric into practice. When embedded in the practice, it can be difficult to see the values that underpin that practice. On reflection, what we were dealing with was less about the techniques of teaching and learning and much more about contested values and beliefs that were enacted through practice. The success of our project depended on our being able to interrupt the teaching and learning practices that had been adopted by the architecture tutors. This was difficult to do when the professional learning of the people with whom we were working was embedded so firmly in a set of values that were so different from ours. In addition, architecture tutors drew on a narrow field of experience of teaching practices, which meshed closely with their personal experiences of learning. Their lack of experience of alternative approaches, coupled with an adherence to a set of guiding principles so embedded in practice that their existence was invisible until there was a practical challenge, worked against change. What made the process more difficult was our
own failure to explicate our values and beliefs either to one another or to the architects.

**CULTURE, OR DISCOURSE?**

These observations identify some striking differences between the values and theories typical of education and architecture and the practices through which the values and theories are expressed. They give support to the view that that “[i]nstitutions have strong and pervasive cultures which are embedded in a particular time and place” (Billett, 1998, p. 258). It was clear to us that there were fixed and pervasive cultures representing opposing forms of educational practice in each School. Influenced by the combative atmosphere, which increasingly haunted all our meetings, we began to see the issue simply in binary, oppositional terms (see Pearce et al. (1996) for a detailed discussion of these perceptions). The possibilities for professional learning seemed to be circumscribed by the orthodoxy of the culture of the School of Architecture. Here, tutors learned how to be tutors by modelling their practice on that of more experienced teachers in the same school. Given the homogeneity of this ‘culture’, tutors rarely experienced opportunities for exposure to alternative ways of working so their opportunities for adopting different practices were compromised, which became detrimental to the project.

However, further reflection on the FLIP suggests a more complex analysis. The first thing that is striking is that if the architecture ‘culture’ was homogenous, which is how it is presented so far, then the same ought to have been the case for the education ‘culture’. Analysis suggests that this was not the case. While our model for practice was one that prioritised collaboration, what we actually practise (particularly during the implementation period) was closer to a transmissive model.
of teaching than a collaborative one. There had been no negotiation of first principles, and negotiation at a later stage was based on an (erroneous) assumption that acceptance of the rhetoric could be translated readily into acceptance of its practical implications, which were still not negotiated. Therefore our practice as agents of professional learning did not measure up to our own rhetoric, which suggests that the relationship between cultural beliefs and cultural practices is not unproblematic.

Also, the shifting set of relations and processes within the group of architects points to a diverse rather than homogenous culture. The most notable example was the case of S., quoted above as having been marginalised by her colleagues. S. was actively counter-resisting the architects’ resistance by telling us what was happening in our absence and by taking responsibility for aspects of the organisation of group work to defuse or circumvent potential problems. S. had a number of personal reasons to want the project to succeed. She had a partner who was a ‘non-traditional’ architecture student, having come in at a mature age as a trade-qualified architectural technician. He had found the transition to the more academic milieu of the university very difficult and had failed several courses before starting to do well. S. was open about the fact that her motivation for change came from a desire to reduce the instances of such experiences for other students. S. was also the only woman in the architecture team. Although she was the coordinator, she had little social status within the group (she was not a member of the ‘inner circle’) and hence had little real authority. We never explored with her or the others the reasons why this was the case, but it is possible to speculate that both her gender and the fact that her research area was teaching and learning in architecture, not an aspect of
architecture itself, were significant factors. She had less to gain both personally and professionally from maintaining her group membership.

On a broader scale it is also possible to identify a continual shifting of positions and responses, depending on who was present at meetings or involved in decision making. The presence or absence of the most senior team member in architecture and the presence or absence of our project manager both impacted on decision making and the ensuing practical outcomes. Similarly, within our own group there were individual differences in the approaches we took, with some of us more prepared to negotiate changes to the project than others. Analysis of our struggle to facilitate change had drawn our attention to the marked differences in culture between education and architecture, but reflections on these experiences now lead me to question the concept of ‘culture’ as a fixed, nameable entity.

Becher points to the use of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘sub-culture’ to explain the social organisation of academic life (1989). How do these terms reflect the experiences discussed in this chapter? In the sense that culture is what is valued by those in authority and supported by organisational structures within an institution (Macmillan, 2001), these experiences reveal the operation of cultural practices. However, in relation to how the individuals discussed here have experienced their teaching and learning practices while part of an institution, the idea that they are acting according to cultural expectations or constraints seems limited. While at one level it is possible to say that culturally orthodox practice does occur within a given institution, its impact on individual practices will differ depending on what the individual brings to the institution. The experiences discussed above show individuals exhibiting a range of comfort levels when asked to adopt culturally new practices. I have suggested that one reason for feelings of comfort or discomfort
might be the extent of identification an individual has with the dominating culture of the institution.

The experiences I have discussed also show that institutional culture can be successfully contested, and that within an institutional culture there is room for the renegotiation of practices. While this is difficult for an individual to do alone, it can happen, particularly if you can find other like-minded people to work with. A postscript to the FLIP experience illustrates this. Two years after the project was officially completed, syndicate group learning had become established as the key approach to learning in the first year architecture course and was being gradually introduced to other years. Students throughout the school were demanding more group-based learning, and tutors who had not been originally involved in the FLIP had begun to ask for advice about adopting more student-centred teaching and learning processes. S. herself had gained a position as lecturer with responsibility for implementing these changes. In this case, S. had been influential in changing student and teacher perceptions of what could be considered as appropriate teaching and learning practices in the school of architecture. Although at first glance an institution may seem to possess some clear and salient cultural features such as those mentioned above, under the surface the picture becomes more complex as practices shift and change. I would suggest that, while institutional culture can provide a rather fixed set of parameters that govern the kind of practices that are possible for teachers, the impact of these parameters is continuously mediated by other factors. In the examples above, personal experience, philosophical and political positioning and theoretical understandings have all impacted on the existing cultural parameters, both to support them and to contest them.
Rather than use the term ‘culture’ to describe social relations in institutions, I suggest ‘discourse’ is a more appropriate way to describe the constantly shifting meanings and social relations that were in play in all three institutions described above. ‘Discourse’, in the Foucauldian sense, assumes that history “is the medium in which life today is conducted” (McHoul & Grace, 1997, p. viii). This suggests that individuals come to develop ideas about practice based on their own histories, which are expressed through discourses (or units of knowledge). The process by which the discourses are identified is “archaeology,” whereby the sources or the “organising archives” of discourses are sought (McHoul & Grace, 1997, p. 40; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, pp. 64-66). Thus for example in the production of institutional practices in education, many different forms of discourse on teaching and learning come into play and, potentially, into conflict (McHoul & Grace, 1997, pp. 38; 40). I suggest that these include the discourses brought to the site by the individual members of the institution. To return finally to the FLIP experience, students in both schools, other tutors in both schools, the historically located practices in both schools, the influence of outside professional bodies on the practices of both schools all contributed to the plurality of discourses in play. For individuals learning about teaching from colleagues, this plurality of discourses has the potential both to constrain individual practices and to enable different ones.

CONCLUSION

I began this chapter by exploring the influence that individual members of the institutions in which I worked had on the way I learned to teach. An analysis of my own professional learning highlighted the problematic relationship between what appear to be the dominant practices of the institution and the sometimes different
practices of individuals within that institution. The experience of working on the FLIP led me to question the extent to which the culture of the institution as a whole, as well as the work of individual colleagues, impacts on teachers’ professional learning. In all the instances discussed, the presence of at least one other like-minded colleague had been significant in assisting the individual to activate their teaching ‘self’ with confidence and success.

Based on the FLIP experience, I initially suggested that culture was highly significant both in providing options and in limiting them. Then I went on to point out that since it is the individuals who form the institution who create an institution’s ‘culture’, the ‘culture’ is not a totalising framework. In effect, cultural practices and cultural positions are constantly shifting and being re-shaped by individuals as they contribute in different ways to their own and their peers’ professional learning. By adopting the use of ‘discourse’ to describe the processes at work in shaping individual practice within institutions, I emphasise the shifting nature of these processes and how social relations can influence both the ideologies and practices of individual teachers.

Based on these perceptions, in the next chapter I further examine the influence of colleagues as academics pursue their professional learning in an institution. In particular I focus on the interface between individual and institutional discourses as participants experience learning from colleagues in an institutional context.
INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 6, I wrote about the role that other teachers have played in my own and other colleagues’ professional learning. I also discussed the conceptual shift that occurred as I reflected on these experiences, and I suggested that the kind of learning that takes place in professional contexts is subject to a set of discourses about what are considered to be acceptable, appropriate or feasible practices. I initially explored the concept of ‘culture’ to account for the distinctions I observed in different institutional settings. However I later adopted ‘discourse’ to describe the processes at work in shaping individual practice within institutions. It provided a more apt conceptual framework from which to examine the shifting and dynamic nature of institutional practices; ‘culture’ can imply a more fixed set of ideologies or values.
In this chapter I look at ways in which the research participants have learned about teaching from other teaching colleagues. Based on the experiences discussed in Chapter 6 I expected to find that fellow teachers would be a significant source of both knowledge about teaching and support for participants’ professional development. The view that knowledge is constructed in sociocultural contexts such as “everyday vocational practice in the workplace” (Billett, 1998, p. 256) suggests that colleagues have roles to play in teachers’ professional learning. Brookfield (1995) advocates using colleagues’ experiences to assist in critical reflection. This conceptual framework has helped form the current research. For Brookfield, holding conversations with colleagues can help teachers share experiences and can assist learning, for example if colleagues are able to suggest solutions to shared problems. Colleagues can also help teachers see their practice “in new ways” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 141).

Based on the FLIP experience and on ideas about academic identity (Becher, 1989; Taylor, 1999), I began this phase of the research expecting that, if participants were to engage in learning of this kind alongside colleagues, then it would take place within their discipline areas. What I found was that, while other colleagues contributed significantly to participants’ professional learning, the nature of the learning was diverse and idiosyncratic. Not only did participants experience problematic relationships with colleagues working in their department or discipline area, their experiences of learning from colleagues could be both highly positive and extremely negative. I have therefore discussed the research data from three different perspectives: first, the problems of discipline identification, then experiences of learning from colleagues, and finally the impact of institutional discourses both public and hidden. The chapter’s title, “On the back foot,”
highlights the difficulties that participants found when these three aspects intersected their practices.

**IDENTIFICATION WITH AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE**

My initial approach to this phase of the research was influenced by my fascination with the apparent congruence between academics’ different teaching practices and the ‘culture’ of the academic discipline with which they identify. The idea that academic identity is closely associated with an academic discipline forms the basis of Becher’s (1989) work. This idea was reinforced by my thinking about the FLIP project. According to Taylor (1999), identification with an academic discipline is one key aspect of academic identity; such identification is expressed in phrases like “I’m a linguist” or ‘I’m a chemist” (Taylor, 1999, p. 41). Identification with one’s academic discipline forms one part of the process of collective “sensemaking” that exists in organisations and provides “the basis for expectation in social interactions — we know what to expect from others, and what/who it is that we are expected to be” (Taylor, 1999, p. 43). Since these distinctions made sense in relation to both Becher’s work and the ideas that emerged from the FLIP, I therefore planned research questions that would, first, trace the extent to which participants identified with their discipline, and secondly explore the extent to which this identification, if it existed, helped them understand what kinds of teachers they were “expected to be.” The following discussion begins by examining ideas about discipline association as they relate to the experiences of participants in this research.

Since I had chosen to select participants on the basis of their broad academic associations, I used the taxonomy that Becher derives from Kolb and Biglan (Becher, 1989, pp. 11-12) as a guide. This taxonomy enables Becher to locate each
academic discipline in one of four domains according to whether it is hard (quantitative) or soft (qualitative) and pure (reflective) or applied (active). Thus, disciplines in the area of the natural sciences are broadly speaking in the hard/applied domain; social professions such as law and education are in the soft/applied area; mathematics and theoretical sciences are hard/pure; and the soft/pure domain is inhabited by the humanities and social sciences. It is important to mention that Becher points out the limitations of a taxonomy such as this one, which attempts such a broad approach to categorising academic disciplines. As he convincingly argues, this categorisation “could prove seriously misleading when subjected to closer and more detailed examination.” But Becher also points to the usefulness of such a broad-based framework as a way of describing disciplinary variations and showing up the “interconnections” between disciplines (1989, p. 17). By selecting two participants to represent each of the four domains of this broader framework I hoped to be able to identify some degree of variation across the four domains.

In the earlier discussion of the FLIP, I highlighted the close identification of both groups of academics with their discipline. For the education staff, our long-term collegial association was built on our individual experiences of working in the discipline area of education. For the architects, the existing professional relationships had evolved out of previous, long-standing student-teacher relationships in that discipline. These long-term associations support the development of common philosophies and practices by exerting a ‘normalising’ influence on group members (hooks, 1994; Billett, 1998). I therefore expected that participants in the research would have similar experiences of long-term associations with their discipline, which I could then use as a starting point to
explore the ‘normalising’ influence of the culture that surrounded them as they learned to teach.

I selected the participants according to the domains in which they currently teach. However, during the research process I quickly discovered that discipline- and domain-association were not easily ascribed. As Table 7.1 shows, even without taking into account each person’s previous domain, three people in their present discipline were working across two domains.

**Table 7.1 Participants’ domain- and discipline-associations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Present domain*</th>
<th>Present discipline area</th>
<th>Previous domain*</th>
<th>Previous discipline area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>Soft pure</td>
<td>Philosophy/cultural studies</td>
<td>Soft pure</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamish</td>
<td>Soft applied</td>
<td>Sociology of education</td>
<td>Hard applied</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>Soft applied</td>
<td>Education (language)</td>
<td>Soft pure</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippa</td>
<td>Hard pure</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Hard applied/hard pure</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justine</td>
<td>Hard pure (hard applied)</td>
<td>Maths &amp; physics (environmental science)</td>
<td>Soft pure/soft-applied</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Hard applied</td>
<td>Mathematics (economics)</td>
<td>Hard applied (soft applied?)</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>Hard applied (soft pure)</td>
<td>Environmental science (ethics)</td>
<td>Soft pure</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on Becher (1989).
I first met Adam when he led a staff development seminar on teaching mathematics, but he turned out to be an economist not primarily a mathematician. Doris, who is an academic in an institute of sustainability and technology policy, is in fact not a scientist but a philosopher who teaches environmental ethics. Justine teaches pure physics in the applied context of environmental science to help students understand about weather. To further complicate the issue, once I started interviewing participants I found that most had the experience of changing disciplines and, in some cases, of changing domains as well. Hamish’ and Justine’s shifts, from chemistry to sociology of education and from music to physics respectively, were the most striking. At an early stage it became clear that the experiences of these participants went beyond the hypothesis that I had started with, and that the academics in the study did not ‘fit’ Becher’s taxonomy very well. However, having selected participants on the basis of their apparent discipline association, I proceeded with questions based on the assumption that discipline- and domain-association were factors worth exploring.

The first questions in this phase\textsuperscript{12} invited participants to reflect on the uniqueness of their subject area.

- How would you describe your own subject to someone who had never heard of it before?
- In what ways do you think your subject is distinct from others?

I then wanted to probe the relation of this uniqueness (if it existed) to the kind of teaching practices that they had developed as a result.

- Does your subject lend itself to any particular styles of teaching?

\textsuperscript{12} The questions were based on my observations of the FLIP.
• Can you think of an occasion when you learned to teach in these styles?

Finally I asked about participants’ feelings of comfort or satisfaction with these distinct ways of teaching (which I assumed existed).

• Do you feel comfortable teaching the way you do? Is there anything you would like to change?
• Have you ever experimented with different ways of teaching? What happened?

As with the first phase of interviews, the prepared questions became prompts that helped us keep a focus but which also allowed participants to take the lead and follow the conversation threads that interested them. This flexibility allowed the conversations to take a different direction than the one I had expected. Rather than expressing a simple identification with their discipline, participants identified with a range of discourses about pedagogy that were present both within and beyond the particular institution and which were not necessarily strongly associated with a particular discipline or domain. In the discussion that immediately follows I have kept a focus on participants’ experiences of working with colleagues both within and outside their immediate discipline area, to allow comparisons of the range of responses to the original questions. However in response to the broader context in which participants framed their experiences I will later open up the discussion to take account of two other aspects of academic identity that Taylor discusses (1999, p. 41). These are identification with an institution, and identification with more general ideas about what it is to be an academic.
IDENTITY PROBLEMS

Participants’ identification with a particular academic discipline was not strong. Of the group as a whole, Adam most closely identified with the discipline area in which he was working. It is notable that Adam was a student in the school of economics where he now teaches, and teachers who are now his departmental colleagues profoundly influenced him. One “brilliant” academic has been a long-term model for Adam, and there are many key strategies that he’s “clearly learned” from this person. Adam is the only person to express a strong identification with not only his discipline but also with other academic colleagues in the discipline area. The other participants’ responses tend to reinforce the impression, already indicated, that participants teach and think not only across disciplinary boundaries but also across domains. At one level, teaching could span two or more disciplines, as in Pippa’s case. Originally a graduate of the applied sciences, she later gained a degree in computer science and now teaches fundamental mathematics to science students. Pippa would like these students to see that mathematics is generic, although “the students still see maths as quite separate from science.” Pippa’s cross-disciplinary work presents a difficulty for her because colleagues in the mathematics department do not consider her to be a ‘real’ mathematician. In both her teaching (her students are science specialists) and in her research (which is in teaching and learning in mathematics), she challenges traditional thinking about what a mathematician should do. Her closest teaching association is in fact with colleagues who teach mathematics in other domains — in student support and in education.

Justine’s situation can be contrasted with Pippa’s. While both teach across disciplines, Justine’s experiences mirror the “trauma of the birth of new disciplinary groupings” discussed by Becher (1989, p. 21). Justine teaches in two long-
established discipline areas, mathematics and physics, within a relatively new area, environmental science. She describes her subject as “definitely multi-disciplinary,” yet in spite of its usefulness across disciplines she struggles to retain physics and maths as core elements in a developing discipline area. “What has happened is that over the years the policy section of environmental science has actually become stronger, at the expense of the physics and maths … it’s eroded the physics and maths staff.” Like Pippa, Justine is at odds with colleagues in her department. Unlike Pippa it is because she wants to continue the work of ‘real’ physics and mathematics.

Doris’ work also occurs across boundaries of disciplines and domains. Her general aim is “to educate the whole person and to provide a space for them to educate themselves.” In simple terms, as a philosopher working in sustainability and technology policy, Doris works alone in her discipline area, but her approach to teaching draws more from applied science than philosophy. She takes students on field trips to teach her subject, eco-philosophy, and describes her approach as “unique”.

I’m a philosopher and most philosophers don’t go on field trips. Physicists or ecologists might possibly do field trips. There’s one group of physicists who went to look at the physics of snow, and they went on field trips to high altitude places, but I haven’t come across any philosopher who does field trips.

In spite of her unique approach, Doris does not feel isolated within her department in the same way as Pippa and Justine. When the then vice-chancellor wanted to cancel her course, Doris’s colleagues and the dean of the school stood by her and argued successfully that it should be retained.
Lindsey works both within and outside of the “box” of her discipline. Although she is a lecturer in education, she primarily identifies with her original discipline area, English, which she now teaches in an applied context. Her concern is that “the mere fact that it’s titled English keeps it in a box,” and she expresses frustration that colleagues with expertise in other subject areas are “territorial” and remain tied to their particular “domain.” Lindsey’s goal is to make what she teaches less content-driven and more “integrative … generic … practical.” She would also like her colleagues to adopt this as a goal. Lindsey envisages a time when she can work collaboratively with colleagues in education to “open up all (original emphasis) of our books, see where everything is linked, see where there’s overlap … see it as a big picture not just our own little box.” Although Lindsey works with colleagues in the same broad discipline, education, as long as colleagues continue working in their own separate “boxes” of sub-disciplines, there remain barriers to collaboration. (Colleagues’ ”boxes” can be as circumscribed as the particular unit they are responsible for: when she refers to “our books” she means each person’s unit materials.) Lindsey’s discussion shows her struggling to do justice to the essential elements of two different disciplines. On one hand, it is important to remain true to the way she sees English, as: “a vehicle for teaching across all the areas.” On the other, she recognises the need for academics in education to be true to that discipline also, and “practice what they preach” by considering the learning needs of the students. Lindsey appears comfortable teaching in the discipline area of English, but finds working among people with conflicting views about the education curriculum and education pedagogy problematic.

