The Politics and Practices of Work-based Learning:

Accounts of experiences in the Community Services sector.

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Doctor of Philosophy
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University of Western Sydney
To Maree, Maddie and Myles,
for your love, tolerance and support.
Acknowledgements

The list of people worthy of mention and thanks is substantial and I fear not all can be mentioned here. I should like to thank everyone who has helped and supported me in this venture, but certainly there are some who need particular mention. First and foremost, I thank the students of the Graduate Diploma in Social Sciences (Community Services) who so willingly and openly took part in this research. I am mindful of the importance of the task of doing justice to their stories. Thanks also to all the students who have undertaken the degree. The achievements of this group of people are inspiring and humbling and serve as a reminder that learning and working in the community services sector are extraordinary endeavours that change the lives of ordinary people for the better.

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Finally, to my dear and loving family, my life-partner and soul mate Maree and my beautiful children Maddie and Myles, I cannot write enough to express my thanks to them for their ever present love. My ability to do anything is underpinned by the strength and joy I draw from them.

16th December 2007.
Statement of authentication

The work in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signed:_______________________________________

M.C. Houlbrook.

Date: _______________
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<td>ACWA</td>
<td>Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies</td>
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<td>APEL</td>
<td>Accredited Prior Experiential Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCWT</td>
<td>Centre for Community Welfare training</td>
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<td>CS</td>
<td>Community Services</td>
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<td>CSP</td>
<td>Critical Social Pedagogy</td>
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<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
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<td>GDSS</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma of Social Sciences (Community Services)</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTO</td>
<td>Registered Training Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
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<td>SASHS</td>
<td>School of Applied Social and Human Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOSS</td>
<td>School of Social Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<td>UWS</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
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<td>WBL</td>
<td>Work-based Learning</td>
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Abstract

This thesis is a phenomenological study of the experiences of students engaged in a work-based learning (WBL) degree in the community service (CS) sector in NSW. The degree – a graduate diploma in social sciences (GDSS) - was developed through an industry/community partnership in response to identified workforce development needs.

Positioned as a novel pedagogy, WBL is presented in the broad context, before the specifics of the research are outlined. The thesis presents, first, a political economy of higher education (HE) and the CS sector, followed by a description of the defining principles of WBL, characteristics of practice and issues arising from these things.

The phenomenological study of the student experiences is supported by a case study of the GDSS. The research is approached from an ontological and epistemological framework informed by critical theory and critical hermeneutics. The methods draw substantially on data collection through semi-structured interviews and supporting data collected form other sources. The analysis of the data is presented as five major data stories – access, self and study, work-based learning and organisation, managing learning and outcomes.

In discussing the data the thesis argues that the students are strongly positioned as non-traditional students with an orientation towards issues of access to HE, as well as a concern with critical practice. The concluding comments of the thesis consider the context of work-based learning under systemic influences of the political economy of the day, notably neo-liberalism and the application of a techno-economic framing of the knowledge economy. Some final comments are offered on the practice of WBL in the CS sector, including the defence of knowledge production as a public good and the lifeworld/system dynamics of partnership.
Chapter one:

A New Pedagogical Landscape?

“All changed, changed utterly: a terrible beauty is born” (Yeats, 1991[1916]).
Chapter 1: A New Pedagogical Landscape?

1.1 Starting out – a rationale.

The idea that work-based learning (WBL) is constitutive of a new pedagogical landscape is commonly advanced by its proponents. Certainly my own embarkation on the WBL journey, described in this thesis, was an act of innovation. Despite over twenty years experience in the education of adults, it was something I viewed as novel. In fact that starting point was the similar experience of those of us who came to this project from the ‘industry’ side of an industry/university partnership. That partnership is between the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) and the University of Western Sydney (UWS). It also includes the Centre for Community Welfare Training (CCWT), as the ‘training arm’ of ACWA. The partnership reflects a broad consensus that such arrangements are part of a ‘new times’ for higher education (HE). Symes and McIntyre (2000:1) capture the essence of this context in their descriptive phrase, “the new business of learning”. However, as they rightly point out, none of these things are entirely new and part of the work of this thesis is to shed some light on the historical context.

What is new, as will be argued, is the context of change and the rise of imperatives, dictated by the political economy of the last few decades, which demand particular relationships between HE and work. This is true of all learning, but the focus of this study is on WBL in the HE sector.

The impetus for change, in particular, has been the association between knowledge production, as the central focus of the knowledge economy, and the consequent primacy of educational reform, within the broader project of microeconomic reform (Powell and Snellman, 2004). Much of this reform is, in turn, predicated on the ideas surrounding the concept of globalisation and its impact on the relations within and between nation states (Korsgaard, 1999, Jamrozik, 2001). This is the backdrop for educational strategies such as WBL, which has been adopted across a range of international contexts, referred to in the following chapters. As will be discussed, these contextual issues are complex, (as they are with other changing aspects of HE), and WBL is not easily practiced without reference to their complexity.
WBL is the main, though not the only, business of the ACWA/UWS partnership. Specifically it is practiced through a work-based degree – the Graduate Diploma in Social Sciences (Community Services) (GDSS). This research is a phenomenological study of the experiences of the students within the GDSS and looks at both the broad, contextual issues, outlined above, and the specific issues of the practice of WBL within the community services (CS) sector.

The GDSS was created in response to workforce development issues in the sector, as perceived by ACWA, from its position as a peak ‘industry body’ with a strong investment in training and education. It was also motivated by the partnership stakeholders within UWS seeking the development of WBL in the sector. The details of these motivations and relationships are taken up as part of the research, as indicated in the following section of this chapter (see 1.2 below). However, before moving on, some broad aspects of the rationale for the research are first outlined.

Undertaking WBL brings with it the responsibility of, not only engaging with a ‘new’ pedagogy, but also setting the parameters of practice with students. For them, the concept of *work as curriculum* \(^1\) will, almost certainly, be alien. The prospect of WBL may well be exciting and well suited to the circumstances of those taking part, but the hegemony of traditional university learning is powerful and tests the frameworks of both those who develop WBL and those who undertake it as a mode of study alike.

There is a strong imperative for developers of WBL give attention to:

- Theorising practice
- Understanding the broader context

and

- Being clear about ‘practice-guiding’ principles

In addition, in a pedagogy which has still to find a secure positioning within the broad notions of disciplinarity, fields of practice and HE discourse in general (Costley,\(^3\)

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\(^1\) As understood in WBL.

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3
2006:341), it is useful for practitioners to identify those things which contribute to the growing body of knowledge about WBL.

This thesis is an attempt to address both sets of issues - by reference, on the one hand, to broad contextual insights, derived from political economy and the body of knowledge already in existence and, on the other hand, by reference to the specifics of practice in the GDSS and the insights gained from student experiences.

The ideas discussed draw considerably on the metaphor of ‘landscape’, to exemplify conceptual framings. Generally this metaphor seems to hold and, therefore, what follows is a short account of the structure of the thesis as an aid to ‘navigating’ its content and form.

### 1.2: The structure of the thesis: a ‘navigational aid’.

**In general.**

The general structure of the thesis overall is to start with the large and work towards the small. For that reason the following chapter looks at underpinning issues from political economy; chapter three looks at the general arrangements of WBL; chapter five deals with the GDSS as a case study and chapter six details the specific experiences of students of the degree. Chapter four is devoted to the methodological approach to the research and chapters seven and eight provide discussion and insights/concluding comments respectively. As any piece of writing begs the indulgence of the reader, a few details are provided below by way of overview of the thesis, in order to explicate not just the content, but also the form.

**In detail.**

Chapter two starts with a broad discussion of aspects of political economy which impact on WBL and on the GDSS specifically. To the extent that it is useful in this context, the chapter provides a potted history of the ‘shorter twentieth century’ (Hobsbawm, 1995) and examines the major transition, following the end of the *Golden Age*, to a period of prolonged neo-liberal economic strategies which still persist. The impact of these events
on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, as well as the concurrent developments in globalisation, are also considered in chapter two. It is suggested that the upshot of these things is a major influence on the development of the knowledge economy, and the way in which knowledge takes on a ‘dominant commodity’ status.

A significant emphasis of chapter two is the way in which microeconomic reform, within the neo-liberal paradigm, has called upon both HE and the CS sector in different (and in some aspects similar) ways. In short, this centres on the reforming of public education and the welfare state, and the way in which both sectors have been the subject and object of reforming discourse. The final part of the chapter charts the changes in HE, particularly as described by Marginson (1997, 2000, 2001a) and the crucial rise of Mode 2 knowledge (Gibbons et al, 1994). Chapter two concludes by suggesting how these events have created the circumstances for pedagogies such as WBL.

Having set the broad scene of political and economic influences and drivers of WBL, chapter three deals with WBL specifically. There are three aspects to this consideration. The first draws on a range of literature (for example Symes and McIntyre, 2001, Boud and Solomon, 2001, Costley, 2001 and 2005) to construct a set of defining principles and characteristics. Though several are listed in sections 3.1 and 3.2, of paramount significance are the concepts of work as curriculum and partnership. Following on from this is a reasonably lengthy description of WBL practices, aimed at fairly representing diversity within the defining parameters.

The final part of chapter three is devoted to the airing of issues and challenges, in particular the idea of interests and circumstances, which are brought out in practice. This section develops some theorising concepts which are compatible with the methodological framework put forward in chapter four.

Chapter four is an extensive explanation of the research framework and methodology. In terms of the overview of the research, it describes the nature and significance of its two major components; first and foremost, a phenomenological study of the experiences of the students of the GDSS and secondly, a ‘supporting’ case study of the degree to articulate aspects of context and practice. The chapter draws on Guba’s (1990)
framework for describing ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects of the research. While not wishing to replicate these things here, the framework generally draws on critical/philosophical hermeneutics to develop knowledge as conversation though the data analysis.

The reporting of the ‘case study’ is undertaken in chapter five. Though this is positioned as a supporting/descriptive case study (Stake, 2003) it provides a wealth of information by which the phenomenological study of the student experiences can be understood. What was intended to provide contextual insight, in fact, provides much more, in my view, and has informed much of the discussion which occurs in chapter seven.

Chapter five deals with four aspects of the GDSS – partnership, profile, practice and pedagogy – all of which are reasonably self-evidently titled. An unexpected benefit of the writing of the case study was the emergence of an historical narrative, which has significantly informed emerging ideas for future research. These are briefly outlined in chapter eight.

Chapter six was the most challenging of the chapters to write. In the end the conscious decision to strip the data reporting bare of any ‘frills’ was the one that felt the most comfortable. It is also the approach most consistent with the methodological framework. There are five major ‘data stories’ reported – Access, Self and Study, WBL and Organisation, Managing Learning and Outcomes. In other parts of the thesis, notably chapters seven and eight, they are signified as they are here to avoid confusion with unrelated usage of similar words. In some ways I would advocate a separate reading of the data stories – the presentation in the format chosen was to give maximum voice to the students’ accounts, by the use of descriptions and quotations only. The temptation to integrate reporting and discussion was resisted for these reasons.

Turning to discussion, in chapter seven, the strongest sentiments of the data stories were the positioning of the students as non-traditional and their ‘quest’ for access to higher education opportunities. For that reason, and in keeping with the holistic sentiments of the data analysis, these central themes constitute the framework around which the discussion is structured. It is also in chapter seven that the significance of the ‘case study’, beyond that of descriptive utility, becomes evident. The idea of WBL as an
enabling pedagogy is put forward and, from this, arise questions related to the ‘politics’ of access (Marks, et al, 2003, Osborne, et al, 2004).

The significance of partnership emerges in the discussions of access. This, and the development of criticality in practice, lead to the application of Habermas’ (1987) schema on social action as a means to consider ethical practice. In particular the importance of advocating in the interests of students is discussed, in a context where systemic imperatives (Welton, 2004) can foster complicity in potentially exploitative models of WBL (Avis, 2004).

The final chapter takes up two themes. The first is the defence of knowledge production as a public good and the second is a consideration of partnership as lifeworld. Both of these are argued from the position of defending WBL in the CS sector, on the basis of the needs of the students (as non-traditional students seeking access) and the sector (as an embattled target of neo-liberalism). In the concluding reflections, in section 8.4, the case is made for supporting diversity of WBL practice, distinctly positioned, but without strong boundaries. In particular it is argued that this practice will help prevent models predicated on conformity to dominant discourses, driven by techno-economic imperatives.
Chapter two: Confluence

Confluence: Political Economies, Neo-liberalism and Globalisation.

“The production of knowledge is advancing into a new phase. It operates according to new imperatives in tension with the traditional way of doing things” (Gibbons et al 1994:19)
Chapter 2: Confluence: Political Economies, Neo-liberalism and Globalisation.

2.1 Rivers on a landscape.

To establish a context for the conduct of WBL in a community services sector setting is to place oneself at the confluence of two turbulent streams in the social landscape. Knowledge production and social welfare, like rivers on a landscape, have both changed in nature and direction as they, in turn, shape the terrain. The ultimate driving force for this cycle of events has been the political economy of the last few decades, which informs and describes the macro influences on higher education (HE) and community services (CS) policy formation. Though the manifestations are different in each case, they are characterised by, and the result of, common causal factors. These things, shaping the context of WBL in this study, are the subject of this chapter.

2.2 Political Economy and the Golden Age.

The marked shift in political and economic conditions of the economically advanced nations from the 1970s onwards has seen the establishment of the dominant economic and social policy discourse of the last thirty years. However, the decades leading up to this time represent both an alternative discourse and the political and economic benchmarks to which the changes of the current period have been applied. The preceding ‘middle period’ of the 20th century is, therefore, crucial to the understanding of what has transpired since.

These ‘former’ times extend generally from the end of the Second World War up until the early 1970s - a period which was one of protracted economic expansion in the OECD countries. Characterised as the Long Boom or Golden Age, it established conditions of almost full employment, rising real wages and consistent annual economic growth of close to five percent (Hobsbawm, 1995, Rafferty, 1997, Went, 2005). In these circumstances the economics of J.M. Keynes dominated, giving rise to the interventionist nation state as the “reforming vehicle” and restraining agent of

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1 Hobsbawm (1995:284) makes the point that the average growth rate of 4.5% is significantly higher in all ‘Western’ nations with the exception of the USA.
“unbridled capitalism” (Ferguson, Lavalette and Mooney, 2004:132). With strong labour interests, (facilitated by the economic prosperity of the times), and booming business, the role of the state was one of mediating the relatively straightforward, social democratic relations between capital and labour (Hobsbawm, 1995, Jamrozik, 2001, Ferguson et al, 2002, Went, 2005). Keynesian economics, combined with strong post-war monetary policy\(^2\) (Mishra, 1999, Schirato and Webb, 2003) allowed for the development of the modern welfare state.

Jamrozik describes the rise of the welfare state across the advanced capitalist countries as a system of “distributive justice” (2001:5). Throughout the *Golden Age* the nation states, utilising the revenue from strong economic growth, delivered health, education, housing and general social welfare provision as a matter of right. Exemplifying a trend across the OECD by reference to the Beveridge\(^3\) reforms in Britain, Jamrozik summarises the idea of the welfare state:

> As a concept of social, economic and political organisation in modern societies, the welfare state was a synthesis of Keynesian economic theory and the program for social policy formulated by Beveridge. In this synthesis the role of the state as regulator of economic activity (as envisaged by Keynes) was extended to the provision of universal health services and income maintenance for those unable to secure adequate income from the market, as well as the provision of a universal retirement pension (as recommended by Beveridge). Entitlements to these benefits were incorporated into social and political theory as the rights of citizenship... (Jamrozik, 2001:5)

In a world where the *Eastern Block*, socialist alternative was juxtaposed with the social reforming, social democratic states of the OECD, the welfare state stood on firm ground as a moderating force against unfettered capitalism (Mishra, 1999, Ferguson *et al*, 2002). It represented an institution aimed against Beveridge’s five ‘giants’ of “idleness, want, disease, ignorance and squalor” (Rodger, 2000:18).

\(^2\)Mishra (1999) and Schirato and Webb (2003) offer accounts of the establishment of the Bretton Woods system of international control over exchange rates which facilitated the relatively closed economies on which the welfare state depended.

\(^3\)The Beveridge report was a landmark work in 1942, targeting the cumulative social inequalities of the Industrial Revolution and beyond, providing a blueprint/agenda for the welfare state. (Jamrozik, 2001, see also Hobsbawm, 1995).
While the welfare state made general provisions against disadvantage in several areas, it made specific provisions in the area of HE during the *Golden Age*. As Marginson (1997, 2004) and Teather (1999) illustrate, post the Second World War, and particularly in the 1960s, HE was expanded considerably as a system of public education. For example, in Australia under the Menzies government in the 1960s, “Universities were more than 90 per cent government funded, and the principal form of support for research activity was not project grants subject to competitive submissions, but the Commonwealth operating funding provided on the same basis to all institutions…” (Marginson, 2004:2). Marginson further makes the point that universities were firmly part of the culture of the Beveridge ‘crusade’ against ‘ignorance’:

*In the long building of the Australian public university system after World War Two, there were two aspects of the policies designed to provide equality of educational opportunity: the conditions governing student participation, and the conditions governing educational supply. The former received most of the direct attention, but the latter was equally important. The conditions governing participation included the cost of tuition, and scholarships and living allowances.* (Marginson, 2004:1).

Partly fuelled by the expanding economy and the need for “manpower” [sic], Teather (1999:24) also notes that the provision of scholarships from the 1950s onwards in Australia was a form of class mobility within the general march of HE reform – a system that was establishing the beginnings of mass HE by the late 1960s (1999:27).

The cumulative effect of the welfare state was both socially *and* economically significant. Hobsbawm (1995) points out that such was the magnitude of the distributive mechanism that in several nation states, (including Australia), welfare provision accounted for more than 60% of total public spending (1995:284). It is a significant feature of the political economy of the *Golden Age*, given the ensuing economic events. Post the 1970s, however, the world political economy shifted dramatically, heralding major crisis and the impending decline of the welfare state.
2.3 The coming of change – Crisis, Neo-liberalism and Globalisation.

“The history of the twenty years after 1973 is that of a world which lost its bearings and slid into instability and crisis” - so begins Hobsbawm’s (1995:403) description of the crisis decades following the end of the Golden Age. A slowing down of the economic growth, which had started in the late 1960s, came to a head in the oil crisis of 1973 with sharp increases in oil impacting on rates of profit, inflation and recession in the OECD.

Went (2005) offers a political economy of crisis stemming form such a declining rate of profit, yielding a subsequent decline in GDP4. He catalogues the substantial decline in the rate of GDP in the advanced countries since the 1970s, which by the 1990s was half the rate at the end of the Golden Age (2005:369). Given the dependence on revenue to fund the provision of social benefits, already described above, it is not surprising that any serious economic downturn would also impact severely on the welfare state.

As a result of the crisis, governments dropped the Keynesian regulatory economic policies, supportive of the welfare state, in favour of neo-liberal, free market policies aimed at revitalising economic growth (Ferguson et al, 2004, Anderson, Brown and Rushbrook, 2004). In their most enthusiastic application these policies not only aim to deregulate the economy, but also apply market forces to many forms of social organisation, including welfare provision (Conely, 2002, Welch, 2002). However, as Went (2005) points out, economic downturn is just one aspect of the major changes in political economic conditions leading to the decline of the welfare state and the abandonment of Keynesianism. The major driver of change in recent times has come from two coincident and related developments - the rise of neo-liberalism and the advent of globalisation. Though independently occurring (Olssen and Peters, 2005), both are the product of the political economy of the middle period of the 20th century

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*4 Hobsbawm (2005) notes that the overall effect is a decline rather than cessation in growth. However he and several other authors (eg. Jamrozik, 2001, Went, 2005) point to the severe effects of the downturn, especially in terms of inequality, the reappearance of poverty in the advanced nations and soaring unemployment. The global picture is exacerbated by the collapse of the socialist economies in the early 1990s.*
and both are related in their impact on change. While the focus of this account is about the impact on, and consequences for, educational and welfare reform, a brief explanation of the neo-liberal/globalised setting is useful, as it provides much of the premise on which such reforms are based.

An important aspect of this setting is the way in which the two things relate. Neo-liberal economics, in part, has fuelled the development of globalisation, allowing a freer movement of capital across national borders (Welch, 2002). At the same time globalisation has provided the impetus for an increasingly neo-liberal approach, on the basis of the inevitability of global trends, cited by those arguing the neo-liberal case (Conely, 2002). In the words of Vidovich and Slee (2001): “We take the position that globalization and an accompanying ideological shift towards the Right operate as mutually reinforcing ‘twins’” (2001:433).

While neo-liberalism has been characterised by ‘free market’ solutions to economic crisis, globalisation has been characterised by a number of features. These features include a significant shift in technological development, which has facilitated a rapid change in productive processes, as well as increased flexibility in the geographical location of capital and production, reducing the significance of the nation state. Several authors have claimed that globalisation is a difficult idea to define (Welch, 2002, Schirato and Webb, 2004, Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard, 2004) and it is often described in relation to internationalisation, in particular in the late 19th century, as being the same process – i.e. as something not new (see for example the idea of globalists and skeptics (Schirato and Webb, 2004:7)). However, in the context of this research, the general idea is accepted that at least aspects of globalisation are new, and sufficiently different in their influence from previous periods of internationalisation of the nation state. This is in keeping with Welch’s (2002) typology of globalisation and his contention that “global capitalism” (2004:436) is the dominant form. It is this definition which offers explanation of some of the driving forces of reform. In citing Sklair and Dahrendorf, Welch summarises the essence of this form of globalisation:

5 In the context of usage “Right” is synonymous with ‘neo-liberalism’.
... global capitalism “locates the dominant global forces in the structures of an ever more globalizing capitalism”, in which, for example, almost half of the world’s 100 largest economies are companies rather than states. This model breaks free of some of the state-centrist assumptions of traditional sociological explanations, seeing capitalism as both a social and economic system. The model explains, for example, the deindustrialization of former key regions of capitalism, the increasingly crisis-prone trajectory of many modern economies since the 1970s, and the development of transnational corporations (TNC) as well as a transnational capitalist class (TCC), which, it is argued, in effect acts as a global ruling class. (Welch, 2002:436).

A significant key to this process continuing apace is the development of what Schirato and Webb refer to as “globalizing technologies” (2003: 58). The influence of digital and computer based technologies has massively increased the rate of transfer of information across space/time. Friedman (1999) suggests that globalisation is the process which has embodied the democratisation of technology, finance and information, while others such as Gardner (2004) view globalisation as a technological hegemonic force emanating from the USA. In essence both perspectives emphasise the significance of a system where the advanced capitalist countries have dominated the development of technology and its globalising effect in a ‘cultural’ sense (Watson, 2004), which both asserts and supports the parallel phenomenon of neo-liberalism (Went, 2005). Conely (2002) goes so far as to say that, not only is the role of the nation state less significant in regulating capital, but that it has become an enforcer of the neo-liberal agenda (2002: 379-380). Clarke (2004: 21-22) argues that the ideological support for neo-liberalism is so strong in some nation states that the ‘new right’ sees the welfare state as causal of economic decline and, therefore, a rightful target of harsh reform – i.e. having no legitimate place in a market driven system.

The combined effects of neo-liberalism and globalisation (and its facilitating technologies), post the crisis which began in the 1970s, yielded a world, within a decade, in which the economic infrastructure was substantially changed. This ‘new world’ of the ‘old economies’ exhibited several features:
The effects of deindustrialisation (Tennant and Morris, 2001, Welch, 2002) meant that the manufacturing industry declined, taking with it secure, permanent work, which was male dominated and relatively highly unionised (Reich, 1991, Hobsbawm, 1995, Cooke-Reynolds and Zukewich, 2004).

New jobs were focused on service based industries, for example hospitality, often casualised, not highly skilled and relatively poorly paid (Stillwell, 1993, Harley, 1995). These jobs also had much greater representation of women (Schaver, 1999, Cooke-Reynolds, 2004).

The increased freedom for business, especially TNCs, to relocate its workforce in cheaper areas of the globe, contributed to a dramatic rise in unemployment compared to the years of the Golden Age. In Australia unemployment reached over 10 per cent in the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s with little respite in between (McAllister and Bean, 2000).

The ongoing challenge for these nation states became that of maintaining their economic strength through competing on a global stage. Robert Reich (1991) makes the point that: “All that will remain rooted within national boundaries are people who comprise a nation” (1991:3). In other words, while the location of capital and production are much less in the control of the nation state, the responsibility for employment and wellbeing of the people still falls within national policy boundaries. Korsgaard (1999) summarises the ensuing reform dilemma as follows:

*Today nation states are players in a highly competitive global game. When capital moves freely and internationally, competition is intensified. It will be a decisive political priority to create optimal conditions for the accumulation of capital and the establishment of new jobs within the framework of the nation state. (Korsgaard, 1999:18)*

The creation of ‘optimal conditions’, to meet the challenges for the ‘old economies’ has been through extensive microeconomic reform, throughout the 1980s, 1990s and

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Stillwell comments on the period from 1976-1990 and presents figures showing that over 70% of the 1.4 million new jobs created were in the bottom wage quintile – ie. Low skilled and poorly paid - compared to only 11% in the middle three quintiles - (1993:20). Though less data is provided, Stillwell (2000) makes the argument that this distribution persisted throughout the whole of the 1990s. (see also Brown and Hesketh, 2004).
beyond, which has had major ramifications for both education and welfare services across the OECD, not least in Australia.

2.4 Adapting to Change – Reform in Brief.

Microeconomic reform in Australia, as with many other industrial nations, has focused on restructuring the economy through a number of measures. The ongoing process of deregulation took the form of tariff reduction and attempts to improve productivity through labour flexibility measures and skills development. At the same time economic rationalism sought to improve efficiency, within the neo-liberal framework, through privatisation of public institutions and the introduction of corporatised and managerialist forms of organisation. (Harley, 1995, McAllister and Bean, 2000, Archbold, 2001, Anderson et al, 2004).

For the welfare state in general, the advent of neo-liberalism has largely been to effect cuts in public spending on welfare services, (ie. privatisation through non-government organisations assuming the role formerly undertaken by the state), increased accountability, decreased advocacy in deference to service provision and the introduction of ‘user pays’ models of service provision (Rees, Rodley and Stillwell, 1993, Hoatson, 2001, Braithwaite, 2002, Rothstein, 2002, Meagher and Healy, 2003, Castles, 2004). In short, the reform impacts on the welfare state have served to undermine the system of distributive justice which Jamrozik (2001) describes above (section 2.1).


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7 The skills and flexibility measures were largely achieved, in the first wave of reform, through the social contract or ‘Accord’ between the Labor Government of the day, unions and, (latterly), employers (ACTU, (nd) ~ 1995, Forrester and McTigue, 2004).
2.5 The Knowledge Economy.

The emergence of the knowledge economy centres around the increasing importance of knowledge as a commodity. As the general process of deindustrialisation has continued, so has the emphasis on knowledge production and the development of ideas in the service-based economy.

Powell and Snellman (2004) make the link between the nature of the knowledge economy and the key components that underscore its essential difference, and divergence, from the previous, manufacturing-based economies of the developed nation states:

*We define the knowledge economy as production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technology and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence. The key components of a knowledge economy include a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources, combined with efforts to integrate improvements at every stage of the production process, from the R&D lab to the factory floor to the interface with customers.* (Powell and Snellman, 2004:201)

Parker (2004) describes the knowledge economy as having two key dimensions: “First is the changing nature of economic activity and second is the infrastructure of knowledge creation and learning” (2004:344). The implications of these dimensions create three significant impacts. Firstly, the knowledge economy has redefined and reshaped employment. Secondly, it has changed the way knowledge itself is produced and defined. Thirdly, by placing knowledge production at the top of the reform agenda, it has had a major impact on the reform process – in other words, the reform of the economy has become predicated on the reform of knowledge production.
Employment

Robert Reich’s (1991) influential book, *The Work of Nations*, provides a useful starting point for considering the employment effects of the knowledge economy. His typology of the future of work - “three jobs of the future” (1991:171) not only recognises the way in which the employment script has been re-written in the global economy, especially for the industrial nations\(^8\), but also cautions of the consequences of not acting strategically in relation to the demands of these job types.

For Reich the three key categories of jobs in the knowledge economy are: *routine production services*, *in-person services* and *symbolic-analytic services* (1991:171). In an environment dominated by service and knowledge based work, the *routine production services* worker undertakes mundane and repetitive tasks, typified by examples such as call centre work and data processing (1991:174). Although numerically significant, Reich points out that such work is not bounded by the borders of the nation state and can be easily located, and readily relocated, in any number of global locations. By contrast *in-person services* are dependent on personal contact between workers and ‘clients/customers’ and thus are not sold worldwide, but are locally bound (1991:176).\(^9\)

However, Reich highlights the crucial status and influence of the *symbolic analyst* in the knowledge economy as being the key to economic development. The symbolic analyst is a kind of ‘winner takes all’ worker in the employment stakes and derives the most potential benefit from the effects of globalisation. This work involves sophisticated knowledge production, tradable on a global basis and capable of generating substantial wealth. As abstract, symbolic work, often carried out in a virtual setting (Friedman, 1999), it does not require any particular location for much of its production – and as a result the producer of such knowledge is not bound by the borders of any particular nation state.

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\(^8\) Though his focus is the USA economy, Reich and other authors have also described the effects across the OECD (for example, Hobsbawm, 1995, Friedman, 1999).

\(^9\) It is worth noting, for discussion in later chapters, that community services sector work is largely focused on ‘client’ contact.
The positioning of the symbolic analyst is crucial in Reich’s construction of the global economy. In keeping with Korsgaard’s (1999) suggestion above, the retention of symbolic analytical work, within a particular nation state, is essential to the success of that state’s economy because of the wealth-generating capacity of such work. And the argument is extended, therefore, to its capacity to provide a flow on to other types of employment (Reich, 1991, 2002).

Each nation’s primary assets will be its citizens’ skills and insights. Each nation’s primary political task will be to cope with the centrifugal forces of the global economy which tear at the ties binding its citizens together – bestowing ever greater wealth on the most skilled and insightful, while consigning the less skilled to a declining standard of living. As borders become ever more meaningless in economic terms, those citizens best positioned to thrive in the world will be tempted to slip the bonds of national allegiance. (Reich, 1991:3).

Because of the power invested in this small group of knowledge producers, the development of the symbolic analyst, in particular through education and training, is seen as a key strategy. Reich (1991, 2004) points out that their small numbers and relative independence potentially exacerbates another major issue in the global economy – the growing gap between the rich and the poor. This has taken on a ubiquitous nature in global terms, not least within the OECD (UN, 1998).

Though only a brief account is given here, much of the argument put by Reich (1991, 2004) and others, (for example, Hobsbawm, 1995, Friedman, 1999, Korsgaard, 1999, McAllister and Bean, 2000, Olssen and Peters, 2005) accounts for the employment demographics within the Australian economy and the impetus for economic reform of recent decades.

Knowledge

Turning to the second point implied by Parker’s (2004) comments above - the production and definition of knowledge - the ascendancy of knowledge as a ‘super
commodity’ has changed the circumstances of its production. This has led to significant focus and attention being paid to what knowledge is and what is its utility.

Gibbons et al (1994) describe the New Production of Knowledge in terms of Mode 2 knowledge – tacit, practical knowledge, as opposed to traditional, explicit knowledge\textsuperscript{10}. They emphasise the importance of the “context of application” (1994:3) as knowledge is seen increasingly in terms of “marketability and commercialisation” (1994:46). Because production needs to occur at the site of application, as the transition to knowledge and knowledge based industry continues, so the variety of both producers and production sites increases (Gibbons et al 1994, Gibbons, 1998).

...both knowledge and the sites of its possible applications are increasing through a process in which a new mode of production – Mode 2 – is diffusing. Mode 2 knowledge production is characterised by closer interaction between [various modes], by the weakening of disciplinary and institutional boundaries…(Gibbons et al, 1994:68).

The more these sites of production lie outside traditional sites, such as universities (Gibbons, 1998), the more knowledge becomes defined in terms of its applied, Mode 2 and economic value. Barnacle (2004:363) argues that Mode 2 knowledge is almost always seen in such terms. This process has not only had an impact on the way knowledge is defined, but the way in which traditional sites of knowledge production operate. A shift away from rigid disciplinary boundaries (Gibbons, 1998, Bullen, Robb and Kenway, 2004) is but one manifestation of the shifting parameters of knowledge configuration. A ‘new production of knowledge’ implies not only new content, but also new processes of production and the third of Parker’s (2004) implications for the knowledge economy - reform.

\textsuperscript{10} Mode 2 knowledge has particular significance in the rationale for WBL and is discussed in this context in chapter three in more detail.
The Politics of Work-based Learning

Chapter two: Confluence

The reform process.

Having briefly discussed the broad parameters of neo-liberal reform in section 2.3, the focus here is on the specifics of the reforming process in relation to knowledge production and the knowledge economy.

With increasing emphasis on knowledge production as the basis for global competitiveness, and a substantial location of ownership of knowledge infrastructure within the public domain (Neuman and Guthrie, 2004), the reform dilemma for the governments of the ‘old economies’ is stark. Education, particularly tertiary/higher education, has a conflicted existence. Seddon and Angus (2000) succinctly sum up this ‘double bind’ suggesting that: “Education has been both the means of adjusting culturally to the growth of globalised relations and the focus of neo-liberal reforms in public administration.” (2000:188)\(^{11}\).

Microeconomic reform merged significantly with educational reform in the 1980s in Australia, in particular through the Dawkins\(^ {12}\) reforms introduced in 1987 under the rubric of Australia Reconstructed (ACTU/TDC(A)), 1987 where skills development was seen as essential to economic prosperity. This established a central role for employment and training in the integration of technology, skills formation, work organisation and industrial relations (1987:155). The shift from the popularised notion of the lucky country to the clever country reflected this change. Casey (2006) traces this and a series of successive, policy based “evolving conceptualizations and developments of a knowledge economy and a knowledge society” (2006:351) by various governments\(^ {13}\) through to the present day\(^ {14}\).

The links between economic reform and education extend across all sectors; schools, vocational training and higher education (Wagner, 1995, Seddon and Angus, 2000, St George, 2006). In Australia, as across most of the OECD, much of the initial impetus

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\(^{11}\) Emphasis added.

\(^{12}\) Minister for Trade in the Hawke Labor Government at the time of the mission – later Minister for Education, Employment and Training and Treasurer.

\(^{13}\) Including the Hawke/Keating labour Governments and the Howard, conservative, Liberal Government.

\(^{14}\) See also Scott, 1999 with particular reference to higher education.
for reform stemmed from a preoccupation with skills development on the part of governments, accompanied by popular notions of human capital theory within government and industry (Kivinen and Ahola, 1999, Garrick and Clegg, 2000, Costley, 2001). As Kivinen and Ahola put it: “The transition from education to employment is no longer an exogenous variable in the art of proceeding from manpower [sic] forecasts to educational planning, it is an endogenous part of the new educational strategy aiming at quality and efficiency.” (1999:192). They go on to make the further point that: “The human capital approach, with its assumptions that investment in education is individually and socially worthwhile, enjoys everywhere warm and uncritical support from governments and educational reformers across political divisions.” (1999:192).