Before taking the discussion of identification with a discipline further, it is appropriate to contextualise the idea of disciplines in relation to the institution in
which participants were teaching. An important feature of the university from the start was the promotion of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning reflected in an emphasis on the development of transferable intellectual skills and on allowing each student to design a degree to suit his or her specific needs from across disciplines (Murdoch University, 2004). This approach has meant that ‘traditional’ divisions between disciplines have become less apparent.

Interdisciplinarity, in which teachers focus on generic aspects of teaching content across a number of disciplinary boundaries, is the main focus and goal of both Hamish’s and Ed’s teaching (also see the later discussion of the institutional setting). Hamish explicitly describes himself as an “interdisciplinarian.”

I’m not exactly sure what my specialty is. It has to do with being an interdisciplinarian, and it’s a strange specialty because it almost denies depth of certain kinds but at the same time it’s not the breadth that you would have within any particular field. When I first came to Gum Tree, in the first few years here I kept asking myself, “Why is it that I don’t feel like a specialist?” And that’s what’s being asked of me. And now I’m much less dissatisfied with that because I see that the kinds of things that I write in and teach in all fit together because they are about general issues.

This positioning has not come without a struggle, both in terms of his identity as an academic (“[w]hy is it that I don’t feel like a specialist?”) and in terms of how colleagues identify him (“that’s what’s being asked of me”). While Hamish is now more comfortable with the way he is positioned (“now I’m much less dissatisfied”), he still feels that colleagues look for “an apology that I would be involved in interdisciplinary work, that that is somehow meant to be unsatisfactory to me as an academic.” Hamish’s comments refer to the expectation that you are cannot really call yourself an academic unless you identify with an academic discipline.
Interdisciplinarity is also Ed’s focus. His teaching examines “shifts and changes in the way people imagine what is real” through the specific lens of culture. His work involves reading “political or economic theorising or political process from a cultural point of view” and “bridges … history, cultural anthropology and cultural studies … also religious studies.” While Ed explores discourses from a number of areas in his teaching, he is

... fairly consistently centring on the cultural aspect of an issue so that even if I’m looking at an economic or political process, I’m more attuned than a political economist might be to ways that their own imaginations construct the scenarios or reflect attitudes.

The area in which Ed teaches, Asian studies, belongs in a “new disciplinary grouping” without the traditions and recognisable identity of more long-standing disciplines (Becher, 1989, pp. 21-23). However, unlike Pippa, Justine and Hamish who, for different reasons, express themselves as at odds with colleagues working in their more immediate discipline area, Ed feels a more isolating lack of identification with the wider institution and the wider society, as well as feeling he has little in common with colleagues. He feels that his situation, in which “it is increasingly problematic to even talk about culture as though it mattered,” places him “in collision with the trajectory of history at the moment.” Of all the participants, Ed expresses most dramatically a lack of identification with what it is to be an academic at this historical moment. We return to this aspect of academic identity later in the chapter.

The discussion of the data around the first of Taylor’s (1994) three aspects of academic identity, identification with a discipline, indicates that this is problematic for participants. Whether they work outside the discipline to which they are
institutionally linked (Pippa), across disciplines (Doris, Justine and Lindsey), or use an interdisciplinary approach (Hamish and Ed), there are different levels of identification with a discipline in the group. Certainly the clear-cut connections identifiable for academics involved in the FLIP are not as clear-cut in the group featured in this current study.

The purpose of this phase of questioning was to find out the extent to which participants identified with their discipline and then explore the extent to which this identification, if it existed, helped them understand what kinds of teachers they were “expected to be” (Taylor, 1999, p. 43). What was found was that the lack of clear association with discipline and domain made the link between discipline association and teacher identity problematic. Following from this it might be expected that, lacking the “sense of belonging” and the “sense of continuity and coherence” that emerges as a result of “[s]uccessful identity work” (through which strong identification with a discipline might be achieved) (Taylor, 1999, p. 43), participants would experience conflict or confusion about their roles as teachers within a discipline. Given the institution’s promotion of an interdisciplinary approach, it is not surprising that many participants do not identify strongly with a particular discipline. Even when there are examples of participants learning about teaching initially from within a particular discipline area, as participants develop their own ideas about appropriate ways to teach, they then find themselves at odds with the disciplinary and institutional norms played out around them. Thus the evidence also suggests that while feelings of non-association with the discipline in which they are teaching might be strong, this does not have a negative impact on participants’ teaching identities. Participants tend to use generic ideas about teaching and learning in universities when describing the aims or goals of their teaching, rather
than ideas about the nature of teaching in a particular discipline. Thus when participants engage in “conversations with colleagues” about pedagogy they are likely to choose colleagues with whom they share an orientation to teaching. Interdisciplinarity has opened up possibilities for academics to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries, and colleagues from within and without participants’ immediate working areas have significant roles to play in supporting professional learning. We now examine some of the positive and negatives aspects of participants’ experiences of learning from colleagues.

LEARNING FROM COLLEAGUES

Not all collegial collaborations are productive. On the positive side, simple collegial support, when present, is important both for day-to-day guidance and in providing support when things suddenly go haywire. In her early years of teaching, Lindsey “always had someone to guide me through.” When Justine started teaching, her collaboration with two other female colleagues involved solving problems over time and working together to reach solutions. Working collectively during this period “really did work out well.” When the then vice chancellor tried to cancel Doris’ course in eco-philosophy, it was only through the advocacy of her colleagues that the course was able to continue. Colleagues also provide models to follow in situations where, as in Lindsey’s case, you have no time to get ideas “from the books” and instead have to “rely on what is around you.” Doris is “always interested in what other teachers do,” and Adam details some specific skills that he has learned from colleagues: “small things like timing and engagement and the use of repetition.” On a larger scale, some of Hamish’s most significant learning came from a colleague who provided “experiences that told me the thing to do is to get
out of the ‘norm’ and do things that aren’t necessarily standard, that aren’t necessarily predictable.”

More abstractly, it is from a few, valued, like-minded colleagues that Hamish gains the “energy” that helps him “stay strong” when faced by his greatest challenges in teaching. This kind of collegial support is qualitatively different from providing advocacy, or giving day to day advice, or helping solve problems. It works at a deeper, more personal level, and its presence is more difficult to identify than the giving of practical assistance. Similarly, when participants report having been “inspired” by colleagues, it is difficult to pin down what it is they found so inspiring. So Lindsey reports that, in her early years, she “had fantastic models around me.” Adam learnt from a range of “extraordinary performers” who were first his teachers and then his colleagues that “the trick is not to get caught up in the detail but to have the vision.” And for a short period, a time that she reports as being the most satisfying period of her academic career, Justine was “just immersed in a really interesting working environment” when she worked with two colleagues whose creativity inspired the development of her own creative talents. Doris continues to draw support and inspiration from a long-time colleague working in a university in the United States. It is possible that the most valuable, deep-seated support comes about when colleagues share some kind of strong personal connection.

**Support from Colleagues**

Having the support of colleagues is especially important to academics at the start of their career. Lindsey, in her second and third years of university teaching, spoke openly about the lack of “real support” for her teaching in the academic department...
in which she is based. While she feels that colleagues “are doing it (supporting one
another) on an individual basis” it is not embedded in “the culture” of the
department. This magnifies the sense of loneliness and isolation she feels as a
“novice.”

There hasn’t been a lot of support on how to improve … you’re just left
to flounder. There are a lot of colleagues who support the professional
side, but that professional development that you want to keep working on,
I’m not sure there are enough forums for that.

Lindsey’s distinction between support for the personal and support for the
professional aspects of her work is significant, revealing on the part of colleagues in
her discipline either an assumption that professional aspects can take care of
themselves, or a lack of awareness of the need for support for professional issues.
The lack of a forum in which to engage in professional learning contributes both to
Lindsey’s feelings of isolation and to her sense of marginalisation as a young
lecturer. Not only is she unable to access support from colleagues, she is also
without a voice in the department. Lindsey taught in schools before joining the
staff of the university, and she compares her university department’s support
mechanisms unfavourably with those available to her as a young schoolteacher. In
Lindsey’s story, the sense of being part of a community that characterised her
experiences in schools contrasts sharply with the isolation she is now feeling as a
university teacher. For Pippa, the importance of collecting student feedback, noted
above, is compounded by the “isolation” of university teaching, which makes it
difficult to obtain feedback about teaching from colleagues. “The thing about
university teaching is you don’t tend to be around the other teachers when they’re
teaching; you’re not so aware.” With this comment Pippa implies a blurring of the
distinction between identification with a discipline, with an institution and with ideas about being an academic. Here she touches on the complex processes whereby institutional practices reflect academic practices, which then in turn filter down to affect individual experiences, relationships and potentialities. In the following discussion we see the dynamics of these processes played out in forms of collegial resistance to new or different ideas or to risk taking.

Colleagues can also influence professional learning unproductively or even counter-productively. In fact, in this small snapshot of university teaching, negative experiences were reported far more often than positive ones. Negative experiences might occur because colleagues provide inappropriate role models; because colleagues fail to give support, particularly to inexperienced academics; because colleagues are resistant to new or different ideas or to risk taking; or because colleagues actively oppose or ignore participants’ achievements, skills, knowledge or expertise as teachers. Experiences such as these can leave participants feeling extremely unhappy. Two people, Ed and Justine, spoke the most poignantly of their feelings of invisibility and marginalisation that resulted from collegial negativity, but they were not alone in experiencing feelings such as these. The following discussion will uncover some of the complex reasons why participants feel out of tune with their colleagues, as well as reveal the personal and emotional impact that this feeling can lead to.

INAPPROPRIATE ROLE MODELS

Many participants express the perception that colleagues do not model appropriate practice in teaching and learning. Rather than having learned directly from colleagues around her, Pippa is clear that she does not know when or where she
learned how to teach in the way she does. “I must have just absorbed it. Whether through by being around teachers or whether by just my own experiences; what seems to work, what doesn’t.” While she has developed an approach to teaching that works specifically for her discipline, this has evolved in response to understanding how students learn in her discipline more so than because she has followed collegial models. Pippa’s sense of what is most effective practice is supported by feedback from the students, by “talking to the students and seeing what the response is . . . just the way I sense the room’s feeling as well as them actually saying it to me or writing it down.” In fact Pippa’s experience is that most of the colleagues in her discipline area teach in ways that do not support learning in the discipline. Countering the dominant view, which is that “demonstrating . . . is quite enough,” Pippa’s advocacy of a hands on approach draws on her views about human nature, that “we’re all sort of lazy by nature” and therefore “students won’t come to grips with it unless they have to come to grips with it.” Her understanding of students’ learning needs in mathematics, informed by the implicit use of a constructivist perspective on learning, is much more significant in shaping her approach to teaching than reliance on the models provided by colleagues in her discipline. The one colleague whom Pippa names as “the back-up person for me” is an academic from outside her immediate discipline area who provides additional learning support in numeracy for Pippa’s students. Among many other kinds of support, which includes researching collaboratively, this person contributes to Pippa’s work by passing on feedback that the students have, without realising, given to her. So her understanding of “where the students are: whether the students can achieve” fundamentally shapes Pippa’s teaching.
Lindsey similarly comments that many colleagues’ practices do not reflect the core approaches that are advocated by them. “Practising what you preach isn’t reflected at the school level” and “we advocate lifelong learning but we’re not modelling that.” Hamish expresses stronger views, that there are “dogmas . . . ritualised norms” associated with “the ways things should be“ in his discipline that make him “almost shudder, quite literally” to think of. Justine speaks of the negative impact that just one senior academic had on teaching in her area.

One of the things I did see when X returned (after a sabbatical) was the erosion of all the changes we had made in the light of the literature on teaching. He actually discarded all of that and re-imposed his structure, which was in fact the same course for, like, 20 years.

This exemplifies a sense that Justine has of the invisibility to many colleagues of educational philosophy. “The philosophy behind it (another colleague’s work) was very strong but he just couldn’t see it.” Some implications of this inability to see the philosophy behind education practices will be discussed in Chapter 9. Meanwhile, for Justine, the lack of acknowledgement of her expertise in education, and of the need to take educational principles into account, have had serious repercussions for her commitment to the idea of being an academic. These repercussions will be explored in the Postscript to this chapter.

**Resistance from Colleagues**

A common experience for participants when working with and learning from colleagues is the discovery of a variety of forms of resistance to what they do. This appears to stem from a refusal to acknowledge that their ideas are important or significant, and in turn creates a deeply conservative suspicion of innovative
practices. Justine identifies a resistance on the part of some close colleagues to engage in discussions about pedagogy. She also notes the ease with which conservative practices reassert themselves. If developmental work in teaching is not “embedded” in the department “it becomes invisible,” as happened to her own developmental work in teaching that, interestingly, led to her receiving the Vice Chancellor’s Teaching Excellence Award. So Justine’s work, although validated at the level of the institution, did not receive the same positive approval from colleagues at a local level. Pippa similarly has found a resistance to acknowledge her expertise in teaching and learning. She gives an example of an occasion when one of her senior colleagues was “making a big thing out of all the difficulties she was having with various things” in her teaching. Pippa was never approached for advice, although she had been researching and publishing in this area for a number of years.

Hamish and Lindsey talk more generally of colleagues’ conservatism when it comes to ideas of teaching and learning. This can take the form of resistance to discuss or share ideas about pedagogy. While Lindsey makes full use of ad hoc meetings in corridors “which are gorgeous for it (sharing ideas),” in general discussion of ideas about teaching and learning are not part of the “core process” of the department where she teaches. She speaks of the need to interrupt accepted practices, that “just replicate what’s always happened,” in order to become “more collaborative.” Lindsey finds this reluctance to engage a frustrating and isolating experience. Hamish, on the other hand, appears less disturbed by his isolation. Although he works in different ways than many colleagues in his immediate department in that “across the board we see very conservative course work,” he enjoys the work he does with a few close colleagues “who are similarly minded, and
I think they do a lot of crazy, exciting and out there kinds of things.” While Hamish doesn’t think there’s anything “strange” about the things he does, in other ways “from reports I realise, yeah, they’re not everyday fare.” One of the things that bothers him about being in an Australian university is “how incredibly conservative it is, how little room there is for any alternative experiences.” In order to develop the pedagogical forms he wants to in this broadly conservative culture, he “plays.” “I guess I’ve played, I’ve thought okay, what might be a good thing and then I’ve set it up, and then I’ve had to live with it.” He then uses the feedback of students who go through the experiences with him to evaluate the pedagogy. Hamish has consciously chosen the path of radical pedagogy.

If students go through an educational experience without having some kind of “Aha!” or if they’re not re-positioned or set out of balance in some way, I’m failing me. I’m failing what my brief is pedagogically.

However Hamish does not believe that this is the responsibility of every academic; it is a position that he feels is demanded by his work as an interdisciplinarian. He does not express his position of isolation in this respect as a cause for personal regret, but feels “quite comfortable” with the path he is on.

We have seen here that identification with participants’ discipline or domain areas, which forms one part of the process of collective “sensemaking” that goes on in organisations (Taylor 1999, p. 43), is compromised by the lack of identification with the pedagogy practised in those areas. Overwhelmingly participants talked of negative experiences of learning from colleagues in their discipline area even though
questions were not framed to invite negative responses. Participants dealt in a number of ways with feelings of negativity from those around them. Some sought out colleagues outside the discipline and outside the university, others formed close associations with one or two sympathetic colleagues and others drew support from their confidence in their individual pedagogies in opposition to other local practices. For two people the isolating effect of this lack of identification is felt particularly sharply. Ed and Justine both disclosed during their interviews that they had decided to withdraw either partially or completely from their work in the institution. Their narratives are explored in some detail in the Postscript.

**IDENTIFICATION WITH THE INSTITUTION**

Ed’s and Justine’s negative experiences occur in the context of their immediate working areas, yet both extrapolate features from their particular experiences and apply them to the wider institution. So when Ed speaks of his “negative perceptions” of the university, and Justine of her concern that “the whole system is changing,” both blur the distinction between the practices and ideologies of their working areas and those of the wider institution. Other participants similarly blur this distinction. Sometimes, participants identify with a range of discourses about pedagogy that can be but are not necessarily strongly associated with a particular discipline or domain. On other occasions, in relation to the discipline or domain in which they work, participants more frequently mention how much they have in common with, and are supported by, other people they find there, rather than identifying with generic pedagogies associated with the discipline. And each

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13 These questions were “Does your subject lend itself to any particular styles of teaching?” and “Can you think of an occasion when you learned to teach in these styles?”
participant at some time draws on ideas about the “institution” and what it represents, particularly in terms of their non-identification with or isolation from institutional practices. So participants frequently express their non-identification both with their discipline area and with their institution. The frequency with which these expressions of non-identity occur is a significant outcome of this phase of the research.

The interview extracts in Table 7.2 show examples of each participant’s expression of non-identification with or isolation from the institutional and/or the more local disciplinary ‘centre’. The table has been organised to show a continuum, with Adam at the left expressing the closest identification with both the local and institutional environments in which he works, and Ed at the right expressing the most acute isolation from both his immediate and the broader environment of the institution. Further illustration of this can be seen later in Figures 7.1 and 7.2, which place each participant on a continuum according to their ‘distance from the centre’ of the institution. We have seen that identification with an academic discipline is problematic or weak for participants. The evidence also indicates that identification with one’s institution, the second aspect of academic identity that Taylor mentions (1999, p. 41), is similarly problematic. Given the kind of institution in which all the participants were working this was unexpected.

**THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING**

Gum Tree University was founded in 1975. Located on an arterial road in an outer suburb of a state capital city, the campus is surrounded by native bush and barely visible from the road. There is no grand entrance. At the turn off there is a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Doris</th>
<th>Hamish</th>
<th>Lindsey</th>
<th>Pippa</th>
<th>Justine</th>
<th>Ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: My now colleague H was a fantastic</td>
<td>D: I'm very lucky in relation to this — that</td>
<td>H: I don't like what generally fits within</td>
<td>L: It's still very much 'this is my domain'</td>
<td>P: I will do things if I've got the</td>
<td>J: A lot of them have enormous problems seeing</td>
<td>E: I do see myself as in collision with the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher. I see myself employing some of</td>
<td>you're able to or allowed to teach the way</td>
<td>the rubric or discipline of my</td>
<td>there's not a lot of that collaborative</td>
<td>conviction about them, rather than</td>
<td>me as winning the award. They thought</td>
<td>trajectory of history at the moment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those strategies, some of those things</td>
<td>you want within the institution.</td>
<td>specialist area.</td>
<td>planning.</td>
<td>because my colleagues think it's the way</td>
<td>it must have been rigged or something. I was</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you learn just from watching really good</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>to go. Now I think I teach quite</td>
<td>the first casual academic to get one.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers who have influenced me really</td>
<td>Me: Do you think there is an accepted</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>differently from a lot of my colleagues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly.</td>
<td>way of teaching associated with this area?</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*****</td>
<td>H: Absolutely, and to think of them I</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>P: I have to, you know, stick to my</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: I ended up in economics because of</td>
<td>almost shudder, quite literally.</td>
<td>H: ... I spend most of my time with</td>
<td>H: I know when I first came I felt very</td>
<td>convictions. Otherwise I think if I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>colleagues who ... do a lot of crazy,</td>
<td>inadequate – still get that sense a lot of</td>
<td>was forced to do anything else I would</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me: So just one person made all the</td>
<td>Me: Do you feel that the way you work is</td>
<td>exciting and out-there things. I don't</td>
<td>times.</td>
<td>lose heart and with all the other things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difference?</td>
<td>in sympathy with the overall philosophy of</td>
<td>think there's anything strange with the</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>that would be it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Yeah, but a really outstanding</td>
<td>the institution? D: I think that the</td>
<td>things I do yet I realise, yeah, they're</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performer.</td>
<td>reason that I'm at all successful as a</td>
<td>not everyday fare.</td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>H: Me: Do colleagues come to you for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*****</td>
<td>teacher is because there's a lot of not</td>
<td></td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>advice or ideas about teaching?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: I became an academic because I</td>
<td>very good teaching happening.</td>
<td></td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>P: No, no. I think I'm seen as a bit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couldn't help myself. I wouldn't change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*****</td>
<td>peculiar.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it for the world.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.2 Local and Institutional Isolation as a Continuum**

(Isolation intensifies from left to right)
simple low sign with the university’s name carved in local limestone. On campus, paths wind through plantings of flowering banksias and grevilleas, and the stands of pungent eucalypts are busy with bird life. Snakes visit occasionally; old hands tell stories of snakes appearing in ground floor classrooms in the early days of the campus. The university buildings are in the Australian architectural vernacular with sand coloured cement blocks, wide cloister-like verandas and corrugated tin roofs. Walkways catch the afternoon breeze from the ocean and provide glimpses of the smoke-blue hills of the eastern scarp. Signs on the campus give quiet directions, and buildings are people-scaled. To a new visitor the university is a welcoming place, designed to draw in and neither intimidate with grandeur nor oppress with history.