Figure 2.1 below summarises the impacts of the changes brought about by the knowledge economy – looking at the change from the point of view of shifts in emphasis around knowledge, work and economy.
Notwithstanding the extent of the reform in relation to the knowledge economy, and its inclusion in an increasing number of economic forum agendas - such as GATT\(^{15}\) and the OECD - the significance of HE as the principle driving force of reform is clear (St George, 2006:593). Given that the focus of this research is located within the HE context, the specifics of HE reform and the knowledge economy, (and its conflicted nature), constitute the concluding section of this chapter.

2.6 Knowledge Economy and Higher Education – Reforming and Reformed.

The policy of the ‘double bind’ is represented by three major reforming influences in higher education – *marketisation, vocationalisation* and *massification* (Marginson, 1997, 2001a and 2001b, Scott, 1999, Symes, 1999 and 2000, Becher and Trowler, 2001). On the one hand, neo-liberal reforms have targeted the fiscal burden associated with public ownership, while on the other educational reforms have been aimed at meeting the needs of an economy with knowledge production as the central strategic question.

*Marketisation.*

In terms of neo-liberalism, the marketisation process has served as the main reforming tool, focusing on competition as the “centrepiece of market ideology [and] a key organizing principle for higher education” (Vidovich and Slee, 2001:436). This has impacted on both the orientation of the university to the rest of the world and on the way the university is organised internally to maximise its competitive edge.

In relation to the former, Becher and Trowler (2001) describe the deregulatory process as aimed at reducing the monopolistic position of public universities by introducing international and private providers. Citing Dill and Spoon, they also argue that it reframes consumers of education as ‘customers’, increasing their power as purchasers (2001:8).

\(^{15}\) General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.
From an internal perspective, several authors have commented that neo-liberal reforms, focused on competition, have involved increasing cutbacks, privatisation, commercialisation and corporatisation; all aimed at driving down the unit cost of education (Marginson, 1997 and 2000, Brett, 2000, Molony, 2000, Seddon and Angus, 2000) as well as an instrumentalist focus on ‘quality’ (Barnett and Bjarnason, 1999, Wood and Meek, 2002). This has also occurred in a climate of **managerialism** where ‘managerial prerogative’ has held sway, ensuring the economic rationalist agenda is implemented (Becher and Trowler, 2001, Schwartz, 2003).

Numerous specific effects of the marketisation of universities have been documented, along with argument about the validity of the neo-liberalist strategy and conjecture about future reforms. Foremost amongst these is the shift away from public funding and investment to private sources of funding (Marginson, 1997, 2001a and 2001b, Wood and Meek, 2002). While funding has risen in dollar terms over recent years both the proportion of government contribution (Wood and Meek 2003:10) and the percentage of GDP have markedly declined (Marginson, 2001a:115, Wood and Meek, 2003:11). Marginson points out that the bulk of non-government funding comes from students via HECS plus fees and charges (2001b:209) and highlights the fact that in more recent times government funding has become differentiated, causing segmentation of the higher education ‘market’ (Marginson, 2004).

Apart from the reduction in burden on government, the changes in funding policy have had knock on effects in practical terms. One such effect has been a significant increase in the student to staff ratio (Macintyre, 2001, Marginson 2001a) and the shift in funding sources “has forced the casualization of a growing number of staff positions” (Marginson, 2001a:119).

Several authors have commented on funding policy and where it might go (Barr, 1998, King, 2001, Wood and Meek, 2002, Marginson, 2001b and 2004) but, despite a

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16 According to the figures of Wood and Meek (2002:10) increases in research funding from 1997-2003 were almost entirely accounted for by non-government sources.
17 Higher Education Contribution Scheme.
18 At 1998 figures this was ~33% and ~53% from government (compared to ~17% and ~70% respectively in 1989). (Marginson 2001b:209).
19 This is particularly noticeable for what Marginson calls the ‘New Universities’ (2004:11) of which UWS is one.
variety of views on policy direction, the inevitability of continuing reduction in government funding (in real terms) seems to be the case.

As with the ‘symbiotic’ relationship between globalisation and neo-liberal reform noted above, the relationship between marketisation and vocationalisation go hand in hand. In the knowledge economy, where vocational knowledge is increasingly demanded by industry, universities – seeking markets – inevitably turn their hands to the creation of ‘vocational’ products (Marginson, 2001b).

Vocationalisation and Massification.

Gibbons (1998) links the massification and vocationalisation of HE as supply and demand aspects, respectively, of the knowledge distribution system which characterises the knowledge economy. Though massification is a phenomenon related, in part, to issues of access (highlighted in section 2.1 above), and commencing post the Second World War (Scott, 1999, Gibbons, 1998), it has accelerated in recent years across the OECD (Foster and Stephenson, 1998, Marginson, 1997, 1999 and 2000, Kivinen and Ahola, 1999, Becher and Trowler 2001). This increase has coincided with the reforms on the demand side associated with the knowledge economy. Vidovich and Slee, (2001) sum up this relationship:

Accompanying the structural changes was a transition from elite to mass higher education, on the (spurious) ‘human capital’ assumption that more university graduates would ensure more appropriate skills development for the knowledge economy. Not only were the numbers of students participating in higher education much greater, but the diversity of student intakes was also significantly increased (2001:435).

Their somewhat critical assessment of the reforms alludes to some of the difficulties of working in the ‘reforming and reformed’ environment. Becher and Trowler (2001) throw more light onto the issue in their following assessment of massification:

As a result of changing demographic characteristics students are likely to be less well prepared for HE than was the case, and this has meant adaptation of
the curriculum and the provision of more and better support services for them. Meanwhile academic staff are more likely to come from professions outside academia and more likely to be involved in vocational subjects and new disciplines and domains of knowledge, partly because of the disciplinary dignification and programme affiliation that accompanies massification. (2001:5).

Given the constraints of neo-liberal reforms in relation to higher education resources, it is not surprising that meeting the demands of knowledge economy related educational reforms might present challenges to academics that seem difficult to achieve.

Taking up the ‘demand side’ aspect of Gibbons (1998) argument, the ascendancy of Mode 2 knowledge has translated into significant shifts in the products of the marketised university. As a result of the increasing nexus with industry, new and broader types of qualifications are offered that shift or permeate disciplinary boundaries, as well as fuel or constrain the growth of disciplinary areas. (Gibbons, 1994, Becher and Trowler, 2001, Bullen, Robb and Kenway, 2004).

Marginson (2001a) demonstrates this graphically, showing how business related studies have dominated subject growth while traditional disciplines have declined in the academy.20 In addition such courses have been used to capture a significant international market (2001a:120-121)21. In describing the process of credentialism, he observes:

*Here demand coincides with supply. For students these credentials appear to combine flexibility and vocational security. For universities, these courses are cheap to provide and more readily marketable than other fields.* (2001a:119).

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20 In the period 1995-200 for example Business Studies increased 139% compared to all non-business related studies increasing only 2.7% and a general increase in all courses of 39.7% (Marginson 2001a:121).

21 In the same period domestic students rose by 9.9% compared to international students whose numbers rose by 137.1% (2001a:122).
Credentialism not only represents a means of dignification of new courses – the legitimisation of their status within the academy – but also a means of codifying tacit knowledge demanded by the knowledge economy, providing industry with a means of assessing the employability of workers. Brown and Hesketh (2004) describe this as the “hard currency” of the job market (2004:28). Massification and vocationalisation have, therefore, been seen in reform terms as the means to supply both the ‘right type’ of workers for the knowledge economy and in sufficient numbers.

Though some elements of these reforms are presented as problematic in the explanations above, the general presentation is limited to a descriptive account in this chapter. One major critique, not dealt with here, is the argument in support of higher education as a public good – a concept undermined by the privatising trends of recent years. Several authors make the argument that such a representation must be considered (Marginson, 2001a, Peters, 2002 and 2003 and Rothstein, 2002) and aspects of this are taken up in later chapters in relation to WBL in the community services sector.

In summary, the knowledge economy discourse has dominated higher education reform in recent years, in particular through the processes of marketisation, massification and vocationalisation. Academics, learners/workers and those who represent the needs of industry, find themselves increasingly encouraged into ‘partnerships’ which will develop and enhance the competitiveness of the nation states within which they are located. For those in the university setting, the expectation is to take a central role in the reforming process while, at the same time, being subject to stringent restrictions through neo-liberal reforms. The challenge for academics is that of finding a response which allows for survival and integrity (Barnacle, 2004) while dealing with the pragmatics of work in the contemporary academy (Wagner and Childs, 2000a).

Notwithstanding such challenges, the environment of reform is not static, and academics are called upon to engage with the ‘real world’ (Symes, 2000). This is the context in which respondent educational strategies are shaped. The following chapter deals in detail with WBL as one such respondent strategy.
Chapter three:

A Geography of Work-based Learning.

“The world of work imposes its own requirements on the educational system.” (Kivinen and Ahola, 1998:195)
Chapter 3: A Geography of Work-based learning.

3.1: Defining Work-based Learning.

Mapping the terrain.

This chapter outlines the development and nature of Work-based Learning (WBL) and the evolving considerations for those engaged in its practice. As conceived within contemporary higher education, WBL is a relatively new idea – an emergent response to contextual circumstances, though its antecedents and related areas of learning are borne of a long history and inform its development and practice. WBL is also an expanding area of learning and its expansion brings an increasing diversity of sites of practice (Boud, Solomon and Symes, 2001). The chapter considers a raft of issues, flagged in chapter one and two, which emerge from WBL practices. They present challenges, opportunities, issues and dilemmas which demand consideration if, as some have suggested, practitioners of WBL wish to claim its practice as an educational field in its own right (Gibbs and Morris, 2001, Portwood, 2001, Costley, 2005).

Because of the expansion and novelty of WBL, the metaphor of WBL as a ‘terrain’ in the process of being ‘mapped’ (and, for that matter ‘colonised’) is offered. As with all engagement with new territory there is a sense of ‘pioneering’, where stakeholders\(^1\) reframe their perspectives as a result of their previous and new experiences coming together. So it is with emergent epistemologies of WBL where questions are posed and problematised.

While acknowledging, (and in part describing), the wider terrain of work related\(^2\) learning, which impacts on WBL, it is also necessary to set my own ‘boundary of

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\(^1\) As discussed later in this chapter, in relation to partnership and collaboration, there are three principle stakeholders in the WBL relationships considered here: the university, the external organisation, (employer/industry partner) and the learner (student/worker).

\(^2\) Work related learning is a much broader term and would include all aspects of learning relating to work. In particular work related learning would include the vast range of training and organisational development activities that occur in relation to work, which are not considered in this work. There are also some forms of work related learning at the boundaries of WBL, (such as sandwich courses and practicum placements), of which some aspects are considered and for which the term work-based learning is used by some commentators.
interest’. This is limited to WBL as it applies to HE, but inevitably draws on wider conceptions, as the very practice of WBL contests the boundaries between HE and other sites of learning in the educational spectrum. ³

For clarity of discussion the starting point for this chapter is a description of WBL from the point of view of its defining principles – what is/constitutes WBL? There is also some discussion of the constraints of definitions, given the context and circumstances of the WBL terrain.

Beyond the broad defining principles the next part of the chapter (section 3.2) looks at the characteristics of WBL in practice – what does it look like in operation and what are the arrangements and relationships that underpin practice? What are the types and varieties of WBL? To some extent this is a more detailed examination of the defining principles that highlight what is common ground and what diversity exists within its boundaries.

Some consideration of the developmental and historical influences on WBL is necessary as these influences inform the construction of WBL in the contemporary setting – its strength of currency and the interests at play in the arrangements between stakeholders. For this reason the latter part of the chapter (section 3.3) is concerned with the context of WBL – the circumstances under which it arises.

The overarching purpose of this chapter is to map the terrain of WBL in which the specific example from practice - the GDSS – can be located, as the central subject of this research.

³ WBL has applications in vocational education and training (VET) and in school education, in particular in the USA. (See for example Bailey, Hughes and Moore, 2004). It is not intended to discuss either of these, or other conceptions of WBL, in any detail or to claim any lack of validity of WBL definitions that lie outside the domain of higher education.
A matrix of relationships.

At the heart of Work-based learning is the notion of work as curriculum within the framework of a formal credential, commonly, (and in the context of this research), a university degree. It involves a matrix of relationships between stakeholders - people in organisations/places of work and in universities and institutions of learning. It primarily includes employers, academics and workers (as students) engaged in ideas about learning, knowledge production and work, and it involves institutional relationships to facilitate the incorporation of these things into formal credentials. It can include learning for work, (its traditional roots), as well as learning at work, learning through work and learning from work (Foster and Stephenson, 1998). It can also be learning as work in the sense of knowledge and knowledge production as an ascendant, fundamental resource of production (Usher, 2000, Parker, 2004).

In this representation WBL is characterised by elements of practice, relationship and interests, the dynamics of which form the basis of the descriptions in subsequent sections of this chapter. The generic characteristics are divided into the content features, encompassed by work as curriculum: recognition, co-production of knowledge and interdisciplinarity, and the process features involving cooperation: partnership and collaboration. The stakeholders, primarily the learner, the organisation and the university, (though possibly including others), are located at the junction of practice and context; the former largely generating the issues with which WBL practitioners must engage, the latter, in large part, informing the interests that stakeholders bring to WBL. ⁴

Boud and Symes, (2000:14) describe WBL as “accredited university courses in which a significant proportion of study, if not all, is undertaken in the workplace whose issues and challenges form the principle focus of study”. This core definition is a typical definition of WBL particularly within the UK and Australia, where some of the more in depth WBL projects have been undertaken, (Foster and Stephenson, 1998, Trigwell and Reid, 1998, Reeders, 2000, Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001).

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⁴ The following section, on contextual characteristics, deals in detail with interests and the circumstances under which they are brought into play.
Slight variations as to extent and emphasis of definition exist in the literature, but the points offered above enjoy reasonable consensus (Costley, 2005).

Johnson (2000), for example, citing the UK University for Industry (UFI) definition of work-based learning, offers a somewhat similar definition: “… work-based learning is used to describe independent learning through work. It is a self managed process supported by learning contracts, higher education and workplace mentors and various types of learning and guidance materials.” (2001:364). Reeders (2000:201) includes simulated, on-campus work settings in his definition of WBL, which is not common, but which, in the main, aligns with the consensus.

Garrick and Kirkpatrick (1998) highlight the theoretical trajectories defining WBL as significant, offering adult education theory and cognitive psychology as important examples. However, they also recognise the significance of WBL as being practically located in “‘authentic’ workplace situations” (1998:172).

Raelin (1998:280) takes a more epistemological line to the definition, describing WBL as an approach which “deliberately merges theory with practice and acknowledges the intersection of explicit and tacit forms of knowing at both individual and collective levels.” The epistemological emphasis is also taken up by Gibbs and Morris (2001) as well as Portwood (2001) who raises the notion of WBL as a separate educational field. In reference to developing a much deeper engagement with WBL within the academy, Portwood makes the following observations:

This meant new knowledge and understanding, which in the team’s view constituted a field of study capable of producing new analytical concepts, theories and methodologies, as well as drawing on, using and enhancing concepts, research and study techniques from existing subject areas. The battle of prepositions began ostensibly between those accepting ‘by’ only and those advocating ‘by and in’. In truth the struggle was [about] work-based learning; that is, the claim that work-based learning is not simply a different type of learning but an educational field in its own right. (Portwood,2001:76)
While not necessarily in contradiction with the core ideas above, some authors also highlight important ambiguities and variations in attempts to define WBL. Boud, Solomon and Symes (2001:4) for example speak of a “wide variation in the mix of elements” of WBL, as do Garrick and Kirkpatrick (1998:176), conceding that “there are no agreements on the meanings and implications of workplace-based learning.” For some there is less tendency to extricate WBL from other forms of work-related learning. Martin (1998), for example, brings various conceptions of university WBL under the general heading of ‘workplace university education’. She focuses more on academic perceptions of WBL from the points of view of the *referential*, (what academics expected the experience to achieve) and the *structural*, (how these achievements were to come about). She develops five categories of WBL from this perspective which incorporate variations on the referential and structural elements.

The theme of variation which Martin takes up goes beyond a ‘core’ definition of WBL and raises the expectation of *understanding* rather than *definition* as an important question. Both the narrow, ‘core’, and the broader understandings have been the subject of much of the literature on WBL. Eileen Shaw (2000) is one author who engages specifically with the question of definition and approaches the idea from a broad and insightful perspective: “it is clear that there is a growing need to appraise the whole notion of work-based learning and to explore the theoretical principles that underpin this complex and ambiguous concept” (2000:399). She adds a further dimension to the conception of WBL by recognising its contextuality:

*The lack of clarity in its usage has been largely a result of considerable variations that exist in the types of initiatives that have arisen. In this sense the definition of work-based learning has become implicit and contextually bound. Yet, at the same time, alongside ideas of lifelong learning, it has become a key concept in the political conceptions of how education for all and for a lifetime should be achieved. (Shaw, 2000:403)*

What this ‘implicit and contextually bound’ defining feature does is to normalise ambiguity of the concept while not undermining the notion of a ‘core’ definition of WBL.
The ‘core’ definition gives us our reference point from which to explore the terrain. The deeper understandings gained from structural, referential, epistemological and other considerations provide our ‘compass’ and the recognition of the implicit and contextual nature allows us to ‘map’ the terrain – all of which provide a framework of consistency in engaging with WBL as a site of learning. From such a starting point it is possible to examine the types of WBL found in practice and draw from them the questions, challenges and issues posed. Given that the macro contextual influences are significant in the development WBL, the intention here is to firstly review these in order to describe the underlying ‘geology’ of the terrain.

Historical influences

WBL is significantly influenced by two major factors. The first and most often referred to, is the political economy of the last three or four decades - described in detail in chapter two. This includes the recent historical tension around work, knowledge and the university. The second is a longer historical influence, less often referred to, borne out in the writings of several authors concerned with the “theory-and-practice divide” (Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001:319) arguing the importance of “an inseparable dialectic between material basis and consciousness” (2001:319) – that is, an implicit link between knowledge and experience. This draws on a number of historical orientations around learning and work, expressed though project based or work related learning (Kilpatrick, 1918, Makarenko, 1951, Dewey, 1963 [1938]) and 1997 [1916]) and substantial debates around the relationship between education and the economy (Wagner et al, 2001:317)). In Dewey’s terms this is about a clear recognition, in the early 20th century, that: “[t]he only adequate training for occupation is training through occupation” (1997 [1916]:310) and that experience and education are fundamentally linked. While the dominant discourse – related to the recent developments of WBL has been driven by the political economy of recent times, to suggest that the newness of WBL has no significant historical roots and is a product of recent times alone would be wrong.

The recent, volatile political economy, described in the previous chapter, has, however, determined much of the educational strategy in the ‘global economy’ (Korsgaard, 1999, Jarvis, 2000, McIntyre and Solomon, 2000) and has been the
primary influence on the development of WBL. The specifics of WBL in higher
education have a close association with the processes of vocationalisation, massification and marketisation (section 2.4), but in a broader context WBL forms a

Finger and Asún (2001) trace the genesis of lifelong learning or éducation permanente from its origins in the early 1970s within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). They describe it as a “discourse on social change” (2001:23) rather than a form of pedagogy, but it was undoubtedly also a response to the realisation of the emergence of andragogical consensus (Welton 1995:128) in the same period. Lifelong learning compliments the notion raised by Knowles (1977) that rapid cultural and technological change demands an adaptive pedagogy: “Under this condition knowledge gained by the time a person is twenty-one is largely obsolete by the time he [sic] is forty.” (1977:38). Gouthrie (2006) has argued that the initial agenda of lifelong learning, as a tool of social change and democratisation, as envisaged by UNESCO, has been subsumed by the same marketisation processes described in detail in chapter two. She points out that within the lifelong learning paradigm: “the value of education is largely determined by how useful it is in training people to successfully participate in and adapt to the evolving global marketplace.” (2006:227). As with the specifics of WBL, some of these issues are taken up in later chapters, as well as within section 3.3 of this chapter, and are noted here primarily as a locus of historical influences. In the ‘terrain’ of WBL these are the tensions and forces from deep within the ‘ground’ of the economy, which shape the development of WBL.
3.2 WBL in practice.

General characteristics.

Before turning to the consideration of WBL in the context of these influences, some consideration of the characteristics of WBL in practice is useful. In terms of the matrix of relationships referred to above what are the common structural and procedural arrangements which characterise practice? What do programs look like and how are the relationships constructed?

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the generic, ‘core’, defining feature of WBL is the development of work as curriculum in a relationship involving organisations, universities and individuals, (students/workers), the outcome of which is a formal qualification. This fundamental arrangement is also the starting point for the consideration of contextuality in WBL relationships. Figure 3.1 (below) captures the relational characteristics of WBL which will be explored throughout the rest of this section.

There are several common features which characterise the practice of WBL. Boud, Solomon and Symes (2001) develop six characteristics of WBL in practice while McIntyre et al (2000) list several characteristics in a broader discussion of academic knowledge and work-based learning (2000:232). Others such as Reeders (2000), Solomon (1999) and Trigwell and Reid (1998) deal with particular characteristics rather than attempting a list per se. Taking into account these ideas three broad, generic characteristics for WBL are put forward here. These are an extension of the notion of work as curriculum, partnership and collaboration in practice.
Figure 3.1: Relational characteristics of WBL.

Key:
- WBL Practice domain (inner circle)
- Stakeholder domain (outer circle)
- Contextual domain (surround)

* NB. Other stakeholders, eg. government, professional bodies etc.
Work as curriculum

Work as curriculum implies that the content of the program will be significantly, if not entirely, determined by issues and problems arising from the student/worker’s work activities. Johnson (2001) explores the opportunities, benefits and barriers to WBL and offers a useful framework for considering the emphasis of constituent components through: the proportion of WBL in the total course, the method of assessment and the degree of student control. He observes that WBL can be placed on several continua in relation to these factors, ranging from a WBL module within a broader program, assessed by assignment set by the ‘tutor’, through to a complete program of WBL, assessed entirely by project and controlled by the learner. Notwithstanding this, most examples involving WBL considered from the general literature tend towards the latter. They give substantial weight to the WBL component and significant emphasis on student negotiated projects for assessment.

Whatever the significance of the WBL component in the course of study, Boud and Solomon (2000) point out that the coincident nature of work and learning in WBL means that, as activities, they are often indistinguishable from each other (2000:46). The learner has a significant position at this point of coincidence - they represent the link between the university and work as curriculum.

However, whilst learning and work may be coincident and indistinguishable in WBL, there are significant differences between the site of knowledge production and the nature of knowledge generated if the constituent WBL institutions of university and work are compared. Unlike the notion of knowledge production in the traditional ‘liberal’ university, where the liberal arts are fostered and kept apart from “servile work” (Symes, 2000:33), knowledge production in the workplace provides for learning as a situated activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this conception Lave and

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5 As noted by Wagner and Childs (2000b:551) work is defined as “meaningful labour regardless of its material base”. While recognising that most people will be employees, they do not have to be to engage in WBL. Volunteers are one example of possible exceptions to paid workers.

6 The notion of the ‘liberal’ university is used here to make the point of difference. In the context of the citation Symes explores several educational discourses as “antecedents of current Higher Education polemics” (2000:32)
Wenger describe learning as *legitimate peripheral participation* situated in a *community of practice*.

In this situated context they make the point that the learner is immersed in a complex set of socio-cultural relations:

> *In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere: learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world.* (1991:35).

*Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world.*

*Changing* locations and perspectives are part of actors’ learning trajectories, developing identities and forms of membership. *Furthermore, legitimate peripherality is a complex notion, implicated in social structures involving relations of power.* (1991:36)

Tennant (2000) argues the relevance of situatedness for learners in WBL while offering some criticism of the position of Lave and Wenger. He argues that breaking the situatedness of the learning may be a useful way of challenging underlying workplace assumptions and suggests that the academy may provide a more “world open” view (2000:132). While the points of Lave and Wenger are reasonable they are not exclusive positions. In particular Wenger (2000) has argued that communities of practice need to integrate into broader systems of learning. In any case the relevant point for WBL, made substantially by Lave and Wenger (1991) seems not to hinge on the limitations of their social practice theory of learning, but on the *situatedness* of the learner in the community of practice of work. This unique position of the learner calls into play a number of considerations for their role as a stakeholder in the relationship, and in the construction of their learning. Crucial amongst these are the issues of *recognition of learning,* (in various forms), *transdisciplinarity* and the *co-production* of knowledge.

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7 Emphasis in original.
Recognition of learning.

Given that the learner inhabits the community of practice that is their work, it follows that they will already possess a degree of knowledge, skill and expertise in relation to that work. This is typically accounted for in WBL through a process of recognition of prior learning (RPL). One feature of the RPL process is in relation to access for learners who may not possess traditional pre-requisites for university courses (see for example Shaw 2000, Houlbrook, 2000, Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001) or who do not wish to undertake learning for things which they already know (Boud and Symes, 2000:20). This not only has a benefit in terms of avoiding repetition, but also in avoiding the costs associated with it. RPL is also important as a means of assessing points of entry into accreditation frameworks, in particular where the learning is highly individualised. Lyons (2000) describes the importance of prior learning portfolios in establishing WBL through the Partnership Programme across several UK universities. Foster and Stephenson (1998:161) detail the use of APEL (RPL) in providing for a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in learner-managed WBL.

Beyond issues of access and entry points, there is a strong pedagogical value in RPL. Seen as establishing where the learner is at, RPL can be taken as a one-way process of fitting into the system. However, it can also be seen as a point of recognition of difference in knowledge production. Solomon (1999) warns against the “one-way traffic” approach to RPL:

\begin{quote}
Recognition of prior learning therefore, while potentially a tool for recognition of difference, often has practices and procedures that assume particular kinds of experiences. Very often the learner’s prior experience has to fit into particular categories that have been constructed in a way that determines what is legitimate and non-legitimate experience and knowledge.
(1999:125)
\end{quote}

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8 Also referred to as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Where the specifics are not contradictory ‘RPL’ is occasionally used as a generic term.
Solomon’s point cuts to the second point of difference referred to above – that of the nature of knowledge produced in WBL. At the heart of this difference is the separation of tacit and explicit knowledge – knowledge which is generated in the situatedness of work and knowledge generated through traditional university learning. Several authors explore this separation of knowledge in relation to WBL. In the main they draw on the ideas of Polanyi’s (1966) notion of tacit, (as opposed to explicit), knowledge (Raelin, 1998, Symes and McIntyre, 2000, Stephenson, 2001) and the work of Gibbons et al (1994) in relation to Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge (Boud and Symes, 2000, Boud and Solomon, 2000, Gann, 2001).

Polanyi’s (1966) starting point for explaining tacit knowledge is to contend that “we can know more than we can tell” (1966:4). He suggests that in our actions, (such as work), we undertake problem solving by drawing on tacit knowledge which we cannot explain, but which has nonetheless been acquired through our experience. And it can be applied intuitively to accomplish solutions. Raelin (1998) distinguishes tacit knowledge as that which is rooted in action and context, typically that which is generated in the workplace. Symes and McIntyre describe this as “on the job” knowledge (2000:4). By contrast these authors describe explicit knowledge as codified, formulated and textualised in the tradition of academic study.

Parallel to the notion of tacit and explicit knowledge is the idea of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge. Boud and Symes (2000) discuss this in terms of Mode 1 knowledge being that which is disciplinary, academic and “culturally concentrated and institutionalized within universities” (2000:24). Mode 2 knowledge is more appropriately described as embodied in “fields of understanding” rather than disciplines and as having utility in the every day world (2000:24). Gann (2001) extends this concept of knowledge in his research into industrial and academic production of knowledge. He puts forward a typology of “university knowledge” and “industrial knowledge” (2001:324) emerging from the Mode 1 and 2 concept. He also recognises the shift towards Mode 2 knowledge by universities in recent years as knowledge production, for the needs of industry, has made inroads into educational

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9 The concepts of tacit and explicit knowledge and Mode 1 and 2 knowledge are discussed in more detail in section 3.4 of this chapter.
policy. This is also noted by Stephenson, (2001) in observing that WBL produces tacit knowledge.

The construction of different knowledge in the *community of practice* or *situatedness* of work can, therefore, be recognised through the process of RPL. But, beyond simply assessing the learner, this recognition highlights the need of WBL to embrace interdisciplinary practice as *work as curriculum* transcends traditional academic boundaries. Hand in hand with *interdisciplinarity*, and emerging from the recognition of difference, is the notion of *co-production* of knowledge. To the extent that WBL is located outside the traditional university boundaries, through work as curriculum, it is also free from the singular control of the academy (McIntyre *et al.*, 2000:233) and therefore requires a cooperative approach to knowledge production. WBL questions the “production of knowledge within a tightly bound university system” it is “both grounded, shared and developmental” (Wagner and Childs, 2000a:409). The merging of the tacit and the explicit as is Raelin’s (1998) contention, (previously put), is the foundation of this co-production of knowledge in WBL. Both interdisciplinarity and the co-production of knowledge, recognised through RPL and embodied within work as curriculum, have implications for collaboration and partnership discussed below.

There are cautionary notes in relation to tacit and explicit and Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge. Usher (2000:101) examines Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge and suggests that there is a danger of invoking “unhelpful binaries” by suggesting that knowledge can be separated in this way. Indeed Polanyi (1966:20) suggests that all formulations of knowledge involve some tacit knowing and that any attempt to exclude tacit knowledge is self defeating. Symes (2000 and 2001a) also notes that the distinction between liberal and vocational sites of knowledge production is not absolute or clear cut by any means.

Another related caution is offered by Harris (2000) who suggests that the application of RPL, in the WBL context, is not simply about facilitating a form of learning providing “greater social inclusiveness” (2000:206). She suggests that it is just as capable of producing significant issues of power and control as is the case with RPL in the traditional academic context. She raises questions about *what* learning is and is not counted as valid in the process. These issues and questions take us back to
Solomon’s (1999) point about the potential and dangers of RPL, which are discussed in section three of this chapter.

A further aspect of recognition, which impacts on the practice of WBL, is the recognition of intended learning – the learning which the student/worker will undertake as part of their WBL experience. This is characteristically undertaken through the development of a learning agreement or contract. (See for example Evans, 2001, Lyons, 2000, Doncaster, 2000).

Boud (2001) lists several elements of WBL curriculum, including documentation of the learning. He highlights the uniqueness of the curriculum in WBL which underpins the implicit need for some form of learning agreement. Doncaster (2000) describes the role of the learning agreement in WBL as “… that of effecting the customisation of [a] generic framework…” (2000:351). In some examples, as with the GDSS, the agreement or contract takes the form of a project outline which accommodates the individual component. In the case of the GDSS this is an alignment to integrated outcomes embodied in a matrix of assessment (Wagner and Childs, 2000a) which define the ‘generic’ characteristics of the course, (see chapter five).

There are also examples where both the RPL/APEL process and the intended learning are linked to the development of a learning contract/agreement. Evans (2001) details a learning contract regime incorporated in to the UK Council for National Academic Awards’ (CNAA) Credit and Accumulation Transfer (CAT) register. The requirements for such contracts include the demonstration of new learning, academic accessibility and demonstrable benefit to the employer as well as the employee. They also demonstrate four essential criteria: learning intentions, activities to be undertaken, evidence of learning achievement and methods of assessment.

In other examples from practice Lyons and Bement (2001) list eight criteria for learning contracts in the UK Partnership Programme which establishes WBL not only across disciplinary boundaries, but also across several universities. Doncaster (2000) and Garnett, Comerford and Webb (2001) also note the increasing inclusion of all stakeholders in the contract or agreement process for WBL (student/workers,
universities and employers). Doncaster sees this as partly enabling the expansion of WBL opportunities with industry partners, due to the customisation of the process facilitating flexibility. Foster and Stephenson (1998) also see it as a method of facilitating increased student autonomy in examples of what they call learner managed WBL (1998:161). Whether incorporating RPL/APEL or, in the more limited sense of documenting the learner’s intended learning, learning agreements/contracts are pivotal to the construction of WBL. Aspects of how learning is ‘agreed’ upon in the GDSS are discussed in chapter five.

In reviewing this first of the three general characteristics of WBL offered above, work as curriculum poses several associated questions for practice. In particular questions are raised around differences in knowledge production, in the situated context of work, and the consequent demand for interdisciplinary practice and the co-production of knowledge. Recognition – of prior learning, of difference in knowledge production and of intended learning – is a key process in engaging with the notion of work as curriculum. It provides the opportunity for not only placing the student in the framework of the university, but also placing the university in the framework of the community of practice of work. Further to this, in providing the recognition of the necessity of interdisciplinarity and the co-production of knowledge in WBL, RPL, in part, foreshadows the issues for consideration in partnership and collaboration.

**Partnership.**

It is useful to distinguish between partnership and the related phenomenon of collaboration because they represent significantly different, albeit subtle, aspects of WBL practice. In brief, partnership is presented here as a formal process, more embodied in policy dimensions and dealing with known aspects of the relationship which must be accounted for. On the other hand, collaboration represents the less formal, (and less certain), aspects of the relationship, as argued by Martin (1999) and taken up in the following section of this chapter.

Partnership is strongly represented in the policy frameworks developed in recent years in higher education, in particular in Australia and the UK, but commonly throughout the OECD countries (Symes, 2000, Garrick and Clegg, 2000, Duke, 1992). Alliances
with industry have been at the forefront of strategic government reports, emerging in the context of the political economy, (highlighted earlier in this chapter and in chapter two). It has been noted that most WBL partnerships involve large, corporate, often multinational, organisations with fewer involving government and fewer still involving the community sector (Boud, Solomon and Symes, 2001, Reeve and Gallacher, 2005). Clearly, this may have implications for the way in which WBL partnerships vary in respect of funding and resources, but nevertheless, partnership is a central characteristic of WBL, representing the mechanism by which the elements of practice are brought into play. Several authors refer to the current circumstances under which partnerships are formed as ‘partnership discourse’ in which the university is more opened to the ‘outside world’ and where the traditional monopoly on learning is being lost or shared. In this partnership discourse, in a climate of flexibility, the credentials, operation and programs of WBL are being negotiated (McIntyre et al, 2000, Reeve and Gallacher, 2000, 2005).

As with the general tenor of WBL characteristics, partnerships in WBL exist in a variety of types and are varied in nature according to the expectations and interests of the stakeholders. In terms of formality, some examples are embodied in agreements such as memoranda of understanding between individual organisations and universities, while others may be part of a wider series of arrangements involving several organisations in a broader partnership framework. A number of partnership types are discussed below.

In approaching partnership development and the negotiation of the arrangements, the stakeholders will have specific expectations in relation to their interests. Looking at issues from an organisational point of view, Costley (2001) has investigated WBL partnerships from the perspective of businesses. She finds that from this perspective, organisations need universities to provide quality and standards in learning criteria and assessment, as well as flexibility in addressing organisational needs. She also notes the importance of the negotiation process in developing the specific WBL agreements. 10 Shipley (2001) discusses the notion of organisational drivers in the

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10 Costley (2001) also notes that some interests of individuals are overridden by organisational needs. These issues are taken up in discussion in chapter seven.
formation of WBL partnerships, both from the perspective of developing organisational learning to improve performance, and from the point of view of articulating clear organisational needs within the partnership. He also reviews desirable and undesirable outcomes in terms of what the partnership should yield for the organisation in relation to its business.