Gum Tree was the second university to be established in the state. The other university in the state at the time was a long-established, prestigious and highly regarded institution. The new university was constituted as an institution whose academic structures and decision-making practices would be very different to those of the other tertiary institutions in the state (Bolton, 1985). The university’s ethos, with its commitment to innovative work, its commitment to non-traditional students and its radical academic programmes, met with a degree of hostility from some sections of the community. Adam, who was a foundation student of the university, “one of the 500”, recalls this.

There was a real sense in the wider community that Gum Tree was a place of utter corruption and wickedness and vice. My wife tells stories – she was at a private girls’ school and she tells stories of girls from her school who were forbidden to even come to the campus, because it was such an evil place. Such a tumultuous start.
PEDAGOGY IN THE INSTITUTION

One distinguishing feature of the new university was its strong commitment to students and teaching. From the start, Gum Tree’s academics “bore their first responsibility towards their students” (Bolton, 1985, p. 70). It was “one of the first universities to set up a unit to promote and improve the quality of teaching and learning in the university” (Bolton, 1985, p. 51), and the university’s future mission as “healer” in fostering a “humane and vital intelligence” was unanimously accepted by a meeting of the foundation professors (Bolton, 1985, p. 30). The focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning led to the establishment of a Teaching and Learning Centre that continues to provide learning support for students, especially support for students with disabilities, and generic bridging courses. It also organises the institution’s awards for teaching excellence.

An example of the pedagogical approaches that are valued by the institution can be found in Guidelines for Presentation of a Teaching Portfolio, a document prepared by the university’s Teaching and Learning Centre and made available to all academics. According to this document, effective teachers:

1. Provide a clear and empathic learning environment.
2. Promote active student involvement.
3. Cater for student learning differences.
4. Assist students to identify the outcomes of their learning.
5. Engage in self-development.
6. Develop their teaching practice to improve quality in outcomes.
7. Provide leadership in the professional development of academic colleagues.
8. Assume a leadership role in course/unit development.
9. Promote quality in teaching and learning within and beyond the University.
The success of the institution’s promotion of “effective” teaching is further indicated by the fact that it has uniquely received a five star rating for graduate satisfaction in 8 out of the past 9 years from the *Good Universities Guide*. No other Australian university has done this.

In this context, participants’ teaching excellence has been recognised or rewarded by the institution in a number of ways. Adam (twice), Justine and Lindsey are recipients of the Vice Chancellor’s Teaching Excellence Awards. Hamish has twice been short listed for this award. Ed and Hamish have both been involved in teaching and coordinating Foundation Units. This is in recognition of their interdisciplinary approach (which is a key focus of the institution) and of the institutional value placed on their teaching expertise aside from whatever academic specialism they might have. This would suggest their effectiveness as teachers in relation to at least points 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 above. Pippa’s expertise as teacher takes her into interdisciplinary work (teaching maths to science students) and her research in mathematics education suggests her effectiveness in relation to points 5, 7, 8 and 9. That Doris’s last promotion was for her excellence in teaching, that she has recently undertaken innovative course development work, and that her recent publications are based on her teaching and course innovation would all suggest her effectiveness in relation to points 5, 6, 8 and 9. I perhaps do not need to add here that there is ample evidence, already presented, that all participants also demonstrate effectiveness in relation to points 1, 2 and 3 in the list above. Thus, participants’ practices reflect approaches that are valued by the institution and their teaching effectiveness has been recognised and rewarded by the institution.

Given the evidence that participants teach in ways that are recognised as “effective” by their institution, it might be expected that they would readily identify...
with that institution and feel comfortable working there. However, *identification* with the institution at a local level does not necessarily follow from wider institutional *recognition*. The interview data reveal that discourses of the wider institution often conflict with those at the local level where participants spend their working lives. For some, uneasy relationships with working colleagues cast a negative cloud over relationships with the institution. Pippa and Justine’s experiences indicate clearly that when institutional messages about desirable pedagogical practices are not embedded in local thinking the outcomes can be extremely negative. This is particularly poignant for Justine, who in her second year of teaching won the university’s prestigious Teaching Excellence Award and yet at the time of interview had decided not to continue her career as a university teacher. Justine spoke at length about the award’s negative impact on her relationships with colleagues. For her, institutional recognition had worsened her feelings of isolation within her working area.

In the previous chapter I suggested that the concept of ‘discourse’ was more appropriate than ‘culture’ to explain the shifting and dynamic nature of institutional practices. The data presented in the present chapter also indicate that institutional ‘culture’ is not monolithic, but rather subject to a wide range of discourses, some of which contribute to participants’ feelings of isolation. In relation to the core research question in this phase, “What do participants learn about teaching from colleagues?” a range of competing discourses about pedagogy become apparent.

The discursive practices revealed in participants’ accounts of their experiences convey a message that, contrary to the evidence given above, pedagogy is not prioritised in the institution. Put baldly by Doris, “the reason that I’m at all successful as a teacher is because there’s not a lot of very good teaching happening.”
An example of “not very good teaching” is “the old thing” of “frightening students . . . that jolly, terrorising behaviour that some academics engage in” (Adam).

Participants identify a deep conservatism, marked in particular by discourses of resistance to pedagogical change experienced across the institution. This conservatism affects both academics and students.

I think that by and large the pedagogy invoked in most university courses … is a very conservative one, which really does limit what our students are able to do. I think across the board we see very conservative course work and I think it’s a huge shame. (Hamish)

Teachers who do “weird things” or “go out on a limb” can experience negative responses from senior colleagues, as we saw in Justine’s case when a senior academic overturned changes she and others had made during his absence on leave. Conservative pedagogy also elicits conservative learning. Students’ negative responses to innovative pedagogy are partly responsible for Justine’s negativity — “most students don’t actually enjoy being in my classes” — although some have “really appreciated” the opportunities she has provided by being innovative.

Pedagogy’s low priority is also implicit in colleagues’ refusal to acknowledge that a pedagogical focus in research (in teaching and learning mathematics for example) has value, or in colleagues’ reluctance to share ideas. Colleagues’ resistance to “coming out of their own little box” and “opening all of [their] books” also exemplifies that. In contrast, an interest in pedagogy would be shown in a person’s interest in sharing ideas by wanting to “look at the big picture” and being prepared for their ideas to be “laid out” to “see” what is there (Lindsey). The low priority that pedagogy has overall is also shown by the lack of a local forum in which pedagogical issues can be raised. The importance of sharing ideas about
effective teaching practices is recognised at the wider institutional level; for example recipients of Teaching Excellence awards present seminars about their practice to the whole university community. This rarely happens at the local level. Where departmental committee meetings might have a role in providing this, these meetings rarely move away from their more traditional function as forums for discussing policy and procedures (Lindsey).

The way that certain pedagogical practices become and remain dominant, even though they are not particularly successful, highlights another aspect of conservatism in the institution. Tutorials are an example. Adam has identified these as “a waste of time” in his discipline area yet has struggled alone in trying to find information or examples of more productive alternatives. This conservatism is exacerbated by the fact that the educational philosophy that underpins teaching practices is often “invisible” to colleagues, and is a particular concern when department heads exemplify this lack of awareness (Justine). In contrast, a characteristic shared by most participants is a willingness to embrace change, to experiment and to take risks with their pedagogy. Ed is unique in the group in that he explicitly distances himself from developments in pedagogy, singling out on-line learning as a largely negative and undesirable development. But interestingly his resistance, which it could be argued is a form of conservatism, is based on the importance he places on pedagogy rather than a disregard for pedagogy that characterises other conservative practices.

Although Doris claims that there is “not a lot of very good teaching happening” in the institution as a whole, there is also little evidence that the expertise or knowledge of good teachers is necessarily valued or even recognised at the local level in the institution. This is in spite of the public promotion of good
teaching by the institution in the form of awards for teaching and professional development courses and seminars. While at the wider institutional level participants are acknowledged for their abilities as teachers, used as resources or consulted by colleagues, this is not commonly reflected at a more localised day-to-day level. The consequences of this can be considerable for participants, both professionally and personally.

**ACADEMIC IDENTITY AND THE PROBLEM OF ISOLATION**

Significant professional dissatisfaction can result from experiences of being on the margins of institutional practice. This is demonstrated by the fact that, while the research was being conducted, six of the seven participants were re-evaluating their working lives in the institution. One was leaving academic work completely, one was leaving the institution, one had decided to move to a 50% contract, one had recently moved to a 50% contract and was considering leaving, one was looking for work elsewhere, and one was “never going to get promoted.” Only Adam, experiencing the least ‘isolation’ as I have framed it, received promotion during the time I was conducting the research, becoming Head of School, and appears closest to the centre of the institution in terms of recognition and satisfaction with the culture. I have used Figures 7.1 and 7.2 to illustrate how each participant is located in relation to the institutional ‘centre’ by placing each person on a continuum. The figures show no clear connections between either a person’s status or their years as a university teacher and their feelings of isolation.

While people such as Justine, with little experience of university teaching, might be expected to experience feelings of isolation as a newcomer, or someone
**Figure 7.1**

**Distance from the ‘centre’ by status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Lecturer Level C</th>
<th>Lecturer Level B</th>
<th>Lecturer Level A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>Lindsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pippa</td>
<td>Hamish</td>
<td>Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Justine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Distance**

- None
- Moderate
- Significant
- Extreme

**Figure 7.2**

**Distance from the ‘centre’ by years as a university teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years as a university teacher</th>
<th>Over 20</th>
<th>10 – 20</th>
<th>5 – 10</th>
<th>Under 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Hamish</td>
<td>Lindsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>Pippa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Justine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Distance**

- None
- Moderate
- Significant
- Extreme
such as Ed, with many years in the university, might feel isolation because he was ready to move on, these are not the reasons given by participants for their feelings of isolation. Feelings of isolation are much more closely related to participants feeling unease about the direction that the institution seems to be heading in relation to aspects of pedagogy.

I feel on the back foot increasingly (Ed).

I would be giving part of myself away by teaching like this (Justine).

As long as I’m employed to teach, I have to teach my way (Pippa).

[T]he thing to do is to get out of the norm … do things that aren’t necessarily standard (Hamish).

The negative consequences of dealing with this situation are reflected in the strong emotions experienced by participants, such as feelings of depression, regret at what is lost, and isolation. Collegial conflicts, absence of collegiality or the disappointment of feeling let down by colleagues are commonly reported and associated with negative feelings of deflation and depression.

Pippa provides a good example of how the experience of having one’s contributions ignored, overlooked or belittled by colleagues can cause unhappiness. A senior colleague, who was having problems in an aspect of pedagogy that had been Pippa’s area of expertise for some years, did not ask her for help. Pippa found it “a little bit soul destroying in a way” when her work went unrecognised. She speaks of having to sit “with my tongue firmly clenched between my teeth” — holding her tongue — as her colleague publicly complained about the difficulties she was having. This imagery indicates the silencing effects of the dominant
discourse, an impression reinforced when I gave Pippa the opportunity to give more
detail about this in the interview. She refused, and her guarded response, “Um, no
… perhaps I...?” (laughter), hints at the dangerous ground the question led to and
highlights the uneasy relationship she has with departmental colleagues. This
relationship, which at one point she describes as “patronising” (her colleague
“doesn’t see the work that I do or the publications I get … you know, they’re
Noddy book ones, not real ones”), led Pippa to search elsewhere for collegial
connections.

A diminution in collegiality can also be a cause of unhappiness. Because
“people are working separately” Justine no longer feels supported, and her creativity
has suffered from the lack of a forum for sharing and experimentation. “It’s gone,
my creativity’s just gone.” Because “the sense of being part of a team effort has
been gradually dissipated,” Ed feels increasingly “deflated and depressed.” In a
similar vein, Lindsey’s sense of being isolated by colleagues as a new member of her
department has made her feel “very inadequate.” But the experience of marginality
is not necessarily negative; sometimes the feeling that one is working differently
from others can give rise to positive feelings of excitement and exhilaration.

[M]y teaching in ways might be more challenging but for me it’s all the
more exciting, I would have it no other way. And in fact if I had it the
way I see other colleagues having it … I wouldn’t want it. (Hamish).

Even though participants might feel that their work is marginal to the mainstream
practices, no one is prepared to normalise their practice simply to gain acceptance.

A more positive interpretation of this situation can be seen if we return to
Taylor’s ideas about academic identity. In the present chapter we have seen that
each participant has resolved to resist certain institutional practices, which makes both identification with a discipline and identification with an institution problematic. However, where participants are able to achieve a “sense of belonging” and a “sense of continuity and coherence” that result from a secure sense of identity (Taylor, 1999, p. 43), it is through identification with certain valued pedagogical practices. Thus participants appear to identify closely with particular ideas about what it is to be a teacher, and these ideas can be positively reinforced and supported through “peer conversations” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 140). Arguably then participants do feel a close identification with the third element of academic identity, part of which involves identification with a role as a teacher (Taylor, 1999, p. 118). Participants express a strong and clear identification with this aspect of their work as academics.

CONCLUSION

I began this phase of the research expecting a strong connection between a person’s identification with their discipline area and their pedagogical practices, as had been the case for academics involved in the FLIP. I found that, on the contrary, participants develop pedagogical practices sometimes in spite of or in opposition to those that are perceived as dominant both in their discipline areas, and in the institution as a whole. Not only is identification with a discipline not strong, identification with the institution is also problematic. Although ideas about good teaching are officially promoted and widely recognised at the level of institutional policy, these are not necessarily embraced in the local discourses about academic work. At this local level, teaching appears to be a near invisible process that is rarely discussed.
The importance of talking about teaching is reflected by the fact that participants value highly the opportunities for collaboration with colleagues. This can be difficult to come by, and does not necessarily appear from within a person’s discipline area. When collegiality is lacking, the personal impact can be significant, with feelings of isolation, depression and negativity arising as a result. In contrast, where collegiality is strong, participants draw strength and inspiration from opportunities to discuss teaching or to teach alongside like-minded colleagues.

Being able to identify with others who share one’s own values and beliefs in teaching appears more important than being able to identify with colleagues in one’s discipline area. Brookfield pointed out the value of holding conversations with colleagues, with the proviso that useful conversations can only happen “under certain circumstances” such as time, openness to different perspectives and respect for others’ contributions (Brookfield, 1995, p. 140).

This research demonstrates the value of conversations with colleagues, but along with Brookfield suggests that in the absence of the circumstances that give rise to the most useful conversations, the experience can “marginalize and close down certain groups and perspectives” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 142). Participants report that a lack of time, brought about by intensification of work, is a barrier to engaging in productive peer conversations. Brookfield discusses the need for critical conversations to be conducted with care so that colleagues may talk “democratically” and with due regard to the ease with which people fall into “domineering patterns of communication” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 143). It would seem that participants in this research have negotiated round these difficulties by seeking out like-minded people to share experiences with. For the participants in this research, not any colleague and not any conversation will do.
Chapter 5 explored the early development of teacher identity. Chapter 7 has thrown light on what happens when that identity is compromised by institutional contexts. The research discussed in this chapter underlines the importance for participants of staying true to what one believes. In Chapter 9 we return to ideas about identity as we examine the principles that underpin the pedagogies that participants believe in — their personal theories. Given participants’ common experience of pedagogical difference from their discipline area and their institution, the question arises of whether there are therefore pedagogical similarities between participants, and whether these practices are consistent with current educational theory of what is sound practice. This question will form part of the discussion of Chapter 9, which will report on data collected during the final phase of the research into participants’ use of educational theory.
POSTSCRIPT

Two of the seven participants stand out as expressing feelings of extreme isolation from the academic environment in which they work. Ed and Justine were selected as participants on the same basis as everyone else – for their success in teaching and for their domain association. It was therefore a complete surprise to learn of the struggles each person was having, and quite unexpected that the interviewing period coincided with a time of great upheaval in their professional lives. While their experiences have already been discussed alongside those of the other participants in the relevant chapters, their stories provide an additional insight into the discussion of the impact of the wider academic environment on teachers’ orientation to teaching and on their ability to practice in ways they value.

One remarkable feature of their situation is the difference in length of service between Ed and Justine. At the time of the interviews Ed had been teaching in universities for over twenty years, Justine for just four. Another interesting feature is that Ed and Justine are the only people to refer to factors beyond their immediate institution to explain their dissatisfaction. The stresses and strains imposed on academics because of the increasing pressure from political and economic arenas are discussed in Chapter 2. Both Ed and Justine express considerable disquiet about the impact of these changes on their abilities to teach well. I have selected key elements from across all the data provided by Ed and Justine to create brief narratives that explain their thoughts and feelings. Except where indicated by italic font there is no commentary on the narratives; these are Ed’s and Justine’s own words, changed from first to third person.
Ed’s recent experiences are of the negative impact of an inimical working environment. Ed’s becoming a teacher was no accident, but rather provided a means to continue doing something that he loved. There was never a moment when he decided instantly or decided at a clear point that he would become a university teacher, though his family was very much oriented to social service occupations. University teaching appeared to be an appropriate career choice very early on. The focus on university level teaching became clear almost as soon as he hit university. He felt instantly at home at university and enjoyed the nature of the interactions he was having with people. He instantly felt an equality and a levelling that were very appealing.

His teaching philosophy stems from ideas that were in the air from earlier in his learning and that culminated in the 1960s in his time at university. Later, he began to miss the kind of affirming and cross fertilisation between his own predilections and the wider environment and to regret that while the environment had changed, he had not. One reason for his feelings of being out of step with the academic world around him lay with the content of what he taught. He used a cultural focus as a lens to look at economic or political processes, thereby being more attuned than a political economist might be to the ways people’s imaginations construct scenarios or reflect attitudes. But one of his main problems in the environment in which he works was that it was increasingly problematic to even talk about culture as though it mattered. Because of the globalising or economic forces that are re-structuring universities into corporate patterns it has become difficult or even dangerous to imagine that culture is important. Ed therefore felt himself in
collision with the trajectory of history, and was increasingly uncomfortable with the way he was being required to teach.

His collegial situation has led to a form of negative learning, which found expression in a form of guerrilla resistance on his part. His deepest regret has been the lack of collegiality engendered by a culture which was increasingly pushing academics to privatise and individualise their productivity and their relations, so that people were relating increasingly on a horse-trading basis rather than trying to imagine creating something together.

The changes in his teaching environment have left Ed feeling progressively disempowered, defeated and depressed. His feelings of powerlessness and negativity were becoming the primary influence on his teaching as he strove to maintain the individual transactive moment. He began to feel that his work was of no value and invisible.

At the same time that Ed was having these conversations with me, he was working through these difficulties in his professional life. The emotional toll these experiences had is particularly evident in the non-verbal signals audible on the tape of the second interview. There are sighs, self-deprecating laughter, frequent pauses for thought, and his voice can sometimes hardly be heard. By the time the third interviews took place however, Ed had made his decision to move from a full time to a half time contract, and the relief was palpable. He became positive, relaxed, and optimistic. Later corridor meetings with him confirmed the positive consequences of his decision to pull back from the institution. However his sense of loss remains.

While thinking he had a mental perspective on the shift, personally he has not been able to come to terms with it. He now feels like when a lover walks away. He is crushed.
Justine has a fascination for learning processes and has striking personal reasons for this. Diagnosed at the age of five as ineducable because of a speech disability, her most significant early learning took place at home with her mother and not at school. Formal schooling proved painful and unproductive, and the most significant learning of her high school years was when she learnt to play the piano outside school. She proved such a gifted pianist that she quickly outgrew each teacher she worked with, until she reached the point of realising she no longer needed a teacher but could teach herself more effectively.

The fact that she now has two first degrees, in music and in environmental science, suggests the error of the early diagnosis of her lack of ability.

Justine loves teaching and particularly enjoys working in innovative and creative ways. Probably what made her become a teacher was because she loved what she was doing so much that she just wanted to keep following the teaching openings as they came up. So she went into teaching out of loving the subject, loving the exploration of it, enjoying the process and feeling immediately self-fulfilled at being able to share it with people who were also interested. She won the Teaching Excellence Award after only three years’ work as a casual tutor in the university.