Garnet, Comerford, and Webb (2001) identify several employer requirements of universities in the case of a WBL partnership with a multinational construction corporation. Once again flexibility and customisation to organisational needs were seen as important, as well as quality assured links to substantial qualifications for the employees. In an example from the public sector, involving librarianship, Alderman and Milne (1998) identify the development of shared vision as one of several elements of best practice in WBL partnership. Other elements include the support for the partnership by professional networks and a series of supportive practices in the operation of the project. And, in an example from local government, Mellor (1998) highlights the significant time allocated to the development of partnership as well as a strong emphasis on quality.

From a university perspective, Boud and Solomon (2001b) suggest a series of generic questions which universities should ask of organisations in constructing productive WBL partnerships. These include ascertaining the commitment of the organisation to the development of its employees, (including appropriate resourcing), the capacity of the organisation to create and sustain a partnership, and an openness to the kinds of critical questioning appropriate to university study.

Both the organisational and the university perspectives on negotiation and development reflect a tendency to emphasise a ‘two-way’ arrangement between these players in WBL partnership. Learner inclusion tends to be more narrowly focused on curriculum aspects. Trigwell and Reid (1998) deal with this, in part, in reviewing a number of types of WBL. They identify curriculum control, as one aspect of partnership relations, being located within several different possible locations: work issues, the university, the university and the employer and the student (1998:144).

Using these examples, four broad distinguishing features of partnership are outlined below (table 3.1). Described as partnership dimensions, they convey a certain contexture on the partnership, depending on the extent to which they are developed. Though these dimensions may overlap in practice, they are useful pointers to contextual characteristics of WBL which are subsequently discussed.

Table 3.1: Dimensions of WBL partnership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner inclusion</th>
<th>Organisational diversity</th>
<th>Diversity of activity</th>
<th>Level of partnership infrastructure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High level of inclusion: learner as a significant/equal partner.</td>
<td>High level of inclusion: eg. WBL arrangements across several organisations, involvement of government, professional associations, other providers etc.</td>
<td>High level: diverse activities: eg. Research, other forms of program</td>
<td>High level: significant policies, procedures and processes in place. High level of resourcing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level of inclusion: eg. learner seen as “client”, “employee”, “student” in traditional sense</td>
<td>Low level of inclusion: specific agreement between an organisation and a university eg. Response to specific organisational needs.</td>
<td>Low level: Specific arrangements for WBL only.</td>
<td>Low level: arrangements much more informal and reliant on individuals within stakeholder groups to facilitate action. Improvisational solutions to problems as they arise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first of these features, which I call the dimension of learner inclusion, is the extent to which the learner is included in the development of the partnership. The second is the dimension of organisational diversity; where the extent of inclusion of different organisations is considered. The third is the dimension of diversity of activities: in this case a measure of the extent to which the partnership involves other activities such as other forms of learning or research. The fourth dimension is the level of development of partnership infrastructure – those organisational policies and practices put in place by stakeholders in order to facilitate partnership. Table 3.1
summarises the aspects of these partnership dimensions in terms of their presence in the WBL partnership.

A good many of the WBL partnerships discussed in contemporary literature fall mainly into the pattern of ‘two-way’ arrangements where, with the exception of the actual learning, the bulk of the partnership is negotiated between the university and the employer organisation/s. In many of these arrangements the partnership is specifically developed between a single university and employer. Costley (2001) reports on a number of such types and describes arrangements where the university customises flexible programs of study to meet the needs of particular organisations. She observes that this form of arrangement sees a shift from the focus on the individual to a greater consideration of the organisation’s needs. In these examples the WBL initiatives were seen as an extension of the organisation’s professional development strategy, with recognition of the ‘human capital’ development potential seen as a significant driving force.

In all of these examples the inclusion of the learner is relatively low, in terms of their involvement in the process of partnership development beyond their own learning – although that aspect of their involvement is often very detailed and structured around highly developed arrangements for RPL/APEL and accreditation. Indeed there are positive accounts of the learners’ experiences strongly evident in these examples. However, the main construction of the learner’s experience in these instances seems to be that of ‘client/consumer’ where, through encouragement by the employer, (in most cases), or the university, (especially in the area of portfolio development for RPL/APEL), the student ‘takes advantage’ of a WBL opportunity. In terms of level of learner inclusion in table 3.1 above, these examples would be seen as low levels of involvement, with the learner occupying the more traditional role of ‘student/trainee’.

Foster and Stephenson (1998) report on a diverse series of these types of ‘low inclusion’ arrangements giving access to academic and vocational awards through WBL. They make the point, however, that:

\[ \text{W} \text{hilst the use of learning contracts has encouraged the close integration of higher education and employer with the needs and aspirations of learners, this} \]
may not extend beyond the accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL) provision and the negotiation of agreed combinations of university-modular and in-company learning. Thus, while much has been achieved, fundamental shifts in control, responsibility and the culture of higher education may not be widespread. (Foster and Stephenson, 1998:161)

In examples of WBL where learner inclusion in partnership development is limited in this way, a number of authors have noted both employer and university partners having significant gains from the partnership, but in some cases this is arguably at the expense of the learning needs of the learner/employee. This is not to say, however, that the learner does not gain from the experience and in some cases the gains are viewed by the learner as substantial (Costley, 2001).

It is Foster and Stephenson’s (1998) observations of the limitations of WBL in partnerships of lower learner inclusion that leads them to discuss the rise of learner managed work-based learning as a possible counter to the problems of ‘two-way’ partnership constructions. Learner managed WBL, of which they cite several instances, significantly increases the role of the learner in the design of the learning, (beyond documenting what will be learned and how), by virtue of the fact that the learning agreement takes on a key designing function.

Several authors (Doncaster, 2000, Lyons, 2000, Lyons and Bement, 2001, Garnet, Comerford and Webb, 2001) have described forms of WBL which are much more learner led/learner managed, where the learning agreement is committed to by the employer, university and the learner by way of a formal signature. The essence of the increased significance of the learning agreement seems to give much more autonomy and authority to the learner in terms of initiating the WBL process. In particular Lyons, (2000) cites examples where students seem to have much more control over the process, though there is greater onus on them to come up with the plan of how the agreement will address the needs and requirements of all stakeholders. However, there are also dangers for learners in this process (Houlbrook and Wagner, 2004, Avis, 2004, Gibbs, 2004) which are the subject of discussion in later chapters. Coincidentally these examples of increased learner inclusion often provide increased
organisational diversity, especially in a cross-university sense, as well as high levels of partnership infrastructure.

Garnett, Comerford and Webb (2001) along with Doncaster (2000) cite examples from the National Centre for Work-Based Learning Partnerships (NCWBLP), at Middlesex University in the UK, which have significant partnership infrastructure built around WBL projects. This includes a specialist accreditation unit, which not only implements recognition practices in relation to students, but also in the accreditation of courses developed by partner organisations. These courses tie into a highly developed generic WBL framework. In some cases this facilitates the inclusion of third party providers in the partnership arrangements (Garnett, Comerford and Webb), broadening the organisational diversity. Lyons (2000), reporting on the Partnership Programme at Portsmouth university in the UK, cites its specific influence on government policy as well as an increasing degree of cross-university arrangements in relation to WBL projects. These include UFI and other universities collaborating on the development of the scheme.

As with the examples cited above, Mellor (1998) reports on a partnership between University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and New South Wales (NSW) Local Government which involves a broader representation of organisational diversity. A significant feature in this example is the inclusion of professional associations in the development as well as employee representation in negotiations. It is also an arrangement which involves local government as an ‘industry’, adding a further dimension to its development. This is the case with the GDSS partnership arrangements, where the ‘industry peak body’ is the primary partner with UWS (Spence, Martinez and Barnes, 2000, Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001).

The ACWA/UWS partnership is also an example based on a broader diversity of activities, being a relationship involving research, RPL services, WBL and other forms of learning. Though WBL is a significant part of the partnership it is not exclusive or even the originating basis for the partnership. This aspect of partnership is less commonly reported in WBL literature, though the research links are

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11 The features of the GDSS are discussed in detail in chapter 5.
implicit in many of the examples. One group that has made the connection in the related field of workplace learning is Solomon et al. (2001) who have linked their experience as researchers to learning in the workplace, in partnership with New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education (DET). Their work is also an interesting study in collaboration, in the sense put forward above, and details many aspects of the less formal features of partnership.

A final comment on partnership must be made. Whatever the dimensions of the partnership, singularly or in combination, as outlined in table 3.1, there are significant aspects of each which present problematic issues. Low inclusion arrangements, for example, may leave the learner out of the loop, but provide a clear, prescribed framework for engagement in WBL. Learner led/managed examples, on the other hand, appear to convey much greater inclusion of the learner, but may place an unreasonable responsibility on them to cater to complex stakeholder issues. In all cases the extended interest in the student’s learning, brought about by the partnership itself, raises questions about interests at play in the process. A number of these problematic features, while not discussed in detail here, will be taken up in part three of this chapter.

Collaboration

Collaboration and partnership are related aspects of cooperative processes which facilitate the operation of WBL. To the extent that they overlap, this section will be brief, but acknowledges that collaboration is a sufficiently different notion to merit consideration as a separate, important characteristic of WBL. Ern Reeders (2000) makes the point in relation to collaboration that: “Scholarly practice in the workplace faces the challenge of discovery and aligning the goals of multiple players” (2000:210). The focus on ‘discovery and alignment’, (as in taking action on what is ‘discovered’), in Reeders’ use of collaboration, sets it out as a process of cooperation – the means by which aspects of the partnership will be elucidated and

12 Though Reeders uses the term ‘workplace’ learning in this instance, he is writing about work-based learning in the paper in question and it would seem reasonable to assume that the different usage is semantic.

13 Emphasis added.
put together for the mutual benefit of the stakeholders. Partnership will embody these arrangements as outcomes, for example the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in cooperative relation, but the genesis of these outcomes will be collaborative practice.

Martin (1999) makes several useful points which exemplify and justify this particular distinction of collaboration. The context for her examination of the subject is the changing nature of academic work, which puts her right at the heart of issues relating to WBL. At the centre of her ideas is the significance of interpersonal cooperation – the expenditure of personal effort to build relationships. This is also a strong theme in research by Solomon et al (2001) on collaboration in workplace learning. The object and purpose of this interpersonal cooperation for Martin is precisely to unify the stakeholder perspectives in a common purpose - to collectively problem solve.

Collaboration is collective learning; it is the sort of thing that happens when research teams and working parties fuse together well. Colleagues share insights and knowledge and move towards a fuller shared understanding. It is not a situation where individuals compromise themselves; indeed, they exert themselves, but they do so with the aim of furthering understanding and working towards resolving a shared problem, not exercising their own egos. Collaboration is appropriate where the issues are uncertain and the task unclear and where those involved have a commitment to move forward and there is some time – weeks or months rather than days – to explore the issue. (Martin, 1999:96)

Martin also makes a distinction between cooperation - which she sees as time saving, (especially in routine activities) – and collaboration, which, she emphasises, is often time consuming. Her main points are that the use of collaboration is about venturing into uncertain territory with a view to engaging with problems – a kind of ‘pioneering’ activity. A further point Martin makes is that: “Collaborations, like any other human relationship, do not lend themselves to strict rules, but equally like other human relationships, they can be made more effective with guidance” (1999:98). To that end she offers a number of guiding comments which include the development and resolution of leadership issues in the collaboration process.
This is a key point and is, in part, taken up by Solomon et al (2001) who recognise the role of collaboration in addressing perceived power dynamics, especially where ‘research’ is seen as the expertise of the academic domain. They also report on the ephemeral nature of collaboration which is “highly relational” (2001:280) – asserting that collaborative strategies are not normally transferable from one context to another.

An interesting, related aspect of this dynamic, relational process is once again taken up by Martin. She cites Pascale and the law of cybernetics (2001:97) – the law of greatest variety – as being an important role played by individuals in the process of collaboration. In this notion the creation of variety internally, through robust and honest application of the interpersonal processes, is the basis on which potent and robust products of collaboration deal with the increasing variety externally. Many of the examples of WBL cited in this chapter rely on engaging with variety and contextuality. They also rely on important individual efforts to make the ‘bigger picture’ aspects of partnership work. The observations and findings of Martin (1999) Solomon et al, (2001) and a number of other authors, (Shaw, 2000, Reeders, 2000) in relation to collaboration, reinforce its status as a significant characteristic of WBL. In summary, collaboration might be viewed as the fluid ‘cement’ which eventually sets in place the solid ‘bricks’ of partnership in WBL.

3.3 Contextual characteristics and the questions of interest and circumstance.

Notwithstanding these generic characteristics there are, as with definitions of WBL, contextual ‘secondary’ characteristics arising form them. It has been already suggested, through the insights of Shaw (2000) and Martin (1998), that WBL is implicit, contextual and varied in its conception. Beckett and Hager (2000:301) also note the “contingent” and “particular” nature of education within the workplace. It follows that any consideration of the characteristics of WBL in practice will reflect these features; that some common or generic characteristics can be defined and described, but that others are particular and contextual.

As a starting point, a model for exploring the constituent relationships of WBL is offered below as a means of framing the kinds of influences which shape the
particular or contextual characteristics. In the example given the model is used to explore the contextual possibilities arising from the core arrangements which are generic to WBL practice. In particular it examines the interests and circumstances or ‘standpoint’ of the stakeholders.

**Stakeholder relationships: a ‘standpoint’ model.**

At the centre of the matrix of relationships of WBL are the specific arrangements involving the learner and other stakeholders. As shown in figure 3.2 below these arrangements represent i) engagement with work, ii) engagement with learning and iii) the consideration of the way in which work and learning interrelate, through the prism of *work as curriculum*, in the organisational/institutional settings.

![Figure 3.2: Stakeholder relationships.](image)

These fundamental relationships are common to all examples of WBL within the parameters outlined earlier in this chapter. What will be contingent, however, is the way in which the particular *interests* and *circumstances* of the stakeholders shape the relationship. For the purposes of the model outlined below these things are represented as the *standpoint* of the stakeholders (figure 3.3). For each stakeholder, their role in shaping the WBL relationship will depend on their *interests*, their
The use of the term *interests* here is related to both the notion of ‘interested action’ as invoked by Dewey ([1916], 1997) and as a motivation in knowledge formation as presented by Habermas (1978) in the concept of ‘human interest’. In Dewey’s terms: “Interest means that one is identified with the objects which define the activity and which furnish the means and obstacles to its realization” (1997:137). Carr and Kemmis (1986:181) also present a useful summary of human interest: “… knowledge is the outcome of human activity that is motivated by natural needs and interests, and that takes place in a social and historical context.”

The use of the term ‘circumstances’ is less formal here, but is an acknowledgment of at least two influences on the application of interests in the relationship. The first is the extent to which the stakeholder interests complement or compete with each other. The second is the capacity of a given stakeholder to assert their interests.\(^\text{14}\) As will be discussed later, it is not to be assumed that the development of WBL inevitably goes

\(^\text{14}\) Horton, Kohl and Kohl (1984) describe a number of examples where assertion of interests is key to their practical realization.
hand in hand with complementary interests, or that the stakeholders relate to each other on equal terms.

As a way of foregrounding stakeholder interests, figures 3.4 and 3.5 below, provide a visual representation of the standpoints of each stakeholder in turn. Figure 3.4 outlines the three basic standpoint positions: for the learner, organisation and university – positions A, B and C, figure 3.4 respectively. Thus, if we are looking at the WBL relationship from the standpoint of the learner (3.4, A) we are considering the interests (and if we wish, the circumstances) from the standpoint of the learner, and so on.

In figure 3.4 the model shows each stakeholder standpoint in relationship to each of the other stakeholders on roughly equal terms; i.e. the extent of the other stakeholders’ involvement is roughly equal. In reality this may not be so and the relationship may be more strongly influenced by one or other of the stakeholders. Figure 3.5 shows this potential range of influences from the standpoint of the each stakeholder (3.5, A, the learner; 3.5, B, the organisation and 3.5, C, the university).

Of course, there are any number of reasons why interests and circumstances may change. Examples might include changes in employment, strategic intent of the organisation, technological revisions of work practices etc. However, the very possibility of such things would be good reason to develop some framework for their assessment and strategic response. The standpoint model is put forward here as a means of firstly acknowledging the contextuality of interests and circumstances under which WBL is constructed, and secondly providing a framework for taking them into account.
Figure 3.4: Viewing WBL from the standpoint of the stakeholders.

A. Primacy given to interests of student

B. Primacy given to the interests of the organisation.

C. Primacy given to the interests of the university
Figure 3.5: Range of influences from different standpoints.

A. Primacy given to interests of learner – range from strong relationship with university to strong relationship with organisation

B. Primacy given to the interests of organisation – range from strong relationship with university to strong relationship with learner

C. Primacy given to the university – range from strong relationship with learner to strong relationship with organisation

General sources of interests.

While the interests at play in any given partnership are implicitly contextual, it is possible to review some of the interests that are likely to inform the standpoint of stakeholders. Some of these, identified in examples from practice, are outlined below and briefly discussed.
A. Examples of interests from the learner standpoint.

The learner may have interests deriving from the following:
- Access to higher education and the gaining of a tertiary qualification.
- Recognition of work/life experience and expertise.
- Professional development and/or improved career prospects.
- Professional interest; a chance to take up an issue, supplemented by ‘study’ that may otherwise not be possible.
- Economic and time advantages of studying while at work.
- Economic and infrastructural support derived from the workplace.
- Increased autonomy over study leading to greater flexibility and control.

B. Examples of interests from the organisational standpoint.

The organisation may have interests deriving from:
- Market advantage through such things as: human capital development, development of a learning organisation, research and development opportunities, increased skill base of employees.
- Retention of staff though provision of learning opportunities.
- Career development needs met.
- Development of performative capacity of staff/links to performance management and productivity needs.
- Development of partnership opportunities in research and development/development of funding for organisational needs.
- Access to academic expertise.

C. Examples of interest from the university standpoint.

The university may have interests deriving from:
- Access to a new source of students.
- Increased sources of funding/income.
- Partnership development in applied settings.
- Development of research potential.
- Entrepreneurial/market success in corporatised/marketised settings.
- Staff retention through increased opportunities.
- Development of flexible learning and new pedagogical strategies.
- Development of interdisciplinary/networking opportunities.
These examples are not exhaustive lists, but represent some of the interests at play. At this point it is hard to proceed without some consideration of the circumstances which generate the interests of the stakeholders. It would be a meaningless exercise to try to catalogue an infinite list of interests, since the whole purpose of considering contextual characteristics implies that they are infinite and unique. But, they are also important and it is important to recognise the illogical process of describing the interests at play without declaring the ‘standpoint’ from which one makes the description. In this research that task has been addressed in the following chapter.

That being said, it is suggested that the interests exemplified above, from the standpoint of each of the stakeholders, can broadly be seen as deriving from three main sources. These are shown in relation to each other in figure 3.6 and are briefly discussed below. As with many features of WBL, the sources of interests influence each other and overlap to some extent.

Figure 3.6: Broad sources of stakeholder interests.
Sources of interest from Political Economy

As detailed in chapter two and earlier in this chapter, the political economy, in particular of the last three decades, has led to transformation of higher education (Marginson, 1997, 1999 and 2000, Angus and Seddon, 2000, Coady, 2000, Symes, 1999 and 2000). The advent of globalisation and concurrent shifts in capitalist economy has seen the development of microeconomic reform strategies, largely dependent on education for their success. Such reform has been predicated on the assumption that competitiveness, established on the basis of increased productivity, is the key to success for the advanced capitalist states in the globally changing environment.

The role of government, in conjunction with strong representation of the interests of industry, has been to generate significant policy initiatives in the area of higher education (Holland and Leggett, 2000, Foster and Stephenson, 1998, Tight, 1998, Symes, 2001b). This has not only led to the increased vocationalisation process in higher education, but is often institutionalised through what Mills and Whittaker (2001) call supra-institutional agencies whose purpose is the coordination and development of work-related learning, often within highly structured national qualification frameworks.

Several authors have related accounts of how political economy has, in this way, shaped the interests at play in WBL. Examples are commonplace as noted by Symes and McIntyre (2000) in OECD countries such as Canada, Australia, UK, Scotland, and several European countries (Foster and Stephenson, 1998, Kivinen and Ahola, 1999, Gronn, 2000, Holland and Leggett, 2000, Costley, 2001, Livingstone, 2001, Mills and Whittaker, 2001,).

In tandem with this has been the development of the lifelong learning ideology (Bachkirova, 2000, Murphy, 2000, Garrick and Clegg, 2001). Bachkirova (2000) describes this as an agenda which is put forward as the key to prosperity and where the prevailing notion is that of the individual investing in self. She notes that this is the pragmatic perspective in lifelong learning, where the humanistic perspective is
somewhat neglected, and discusses the lifelong learning discourse role in shaping the “pragmatic interests” of individuals (2001:294).

Garrick and Clegg (2001) make a strong link between the broad policy agendas, lifelong learning, (akin to the pragmatic conception offered by Bachkirova) and WBL. They draw on UNESCO policy on lifelong learning to make the point:

Workplace – or work-based learning is often subsumed under the rubric of ‘lifelong learning’. According to UNESCO’s (1999) main working document on lifelong learning, this is a term that assumes it is up to each individual to identify and pursue opportunities for his or her employability – including formal studies and informal experiences. For UNESCO this means (para 14) ‘facilitating approaches that include designing courses in modular format, introducing competency-based assessment, using self-paced learning to meet individual requirements, and giving recognition to experience, knowledge and skills already possessed’. This ‘official’ version of lifelong learning is then bound up with the informal learning that might occur in and through workplaces and project involvement. Project based learning, therefore, can be directly related to broader societal movements in the promotion of ‘learning societies’. (Garrick and Clegg, 2001:119/120).

An interesting example of university interests is reported by Onyx (2001) in relation to WBL. In citing university objectives for WBL, constructed by Portwood, she reports that the first of five objectives is: “to establish [the university] as a national leader in work-based partnerships in Australia” (2001:129). While the drive for excellence is a laudable objective it also characterises a much more competitive and business orientated approach to the work of the university. Indeed of the five objectives cited by Onyx, such issues are far more in evidence than pedagogical questions. Nor would it be fair to single out Onyx’s example as being unusual. It is more a typical example of the contemporary interests of universities than atypical. Rose et al (2001) go so far as to suggest examples where WBL interests, from a

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15 Emphasis in original.
university standpoint, are about creating a diversity of “new products”, as a means of staying in business, in response to “shrinking target numbers” (2001:71).

Symes (2001b) also comments on this market orientated approach of universities under the influence of dominant political economy. In reference to market driven interests and university strategy Symes makes the following comment:

*One way in which universities have done this is to exploit the receptivity that business and industry has for knowledge and learning, and which they have recognized as being an important ingredient in the chase for economic advantage and competitiveness. The newly constituted culture of information, ushered in by the desktop computer and the Internet, has magnified the importance of epistemological activity in the new times economy.* (Symes, 2001b:206)

This statement not only encompasses the political economic shaping of university interests, but also flags the significance of related learning theory in the process.

*Sources of interest from learning theories.*

Given the wide ranging commentary on tacit and explicit forms of learning and the notions of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge (Polanyi, 1966, Gibbons *et al*, 1994), in relation to WBL, it follows that these theories of knowledge production, and their corresponding critiques (see for example Usher, 2001), will have significant influence on the interests of stakeholders. In particular, arguments which stem from a consideration of the role of the university and the nature of knowledge which *should* be produced (see for example Barnett, 1997, Barrett, 1998, Garrick and Kirkpatrick, 1998, Beckett and Hager, 2000). Having touched on these issues previously and in view of their inclusion in discussion in later chapters, the intention here is to include them, in a limited way, for sake of completeness and to note their significance in interest formation in WBL.

Further to the *nature* of knowledge produced, there are three significant factors commonly featured in WBL literature which impact on interest formation from a
learning perspective. Though not a theory of knowledge as such, lifelong learning, as a philosophy or ideology of knowledge acquisition, is a key notion underpinning two significant influences. The first of these is the conception of the learning organisation and the second is the notion of intellectual or knowledge capital theory and its related sub-sets.

The relationship between the learning organisation and human capital theory is perhaps best described as the ‘form’ and ‘content’ approaches to learning at work in recent times. Though there is much critique of both notions, they represent a mainstream story of the orientation of organisations to the ‘knowledge era’ – that is, the shifting of learning to ‘centre stage’ in organisational thinking (Matthews and Candy, 1999). This has taken place with the accompanying rise of the knowledge management industry or “think inc.” as described by Symes (2001b:207).

The learning organisation

The learning organisation is described by Marsick and Watkins (1999), in a review of contemporary influence on organisational learning. The essence of the concept is that of an organisation which has a continual capacity to transform itself, to productive advantage, in its business. In the words of Marsick and Watkins, a learning organisation is more than just one in which learning takes place:

*It can be argued that all organisations learn, or they would not survive, but learning organisations demand proactive interventions to generate, capture, store, share and use learning at the systems level in order to create innovative products and services.* (Marsick and Watkins, 1999:206).

Matthews and Candy (1999) appear to support this view and argue supportively that, in most cases, the learning organisation is constructed as a template for the design and structure of organisational features aimed at facilitating continuous learning. They

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16 Marsick and Watkins (1999) draw on a number of significant historical influences on the learning organisation conception, including the work of Peter Senge – *The Fifth Discipline*, and others.
highlight the primacy of the ability to learn as an emerging “principle competency” in the learning organisation framework (1999:50).

Both sets of authors above point to the existence of strong critique of the learning organisation concept, especially on the basis of its idealistic nature. Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) would support a strong criticism of the learning organisation, but point to its strength of currency in the wake of the influences of globalisation and technological change. They offer this comment on Senge’s original conception:

*The business world, as part and parcel of massive global, technological and social change, now sees knowledge as its primary ‘value’. Contemporary, globally competitive businesses don’t any longer really compete on the basis of their products or services per se. They compete, rather, on the basis of how much learning and knowledge they can use as leverage in order to expeditiously invent, produce, distribute and market their goods and services, as well as to innovatively vary and customize them. Such knowledge is made up of both highly technical components and components dealing with communication, motivation and social interaction. Similar changes are affecting non-business institutions as well.* (Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996:5).

Taken from this point of view, the learning organisation has extensive ramifications for all forms of learning including the interests around WBL.

*Intellectual capital*

If the learning organisation represents the ‘form’ of organisational learning, then it can be argued that intellectual or knowledge capital theory is the ‘content’ of the ‘organisational learning’ project.

At this point it is necessary to limit the comment on intellectual capital to that of its description as a potential source of stakeholder interests. However it is worth noting in passing, (and will be taken up later), that, while the learning organisation is less often referred to directly in relation to WBL, intellectual capital is commonly
associated with it. Howard Buchbinder (1993) comments on the concept of knowledge as property and makes the following insightful comment:

> *In the market oriented university knowledge becomes property, intellectual property. It is traded in the market like any other form of property. As property it is owned by its owner. It is private.* (Buchbinder, 1993:343).

Though he does not use the word ‘commodity’ here, the essence of Buchbinder’s comment is that knowledge is commodified in the marketised university. This runs parallel to the notion of knowledge as capital – and therefore, it alerts us to an association with WBL which will directly impact on the interests of all stakeholders.

Typically, intellectual capital is divided into three subsets: human capital, structural capital and client or customer capital (Stewart, cited in Marsick and Watkins, 1999 and Garnett, 2001). In this division, human capital is the people and their knowledge, expertise and capacity to apply these things. Structural capital is the physical structure, processes, policies etc. which capture and codify knowledge. Client or customer capital is the capital embodied in relationships, systems and processes which tap into the intellectual capital of client organisations.

Garnett (2001) sees the application of intellectual capital theory as an important aspect of highlighting the usefulness of WBL in value adding to the intellectual capital of the partners. He cites examples of achieving this through mutual accreditation of learning and reciprocal use of learning resources – shifting the locus of control away from the university into more neutral territory.

Several authors examine the notion of intellectual capital from a more critical standpoint and, interestingly, tend to use the phrase human capital as the central term. Indeed within this framework, the term human capital seems more useful, as it foregrounds the essential focus on the social relations of knowledge production and its appropriation.17

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17 However term intellectual or knowledge capital, with its related subsets, is also a useful framing of the subject, in that it provides the opportunity to examine some of the practicalities of capturing working knowledge, both within and between organisations in partnership.
Kivinen and Ahola (1999), for example, use the phrase *human risk capital* in relation to higher education. In reviewing the development of human capital in the European setting, (in particular in the Nordic countries), they stress the significance of the *information state* in promoting the lifelong learning agenda, but also report an increase in underemployment as workers increase their qualifications. They argue that this forces workers into entrepreneurial investment in their own human capital. As such, Kivinen and Ahola see this as a kind of insurance against job insecurity in the constantly changing employment market. They note that this entrepreneurialism can be willing or forced:

*There are basically two types of entrepreneurial workers: voluntary and involuntary. Involuntary ones see this status in the labour market as a temporary phenomenon, and are constantly attempting to return to the greater security of traditional employment. Entrepreneurial work is a survival response to unpleasant and unwanted labour market conditions. In contrast the voluntary entrepreneurial worker may initially be involuntary, but has subsequently adjusted to a new kind of employment status. (Kivinen and Ahola, 2001:202)*

Livingstone (2001) has noted the development of underemployment and shows evidence from the Canadian setting where choice for workers, in relation to learning at work, is greatly influenced by status and economic power (2001:316). This fits closely with Marginson’s (1997) conception of *positional goods*, where the dialectic of increasing personal qualifications and the massification of higher education is laid out. This represents the notion that positional advantage, gained from increased qualifications, is contradictory to the notion of mass education in terms of any advantage for an individual.

Marginson (1997) takes up an extensive survey of human capital theory and traces its development to seventeenth century examples of calculation of “the stock of human capital” by the economist William Petty (Marginson, 1997:103). In this thorough
treatment of the subject, Marginson makes a strong connection to the influence of stakeholder interests in higher education by governments, employers and workers:

Thus, investment in human capital retained its generality as a policy metaphor. Since Sputnik it had remained a flexible servant of the national interest, and economic competitiveness. It reinforced the vocational image of education conceived by employers and, increasingly, governments. It extended the practice of personal investment and capital accumulation to a broad layer of the population. Everyone could be the entrepreneur of themselves, even though many were likely to be disappointed with the results. And like the 1960s human capital theory, its 1990s successor also broadened the scope for institutional education. In the market liberal world, part of the part of the obligation of self to self was the management of work, career, education and property as a common set constituting personal security. (Marginson, 1997:115).

Garrick (1999), who frames his description under the human capital banner, takes up the same theme. He cites the comments of Marsick and Watkins in arguing that: “human capital theory ‘provides the most compelling arguments related to increasing the net worth of workers skills and abilities’” and draws on a counter argument from Mechtild Hart to suggest that “[the] human capital approach to learning has the effect of making employees economically active, but politically passive” (Garrick, 1999:218, citing Hart and Marsick and Watkins).

While discussion of the tensions, arising from these formulations of human/intellectual capital theory, are aired in later chapters, the examples above provide a sense of how interests of the stakeholders in WBL may be shaped.

Two other points on learning at work, which may impact on interests, are raised by Garrick (1999). These are competency based learning and experienced based learning and both are common framings of WBL. A further type is provided by Stephenson (2001) in the notion of capability, as an extension of competency based approaches. I wish to deal only briefly with these here as, I would argue, they represent approaches to learning which are capable of fitting within the general
framework of the learning organisation and human capital theory – which in turn are underpinned by lifelong learning.

Stephenson’s work on capability (2001) highlights its advantages over a competency based approach to learning in that it develops, (in its best practice form), an ability for workers to discover new learning in an unfamiliar environment and with unfamiliar problems. It encourages the development of new ways of approaching work which have not been codified in the competency framework. Stephenson’s arguments for capability can be seen as part of the creation of a learning organisation which implicitly engenders human capital development. Indeed he makes the link between the learning organisation literature and capability, and outlines organisational aims which are consistent with human capital theory (Stephenson, 2001:89/90). Further to this he links this, in other work, to learner-led WBL (Foster and Stephenson, 1998).

Competency based learning, (more commonly bound up in the notion of competency based training or CBT), is a vast terrain which is mainly catered for in the VET sector. As such it lies, in the main, outside the scope of this research. Its consideration here is mainly from the point of view of its inclusion in codification frameworks, such as national qualifications frameworks referred to earlier in this section.

The critical discussion of human capital theory and learning organisation approach leads back to the nexus between political economy and learning theories in shaping the stakeholder interests in WBL.

Sources of Interest from the workplace.

Both political economy and learning theory interests are mediated through WBL in the specific location of the workplace. It follows that, regardless of the way in which partnership and collaboration facilitate WBL, there are inevitably pre-existing relations in the workplace. These are imbued with interested actions as described earlier (Dewey, 1997 [1916]).

Some aspects of these relations are described by traditional features of the relations of production – workers and management, core and flexible employment practices etc.
(Harley, 1995, Rafferty, 1997). Others are captured in less formal conceptualisations of workplace learning such as *situated learning* and *communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991) “where making sense becomes a social matter, experience and its interpretation inform each other” (Ewing, 2005:150).

The nature of such learning relations may be constructive or subversive (Brown, 2005), imbued with political tension (Newman, 1993, 2006) or relatively harmonious. However, all have the potential to embody interests which can be played out in the activities of WBL practice.

Given the mutual influence of these broad sources of interest upon each other the intention here is not to create an exclusive list, but to flag the specifics of generalities captured in figure 3.6. Returning to the notion of *standpoint* being a product of *interests* and *circumstances* (figure 3.3), the following section addresses the *circumstantial* influences on standpoint. In particular it examines the extent to which stakeholder interests *can* be played out either through personal circumstances or situational circumstances.

*Circumstances*

Taking the proposition made earlier that interests can be compatible or not and that stakeholders have varying capacity to *assert* their own or others’ interests, figure 3.7 below illustrates some possible circumstantial relationships. It shows the broad possibilities for any given stakeholder in relation to other stakeholders.
Analysing the points at A, B, C and D in figure 3.7 it is possible to speculate on potential relationships between stakeholders and be alerted to potential areas needing attention in setting up the WBL relationship. As an example the different positions identified in figure 3.7 are considered below from the standpoint of the learner in relation to the organisation.

A: low compatibility of interests/low capacity to assert.

In this case there is little or no compatibility of interests in relation to the organisation and little capacity to assert the learner’s own interests. A case in point might involve change in company policy regarding qualifications for a particular job, where the experienced employee may see no need to gain ‘a piece of paper’ to prove their worth\textsuperscript{18}. The organisation may well support a WBL approach as a means of keeping

\textsuperscript{18} Chapter six reports at least one example from Susan (section 6.2) where this scenario was seen as likely.
the worker in the workplace while studying, but the worker’s needs may well not be met.

From the learner’s standpoint, their lack of capacity to assert their interests, (in this case the rejection of qualifications based criteria), could lead to a number of outcomes. Conflict may be one outcome, but also disaffection, frustration and possibly resistance.

B: high compatibility of interests/low capacity to assert.

The high compatibility of interests will probably ensure that the learner’s interests are met. The low capacity to assert their interests may well mean that there are unresolved issues in the workplace, but given the likely spin off for the learner, one might expect these issues not to impact on the WBL project.

C: high compatibility of interests/high capacity to assert.

In this case all interests are met. A likely outcome might be increased cooperation from the learner’s standpoint and possibly more opportunities for increased autonomy and responsibility. Given the high levels of capacity, it seems reasonable to assume convivial and confident participation from the learner’s perspective.

D: low compatibility of interest/high capacity to assert.

The ability to assert their interests may see their interests met, but one might expect a level of conflict in this situation. Possible examples might include a specialist professional, with organisationally scarce skills and knowledge, able to assert their interests on the basis of their expertise. It might also involve forms of collective action/assertion on the part of employees. In this case the learners might be seen as change agents in a resistant organisation.

Some points should be made about this speculative analysis. Firstly it is from a particular standpoint – that of the learner. As such there is no attempt to comment on the other stakeholder standpoints, (though, of course, the exercise could be repeated

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for them). Secondly, while some situations conjure up ideas of rightfulness or wrongfulness, it is not the purpose to debate that here – however, the whole point of such an analysis in a real case would be to apply the insights strategically, in an effort to ameliorate or otherwise respond to the interests at play. Finally, while it is normal to construct representations of WBL in an idealised way in general discussion (we strive to achieve position ‘C’) there are examples of all interest positions outlined above, both in literature, in my own experience and in the reporting of this research in later chapters. This point is taken up briefly below.

While she does not elaborate on outcomes, Jackson (2000) reports on some ‘A’ like characteristics\textsuperscript{19} in her discussion of the introduction of literacy programs into the automotive industry in Canada. She makes the following point from the standpoint of the workers involved:

In the ‘new workplace’ workers are drawn into the processes of controlling work through the increasing demands that they document and record their own work. They fulfil these expectations under circumstances not of their own choosing, in which they have little control over what will be done with the information they create. Some of it may be used to set standards, monitor, assess and discipline their own work. Thus through literacy practices as such, they participate in policing their own work, by providing the evidence which may be used against them by their superiors. (Jackson, 2000:268).

Type ‘B’ is possibly less easy to identify as it is less likely to emerge as a consequence of WBL practice, given the compatibility of interests. One indicator might be the introduction of compulsion into WBL programs or the ‘involuntary’ notion of engagement in learning as described by Kivinen and Ahola (1999), where the learner is not necessarily resistant, despite the ‘compulsory’ nature of the learning.

Lyons (2000) probably provides the best examples of type ‘C’ interests. Along with examples from Costley (2001) and Doncaster (2000), these examples are strongly

\textsuperscript{19} In this example the capacity of the workers appears variable, but approximates most closely to an ‘A’ type in the standpoint model above. As with all models, in the examples given the fit is not perfect, but the ‘best fit’ in applying the model.
akin to Stephenson’s (2001) and Foster and Stephenson’s (1998) model of learner-led WBL. In these cases the learning contract seeks to give greater autonomy to the learner and formality of employer, (and university) commitment.

From my own experience in work related learning with trade unions, employer commitment to occupational health and safety training\textsuperscript{20}, while being provided for in legislation in some states, is not always in keeping with the interests of employees. Collective action to assert the rights and interests of employees was sometimes needed to ensure the training of representatives took place. While not specifically WBL, this would fit type ‘D’ interests above. Fenwick (2001) offers an interesting insight into struggles over interests by women who have relatively high capacity to assert their differing interests, but often by leaving the organisation to establish their own enterprises. Citing others in the process, (Usher and Solomon and Forrester), she makes the following observation:

\begin{quote}
[W]ork related learning is enmeshed in workers’ struggles for subjectivity, as they resist or consent to corporate attempts to capture their commitments, aspirations, emotional engagements and formation of selves. (Fenwick 2001:127).
\end{quote}

Of these women Fenwick says:

\begin{quote}
They found themselves suddenly to have become new owners in a frantic world of unimagined new pressures and forces. … [T]hey now faced negotiation of endless choices and conflicting expectations to take up positions as active enterprising participants in global capitalism. (2001:128).
\end{quote}

There is no suggestion here that the choices of these women were easy, but that they had the capacity to make these choices in their own interests.

\textsuperscript{20} I am inclined to indulge in this anecdote on the basis that it exemplifies well apparent commitment to common interests in OHSW, through tripartite relationships between employers, unions and government. However my experience, with monotonous regularity, was that practice in the workplace frequently did not match the “agreed” principles and policies. Assertion through collective action was often the only means of facilitating the release of elected OHS representatives for legislated training in the interests of employees’ safety.
This standpoint example for the learner would be quite different if viewed in relationship to the university, but the application of such a model can offer at least a way of considering information about interests in the relationship. Perhaps more importantly for the learner, in the power laden relationships at play, it might provide ways in which the university, in this example, could mediate in type ‘A’ situations so as to improve the achievement of learner interests.

The second, and final, part of this section is a consideration of situational circumstance in the contextual view of WBL. The discussion above looked at the circumstances which determine not only interests, but also the capacity of stakeholders to assert their own interests, or advocate the interests of others. A broader view of circumstances might yield any number of phenomena that contribute to the contextual uniqueness of WBL in practice. Examples might include resources, geographical location, personal circumstances of individuals involved, to name but a few. In relation to discussion in later chapters (see chapter five), just two are flagged here - organisational size and sectoral location. In this instance, sectoral location is about whether the organisation is located in the community, government or corporate/private sector.

As noted previously in the chapter, WBL partnerships to date have tended to be dominated by large corporate, often multinational, corporations (Boud, et al, 2001). In part this is limited by size of organisation and available resources (Whyte, 2001:28). In view of the fact that learners in the GDSS are involved overwhelmingly in the community and government sectors, possible combinations of these two circumstances are represented below, figure 3.8, using similar modelling to the examples in figure 3.7 above. In this instance figure 3.8 below shows the possible combinations of size and sectoral location.
In terms of the ‘terrain’ on which WBL is constructed, the circumstances under which WBL takes place are, arguably, very different in position ‘A’, figure 3.8 (small, community based organisations), than in position ‘C’, (large corporate organisations). Not just because of the relevance to this research, but in considering the contextual characteristics of WBL in general, the example above highlights the importance of knowing the contextual ‘terrain’. This goes beyond the learning that may take place and cuts to the heart of how flexibility and innovation might be framed.

Chapter five to gives an account of the kinds of organisations involved in WBL within the GDSS (section 5.3). Usher’s (2000:101) concept of ‘unhelpful binaries’, noted in section 3.2, is worth bearing in mind in the examples above. He suggests a complexity which is less likely to be represented in simple, linear dichotomies than by

\[\text{Figure 3.8: Combined circumstances of organisational size and sectoral location.}^{21}\]

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\[\text{In this instance ‘government’ is presented as somewhere between the community sector and the corporate/private sector. It is acknowledged that, in reality, things are more complex than this linear proposition. However, given the focus of this research and the significance of the changing nature of the welfare state in recent decades, I believe the generality of this continuum holds true. (See, for example, commentary by Rees, Rodley and Stilwell, 1993, Bryson, 1992 and Dow, 1999).}\]

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more complex and mingled characteristics. The intention, however, is to flag possible, rather than exclusive, combinations, which will provide insights into issues under which WBL is constructed.

Having attempted to provide a ‘map’ in the preceding sections, the following chapters are concerned with the particular ‘exploration’ of the GDSS, both in terms of the methodological ‘mode of travel’ (chapter four), the description of the specific ‘location’ (chapter five) and the ‘discoveries’ made on the journey (chapters six and seven). The following chapter deals, in detail, with the way in which the specific research was framed and carried out in relation to the GDSS.
Chapter four:

Views of the Lifeworld: research framework and methodology

"Any set of practices is dogmatic which is not based upon critical examination of its underlying principles" (Dewey, 1966[1916]: 99)
Chapter 4: Views of the Lifeworld: research framework and methodology.

4.1 The domain of qualitative research.

If there had to be only one sentence to describe this research it would possibly be the following: *This research is a phenomenological study of work-based learning in the community services sector.* In the complex domain of qualitative research, I have taken this as a useful starting point because, as Patton (1990:69) puts it:

“phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: what is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” This research is about the “structure and essence of experience” for students involved in the GDSS as a work-based learning degree.

But, the limitations of a ‘one sentence’ description are quickly exposed. Patton raises the question of confusion of the term “phenomenology” (1990:68) not just as a research method, but also as a philosophical or paradigmatic descriptor. Confusion and ambiguity are commonplace in qualitative research literature – or to put it more accurately – it is a contested domain. Within the related areas of *this* research there are a variety of arguments at various levels. At a philosophical level Giddens (1984), in putting forward structuration theory, Carr and Kemmis (1986) in arguing for critical theory and Guba (1990), in promoting naturalistic inquiry, all engage in critique of competing perspectives. Habermas (1974) and Bourdieu (1998) contest the nature of *lifeworld* and *system*, on the one hand, and *habitus* and *social and symbolic space* on the other, while Harrington (2000), taking the part of Alfred Schutz, defends the “objectifying attitude” (2000:727) in relation to intersubjectivity. Garrick (1999:147) contends that: “the philosophical assumptions that underpin interpretive research are seldom scrutinized in education literature”. He uses “interpretive” and “phenomenological” as interchangeable terms (1990:147), while Kincheloe and McLaren (2003:443) apply similar equivalence to “interpretive” and “hermeneutic” research.

This apparent looseness of phrase can be disconcerting where appropriateness of framework is contested. Part of the debate is reflective of a historical tradition of clear delineation of research frameworks, well outlined by Denzin and Lincoln
(2000), who recognise the shift to “blurred genres” in qualitative research in recent times (2000:14). With blurred genres comes both a sense of wanting to clearly define the research process while, at the same time, not wishing to label it in an exclusive way. In the debate about whether perspectives or paradigms in research are mutually exclusive or complementary (Guba, 1990, Patton, 1990, D’Cruz, 2001), I have taken the latter view, by and large\(^1\), and agree with Patton (1990:38) that pragmatism is more useful than “one sided paradigm allegiance”. A number of authors (Stanley, 1990, Horsfall, Byrne-Armstrong and Higgs 2001 for example) document the struggle around choice and appropriateness of approach. In particular D’Cruz (2001) displays the theoretical development of multiple perspective choice in research. Finally, Higgs (2001) makes the following, resonant, observation about qualitative research:

\[
\text{Apart from trying to understand what qualitative research is all about, novice researchers, and indeed experienced researchers new to qualitative research are both faced with two other areas of confusion: the huge array of methodologies which appear to fall under this title, and the considerable confusion linked to what constitutes good qualitative research. (2001:46)}
\]

Both Higgs (2001) and Creswell (1998) provide guidance as to how to deal with complexity and contestation in qualitative research in a pragmatic and credible way. Along with some general principles outlined by Guba (1990) they have given impetus to my inclination to approach outlining “methodology” starting from the position of practical intent. To that end, the description that follows starts with a summary of activities undertaken in the research, with some explanation of the intention embodied within them. This is then related to my choice of theoretical framework, from the consideration of numerous research paradigms, and the questions posed by the adoption of such a framework. I then relate these questions to the concrete activities, which were undertaken, in detail – practical design, data collection and data analysis.

The general organisation of the chapter is orientated towards clarity of description of an eclectic methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), with transparency being the

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\(^1\) I say “by and large” because I believe there is a large degree of compatibility, but that some positions – for example a positivist belief in an external reality – that cannot be reconciled with alternative positions that hold to a social construction of reality.
main objective, rather than a purist stance where all the arguable points are resolved. In this way I hope to avoid two things: an attempted rewriting of the philosophy of social science, where ontological contestation is resolved (a truly frightening and foolish project!) and a preoccupation with defending eclecticism. It is an attempt to show where this research is limited and bounded so that its claim to usefulness is clear for others to judge.

4.2 Research overview.

The main aim of this research is to elucidate the WBL experience of students undertaking the GDSS. To that end the study is comprised of semi-structured interviews with recent graduates of the degree as the main source of data collection. In order to put the experience in context the research also provides a detailed description of the GDSS, by way of a supporting case study. This description explores the partnership approach to course development, underpinning philosophical and pedagogical orientation and a profile of the student body in terms of background and organisational origin. As a ‘case study’ it is a collection of multiple sources of data, as described by Creswell (1998:36) with a significant amount collected from semi-structured, long interviews with major stakeholders in the course development. It is an ‘instrumental’ case study because as Stake (2003:137) puts it: “it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (rather than emphasis being made on comparison to other ‘cases’) ⁴. In this research the “something else” is the student experiences of the GDSS as a WBL degree. The GDSS description is presented in chapter five and the main account of student experiences is presented in chapter six.

Figure 4.1 summarises the research project showing the basic relationships between the two facets of the research, the sources of data and the relative strength of data collection. This summary is the basic template for the following research framework and methodological discussion.

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² That is not to say that elements of the nature of the GDSS are not raised in discussion, but that this is done through reflections on the student stories – the focus is on the student experience.
4.3 Research framework: ontology and epistemology.

Guba (1990) presents a framework for elucidating underlying sets of beliefs that guide action. In outlining how paradigms of inquiry might be generated he suggests that three basic questions need to be addressed:

1) **Ontological:** what is the nature of the “knowable”? Or what is the nature of “reality”?
2) **Epistemological:** what is the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known or knowable?
3) **Methodological:** how should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?  

(Guba 1990:18)

Though Guba (1990:27), supported by Lincoln (1990:81), does not entirely resolve the ambiguity of terms in qualitative research, (and both exhibit some paradigmatic
rigidities, which I do not support), the provision of the paradigmatic questioning above is a useful means of structuring this research framework. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) add to Guba’s framework the important idea that behind the terminology and generic activities of the research process “stands the personal biography of the researcher” (2000:18). It is by attending to these three basic questions, and the biographical signature of myself as a researcher, that I intend to raise the issues, and subsequent questions for resolution, in the methodology of this research.

**Ontology – choice and chance.**

Having argued that my inclination is towards loose paradigmatic boundaries, within interpretive research, the major ontological influence on the framing of this research is critical theory. Though some have argued that critical theory itself is loose, changing and avoiding of specificity (Kincheloe and McClaren 2003:435)\(^3\), the central themes, as argued by numerous authors (Carr. W. and Kemmis, 1986, Carr. A. 2000, Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003), provide a useful framework for this research. Taking the work of Habermas (1974, 1978, 1984, 1987) in particular, as the major writer from the Frankfurt School in recent decades, critical theory literature highlights several elements for consideration which best accommodate the ontological choice framing this research. These elements are:

1) Recognition of the social construction of reality.
2) The recognition of interested action – that is, action reflecting the interests of social players.
3) The accommodation of dialectical phenomena through the notion of *lifeworld* and *system*.

And

4) Emancipatory intent – that is, the intention to produce outcomes ‘free’ of oppressive interests.

To explicate the theoretical underpinnings of the research it is useful to deal with each of the above elements in brief detail. O’Donnell (1999) and others (Schwandt,
1990:258, Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000:594) highlight the nature of critical theory’s opposition to the Cartesian perspective of objective reality (Guba, 1990:19) and the fact that critical theory “proposes a more dialogic, self-reflective and intersubjective view where meaning must be understood as something created between people” (O Donnell, 1999:252). It represents an analysis borne out in Habermas’ (1987) theory of communicative action which is aimed at structures “put forward as invariant” (1987:119).

The second element above is the related notion that socially constructed knowledge will be reflective of social interests captured in the maxim:

The only knowledge that can truly orient action is knowledge that frees itself from mere human interests and is based on ideas – in other words knowledge that has taken a theoretical attitude. (Habermas, 1978:301).

This, somewhat famous, phrase also flags Habermas’ approach to theory and practice and notions of praxis, action and discourse (Habermas, 1974) and his exposure of the myth of positivistic claims of ‘value freedom’ or ‘ethical neutrality’ and the attempted severance of knowledge and interest therein, which he cautions have “permeated the self-understandings of the social sciences” (1989:303). Carr. (W.) and Kemmis (1986:141) give a clear explanation of the relevance of discourse as the means to question implicit (and potentially problematic) norms present in communicative action (speech). Habermas makes clear the link between discourse and misplaced notions of objectivity in the following way:

The meaning of the truth or untruth of a statement does not consist in the conditions of guaranteeing the objectivity of our experience but in the possibility of argumentative corroboration of a truth claim which is feasible in principle. (1978:361).

This is in turn linked to the third and fourth elements listed above. In the former there is the notion that truth claims are interactions mediated in the lifeworld (culture, society and personality) of participants (Habermas, 1987, O’Donnell, 1999) and that there is a dialectical relationship with the system, representing the structures and
institutions of social order (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003). Habermas describes the essence of this dialectical relationship within which mutual understandings are formed:

> With every common situation definition [the participants] are determining the boundary between external nature, society, and inner nature; at the same time, they are renewing the demarcation between themselves as interpreters, on the one side, and the external world and their own inner worlds, on the other side. (Habermas, 1987:122).

The notion of emancipatory intent, the fourth element above, is a key product of the critical theory project. In its application, critical theory resonates strongly with the Marxist tenet:

> The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point however is to change it. (Marx [1845]1969:15)\(^4\)

While Marxist orthodoxy is largely absent from critical theory, especially the notion of economic determinism (Kincheloe and McClaren: 2003)\(^5\), the links of Hegelian and Marxist thought through to the Frankfurt School and Habermas are strong; not only in regard to the dialectical nature of the relations of production, but in that the point of critical theory is to uncover social inequalities in order to address them (Popkewitz, 1990, Kincheloe and McClaren, 2003, Carr (A), 2000). Carr (W) and Kemmis (1986) make the point well in relation to educational research and critical theory:

> A critical educational science takes it as central that [the] institutionalized separation of knowledge from action (in a division of labour between researchers and researched, or researchers and practitioners) must be overcome; it aims at the transformation of action through the self-critical transformation of practitioners. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:198).

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\(^4\) In Marx and Engels (1969) emphasis in original.

\(^5\) Kincheloe and McClaren (2003) make this point specifically in relation to the ideas of economic base and superstructure as “orthodoxy”.
Carr (A) describes this emancipatory intent as aimed at producing enlightenment (2000:216) and Kincheloe and McLaren (2003:437) frame the notion as twofold: critical enlightenment and critical emancipation, where the latter is a more activist framing of critical theory and the former is more concerned with the process of laying bare privileged interests.

The ontological choice of critical theory sets in place the epistemological and methodological parameters for this research, but there is also a significant element of chance in terms of the critical stance. Returning to Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) notion of ‘biography’, they make the point that:

*Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community that configures, in its own special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:30)*

Lofland and Lofland (1984) talk about what the researcher brings to the situation of doing social analysis and describe the influence of the researcher’s “extrasocial scientific concerns” in the interpretive domain (1984:7). The idea that paradigm is entirely a matter of choice, in an interpretive research approach, where the researcher is strongly implicated, makes no sense. Legitimate biographical concerns, some of which are as much a matter of chance, need to be examined, particularly in the relational aspects of epistemology. The epistemological framings stemming from the critical approach applied in this research are taken up below.

**Epistemology - a way of being and a way of doing.**

The epistemological relationship between the known and the knowable within Guba’s (1990) framework, outlined above, is predicated, within a critical theory perspective, upon the fundamental question of, and approach to, interpretation. Drawing on the ideas of Schwandt (1990, 2003) and Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) in particular, interpretation within this research is mediated through the lens of critical/philosophical hermeneutics and facilitated by the application of reflexivity
(Foley (D), 2002, Lincoln and Guba, 2003) and the recognition of *intersubjectivity*
(Habermas, 1984, Foley (D), 2002).

**Critical/philosophical hermeneutics**

Schwandt (1990) describes the interpretive inquirer as engaged in a process of *complimentarity* where: “the inquirer compliments the inquiry, that is, makes it complete or whole… the knower must participate in the known” (1990:273). He suggests that this is fundamental to the process of making meaning. In a later work (Schwandt, 2003) he generalises features of interpretation where the inquirer, within the act of interpretation, recognising human action as meaningful, shows “respect for and fidelity to the life world” and gives emphasis to “the contribution of human subjectivity” (2003:298).

Leading on from this, Schwandt (2003) makes three important points in relation to interpretation within *philosophical hermeneutics*. In essence these are that: “understanding is interpretation”, that bias needs to be engaged with rather than eliminated and that understanding is participative and dialogic (2003:301-302).

In similar manner, putting forward the characteristics of *critical hermeneutics*, Kincheloe and McClaren (2003) invoke the *hermeneutic circle* as: “a process of analysis in which the interpreters seek the historical and social dynamics that shape textual interpretation” and “engage in the back-and-forth of studying the parts in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to parts” (2003:445). In both conceptions the application of hermeneutics is about what Kincheloe and McClaren summarise as the need to “think through and clarify the conditions under which interpretation and understanding take place” (2003:444).

Patton (1990) highlights a number of principles of hermeneutic inquiry and offers the following summary:

> Thus one must know about the researcher as well as the researched to place any qualitative study in a proper, hermeneutic context. Hermeneutic theory argues that one can only interpret the meaning of something from some perspective, a certain standpoint, a praxis, or a situational context, whether
one is reporting one’s own findings or reporting the perspective of people being studied (and thus reporting on their standpoint or perspective). (Patton, 1990:85)

This ‘knowing’ the researcher and the researched echoes the sentiments of Lofland and Lofland (1984) and the importance of biography in relation to qualitative research. It highlights the situatedness of the research in a social and historical context and the need to make these things visible. Giddens (1984) suggests that: “all social research presumes a hermeneutic moment” and advocates the elucidation of “frames of meaning” (1984:327-328). Epistemologically, hermeneutics frames “understanding as a condition of being” (Schwandt, 2003:301). The means by which this ‘being’ is translated into research action, (‘doing’), to achieve ‘elucidation of meaning’ in this research, is through the practice of reflexivity and attention to intersubjectivity.

Reflexivity.

The significance of reflexivity in the application of a hermeneutic framework is the critical understanding of ‘self’ as researcher and of self in relation to ‘other’ – that is the people being ‘researched’. Michelle Fine (1990) articulates this well as the notion of ‘working at the hyphen’: “self and other are always knottily entangled… despite denials, qualitative researchers are always implicated at the hyphen [between self and other]” (1990:72). Reflexivity allows for this implication to be examined.

Lincoln and Guba suggest that: “reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher” (2003:283). Douglas Foley (2002) draws on the formulations of Barbara Babcock around reflexivity which compliment Fine’s (1990) notion of the ‘hyphen’:

[R]eflexivity is the capacity of language and of thought – of any system of signification – to turn or bend back upon itself, thus becoming an object to itself. Directing one’s gaze at one’s own experience makes it possible to regard oneself as “other”. Through a constant mirroring of the self, one
becomes reflexive about the situated, socially constructed nature of the self, and by extension, the other. (Foley, (D), 2002:473).

I have attempted, in the methodological considerations derived from reflexive practice, to avoid limiting this notion of self to simple personal autobiography. Sewardt (1990) cautions against the production of “inquiry [that] is a private and inaccessible reconstruction of others’ lives” (1990:273) and Foley (D) highlights the danger of overly “self-serving, narcissistic” autobiographical reflexivity (2002:475) in qualitative research. In trying to encourage reflexive depth, Lincoln and Guba (2003:283) draw attention to Reinharz’ formulation of research selves, brought selves and created selves and Douglas Foley (2002) develops a typology of reflexivity encompassing confessional, theoretical, intertextual and deconstructive categories. I am guided by Foley’s attempts at blending autobiographical and theoretical aspects of reflexive practice in that it seems to establish a balance between tensions accounting for lifeworld and system considerations within a critical research framework (O’Donnell, 1999, Harrington, 2000).

Intersubjectivity.

Moving on from Foley’s (2002) notion that reflexivity leads to an understanding, not only of the socially constructed self, but also of other, he also makes the point that: “all cultural groups produce an intersubjective reality which is both “inherited” and continually constructed and reconstructed as it is lived or practiced.” (2002:472). Habermas (1984) elaborates on the significance of intersubjectivity in the construction of the lifeworld:

The world gains objectivity only through counting as one and the same world for a community of speaking and acting subjects. The abstract concept of the world is a necessary condition if communicatively acting subjects are to reach understanding among themselves about what is to take place in the world or is to be effected in it. Through this communicative practice they assure themselves at the same time of their common life-relations, of an

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6 Emphasis in original.
The significance of the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld in Habermas’ conception of interpretive social science is not just the ‘complimentarity’ and ‘fidelity’ of Schwandt (1990, 2003). In Habermas’ terms the interpreter must be a part of the lifeworld they seek to understand and go beyond mere detached “empathy” with the community being researched (1984:109). O’Donnell (1999:252) explains this as the need for the researcher to “adopt the performative attitude of a communicative participant, in which both actor and interpreter belong to the same ‘universe of discourse’.” Habermas explains the need for this:

The social scientist has basically no other access to the lifeworld than the social scientific layman [sic] does. He must already belong in a certain way to the lifeworld whose elements he wishes to describe. In order to describe them he must be able in principle to take part in their production; and participation presupposes that one belongs...

This circumstance prohibits the interpreter from separating questions of meaning from questions of validity in such a way as to secure for the understanding of meaning a purely descriptive character. (Habermas, 1984:108)

The complex point is elaborated by Habermas (1984:109-119) and highlights the dialectic of the position of the researcher as both participant and observer. In essence interpretation cannot be made without the interpreter taking a position where they attempt to step outside the lifeworld within which the meaning was mutually and subjectively made with the participants. O’Donnell highlights this as the insufficiency of an exclusively hermeneutic approach:

The fact that the project of a critical social theory must combine a hermeneutic approach with a systems-theoretic perspective, requires that critical theorists… be able to move back and forth between an internal
(participant) and external (observer) perspective, that is, with an analytic perspective on society as lifeworld and system. (O’Donnell, 1999:253).

The distinction of a lifeworld/system duality is central to Habermas’ (1984,1987) theory of communicative action and to his conception of the task of critical theory. Key to this ‘analytic perspective’ is locating the lifeworld meanings in the broader context while, at the same time, maintaining the strength of their intersubjective nature.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) provide an excellent summary of the reflexive-dialectic essence of the lifeworld/system relationship (2000:588). They outline the objectifying, (and alienating), nature of the system, in terms of social order, which is both derived from and colonising of the lifeworld, (see also O’Donnell, 1999 and Wallace, 2003 for useful descriptions). The epistemological significance of intersubjectivity within a critical framework is taking account of the dialectics of lifeworld and system through assuming both a participant and observer stance. Some aspects of this are taken up in more detail in later chapters, but at this point, in terms of completion and brevity, the ideas of Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) are adapted and summarised in figure 4.2 below. The essential relationships outlined are the objectifying features of the system; formal, structured, theoretical - and their parallel, intersubjective features within the lifeworld; practical, orientated to meaningful action. Thus, the lifeworld elements of meaning, subjectivity, practice and agency have their dialectical counterparts in the system; rules, objectivity, theory and structure.

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7 Emphasis added.
8 Adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (2000:588) who provide a more complex schema, elaborating on the social and individual dimensions in greater detail.
By way of a concluding comment on epistemological questions, and in order to give some insight into my reflexive and intersubjective positioning, figures 4.3.a and 4.3.b below attempt to capture, (briefly), some of the key influences and relationships.

Figure 4.3.a outlines the biographical influences based on the notion of *accidents of current biography* and of *remote biography and personal history* described by Lofland and Lofland (1984:7). Figure 4.3.b describes the intersubjective relationships between self and others.

Without resorting to issues, cautioned against above, of excessive confessional or narcissistic reflexivity (Foley, 2002) it is at least possible to make a reference point in relation to biographical and relational issues. While I have declined to expand on *detail* in this account, I have tried to indicate that the detail *implied* in these biographical and relational categories has been at the forefront of my thinking in both data collection and analysis. Where appropriate in subsequent sections of this chapter, I have made reference to relevant biography, (highlighted in figure 4.3a and b), in the explanation of methodological issues.
The nature of intersubjectivity (and its objectifying opposite), of reflexivity and of the application of critical/philosophical hermeneutics set the epistemological framework.
for the practical methods of approach to the research – the methodological question of ‘how the inquirer should go about finding out’. The general and the specific aspects of methodology are outlined in turn below.

4.4 Methodology: data collection and analysis.

Methodology in brief.

Figure 4.4, below, outlines a schema for the general methodological approach to the research. This is followed by a description of the practical, specific actions undertaken in each aspect of the research, the ‘case’ study and the ‘phenomenological’ study. The schema and the following description of methods explain in detail data collection, type and analysis methods.

Method 1: Case study data collection and analysis.

Given the instrumental nature of the ‘case study’ of the GDSS, outlined in section 4.2, the overall aim is to provide a detailed description of the course, in terms of structure and content, in order to provide practical and theoretical insight into the ‘phenomenological’ study of student experience. In seeking to avoid misnomer it is important to emphasise the term ‘case study’ is applied in keeping with Stake’s (2003) notion that cases may be complex or simple; the latter being a more appropriate term for this case. In this instance the data collected is used for a straightforward, descriptive presentation. Some of the data is simple quantitative information, for example material derived from records or course outlines.descriptions. In other cases, such as interviews with the teaching team, the intention is to present the range of perspectives and is ‘triangulated’ in terms of artefacts, publications (produced collectively and individually) etc. Data/information was collected from a number of sources:

- Course application records
- Course materials and promotional materials
Four main aspects of the course are developed in order to meet the aim of the case study. The first of these is a description of the course structure and content - what is involved and how it is organised. A second aspect, on student demographics, is also described, which includes personal information – age, gender etc. – as well as information about the type and nature of the organisations students came from and the project topics they undertook.

Thirdly, taking into account the importance of university/industry partnership to WBL, elements of the partnership are also outlined which include how it was established, how it functions and the range of activities undertaken. Finally, the fourth aspect of the course described is the underpinning philosophy and pedagogical practice.

As shown in figure 4.4, the principle aim of describing these four aspects is to provide both theoretical and practical insight into the GDSS. The overall description of the GDSS ‘case’ is presented in chapter five. The methodology of the substantial research undertaken in this project – the ‘phenomenological study’ - is now described in detail below.

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9 These include regular teaching team meetings, review and planning meetings for the degree.
10 In this case predominantly teaching team members, though ‘stakeholders’ can include students and other university staff.
Figure 4.4: Methodological schema of the research pathway.

- Ontology: Critical Theory
- Epistemology: Hermeneutics
- Reflexivity
- Intersubjectivity

Methodology

Data collection
- Systems-theoretic – Critical Social Pedagogy
- Participant/Observer -
  - Practice based
  - Intimate/Familiar
  - Common experience
  - Field notes
- Semi-structured - long interviews
  - Dialogic
  - Conversational
  - Self checking
- Systems-theoretic –
  - Critical Social Pedagogy
  - GDSS Students

Data analysis/reporting
- Inductive
  - Integrative/Holistic
    o Thematic development
    o Mind mapping
  - Disintegrative
    o Line by line analysis
    o Thematic saturation

Semi-structured - long interviews
- Inductive
  - Transparent
  - Transcription method
  - In-text voice

Data Stories
- GDSS Students

GDSS Snapshot
- Theoretical/Practical insight
Method 2: The GDSS ‘Phenomenon’.

As outlined in figure 4.1, above, the principle source of data in this study is derived from long, semi-structured interviews with students who were recent graduates of the GDSS. Additional data was collected from other sources, but this was used to supplement/compliment the interview data. The following section sets out three things: the rationale for choice and style of interviews, the practical conduct of the interviews and the methods of interpretation and reporting of the interview data. For each of these things there is an attempt to link the practical decisions to the framework elucidated in the previous section. This is then followed by an explanation of ethical issues taken into account in the conduct of the research. Finally this section deals with limitations of the research.

“Knowledge as conversation”\(^{11}\) – interviews as research.

“Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 1990:278). Patton’s words present a straightforward rationale for choosing to use interviews as the primary data source - the need to make explicit the perspectives of the GDSS students. Steiner Kvale (1996) provides a seminal text on qualitative interviewing and suggests that the qualitative research interview has the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the “lived world” of the participants (1996:30). This purpose suits my needs as a researcher, both in terms of the study of the ‘phenomenon’ of the GDSS WBL experience and as a person concerned with the intersubjective nature of meaning making.

Several authors outline different interview types (Patton, 1990, Kvale, 1996, Fontana and Frey, 2000, Wengraf, 2001), but the choice of long, semi-structured interviews provides a number of practical opportunities, especially:

- In-depth data collection
- Dialogic/conversational style

\(^{11}\) Taken from Kvale (1996: 19)
• Appropriate focus without prescriptive structure
• Maintenance of familiar/intimate relationship (reflective of intersubjective domain)

In some ways the selection of semi-structured interviews is a natural choice on my part. My status as ‘participant/observer’ and depth of common experience with the students and my biographical status as ‘interviewer’ are strongly implicated in the rationale/justification of this method of data collection. Kvale (1996) deals with several aspects of interview quality and highlights ‘qualifications’ that the interviewer needs in order to establish good practice. He suggests nine qualification criteria for the interviewer which are that they should be:

i. Knowledgeable
ii. Structuring
iii. Clear
iv. Gentle
v. Sensitive
vi. Open
vii. Steering
viii. Critical
ix. Remembering and Interpreting (Kvale, 1996:148-149)

From a biographical perspective I have claim to several of these criteria. As a union organiser in several trade unions, as a child advocate in the education and welfare sectors, and as a manager/employer I have a strong background in interviewing; often with people in crisis for whom trust and comfort in the interview situation was paramount. Similarly a career of over twenty years in education in various sectors has demanded a high level of skill as a communicator. While this accounts for some aspects of my ‘qualification’ as an interviewer, my participant/observer status is more relevant in terms of the specifics of this study. To that end it requires a more integrated and in-depth account of the relationship to the methods of data collection. I hope, therefore, to attend to some common methodological criteria for interviewing, (put forward by different authors), by drawing on these situational and biographical characteristics.
Wengraf (2001) highlights some general approaches to qualitative interviews which need to be considered in order to establish credible interpretation of the data. Using his typology the interviews in this research would be best described as fitting a “common-sense hypothetico-inductivist” model (Wengraf, 2001:2). Under this model Wengraf suggests that the data is handled from a particular set of assumptions:

*I have assumed the relatively inductivist position that, if properly recorded by tape-recorder and properly transcribed, the words spoken in the interview are relatively non-controversial ‘facts’. (Wengraf, 2001:6).*

The interviews in this study are based on this assumption - they are tape-recorded in full and faithfully transcribed word for word. However, in order to start from this assumption Wengraf argues that researcher must pay attention to the underpinning relationships and conditions of such an interview. These are: assessing the authenticity of *discourse* and its relationship to both the subject matter of the interview and the context of the person speaking.\(^\text{12}\) He maintains that this *attention* is the way in which justification is made for *certain* inferences over *alternative* inferences (2001:13) either about the speaker or about that which is being spoken of. In Wengraf’s words:

*However, if I wish to make inferences from the discourse in the interview to other realities\(^\text{13}\), I can move in either or both of two directions. One direction is towards knowledge of that which is being talked about (the topic, the referent); the other is towards knowledge of the time-and-place located subjectivities who are doing the talking. (Wengraf, 2001:8).*

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\(^{12}\) Wengraf refers to these items as *discourse, object referents* and *subjectivity* (2001:6-10) in a rather complex explanation. I have tried to limit my comments above to a straightforward account of his argument and how I respond to it in practical terms.