Early in her first interview she disclosed that she had decided to leave her job at the university.

Recently, the content of the degree course in which she taught had changed. The more theoretically rigorous elements had been reduced and replaced by more applied and practical elements. This change of focus compromised the quality of the degree. While the degree became more diversified, it also became ‘dumbed
down’ because those students who were exceptional were really hard to find. So now she no longer believed in what she was teaching.

Another disappointment was the lack of recognition of what she could offer as a gifted teacher. As a ‘casual’ academic, a lot of her colleagues had enormous problems seeing her as winning the award (for teaching excellence). Even her supervisor couldn’t quite believe it. Justine could only imagine that they must have thought it had been rigged. She was the first casual academic to get one, and many colleagues couldn’t understand how it had happened. When they asked her what she had done she would say, “I’m a demonstrator” but they would persist, and she would say, “Well I tutored for my first time last semester” and when they continued to ask she would be reduced to saying, “Er, er, er …”

She was not offered further opportunities to develop as a teacher in spite of this remarkable achievement. Because the new materials and new pedagogy she had developed had not been embedded in the department, when Justine became sick and had to take a year's leave everything went wrong. On her return, her head of department blamed the new approaches for the problems instead of seeing that Justine’s presence was essential to their successful implementation. This left Justine with sense that her new head of department did not value what she believed in. In her final year in the university she also began to get the sense that she wasn’t being given enough teaching experience with her students so she could not get to know them as learners. Her marking had increased and had become very stressful. This was not how Justine wanted her teaching to develop. She decided not to sign another casual academic contract. She decided to give up her job because her way of teaching wasn’t fitting in. She felt she would have been giving part of herself away by making these compromises in her teaching.
CHAPTER 8

PUBLIC THEORY AND PERSONAL PEDAGOGY

INTRODUCTION

In Chapters 4 and 6 I used critical moments from my early learning and from my experiences of learning with colleagues as examples of how my own experiences fit into the conceptual framework on which this research is based. I now turn to the third element in this framework, the theories about teaching and learning that underpin personal pedagogies. Here I bring my own biography up to date by discussing an example of an incident that occurred as part of my work as a teacher educator and that demonstrates how important a theoretical perspective can be when thinking about ways to change one’s teaching practices. Later, in Chapter 9, I will explore the experientially based personal or ‘private’ theories about teaching and learning that underpin participants’ pedagogies. The discussion in this chapter brings together several key elements already reported in the biographical chapters to contextualise the way theory has been used. The reasons for my choice of a particular theoretical position can be traced back to moments in my biography that clarified or defined the kind of teacher I was becoming. In this sense the discussion
highlights the interconnectedness of the relationship between theory and the
development of a personal pedagogy.

I begin by looking at the culturally specific nature of classroom practices. I
then use the incident as a starting point for discussion of how a particular theory —
postcolonial theory — has helped me understand aspects of my practice and
suggested new approaches to pedagogy. I have chosen this particular incident as it
demonstrates the value of a theoretical approach to solving a practical problem by
opening up some alternative ways of being a teacher. The chapter that follows was
first published as a refereed conference paper in Proceedings of the AARE Conference

INDIGENOUS STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY: IS TEACHING STILL A COLONISING
PROCESS?

As a teacher educator I encourage my students to develop culturally inclusive
pedagogies, and also see it as my responsibility to practise them myself. However, I
have found that my position as a culturally inclusive practitioner is rarely tested in
my work in a university setting. While universities are welcoming increasingly
diverse groups of students into their midst, most of the students I encounter share
cultural capital with me. This paper is an exploration of a ‘critical incident’ when
the presence in my class of an Indigenous Australian student, a culturally ‘different’
student, challenged me to act according to my stated position as a culturally
inclusive teacher. I shall outline my reflections on this experience, using
postcolonial theory as a framework to examine the colonising nature of my
pedagogy, and then discuss some possibilities for a more culturally inclusive
definition of what is acceptable as teaching and learning in universities. To frame
the discussion, about an event in one of my classes that gave me much food for
thought, I have used three of Brookfield’s ‘critically reflective lenses’. At different
points in the paper I “consult my own autobiography as a teacher and learner,” I
“look through one of my students’ eyes,” and use “theoretical literature . . . to help
understand the experience” (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 29-30).

TEACHING — A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC ACTIVITY

Working as a teacher educator, I am interested in the social and cultural influences
on teaching and learning. For me, the social and cultural contexts in which teaching
and learning take place are as significant as psychological factors (such as motivation
or self esteem) in influencing the outcomes of education at any level. Because of
this, one of my professional goals is to develop and practise culturally inclusive
pedagogies myself so that my students have the chance to observe and critique these
practices. My present orientation to teaching has been influenced by reading in the
areas of poststructuralism and postcolonialism. I now recognise more clearly how
my own early experiences of learning, as a member of a privileged group in
classrooms and lecture theatres, not only contributed to my success, but also
positioned me to view myself as the ‘norm’ in an academic environment. I now see
it as necessary to interrogate the legitimacy of my powerful position as ‘lecturer’,
and to re-examine my attempts to practice in a culturally inclusive way. In teaching
about teaching, as well as when reflecting on my own teaching, I draw on
poststructural and postcolonial theory to explain what is happening in my
classrooms. I understand teaching and learning as both value-laden and as culturally
specific activities (Brandt, 1986, pp. 142-143; Hatton, 1998, pp. 3-15). In using
‘culturally specific’, I am thinking of both the cultural specificity of the society in
which the teaching and learning take place (so that teaching and learning in an
English university will have culturally specific characteristics because of the
institution’s English location), and to the culturally specific nature of the institution
itself (so that the practices of a primary school will be culturally different from the
practices of a university, and the practices found in formal educational settings will
differ from those of informal settings). Of course, there also exists a synergy
between the culture of the society and the culture of the institution, since
educational institutions exist largely to promote the valued practices and attitudes of
the wider society of which they are a part. In educational institutions, dominant
cultural values are valorised not only through curriculum content, but also through
pedagogy.

The cultural practices of institutions are reproduced and reinforced by a
system that recruits from within itself, so that for example university academics are
usually people who have been successful students within the same system that then
recruits them as academics (Becher, 1989; Pearce, Stewart, Garrigan & Ferguson,
1996). Arguably, it is difficult to promote cultural diversity at an institutional level
when these systems work to reproduce the dominant cultures in educational
institutions. In fact cultural capital is doubly significant for academics. Not only are
academics drawn from within a culturally narrow group of people in the
institutional sense, it has been argued that they are also culturally dominant
members of the wider society. For example, Gramsci conceptualises academics as
‘conservative’ intellectuals who operate within the status quo and provide ‘the ruling
classes with rationales for economic, political and ethical formations’ (Giroux, 1988,
p. 151). However, as writers such as Yeatman (1995) have pointed out, changes in
the cultural composition of the student body in universities demand both “an
increased tolerance of socio-cultural complexity in general, and . . . skills in intercultural communication in particular” (Yeatman, 1995, p. 195). If this is the case, the question of how to negotiate cultural difference is a question for all academics, not just for cultural theorists. In the following discussion, I explore some possibilities for addressing this dilemma in relation to a core academic activity.

The Critical Incident

I shall focus in particular on the culturally specific nature of teaching practices in an Australian university, and draw on a critical incident that occurred when I was teaching a unit entitled Aborigines and Education,14 offered by Murdoch University’s School of Education. The unit is designed to raise student teachers’ and practising teachers’ awareness of the many issues which affect Indigenous students’ learning in mainstream classrooms in Australia. In particular, students are asked to explore the differences in culture, learning and values between the mainstream, non-Indigenous students in Australian classrooms and their Indigenous counterparts. It is a forthright and uncompromising unit, making as much use of writing and presentations by Indigenous people as possible, and locating the present educational provision for Indigenous people in the context of a history of oppressive and racist policies and practices. A strong theme in the unit is that the practices of teaching are highly culturally specific, and that in order to achieve a more inclusive education for Indigenous students it is not enough just to be sympathetic, or merely include Indigenous studies in the curriculum. Rather, non-Indigenous teachers must also explore the processes of teaching which they employ, and must be ready to change

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14 Associate Professor Jan Currie and Dr John Hall first devised this unit in 1994.
their practices to make them more culturally congruent with Indigenous cultures and values.

In 2000, when two Indigenous Australian students enrolled to study *Aborigines and Education*, I realised not only that this was a good opportunity for me to exemplify some alternative practices, but also that, given my publicly stated position as a teacher who aimed to be culturally inclusive, my credibility (and ethical position) would be compromised unless I could demonstrate in practice my support of the cultural values and learning styles of the Indigenous students in the group.

Students present a tutorial on one of a number of given topics as part of their assessed work for this unit. Wayne Turner, one of the Indigenous students in the group, opted for the topic ‘Anti-racist teaching’ for his tutorial. Knowing that the student with whom he was sharing the topic was going to talk about how to teach in an anti-racist way, he decided to “talk about the other side of it, about what I’d experienced in my education . . . I thought it was important to explain what I faced as I was growing up as an Indigenous child.” Wayne began by teaching a Torres Straits story, and asked the students to sit in a circle while he explained to them how to make a fish trap. “I was trying to put across that there’s also another way of teaching, not the standard way of teaching with the teacher up the front with desks in rows but there’s lots of ways it can be taught.” He then decided to perform a role-play about an Indigenous student in the classroom. He wrote a script, and asked me, the tutor, to play the role of the racist teacher, “someone who was picking up all the stereotypes,” while he played an Indigenous student whom I held up to ridicule in front of the ‘class’, played by the rest of the tutorial group. The scenario was drawn directly from Wayne’s own experiences as an Indigenous child in a mainly white classroom, and the subsequent discussion focused further on the
kinds of things that teachers used to say to him, and on how he felt about them. He spoke of the ‘element of shame,” which as an Indigenous child he felt in the classroom, and of the dilemmas this presented.

If one of us (me and my five cousins) did know something, then we wouldn’t say it because the others would be saying, “Oh, you think you’re white, you know everything” and by not speaking up the teacher’s thinking “Well, he’s dumb like the rest of them.”

He also spoke of the “big power play” which teachers have.

It was a powerful and successful tutorial, although in many ways it did not conform to ‘normal’ tutorial practices. For one thing, there was no research paper, and no references to readings. For another, I was an integral part of the presentation, unlike in all the other tutorials when the students had to do it alone. Later, in a debriefing session, Wayne and I discussed some of these issues further and he agreed that I tape the conversation. The following discussion draws on the recording made at the time.15

**Exploring the Teacher’s Cultural Difference**

We spoke first about the nature of my intervention and participation. I was initially concerned about equity issues: about whether the other students thought I’d given an unfair amount of help to a single individual on this occasion. However when we thought about the kinds of help I’d given to other people, such as suggesting readings, or having a conversation about what they might choose to present, or even asking questions in the tutorial to help focus the discussion, it appeared that here was a different kind of involvement but not necessarily more help than I had

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15 I am indebted to Wayne Turner for his generous involvement in this process.
given, in different ways, to other people. The discussion then moved on to the culturally specific nature of the ‘normal’ tutorial. It emerged that the reason why Wayne came to me in the first place to ask for help was because he thought he would have to come to ask me for permission to do it that way. “I wasn’t sure whether it was right to do it that way, whether I would offend anyone, so that’s why I came and asked.”

Underpinning this need to ask for permission is Wayne’s awareness of the need to observe traditional practices; his awareness that certain kinds of things happen in tutorials, and that people in universities expect tutorials to be a certain kind of experience. As he put it, “there’s a traditional thing that people have to be sitting down, and you’re at the front talking, and for your tutorial presentation you have to have a couple of overheads and a handout, a couple of videos.” I found it significant that Wayne interpreted tutorial practices as a set of cultural behaviours ("there’s a traditional thing . . . people sitting down, you’re at the front talking, you have a couple of overheads and a handout" and so on), and that his concern was about the need to act within appropriate cultural parameters rather than, as I had wrongly assumed, to maintain appropriate intellectual rigour. This was important for me, for two reasons. First, it made me aware of the hegemonic nature of tutorial practices whereby only certain (academic) practices are ‘allowable’ (in fact I am captured on the tape saying “Yes, we’re just trying to make people pretend to be good little academics”). Have I then taken for granted that these practices are intellectually rigorous simply because they are what academics do? And if so, why should we require all our students to behave like academics? And are the ‘best’ students those whose academic practices match those of their teachers as closely as possible? Second, it made me realise that by assuming the tutorial was primarily a cognitive
process, I was making the arrogant assumption of the culturally powerful that this was culturally neutral or even culture-free territory.

Wayne also pointed out that he drew from his own culture not just to devise a culturally different tutorial but also to reconfigure the tutor’s role.

Basically what I did was I approached you and asked if it was all right to do this. That’s what I’d do back in my own community in a cultural way. You always have to have that permission from the Elders. So in a white classroom you’re the teacher so I still had to go to you, you basically took the same place as the Elder, so I had to go to you and talk it out with you. So I was doing it in a traditional way, drawing from my own culture.

Hence he had not just suggested new possibilities for tutorial practices, he had also depicted for me a kind of teacher-student relationship that I had never before imagined. I was reminded that to a culturally ‘different’ student it was I who was the ‘other’. It shames me that the need to explain my own cultural traditions to Wayne had never entered my head.

**EDUCATION’S ROLE IN THE COLONISING PROCESS**

This incident touches on a number of questions for culturally inclusive education. The questions I shall explore here relate to the culturally specific nature of classroom practices, and the ways these practices work to make the classroom a more comfortable space for students who are most capable of conforming to the normalising expectations of its culture than for students who are culturally different. To do this I shall discuss some parallels between the processes of colonisation, as experienced by Indigenous Australians and as explored by postcolonial theorists, and the processes of learning in classrooms. Both of these valorise a particular set of cultural practices.
Cultural historians and postcolonial theorists note that part of the colonial process was to promote the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and maturity (Long, 1980; Bhabha, 1994; Gandhi, 1998). In Australia, policies and practices, from assimilation via mission schools in which children were forbidden to speak their classical Indigenous languages (Ward, 1995) through to the Stolen Generations, attest to the desire of the authorities to ‘civilise’ by making Indigenous people more like the whites, by using education practices to limit their behaviour in particular, culturally specific ways, with complete disregard for the fact that well established and highly successful systems of education already existed in Indigenous communities (Benterrak, Muecke and Roe, 1996). One outcome of this was that many Indigenous people felt constrained to adopt the outward signifiers of civilisation in order to interact in positive ways with the colonising community. Education played a major role in this civilising process, serving not only to try to make Indigenous people more ‘white’ but also to institutionalise the oppositionality of European and Indigenous ways of being.

Bhabha sees the process of ‘othering’ as an essential element in the colonising mission. He identifies the objectives of colonial discourse as “to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types” in order to justify conquest and “establish systems of . . . instruction” (1994, p. 70); in other words to render the colonised a homogenous group identifiable in terms of their otherness simply in order to effect the colonising mission. To what extent is this process mirrored in the way university teachers use the othering of students in order to justify what they do? For example, when I see my students as having ‘needs’ which I identify and satisfy, hence employing specific discourses such as those of difference, deficiency, ability, standards, am I actually reproducing and institutionalising an ideology which
ensures the students’ continuing dependency on my authority? The colonial rhetoric in which the colonised ‘other’ is depicted as in need of education in order to become civilised provided a set of guiding principles for educational practices in Australia up to the latter half of the last century. The question for me at the start of this new one is do such embedded notions still exist in my thinking as a teacher, when confronted by culturally different students?

**COLONISING DISCOURSES AND ACADEMIC PRACTICES**

We have seen how, in order to justify its educational practices, colonial discourse made use of a series of oppositions such as child/adult, ignorant/cultured and barbaric/civilised. The incident described above raised the question for me whether these processes are still, invisibly, being played out in universities. While university teachers may not go so far as to see their students as barbaric, there are aspects of the relationship between the teacher and the student, such as the requirement referred to earlier for the student to ‘pretend’ to be an academic, which mirror colonising processes. I have heard, and joined in with, informal chats between colleagues in corridors and common rooms that employ a discourse depicting students as lacking culture, literacy, knowledge or dedication and therefore, the assumption is, academic ability. Such discourse implies a deficit in the student when compared to the teacher’s attributes, in the same way that the young Wayne’s teachers saw him as deficient. However, if we are to cast academic practices as culturally specific, and see teaching as part of a broader agenda to bring subjects (students) into line with the dominant culture, we ought then to ask whether we can so easily ascribe deficiencies to students on the grounds that they exhibit different
behaviours from ours, when what we see as signifiers of academic ability are also aspects of cultural practices normalised within the institutions in which we teach.

My experience of teaching in schools in northern English cities brought me into contact with students who were maladjusted to the school not because of intellectual disability (although the common sense view was that this was the source of their ‘problem’) but because of a major cultural rift between the norms and values of the school and those of the students’ private lives. For example, a school culture which valued competition and individual achievement worked against the culture of those students who had learned to value peer approbation more than the approval of the teacher. Wayne’s experiences as a school student in Australia, whereby his teachers misread his reluctance to answer — a culturally specific behaviour — as evidence of his ‘dumbness’, mirror this. Research (for example Malin, 1990a; 1990b) suggests that teachers respond more favourably to students who are culturally similar to them than to students who are culturally different. Furthermore, my own reflections on my early years in teaching reveal a clear motivation to deny evidence of cultural difference trying to make my students as like me as possible (and this motivation is still evident in the conversation discussed above when I suggested the tutorial process worked to make students behave like “good little academics”). If I expect students to be as much like me as possible, my behaviour provides the benchmark for their success.

For most students in Australian universities, this is not a problem. Many students share cultural capital with their teachers, possessing such attributes as a history of success in educational settings, a lifelong initiation into dominant cultural practices, and identification with middle class values. However, for students who, because of their cultural ‘difference’, cannot bring these attributes to the classroom,
the experience is very different. They must either adjust to the dominant culture of the classroom or forever exist on its margins. It is important to note that, for the most part, it is the students, not the classrooms, who make the adjustment.

A CASE FOR ADJUSTMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

Why should it worry us that academic practices have elements in common with colonising practices? The wider society looks to universities and university academics to make decisions about standards, and perform gate-keeping activities such as marking examinations and selecting students. If shared understandings exist, both within and outside educational institutions, about the kinds of practices which are promoted, valued and rewarded by those institutions, isn’t it our responsibility as academics to maintain these established practices? If we don’t, do we risk lowering standards?

An aspect of the current debate about standards is reflected in a growing recognition that, in Australia, universities are changing. University students are becoming increasingly diverse as groups of people, (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995; Parliament of Australia, 2000), and universities are becoming increasingly diverse as institutions (Kemmis 2000). Debate in the Australian national press around evidence that some universities have been “lowering standards for some fee-paying students,” with demands being made that academics work to ensure “fair”

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16 These understandings have arisen historically, and many aspects have become so embedded as to be taken for granted. For example if you teach in an Australian university you are called a ‘lecturer’ unless you’re an associate or full professor, which suggests the privileging of lecturing as a teaching method over all others. Another example is the design of the lecture theatre, used by Hebdige (1995) as an example of a way in which “implicit ideological assumptions . . . are literally structured into . . . architecture itself.” For Hebdige, the hierarchical seating arrangement of the lecture theatre “dictate[s] the flow of information and serve[s] to ‘naturalise’ professorial authority” (p. 363).

17 The Australian Senate’s inquiry includes among its terms of reference “the levels of access among social groups under-represented in higher education.”
(i.e. “uniform”) assessment practices (Moodie, 2001), is further indication of a problem.

How should universities approach this? While I do not dispute the need for fair selection and assessment practices (although in both cases the notion of ‘fairness’ is contestable), I suggest that to focus solely on what happens at the beginning and end of a person’s university education, and ignore the experiences in between, is to miss part of the point. Even without a postcolonial analysis, if ‘fairness’ is a criterion by which university practices are judged, then an examination of ‘fairness’ in university education that includes pedagogy as well as selection and assessment might be significant in ensuring ‘fairer’ outcomes.

The 'standpoint' curriculum model is helpful here. Drawing on Rawls' theory of social justice, whereby social justice is achieved by putting the interests of the least advantaged members of the society first when considering any social policies, Connell suggests a ‘standpoint’ model for achieving curricular justice by reconstructing the curriculum.

The fundamental principle is that you take the standpoint of the least advantaged. That is where you start from. You think out the education strategies that are in their interests; and implement them. That, in a nutshell, is what is meant by social justice in education. (Connell, 1998, pp. 308-309, original emphasis)

This approach shows how we might begin to make adjustments to our classrooms. However, I am uncomfortable with Connell’s suggestion that ‘you’ make these decisions on behalf of ‘the least advantaged’. On what basis can we make such decisions? The critical incident I have described is only a reflection at a local level of what is happening on a bigger scale. I have reflected on my own problem using
concepts of ‘diversity’, ‘difference’ and ‘the other’ to help me theorise and understand an aspect of my relationships with students. I now want to explore these concepts further, and ask how far they can go to suggesting a solution both to my local problem and, possibly, the bigger one.

‘DIVERSITY’, ‘DIFFERENCE’ AND ‘THE OTHER’

We have seen that the concept of diversity, and the need to provide for diversity, is gaining significance in contemporary discussions about the need to reappraise and reshape university practices to ensure inclusion. However I find the idea of diversity problematic. I have argued above that students who have academic practices in common with those of their teachers are advantaged by their membership of the same (culturally dominant) group in the institution (remembering that teachers and students will also have one or more of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age in common). I have suggested that institutional practices assume a deficiency in those who fall outside the cultural norms.

This being so, notions of diversity, which imply universality and equivalence (and fail to take account of the significance of cultural capital in formal education contexts and the power it confers on those who possess it) are not adequate to the task of achieving inclusive practices. A reading of Wayne’s tutorial within ‘diversity’ discourses might have led me to celebrate, enjoy, or be enlightened by the experience as another way of being or thinking (which it did). It would not have provided a conceptual framework from which I could understand my own practices as different, and hence open to interrogation. As I mentioned earlier, the concept of ‘difference’ enabled me to understand that to a culturally ‘different’ student it was I who was the ‘other’.
An important way in which ‘difference’ differs from ‘diversity’ is that whereas diversity implies equivalence, difference highlights oppositionality. Bacchi, writing about difference in the context of debates about gender, reminds us that difference implies deviation from a norm (Bacchi, 1990, p. 259). While embracing the notion of ‘difference’ is a step forward from assuming ‘sameness’, since “[t]he ‘sameness’ alternative is insufficiently critical of the status quo” nevertheless “[t]hink . . . how difficult it is in a world where men hold most of the positions of power to conceive of a point of reference other than man” (Bacchi, 1990, pp. 262 & 264). I think this difficulty applies in any unequal social relationship, including those that sometimes exist between teacher and student and between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples.

A WAY FORWARD IN THE ‘THIRD SPACE’

Bacchi emphasises the need to examine the social institutions which give rise to concepts such as ‘difference’ in the first place, and which continue to “convert this ‘difference’ into ‘disadvantage’ ” (1990, p. xvii). A first step on the path to redressing disadvantage, and providing better access to university for under-represented groups (Parliament of Australia, 2000), might then be to accept that culturally-specific pedagogy, with practices derived from culturally-specific ideas such as what is ‘intelligence’ and what kinds of behaviours constitute ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’, is a practice that disadvantages students who experience it as ‘different’. A further step would then be to analyse the structures that convert this particular ‘difference’ into ‘disadvantage’, as I have done in relation to the tutorial. But if things are to change we need to move beyond analysis. In the tutorial, as student
and tutor each drew the other some way into their own cultural space, a middle
ground, a ‘third space’, was created. Bhabha writes:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think
beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on
those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural
differences. (1994, p. 1, my emphasis)

The ‘third space’ is a powerful concept for me. It makes me more comfortable
about taking on Connell’s suggestion that ‘you’ make these decisions on behalf of
‘the least advantaged’ in order to achieve a standpoint curriculum. (1994, p. 308). It
also provides a framework for action. I have already argued that a form of cultural
exchange is already taking place in the classroom, woven into activities such as
knowledge generation and critical reflection. What I would like to see is a more
explicit acknowledgment of this, where teachers and students together explore the
possibilities of a ‘third space’ as the location of more culturally inclusive pedagogies.
This process would involve exploring our own cultural specificity as teachers, and
how this seeps into our practices. To do this, we need to engage all our students
(not just culturally ‘different’ students) in the process of uncovering this in us as
teachers and also in themselves as students.

Wayne’s decisions about how to conduct his tutorial exemplify a desire to
maintain and celebrate his different culture and his different “ways of being human”
(Gandhi, 1998, p. 32). He did this successfully, but in so doing he achieved
something else; he provided a way of understanding that ‘normal’ academic
practices are also ‘different’ practices. As we talked about what was and was not
possible, Wayne’s responses enabled me to reflect on the necessity not only for a
fluid and dynamic definition of ‘teaching’, but also for the presence of culturally
different students like Wayne who are willing to help me interrogate my own positioning and cultural specificity. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg argue that unless as educators we

understand our own culturally mediated values and biases, we may be misguided in believing that we are encouraging divergent points of view and providing meaningful opportunities for learning to occur when we are, in fact, repackaging or disguising past dogmas. (1995, p. 10)

For me, a way forward is to become more critically aware of the cultural practices and histories that I bring to the classroom by exploring with my students some alternative ways of being a teacher.

This discussion shows the value of theories available in the public domain (and not necessarily only educational theories) as a source of new approaches or ideas to take teachers beyond the potentially limiting experience of their own biographies. But as a conclusion to the sections of this thesis that focus on my autobiographical narrative, the chapter demonstrates both the interconnectedness of my personal experiences and the underlying principles that guide my practice and the use of theories to move my practice forward. Here, when faced with the ‘problem’ of having to practise my espoused goal (developed experientially) of inclusive teaching, I needed a theoretical perspective to take me further than the limitations of experience. However the reasons for my choice of a particular theoretical position can be traced back to moments in my autobiography that clarified or defined the kind of teacher I have become: someone whose goal is to develop inclusive practices. In this the discussion highlights the interconnectedness of the relationships between personal principles, the development of a personal pedagogy, the use of theory and autobiography. I return to these connections in the
following chapter, where I explore the underlying principles that are reflected in the pedagogies that participants own as theirs.
CHAPTER 9

“THE WHOLE POINT OF THEORISING IS TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY”

USING PRIVATE THEORIES

INTRODUCTION

The thesis so far has traced participants’ learning from when they were small children and first began to identify pedagogies that were helpful and supportive of them as learners. As their experiences as learners diversified, and they were exposed to other pedagogies in schools and universities, they gradually developed pedagogies that were their own. The strength of their commitment to these pedagogical practices was seen in Chapter 7 where participants reported the isolation that could come from working against the grain of local institutional practices when their preferred approaches were different. Now in Chapter 9 I explore the underlying principles reflected in the pedagogies that participants own as theirs. The distinction between propositional knowledge (such as might be found in ‘public’ theories) and experiential knowledge (used when the existing propositional knowledge is
inadequate) is relevant to this discussion. Experiential knowledge “is the basis for much of the behaviour and values which inform the practice of teaching” (Thomas, 1995, p. 13). In the case of academics who have encountered little propositional knowledge about teaching, it may be assumed that experiential knowledge has a significant role in informing their practice.

By ‘theories’ I mean a set of consistent principles that underlie what teachers do (or say they do). I assume that although teachers may lack propositional knowledge and may thus not explicitly espouse theories, this is not to say there are no implicit theories, their ‘theories in use’ (Argyris and Schön, 1974), which form a basis for their work. Academics involved in the FLIP in Liverpool were seen to make decisions about their teaching practice based on one or more private ‘theories in use’ (see Chapter 6). Even though they claimed to have no knowledge of or interest in ‘public’ educational theories, they nevertheless based their practices on consistent principles. For example, practices such as the use of the ‘expert’ tutor to model design were common across the whole group of architecture tutors and, interestingly, draw on ‘public’ socio-cognitive theory derived from Vygotsky’s work (1978). These underpinning principles had nevertheless developed experientially and, although they were implicit (because not reported), by analysing the consistencies of approach it was possible to identify the implicit “model of learning” (Brockbank and McGill, 1998, p. 28) on which the academics based their practice. This earlier finding prompted me to explore the same processes in the present research. Since my interest is in the informal and experiential means whereby academics construct the knowledge about teaching and learning that underpins their pedagogies, I want to focus also on the origins of participants’ private theories in use.
The core of this research project is the personal dimension of teachers’ work. This leads to a particular interest in the concept of “private theory,” which is theory “grounded in personal experience” and therefore different from “public theory” which is “the substance of academic discourse” and therefore accessible in the public domain (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 1). Hence I am interested to see whether participants have developed underlying “private” principles or theories (for example theories about how students learn, or theories that explore the social interactions between teachers and students) to inform their teaching. I also intend to look for similarities between these private theories, if they are found, and public theories such as are found in literature about teaching and learning. The use of theoretical literature (about teaching and learning) is the third of Brookfield’s “critically reflective lenses” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 29) that have suggested the structure of this research, and this has been discussed already in Chapter 2 when I considered the scope of theoretical literature available to university teachers. (Although Brookfield promotes the use of the lenses as tools for critical reflection, I am adapting his conceptual framework to uncover the processes whereby participants construct knowledge about teaching and learning.) As Brookfield says, the theories found in theoretical literature “can help us ‘name’ our practice by illuminating the general elements of what we think are idiosyncratic experiences” (1995, p. 36). Later in this chapter I explore the extent to which participants’ private theories can be ‘named’ in terms of the public theories found in this literature. I begin by discussing how participants’ private theories were identified in this research.
IDENTIFYING PRIVATE THEORIES

I felt I should tread carefully in this phase of the research. I suspected that questions such as “Which teaching and learning theories do you use to inform your teaching?” or “Which professional development text to you use most frequently to help you manage problems in your teaching?” might have been unproductive. Where could we go if the answers were “None?” Instead, and with a view to trying to pick out private theories that might be well hidden, I chose an oblique approach and asked participants to talk about their goals as teachers, their strategies, their problems and successes, and their imagination of the kind of teacher they would like to be. I then looked for evidence of underlying, consistent principles that gave coherence to the way participants articulated their practice. Again, I attempted to use questions that were as far as possible value-free; I tried not to give ‘leads’ that might indicate the kinds of answers I expected or wanted to receive, although there are clear assumptions in the questions I asked that participants would use strategies, have goals, be aware of problems and successes in their teaching, and so on. These are the questions I asked:

- What strategies do you normally use when you teach? Do you have any preferred approaches? Are you always able to teach in the way you would like to? (If so, what way is that? If not, how would you like to teach; why can’t you do it that way?)
- What broad, generic goals do you have in mind when planning teaching and learning? Do you accomplish these goals — regularly? occasionally? rarely? How do you know?
- Tell me about the last time you had a problem relating to your teaching. What happened, and how do you account for it? What did you do?
- Tell me about the last success you had in your teaching. What happened, and how do you account for it? What did you do?
• What do you do well? What would you like to do better?

• Using the ideas about teaching and learning that we’ve been talking about throughout this research, what kind of teacher do you now think you are? Would you like to become a different kind of teacher? How would you like to change?

• Overall, considering everything you’ve talked about with me, who or what would you say is the single most important influence on your development as a teacher?

Using the responses I received I looked for similarities and contradictions across the whole interview in order to generate a picture of participants’ use of public and private theories. I also looked at any patterns and relationships between participants’ private theories and the other influences already discussed: their personal histories as learners and their academic culture. I then took all these sets of data into account to generate a sense of participants’ attitudes to educational theory and whether they used a particular theory to inform their teaching, and also to discern some of the private theories underlying what participants do (or say they do). In the following presentation and analysis of data I have taken into account the importance both of researcher subjectivity and of personal experience (Patton, 1990). I have tried to minimise subjectivity by considering the assumptions and prejudices I bring to the analysis through my personal experiences as a university teacher.

**Attitudes to theory**

Two of the seven participants are explicit about the importance of understanding public theories, or “educational philosophy” (Justine) behind what teachers do. In her view it is something that distinguishes the “newer” teachers, those who have
been “prepared” to teach in a university, from the “established academics [who] can’t see it (the philosophy) because they are not trained to see it”. One consequence of this is a generally conservative attitude to pedagogy among academics, which makes it difficult to “embed” new approaches such as group learning, and which predisposes more senior academics to be dismissive of the work of the “new” academic who may take risks but who also “knows how to teach, really.”

Lindsey also values public theory and accesses it mainly through academic staff development seminars at Gum Tree University. These sessions provide a valuable resource for Lindsey by providing a venue where she can reflect on questions such as “Am I doing the right thing?” and see “lecturers from different faculties who deliver quite differently.” Even though a presenter might be teaching in a completely different field, “no matter what field they’re in, it overlaps with what you’re doing — it has to.” Because she wants to continue to be an innovative teacher, the only way she can do that is by “professional discourse, going to these meetings, attending conferences . . . just sitting back and listening to it all and filtering out what I believe to be good practice.” Interestingly, Justine and Lindsey both have a formal qualification in teaching. One is a qualified teacher of adults (not exclusively tertiary students), one a qualified teacher of primary students, and yet in spite of (or perhaps because of) this both maintain an active, ongoing interest in continuing their formal professional learning. I talked to Lindsey about this.

Me: But I’m wondering why it’s important for you who actually has a lot more experience of teaching and are much better positioned to actually understand the teaching process than the majority of the teachers in the university, so you know you would be the sort of person who might be seen as someone who knew it all, you got the award and everything, what
point would there be for you to go along? And yet you’ve said it’s really important. There’s quite an interesting issue there.

I: I don’t know whether it’s a thirst for wanting to know more, or not being over confident. You know you always balance with this “Am I doing the right thing?” and I sort of — I’m okay at this job, I need to know more, where can I find out more?

The idea that you have to know how to make use of educational ideas in order for them to be useful or even relevant is emphasised by both Lindsey and Justine.

I don’t think you can lead people to water, they have to realise the importance of it. (Lindsey)

I said “But everything she wants to do is educationally very sound. You know you can’t criticise it.” He couldn’t see it, because he’s not trained to see it, but I said, “I can see it.” (Justine)

So their interest in public theories appears to come from both an existing awareness of its value and an ability to recognise it, attitudes picked up during previous formal professional learning. We have explored ideas about reflexivity and self-identity in Chapter 5 (also see Giddens 1991). Here, a reflexive sense of a professional self, that acts with the consciousness of what is considered appropriate professional practice, features in Justine’s and Lindsey’s disposition towards making use of public theory.

Other participants, however, claim to lack interest in exploring the possibilities presented by public theories.

… [B]ut theories about teaching, I guess … I don’t … I haven’t been exposed to them and I haven’t, I guess, shown an interest in seeking the knowledge. I’ve read very little about education theory, and actually the theory doesn’t interest me, the practice interests me. (Doris)
… as to the actual theories of education, I’ve actually got no ideas at all …
what theories exist … or an interest, even, in finding out what theories
exist. I think I feel at my age if I’m doing something that I feel works, that
I think I do quite well (and my teaching surveys would suggest that I’m a
reasonable teacher) then I would just stick to that. I do think it’s part of
being a scientist, that you tend to be more practical than theoretical.
(Pippa)

I don’t actually pay attention to theorising in this area. I have probably …
even got an ideological disposition against being methodological in
approaching such a thing … I have a conviction that what matters more
than any theory is what you think in the way you are being and not what
you are teaching. (Ed)

Note that this is a conscious rejection of theory, framed reflexively in terms of these
people’s views of themselves as teachers. This position (which sets theory in
opposition to a focus on the practical: what is actually going on) when compared to
the position shared by Justine and Lindsey suggests a misunderstanding of the
connections between theory and practice. A characteristic of the conversations with
Lindsey and Justine is their engagement with the detail of their practice; in fact none
of the other participants talks so explicitly about the practical problems they face.
Both Lindsey and Justine engage with practical concerns such as dealing with large
groups, assessment, planning teaching, and course design in their conversations.
The value of theory, for both of them, is to inform and enhance practice. This
suggests that a focus on theory does not preclude an engagement with practice,
contrary to the impressions given by the participants quoted above. Lindsey is
explicit about this when she says, “there should never be a debate about which is
best, theory or practice. It should be, hey, we value them both equally. And I don’t
think that message is being heard.”
But does an *explicit* dismissal of theory to inform practice preclude the *implicit* use of theory, as might be suggested by the responses above? If we look at the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ theories, and in the light of the evidence gathered about the thinking that underpins what they do, it appears that what Doris, Pippa and Ed dismiss is ‘public’ theory; “expert talk … concepts, generalizations, models and ways of making meaning” (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 1). What remains however, hidden but close to the surface of each participants’ practice, is ‘private’ theory, “grounded experientially and . . . represented by idiosyncratic, biographically embedded, and often implicit assumptions and beliefs” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 1). Perhaps not surprisingly, because these are ‘good’ teachers, there are some close matches between their ‘private’ theories and the expert ‘public’ theories. These connections will now be explored.

**Matching ‘private’ with ‘public’ theory**

Anything that dictates the way I teach comes from the way the students respond to what I teach. (Pippa)

Her understanding of “where the students are . . . whether the students can achieve” fundamentally shapes Pippa’s teaching. Thus, although she very clearly rejects ‘public’ theory, by adopting a student-centred approach to teaching in her private theory she aligns herself with beliefs about teaching that are well documented in the literature (Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001). Other participants also speak of the importance of placing students and their learning at the centre of the teaching and learning process. Often this is an explicit intention.
When I plan teaching I really try and think about what it is to be a student and what it is they need to know. I really try to do a lot of putting myself in their position. What I’m trying to do is to create a space for [the students] to develop their own theories. (Doris)

There’s not one system that fits, we have to actually look at the needs of the people. I don’t think that we’ve personalised the curriculum. We forget that we’re here for the students. (Lindsey)

Often I’ll tend to describe my teaching more along the lines that I teach first and second year students. (Justine)

I judge some of the effectiveness of my teaching based on . . . how comfortable students become in that learning environment, however that’s created . . . whether it’s with a very large group in a lecture theatre hall or one to one, that’s one part of it. I want to value the students’ ability to choose, to be responsible. (Hamish)

I certainly have problems that I am so much trying to get the students to understand at the beginning that . . . they should speak from exactly where they are, with no self-consciousness that it is presumed they’re supposed to know more of this or that. (Ed)

These participants are aware of their students as learners, and adopt the principle that it is important in teaching to create environments capable of supporting their students’ learning. On this basis participants have developed a wide range of approaches to promote student learning. One is developing group work and other collaborative approaches.

I said we should separate all the desks out, there are 6 students at every desk, and we have them talking amongst themselves instead of being in columns of 20 students on a long table. (Justine)
We actually decided that they could talk with each other during the test! Which they all thought was really weird ... and they had to write it in their own words, but it meant that the students had the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding instead of demonstrating how good their memory was. (Justine)

Another is the encouragement of independence by supporting collaborative learning outside the classroom.

Look, I tell the students in the first lecture the least important part of the class is the lectures. The most important thing is them struggling with the material for themselves, opening the book, trying to read the words one after the other and trying to work out what the bloody hell the person's trying to communicate. That personal struggle ... that's the richest experience for them. Then talking with their friends about it, their own discussions. (Adam)

A change in focus in the lecture from 'telling' to questioning is another way to encourage a higher level of student engagement in the learning.

My lecturing style is normally that I ask [students] lots of questions and expect them to answer. Pippa

So is a slight change in how a student-led tutorial is conceptualised to allow students greater freedom to choose what they might do.

What often happens is that in tutorial presentations people, pardon my lack of a compliment, tend to drone on about the readings ... and it doesn't really facilitate a learning environment. So I just changed it and instead of doing a presentation changed it to a 'seminar stimulation'. And for some reason that slight change of words ... has worked absolutely wonders. And people themselves are actually expanding into different forms, setting up debates, leading us in guided meditations for part of it, they've been doing all kinds of things. (Doris)
These responses show how participants’ practices reflect the underlying principle that the main focus of teaching should be on providing contexts that support student learning. As these conversations show, a lack of interest in ‘public’ theory does not appear to have stopped participants from developing effective strategies for promoting student learning based on their own ideas and beliefs about learning, that is, using private theories.