\(^{13}\) Wengraf does not deal with ontological and epistemological details in this explanation, rather he merely flags the issues in relation to “reality” and how it is structured (2001:4). Having dealt with these issues in substance in section 4.3 my use of Wengraf’s model here is limited to the practical assumptions on which the data was processed and interpreted.
The emphasis in this research – the *practical* ‘direction’ - is focused on the nature of the experience for the students from their individual perspectives. In Wengraf’s terms the relationship might be described as described in figure 4.5.

In interpreting data with a focus on the student experience I ‘pay attention’ to aspects of discourse and subject matter in order to focus interpretation on the student experience. There are two important points to be made in relation to this. The first is that I am not seeking to make a case for objective “reality”, implied in Wengraf’s account (2001:4) and hope I have made that case in the previous section. The second point is that the interpretation of the data is cognisant of: 1. Discourse and 2. The GDSS as subject matter, by virtue of the familiarity acquired through my participant/observer status and common experience. It is on this basis that interpretations are made in relation to: 3. The nature of the GDSS experience (figure 4.5).

![Figure 4.5: Interpretive focus of interviews.](image-url)
Planning and conducting the interviews.

Selection of participants.

As described in the following chapter the total number of students in the first two cohorts of the degree was 35, 17 in the first year of the course and 18 in the second year. All students were invited to take part after completing the course, but before formal graduation – the intention being to talk to people while the experience was still fresh in their minds, but with every effort to avoid feeling any sense of ‘fear or favour’ in the interview situation. All students were formally invited with a letter explaining the project, the ethical parameters approved by the ethics committee of the university and guarantee of confidentiality in relation to the information gathered. The original intention was to interview all of the students from the first cohort if possible (bearing in mind the voluntary nature of their involvement). Of the first cohort 14 of the 17 took part in the interviews. Of the three not included two had moved location (one interstate, one overseas at the time of the project) and the remaining student had moved jobs and was not in contact.

The intention with the second group was to interview as many as possible, but with the added dimension of purposeful selection, in keeping with the schema offered by Patton (1990:182-3). According to Patton’s typology of purposeful sampling the selection of students from the second group is a combination of typical case sampling (1990:173) and intensity sampling (1990:171); that is, selection of students who were both reasonably typical of the second group, but also who presented information rich cases in terms of their projects and WBL experience. On this basis 11 from 18 of the second group of students were interviewed. While purposeful selection was used to select students form the second group, care was also taken not to exclude cases of significant difference. On that point one student in the second group did not successfully complete to GDSS, the significance of which is discussed in the ‘limitations’ section below (section 4.5).

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14 I prefer the use of the term selection in this context to avoid the connotation of ‘sampling’ in a quantitative sense.
15 Aspects of this are discussed in relation to the limitations of the research in section 4.5.
The purposeful selection involved approaching some students who had received letters. None of these students refused and all seemed more than happy to take part.\(^{16}\)

*Conduct of the interviews.*

The interviews were carried out with particular attention to setting, planning the questions and data gathering issues. All of the interview settings were chosen by the interviewees, at a time and place convenient to them. This was roughly equally distributed between students’ work and home settings, with one student electing to be interviewed at my workplace and one at my home. All the settings involved private spaces for the conduct of the interviews. Care was taken to establish comfortable seating access to tea, coffee, water etc.

Taking into account both the principles of interview relationship outlined by Fontana and Frey (2000) and aspects of qualitative research interviews described by Kvale (1996) attention was paid to establishing trust and rapport. Care was taken in order to create an environment conducive to convivial discussion and response without creating an atmosphere where serious comment and criticism could not be made.

A general plan/guide was developed for the interview. The questions were centred around two major themes plus an extra option:

- How did you come to do the graduate diploma?
- What were the impacts on you in terms of yourself, your practice and your organisation? (Developed as three sub-themes)
- Are there any things you wanted to say which we haven’t talked about?

In preparation for each interview the questions were written out, in a form which made intuitive sense for that student. This was done in specific pages of a field notebook so that some minor notes could be jotted down in the course of the interview. The style of questioning was generally conversational, though a range of

\(^{16}\) The indications seem to be that, in cases where they had not yet responded to the invitation letters, the only reason for lack of reply had been ambivalence towards the research project. In all cases the demeanour of the participants was positive in relation to the interviews.
techniques was used in order to achieve depth, focus and clarity in the interview discussion. While this was largely intuitive and based on my interviewing experience, the style of questioning followed an approach similar to that laid out by Kvale (1996:133-135). The interviews were recorded from the first major thematic question with a short, unrecorded prelude where the project outline and conditions of participation were reiterated, as well as a general welcoming/setting at ease discussion, usually of one or two minutes duration. (This was also used to check the tape-recorder).

Data gathering/recording.

The interviews were taped and usually lasted between one-and-a-half to two hours. During the discussion occasional short notes were made to remind me of points when reviewing the tape. Shortly after the conclusion of the interview and as soon as practicable, the notes and the tape were reviewed and any further notes added to the field notebook. This was done in the form of an interview summary. The transcription of the interviews was usually done within two weeks of their taking place.

In order to maintain a sense of intimate contact, the interviews were transcribed by myself using a transcription machine. The intention of personal transcription was to maintain deep familiarity with the text (Lofland, 2002:150) and to guard against the influences of interviews as “decontextualised conversation” (Kvale, 1996:165). The transcriptions were verbatim transcription with occasional notes added, for example when things were said in a light hearted manner or where students paused for thought before answering particular questions. Both electronic and hard copy transcriptions were used for the process of data analysis/interpretation. The initial production of the interview transcripts involved a certain degree of memo production (Wengraf, 2001:209) in the form of notes added to the initial interview summaries. These ‘memos’ were called upon in the initial data analysis.

Data analysis/interpretation.

17 In a handful of cases this was between two weeks and one month due to the volume of tapes to be transcribed.
The process of analysing the data was lengthy and exhaustive. The period between the production of the transcripts from the tape recordings and the development of the data stories, (figure 4.6) reported in chapter six, was approximately one year. It represented the marrying of systematic data treatment (McCracken, 1988, Patton, 1990, Kvale, 1996, Wengraf, 2001) with a reflexive, iterative process. This length of time allowed for intuitive reflexivity (Moustakas, 1990) to influence the data processing, while guarding against pitfalls brought about by excessive reliance on novelty and first impressions (Sadler, 2002). It also allowed time for the reflective evolution of the interpretive process.

The outcome of the deep immersion in the data was a hermeneutic process consistent with the framework outlined above and with the “hermeneutical canons of interpretation” (Kvale, 1996: 48). Central to this was a dual and parallel process of data analysis, aimed at the ‘back and forth’ nature of hermeneutic interpretation – between the ‘parts and the whole’ as described in previous sections of this chapter. The components of this parallel process were:

- Disintegrated, line by line analysis
- Holistic story summaries

This parallel process involved condensation of material in terms of holistic analysis and categorisation in terms of the line by line analysis (McCracken, 1990, Kvale, 1996). The eventual integration of these components produced the final data stories, (chapter six). Figure 4.6 outlines the data analysis process.

In each part of the process; the holistic and the disintegrated, the application of the principle of “theoretical saturation” (Eisenhardt, 2002: 7) was made. This means the systematic treatment of the data to a kind of ‘law of diminishing returns’ deriving new information until a point is reached where further analysis yields no further significant information. The parallel processes outlined in figure 4.6 were the product of some

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18 For practical purposes I gauged this ‘point’ on an intuitive, commonsensical basis. The main emphasis was to ensure that no significant stories were left out. I acknowledge that this process leaves
trial and error, especially in the case of line by line analysis (which is more consistent with commonly documented methods by authors cited above). I saw this as beneficial as it allowed for different insights into the data in general before shaping the data stories as the final products.

While the holistic process employed some recognised methods, such as data condensation (Kvale, 1996, McCracken, 1990), it was also quite idiosyncratic in its method. Each process is discussed in detail in the following summary.

**Line by line analysis.**

The process outlined in figure 4.6 had four main steps:19

1. Reading hard copy and note making in margins/text
2. Production of data tables: text/notes/quotes/provisional categories
3. Provisional category development
4. Revision for internal homogeneity

The first step of reading hard copy of the transcripts involved making notes on discrete sections of the text; highlighting words and phrases, making provisional comments/notes in the margins of the text and posing questions. This part of the analysis also involved the parallel reading of the notes made at interview and during the transcribing process. Figure 4.7 is a replication of this preliminary marking of the text for provisional ideas.20 These ‘markings’ were re-worked several times into varying lists of possible categories until the second step of the process could be undertaken in a reasonably structured manner.

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19 Along the way a number of minor steps were developed which are not reported. In keeping with previous comments, these included various trial and error visual/tabular representations of the data.

20 I have attempted to reproduce as authentically as possible the spontaneity of circling, underlining, highlighting and memo making – all of which were done by hand in the original text as it was read.
Disintegration – development of categorical internal homogeneity

Raw data (Transcripts)

- Line by line analysis
- Provisional list of categories
- Revised list of categories
- Thematic summaries

Story summaries + Thematic mind maps

Text

Integrated thematic summaries

Integration – development of external heterogeneity

Data stories

Holistic sense making
The second step involved working with the text electronically to produce data analysis tables based on several general models (McCracken, 1988, Patton, 1990, Kvale, 1996) and in particular on a format suggested by Wengraf (2001:22) in a slightly modified form. Figure 4.8 shows a typical excerpt from the data tables where text, potential quotes, notes and emergent themes are aligned and developed.

From this process forty-two provisional categories were eventually produced. The development from the data tables shown in figure 4.8 involved electronic and manual ‘cut and paste’ processes and numerous iterative ‘shuffling and sorting’ steps leading
to the provisional category development described as step three above. This was followed by step four; the revision of these categories for internal homogeneity. Patton (1990: 403), cites the work of Egon Guba on criteria for establishing *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity* in category development.

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**Figure 4.8: excerpt from data tables.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Possible quotes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J: Well, I worked in a, um, small, grass roots organisation and I just thought that there was nothing done research wise and nothing done that was um, it was all, you know there was nothing to support why I worked the way I worked. And the way I worked is very, er different to the way that probably um, the direction of the way the organisation was going, and I felt that I needed… that is was good to have something to back up the way I actually er, um, you know, work. And I just thought it was a really good thing to be able to provide a research for the organisation, I thought the organisation and the client group would really benefit from it all so… and that they … I wanted … I just could see that, you know their involvement, was really something I was interested in also, because I was getting, you know, having those sort of relations with the client group too. (048)</td>
<td>Well, I worked in a small, grass roots organisation and I just thought that there was nothing done research wise and nothing done that was, you know, there was nothing to support why I worked the way I worked.</td>
<td>Practice and research based practice</td>
<td>Practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict/tension?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Talks about issues of practice being different to organisational direction – key point in autonomy of worker in organisation – is this a different question for the community sector??</td>
<td>Practice control?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong notion of client group as a stakeholder in the process – another point of difference with other sectors??</td>
<td>Organisational issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Practice based issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This process ensures that the eventual categories formed are internally consistent; that is, they have no items that are distinguishable from each other in terms of the

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21 It should be noted here that although these steps can be identified as discrete parts of the process, the actual progress of the data analysis was fairly continuous and involved a number of intermediate checking, sorting and speculative arrangements to tease out the emergent categories.
categorical formation. Likewise, external heterogeneity is the establishment of categories that are discrete formations and have no categorical overlap.

The process of disintegrative categorical development led to a list of nine initial categories from which the thematic summaries (figure 4.6) were developed.

*Holistic sense making.*

The parallel process of data analysis was to treat the transcripts as whole stories. In order to do this the transcripts were read ‘uninterrupted’ in order to get a sense of the ‘story’ being told. This also involved several cases of listening to the tape-recordings again. From the text (both transcribed and spoken) each interviewee’s story was summarised or condensed (Kvale, 1996). The summaries were limited to around 150 to 200 words in length in order to avoid producing long-winded rehashes of the text. Figure 4.9 shows an example of a story summary from Clarice’s experience of the degree.

In the second phase of the holistic data analysis the story summaries, supported by back and forth returning to the transcripts and tape-recordings, were re-written as thematic mind maps. I found this useful for establishing visual connections between different aspects of the transcribed conversations. It was often the case that similar issues and ideas were raised in different parts of the interview. Clarice’s thematic mind map has been reproduced in electronic form in figure 4.10.\(^22\)

\(^{22}\) The thematic mind maps were drawn by hand on large sketch pads. Though it was possible to produce electronic versions, the requirement to think and draw while focusing on the concepts precluded the time consuming (if neat) word processed versions shown in figure 4.10. The relationships of the original are captured in the version offered here by way of example.
**Figure 4.9: Story summary example.**

*Clarice.*

ACCESS is a very important issue for Clarice. She has had several attempts at university study under ‘normal’ circumstances and failed due to finances and a pressing mental health disability. Her reaction to seeing the degree advertised was “that’s me” and saw it as a strong FIT with her needs.

Doing the degree was important to her CONFIDENCE/SELF-IMAGE and the successful outcome was a major achievement in her view. Her project received high public acclaim across the sector.

Clarice has a strong commitment to her PRACTICE in the mental health field, influenced by her status as practitioner/consumer. She endured significant CONFLICT within her organisation around her approach to inclusive practice (ie. client involvement in their service delivery). Her experience of the course was seen as an opportunity to review PRACTICE.

She expressed a strong commitment to the “politics” of her work, describing herself as a “radical bitch”.

RPL was a major factor, given her extensive experience, despite three failed attempts at tertiary study. TIME was also seen as an issue in doing the course as she felt previous attempts at study had been partly hampered by her inability to sustain involvement.

Clarice funded the degree by re-mortgaging her house, describing this as a “fact of life” (ACCESS/POLITICAL ECONOMY?)
Having produced a revised list of categories and thematic summaries from the parallel processes, the final treatment of the data was to integrate the categorical and thematic products. This involved aligning broad themes and categories and a final revision of the major categories. It also involved the development of external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990) highlighted in figure 4.6. This meant that the transition from thematic summaries to integrated thematic summaries produced discrete sub-categories within the final data stories. The final part of this integrative process involved the selection of quotes from the transcripts, which exemplified the stories as told by the students. The intention of this process was to imbue the data stories with a strong student voice alongside my own interpretations (Fine, 1994, Fine et al 2003).
The data stories (figure 4.6), as the final product of the analysis process, represented five major thematic categories, each with several sub-categories. These were:

- **Access**
- **Self and Study**
- **WBL and Organisation**
- **Managing Learning and**
- **Outcomes**

The stories are reported in full in chapter six.

### 4.5 Limitations and Constraints.

My concern to make clear the limitations of this research led to a series of critical questions about the way in which I set about the task of the investigation. This was a process of distillation – reflections – about the focus of the research; the faithfulness of the methodology to the focus; the internal consistency of the framework/method relationships and the nature and rightfulness of the interpretations of the data. These critical reflections yielded two essential questions, to which the answers might make the limitations clear. These were:

- **What are the limits of what can be claimed?**
- **What is the authenticity of what is claimed?**

Put another way I think the first question pertains to the limitations of the framework, whereas the second question focuses on issues of quality and integrity of the research.

*Framework limitations.*

In terms of the framework, I would probably choose ‘scope’ in preference to limitations, having less of a negative connotation. Several authors (Kvale, 1996, Angen, 2000, Janesick, 2000) attest to the hegemonic influence of the “trinity of generalizability, reliability and validity” (Kvale, 1996:229) and the tendency for qualitative research to be judged in positivist terms. In Janesick’s terms: “Most often,
questions addressed to qualitative researchers are constructed from the psychometric paradigm and revolve around the trinity of validity, reliability and generalizability, as if there were no other linguistic representations for questions” (2000:393).

Having made the case for the critical perspective outlined above, I think the limitations – or rather differences from positivist benchmarks – are clear enough and sufficiently justified. However there is a need, within the framework, to be explicit about the limitations of what can be claimed. Angen (2000), in her discussion of interpretive inquiry, raises the issue of credibility. She retains validity as a provisional terminology, and puts forward the view that this is the central issue for qualitative, interpretive research, making the point, along with Williams (2000), that release from the positivistic dominance does not abrogate responsibility to address validity as an issue. The framework limitations of this research, and therefore what can be claimed, are related to this question of validity.

Having delineated the boundaries between positivism and interpretive inquiry, Angen (2000) outlines an approach to guard against the opposite extreme of nihilistic relativism by suggesting that validation, (as opposed to validity), is a more appropriate phrase to focus potential and legitimate research claims. She describes this process of validation as being comprised of both ethical validation and substantive validation (2000:387). The former focuses on the need for transparency and inclusivity, while the latter focuses on thoroughness and clarity of method. (The substantive limitations are dealt with in the following section). The framework of this research is limited to the concept of validation put forward by Angen (2000).

In specific terms this limitation means that the claims made are limited to theoretical insights and situational representations (Horsburgh, 2003) and akin to notions of Williams’ (2000) concept of moderatum – that is, generalisation limited to the area of developing theoretical ideas. In this way I have restricted the claims of the research (discussed in chapters 7 and 8) to insights into practice of the GDSS and to propositions about possible events, in similar circumstances or future courses.

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23 Angen (2000) uses the term interpretive in a variety of ways, but generally its usage is consistent with the framework of this research. She deals specifically with this point (2000:379) in similar terms to the points made above in section 4.1 of this chapter.
(Houlbrook and Wagner, 2004), rather than generalisations to broad situations. Horsburgh (2003:311) cites Popay *et al* in this regard: “the aim is to make logical generalizations to a theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena rather than probabilistic generalizations to a population”. This making of logical generalisations is the basis on which limitations related to authenticity – questions of quality – are raised.

*Limitations to what is claimed.*

Using the notions of substantive validation and theoretical insights, the limitations of what is claimed are prescribed by the appropriateness of methods, especially methods in relation to validation. Kvale (1996) raises the question of validating interpretation of data and, in his conception of *communicative validation* (1996:244), he poses the specific question of validating dialogue and with whom this should take place. He suggests that validation involves:

> … a reflected judgement as to what forms of validation are relevant to a specific study, the application of the concrete process of validation, and a decision on what the appropriate community is for a dialogue on validity. (Kvale, 1996:237)

Creswell (1998), amongst several authors (Angen, 2000, Janesick, 2000, Williams, 2000, Horsburgh, 2003), offers a number of methods for applying specific criteria to establish approaches to ‘dialogue on validity’. In my view these methods fall into two broad categories: those that favour a quasi-objective ‘third party’ verification of interpretation, such as member checking and triangulation, and those that favour explication of the intersubjective position of the researcher in the interpretive process such as clarification of bias, reflexivity, deep familiarisation of the researcher etc. Angen (2000), in particular, offers critique of some of these methods: *member checking, reflexivity, peer review* and *triangulation* (2000:383-384). Others offer a similar critique (Horsburgh, 2003), which like Angen, seem to favour the intersubjective methods, while writers such as Williams (2000) tend more towards the quasi-objective methods.
I am aware that my own interpretive process tends more towards, and is therefore limited by, the intersubjective end of this spectrum of substantive validation methods. For example, Creswell (1998:201-203) lists eight verification methods and suggests that at least two of these methods ought to be employed in any given qualitative study. While the methodology outlined above uses a combination of at least three of Creswell’s suggestions, these methods are focused on elements of intersubjective interpretation.

The effects of this are that I am not only deeply familiar with the lifeworld and context of the students’ learning, but also deeply and personally implicated in the interpretations of the data. The texts are strongly co-productions, but the meaning made of them is substantially my own. In part I have attempted to deal with this by clarifying my bias through the reflexive descriptions (Angen 2000:383) of practice and philosophy contained within the ‘case study’ (elaborated in chapter five). To some extent there is a level of informal triangulation through practice, however, in making a general case not to engage in ‘quasi-objective’ methods around validation processes I wish to make a number of points.

The first, and most general point, is that, having made the case for deep familiarity and its benefits, it seems to me that a shift away from this to a more objectifying stance (Harrington, 2000) makes little sense. It makes more sense to be explicit about the intersubjective nature of the interpretation.

A second point is that several authors (Angen, 2000, Janesick, 2000, Horsburgh, 2003) offer reasonable critique of ‘quasi-objective’ methods. This critique generally makes the point that such methods as member checking, peer review etc. are subject to the same intersubjective constraints and ultimately have no greater claim to validity. As Angen puts it: “From an interpretive perspective, if the inquirer is not separate from the subject of inquiry, there is no way to obtain that optimal distance that would allow the truth to show itself” (2000:383). She also makes the point that disagreement about interpretation exposes this dilemma in that there is no objective means of determining whose interpretation should stand (2000:383). Similarly, Horsburgh (2003:310) highlights the issue of conflation of participants’ views in
producing interpretation and the problematic of distinguishing segregated facets of interpretation for comment.

Within the limitation of the applicability of interpretations of the data to theoretical insights, I am of the view that the intersubjective position holds, but that a shift towards quasi-objective methods has the effect of neither producing a more broadly generalisable outcome or a more valid outcome within the limitations acknowledged. I have taken the position that the further I move from the intersubjective interpretation, the less are the benefits of being there in the first place.

The outcome of the limitations of the research is that it is limited to theoretical insights, by virtue of the intersubjective nature of the interpretation, but that, provided it is limited to that position, the methodology remains faithful to the research focus. By acknowledging these limitations and confining the scope of the application of the interpretations I hope to have avoided taking a position of assuming a ‘superior interpretation’ (Heron, 1996) or any implication of single or ‘correct’ interpretation (Janesick, 2000).

Constraints.

Notwithstanding the framework and methodological limitations to the study, there are other aspects of the research that are constrained. In particular I make no attempt to investigate aspects of the student demographics that give rise to difference and potentially varied experiences. The demographic profile outlined in the next chapter gives a broad picture of the students taking part in the course. I have not sought to specifically study the effects of demographic differences, gender, ethnicity, organisational type, previous level of qualifications etc. other than to offer that broad picture. I readily acknowledge that these things may well justify separate investigation in their own right.

24 Though in relation to qualifications it is the case that some students’ experience of access is determined by their entry via RPL.
Finally I acknowledge the limitations and constraints in approaching this research from a relatively novice position and the fact that this has inevitably raised possibilities for improvements that could not practically be implemented.
Chapter five:

The Co-production of Knowledge: The GDSS Case Study.

“Knowledge is always produced under an aspect of continuous negotiation.” (Gibbons et al, 1994:4)
Chapter 5: The GDSS case study.

5.1: Case study composition.

In keeping with the parameters outlined in section 4.4 of the previous chapter, information and data from several sources is used here to provide a description of the degree, its context and operation. The study also outlines the broad characteristics of the students and their organisations. It is reported under four main headings, each representing a major feature of the degree:

Figure 5.1 The four ‘Ps’: aspects of the GDSS case study.

As shown in figure 4.1 above (chapter four, section 4.2), one of the principal sources of information and data is from interviews with key stakeholders in the degree. This core group of informants was largely involved in establishing both the general and specific circumstances under which the degree was developed. It includes the following:

- President of UWS Nepean
- Head of school (HOS)
- CEO ACWA
- Director CCWT (former and current)
- Academic coordinator of the GDSS
- Academic member of the teaching team
- WBL coordinator
On a personal note my role in the teaching and development process has been as director CCWT and as academic member of the teaching team. In addition my involvement with the university/industry partnership began approximately one year prior to the development of the GDSS.

Taking the aspects of the case study in turn, partnership deals with the history, nature and functions of the partnership within which the GDSS was developed. Profile outlines the basic demographics of the student body, their project interests and their organisations. The structure and operations of the course are described in practice and the philosophical underpinnings of the degree are outlined in pedagogy. As the GDSS is one component of the broader ACWA/UWS partnership, the nature of this set of relationships is described first to offer the contextual setting for the case study.

5.2: Partnership.

The development of partnerships is a significant characteristic of both organisations going back over several years. The circumstances of political economy, described in chapter two, underpin the formation of the ACWA/UWS partnership in general. What is reported here is the set of specific influences and conditions in each organisation and in the relationships between the two. Broadly these fit into two categories: organisational strategic directions and individual activities and influences. In relation to the latter there are elements of individual behaviour attributable to people’s formal roles, but also informal actions, played out in the development of personal working relationships. In addition there are structural dimensions to the partnership, that is aspects related to size, variety and diversity of activities.

Using the notion of dimensions of WBL partnership as outlined in chapter 3 (table 3.1, section 3.2) the ACWA/UWS partnership would be described structurally as having a low level of organisational diversity in that formal operational aspects of the partnership are limited to two organisations. There is a moderate level of diversity of activity, incorporating several research projects and other activities³ in addition to

³ For example there have been a number of CS industry forums run jointly by ACWA and UWS.
the GDSS. There is also a moderate level of partnership infrastructure, especially in terms of facilitation of contact for purposes of strategic discussion/planning and collaborative work\(^2\). Though the students form strong links with the members of the teaching team, as ‘partners’ there is a low level of learner inclusion as stakeholders. The implications of these dimensional aspects contribute to general characteristics of the partnership outlined below. In general terms, they set up a relationship which is relatively easy to formalise, having only two parties, and which is sustained by a number of project outcomes - not just WBL and the GDSS. The moderate level of infrastructure facilitates less formal aspects of the partnership – opportunities to meet and the like - which means that there is less reliance on policy and procedure than on contact and dialogue.

Beyond these dimensional aspects are the strategic and personal activities of the organisational and individual stakeholders.

Strategic and personal elements of partnership - UWS.

Within UWS the strategic significance of partnership was recognised as part of the planning process from its inception as a ‘federated university’ in 1988 (Duke, 2001). Also dubbed the ‘network universities’ (Massingham, 2001, Latham 2001), emphasis in organisations such as UWS developed both an internal and external networking orientation conducive to partnership. Duke reflects on leading UWS Nepean through that process in the mid 1990s:

\[ As \, important \, as \, the \, open \, process \, was \, an \, increasingly \, visible \, connection. \, This \, was \, between \, enhanced \, capacity \, to \, collaborate \, and \, network \, internally \, across \, school \, boundaries \, and \, between \, academic \, units \, and \, administration \, on \, the \, one \, hand, \, and \, to \, build \, fruitful \, partnerships \, in \, the \, wider \, world \, on \, the \, other. \, (Duke \, 2001:111). \]

\(^2\) Throughout the lifetime of the partnership there have been regular monthly GDSS meetings at alternating venues, annual review days for the degree and numerous incidental meetings in relation to other projects.
This ‘culture’ persisted beyond unification of the university’s federated members in 2001 through strong policy in relation to regional and community engagement (UWS 2004a, UWS 2004b). It also survived, though not without critique, several restructures (Wagner and Childs, 1997, Duke, 1998, 2001, Wagner, Childs and Field, 1999, Wagner, 2001). The general effect was to create an environment where schools were relatively autonomous and partnership easily negotiated both internally and externally. Reflecting on the structural changes needed to establish such a culture, Duke comments on the outcomes of initial restructures:

*What emerged was not in fact super-faculties but a more radical change, to a flat structure of 20 quite small schools with no other level of administrative division. This allowed the whole school to meet as a face-to-face participating community and develop common identity and purpose.* (2001:109)

Duke also argues that this structural/cultural shift facilitated innovation which was reflected in the people attracted to UWS. “Many outstandingly innovative staff had been attracted to [UWS] Nepean by the prospect of freedom to do things denied in Australia’s older universities by their conservatism.” (2001:108).

A product of these circumstances was vigorous strategic planning at a school level in relation to establishing both partnerships and work related learning projects. In 1997 the rationale for what would become the School’s Workplace Learning Unit, entitled ‘Working Futures’, signalled a clear intention:

*The unit will be established as a:*

- ‘One-stop’ shop for entrepreneurial development, focussed on collaboration, both internally and externally.
- *Fed by a research, development and teaching nucleus for workbased learning, organisational development, the future of work and critical social, environmental and political pedagogy (Wagner and Childs1997:3)*
Within this process was the establishment of a critical commitment to WBL dealt with in section 5.5 below.

This period also reflected GDSS stakeholders’ interest in partnership, developing in parallel to the general strategic direction rather than as a product of it. The input of members of the GDSS team from UWS both informed the strategic process as well as being informed by it – a process more of mutual reciprocity than linear development. For example Wagner, Childs and Field (1999) argue for strategic location of WBL as a sub-set of partnership in discussions about future directions of the School of Community and Organisational Studies (SCOS)\(^3\). This strategic location gave some weight to the development of principles of partnership conducive to the development of WBL. In the words of Wagner, Childs and Field:

*Although partnerships can be quite varied... we propose that they are underpinned by a set of principles, namely commitments to:*

- long term development
- the co-production of knowledge
- collaboration, joint activity, consultation
- changed boundaries between theory, practice and disciplines
- changed boundaries between teaching, research and enterprise
- organisational learning and change (all partners) (1999:1)

The association between partnership and work was also strengthened and influenced by the work of Carla Lipsig-Mumme (1996) of the Canadian Centre for Work and Society. In particular this highlighted the issues of interests within partnership around “divergence of objectives, conflicting class and community [perspectives]” (Lipsig-Mumme, 1996:19). Building on these influences Wagner, Childs and Field suggest that awareness of the nature of partnership is an essential consideration for success and practical action: “partnerships can be driven by economic, philosophical or pragmatic aims, and most likely a combination” (1999:2).

\(^3\) SCOS was one of the 20 new schools described by Duke (2001) resulting from the restructuring processes of the federated UWS Nepean.
The strategic discourse led to a number of elements being foreshadowed for the effective management of partnership within SCOS and the Workplace Learning Unit. These included: multi-disciplinarity, outside ‘ownership’, accountability to all stakeholders, affirmation of the teaching-research nexus and acknowledgement of a period of ‘incubation’ in the initial stages of development. (Wagner, Childs and Field, 1999:6). In particular the last point shows evidence of a wider acceptance of Duke’s (2001) ‘softer’ indicators (as opposed to ‘hard’, economic rationalist indicators) as being important in the initial stages of partnership development.

It is less that these examples of formal discussion led to ‘binding policies’ in relation to partnership formation, than that they set a tone for the way in which the school operated in practical terms. In short, the climate was reasonably conducive to partnership activities that went beyond pure economic rationalist terms – a proposition of some importance for a relatively poor community sector.

The academic coordinator provides a good example of this supportive climate in relating her discussions with the Head of School (HOS) regarding secondment to ACWA in 1998 – a significant event in the development of the partnership. In relation to the experience she comments:

Well from different perspectives it was fabulous for me for a number of reasons. I think it demonstrated to ACWA that we were committed to the relationship, in whatever way, by making that happen. To the university it demonstrated that the partnership was a serious one and wasn’t just about a “have we got a deal for you” sort of development. And it demonstrated to the school that partnerships required a bit more than saying “yes I’ve spoken to the organisation etc.” and that input to partnership development pays off in the end... I said to [the HOS] “I’m going on secondment”. I didn’t ask him I just told him. He said “Mmm”! I mean for him to accept that and to embrace it was an important step – to learn that it was worthwhile doing and wasn’t just a cop out. (Academic coordinator)

This level of support made the process of cementing the partnership relationship relatively easy. Reflecting on his own perspectives the HOS presents a level of
scepticism about partnership, but one which is tempered by a level of support, the like of which is demonstrated by the above comments. On partnerships he expresses some reservations:

It’s income generation that has formed our notion of partnership. For most of us, we wouldn’t have gone to this willingly – we certainly didn’t go to it intelligently and, in most cases, we didn’t go to it having thought what partnerships were… Partnerships are always described in terms of the money they generate – never the other benefits they offer. (HOS)

However his description of advocacy for partnerships (and WBL in particular) is more in keeping with the tone of the academic coordinator’s comments:

In the main my interest in work-based learning has really only been sponsored as a result of chairing a school where there are staff committed to [it]. I try to negotiate and open up opportunities on that basis… I’ve listened to staff speak, they’ve presented their ideas on work-based learning at a school level and we’ve mapped things out… I advocate for that because that’s their passion. That’s the way forward and the motivation that drives them as part of this school. And so the notion of chairing an academic group, deciding on the direction that group will take by not capturing the passions of that group would be a bit of a nonsense. (HOS)

From the perspective of leading the changes the president of UWS Nepean expresses a view that is both pragmatic and optimistic:

The whole world of the university has totally opened up. Its been exploded into the world around it and its totally penetrated by things around it. You can’t put a fence around it… [Partnerships] are great opportunities for universities. They’re also important opportunities to access resources in a mass system in which government will only contribute so much to higher education.

But for all that they have to be real partnerships of an openness and equality, with complimentary things brought to the table. Not a kind of grace and
favour from on high – a kind of intellectual ivory tower – to people who are, on the one hand seen as supplicants and beneficiaries of an unequal relationship, and on the other putting their hands in their pockets and contributing resources. (UWS President)

Within this climate of varying views the academic coordinator comments on the practical issues of marrying pragmatics with philosophical perspectives on partnership and WBL:

In our thinking it came out of pressures within the university to establish alternative ways of delivering education and preferably in a way that could charge fees... The university was pushing partnerships as one sort of collaboration.

To some extent it was an attempt to try and be conservative about what the university wanted, but in a way that we could live with and turn it into something that wasn’t conservative in the actual delivery, content or otherwise – what made sense to us and could be sort of politically justifiable – what we now call sustainable and defensible. (Academic coordinator)

Apart from acting through the relatively formal roles prescribed by strategic and organisational frameworks, there are also personal perspectives contributing to the construction of the partnership. The academic team member gives her own views on the development of the relationship:

I need to feel that link between the way of seeing the world and the people I’m working with. Working with ‘good guys’ and doing something that makes sense. (Academic team member)

She not only highlights the need to have personal affinity with the people in the partnership, but also the practical nature of what that means in partnership terms:

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4 In this instance the academic coordinator is referring to the work of academics within the Workplace Learning Unit in developing the UWS/ACWA partnership.
The Politics of Work-based Learning  Chapter five: The Co-production of Knowledge

Serious partnership requires entry into the reality of the workplace.

(Academic team member)

The academic coordinator also picks up on this personal/practical dimension in terms of partnership endurance and longevity:

From our point of view it lasted because we achieved outcomes fairly people [at ACWA] and I suppose the same happened the other way round regularly and fairly quickly. There was a great sense of being able to rely on. And because there was very little conflict on direction and processes, and a commitment to exploring differences rather than saying “we can’t do that”. So to some extent I think it’s the openness of everybody involved in the process that made it possible as well as reliability and outcomes. (Academic coordinator)

In much the same way as partnership development had strategic and personal elements in UWS so it did in ACWA.

Strategic and personal elements of partnership - ACWA.

The broad climate of deregulation and economic rationalism has its corresponding manifestations in the community sector as outlined in chapter two. In particular the broad shift in the conception of the welfare state (Lyons, 2000, Patulny, 2004), and consequent increased uptake of human services provision, has increased the expectation of collaboration and partnership (Packer, Spence and Beare, 2002, Tett, 2005, Maddison and Denniss, 2005). This has also been impacted upon by ‘social capital’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘third way’ social policy influences (see for example Cox, 1995, Giddens, 2000, Botsman, 2001).