Many studies of successful university teaching emphasise the idea that good teachers understand how students learn (Weimer, 2003; Trigwell and Shale, 2004). Research also suggests that a teacher’s beliefs about learning lead in turn to the creation of a classroom environment suited to the kind of learning they want students to adopt (Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001). Students then respond “by tuning their approach to learning to suit the environment to which they are exposed” (Biggs, 1999, p. 25). Here, the fact that participants are consciously creating learning environments that are supportive of students learning implies the presence of an underlying set of beliefs, or private theories, about learning. This focus on student engagement and student learning places them at the third and most sophisticated level of theorising suggested by Biggs (1999, p. 21). Teachers who think at this level understand that the role of teaching is to support learning, that “the focus is on what the student does, on what learning is or is not going on” rather than on “what the student is” or “what the teacher does” (Biggs, 1999, pp. 21–24). Teachers who think at this level take both “student-based factors” and “the teaching context” into consideration when thinking about teaching, as do the participants in the study. If we compare what participants say with the position found in this literature, it seems that participants have developed a set of principles on which to base their practice that resemble the theories found in the literature
cited. Ideas which draw from constructivist perspectives on learning, and which emphasise the learner’s active role in building understanding along with collaborative learning and social interaction in learning (McInerny and McInerny, 2002, pp. 4-5) also appear to provide a particularly valuable, if un-acknowledged, theoretical framework for participants. But while this may tell us that participants have developed sound private theoretical bases from which to practice, it takes us no closer to an understanding of how participants have done this.

**THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE IN GENERATING PRIVATE THEORY**

According to Bullough and Gitlin, private theory is “grounded experientially and . . . represented by idiosyncratic, biographically embedded, and often implicit assumptions and beliefs” (2001, p. 1). If we look at what participants say about the experiential basis of their ideas about teaching, the importance of their experiences of being students themselves stands out.

> I can remember what it’s like to be in the audience and . . . I always feel that I should do if I was a student what I would like my lecturer to be. I feel a real empathy with my students. (Adam)

> I think when I plan teaching that I really try and think about what it is to be a student. (Doris)

> Doing my degree as a mature age student here, I was able to observe . . . the different teaching styles and I was aware of the styles that I found helped me, and this is where I developed the idea that even if you’re lecturing you should be asking questions. (Pippa)

Participants draw on a knowledge base derived from their past and present experiences as learners to make decisions about their teaching. When we looked at
participants’ early experiences of learning, revealed during the first phase of interviews, we saw that participants appeared to be able to reflect on their learning, identify some constituents of positive and negative learning experiences and pinpoint some of the idiosyncratic features that made a particular learning situation particularly important for them. We also saw in Chapter 5 that early experiences as learners brought participants into contact with inspirational teachers who provided important role models. Thus an early interest in learning, fuelled by successful learning and the influence of positive models, has enabled participants to come into the profession with both a positive experiential base and a belief in the importance of learning. These experiences and beliefs provide key motivating factors and inspiration for their work as teachers.

Participants also continue to learn. The learning might have a specific, pragmatic purpose, such as being engaged in professional development.

I’ve self-taught myself how to set up web pages for my units . . . it’s keeping abreast. I don’t want to be left behind, because I’ve always felt I have been quite innovative and I want to continue that feeling. (Lindsey)

Alternatively, it might involve learning from one’s own students.

You learn so much from the students too. I always feel a fraud the first few times I teach a particular unit because there’s stuff I should know but . . . you really get to understand the material . . . in a way that you just don’t if you’re not teaching. (Adam)

The idea that teachers are also continuing learners creates the possibility for a teacher to take on a dual role: to be both teacher and learner.
I never feel that I’m not in the role of a teacher... because I’m teaching myself as well, that is how I approach the world... being able to understand more. (Hamish)

The idea of the teacher-as-learner, engaged in a continuing search for better understanding, is further seen in an emphasis on being responsive to students, and open and attentive to what is happening in the space around you.

I hope I’m a responsive teacher, and that I respond to the students and their needs in the way that I teach. (Pippa)

I’m more or less aware of [strategies] but whatever the situation I go into, one of the things I do is begin breathing into that space... and then moving into it, I’m always playing around checking to see what works and what doesn’t. It’s not a mechanical feeling; it’s a much more intuitive, liquid sort of experience. (Hamish)

In tutorials for instance I have lots of techniques that I could use for making the tutorial better, but I often don’t use them... because you have to be responsive to the needs of the group. You have to pay attention to what [students] are interested in. (Doris)

I think the nicest thing a student ever said to me was “You’re trying to read us all the time aren’t you?” Then I realised that’s what you have to do, you have to read the students to see what they’re getting. And that’s part of engagement: looking at them, trying to read them. (Adam)

This metaphor of attentive, engaged teachers, “reading” students to work out what they’re “getting” or understanding, reflects an implicit belief that, to be effective, teachers must be able to respond in an open and flexible way to the messages that their students are sending. Two different sets of ideas about effective teaching can be seen here. First is the attitude that effective teachers are those who
are ‘engaged’ with their students as other human beings, and who understand that to do that involves listening as well as speaking. Second is the attitude that effective teachers know that there are no final answers to practical questions about teaching and learning because no two students are ever alike. In using students’ responses to gauge the success of what they do, these teachers are being ‘reflective’ about their practice.

‘Engaged’ teachers

The attentiveness that participants refer to, a quality that seems hard to pin down (it’s an “intuitive, liquid sort of experience”) is indicative of a humanistic concern for students’ well being both as learners and as valuable fellow human beings. Students are seen as important in their own right, worthy of a teacher’s respect and attention. In this regard participants have the qualities of “engaged” teachers, whose intention is “not merely to share information” but to “teach in a manner that respects and cares for . . . our students” (hooks, 1994, p. 13). This concern for students is more than a technical concern about maximising learning or teaching efficiency; one of the “privileges” of a teacher’s work is “. . . being deeply involved in people’s personal development. Everything that I’m involved in is related to love . . . it is a human to human-ness” (Hamish). “Loving” students is, for Doris, an essential part of being a good teacher.

Teaching is all kinds of things; it’s healing and it’s loving, and I think if you can actually in some sense extend unconditional love to your students then I think you’re a good teacher. (Doris)

Working at this intense level with other people involves giving of yourself. Even in the more typical tutorial settings, rather than focus on the techniques she might
easily use, Doris believes “it’s much more important to share with students how you’re feeling about the tutorial.” But Doris goes further than sharing her feelings with students by spending several days deep in the bush with them. From this, an unusually intimate relationship develops.

I think I mentioned, we get to know each other well, almost like members of a tribe or a family, we get to know each other pretty well! So they would get to know all my limitations.

The impact on students of this kind of experience is enormous, “I think that people have learned things that they will remember for the rest of their lives,” but the cost to the teacher is equally significant.

About three quarters of the way through the course I thought “I’m never going to do the course again. I just can’t do it.” And I think the reason that I feel this is that it’s challenging, because I have to give out lots. But I think it’s double-edged sword, because the reason the course is a success is because I have given out so much, and I think students then respond by giving a lot back. So the very things that make me want to give the course away are the very things that make the course successful. (Doris)

Thus there’s a contradiction at the heart of Doris’ generosity; the course cannot work unless she gives herself to it completely, but by giving so much she also risks the future of the course because the demands on her are so great. Doris’ situation is a reminder of the implications of ‘burnout’ for teachers who become so exhausted by the demands of their work that they cannot continue.

While Doris’ commitment to giving so much of herself as a teacher is unique in the group, other participants describe how important it is to be ‘present’ in the learning. Participants value moments of intimacy in teaching, which are even possible in a large lecture theatre.
The students in [a unit I teach] played a wonderful joke on me the other day. I use a laser pointer, you know the red dot things on the screen, and I was about to go and put this red dot on the screen to do the diagram, because it was a big video projection, and there was a red dot already there. I thought “Oh gosh, it’s bouncing off my shirt,” then I realised it was someone about ten rows back had one, and I just told them I thought it was the funniest thing that had ever happened. Laughed about it with them and so on. It was great that they thought they could get that involved. (Adam)

They also value experiences of heightened awareness or of an acute consciousness of the moment.

What I remember in the classroom environment … is when the atmosphere is really alive and everybody is charged and engaged and feeling “Oh! There’s something here!” There are times when everyone is more awake and present in the room, and everyone is clearly engaged. (Ed)

There’s a great Calvin and Hobbes cartoon where Hobbes (the tiger) is hiding and as Calvin goes past he leaps upon him. And Calvin’s eyes are like this (wide eyed) and Hobbes turns to the audience and says “It’s that moment of dawning appreciation that I live for.” And that’s what it’s like being a teacher; you can see the students being empowered by what you give them. (Adam)

Such moments provide important feedback to the teacher, indicating as they do that the class’ attention has been secured; students are “awake,” and following what is going on. The pleasure in these moments is therefore partly a satisfaction that strategies are working. But, when set beside ideas about the “human-ness” and the “love” in teaching, the experience of a sharpened connectedness with other people would also seem to be a worthwhile pleasure in itself.
A focus on interpersonal and affective aspects of teaching is not easy to achieve or find in universities with large lecture halls, a focus on subject matter and an increasingly “computer-mediated education” (Brabazon, 2002, p. 36). There is a tension between focusing on communicating subject matter and communicating with students. University teachers’ work revolves so much around an ability to communicate clearly what’s in their own heads. Being able to “read” what’s in students’ heads requires different kinds of communication skills. A focus on receptivity in communication, coming from an awareness both of students’ learning needs and of students as people, is a strong characteristic of this group. Since it is, arguably, difficult to achieve in the university environment, it is perhaps one of the things that marks these teachers as exceptional.

‘Reflective’ teachers

Participants’ practice is underpinned by a strong awareness of the learning needs of their students. This awareness feeds into their continuing professional learning. Participants’ ‘engagement’ with the teaching and learning processes as they evolve in classrooms and lecture theatres, their ‘presence’ in the teaching and learning environment, and their absorbed interest in what students are experiencing, are all aspects of what ‘reflective practitioners’ do. In this respect, participants’ practice matches closely with ideas from public theory about ‘good’ teaching. “The ‘good teacher,’ it is said, is a reflective teacher, one who inquires into his or her thinking and practice with an eye to making improvements” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 13). In their engagement in the moment and with what is actually happening in the teaching environment, rather than in the application of expert theory to their teaching, participants exhibit the qualities of the reflective teacher. In other words,
they are not concerned with using “a preferred teaching model” but rather with giving “careful attention … to individual experience” and being “actively engaged in the study of [their] own practice” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 14).

Based on the definitions above, there is clear evidence that participants engage in reflective teaching. To support this, we can turn again to Brookfield’s “four lenses” for critical reflection and see that three of them are routinely in use. Participants remember and reflect on their experiences as learners and teachers, they engage in “critical conversations” with colleagues to help them look at what they do and they watch and listen to students (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 28-30). However, in order to be useful, reflection requires teachers to do more than “think hard” about what they do (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 13). Teachers need also to reflect critically on their practice. For Brookfield, critical reflection is “anchored in values of justice, fairness and compassion, and … finds its political representation in the democratic process” (1995, pp. 26-27). It is based on “an awareness of how the apparently isolated and idiosyncratic world of the classroom embodies forces, contradictions, and structures of the wider society” (1995, p. 8). Being critically reflective involves making judgements based on “contextual” factors such as the social, political and ethical dimensions to teaching (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 14). This reflection involves paying attention to the “aims, social and personal consequences, ethics, methods and curricula” and the “intimate relationship between these and the immediate reality of classroom practice” (Parker, 1997, p. 31). Thus the reflective teacher “is one who attempts to bring about improvement in her practice by applying critical thinking to her situation” (Parker, 1997, p. 36). The extent to which participants do engage in critical reflection, by struggling with
the political and ethical issues that arise in their teaching, is discussed later. There is first another characteristic of reflective teaching to consider.

Critical reflection on a teaching situation is modulated by a teacher’s “appreciation of that situation’s uniqueness and its resistance to ready-made descriptions and interpretations” (Parker, 1997, p. 36). This resistance to “ready made descriptions and interpretations” reminds us that private theory is partly based on “idiosyncratic” assumptions and beliefs (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 1). It has even been suggested that the reflective teaching movement can be seen as a reaction to a view of teaching that is built around “ready made” solutions and technicality by creating possibilities for teachers to have more control over their own professional decision making (Parker, 1997, pp. 8-20). In line with this, one participant, Hamish, expresses strong resistance to over-prescribed answers or “recipes” for teaching. So an interesting question is about how participants go about constructing their pedagogies developing from their ‘private’ theory. What are participants’ idiosyncratic assumptions and beliefs about teaching, and what is their role in the shaping of ‘private’ theory?

IDIOSYNCRATIC ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS

In Chapter 5 I focused on participants’ early experiences as learners. One memorable aspect of participants’ early experiences was their idiosyncrasy. Polishing floors, a ropes course, dinner-table conversations, learning the piano, discovering that words could have more than one meaning all featured as examples of significant early learning. Evidence presented now, in this chapter, suggests that participants continue to draw on their idiosyncratic early learning experiences to develop ‘private’ theories about how to present ideas, organise classes or challenge
students. Participants know that there are numerous ways to learn because they have experienced them. Their rich experiential base gives the confidence to experiment, and a certainty about the value of the strategies they adopt.

Perhaps one reason why most participants do not feel the need for the security of conventional or ‘public’ theories is because of their confidence in and commitment to their idiosyncratic ‘private’ theories. Such is this commitment that, as we have seen, participants tend to resist the various institutional pressures to conform and, when conflict does occur, risk being marginalised within the institution by trying to stay true to their principles. Participants’ commitment to their ‘private’ theories would seem to be connected to the desire to remain true to their ‘teaching selves’ whose development we have followed throughout this thesis. If we look back over the three research phases, it is possible to trace clear threads back from present day idiosyncratic theory to the experiences and ideas revealed in conversations about early learning. When the pieces of each person’s story are re-assembled, the connections take shape very clearly.

The connections are expressed in different ways. They can be present as explicit intentions; because this happened to me, I want this in my teaching. Adam is a good example of this. He learnt from some “outstanding teachers” to see lecturing as performing, and a core focus for him now is to perfect his own performance skills. He uses “little diversions ... timing ... slightly odd humour ... showmanship ... cheap gimmicks ... props (pies and cans of beer)’’ to engage his student audience, and like an actor relishes the audience response, living for moments of “dawning appreciation.” More often there is an implied connection between past experiences and present intentions; the kinds of experiences that were valued then reappear in different but connected form. Doris’s most important early
learning came from joyful, interactive and every day experiences: her dog, birds, her parents’ touch, floor polishing. Now, when she takes her students into the remote bush for ten days to teach that “the whole point of theorising is to actually live differently,” she appears to be replicating for the students those experiences that she treasured. On the field trip “all of my students become my family.” In the bush, students learn from the natural world, as Doris herself did. Just as she learned from surprising and unexpected experiences (polishing the floor, performing in a school play), she enjoys creating surprising and unexpected contexts for learning. She is fascinated by performance; she wears hats and performs tricks in lectures, would like to make more use of props to teach philosophy, and once stripped in a lecture to illustrate the “mind-body problem.” Doris valued “intimacy . . . commitment . . . passion” in her own teachers, and now gives “herself” and her “unconditional love” to her students.

Links between past and present also appear at a metaphorical level. Metaphors are words that “link the known and the unknown, the familiar and the new, that bridge one thing . . . to another” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 49), and by picking out repeated metaphors it is possible to portray a succinct picture of how each person makes idiosyncratic sense of their work as a teacher. The metaphors that become associated with each person both highlight the idiosyncrasies of their thinking and give insights into the developing person behind the teacher. So Hamish’s early awareness of a world full of possibility, both intellectual and sensual, finds echoes in the metaphors he uses to describe his present thinking about teaching. His early memories include feeling the freedom of getting lost and finding pleasure in eating glue. He enjoyed “mess . . . playing around.” He loved it that teachers were “rich in knowledge” and wanted that for himself. For him now,
teaching is “messy, beautiful, warm and breathing.” It is “risk-taking”; the ideas and concerns of the classroom provide “a beautiful feast.” The sensual imagery is striking here; the mess, the richness of experience and the feasting are present both then and now. I have attached the ‘teacher as explorer’ metaphor to Hamish. It reminds me of his early love of exploration (epitomised in his trip round “the block”), risk taking and getting lost. It recurs when he talks of accompanying students (he is “with” students, he does not “have” them in his class) over risky terrain on their journey from vexation, irritation and anger to the discovery of understanding. Similar metaphorical connections are found in each person’s story, presented more fully in Appendix III. There I have shown how each person’s story can be explained by a single or extended metaphor, hoping to both emphasise each person’s idiosyncrasy and demonstrate the evolution of a coherent teaching self.

Metaphors fill the gap when literal meanings would be unclear or are too long-winded, but their use also relies on shared understandings of the meanings contained in the metaphor (Goatly, 1997, p. 17). By using metaphors, participants on the one hand are able to convey complex ideas about their idiosyncratic approach to teaching in a succinct form. What I find interesting is the consistency of the metaphorical descriptions over people’s lives and over the period during which the research took place. The metaphors evoked in this phase of the research echo back to the groups of images developed in Chapter 5. Through metaphors we can see the ideas each person has about the kind of teacher they are and trace how these ideas are enacted in their teaching practices. The way private theories begin, grow and become embedded in thinking is illustrated by this consistency of metaphor. However since metaphor is “pervasive in everyday life” and “plays a central role in defining our everyday realities” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1981, p. 3), the
metaphors used by participants only make sense because they reflect shared and existing understandings of what is and is not possible for a teacher to be. So while each person has their own, consistent, idiosyncratic teaching self, each self belongs within a wider set of shared ideas about teaching that also appear in ‘public theory’.

On the surface, as far as these teachers are concerned, private theory is highly idiosyncratic. The importance of being ‘true’ to yourself when teaching is evident in this data, and this reinforces the idea that teaching is not just about what you do but also about who you are. It is explicit in Doris and Ed’s thinking.

It’s got to be you; it can’t be somebody else’s style. (Doris)

I think we teach much more about what we are and how we display or share that. I’m interested in the side of teaching that is related to how we are. (Ed)

It is also implicit in the coherence of each person’s story and in the connected way that people have selected ideas, expressed attitudes and adopted positions. The data further demonstrates the “reflexive awareness” of the self (Giddens, 1991, p. 52) that participants have demonstrated throughout the study. This research is not able to bring out whether participants’ attitudes and beliefs are idiosyncratic because their experiences are unique. What it does show is that participants have reflexively woven these experiences into a coherent set of attitudes, beliefs and principles that both describe the ‘teaching self’ and guide their practice. The existence and development of a professional ‘self’ expressed in terms of a set of private theories about teaching and intimately connected to self-identities, is clearly important. But are private theories enough?
**ARE PRIVATE THEORIES ENOUGH?**

It could be argued that academics with such a positive, diverse and rich set of learning experiences are enormously advantaged as teachers. Because of the richness of their experiences, they come into the profession with strongly developed self-identities, already knowing what to do, what works and what the possibilities are because of their previous experiences. For many participants, for whom ‘public’ or expert theory is irrelevant and unnecessary, the important thing is to focus instead on expressing “how they are being” (Ed) in a teaching situation.

Participants appear to value idiosyncratic approaches. But there is a problem in taking up this position. What’s to stop you from adopting idiosyncratic practices that are ineffective, inappropriate, or actually harmful to students? What stops Adam himself from “frightening students” by engaging in that “jolly, terrorising behaviour” that some academics indulge in? Presumably, academics who do engage in this sort of thing could justify it on the grounds that this was their own, idiosyncratic style, and that it would be distressing to them to have to change.

What’s to stop practice based on private theory, practice that is idiosyncratic and allows freedom for the ‘teaching self’ to be expressed, from becoming merely self-indulgent? One reason is that participants’ pedagogies are not value-neutral.

Participants value education because it can change the way students see the world and themselves. It has a purpose beyond providing students with useful credentials. As Doris phrases it, “I think that’s what education, that’s what the word means: drawing out . . . drawing out the best.” So participants tend to see their role as broadly transformative, “deeply involved in people’s personal development” (Hamish), and helping students “to see the world in different ways” by “empowering them with critical techniques, making them more intellectual; to
value the process of knowing and learning.” (Adam). Participants value their subject as a tool (“friendly and useful!” — Pippa) or “a vehicle” (Lindsey) to understand the world better. Thus the subject has a value beyond being something worthy of study in itself. All education “is about learning, it’s about being transformed, it’s about moving in new directions” (Hamish) and involves “opening questions, and making us aware how much there is to know rather than working towards any sense that we know it” (Ed). So decisions about pedagogy start with a position that values learning for its own sake and places the students as learners at the centre of a democratic process involving teachers as co-learners in the activity.