In addition to the general climate ACWA, as a peak organisation representing the interests of an ‘industry’ sector, has a natural inclination towards partnership activity and, through CCWT, a vested interest in work and learning. In this regard there is also a strong representation of partnership development in the organisation’s strategic planning.
In all four key results areas (KRAs) of its strategic planning processes ACWA/CCWT incorporates partnership and networking activities and in relation to UWS had a strong strategic compliment in relation to the partnership development in both research and industry training and development (ACWA, 1998, ACWA, 1999, ACWA, 2000). Several partnerships were developed around VET related training (ACWA, 1999) and the strategic role of CCWT as a registered training organisation (RTO). This was consistent with the role of ACWA as a member of the NSW Community Services and Health Industry Training Advisory Body Board (CSHITAB) and contributor to the CSH Industry Training Plan (NSWCISHITAB, 1998, Spence, Martinez and Barnes, 2000). However, the concern with the dominance of VET, as the means by which the sector would be developed, was also one of the factors which encouraged the development of the UWS partnership.

My own reflections, as director of CCWT, would summarise the strategic thinking as predicated upon:

- cementing our organisational position as leaders in the sector
- meeting the needs of workers in the sector and,
- introducing diversity of approaches in a sector increasingly dominated by VET

In relation to the last point my own feeling was that retention of RTO status (ACWA, 1998, ACWA, 1999) was strategically a case of ‘being on the juggernaut’ as opposed to being run over by it. Notwithstanding the necessity for RTO status and an involvement in VET (reflected in the strategic plan)\(^5\), the idea of developing learning beyond instrumental skills acquisition was seen as a desirable direction for ACWA/CCWT. The development of the GDSS was one way to resist the dominating framework and provide an alternative, academic/critical pathway. Though it represented a personal bias, in terms of what was needed in the sector, it also reflected what I saw as legitimate critique of both the VET system and the political economy

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Much of the critique of VET was shared by colleagues in the organisation, in particular in its inability to meet the needs of sectoral workers from the perspective of developing critical skills. Conversely, the development of the GDSS was seen as an opportunity to engage in critical practice. The CEO ACWA puts the point from the leadership position within ACWA in relation to the development of the course:

*I suppose we were influenced by the idea that a lot of the training that we provide is short, skills based stuff... we wanted people to think more deeply and reflectively about what they were doing and why they were doing it... I do feel that as a sector the whole notion of critically examining the broader influences is diminishing.* (CEO ACWA)

The Director CCWT comments on the perception that the ‘skills-base’ approach has some limitations for workers in the sector:

*They've had lots and lots of practice experience and done a little bit of professional development experience at workshops, but to actually bring to bear a more rigorous reflective process to their work, there aren't a lot of opportunities.* (Director CCWT)

In a climate where partnership was actively sought and, strategically, where the idea of entering an educational and research relationship with the tertiary sector was seen as desirable, the conditions for growing a partnership with UWS were positive. However, as with UWS, the discussions were not necessarily straightforward or ubiquitously supported. In some ways ACWA represented a typical CS sector organisation (Lyons, 2001) in that it reflected occasional tensions between conservative perspectives of the board and innovative ideas from operational staff\(^6\). The process of introducing the GDSS required persuasion of the ACWA board by the ACWA/CCWT stakeholders within the staff. Indeed initial reticence over WBL was

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\(^6\) This is not to say that Lyon’s (2001) point applies uniformly between or within organisations, but that, in this instance, the introduction of the GDSS exemplifies the point.
an aspect of the thinking of those of us on the ACWA/CCWT side directly involved in the setting up of the degree. From a UWS perspective it might well have been seen as a process of first persuading us and then leaving us to persuade the board. The CEO ACWA captures some of these sentiments in a series of comments on both WBL and the need to win over the board⁷:

[The academic coordinator’s secondment from UWS] really gave us an enormous boost. To be really frank it was her idea and we were sort of going along with it because it sounded promising... I can remember her introducing the concept to us and, as I’ve already said, I don’t think I particularly understood it very well – how you do a qualification while basically remaining in the workplace. But it sounded exiting, sounded promising, so she said “how about we investigate it further?” It very quickly formed up into a solid proposal – significant enough to take to the board. (CEO ACWA)

This ‘first stage’ of the GDSS development reflected a position of how the CEO ACWA saw the role of his own leadership and the direction of the staff of the organisation. In relation to our everyday work within the organisation (albeit in keeping with the strategic planning) these practical first steps were the result of the work of the staff:

And there was some self-interest, I think, for the organisation, because it was important for us, at that time, to get some new ideas; to form some new partnerships and to be a bit more progressive in our approach - to try and keep ourselves at the cutting edge of the sector. Its important for us to be constantly turning over what it is that we’re doing and whether it’s using our limited resources for the most benefit. I suppose I try and marry my professional views about thinking critically with the organisation’s role and what’s happening in the sector. (CEO ACWA)

The question of persuading the board followed on. The CEO ACWA continues:

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⁷ As a peak community organisation the board of ACWA largely consists of CEOs and senior management of member organisations, academics and prominent practitioners within the sector.
The board in general were fairly lukewarm about the idea frankly. There were a couple of people on the board who were quite influential – they were convinced that there was a need, but they didn’t quite get it [WBL]. And there was some doubt as to whether people would sign up. They accepted the issue, but they were really much more of the view that people should do traditional, orthodox [courses]. The board is fairly conservative really in this organisation. We had to sort of sell it – we had to win the argument. (CEO ACWA)

This process of both being ‘sold’ on and of ‘selling’ the idea of WBL represented more of a learning process than an impediment to the development of the course and the partnership. A certain level of openness to ideas facilitated positive actions and established the groundwork for the formal basis of the partnership and the initial service agreement on which the course and broader aspects were based (ACWA 1999:13). Having established this formal ‘setting up’ the future success was then more reliant on the ongoing approach to and management of the relationship. In other words how the organisations worked in partnership once established.

General characteristics of the ongoing partnership.

Considering these strategic and personal elements from both sides of the fence, it is possible to articulate some key features of the ongoing ACWA/UWS collaboration and to discuss these in the context of broader commentary on university/industry partnership. Several authors have identified characteristics of successful collaboration as well as problems associated with partnership models, (Chalmers, Swallow and Miller, 2001, Bernal, Shellman and Reid, 2004, Bringle and Hatcher, 2002, Reeve and Gallacher, 2005). From a consideration of the case study data, the key features of the ACWA/UWS partnership are:

- Strategic intent.
- Cultural dialogue.
- Open and Like-mindedness.
- Facilitation of conflict resolution
• **Individual commitment.**
• **Quick development of concrete plans.**
• **Positive and timely initial outcomes.**

These features are not stand alone aspects, but facilitate stronger partnership through their influence on each other. They also span a number of features described in the literature. A significant case in point is *strategic intent* in that it provides organisational clarity around which *cultural dialogue* can take place. *Strategic intent* and *cultural dialogue* facilitate the establishment of compatibility of interests and the relevance of what is actually on offer in the partnership (Reeve and Gallacher, 2005:224). They allow stakeholders to assess how to “add value” and “broaden the scale and scope of intervention” (Tett, 2004:4) through partnership formation.

Within the ACWA/UWS partnership *strategic intent* and *cultural dialogue* also help develop common goals and understanding of purpose, cited as central to successful partnership by a number of authors, (Chalmers *et al*, 2001, Bringle and Hatcher, 2002, Bernal *et al*, 2004).

Several strong sentiments are outlined in the literature that resonate with the idea of *open and like-mindedness* and *facilitation of conflict resolution*. These include notions of open communications and planning (Bernal *et al*, 2004), collaboration and clearly defined roles and purpose (Bringle and Hatcher, 2002) and effective communication (Chalmers *et al*, 2001). To some extent this is also about ‘getting on’ and reflects the notion of *individual commitment*. The Director CCWT expresses some aspects of the relationship that embody these things:

*My sense is that a lot of the strength of [the partnership] is the personal relationships between the different players. When we meet as a team from ACWA and UWS there is a lot of conviviality about the meeting. I think it’s a very positive aspect – in the sense that there is a lot of mutual respect. There is a partnership around thinking through the difficulties, there is a sharing of the workload, so everyone is getting an experience of students, of teaching, of analysing some of the issues and working out changes to the program. I don’t...*
feel it is driven from one side of the partnership, but from both sides. I think that sometimes one part of the partnership will bring an expertise to bear that the other side may not have as strongly, but I think that is kind of recognised and exists on both sides. (Director CCWT)

The sense of partners bringing to bear expertise echoes the CEO ACWA’s sentiments (above) in relation to the newness of the concept of WBL. While there is a general emphasis on shared goals and cultural compatibility - i.e. like-mindedness - there is also a significant requirement for open mindedness – i.e. the willingness to be persuaded to change. Bernal et al make the point well: “partners should be committed to assimilating changes while keeping the core values of the program intact” (2004:36).

In a related sense, aspects of open and like-mindedness reflect the need for partnership to stand for something in and of itself. Several authors describe partnerships in terms of mutual or beneficial exchanges (Chalmers, 2001, Williams, Labonte, Randall and Muhajarine, 2005), but some also suggest a relationship which goes beyond this. Packer Spence and Beare (2002) describe a form of symbiotic relationship which is more about interdependency than exchange (2002:321). Bringle and Hatcher (2002) suggest that: “[w]hen dependency is mutual, it leads to healthy interdependency” (2002:510) and that this engenders a shift “from and exclusively exchange orientation to a more communal one that considers joint outcomes”

In the ACWA/UWS partnership there are elements of the relationship which have this quality in terms of shared experience unique to the partners. From my own perception this is about the uniqueness of the lifeworld that exists around the GDSS teaching team and associated planning involved. An aspect of this is also reflected in specific roles which transcend the ACWA/UWS divide, notably the role of the WBL coordinator – who is employed by both organisations, establishing an organisational ‘hub’ to the GDSS partnership.

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8 Emphasis added.
9 See chapter 4, section 4.3.
10 Post 2003 and the expansion of the degree this involved two people employed exclusively on the GDSS as WBL coordinators. (See Ingham and Martinez, 2000).
While applied examples in the literature focus on project outcomes, (eg. Packer et al, 2002, Bernal et al, 2004, Williams et al, 2005) a less commonly featured aspect of partnership outcomes is their role in sustaining the partnership itself. Both the quick development of concrete plans and positive and timely outcomes have a consolidating effect on the ACWA/UWS partnership. This is particularly true of the ACWA perspective. In contrast to the reluctance of the board to take up the model initially (noted above) the early success of the GDSS plays a significant role in winning support. In relation to this success the CEO ACWA comments:

_We haven’t gone back. There hasn’t been a lot of discussion about the course since [its inception]. But I do certainly detect a considerable level of kudos for the organisation and for the board in being part of this initiative. It would be interesting for some of the leaders to have a more direct discussion about the course – because I suspect they would have a rather different view now._ (CEO ACWA)

Speaking from the university side in relation to the perceived success of the early aspects of the GDSS partnership, the academic coordinator reflects:

_Well from our point of view, from my point of view, I think what has worked and why it has lasted is because we achieved outcomes fairly regularly and fairly quickly. There was a great sense of being able to rely on people and I suppose the same happened the other way round._ (Academic coordinator)

A number of the key features are enhanced by what might be described as serendipity – i.e. a set of fortuitous circumstances that were neither planned, nor predictable – although, once again, a level of open mindedness contributed to the taking advantage of such events. The academic coordinator’s reflections give some good examples. She makes the following comments in relation to the partnership:

_Well there’s a historical development of course. It didn’t just fall out of the sky. It came out in our thinking – it came out of pressure within the university to establish alternative ways of delivering education, and preferably in ways which we could charge fees._
My own experience in the community sector in the past led to the thinking that, if there was a way of doing this sensibly, with the most benefit to the most people, then the sector would be worth looking at. (Academic coordinator)

While the logic of the action was there, the initial development of the relationship with ACWA is less to do with planning than circumstances:

We talked to [another peak organisation] about how they viewed education throughout the sector and what they thought was relevant and important and necessary. But whilst we got some important information, we didn’t think they were interested in any developments. In some ways [the ACWA partnership] was a partnership of convenience in the sense that we knew people – individuals. (Academic coordinator)

The lack of interest from the ‘other organisation’ is simply fortuitous in terms of involvement the involvement of ACWA. A further comment also exemplifies the serendipitous nature:

I think it was only really at the point when we started to develop the degree that it emerged that there was more to the partnership than convenience and circumstances\textsuperscript{11}. There was a lot of overlap in terms of people’s visions and so forth… because you could have had, for example, a CEO and manager of CCWT who had completely different views on how education should be done. We could have faced two people who were completely wedded to the competency agenda let’s say. (Academic coordinator)

Though there are obvious links to key features, such as open and like-mindedness and individual commitment in these examples, there is also a significant circumstantial theme.

\textsuperscript{11} Previous comments had addressed the fortuitous circumstances of money available and opportunity to work with ACWA.
Finally, these key features of the ACWA/UWS partnership are manifest in a number of operational characteristics. These are:

- Regular meetings
- Annual planning and review days
- Hands on experience and practice from both parties
- Specifically dedicated staff and resources
- Stable/low turnover in stakeholder personnel

These operational characteristics have provided the basis for the partnership to maintain a strong identity within the ACWA/UWS dealings.

For a number of reasons the ACWA/UWS partnership seems to have avoided some of the pitfalls described by others. Reeve and Gallacher (2005) suggest that the very emphasis on partnership itself in WBL may be problematic and Tett (2005:5) discusses problems with idealised models in community partnerships. One aspect is the possible distinction between corporate examples of partnership, and their problematic features (Gustavs and Clegg, 2005) and community sector examples such as this one. A number of these issues are discussed in chapters seven and eight.

5.3 Profile.

The data presented below looks at student profiles in relation to age, gender, mode of entry to the degree\textsuperscript{12} and workplace location. It also gives an indication of organisational type, job type and the nature of the work-based project. Primarily the information focuses on the two cohorts from which the interviewees were selected, but some additional information is provided for the first five years in order to facilitate some assessment of how the demographics have changed.

\textsuperscript{12} i.e. Entry via RPL or on the basis of previous qualifications.
Basic demographics.

Of the students graduating in 2000 there were 20 enrolments in the course, of which 17 students graduated. In 2001 there were 18 enrolments, of which 15 graduated. Of these 38 students there were three men and 17 women in the first year and one man and 17 women in the second year. The average age of the first cohort was 40.6 years\(^{13}\) and for the second cohort was 39.5 years\(^{14}\). 17 of the 2000 cohort entered the degree via RPL, three having previous degrees. In 2001, 16 people entered via RPL, four having previous degrees. Of the first cohort all degree holders had undergraduate degrees, whereas, of the degree holders in the second cohort, two had undergraduate degrees and two had masters degrees.

In terms of location, students are described here as coming from one of three categories: metropolitan (Sydney and surrounds), regional (significant urban centres outside Sydney) or rural (smaller country towns). In 2000, there were five regional, one rural and 14 metropolitan based students. In 2001, there were three regional, three rural and 12 metropolitan based students. Table 5.1 summarises this basic demographic data over the first five years of the degree. From the data, there has been a minor increase in the proportion of men in the course, but generally the demographics are reflective of the industry – largely women with substantial workforce/life experience, with no formal qualifications at a tertiary level.

Organisations, jobs and projects.

Of the 38 students in the first two years of the degree there was a variety of organisational settings. This ranged from small, one or two person community based projects to large government organisations. Most people worked in front line positions, i.e. with direct client contact, with a few in coordinating roles or positions managing front line staff. Table 5.2 (p141) classifies organisations into several broad types and indicates the numbers of students working in each type. Following a brief description of the variety of job types, table 5.3 (p142) gives representative examples of projects from a range of settings typical of the students interviewed.

\(^{13}\) 20-29 yrs = 2; 30-39 yrs = 4; 40-49 yrs = 11; 50-59 yrs = 3. Total = 20.
\(^{14}\) 20-29 yrs = 4; 30-39 yrs = 5; 40-49 yrs = 5; 50-59 yrs = 4. Total = 18.
Table 5.1: GDSS Student demographics 2000-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of graduation</th>
<th>Enrolments</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Ratio F:M</th>
<th>Completions n (%)</th>
<th>Metro</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Entry by RPL n (%)</th>
<th>Average age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.7:1</td>
<td>17 (85)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17 (85)</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17:1</td>
<td>15 (83)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16 (89)</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.5:1</td>
<td>20 (91)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19 (86)</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.7:1</td>
<td>31 (94)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29 (88)</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.4:1</td>
<td>35 (83)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35 (85)</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All years</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.9:1</td>
<td>118 (88)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>116 (86)</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data not available.
In terms of organisational types the descriptors used here are informal. The intention is to give a sense of workplace size and operational focus. For example Not for Profit/CBOs is used in this context to describe a small to medium sized organisation relying on a mix of government funding, such as SAAP\textsuperscript{15} funding, and donations based funding.

Typical examples in this category may include locally focused organisations providing a mix of services or projects, or special interest group associations catering to the needs of a particular community.

\textit{Government} is used to describe predominantly state government departments such as Department of Community Services (DoCS), Juvenile Justice (JJ) and Department of Housing (DoH) – all of which have had multiple student participation – as well as NSW Police and NSW Fire Brigades and the federal Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). Local Community Services Association (LCSA) includes neighbourhood and community centres which have membership of the LCSA. They are typically small to medium organisations, under community management and based on community development principles (LCSA, 2005). In a similar way \textit{Family Services} involves small/medium, centre based organisations which are members of NSW Family Services and provide localised family support (Family Services n.d.).

The term \textit{NGO} has been used here to signify large non-government organisations, in many cases operating on a scale similar to government departments in terms of people employed and organisational complexity. Examples would include Barnados, Wesley-Dalmar, Centacare and Burnside. Some NGOs operate from a faith based framework, while others are secular in operation. While NGOs may have discrete programs in various localities, the students listed in this category of table 5.2 were generally working in a large/complex organisational context.

\textsuperscript{15} Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program funding provided by a combination of state and federal government sources (NSW Department of Community Services, 2004).
Students from a local government (LGA) background are predominantly from within the Community Services section of their LGA, usually employed in a social planning, community development or children’s services context.

Although *Refuges* do not figure in the first two years they are listed separately for two reasons. Firstly, they have a significant representation in the course and secondly, because students from a refuge context have a strong affiliation to that context, (for example Women’s Refuge Movement) rather than to any particular auspicing body (NSW Women’s Refuge Resource Centre, n.d., ¶ 1). Students from *Other* locations included examples such as peak organisations, migrant resource centres etc. as well as some students whose work was not in a paid/workplace context. A good example was a student who set up a self-help network around a particular disability issue in relation to her own life experiences.

From table 5.2, it can be seen that the workplace setting for a significant number of the GDSS students is typically a small to medium community based organisation. Taking into account the sub-divisions of larger organisations, such as NGOs and LGAs, as many as two thirds of the students work in a relatively small workplace.

Within the group of students from years one and two there were some common job types. 31 of the cohort were front-line workers, of which the most common job description type was ‘support worker’. Of the 10 support workers in this category, the terms ‘disability’, ‘youth’ and ‘accommodation’ were represented in their job titles. There were three students who were classified as ‘family support workers’ specifically – all of which worked in a family services context as described in table 5.2. Four people had the job description of ‘youth worker’. A number of people had the term ‘officer’ in their job title – which generally indicated client contact, either on a caseload basis or through group work or community development work. The titles ranged from generic ‘project officer’ positions to specific titles such as ‘Housing Officer’, ‘Health Officer’ etc. All in all nine people fell into this category. Remaining front-line workers, had a variety of titles: librarian, volunteer, policy officer etc. which generally reflected their work.

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16 Though some projects within accommodation services, categorised under *CBOs*, ran on refuge-like models.
Table 5.2: Numbers of GDSS students by organisational type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational Type</th>
<th>Years 1&amp;2</th>
<th>Years 3-5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not for Profit/CBO</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCSA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuge</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven students had responsibility for coordination of teams of workers or volunteers. Some of these managed a number of programs in small, centre based settings. Typically job titles included terms such as ‘coordinator’, ‘team leader’ and ‘manager’. In keeping with the ‘snapshot’ objective of the case study, table 5.3 details examples of jobs, organisational setting and project for a representative group of students from this cohort.

\[17\] NB data not available for 11 students. This is primarily because they enrolled, but either did not attend or progress beyond the first study block.
### Table 5.3: GDSS projects by organisational setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Organisational setting</th>
<th>Position description</th>
<th>Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>Head office of large NGO – major area of work in family and children’s services and substitute care.</td>
<td>Policy Officer – working with manager of policy in substitute care.</td>
<td>Organisational change agency. Developing and implementing new substitute care policy with front-line workers in line with major organisational restructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy.</td>
<td>Registered Training Organisation – medium sized organisation providing training and education in CS sector.</td>
<td>Trainer/Coordinator – working with consultant trainers and organisational staff to develop and provide training and education.</td>
<td>Action research project on IT needs of small CBOs with no IT support. Developing IT support network for CBOs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary.</td>
<td>Small, community based project team – auspiced by, and working in close association with large NGO in rural/regional setting.</td>
<td>Coordinator – responsible for several projects around youth issues and accommodation through drop-in centre model.</td>
<td>Development of access models for young people identifying as gay/lesbian/same sex orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan.</td>
<td>LCSA – community based centre with several program areas in rural setting.</td>
<td>Family support worker – working with young mothers.</td>
<td>Development of self-help model for young mums around parenting, life skills and second chance education opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Though the association between work and learning in WBL obviates a certain level of experience, it is less easy to ascertain accurate figures on experience within a given job. As a requirement to enter the degree by RPL, (~85% of the students) applicants are required to demonstrate at least three years full time equivalence in employment in the sector. As a result accurate accounts of complete employment history are not essential and are varied. From the first two groups of students it was possible to gain reasonable accounts from about 80% of the RPL based applicants (24 students). Of this group eight students (~40%) had 3-5 years experience, while the same number had over 10 years experience; the remainder having 5-10 years. All other students (i.e. those entering via previous qualifications) had some level of experience. The youngest student to date (21 years) came from a youth activist background and had over five years experience as a client/advocate in substitute care.

5.4 Practice.

Practice encompasses a description of the degree in terms of content and structure as well as the organisation of learning and the people, resources and processes put in place to support it. It also includes the ways in which entry is gained to the GDSS. The description of how the learning is organised also provides the framework for the assessment of the degree.

Given that the central feature of the GDSS is a work-based project, the aspects of practice outlined above are designed around supporting and facilitating the completion of the work-based project. For that reason the project development process is also described as a key aspect of practice.

Course content

The course content can be described in two ways: the first is a ‘formal’ description based on the academic requirements of the university, the second is a ‘practical’ description, based on the need to facilitate the melding of tacit and explicit knowledge, characteristic of WBL and described in chapter three. Table 5.4 captures

18 As per discussions in section 5.2 this can be ‘unpaid” work. (Wagner and Childs, 1997)
the formal description of the course. A graduate diploma, compliant with the
requirements of the university, consists of a combination of academic units of specific
‘credit point’ values totalling 80 ‘credit points’ in all (UWS, 2004c). Each unit in this
formal description has a discrete unit outline with specific content and outcomes
defined. However, the need to apply content holistically and in a ‘practical’ context
led to the development of an integrated learning matrix – providing the framework
for both the learning and assessment processes in practice. Table 5.5 outlines this
matrix.

Table 5.4: Course description GDSS (Community Services)\textsuperscript{19}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit descriptions</th>
<th>Number of credit points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester one\textsuperscript{*}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Context of Community services</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Workbased Research and Academic Competence</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Workbased Project 1A</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Policy in Community Services</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Social Ecology of Client and Worker in CS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Workbased Project 1B</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{*}NB. Students can exit with a Graduate Certificate in Social Sciences (Community Services) (40 credit points) upon the successful completion of units in semester one.

Taking this practical framework as a starting point, students are invited to develop
their work-based projects in response to a series of integrated learning outcomes
posed in terms of the broad question: “what learning outcomes am I working
towards?” (Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001:326). These integrated learning
outcomes questions are listed in table 5.6.

\textsuperscript{19} Adapted from the UWS Course Handbook (UWS, 2004c).
Table 5.5: Learning/Assessment matrix GDSS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning areas</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study related</td>
<td>Collects information</td>
<td>Shows understanding of reference materials</td>
<td>Analyses literature in the context of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Searches for existing data</td>
<td>Links reference materials to the development of the project</td>
<td>Provides an analysis of the learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References competently</td>
<td>Provides a well thought-out ‘story’ of the learning process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describes raw data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summarises referenced materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provides a well organised lay-out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project related</td>
<td>Poses questions</td>
<td>Consistently writes in Learning Journal</td>
<td>Develops a convincing argument about the way the project is being done and why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document peer group meetings</td>
<td>Understands the way the project is developing</td>
<td>Links the Learning Journal an exploration of the reference material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document project actions (field notes)</td>
<td>Understands the learning that occurs in the peer group meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work related</td>
<td>Positions project in the work context</td>
<td>Develops understanding about work</td>
<td>Positions project in broad political, social and economic contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies direct relationship between work and project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflects and comments on relevance of multiple sources of data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of student input around project development, and the practical framework established around the matrix, a holistic learning strategy is developed for the degree:

*The team developed a complex set of criteria to guide the assessment of projects and journals and specific assessment tasks, such as force field analysis and a strategic plan for students’ projects. The breadth of assessment was considered through study related, work related and project related descriptors that are also intended to reflect the technical, interpretive and critical aspects of the learning process. (Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001:327).*

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20 Adapted from Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, (2001:327).
Table 5.6: Integrated outcomes questions posed to GDSS student around course participation and work-base project development.\textsuperscript{21}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What learning outcomes am I working towards?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A complex understanding of community service sector relationships in relation to policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A complex understanding of changing societal values bases</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A complex understanding of policy impact in relation to clients, workers and organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Critical analysis of concepts and frameworks impacting on provision of community services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Development of an analytical response to the changing role of the state and individual in the provision of community services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Application of critical and analytical competence to specific workplace contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Integration of multiple perspectives on community services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Improved response to complexity and ambiguity of clients’ needs and environments</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Development of multidisciplinary interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Complex analysis of the individual/system interface</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Development of strategies for critical reflection in everyday practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consideration of frameworks for analysis and decision making in community services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Developing research competence in application to work-based project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing critical analysis of research paradigms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the role of ‘research’ and the researcher in the community sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of writing skills in the community service sector (eg. Submission writing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two examples of the application of the matrix to these specific assessment tasks are outlined in table 5.7. In these examples specific project related assessments – *Project Outline* and *Force Field Analysis* – are located within formal unit content (27028, *Workbased Project 1A* and 60018, *Research in the Community*)\textsuperscript{22} and mapped across the developmental areas of *skill*, *understanding* and *analysis*. The assessment tasks are also organised in such a way as to compliment a cyclical process of learning in the degree, following three distinct phases: *understanding and describing practice; problematising practice*, and *reshaping practice* (Wagner and Childs 2001:10). This practical framework is also designed to be consistent with the application of *critical social pedagogy*, discussed in section 5.5 below.

\textsuperscript{21} Adapted from Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook (2001:326).  
\textsuperscript{22} UWS Handbook, 2004c.
Table 5.7: Learning matrix assessment task examples.

**Assessment 2: Project Outline**

**Due: 11th April**

Provide a project outline that describes your project idea (what), its background and history (why) and steps taken for its implementation (how). This includes a description of your organisation and where your own job and the project fits. What are the benefits of your project? Consider any ethical issues.

This assignment is fundamental to the on-going project development and implementation. It sets the parameters for the final project. The assignment requires that students deal with the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>27028 Workbased Project 1A</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Project Outline             | • Description of the problem the project is to address  
                              • Project Planning | • The reasons for the project (rationale) are convincing  
                              • Discussion of ethical issues, whether or not formal ethics application is required | • The potential impact of the project needs to be anticipated as part of the planning process. In this assignment the project needs to be positioned in a workplace context. |

**Assessment 3: Force Field Analysis & Applied FFA**

**Due: 6th June**

In Block 2 you will be introduced to the concept of Force Field Analysis (FFA). You will use this to describe the status quo of your workplace in relation to your project. You will identify the restraining and driving forces impacting on it. Using FFA, develop strategies for your project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>60018 Research in the Community</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Force Field Analysis & Applied Force Field Analysis | • Describes driving and restraining forces in relation to the problem | • positions project in context of work  
                              • demonstrates an understanding of strategic planning processes  
                              • provides overview of the personal, group, organisational & political forces shaping their project | • Analyses relationship between work and project  
                              • Formulates strategies |
Course structure.

The GDSS has two structural aspects, firstly there is an operational structure which outlines the teaching and support roles and functions, and secondly there is a logistical structure which describes how the learning is arranged over the duration of the course. The degree is one year full-time consisting of the work-based project and fifteen days of block study, aimed at supporting the project, spread over four blocks throughout the year. Entry to the degree can be by means of previous undergraduate or postgraduate qualification or by RPL, based on a minimum of three years full-time equivalent experience in the community services sector\(^{23}\) (UWS, 2004c). Figure 5.2, below, shows the operational structure of the degree, while table 5.8 shows the logistical structure.

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\(^{23}\) Including volunteer or activist work.
Table 5.8: Logistical structure of the GDSS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sep</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>Students Input</td>
<td>Block 1* – 5 days</td>
<td>(peer group meetings)</td>
<td>Block 2 – 4 days</td>
<td>(peer group meetings)</td>
<td>Block 3 – 4 days</td>
<td>(peer group meetings)</td>
<td>Block 4 – 2 days</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>Work-based Coordinator(s) Input</td>
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<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>Teaching Team Input</td>
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<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>LSU/Library input</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangement of assessment tasks/learning cycle</td>
<td>A1 Project outline</td>
<td>A 2 Literature review</td>
<td>A 3 Force Field Analysis</td>
<td>A 4 Critical Incident Analysis</td>
<td>A 5 Project Report</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** NB. ** Thickness of arrows indicates level of input; dashed lines indicate secondary involvement in process. LSU = Learning Skills Unit.

** Blocks do not extend over whole month, but occur as a single event within that month.

Arrows in shaded area are for duration of block only – i.e. shaded area is not to scale.
The groups identified in figure 5.2 comprise the stakeholders who have input to the degree shown in table 5.8. From a student perspective the main input from the teaching team is during the periods of block study. During the first block students are also formed into peer groups which meet for support and collective approaches to their project work in the periods between blocks. Each member of the teaching team is assigned to a peer group and provides the principal feedback for students in that group, including project assessment, throughout the year. Learning Skills Unit (LSU) and library staff are co-opted into the teaching team to provide specific sessions on academic skills and general support throughout the course. The practical and non-academic backgrounds of the students, described earlier, (Spence, Martinez and Barnes, 2000) necessitate input around writing and research skills.

The core teaching team is comprised of the CEO ACWA and Director CCWT, and the two academic staff from the university. Teaching on the blocks is divided roughly equally between each member.

Although very much part of the teaching team the position of WBL coordinator has been separated out for the purposes of this description, due to the specific and special role played by that person. The role is essentially a support role for students and a first point of contact for any issues arising during the course of their involvement in the degree. To some extent the role of WBL coordinator also operates as a trouble shooting role at the interface between students, teaching team, employers and university. Ingham and Martinez (2003) have used the metaphor of WBL coordinator acting as a hub at the centre of a windmill:

> Using the metaphor of a windmill with three sails and a central point the Workbased Learning Coordinator’s role will be described as a pivot around which the sails swing. Each sail represents the teaching team, the students and the university respectively. (Ingham and Martinez, 2003:PP)

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24 Guest lecturers are not included in figure 5.8 as their inclusion is variable and based on responses to issues that arise in block periods. They may include significant community sector leaders, activists or commentators and are invited by the teaching team after consideration of the input needed.

25 In 2003 the position of WBL coordinator was expanded to include two people.
While not refuting this, Armitage and Lamelas (2005) offer a series of alternative metaphors for WBL coordinator practice and provide an additional insight into the role as one of one where they “act in the gaps” (2005:10) between students and teaching team.

As shown in table 5.8, the input of the WBL coordinator remains consistent throughout the course whereas other teaching team members tend to have intense input in block sessions and take a secondary role in the periods between blocks. While not the focus of this case study or this research in general, some aspects of the role of the WBL coordinator are discussed in chapter seven in relation to the experience of students on the degree.

The development of student projects, from commencement of the degree to completion, is facilitated through the application of the learning matrix described in table 5.5, in keeping with the integrated learning outcomes questions outlined in table 5.6 and the inputs and activities laid out in table 5.8. While the projects are not required to conform to any particular set of arrangements or format, such as a formal learning contract (Houlbrook and Wagner, 2004), the expectation placed on students is that they will negotiate a project which benefits the workplace in some way (Wagner and Childs 2001) and is sufficient to meet the requirements of the degree:

As a part of a postgraduate degree, the project needs to be sufficiently complex to allow the development of investigative and research skills. The project needs to lead to a ‘product’ that adds value to the [organisation] and meets both the assessment criteria of the course and organisational expectations. (Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001:328)

As change activities in their work context, the projects are informed by frameworks developed from inputs by the teaching team, for example in relation to Force Field Analysis (Lewin, 1951) and critical incident analysis, (Tripp, 1993, Angelides, 2001). The assessment tasks reflect the various stages of the learning cycle described above in above and indicated in table 5.8. These issues are taken up from a pedagogical perspective below.
5.5 Pedagogy.

The philosophical underpinnings of the GDSS emerged, as with the principles of partnership, from a combination of perspectives existing within ACWA and UWS. The sense of open and like-mindedness, to which the partnership is partly attributable, is also the basis on which the pedagogical approach to the degree was developed.

Various descriptions of the degree (Wagner and Childs 2001, Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook, 2001, Houlbrook and Wagner, 2004) refer to the philosophical underpinnings as derived from Critical Social Pedagogy (CSP). Though CSP has a particular meaning as described by Wagner and Childs (2001) its application to the GDSS is less rigid, due to the influences derived from both sides of the partnership. What is presented here is a brief summary of those influences and their practical amalgamation in the context of the degree.

From a UWS perspective the notion of CSP is more theorised and academically based, while the ACWA perspective is more about the application of a critical framework. The term CSP came from the university side of the partnership, but finds common expression in the context of the degree through the following definition:

*Critical Social Pedagogy [is] the application of an interdisciplinary action focus with the aim to balance power inequities and economic, social and political disadvantage.* (Wagner and Childs 2001:5)

An essential feature of this pedagogical framing is that CSP is about change and WBL provides the means by which students can operate as change agents within their workplaces. Another aspect is the centrality of criticality to the learning process.

From within ACWA, criticality, and support for CSP, is influenced by two sources. Given the organisational focus on children’s welfare issues, and the background of individuals within the organisation, one strong influence has been the tradition of critical/radical social work. In general terms this is about the intersection of social work practice with the role of the state and service provision – bringing insights to bear from the perspective of feminist, culturally sensitive and collective trajectories –
articulated in particular by Brake and Bailey, (1980). It is a tradition which has resisted oppressive constructions of client identities and recognised the relationships of power and agency in service provision (Wearing, 1998), as well reflexive practice and an acknowledgement of the influence of critical theory more formally in social work (Payne, Adams and Dominelli, 2002). Adams (2002) describes an approach to critical practice in keeping with the organisational view of ACWA (Spence, Martinez and Barnes, 2000) in relation to sector needs:

Inevitably, because critical thinking will use the experience of action and its outcomes to inform further thinking, critical practice is a cycle in which thinking is bound up with action. This is part of a reflexive cycle, as practitioners are engaged in and committed to the struggle to develop their practice through a questioning rather than a defensive approach. (Adams, 2002:83).

Through the role played by CCWT, as the educational arm of ACWA, the second influence on the industry perspective on criticality derives from the realm of critical adult education. In particular this is influenced by popular critical educational responses to contemporary political economy (Foley, 2004, Newman, 1993, 1994, 1999), some of which overlaps with a social work perspective (Mayo and Thompson, 1995) as well as higher education (Duke, 1995). The concern with VET and competency based training expressed in section 5.2 of this chapter exemplifies this critical perspective in the popular vein.26

As with a critical social work perspective, the critical adult education orientation of CCWT incorporates a lifeworld and system view consistent with a Habermasian social theory, but translated through more popular authors such as Mayo (1995) and, in particular, Welton, (1995) in his critical positioning of adult education as a defense of the lifeworld. As Welton puts it:

In a world where both symbolic and material reproductive processes are radically unstable – the lifeworld is increasingly stripped of its life-orienting

potential and economic restructuring is wreaking havoc throughout all societal domains – “adult education” will always be called to serve two masters (system or lifeworld). (Welton, 1995:131)

By contrast, the university perspective of CSP specifically identifies theoretical sources of the interdisciplinary influences. Wagner and Childs (2001) present a view of CSP as having four broad disciplinary influences: education, philosophy, psychology and sociology. Wagner (2001) outlines a schema of these theoretical relationships, reproduced in figure 5.3 below. This schema provides much of the theoretical impetus for pedagogical consensus within the partnership. The resultant practical application of CSP – in relation to the GDSS learning cycle outlined in the previous section (see table 5.8) - is summarised is figure 5.4.

This manifestation of CSP, therefore, applies its theorisation around hope, experience, change and social justice. Drawing on the multidisciplinary facets of CSP outlined in figure 5.3 and the ‘industry’ perspectives outlined above, a number of specific influences can be described in relation to these four things. A brief description is provided here in order to elucidate CSP practice in this instance.

The starting point of hope as “ontogenetic principle” (Wagner and Childs, 2001:5) represents an increasing engagement with Bloch’s ‘principle of hope’ (1986) within the framework of critical theory (Gekle, 1988, Aronson, 1999, Sinnerbrink, et al, 2005, Smith, 2005). This extends to the idea of conceptualising ‘utopia’ in a practical sense (David and Wilkinson, 2002, Browne 2005). While the ontological status is not universally confirmed (Smith 2005), its essence and intent are given voice. As Gekle (1988:57) remarks on this ontological orientation: “It searches for a place in the future where the substantial content of this hope can establish a colony”. Essentially hope informs CSP from the point of view of envisioning change for the better in a practical way.

27 Taken from Wagner (2001) presentation notes on CSP.
Figure 5.3: Adaptation of Wagner’s framework for understanding CSP

**Philosophy**
- Hope as ontogenetic principle: Bloch
- Individual action as a fundamental moral and ethical category: Arendt
- Human and social development as the result of class struggle: Marx/Engels

**Psychology:**
- Psychology of human action: The development of abstract concepts from concrete operations: Leontjev, Vygotsky
- Critical psychology: The ontogenetic development of the individual as a reflection of material processes: Holzkamp
- Psychoanalysis: Individual reflection of social, economic and political structures: Fromm,

**Sociology**
- Organisations as ‘organic’ processes, individuals and organisations at the centre of force fields: Lewin
- Communicative action, unveiling of power as distortion of the ideal speech situation. Human interest and knowledge generation: Habermas
- Power as fundamental sociological category. Foucault
- Work as fundamental social category: Offe

**Education:**
- Integrating theory and practice, developing critical minds: Dewey
- Work as education process, collective self-determination: Makarenko
- Dialogue and Demystification: Freire

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Figure 5.4: A Pedagogical Framework for the GDSS.

1. Developing a notion of hopefulness, based on a utopian conception, establishing a rationale for change.

2. Engaging with the experience of work – using tools for description and analysis to develop a critical perspective.

3. Project as a means of changing/reshaping experience towards social justice outcomes.
Freire (1994), having spent a lifetime in action, emphasises the ontological need of hope from a critical perspective:\(^28\):

"We need critical hope in the way a fish needs unpolluted water. The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naïveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism. But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if the struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion (Freire, 1994:8)."

Bloch’s own resolve underpins the idea of transition from thought to action and is captured emphatically as follows: “There is never anything soft about conscious hope, but a will within it insists: it should be so, it must become so” (1986:147).

It is in the context of hope that CSP also asserts a social component. Aronson (1999) examines the relevance of Bloch from the point of view of individuality and the privatisation of hope – in particular in relation to Fukuyama’s\(^29\) notion of the ‘end of history’ and capitalism’s ‘victory’ over communism – and strongly argues the irrevocably social nature of the capitalist mode of production. Aronson’s argument draws on the collective imperative to make the point: “whether it is spelled under the old name of socialism or not, victorious capitalism cannot help but generate the need for a collectively\(^30\) understood and democratically administered alternative” (1999:484). Fukuyama’s alternative, according to Giroux (2001), is a limited, neo-liberal notion of hope “that is utterly personal, displacing grand social and collective hopes with the narrow convictions of the entrepreneurial self unconstrained by the discourse of social responsibility and public accountability” (2001:228).

Hope then, as a starting point for CSP applied in the GDSS, is about the idea that people can develop a socially just rationale for WBL. It sets the context for critical


\(^{29}\) Aronson’s (1999) broader point is that Fukuyama (1992) mistakenly sees the end of history as the victory of capitalism rather than the defeat of communism.

\(^{30}\) Emphasis added.
engagement with the experience of work to bring about change – i.e. describing, problematising and reshaping practice (figure 5.4).

From the four disciplinary influences outlined by Wagner and Childs (2001) a number of points are made around the theorising of experience and its analysis. One such consideration, included in Wagner’s schema (figure 5.3), is the influence of critical psychology from the work of Holzkamp. Teo (1998:236) makes the point that Holzkamp’s critical approach also operates within a utopian tradition and that it highlights the importance of context and history in relation to analysis (1998:248). This is a point emphasised by Vygotsky (1978) who argues that historical analysis, from a critical perspective, allows the consideration of processes, (and therefore change), as opposed to objects:

To study something historically means to study it in the process of change: that is the dialectical method’s basic demand” (Vygotsky, 1978:64-65)

The importance of this is the way in which it facilitates explanation, rather than merely description, i.e. allowing the posing of problematising questions in order to establish “the causal-dynamic relations that underlie phenomena” (1978:62).

Given the establishment of ‘causal-dynamic relations’ as a central objective of Habermasian critical theory, the application of such an approach is also influential in the practice of CSP. Welton (1995) points out the particular usefulness of the theory of communicative action31 in analysing the institutional dynamics of welfare-state capitalism (Welton, 1995:144-145), which underpins the much of the institutional context for the GDSS students. A similarity, and influence, is seen in Dewey’s attention to the development of socially “good aims” (1966:104) and his call for critical analysis in relation to communication and experience.

The criticality and relevance of Dewey to CSP - and to critical theory in general - lies in his call for a democratic opposition to dogmatism (1963:22) and his link between social interests and communicative action:

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The two points selected by which to measure the worth of a form of social life are the extent to which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups. An undesirable society, in other words, is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience. (Dewey, 1966:99).

Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. (Dewey, 1966:5)

However Grumley (2005), while arguing the merits of Habermas’ communicative action, also cautions the need for practical, and concrete forms of action – such as is required of WBL:

A critical theory needs more than historical and institutional points of reference like those that issue from Habermas’ Hegelian reading of immanence: it needs to grasp these values in the context of the concrete constraints and alternatives making for their practical exercise (Grumley, 2005:97).

One way in which this is addressed in the application of CSP, within the GDSS, is through the use of practical tasks within the learning cycle of the degree, as outlined in table 5.8, in particular the use of Lewin’s (1951) force field analysis, where students identify driving and restraining forces aimed at action in relation to their projects (Wagner and Childs, 2001). This in turn allows them to make choices about action in relation to constraints and alternatives.

The use of CSP as the pedagogical framework for the GDSS attempts to lay down a philosophical framework which makes sense for the community services sector – i.e. puts humans at the centre of a human services ‘industry’. This is not without challenges in relation to knowledge production and the knowledge economy – some of which are taken up in the final chapter.
Chapter six:

Data Stories: Journeys Through Work-based Learning.

The hope of producing the object is as basic to the worker as the hope of changing the world is indispensable in the struggle of oppressed men and women. The revelatory... practice of education does not of itself effect the transformation of the world; but it implies it. (Freire, 1994:31)
Chapter 6: Data stories: findings from student interviews.

6.1: Structuring the data.

Student interview data emerging from the data analysis process outlined in chapter four is presented here as five major stories. These are:

- Access
- Self and Study
- WBL and Organisation
- Managing Learning
- Outcomes

The stories evoke a sense of journey, being broadly related to the progress of the students through the course. They journey from prospective applicants, through the progress of the course, to reflections and descriptions of the new terrain on which they find themselves after completion. Figure 6.1 below maps the relationships between the stories (in brackets) and the broad aspects of the journey – descriptions, processes, relationships etc.

The stories wax and wane as the journey progresses from access to outcomes with ideas being more or less strongly developed at the different points along the way. They also vary in complexity and subtlety throughout the journey. As with a changing landscape the data is sharply defined at some points - the ideas held in sharp relief - while at other points there are complex and intricate connections which create softer, more blurred boundaries. Such is the case with the stories of access and self and study at the early stages of the GDSS journey; the former being composed of more distinct, separate features, the latter being a more subtle mixture of constituent themes. Figure 6.2 exemplifies this, showing those stories in which the categorical detail extends to a more detailed ‘layering’ and those which do not require further layering beyond the sub-headings indicated.
Just as with a journey the traveller engages with both terrain and their own capacity for endurance, the students, as travellers, provide data which is both outwardly engaged and inwardly reflective. *Self and study* and *Managing Learning* are more personally reflective stories, whereas *Access* and *WBL and Organisation* are more about engagement with the external, environmental influences. *Outcomes* is a story which presents both aspects - practical, tangible actions and practices as well as changed perceptions and personal understandings.

(N.B. In order to avoid confusion, where the data categories are being used as nouns, the convention of italicising, and in the case of the main stories, capitalising the words has been used – as in the previous paragraph).

The temptation to quantify the data stories has been strongly resisted, in keeping with the methodological parameters laid out in chapter four. To that end each major story is comparably significant. There is more data for some stories than others, in terms of quantity, but the analysis has given strong consideration of the *quality* of the data. That is not to say it is ‘good’ or ‘less good’ data, but that the power and forcefulness of data is allowed to come through.

As with all metaphors, the ‘journey’ concept holds to a point, but in the end the reader is also invited to read the data at face value. The stories represent data emerging from the thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences of students of the GDSS.
The following sections, 6.2 – 6.6 describe in detail the five categorical stories, laid out in figure 6.2. The descriptions use extensive citations from the student interview data to exemplify the stories, with the aim of retaining the ‘voice’ of the students in the accounts. The sections of figure 6.2 are used as motifs in conjunction with the story headings in order to provide a ‘reference map’ to the reader.
Figure 6.2 Data stories and their layers of detail.

ACCESS

Work as Study

Circumstances

SELF & STUDY

Educational Experience

Academic as ‘Other’

Anxiety/Fear

Recognition

WBL & ORGANISATION

Engagement

Change

MANAGING LEARNING

GDSS

Practicalities of WBL

Stresses and Challenges

OUTCOMES

Personal

Practical

Organisational

Practical Synergy
Gateway to Critical Practice
RPL

Support
Inertia
Hostility
Circumstantial
Shift

Skills
Self Perceptions
Positional
Theorised Practice
Changed Practice
Positive
Negative
6.2: The story of Access.

**Diagram:**
- ACCESS
- Work as Study
- Circumstances
  - Practical Synergy
  - Gateway to Critical Practice
  - RPL
  - Fit
  - Situational demands

*I never thought I’d get the opportunity to go to university – I worked in the service and had lots of experience, but I never had the piece of paper. [Heather]*

Students describe their entry to the GDSS as a decision mediated by a range of existing conditions. *Access* is about phenomena which, by their presence or absence, influence the capacity of students to do the course. In particular the work-based nature of the course is key feature of *access*, being repeatedly cited as an enabling factor in an environment where many constraints to study exist.

*Access* is about descriptions of the terrain on which the WBL journey took place. It is about pre-existing, external conditions; that is, the way things are for students, both at work and in their broader lives. Students talk about access in terms of the disposition of other stakeholders\(^1\) towards their desire to study, in terms of the material circumstances under which study must be undertaken and in terms of motivators and imperatives for study in the contemporary climate.

*Access* is about practical, sometimes pragmatic, considerations about the choice to study. It includes issues of professional concern, perceived as being concomitant with WBL, where ‘work as curriculum’ delivers benefits to practice. However, it can also include influences of political economy or organisational change, which have no direct derivation from practice, and are more about ‘qualification’ for work.

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\(^1\) Stakeholders in this case being employers, colleagues, friends and family etc.
The tale of work as study.

I found the work-based learning a novel approach. You know, you’ve usually got work and then you’ve got uni or TAFE\(^2\) and so you’ve got to try to combine both. But the concept was that we would be able to put together a program based around our work. People could actually do that – rather than do it as a second thing to work. [Dan]

Well I worked in a small grass roots organisation and I thought there was nothing being done in the way of research, you know, nothing to support why I worked the way I worked. I thought the client group and the organisation would really benefit from it. [Betty]

I’ve never actually done any studies in managing a community organisation in development disability. Yet I’m quite specialised, with a disability, I’ve been doing self research for years. It’s acknowledged in the field, but I didn’t have any formal qualifications to show for it. I got in through the knowledge I got from work. [Heather]

Dan captures a strong element of *work as study* in his comments above. He highlights the possibility of deriving practical synergy from the work/study relationship. This is about overcoming constraints by using a work-based approach. He also echoes a typical view of the notion of *work as curriculum*, (as described in chapter three), as being a ‘novel’ approach. This concept of novelty – that students had not formerly seen it as an option – is reiterated throughout the data.

\(^2\) Technical and Further Education
Betty flags a second aspect of work as study, which is the notion of work-based learning as a gateway to critical practice - a desire to improve practice and/or learn more about the client group. In about one third of the interviews, (including Dan, Betty, and Heather), students indicated some personal association with issues of the client group or former/current client status. Examples include mental health, juvenile justice/corrective services, disability, youth issues, domestic violence and migration issues.

Heather touches on this issue from the point of view of a third element of work as study, that of RPL. She exemplifies how both work and personal experience make an important contribution to her RPL based entry to the course. For those entering the course this way there is not extensive comment on the RPL process as such. However there are two important points in this regard. Firstly there is a clear communication that, without the RPL process, study would not have been possible. In some cases comments were very clear that commencing study at a more elementary level was just not an option. This was often not just a matter of feasibility, but also an issue of reasonability, where students felt it was just unreasonable to ‘go back’ to a level of learning they had moved beyond. The second important point in relation RPL is that, while comments on the mechanics of the RPL process were relatively few, comments about the question of recognition more broadly were very strong. Both of these points are taken up in subsequent sections of the data report below.

Practical synergy.

The practical synergy derived from the combination of work and study was the single biggest issue in facilitating access to the GDSS. Though there were other strong reasons as to why the degree was chosen, the influence of the work-based mode of learning was highly significant. It was often the first issue referred to when students talked about why they came to do the degree. Rita puts this succinctly:

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As noted in chapter five some students did not enter the GDSS via the RPL route. However, on the subject of recognition in the subsequent data reports, comments on the significance of valorising work were not limited to students who accessed the degree via RPL.
‘Nothing was feasible, but given that fact, work-based learning was the most feasible thing I’d seen’. [Rita]

Her comment is typical of a range of strong statements about how busy the lives of the students are. Just ‘fitting in’ study was seen as a major problem. It was typical in its humorous tone – the idea that ‘nothing’ is possible, but doing ‘something’. It expresses how students manage their precious time, both at work and in their broader lives.

This ‘time saving’ has two aspects. The first is less to do with WBL as a mode of study and more to do with the length of the course. Students were attracted to the idea that the course could be done in one year and often spoke of a preparedness to put in an intensive period of study for a shorter time, rather than endure a long-haul approach over several years.

_I couldn’t come to grips with doing a social science degree at [another university], which so many of my colleagues were doing. I couldn’t see myself committing to six years of drudge to get through. [Susan]_

_I hadn’t the energy to go back and do four years of social work. [Rita]_

_Until this I never really found a course that I felt good about. If I started a [conventional] course I knew that I wouldn’t complete it – that I wouldn’t get through. [Susan]_

The length of the course was therefore a motivator, from the perspective of concerted effort, as well as a safeguard against dropping out. The synergistic effect of this aspect was about reducing the period of exposure to a more stressful environment, where study was fitted into an already burgeoning regime.

The second aspect of time saving is directly related to the mode of study. There was a strong sentiment in the student data that when work is seen as the curriculum – as being the same _thing_ - then ‘full time work’ and ‘full time study’, being concurrent, represent

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4 Though related in terms of RPL.
the same time. Comments in the data are replete with synonyms of manageability, feasibility or practical solutions, and with their counterparts; reduced burden, less stressful etc. There are extensive listings of the practical benefits of this synergy, both work related and in relation to other life issues.

_It was something manageable. A practical consideration, based on what I could cope with, in terms of travel, childcare responsibilities and my relationship. Just keeping everything juggled._ [Alex]

_I certainly didn’t want to put any further burden on my work environment. I thought if I could get a course that fitted with my work it wouldn’t be too stressful and would suit me a lot better._ [Nola]

This particular aspect of synergy was also related to another powerful driver of student access, that is, _work as study_ as a means to staying in paid employment while studying. Students frequently stated that they could not contemplate any reduction in paid work in order to undertake study. Sarah, (a shift worker constrained by work in relation to part time study), emphasises this point in discussion about the positive, (or otherwise), features of WBL. Her comments are put in typically unequivocal terms:

_For me it was because I couldn’t afford not to do a work-based degree. Financially I couldn’t afford to give up work and go to uni. And the fact that it was work-based moved me on._ [Sarah]

_Bonita_ takes up the point in the context of several converging factors and the synergy derived from the work-based approach:

_The work-based part made it feasible. I was looking after a sick child at the time and that made a big difference. I couldn’t afford to [do a degree] to start off with and by the time I could afford it, it made it almost impossible with the kids. And then all the [work] stresses get in there and you wouldn’t know how to cope. So until the work-based option came up I hadn’t envisaged doing it at all._ [Bonita]
The combination of constraints and their alleviation through several aspects of synergy was a common experience of the students in gaining access to study.

Practical synergy, in summary, is the way in which the students saw a means to overcome issues of workload, stress, family commitments and practical needs such as earning an income while studying. They derived incentive/motivation from the synergy and safeguarded against giving up or dropping out.

A final comment on this synergy is that some students expressed the effects as a balance of personal and organisational interests, rather than of their own time and needs. Several people expressed an expectation that study would involve a significant amount of extra work, but that work as study gave rise to opportunities to implement projects with merit that did not have a high organisational priority because of limited resources. They saw that work as study would yield better time management than if work and study were separate, but that the organisation/clients would also gain from their taking on a specific project. In these cases students were almost using their study time as a resource which would produce mutual gains for the organisation and for themselves. Michelle and Clara make typical points:

It was about being able to achieve something and putting something back into the service that made it work better. [Michelle]

I was very much aware that, in the community, there was a whole lot more we could be doing for kids and the work-based project was a chance to do that. [Clara]

Unlike situations where projects were already underway or part of organisational planning, these instances were specifically about projects which would not have been done otherwise. They were the opportunity for the organisation to do more via the association of work and study. These projects were seen as a synergistic means of overcoming constraints on the organisation as well as the student.
A gateway to critical practice.

Work as study was also seen as a chance to engage with practice in a more critical and informed way. The WBL supported what students were trying to achieve at work and, because of its relevance, legitimised their decision to undertake study.

This deeper engagement with practice brought useful knowledge to bear on a particular project within the organisation. Such engagement was often synergistic as described above, but it was also distinguished by the practice benefits over and above temporal and financial benefits. Projects referred to in this way did not need WBL to improve their organisational viability, but were enhanced in terms of quality. In other words the perceived practice benefits from learning supported access to WBL.

In these examples of ‘study enhanced’ projects, some students had detailed discussions with their managers about a range of organisational projects which would be suited to the WBL approach. Others were able to develop projects as part of their work, where their role reflected a degree of autonomy around the choice of work content.

Valerie gives a typical example from the perspective of a project choice made in response to suggestions from her manager. Her project focused on across the board changes to practice in a substitute care organisation:

[My manager] was keen for me to take on work-based study and had about six projects for me to choose from. In the end I chose the one which I thought would most benefit the organisation. [Valerie]

Rita is an example of a much more autonomous worker who saw the production of an organisational history as an important feature of preparation for amalgamation with another service:
I talked with my management committee about the benefits of collaboration between me, as a student worker, and the organisation [around the project]. They had lots of input and saw the benefit of completing the project. [Rita]

Both examples draw on the usefulness of work as study as an organising tool around workplace projects. In both cases WBL enhanced the development of the projects, though in each case the project had organisational priority in its own right.

Engagement with practice had both a personal and an organisational dimension, that is students saw the need to examine both their own practice as well as organisational practices. There were several elements to this with varying emphasis on the personal and organisational. In general the practice aspirations represented the need to improve, develop and theorise practice.

At a personal level students recognised the need for acquisition of greater skills and knowledge. Some articulated a lack of experience in the broader context of community services, even though they might have significant experience in their particular field:

*I thought it would be good to get a broader view of welfare work because I’ve only ever worked in [this organisation] … to get more skills on how to deal with real life situations on a daily basis. I thought it would be a great opportunity to do that.* [Michelle]

*I’m a very confident person normally in my job and do it very well, but I often feel I don’t have the theory to back up what I’m doing – to justify myself to others. This was a chance to get some theory to support my practice.* [Hei-Win]

*Well I worked for a small, grass roots organisation and there was nothing done research wise, nothing that would support why I worked the way I worked. I thought it would be a really good thing to provide some research for the organisation and that the client group would really benefit from it.* [Susan]
At other times it represented changes in position or role for the student and led to a desire to improve practice I order to do a better job:

*I was in a new job – new to community development and saw this as an opportunity to broaden my content knowledge in the new position.* [Libby]

*I was starting a new job and had a number of challenges I was facing in the new position. But having study [work-based] meant it could be incorporated into my learning.* [Valerie]

In other cases the need to engage in critical questioning of practice arose from an existing perception or concern about practice. This was more often located in a concern for the organisational direction. It was also more often linked to ideas about broader influences, including political ideas about practice. Though several students spoke of this Kathy captures these sentiments and links them in a relatively lengthy, but succinct comment:

*[B]ut the linking of practice with the context, with the theory. At the time I was linking the politics with what I was doing at work. Making these connections seemed to be a really sensible way for me to study. It seemed a really useful direction personally and I was able to construct a research project that looked like it was going to be useful for work.*

*I think a lot of people in the community sector have felt they are operating in a vacuum – in a climate where we’re under this little community sector umbrella, doing our stuff to basically burn ourselves out helping people. Not linking that isolation to the situation of people we’re working with. Not linking that to the wider society – the whole system we’re operating under.* [Kathy]
The broader contextual concerns occasionally represented differences in ideas about practice between the student and the organisation. In some instances this was a source of conflict\textsuperscript{5}. Betty cites a mild example of such a difference:

\begin{quote}
The way I work is very different to the direction the organisation was going. I felt that I needed something to actually back up the way I work. [Betty]
\end{quote}

In the case of Susan and Collette the conflict was of a more serious nature.

\begin{quote}
This particular management committee had about two years experience with very little change and there was a lot of discontent with the way the service was running, because we were running as a cooperative. Under that auspice there’s something like eight different services, each structured with a coordinator and then workers. So we didn’t fit the mould. The management committee didn’t like that, even though we had been successfully running that way for years. [Susan]

Management weren’t used to us having a say about how things should be done, so asking questions about other ways of doing things rattled them. They were fairly threatened by that and it made things difficult. [Collette]
\end{quote}

The emphasis in each of these examples was on the use of the WBL opportunity to inform the debate about practice in the workplace. In some cases the concept of access here is about access to a means of defence of practice.

\textit{Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).}

The third important element within the theme of \textit{work as study} is the significance of RPL. Its significance is implied in terms of access, rather than stated strongly. That is, it is the case that without RPL many of the students would simply not have been able to undertake the GDSS. To that end comments about RPL, specifically, are limited to short statements about how the students ‘got in’ to the course. Where the significance becomes

\textsuperscript{5} These issues are discussed in more detail in section 6.4.
more apparent is in student comments about *self and study* reported later in this chapter. In the context of *self and study* RPL is a catalyst for other issues in relation to recognition more broadly; including students’ feelings that previous study counted for nothing, experience was not recognised and work was not seen as ‘worthy’ of academic recognition.\(^6\)

Notwithstanding the bulk of data being more appropriately located within thematic considerations of *self and study*, there were some comments about the significance of RPL in terms of *access*. Some students reflected on the importance of counting incomplete study experiences, where other issues had prevented completion:

> I looked at the course and thought ‘that’s me’. I’d had three attempts at doing a degree before and all had failed through illness. At least I could count the bits that I had completed. [Collette]

*Rita* flags some of the related issues dealt with in *self and study* while reflecting on the importance of RPL in terms of access:

> I thought ‘this is the course that I really would have done if I’d had enough to get in’. And then I thought ‘oh wow!’ It was a really nice moment of thinking this could actually work. This actually captures where I’m at now and it does let me go in at a level I’m comfortable with. And there is a great sense of honouring what I’ve achieved. [Rita]

Having ‘enough to get in’ was a common issue and students almost always expressed surprise at being accepted into the course. As with other aspects of RPL this issue is taken up in the theme of *self and study*, being strongly related to how students *viewed* their experience.

In terms of access, work as study plays an important role for students entering the GDSS. The benefit derived from the concept and the relative novelty of work as curriculum not

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\(^6\) See section 6.3, *self and study*. 
only gave students the opportunity to undertake the GDSS but, in some cases, provided the *only* practical opportunity to study at university. RPL was a key aspect of that opportunity, as well as a channel through which students’ issues about self and study could be reflected (and which are taken up at a later stage in this chapter).

Also of great significance was the prevalence of particular circumstances under which access to the GDSS was made possible.

*The tale of circumstances.*

![Diagram: ACCESS \[ Circumstances \[ Situational demands \[ Fit \]

*So it was a practical consideration which had to be based on what I can cope with. In terms of travel and child care responsibilities, my relationship – just keeping everything balanced and juggled. [Emma]*

*Work was offering to pay, so that was a huge incentive, because I couldn’t have paid to go to uni myself. And the fact that work was OK with it meant it would fit in with my shifts and everything and that I would have time to study. So I thought it would be good. [Susan]*

*My unit was going through a merger and it looked like my job might be under threat – would possibly be spilled, to use the department’s terminology. And, although I had a lot of experience in the job, I recognised that my lack of formal qualifications was problematic. [Patrick]*

*The more I got involved, not just in the management of the centre, but in my new role – the broader picture – I needed to know a lot more. So I started looking for*
courses that involved aspects of all of those things I needed to know more about.
[Nola]

_Circumstances_ reflects how ‘the way things are’ for students impacts on their capacity to undertake the GDSS and/or study in general. It is a series of factors, sometimes coincidental, sometimes in combination, which influence _access_ to the course. _Emma_ and _Susan_ describe circumstances above that pertain to the course ‘fitting in’ to their situation. They describe factors coming together and creating a fit between their situation and study. _Patrick_ and _Nola_ also describe the way things are, but there is more of a sense that their circumstances create a demand for study, rather than facilitating a ‘fit’. These comments are examples of the two important themes that constitute the story of _circumstances_: _fit_ and _situational demand_.

_Fit_.

The emphasis of _fit_ is that study sits well with the needs of the students. There is a strong sense of compatibility – that undertaking the GDSS suits the students’ circumstances. Comments made about _fit_ were often positively framed and concerned with issues such as resources, support and information. _Fit_ also included a matching of study with students’ aspirations or sense of vocation.

Organisational support for study often led to direct provision of time and or money to do the course. Whole or part payment of the course fees was common.

*When I talked to my [bosses] they were happy to agree to four hours a week and [the organisation] paid three quarters of the fees which was wonderful.* [Valerie]

*My supervisor showed me the flyer and said ‘why don’t you at least apply and see how you go’. I was rapt that someone thought I could even do a course and so I applied and got in.* [Kate]
Valerie and Kate represent situations where there was active support in the workplace. The support was also personal/emotional in its nature and students had a sense of being valued as workers. In some cases the support was more passive in its nature. In such cases approaches from the student for material support were favourably met, but there was no particular interest from the organisation in the WBL or the course itself. Dan highlights a typical example below in relation to a request for support for study:

It was put to our management committee who ummed and ahhed about it. Then I sort of picked it up and ran with it and it sort of went from there. They ended up paying for the whole course. [Dan]

The request for full funding was met for Dan despite a sense of organisational inertia in relation to his study aspirations.

Students also commented on the significance of family support in terms of circumstances and access. Examples included family decisions to set aside/allocate money for study and re-arrangement of domestic schedules in order to facilitate study. Re-arrangement of child care was often cited as a means of providing support. In one example the financial resources for study were procured by extending the mortgage on the family home.

While such cases involved broader arrangements of circumstances to facilitate access they also had implications for ongoing management of learning which are taken up later in this chapter.

Apart from issues of compatibility, in terms of resources, there was also a significant element of compatibility with aspirational objectives of the students. A number of people commented on strong motivations for study emerging from either personal goal setting or a sense of vocation. The desire to ‘get a degree’, for example, was a very strong objective for some students.

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7 The notion of organisational inertia is a significant feature of the data taken up later in this chapter under the story of WBL and organisation.
I wanted to make a difference too with where I was going – working with young people and so forth. So I needed something extra. As well as that I wanted to get a degree, because I should have done that years ago, but I had never done that, you know. I had been working all that time. And that wasn’t easy, but then all of a sudden this came up and I thought ‘fantastic’. [Bonita]

I guess that’s what I wanted, [a degree]. It was more wondering whether I’d be able to do it, but wanting to do it at the same time. Wanting to actually formalise something for myself – to actually achieve something. [Nola]

I knew that I wanted to do more and that I always wanted to have formal academic qualifications. In the last five years, since I’ve been in this job in particular, that has been something that has bugged me, annoyed me, or I have kind of pondered the way forward with. [Rita]

For others it was a desire to move into a chosen field for which the GDSS was seen as useful. Prashir talks about her experience shifting from banking to community through the inspiration of volunteer work with torture and trauma survivors. She commenced as an administrative worker in the community sector and then pursued her objective of becoming a community worker.

After I had worked [with migrant women] I realised there were lots of issues (with my science background) I had never thought about. I realised there were lots of things I needed to learn. The reason I came to learn more in [the GDSS] was to find out about community, learn skills to do case work and enable me to shift jobs. [Prashir]

At the time of interview Prashir had been selected for interview in her first ‘community worker’ position. She represents an example of a highly qualified student who entered the degree as a conscious strategy in seeking community work as a vocation.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Part of the notion of ‘vocation’ in this case is a conscious shift to substantially lower paid work, motivated by a commitment to the issues arising from her volunteer experiences.
One description of fit could be framed as circumstances in which the student was *drawn* towards study as a means of meeting their aspirations and needs. In this framing it is seen as an affinity. In contrast other aspects of *circumstances* were about students being pulled towards study out of necessity due to *situational demands*. This framing is less about affinity than it is about necessity.

*Situational demands.*

From a significant number of students there was less choice about taking up study. Changes at both organisational, and sometimes at a broader level, produced significant demands for study. Rather than being framed as an ‘affinity’ or being *drawn* towards the GDSS there is more of a sense of being *driven* to study for these students. *Situational demands* is, therefore, less about compatibility than it is about necessity. The driving forces are about changes which are out of the students’ control and which may yield negative outcomes if study is not undertaken. The most pressing examples involved the threat of likely loss of employment, but also included barriers to promotion for workers who were otherwise capable and experienced.

*Patrick’s* example from the beginning of this section, is typical of people feeling under threat from restructuring and comes from the context of a large government department in the community services sector. *Susan* provides an example from a more traditional community organisation setting, where both broad and local conditions pose a threat to her employment:

*The ‘why’ [of why I did the GDSS] was because I’m employed as a family worker in a community based organisation. The management committee had passed a policy which stated that all employees in the organisation had to have tertiary qualifications. As well as that our future in Family Support Services [FSS] has always been rocky …*
We were actually told that the committee could say ‘right your jobs are finished, you’re out of here – we’re restructuring and you’ll have to apply for the new positions… I thought if that happened and I didn’t have tertiary qualifications I couldn’t even apply for my own job.’ [Susan]

Alex, a Family Support worker in another organisation, also put the view that FFS had broader pressures on employment. Speaking of her perceptions of a general push for tertiary qualifications and consolidation of services in FSS she makes the following comments:

*I knew what impact that had on workers and on job security, so that was already in my mind. You know, how to consolidate my career as a sole parent without a tertiary qualification.* [Alex]

While less pressing, Betty presents a perspective from the point of view of barriers to career advancement:

*I was just in a situation where I’d been working in organisations for a long time, and I’m a good worker. I hear that from my co-workers and bosses that I’ve had and stuff like that. But I never got the opportunity to go up the ladder. I could never apply for higher positions because I felt they would knock me out [of the running] – without the qualification I’d never be able to apply.* [Betty]

These examples typically highlight the complexity of issues arising from circumstances. All three students cited immediately above had concerns, not only about pressures to study in a changing environment, but also financial pressures and significant domestic demands in terms of family commitments. This included both sole parent and sole bread winner status and was common to other students. In Susan’s case there is also the additional pressure of conflict around practice and organisational structure between

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9 A noteworthy point from the interview was that there was no accompanying policy to assist unqualified workers to gain tertiary qualifications.
workers and management committee. Some aspects of this are taken up below in section 6.4.

In summarising circumstances, the students flagged both issues of affinity, through fit, and necessity, through situational demands, which shaped their access to study and the GDSS.

6.3: The story of Self and Study.

Well I guess I think it’s all related to self-esteem. When I went to school you either did languages or you did cooking and sewing and too bad if you weren’t interested in those things. I found school boring and very frustrating. By nature I’m a hoarder, but the day I left school I went down the back yard and burnt all my books. [Susan]

I’ve never seen myself as an academic style person. I think a lot of academia is often just bullshit. I think that academics often make things that are simple complicated and I couldn’t see how I would fit into that academic world. [Sarah]

Self and study is about how students of the GDSS factor in and/or see as relevant their perceptions, experiences, and feelings. They call upon strong influences in the descriptions of themselves as potential higher education students and have equally strong perceptions about the notion of academia and how they do (or do not) relate to it. There
is a very strong theme within the data of comparison of ‘self’ with ‘other’ and a significant consideration of the process by which self and other are reconciled in taking up the course.