The desire for a democratic classroom makes participants concerned about power and equity in their relationships with students. They struggle to find the balance between being fair to students and performing their academic duties responsibly. For Ed, the struggle is highlighted because students themselves, used to being part of the “game” of education, are often “still in the position of feeling that there’s something sure that I want” when he would like to be saying “there aren’t any set answers.” When students feel uncomfortable in an intellectually open environment, and “don’t feel like they can be easily active,” Ed unwillingly has to accept that he must “talk most of the time.” While ideally he would like to be genuinely “opening questions,” he also has to acknowledge that of course he cannot be “completely neutral.” Issues of power therefore modify both what it is possible to teach and the kind of relationships you are able to develop with students. That you will eventually be assessing students also compromises your relationship with them; as Doris explains this creates a dilemma.

I really struggle to be fair, and agonise between wanting them to do well and being fair to them. There’s this battle between encouragement on the
one hand and trying to be fair on the other. It’s a bit uneasy that kind of relationship, because on the one hand the students and I become like a family, but on the other I’m still their teacher . . . I still have that little bit of power over them, just a little, but it’s uncomfortable to exercise.

This paradox emerges because values-related problems are integral to Doris’ pedagogy. “How do I do it?” goes hand in hand with “Why should I do it?”

In Chapter 8, I discussed how I located my own practice within the broader social and cultural contexts that frame relationships between teachers, students, curriculum and pedagogy. This political dimension of education is explored as public theory in literature about emancipatory education, social justice and power relations in education (Sturman, 1997; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997; Apple, 1993; Freire, 1987). Critical theorists and postmodernists (for example Kanpol, 1999; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997; Giroux, 1992; Gibson, 1986;) claim that teaching is a value-laden, socially critical process. Even at the basic level of transmission of information, the decisions made by teachers about which information to transmit and which to omit implies a decision-making process that can be contested on social grounds. The privileging of non-Aboriginal history over Aboriginal history in Australian educational institutions is one obvious example. Choices about who to allow to speak in tutorials, about who should assess students’ work and how, and about the organisation of discussion groups all involve a socially critical awareness. For these reasons too public theory has a role to play. If a teacher’s biography does not create an awareness of the fact that teaching is not a value-neutral activity, then public theory does.
CONCLUSION

The whole point of theorising is to live differently (Doris)

Brookfield warns of the dangers of “teaching innocently,” of teaching as though we “always understand exactly what we’re doing and what effect we’re having” (1995, p. 1). Because cultural, psychological and political factors always complicate learning, teaching “can never be innocent” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1). By teaching this way we risk “a lifetime of frustration” as teachers, never being able to understand why things go wrong or why our strategies don’t work. Brookfield suggests that the “habit of critical reflection is crucial” if teachers are to maintain their energy and sense of purpose (Brookfield, 1995, p. 2). In this chapter we have seen that participants go some way to avoid teaching “innocently” by using three of the four reflective lenses and by engaging in critical reflection that takes into account the political and ethical dimensions of their work as teachers. We have also seen that, while participants tend not to express an interest in the public theory found in educational literature (Brookfield’s fourth lens) and other expert forums, their practice is nevertheless founded on private theory that both mirrors theories about teaching and learning found in the public domain and provides a consistent, well articulated model of learning on which they base their practice. Each person’s model forms part of their “ongoing ‘story’ about the self” that not only reflects a “stable sense of self-identity” (Giddens, 1991, p. 54) but also enables participants to maintain a consistent, continuous professional identity within which their model makes sense.

We have also seen how fortunate participants have been in being able to build their models of learning on the basis of positive encounters with other teachers. Because of the diversity of their early learning experiences, and in some cases
because of positive encounters with colleagues, participants have a rich resource to
draw on. I can only speculate about how it might be for teachers who have a more
limited experience as learners or a more negative engagement with other teachers.
In such cases, it could be argued, public theory might have a more significant role to
play in suggesting new possibilities for teaching.

There is also evidence that public theory has a role even when teachers do
have rich and positive personal experiences to draw from; Lindsey and Justine are
teachers whose private theory is informed and enhanced by ideas from public
theory. In Chapter 8 I illustrated the value of public theory in helping me
understand my own attempts to develop culturally inclusive teaching practices. I
argued that public theory has a key role to play in suggesting approaches or ideas
that take teachers beyond their existing experience. Looking in as an outsider I have
a concern that, by developing a pedagogy based only on that of like-minded
teachers and colleagues, participants risk becoming fixed in a learning loop where
their existing assumptions remain unchallenged because there are no outside ideas
to challenge them. This danger may be partially averted for these participants by
their use of three of the lenses for critical reflection. I suggest that by also bringing
in the fourth lens, theoretical literature or public theory, this risk would be even less.

One of the significant findings of this research has been that the ‘teaching
self’ is both secure and fragile. Participants work hard to preserve this self, and they
feel it deeply when its integrity is threatened. Idiosyncrasy is valued as a way to
reaffirm identity. This is perhaps one reason why some participants resist ‘public’
theory. It is possible that there is a fear that to take on a more orthodox approach
would stifle their idiosyncratic way of working. There is also the negative
perception, articulated by Ed, that “methodology” imposes unwanted restrictions
on a person’s practice. This negativity can be understood if ‘theory’ were only imposed from top down to operate as a series of disciplining discursive practices that limit possibilities for action (Foucault, 1972). However the findings presented here illustrate the point that theory is not just a fixed set of principles but rather “one of the essential components through which the organizing practices operate” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 103). If this were recognised, and if ‘public’ theory was seen not as “expert talk” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 1) detached from everyday experiences but rather as a means to engage in deeper conversations about teaching, an opportunity for deeper engagement rather than a methodological constraint, then perhaps its use would not meet with such resistance. To paraphrase Doris, “the whole point of theorising is to actually teach differently.”
The aim of this study was to identify some key influences in the informal professional learning of university teachers and, in particular, how academics construct the knowledge about teaching and learning that underpins their pedagogies. Many academics do not undergo formal teacher education. The study explored how some academics become excellent teachers through informal, adventitious learning. The research was designed to focus on three different influences on this learning: participants’ early experiences as learners, especially in family and school environments; their experiences as academics working alongside colleagues in a university setting; and participants’ use of theories to underpin their practice. Observations of academics involved in the FLIP at Liverpool University in the UK initially suggested the design of the project (see Chapter 6). The design was further developed in light of Brookfield's lenses for critical reflection (1995), and in view of social constructivist views of learning (see Chapter 2).

The research design was also influenced by a wish to conduct ‘engaged’ research, which is research in which the researcher is present as a participant as well
as a researcher. For this reason, Chapters 4 and 6 presented an educational autobiography detailing the researcher’s experiences as a learner and of learning from colleagues in institutional settings. Chapter 8 then demonstrated the use of a theoretical perspective to understand and resolve a critical teaching incident. These three personal chapters provided a counterpoint to the three chapters in which participants’ experiences were discussed. Sometimes the experiences in the researcher’s biography confirmed or expanded on the experiences reported by participants; at other times discrepancies or contradictions emerged as the two strands of biography unfolded.

TEACHER IDENTITY IN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS

The strongest theme that emerged from the research was the importance of a ‘teaching self’ or consistent teacher identity that develops in early life and continues through to the adult professional context. The theme of teacher identity ran through both the researcher’s and the participants’ biographies. This identity formed a basis for the development of pedagogies, and the research revealed how much energy participants expended in maintaining the pedagogical practices that they own as theirs. Alongside the maintenance of identity through practice, participants developed consistent principles or private theories of teaching that supported their practices. Linked to the need to maintain teacher identity was the evidence of the pleasure that participants found in their work when the environment enabled them to maintain their identity as teachers. The theme of teacher identity was particularly important because it impacted on each stage of the biography, from early learning through learning in the institution to the development of personal theories as an experienced professional.
Participants’ practice drew significantly on early experiences of learning. Participants’ teaching identities could be traced from early experiences of learning in the family that were then mediated through other influences, such as their experiences as students and their experiences as teachers. One notable feature of each participant’s early experience was the influence of family members on their learning. Another was the influence of teachers, both in early life and later as colleagues, who provided strong, positive role models that participants continued to refer to. Through such experiences, participants developed consistent ideas about what good teaching is, what works in teaching and what is ethical practice in teaching. The research reflected Giddens’ (1991) suggestion that identity is not fixed, but part of an ongoing process that involves “sustaining … coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (p. 5). Not only that; the ‘self’ is reflexively understood by a person “in terms of his or her biography” (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). Thus, as participants continued to develop professionally they selected appropriate approaches and chose appropriate professional role models based on their biographies.

Teacher identity was also evident in participants’ use of consistent metaphors to describe their pedagogies. These metaphors often originated in early experiences of learning and expressed fundamental and consistent principles that formed the basis of participants’ current goals for practice. The durability of the ‘teaching self,’ traceable to early experiences of learning and continuing to shape the identity of the participants and the researcher as adult professionals, was a recurrent theme throughout the research.

Evidence of the need to maintain teacher identity was an unexpected discovery in the second phase of the research. This phase began with an
assumption, based on the FLIP experience and supported by literature on the topic, that participants would identify strongly with the philosophies and practices encountered in their local disciplinary area within the wider institution. However, the research indicated that these relationships were not straightforward. While participants each reported positive experiences of collegial support, and the strong influence of collegial role models on their development as teachers, these experiences were not necessarily located in their immediate discipline area. Some participants had to look outside their local discipline area, and sometimes outside the institution, to find others with whom they could engage in productive and supportive collegial conversations. In addition, most participants also reported that their identity as teachers became compromised if their chosen approaches were seen to be at odds with those valued by the institution. These participants expressed dissatisfaction and sadness at their loss of ability to practice in the ways that they valued.

Distinctions emerged between participants who felt comfortable in the institution and those who did not. While participants’ reports of institutional influences were variable, there was a tendency across the group for people to seek out colleagues with similar ideas about teaching, and to isolate themselves from those who did not share these ideas. These findings further reinforced those that revealed the strength of participants’ commitment to their teaching identity. In summary, the research brought out the equivocal nature of collegial influences and the disciplining nature of institutional discursive practices. However it is important to add that the participants in this study had all been rewarded in different ways by the institution as a whole, and while some may have expressed the idea that they were working against the grain of institutional practices they were still working
within a set of values espoused by the institution (otherwise they would not have
been rewarded). This point underlines the highly complex and sometimes
contradictory nature of the institutional discourses that participants were subject to.

The final phase of the research revealed the existence of a set of consistent,
coherent principles or ‘private theories’ informing each participant’s teaching
practice. Such principles developed as the result of reflection on wide-ranging
experiences of teaching and learning, and their consistency was a further indication
of the nature of teacher identity as explored here. These principles were often
expressed idiosyncratically, in metaphorical rather than theoretical terms, and it was
possible to generate a core, defining metaphor to encapsulate each participant’s
idiosyncratic approach. Participants thus demonstrated a “reflexive awareness” of
the self (Giddens, 1991, p. 52) as they wove past experiences into a coherent set of
attitudes, beliefs and principles to guide their practice.

Although participants were found to make use of implicit or private theories
or philosophies to inform their practice, the research also uncovered equivocal
attitudes to ‘public’ educational theory. These attitudes fell into four broad
categories:

- Theory requires expertise in the specialist area of education. It is therefore
  inaccessible for ‘ordinary’ university teachers.
- Understanding theory is not as relevant or as useful as investigating practice
  for university teachers.
- Theory is too constraining, dogmatic and potentially too limiting for a
  teacher who wants to be able to respond fully to the ‘moment’.
- Theory helps teachers continuously develop and critique their pedagogies.
  It provides freedom not constraint; it offers possibilities not limitations; it
  enables risk taking.
The researcher’s biography contrasted with some of the participants’ narratives in its explicit use of a ‘public’ theory to inform practice, and the importance of ‘public’ educational theory was acknowledged in particular by the two participants who held formal teaching qualifications. Attitudes to public theory were therefore complex and sometimes contradictory. An interesting additional finding was that participants who professed lack of interest in following educational theory actually practised in ways that were supported by sound theoretical principles in the field of university learning and teaching.

The research framework, building as it did on three of Brookfield’s lenses for critical reflection (which is a form of ongoing professional learning), was very productive as a means of giving an account of prior, adventitious professional learning. The research provided a vehicle for participants’ voices to be heard and (hopefully) reported to a wider audience. But participants also reported that the experience of being involved in the research helped them think differently about their work as teachers. It helped them make decisions about practical problems in their teaching by providing a useful space for reflection. These responses suggest a practical use of the research framework and outcomes, which is to inform the provision of professional learning in universities. The key goal of such professional learning would be to encourage teacher reflexivity through a focus on biography and teacher identity. The suggestions that follow draw from the findings in each phase of the enquiry.
REFLEXIVITY AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: A WAY FORWARD FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The suggested framework for professional learning focuses on the idea of teacher identity and the reflexive individual. The research has shown how participants’ ideas about teaching and learning come to be shaped by their biographies as learners and teachers. The importance of biography as the basis for informal, adventitious learning indicates that formal professional learning might begin here too, by placing the teacher’s experiences at the centre of the process. This approach has been suggested for students in initial teacher education, using methodologies such as life writing and the exploration of personal teaching metaphors as starting points (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001). This approach could be equally relevant to university teachers, with professional learning activities built round the exploration of biography and teacher identity.

This beginning provides the basis for the further development of professional learning activities. To begin professional learning with biography provides a clear framework from which each teacher can develop by building approaches that they can ‘own’ as theirs. A key element in this approach would be a focus on ‘reflexivity’, whereby the teaching ‘self’ is reflexively understood by a person in terms of his or her biography as a teacher and learner. Critical explorations of the source of individuals’ ideas about teaching, and an examination of the reasons why one approach is preferred over another, could form parts of this process. It is important to acknowledge that identity is not fixed, but develops with experience. This model of professional learning will acknowledge the changing nature of teacher identity by providing opportunities for academics to engage in a continuing process of reflexivity through the use of the remaining elements in this model of
professional learning. Importantly, one requires resources beyond the self and biography in order to do this, and colleagues provide one potential resource. The value of sharing ideas and of working with other people to reflect on challenges and to solve problems is also recognised in proposing the second element in this framework for professional learning: participation in critical conversations with colleagues.

This element takes into account the importance of role models and co-workers in supporting participants, and it is suggested that this be acknowledged and utilised in professional learning. The research points to the value of collegial conversations to support professional learning, and the need for institutions to provide space for these. This position is further supported by participants’ positive responses to the opportunity to engage in conversations about their teaching provided by the research, with many commenting on the difficulty, in normal circumstances, of finding time to engage in such conversations. This underlines the dialogic nature of learning, a process that, according to this small snapshot, is rarely evoked in supporting professional learning. A framework for professional learning based on these findings, then, would use collegial conversations, based on existing collegial relationships, as a vehicle for learning.

Learners might engage in collegial conversations beginning with the exploration of biography and teacher identity, perhaps using starting points such as the questions used for the research interviews. Since it was found that collegiality often extends beyond disciplinary boundaries, it would be important to begin the conversations with people on the basis of their shared teaching philosophies and not necessarily with colleagues in the discipline. This would enable ideas about one’s teaching identity to be consolidated at the same time as ideas about
developing congenial practices were explored. From these relationships, further possibilities for collaborative professional learning might develop, such as shared teaching, shared enquiry and problem solving. The goal would initially be to develop secure and supportive relationships from which new directions can develop.

To implement such a process would not be an easy task. It would require the de-centralisation of professional learning, where the role of the institution would include the provision of opportunities and time for productive collegial conversations to take place. Attempts at an institutional level to supervise or manage such conversations are likely to be counter-productive, since research suggests that such conversations are most successful when based on open and equal relationships, in where participants in the conversations are given the freedom to develop “ground rules” (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 140-141). Involvement in the conversations would also have to be voluntary, since there would be no value in involving participants who were not ready to commit to the process. There would be a role for a facilitator to link like-minded people together and to provide bridging support for academics new to the university. Productive existing relationships would be given the support to continue.

Based on the findings of the present research, these conversations would be more productive if they were to take place in a local rather than a wider institutional setting. De-centralised provision would also help to address the need, indicated by the research, for increased critical awareness of the discourses that underpin approaches to teaching in universities. Without this awareness it is difficult to move beyond what is considered ‘normal’ practice in teaching and, by association, in professional learning. A de-centralised provision would be a means of addressing
the problem of the complex and sometimes negative influence of institutional practices and cultures on the maintenance of teacher identity. A de-centralised model of professional development may also go some way towards interrupting the problem of competing institutional discourses by moving away from homogenisation of practices to better accommodate a diversity of approaches to teaching and learning.

I have advocated a focus on teacher identity by suggesting that professional learning activities focus on biography, a process that draws on and utilises the developing self and begins within and not from outside. Collegial conversations are then a vehicle for moving beyond identification of the teaching self by finding ways to maintain it in classroom practice. But there are risks that, in making this the key focus, opportunities to move forward and meet new challenges will not be taken. If academics are not prepared to question their colleagues’ assumptions and practices (which is quite possible), these may remain unchallenged. Hatton (1998) has warned of the risk of un-reflexive “mimicry” of models of teaching; the value of using teachers’ practical or experiential knowledge as the basis for professional learning is limited when the learning is based on an unexamined adoption of standard practices (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996). It will be important to encourage teachers to respond flexibly to change and enable them to “continuously revise” (Giddens, 1991, p. 5) their identities and develop new responses to the changing context in which they work. There is a danger of developing “blind spots” or of “unthinkingly” accepting the dominant assumptions around us (Brookfield, 1995, p. 71). This is where the final element of the suggested framework for professional learning comes in. The value of ‘public’ theory to assist
teachers to critique and develop their pedagogies was discussed briefly in Chapter 9 and is now examined further.

The use of metaphor as a means of expressing the personal theories (the hidden beliefs and assumptions) that underpin participants’ pedagogies was earlier highlighted. The research also showed that while participants may use idiosyncratic ways of expressing hidden beliefs and assumptions, the beliefs themselves are not necessarily idiosyncratic, and examples of the matches between private and public theories about teaching and learning were pointed out in Chapter 9. The final element in this framework for professional development would begin with identifying academics’ private theories through the analysis of personal teaching metaphors. It would then move on to engagement with ‘public’ educational theory as a vehicle for engagement in professional development that challenges the assumptions underpinning ‘private’ theories.

Teaching metaphors work in two ways: they help teachers “make sense of” their experience and help them understand “who [they] are as teachers” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 64). For this reason, Bullough and Gitlin (2001) suggest the discussion of teaching metaphors as a means to explore the teaching self. Discussion of personal metaphors is a means to bring teachers’ personal theories “to a concrete level,” described as a core goal of professional learning (McCutcheon, 1992, p. 202). It has been suggested that this process may involve discussing the theories with peers (so they can be understood by being made explicit), encouraging teachers to question each others’ and defend their own theories, and promoting acceptance of the idea that theories are not fixed but always capable of being tested against practice (McCutcheon, 1992). Exploring personal metaphors, then, is a means to understand the basis on which we practice as
teachers, by uncovering the beliefs and assumptions that hide behind the metaphors we use to describe or explain what we do.

Metaphors can also open up and expand our thinking about what is possible in teaching (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001). Thus metaphors provide an accessible starting point for engaging with colleagues in conversations from which increasingly complex understandings may develop. To imagine a conversation in which any two or more of the participants in this study shared their different understandings of the metaphors they used to explain how they teach is to imagine a rich and fruitful exchange of perceptions about pedagogy and the role of the teacher.

Analysis of teaching metaphors would be the first step in bridging the perceived gap between theory and practice (Deng, 2004). The next step would be to encourage academics to engage reflexively with a process of theorising, as a positive tool for developing practice. It is suggested that, as their internal beliefs about teaching and learning are made increasingly explicit, academics will begin to recognise that hidden assumptions lie behind all practices and to question what these are. Here is a role for an ‘expert’ facilitator. This person might work with academics to provide a context for exploring the assumptions that lie behind their personal theories and then, by encouraging a conversation between public and private theories (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001), suggest alternatives to enrich future practice.

By linking the process of theorising back to biography, this framework for professional learning provides ways to help academics maintain and develop the teaching self. Academics thus remain reflexively aware of who they are as teachers while at the same time developing a critical understanding of the value of theorising. This final component of the professional learning framework also addresses the idea
that the goal of professional development is to both challenge and *transform* teachers’ inherent beliefs and assumptions (Deng, 2004).

The framework for professional learning suggested here is designed to enable academics to develop an awareness of the way their teaching self has been constituted by past experience. While the framework values the individual teaching self by placing it at the centre of the process, it also encourages a critical awareness of the way teachers both act and are acted upon by the prevailing discourses and practices in their past and present experience. The framework values what teachers bring with them to each teaching act, and it also encourages a reflexive awareness of the limitations of using biography alone as the basis for developing and transforming pedagogy.

This research was conducted in a climate of university reform in Australia (see Chapter 2). Among recent proposals for reform is the suggestion that, as a means to improve the quality of teaching in Australian universities, every university academic should hold a formal teaching qualification, with associated discussion of whether Australia should “introduce compulsory teacher training for academics” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003; Cook, 2003). There is a danger in the discourses of ‘training’ that professional learning is reduced to a “technical-rationality” or instrumental view (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 6; Deng, 2004, p. 144), in which ‘training’ presumes the dissemination of pre-packaged ‘expert’ knowledge to novices. The research reported in this thesis not only highlights the complex nature of professional learning but also emphasises the relevance of the experiential, informal learning that takes place irrespective of exposure to formal training. It challenges discourses about ‘training’ university teachers that take no account of the presence of the person behind the teacher. It also shows the
importance of biography and teacher identity for teachers themselves as they struggle to adapt to new demands and challenges. The research indicates that, at the very least, training should take these ideas into account if it is to be effective.

In discussing some future directions for staff development, Webb reminded his readers to be aware of the way “the person enters such development,” pointing out “the impoverishment of the act of learning which follows when the learner is excluded” (1996, p. 110). Bullough and Gitlin (2001) reassert this position, as does Rowland (2000) who advocates placing of personal as well as intellectual values at the centre of university teaching. This present research has also revealed the human-ness of teaching, where teaching is messy, complicated, at times emotionally exhilarating and at others depressingly disappointing. To lose sight of this would be to lose awareness of the endless opportunities for human beings to engage with one another in exciting, memorable, life-changing experiences. In re-framing what we believe university teachers should do, value and believe there is an opportunity to reaffirm a belief that teaching is a fully human activity.
APPENDICES
I offered participants the opportunity for anonymity by choosing a pseudonym but no one expressed a desire for this to happen. However to avoid possible later problems of disclosure I made the decision to use pseudonyms.

**ADAM**

I first met Adam when, as a recipient of the university’s Vice Chancellor’s Teaching Excellence Award, he gave a presentation in the university’s lunchtime Staff Development Seminars series. At the time I wanted to include participants from outside the arts and human sciences area, and his talk on “maths for economists” attracted my attention. He readily became involved in my research, and expressed pleasure at the unusual opportunity to talk about his teaching.

Adam was born and brought up in the city where the university is located. Not only that, he was in the original intake of students when the university opened in 1975. He speaks of this experience as “heady stuff”, a “privileged time” and apart from a stint as a graduate student at a university in the US his whole career has been based at the same Australian university. At the time of the research he was working as a colleague with several academics who had taught him when he himself was a student. Adam became an academic “because he couldn’t help himself.”
DORIS

Doris teaches her course in environmental ethics by taking students out of the university and into remote areas of the Australian bush, where they camp together for part of the semester. She was a ‘foundation’ member of the university’s staff, and is named by Adam as one of the inspirational teachers he met during his years as an undergraduate at the university. She is well known in the university for her love of teaching, her engagement with her students, and her support for their learning, and has featured in one of the university’s staff development videos as an exemplary tutor.

Doris is the most typically ‘intellectual’ of the eight participants. A member of a family that loved philosophical discussions and spent meal times reflecting on questions such as “How do you know that you’re not dreaming a dream?” she read Descartes at the age of nine and eventually became a doctoral student in philosophy. Her father, “a frustrated academic”, supported her learning by reading her set texts alongside her, and even created an “illustrated companion” to some of the books she read at university. With an older brother who would “share his wonderings with me” Doris grew up learning the most significant things from home rather than from school, until she went to university. She counts creatures in the natural world among her most significant teachers.

ED

Ed teaches in an interdisciplinary context, working within the broad area of Asian studies. He is a cultural historian with an interest in spirituality. Born in the United States, he spent several years as a child living in Indonesia where he developed a fascination for the region’s cultures, histories, religions and philosophies. His mother was a significant early influence, and his early experiences of learning at home prepared him to fit easily into school life and, later, university. He felt “at home” at university, and became an academic as a way to continue to do the things he loved.

Ed’s more recent experiences of academic life have been less comfortable. Known in the institution for the energy and radicalism with which he approached his work, including his teaching, by the time he began to share his
experiences with me he was becoming disillusioned and depressed about his future as an academic. At the same time as he was involved in the research, he was experiencing a period of intense soul searching as he attempted to find ways of responding to the changes in academic life that were affecting his ability to carry on teaching in the area that fascinated him, and in a way that he believed in. Having first explored a number of forms of resistance (he described himself to me as “a Socratic gadfly” in his department) by the end of the research he was in the middle of negotiating a pre-retirement contract. His decision to begin to withdraw from academic life led to feelings of considerable sadness and loss, mitigated by a sense of relief and renewed optimism as he prepared for a life with a different focus. His feelings about the changes are evident in his responses to the interview questions, and traced in some detail in chapters 5, 7 and 9.

Hamish

Hamish is a U.S. migrant, and has been teaching at the university for eight years. A science graduate, he discovered during his chemistry degree that he “hated being in a lab” and began looking for another discipline that would give scope to explore answers to what was turning out to be the key question for him, “what is it to be human?” By way of studies in psychology and social work he finally discovered education; “that fit, that complete match” with what he had always done through his life. Hamish has not trained to be a teacher but has studied the politics, sociology and philosophy of education. However at the moment he chose to study education he also found himself having to “face up to that realisation that I was a teacher, and that I had never stopped teaching.”

Hamish calls himself an interdisciplinarian, not only because of his education but also in terms of his current practice. Although based in a school of education, his core work is as a “foundational interdisciplinarian” designing, coordinating and teaching one of the ‘foundation units’, which the university has made compulsory for all first year students. He is widely acknowledged to be a challenging and inspiring teacher, and has three times been nominated for the university’s Vice Chancellor’s Teaching Excellence Award. I have taught with Hamish and have first hand knowledge of both his philosophies of teaching and learning and his teaching practices. Of all the participants, Hamish is the person
I know best. I attribute the quality of his response to my questions to our close and long-standing relationship.

**JUSTINE**

Justine is Australian, but has lived and been educated in two states in Australia and also in Denmark in Europe. She has two degrees, the first in music and the second a science degree which she completed as a mature age student. She taught herself the physics she needed to complete the second degree. She studied for her second degree at the university where she went on to teach as a casual tutor of first and second year students in environmental science.

Justine is a qualified adult educator, having completed a postgraduate diploma in tertiary and adult education during her time as a casual tutor. I was her tutor for one of the adult education units, and when a year later she won the university’s Vice Chancellor’s Teaching Excellence Award in 1998 it was only in her third year of university teaching and while still employed as a casual tutor. This exceptional achievement as well as our previous relationship led me to ask her to be a participant in the research. I was disturbed to discover during the course of the research that she had made the decision to resign from her casual academic position as tutor in environmental science (for reasons that are revealed in Chapter 7). She is currently working in her family’s business and is occasionally asked to do some private tutoring.

**LINDSEY**

Lindsey is a local woman, having been brought up and educated in the same state in which she now teaches. She teaches in language and literacy education, focusing on primary English and LOTE (languages other than English) and working with initial teacher education students as well as qualified teachers. She is the only participant with teaching experience outside a university setting, having trained as a primary school teacher and taught in remote schools in Australia. She has expertise in all areas of the primary school curriculum, but is passionate about promoting an “integrative approach” to teaching language in primary schools.

She won the university’s Vice Chancellor’s Teaching Excellence Award in 2001, just two years after joining the staff of the university. Before her
involvement in this research she and I had held many corridor conversations about university teaching even though we had never formally worked together. I was aware that she was fascinated by the experience of managing her transition from primary school teacher to university teacher, and knew of her commitment to both practice reflectively and teach students to do this. Lindsey is the only participant to have been formally trained to teach. I was interested to know the extent to which her thinking might differ from that of other participants because of this. Memories of working as a primary teacher are woven throughout her interviews.

**Pippa**

Pippa has herself told me that she finds it difficult to work out where she ‘fits’ as a specialist. She talked with pleasure of her time as a student in a small girls’ grammar school in a small English town. Although known for her mathematical ability (she used to act as a go-between for less able students in their negotiations with the maths teacher), her first degree was in physics and materials science, where she researched before migrating to Australia from the UK in the mid 1970s. She became involved in tutoring at university “by pure chance” when her partner contracted chickenpox and she ended up marking some maths papers for him. She was so successful that she was invited to take on a tutoring role in maths the following semester.

Pippa studied for a second degree in maths and computing in order to support her new academic direction. “More a teacher than a mathematician,” Pippa nevertheless claims she feels she does not belong with educationists. Her experience and skill is in teaching students “that many other [maths] lecturers couldn’t,” students who don’t like maths or are frightened of it but who need some knowledge of maths to support their study in science. She is well known in the university as an excellent and effective teacher, and is unusual in that her research focuses on teaching and learning mathematics, rather than on mathematics itself. This is the main reason I first chose to involve her in the project.
APPENDIX II

QUESTIONS CUES/PROMPTS

PHASE ONE: YOUR PAST EXPERIENCES AS A LEARNER

LEARNING

What are your most outstanding memories of the experiences you have had as a learner? I'd like you to go back as far as your school days to start with then move forward to more recent experiences. I'd like to focus on your memories of good experiences first, then if you agree we can turn to experiences you found difficult or even painful.

Why were these experiences good or bad?

Are you now aware of these personal experiences when making decisions about your own teaching? For example, are there kinds of experiences that you would like your own students to have, because they were so good for you? And the other way round - experiences that you would like to protect your students from?

Have your past experiences of learning influenced in any way your decision to become a teacher, and if so, how?
YOUR TEACHERS
Thinking about the teachers you have had next. Do any teachers stand out for you as good teaching role models - who represented the kind of teacher you now are or would like to be? Is there anyone who is a negative role model - someone whose style or approach you hope never to emulate?

Why have you selected these particular teachers? Are there any common links or themes? Is the ‘bad’ a negative reflection of the ‘good’? On what grounds have you chosen to describe these particular teachers - according to their teaching skills; their personalities; their philosophies of teaching?

YOUR OWN GOALS FOR TEACHING
Using the ideas about teaching and learning that we’ve been talking about, what kind of teacher do you think you are? Would you like to become a different kind of teacher? How would you like to change?

(The final question prefigures the next area that we’ll be talking about in the next interview. Thinking briefly about teachers in your field - any common element in the way they approach the teaching/learning process?)
PHASE TWO: THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

We ended the previous interview with a brief look at the particular teaching approach found in your specialist area. Today’s interview will focus specifically on this.

Do you think your subject is easy to teach? Is it easy to learn? Why?

Does your specialist area lend itself to any particular styles of or approaches to teaching?

Have you been trained in any way — or initiated in any way — into this particular culture of teaching?

Do you think these approaches mesh well with your preferred approach to teaching - which you talked about in the previous interview?

Do you teach in the culturally approved way, or have you moved away from it in any way (large or small?).

If so, how did it happen - what made you change, were you supported in the change, were the outcomes successful?

If you conform to the culture — would you like to challenge it? How might you do this? What outcomes would you be looking for and how would you know what they were?
Phase Three: Your theories of teaching and learning

What strategies do you normally use when you teach? Do you have any preferred approaches? Are you always able to teach in the way you would like to? (If so, what way is that? If not, how would you like to teach; why can’t you do it that way?)

What broad, generic goals do you have in mind when planning teaching and learning? Do you accomplish these goals — regularly? occasionally? rarely? How do you know?

Tell me about the last time you had a problem relating to your teaching. What happened, and how do you account for it? What did you do?

Tell me about the last success you had in your teaching. What happened, and how do you account for it? What did you do?

What do you do well? What would you like to do better?

Using the ideas about teaching and learning that we’ve been talking about throughout this research, what kind of teacher do you now think you are? Would you like to become a different kind of teacher? How would you like to change?

Overall, considering everything you’ve talked about with me, who or what would you say is the single most important influence on your development as a teacher?

Returning to the first interview: Your own goals for teaching

Using the ideas about teaching and learning that we’ve been talking about throughout this research, what kind of teacher do you now think you are? Would you like to become a different kind of teacher? How would you like to change?
APPENDIX III

PARTICIPANTS’ IDIOSYNCRATIC AND METAPHORICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR TEACHING

These are listed in order of:

- Significant early experiences
- What kind of teacher you want to be? (literal)
- What kind of teacher do you want to be? (metaphorical)
- Attitude to theory
- Attitude to institution
- Most important influence

ADAM (TEACHER AS PERFORMER)

- His family “bequeathed” to him “a fascination in everything.” From his family he learnt to celebrate “knowing, understanding” and “just how wonderful things are.”
- Teaching is about having a “passion to communicate … to inform, to enrich, to discomfort.” Values and promotes “critical thinking, research, iconoclasm … discomfort” as ways to “help students see the world in different ways … bring different sets of lenses to issues to understand them.”
• Learnt from some “outstanding teachers” to see lecturing as performing. Focuses on perfecting his own performance skills. Uses “little diversions … timing … slightly odd humour … showmanship … cheap gimmicks … props (pies and cans of beer)” to engage his student audience. Lives for moments of “dawning appreciation.”

• In spite of the energy he puts into his lecturing, considers this the least effective element in student learning. Having a “personal struggle” with an idea, and “explaining it to your mates” are much richer experiences.

• Is concerned about the future of universities if they become “diploma-distributing, credentialising” institutions. Feels the things he values such as research and critical thinking will be at risk.

• Became an academic because he “couldn’t help it.” Met inspiring teachers at university, but it was with his family that he learnt to “value the process of knowing and learning.”

DORIS (THE CELEBRATORY TEACHER)

• Her early important learning came from joyful, interactive and exuberant experiences; her dog, birds, her parents’ touch, floor polishing, reading Hegel.

• She creates extraordinary and creative contexts for learning. She is fascinated by performance; she wears hats and performs tricks in lectures, and would like to make more use of props to teach philosophy. She once stripped in a lecture, so illustrate the “mind-body problem.” Being creative means she is “always operating on the edge of my competence.”

• The hardest and the best thing she does is the field trip, when she takes her students into remote bush for ten days to teach that “the whole point of
theorising is to actually live differently.”  Teaching is “healing and loving.” In the bush, “all of my students become my family.” Doris values “intimacy … commitment … passion” and gives “herself” and her “unconditional love” to her students. They in return learn that they are “lovable.”

- With an interest in educational practice not theory, her teaching practice is informed by the theoretical content of her teaching. With her students she can explore the problems of living the “vision.”

- Feels that the quality of education in the university has recently “deteriorated.” Unlike many academics, she can do the things she does because part time work allows her “energy, and a commitment to making time for my students.”

- She has learnt how to be a teacher from “people who have loved me.” Being cared for has “really helped me care.” Teaching is “a gift.”

ED (THE DIONYSIAN TEACHER)

- Immersed in learning from earliest childhood. Mother an educator. In school, always felt he was “not playing quite the same game as the other kids.” Instantly felt at home at university and became a teacher as a way to continue doing “what I really loved.” Chose his subject as a way to understand a country, Indonesia, that “marked me so deeply.” Wasn’t afraid to work on “dangerous ground.” Remains fascinated by questions he doesn’t “really know the answers to.”

- Worries that students expect to find “an answer’ or “be finished.” Believes in an education that is “inclined to change how people understand the world.” Would like students to be more comfortable with uncertainty.
• His focus on “consciousness” both as a subject of study and as an experience makes him interested in “making the classroom come alive” and in “actualising ideas.” Is a “Dionysian” teacher who has to operate “by inspiration.”

• Has an ideological resistance to “thinking systematically” about teaching. Reluctant to make “any attempt to make a technique out of it.”

• Academic work is akin to “game playing;” a game he no longer wants to be part of. He remains at “slightly odd twist … away from what is mainstream.”

• Ed’s mother is “the person that had the deepest influence on the way that I look at teaching and in the way that I look for meaning in life.”

**HAMISH (TEACHER AS EXPLORER)**

• Aware very early of a world full of possibility, both intellectual and sensual. Remembers the thrill of the freedom of getting lost and finding pleasure in eating glue. Enjoyed (and enjoys) “mess … playing around.” Loved it that teachers were “rich in knowledge” and wanted that for himself.

• Starts by being a warm teacher, then becomes more prickly and challenging. Success for him would be a student who changed from being “vexed, irritated and angry” to being someone able to say “Yes, I understand.” Problems are “the most beautiful things.” His goal as a teacher: for people to embrace problems.

• Uses a range of complex metaphors. Teaching is like being in “a state of grace;” it is “messy, beautiful, warm and breathing;” it is “risk-taking;” the ideas and concerns of the classroom provide “a beautiful feast.” Teaching is about “being human.”
• Puts himself in the “critical pedagogy mould” with a concern for problems associated with privilege and power. His pedagogy and curriculum both reflect this. Rejects “recipes” for teaching; models what he believes.

• Relies on “committed people” around him at work who “feed one another.” Shudders at the “dogmas about the way things should be” in universities. Dislikes the “ritualised norms” that penalise creative students. Fears that universities aspire to be institutions “that have no people in them.”

• Has learnt his most important lessons from “all the excellent teachers” he has known.

JUSTINE (TEACHER AS CREATIVE ARTIST)

• Labelled ‘ineducable’ and called “Dummy” as a little girl at school. Finally found pleasure in learning when she began to play the piano. Continues to be fascinated by her own learning processes. The youngest participant, recognised exceptionally early in her career as an excellent teacher by her university. Loves teaching “so much.”

• Interested in what makes learning “fun.” Values innovation but would sometimes like to be “a more boring teacher.” Students can find her classes overly challenging and uncomfortable, partly because she focuses beyond cognitive aspects of learning and considers emotional and interpersonal intelligence. Teaches the students first, then the subject.

• A creative and playful teacher. Goes “out on a limb,” takes risks, does “weird things.” Uses story telling as a tool to teach concepts in science. Puts “so much of myself” into teaching that it’s painful when things don’t work. At these times tends to “retreat.”
• ‘Public’ theory valuable for her. Helps her know what to do, plan teaching, solve problems. Has not needed to rely on experientially-based knowledge as much as teachers who have no ‘public’ theory.

• Has fought the conservative and uninformed views of senior academics in her department. Frustration, sadness and regret at the low status of teaching in the university made her leave. She “just spooked” one day, and quit.

LINDSEY (TEACHER AS CO-LEARNER)

• Learnt early in life that she was valued and cared for. Warm family environment was mirrored in the warm school environment; learning was positive and happy from the start. Her parents’ and teachers’ belief in her carried over to her own belief that all students can learn.

• Would like to be thought of as a teacher who values innovation and is open to change. Bases her teaching on the “very, very good role models” who were her mentors in her first years in teaching. Values professionalism, which gives her the knowledge and abilities to “make a difference.”

• Hopes to create a sense of “belonging” for students. “Honesty, voice, teamwork” are her “happy threesome” in learning. Projects both the “expert and the person” in the classroom. Values teaching that is “applied … process-orientated … pragmatic … hands-on … professional.”

• Rejects the theory / practice dichotomy. Her practice grounded explicitly in knowledge of educational theory. Values opportunities to engage with colleagues in “professional discourse.”
• Feels isolated in the institution. Wants colleagues to be “more open” about what they do; would like to find the close collegial relationships she remembers from early teaching.

• People who have “trusted” her have helped her become a teacher, especially her late father. She hopes she is “living up to his expectations . . . doing him proud.”

**Pippa (Teacher as artisan)**

• Experienced early on being a mentor for fellow students at school. Other students would “put me up to ask the questions” that they were too scared to ask themselves. Her lecturing style is now that she asks “lots of questions,” and she therefore expects students to be able to respond and interact in the lecture situation.

• Would like to be thought of as a “responsive” teacher. Links teaching with parenting, responding to students’ needs as a parent responds to a child’s needs. Relationships with students are essential for her teaching to be a success. She works to develop these even in large lectures.

• Imagines herself removing the “blocks” to students’ understanding and presents a workperson-like image. Is at pains to analyse “what works” and the value of “different techniques.” Would like students to see maths as a “friendly, useful tool.” Uses memories of “what worked” for her as a student as the basis for developing strategies for teaching.

• Is uninterested in educational theory but strategies show use of socio-cultural approach.
• Because of her interest in teaching and learning, and not in mathematics in itself, she feels at odds with colleagues in mathematics.

• Cannot point to one key influence on her development as a teacher. Came into teaching because her husband caught chicken pox, and it “grabbed me in totally!”
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