Susan gives an excellent example above of the influence of educational experience on describing self in relation to study. Her citing of school as an important influence is a typical feature of the data, despite the fact that her school experiences date from thirty years ago. Likewise Sarah, in her early fifties, related school as a significant factor in shaping her strong feelings about ‘academia’ cited above. Educational experience and academic as other represent two of the four themes emerging from the data within the story of self and study. In relation to the ‘reconciliation’ of some contradictory aspects of these themes, recognition and anxiety/fear play an important role and represent the additional themes in the self and study story.

The self and study story compliments the access story and both are strong features of the data. Where access might be viewed as a means to ‘opening the gate’ to the GDSS, self and study, through the four themes outlined below, might be seen as the way in which students managed to ‘walk through’ the gate.

The tale of educational experience

Previous learning experiences were often referred to, usually in framing the choices made around entry to the course. These were often negative stories, like the comments form Susan cited above. School was one aspect of this, but there were also common accounts of successive attempts at tertiary, or other, study which had not been completed. Heather
makes such a point in relation to both school and tertiary study, having dropped out of school and made further attempts at both school and university:

*I had been going to uni on and off for about thirteen years trying to get a degree. Every year since I left school I’ve actually enrolled in something – and most often HSC\textsuperscript{10} type stuff. So I finally got myself through that and got myself into uni. I used to love uni, but I wasn’t doing a really ‘put together’ course just stuff that I was interested in for a while. So I never finished anything. [Heather]*

*Heather’s* story is not framed in a negative sense, in that she enjoyed her learning experiences, but in relating her experiences she makes a clear statement about wanting to get a degree – to complete a course of study:

*I was getting a lot more experience at work, in management positions, and I had to get a bit more serious about getting a degree rather than just studying subjects of interest. I also wanted to get a degree which reflected my learning already and my work needs. [Heather]*

Nor is it the case that all *educational experiences* stories were about incomplete or failed attempts at study. Some students not only had previous tertiary qualifications, but also had qualifications at masters level, including education, librarianship and electronics. In these cases the educational experiences tended to reduced the *anxiety/fear*, (discussed in this section below) and included students who had not entered through the RPL process. However, particularly with students for whom RPL was the method of entry, educational experiences were significant points of comment and were often fractured and incomplete. A common feature was also the significant accumulation of learning through short courses, often offered through work. *Susan* again:

*Well I’ve actually done a lot of short courses. So many in fact that it’s almost embarrassing when I look at my résumé. There are so many of them. [Susan]*

\textsuperscript{10} High school certificate.
She goes on to highlight a very positive aspect of this experience:

_I did an [accredited] course through a [registered training organisation] and there were assignments. I hadn’t done assignments since school (and I don’t even remember them and so these were really the first assignments I’d done). And I did really well with them, so that gave me a boost._ [Susan]

The influence of educational experiences is strong in the data. It is varied in its nature, being most often a negative story of incompleteness or failure in relation to previous study, especially for students entering the course through RPL. It can also be a positive influence both as an entry criterion to the course and as an accumulation of useful knowledge. Students often commented on educational experiences in relation to statements about how they viewed academia, which was strongly positioned as an unfamiliar terrain. In the main educational experiences were cited as confirming academic as other.

**Academic as other.**

There were two aspects of the construction of academic as other. One was the presentation of ideas of academia as an alien domain, of which the students felt they had little knowledge or common ground, the other was about seeing academia in a poor light and expressing disdain for the academic ‘ideal’, as with Sarah’s comments at the beginning of this section. In some cases comments were starkly contradictory, with perceptions of no-academic educational experiences presented as not ‘normal’, whereas the academic pathway represented ‘normality’, despite the disdain. Also students, while
contemptuous of ‘academia’, showed clear aspirations to being regarded as part of the academic environment, (as discussed in section 6.2). There was a tendency, typical of this contradiction, to be both defensive and self-deprecating. Nola juxtaposes academia and ‘hard work’ for example, as well as flagging some of the issues around anxiety/fear discussed in the following section:

**But I’ve got to be honest, I wasn’t confident about getting in. I don’t have a great deal of confidence in the academic area because I’m not an academic. Most of the things I’ve done have been through really hard work. I’m a very hands on sort of person.**  [Nola]

This sentiment is also echoed by Betty:

**I’d dropped out of study when I was very young and never really felt like I fitted into the normal, mainstream education system. And when I looked at the formal courses I should possibly do I knew that I would drop out again and that wasn’t going to be good for my confidence.**  [Betty]

Betty goes on to describe the importance of the WBL aspect of the course, but not just in terms of the benefits of work as study as described in section 6.2 above. There is a strong sentiment in student comments that the choice to do the GDSS is, in part, reflective of a ‘bridging of the gap’ created in the framing of academic as other. Kathy and Heather provide two examples of this sentiment:

**I’d been looking for postgraduate study to do. I’d already dropped out of a graduate certificate because I didn’t like the way the course was run and I wasn’t sufficiently self-motivated to study. My ideas about the way study should link with work certainly fitted in [this course].**  [Kathy]

**I think it’s quite hard to study something separate from work. I guess traditional courses don’t do that, don’t have any connection with [the workplace]. I think that’s probably the biggest thing that appealed to me.**  [Heather]
Once again, the idea of the ‘traditional’ and isolation from the ‘reality’ of work are perceptions of what ‘normal/academic’ study represents. More often, however, the notion of academic as other is not cited in terms of simple relevance or difference, but as a source of something which is beyond the student and which they find intimidating. Despite Sarah’s notion of academia as ‘bullshit’, she provides a graphic example of how persistent the notion of academic as other can be. Having successfully completed the GDSS, and just prior to her graduation, she makes the following response to a question about how she feels having successfully completed the course:

Well I never really thought that I was university level stuff – you know, that I could actually accomplish that. But having done it now I think I could. If I had the time and the money I could easily go to university and do something and accomplish it quite well. [Sarah]

Her actual response was intended as a positive reflection on the course, though the notion that she had just achieved a significant qualification at a graduate level at university was still an alien concept. For most of the students the notion of academic as other was a major influence on their perceptions of self and study. Despite a stated disregard for academic achievement they often declared strong aspirations to enter the ‘academic’ domain and strong fear and anxiety about undertaking the course.

Sarah also provided several points which serve to make a final comment on academic as other which portray a secondary sentiment, often implied, (though stated quite directly in Sarah’s case), about ‘who’ can or cannot be an academic.

Well, you know, when I went to school it was always those with the brains who went on to university or college. Those who weren’t – because when I went to school to actually go to university was a scholarship thing – no one paid for their university. If you didn’t go on scholarship, most parents couldn’t afford to send you. [Sarah]

She continues:
The odd solicitor in the country area where I came from – they sent their kids to university. They were there for nine years and never passed an exam. [laughs] well, quite honestly that’s what I’d be doing. One kid that I went to school with, he ultimately became a solicitor, but by the time he’d finished his law degree I’d done two apprenticeships and had three babies.

My father couldn’t afford to send me to university. If I’d had the brains to get a scholarship, to go to teachers’ college or one of those sort of things, but we weren’t able to do that. We had to have the brains and the money to move on, so education was actually part of the privileged area. [Sarah]

It is a particularly illustrative example of a number of ideas expressed in the data. In Sarah’s case she draws together a number in one passage. It contains elements of the historic, socially driven and financial aspects of academic as other, as well as a powerful statement about Sarah herself and her assessment of ‘self’ worth.

Anxiety/fear.

I thought I’d miss out because I wasn’t qualified or experienced enough or something. I didn’t think there would be a chance for me to go to university without doing something prior to entry like the HSC. I was quite anxious about it. [Mary]

I suppose it was a lack of confidence that I would get in, but when I did I remember thinking ‘oh no, does this mean they think I can do it?’ ...
I had been removed from the academic environment for so long I had the scary feeling of ‘am I up to this?’ [Rita]

Students offered lots of comments about lack of confidence or fear of failure. Their self-perception in relation to study and low confidence was often expressed as doubt about their individual capacity. They had low expectations about their applications and commonly expressed surprise at being accepted into the course. In a good number of cases students had clearly had to make considerable efforts in order to overcome their anxiety/fear. There were also comments from some students as to how they managed to overcome their apprehension.

For some students there was a sense of feeling both intimidated by academia as well as feeling a lack of tertiary qualification in the workplace. Nola speaks of both anxiety about study and a sense of inferiority in her work unit. In explaining her reticence to study she makes the following comments:

Well – I don’t know – I think it’s probably fear of failure again. I think that’s the bottom line for most people. I hadn’t studied for a long time and things have changed. That was the thing that really scared me – whether I would have the capacity to do it. I didn’t want to look like the village idiot… But everybody I work with in the office has got a degree and it felt like there were expectations of other people in that work environment. [Nola]

For some students the low expectation of acceptance through the RPL process was also accompanied by strong feelings of affirmation upon acceptance to the course.

After all my failures at study and what that did to my self esteem, just the acceptance was very significant. I felt like pasting it up on the wall. [Collette]

Surprise and delight were often the expressions of students who felt they would not be accepted, even when acceptance did not necessarily dispel fears of not being up to the task.
An interesting aspect of anxiety/fear, and the process of overcoming these things in order to undertake the course, was the occasional expression of the sentiment that difficult educational experiences had brought about a certain level of tenaciousness in some students. ‘Not giving up’, ‘sticking with things once they were started’ and ‘giving things a go’ were typical expressions of determination, despite the reservations and fearfulness.

Anxiety/fear was strongly related to academic as other in that students talked about the ‘otherness’ as being the source of the fear. As with Sarah’s comments, in the previous section, on who could and could not be an ‘academic’ it is the implicit reply of ‘not me’ in the data which students related to their fear and anxiety – a sense that it is not appropriate to take up study.

For some students there is a counterpoint to anxiety/fear which is seeing the GDSS as a considerable challenge, but approaching it with a much more confident demeanour. Valerie provides an example of this:

> Well I think because I hadn’t studied for a long time I was hoping to think things through, without drowning or not being able to cope. But I found the idea really challenging and stimulating. [Valerie]

There is a sense of apprehension in commencing the GDSS, but in Valerie’s case, as with some others, the challenge seemed to provide stimulation rather than apprehension. Although not a common response it is related to a much more common response which was in some ways the obverse of anxiety/fear; that is the strong significance in the data of recognition of students’ worth.
Recognition

Recognition was significantly more important than simply the access derived from RPL for many of the students. Although the RPL process was essential to their acceptance into the GDSS, their comments about recognition provided a much deeper appreciation of the valorisation of their work. There are two aspects to recognition for the students. The first is about the statement of worth of the work that they do. The second is the implicit statement of worth about them as potential university students.

In relation to the former point Rita and Mary capture typical sentiments:

_There was a great sense of honouring and recognising my work. What I’d achieved to that point. That was very important to me – that what I’d done mattered._ [Rita]

_The idea that it would recognise my work and experience appealed to me. At first I was worried about whether it would mean anything, even though I felt it should._ [Mary]

Hei-Win also comments on this sense of value attributed to students’ work in their jobs. She expresses a feeling of slight isolation in her work, which is also present for other students. Recognition is partly about dispelling that feeling:
I always felt confident about my work, but uncomfortable when people challenged it, being the only worker involved [in my practice]. Being accepted on the course meant that someone else felt my work was OK. [Hei-Win]

Other students focused more on the second point –that of being a ‘worthy’ student. Their comments are more about learning than work, about what they know and think as a result of their experience:

It was hard to find something that took into account what you already know. I wanted something to reflect my learning so far. [Heather]

I was looking for a course that would suit my needs. I wanted a learning environment that was honouring learning, where my experience was regarded and welcomed. [One that] would recognise my knowledge and understandings and that type of stuff. Not something that was didactic in approach. [Patrick]

Recognition was clearly related to RPL in that the students who made the most emphatic statements about recognition came to the course via RPL. The extent to which the emphasis was placed on the valorising aspects of recognition was significant. Students acknowledged the importance of RPL as a means of access. However recognition was a clear theme within the data that reflected the facilitation of access through appreciation; that is, through students feeling that they and their work were appreciated. Recognition could, in part, be re-framed as welcoming students into the course, whereas RPL was a process of allowing them to enter.

In self and study the thematic points are less easily separable than in access, but the essence of the story of self and study is equally strong. It is a tapestry of feelings and perceptions about how the students position themselves in relation to study. The themes within self and study are at times complimentary and contradictory. The fearfulness about worth and the affirmation of recognition, the contempt for the ‘academic’ other and the desire to be ‘academic’ are examples of the ‘weave’ and ‘weft’ of the tapestry. So to is the presentation of apprehension about the course as both intimidation and challenge.
The nature of self and study, like access, is largely about perceptions and feelings prior to the GDSS. However it is distinct from access in that its elements are capable of change and are reflected in the story of outcomes considered later in this chapter. Both access and self and study have implications for issues arising in the course for students. These issues are largely taken up in the stories of WBL and Organisation and Managing learning.

6.4 The story of WBL and Organisation.

Well apart from the fact that they paid for me and allotted time, there was a lot of interest from [the CEO]. I also got lots of supervision for my project and felt that I could ask any of the staff for assistance. No one baulked at the research, they were all very happy to take part. [Valerie]

I don’t think the organisation was interested in the issues that came up. I had a strong conviction about the outcomes of [the project], but I don’t think the organisation did. [Patrick]

It was a good way of expressing my experience and putting something back into the service in return for that support. Unfortunately it didn’t really work out like that. [Dan]

The data reflects a diverse range of experiences for the students in their workplaces. The introduction of WBL into their organisations created a whole series of arrangements and understandings, perceptions and expectations about the WBL project and the course. These existed at several levels for the students – with fellow workers, management and
clients and occasionally with other agencies. WBL and organisation deals with how the organisation is orientated towards the course and how the phenomena described immediately above were manifest. As with access there are two major themes within the story of WBL and organisation. The first of these is engagement and is related to the way in which the organisation engages with the student and the WBL project. The second major theme is that of change, which represents the way in which the WBL project is located within a changing context and subject to a changing context. The themes of engagement and change are also sub-divided into significant parts – support, inertia and hostility and circumstantial change and shift respectively.

**The Tale of Engagement**

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The data representing engagement reflects the integration of WBL experiences of students within their organisations. It is expressed as a phase where the WBL ‘journey’ is underway, beyond access and self and study, (which are elements of why the course was undertaken). It is about their experience of doing WBL through a series of arrangements within the workplace. Specifically, engagement is about the extent to which the organisation is involved with the student and their WBL and about the nature of that involvement. In the students’ terms engagement often reflects the quality of the relationships around WBL.

The data in this thematic category falls into three distinct areas: support, where the organisation establishes positive relationships, inertia, where there is organisational ambivalence to the WBL project and hostility, where the relationship is often marked by negativity and conflict.
Support

Apart from issues in relation to access, students also reported various forms of support for the practice of their WBL and the GDSS. There were five ways in which this was manifest. In a material sense there was ongoing financial support and the provision of time. Additionally there was the provision, in some cases, of moral and practical support from a number of organisational levels. This was often informal, but there were also instances of formal support through the implementation of specific supervision in relation to the WBL project.

Financial support and the provision of study time were frequently commented on and represented largely formal arrangements between the organisation and the student. Although about half of the students interviewed paid for the course entirely themselves, others had varying levels of financial support. This was most often through the payment of all or half of the course fees. In the main the students saw this as generous and in some cases it incorporated a strong sense of reciprocity. Nola gives a specific example from her experience of having very positive organisational support. Her organisation paid for her study as part of a re-deployment strategy and also provided support on several other levels.

_I think the organisation has been extremely supportive. And I feel if people are going to do their utmost for you, whether it be in a work environment or wherever, you have an obligation to fulfil what’s required. Because my manager is so supportive I feel I really have an obligation to fulfil this role and to do it as well as I can. And by doing the course that was part of the obligation that’s involved. That’s part of the contract I believe I have to them._ [Nola]

The notion of reciprocal commitment is very strong for Nola although there was no actual requirement for her to ‘fulfil a contract’. In fact she expressed a strong sense of unqualified support and the freedom to pursue study in keeping with her own interests. The support was both financial and temporal, as well as moral and practical. She comments on the practical support offered:
In my immediate work environment the staff were really supportive, they’d say ‘how’s it going’ and ‘any time you need some help, give us a yell’ … they were really great and I learnt a lot from them about how they [went] about things as far as university work goes. [Nola]

This experience is echoed in sentiment by Valerie’s comments at the beginning of this section. In both examples the support is consistent across the board and is both informal and formal, through clear supervision in relation to the WBL project. Both examples also emphasised the element of choice in the study course and content.

The range of projects from students was such that some involved clients of their organisations while others had no client contact. A number of students commented on client support for their learning which was independent of their role as clients within the project. The support was mainly in the form of interest in the student’s study – as to whether it was going well – and in some cases it was a genuine desire to do the right thing by the student’s work:

[The women] on the project were very supportive. They were a close knit group of women and we found support in each other. They were very interested in how I was going on the course and always encouraging me. [Alex]

Betty gives an example where the interest of the client group in the project is in itself a strong source of moral support – often imbued with a sense of levity:

I felt I had a really good, cooperative group of clients to work with and they got really interested in the project. They’d say ‘oh not, you’ve not come to talk about your bloody research again’, but then they’d get right into it with me. … They were there in the thick of it and really enjoyed it. [Betty]

Prashir’s project was deeply embedded in a familiar community and involved significant group work in that community:
Some women would come to the group and say “Prashir, I’m attending because of your research project – I will try to help”. They were very interested in my work with the community and my study. [Prashir]

She goes on to explain the way in which she had to separate and manage personal loyalty to her within her project. Despite the creation of extra work in that regard she saw the clients’ sentiments as very supportive.

The level of support was variable and students would often discuss support in the context of this variability. It would be contrasted with the lack of support, or even detrimental behaviour from others in relation to the project – some aspects of which are taken up in sections below.

Support could be translated across all aspects described above or could be quite specific, for example in terms of money or time. A significant counterpart of support was the absence of any organisational position towards the student or their WBL project. This is the second aspect of engagement, taken up below.

Inertia.

In terms of engagement, inertia describes a passive orientation towards the student by the organisation. There is an absence of either strongly positive or negative relationship to the WBL. In some cases this inertia might also be described as indifference, whereas in others it might better be described as neutrality. That is to say there were some cases where there was a sense of not caring about the progress of the WBL project – as though it were of no consequence to the organisation, but in other cases the lack of engagement was about a more ‘hands off’ approach to the students’ learning. In the latter case it may well have been well intentioned – even supportive in intention, but it was not perceived as such by the students.

As the data shows, inertia does not always imply complete lack of engagement. There were some cases where there was material support, (sometimes prescribed by organisational policy), but there was no particular attention or support in other ways for
the project. In such examples a student may well have the right to undertake the GDSS within policy parameters, but the general position on learning in the organisation gave no particular attention to WBL, despite work being the curriculum.

Michelle offers some insight into a situation where organisational policy allowed for full financial support for her undertaking the GDSS, but there was no real interest shown in the WBL project, which was about support for young women in emergency accommodation. She expressed a sense of disappointment and demoralisation at the level of indifference:

No they weren’t really interested in what I was doing. I asked for time at staff meetings to give feedback on the project - I just felt like ‘they’re paying for it why shouldn’t I give them some feedback.’ Some of the staff were interested, but management wasn’t. [Michelle]

She offers a rationalisation of the indifference, (and its lack of compatibility with the financial support), which also flags issues leading to the development of subsequent conflict in the organisation.

I think that they wanted to be seen as having staff that were well trained. But also not wanting to have staff throwing their weight around or rocking the boat. Just trying to keep things as they were. You know ‘you can do your little bit of study, but it isn’t to influence your kind of work.’ Which is the crazy thing because it was work based! [Michelle]

Examples of inertia which was more neutral than indifferent seemed to be less precipitating of demoralisation than of disappointment. Kathy is a case in point, she expresses some disappointment in the ‘hands off’ approach. In response to the question of whether this represented unsupportive behaviour she offers the following answer:

It was hands off. That’s a fine line that one, because I don’t think it was unsupportive, but it was uninvolved. So supportive of the process and ‘you’re
doing this’ and ‘that’s great’ and ‘do you want to talk about it’ – that’s supportive – but uninvolved. And that’s partly due to the involvement of the organisation, but it’s also partly due to the nature of the project. [Kathy]

She emphasises the sense of inertia in response to a further question as to whether the organisation had a problem with lack of organisational relevance of the project:

If I was doing a policy document for the organisation there might have been more involvement and hence perhaps more organisational support. I’ve got no actual idea whether there was a bother or concern for the organisation – there was never one expressed. [Kathy]

This sense of inertia for Kathy was also in an example where financial and temporal support was strong, as well as freedom to choose a project independent of organisational input. Both of these things are acknowledged while, at the same time, she finds the lack of engagement disappointing. For some students organisational inertia was less of a problem and seen as a fact of life in their work. Heather presents such an example:

[The project] was supervised to a degree. I had a very avoidant relationship with my boss. She pretty well left me to it. I discussed it with her at the beginning – my ideas. And I asked her to be on the committee that was looking at what I was producing and providing feedback, which she also did. But she pretty much left me to it. There were no problems about my study, but she just left me to it. [Heather]

There were some cases where inertia was more reflective of wider relationships than just the WBL project and the GDSS. Heather’s example above indicates that the inertia already existed to some extent, though the effect on the WBL project was nonetheless specifically commented upon. Rita gives such an example below which also draws on wider aspects of organisational regard for her as a worker:
This is tricky because I don't think this would have happened for another worker in the organisation, because we’re cash strapped and not well funded. It’s because of my history with the organisation, I’m held in high regard by the management committee. It’s very hard with a volunteer management committee, but I’ve been disappointed at times when I’ve written a report [about the WBL project] and not got one bit of feedback. I don’t think it’s because they’re not interested, but they’ve made no demands or requirements on me in return for funding me to do the study. I think it’s because it’s me they go: ‘oh it’s safe with Rita,, it’s good with Rita, we can leave it to her.’

I suppose it’s disappointing because I wanted other people to be going ‘yeah, that sounds like us. That sounds like it would be a great way to represent or talk about us and our organisation’. I wanted to have a sense of shared ownership – to be something of a shared ground. [Rita]

Though inertia represented a middle ground between support and hostility its effect was often negative. Inertia has a sense of insidiousness; it presents as a drain on student morale or as a disappointment in the undertaking of their project. Though students gave accounts of failed attempts to bring their projects to the active attention of others in the organisation, there are no accounts of challenging the inertia itself. The comments are confined to expressions of the effects of absence of engagement. On the other hand, there was a more varied response to issues of hostility towards the WBL.

Hostility

The incidence of hostile engagement towards the WBL project was, unfortunately, not rare. Whether as a catalyst for existing differences, or as a source of hostility in its own right, the act of study was, for some students, the precipitator of significant negativity and conflict. There is clear evidence from the data that some students saw study as a chance to take up challenges within the organisation, around which there was already sharp division. As such these students often expected the WBL process to bring on hostile engagement. For others, however, the advent of hostility, in relation to their participation
in the GDSS, was unexpected and, therefore, additionally difficult to deal with. In some cases, hostility led to significant shifts in organisational arrangements and engagement. It was one of a number of issues which led to the development of shift as a separate category, outlined and described below. Some of the outcomes of hostility and conflict are also dealt with in Managing learning.

In keeping with the descriptions above, hostility was broadly represented in the data in two ways. Firstly it was a product of practice outcomes from the WBL project – in this sense engagement might be seen as resistance to new/different ideas and practices. Secondly, and more commonly, however, students described hostility towards the act of study itself.

_Collette_ gives an example of hostility in relation to practice, which is also related to a pre-existing difference. She held a strong position about involvement of clients on the organisation’s management committee – an issue which fell within the scope of her project. In the first instance she clearly connects the opportunity to study with her ideas about practice:

*I thought it was amazing, I actually had a chance to review what I’m doing in an objective, ‘academic’ if you like, environment. [Collette]*

She goes on to say of her employer:

*I think they thought I was some kind of radical bitch, because I didn’t accept their ideas about clients. I quite honestly feel they regret the day they employed me – they just wanted someone to get on with the work and shut up. And not hassle to have consumers on the management committee – which is what finally happened. [Collette]*
Despite producing a highly successful project in both personal and organisational terms\textsuperscript{11}, the conflict arising out of her WBL project led to communication with her manager being reduced to email only, in an organisation based entirely in a converted suburban house.

*Bonita* relates an example which was less drastic, but which she saw as significant hostility towards her project by fellow workers.

\begin{quote}
*I can’t say animosity, but it was certainly strong anti feeling from my co-workers, rather than my boss, to what I was doing. People would say [about the clients in my project] ‘well just get a gun and shoot them in the head’ – stuff like that. So there was a lot of that kind of negativity.* [Bonita]
\end{quote}

These two cases also exemplify different impact of hostility on students. For *Collette* the experience was a long and hard battle with hostility, whereas for *Bonita* the hostility was something easier to take in her stride. Both women, however, saw their learning experiences as significant influences on building their confidence at work.

A similar source of hostility was the emergence of issues from the findings of projects. A number of students had to make significant changes to their project content or focus as a result of findings that were not acceptable to the organisation. Where this occurred it was in situations where the initial project had been given the go ahead. In one example a student shredded the entire results of her interviews, in a project related to staff morale, after the issues raised were seen as too contentious for the organisation. Another example, related by *Patrick*, highlighted ‘political’ issues related to his project, which had been approved within his work unit. It was eventually ‘vetoed’ by senior management because of what *Patrick* saw as ‘politically’ sensitive issues around drug related health matters. This was despite its submission to the ethics committee in his organisation. For him the project was a source of conflict, not so much about practice, but about organisational secrecy in relation to important issues:

\begin{footnote}
\textit{Collette’s} production of a self help guide for people with psychiatric disabilities was highly acclaimed and launched by the Premier in NSW Mental Health Week. It elaborated a respected practice model and led her into a higher degree course.
\end{footnote}
There were some major issues there. The [organisation] has hidden for a long time behind the walls that it has built. It’s a block to transparency of organisational structure…

I guess I was naïve, but I didn’t expect to meet the ‘brick wall’ that I actually met. What I found affected the project quite significantly and ended up preventing me from completing the initial project. [Patrick]¹²

The more common form of hostility was around the study itself, rather than the content of the project. As with the practice based conflict and negativity, hostility around study tended to be either with management or with fellow workers, sometimes involved in the projects. In the latter cases the hostility tended to be around suspicion of the intent of the project, examples include re-structuring processes and staff development based projects.

In cases where hostility was described as a product of issues around study, it was not always clear if the study was the cause of the negative relations or simply a convenient site of conflict for already existing tensions. Regardless of the data representing situations from the students’ perspectives, some examples of hostility appeared to have no rational basis. In an unusual situation, where three of the students interviewed came from different parts of one organisation, hostility around their study became increasingly severe throughout the course. However, the organisation in question had provided full financial support for the students to undertake the GDSS. Michelle exemplifies what she saw as the unreasonable hostility of her manager:

[He] said at one meeting, where I wasn’t there, that we were just wasting time and were too focused on uni and should focus more on the clients. It was really insulting because we felt that we were focused on the clients – it was for our clients we were doing it anyway. [Michelle]

Mary echoed the sentiment of initial shock at the hostility. She had previously emphasised the significance of WBL, and its contribution to work, as a significant reason

¹² Patrick substantially revised his project with a successful outcome.
for doing the course. The third worker in the organisation, *Dan*, makes a direct link
between the study and the conflict:

*I think it gave us an opportunity to see how completely different other services
operated and how controlled and manipulated we were. We saw things in a
different light, whereas before I think we just got on with the job…
For me I think it was probably a saviour in lots of ways. [Dan]*

*Dan’s* explanation, of how study was both a source of conflict and emancipation, is
juxtaposed by *Michelle* in terms of the negative effect on management in the
organisation. Relating the hostile behaviour she continues from her point above:

*And so those sort of [negative] comments went along the way. I think it was that
we were starting to feel more confident and he was trying to knock that on the
head or whatever. I just feel that’s why he was uncomfortable with the study. He
didn’t like having to lose some power in the organisation because he likes to
rule.*

*The comments kept coming. Just before graduation he said we hadn’t put any
effort in and didn’t deserve to pass. And how he would know how much effort we
had put in I don’t know. He didn’t show the slightest interest in what we did.*
*[Michelle]*

While this was the most serious example of hostility, all three students commenting on
the stressfulness of their experience, it was not the only example. Several other students
cited hostility in the data. *Kate* relates a story of trying to implement ideas picked up
from her study in a strategic planning process. She describes one instance of being put
down by both fellow workers and her boss:

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13 In point of fact all three students met the requirements of the course. *Michelle* produced a product of
both high quality and organisational utility.
We had a big three day meeting about how to bring about organisational change and the importance of developing strategy. I brought up the issue of our methodology [for collecting client input] and the others just said ‘that’s just academic stuff’.

So, I’ve had enough, I’ve resigned. Staff relationships and staff infrastructure are nonexistent here. People are just expected to wing it and that’s not what I want to be doing. I need to be learning from people. [Kate]

In her drastic solution to the conflict Kate related further stories of haphazard and differential/inconsistent approaches to learning in the organisation, around which she had specific hostility and conflict. She saw her study as a catalyst for breaking with a hostile work environment, but expressed her moving on in confident and optimistic terms.

Bonita also relates a story of hostility based on varying organisational culture; in this instance at different levels within her large government organisation. At the local level (and her place of work) she experienced some hostility to her taking up study, but at the regional level there was support for her undertaking the GDSS. Her success, at the regional level, in securing support for her study was met by significant, personal hostility from her own line manager:

It was open to people to get into a course [like the GDSS], but not many people knew about it. When I spoke to my boss about regional support he said ‘for heaven’s sake, you think you’re top notch don’t you.’ He said ‘how dare you go to regional office – who the hell do you think you are?’ He was convinced that I would never succeed, he said ‘what a load of garbage, you’ll never get this’ [Bonita]

Bonita, having both got in and succeeded, describes how, over the period of the course, this hostility subsided. However she was clear that, without going to ‘regional office’, the hostile view of her study aspirations would have led to her being prevented from
receiving organisational support.\textsuperscript{14} It is also a good example of how policy and practice were sometimes variable for students.

Not all examples of hostility were major, but some minor examples were reported as significant in terms of creating onerous feelings for students. In some cases they could see the other point of view, but felt that it was reasonable that study, at work and about work, would create some differences. \textit{Alex} provides an example where she felt that study changed her behaviour at work with slightly hostile consequences:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I think that management should have provided some leadership around how it, [the study], would impact on the service. Not just around workload, but about how to weave it into the fabric of what we were meant to be doing. In fact it was all left to me to manage as best I could and I didn’t manage it really. I was so busy with my caseload that I withdrew from social aspects of work, became less available to people and that set me up for criticism – which I got from some of my fellow workers. [Alex]}
\end{quote}

Other examples of this kind included other workers feeling that their work, as part of the service, was being impinged upon, even though the student had no intention of doing so. \textit{Prashir} was one student who fell into hostile relations at work due to perceptions that she was doing work that was within the role of others in related community organisations:

\begin{quote}
\textit{When I started the women’s group the [other agency] decided they would set up a similar group and started to try to persuade the women in my group to join them. It became quite tense and I got a very nasty letter sent to my work saying that they didn’t like what I was doing. I felt very embarrassed – as though I was doing something wrong. But I got lots of support for this work and the women stayed with the group. [Prashir]}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} She had also made it clear in relation to access that she could not have studied without organisational support.
While the hostility reflected existing tensions within the community, Prashir’s experience was one of her study precipitating unforeseen conflict.

In summary hostility was a significant aspect of engagement. It presented, in some cases, as quite severe and had a substantial effect on the study process. In others it was seen as part and parcel of the process. Some students had expectations that hostility around practice tensions would occur, but expectations of hostility to study itself were less common. In these cases it was more often surprising and related to reshaping of understandings of the WBL which are dealt with in discussions about shift below. The existence of hostility in relation to other organisations, as with Prashir, was relatively isolated and reflected in occasional passing comments. Although hostility was a significant aspect of engagement with managers and fellow workers, there were no accounts of hostility in relation to clients involved in WBL projects.

Engagement was an important feature of the WBL experience. It was complex and was manifest in all its forms - support, inertia and hostility - for some students. Woven in the policies and practices of the organisations, and in the relationships at various levels - management, peers and clients - engagement was a crucial influence on the students’ confidence and wellbeing. It reflected both orientation to learning and pre-existing issues around such things as practice. In terms of the dynamics of the WBL process engagement also was significantly related to the second major theme of WBL and organisation – Change.
The tale of Change

It was the most devastating time I can tell you. Coming out of the centre and sitting in an office. It was a huge change and it was just amazing for me to adjust to. [Nola]

The student data reflected significant change as being a commonplace experience. There were two strong aspects to this: the first is circumstantial change, the second is shift. The former is related to circumstances, because it reflects the changing context of the students’ work. But where circumstances was a facet of access, circumstantial change is a feature of the ongoing WBL process. Shift is influenced by circumstantial change, but is distinguished as a separate, and important, theme because it represents changes in the arrangements under which the WBL took place. Shift can be a product of the broader changing context, or it can be generated by other, specific things arising out of the WBL itself. Shift is more directly represented in the data, whereas circumstantial change is often implied as part of the given nature of the community services sector.15

Circumstantial change

There were numerous references to ongoing change within the workplace which had significant influence on the WBL process. Examples included organisational restructuring, personnel changes, (in particular in key management positions), and job

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15 This point is in keeping with the description of the nature of community services in previous chapters. It encompasses high staff turnover, organisational restructuring and crisis driven practice emerging from a needy client group, often dealing with multiple problems.
changes for the students themselves. In some cases there were several such changes occurring in the same workplace, each having an impact on the student’s learning.

*Patrick* relates an example of project difficulty related to both restructuring and consequent replacement of his manager:

> My initial planning coincided with the changeover period, so my project started at the same time as two to three months of upheaval. The merger of the unit, the moving on of my old boss and the taking over of my new boss. [Patrick]

*Patrick* describes the workplace as ‘totally dysfunctional’ during the period in question and a process of having to re-establish the parameters of his project as a result of the changes. *Kate*, who had a change of manager, organisational structure and job during her experience of the GDSS reflects on just one aspect of the multiple effects:

> It was really hard to be at work. We were incorporating at the time and there was a lot of pressure on all of us and my uni project so to speak. Even though it was a project that was in my workplace and part of my job, it seemed to be given less and less significance in the priorities – which were set by three other people. [Kate]

These kinds of *circumstantial changes* were largely out of control of the students. Seemingly not so were instances where students changed jobs/workplaces themselves, though, in the telling of their stories, the sense was more that such opportunities had to be taken when they arose. *Heather* and *Clara* give two examples where, in each case, they viewed the change of jobs as an accepted part of their career pathways.\(^{16}\)

> The job was a bit unexpected. I had no intention of looking for a job with adults for a start. But then it came up and I took it. Then I had to adapt the project to a new situation. [Heather]

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\(^{16}\) This was implied rather than stated explicitly, but the tenor of the conversation was strongly aligned to a notion that the job prospects had an important priority over the study issues. In both cases the students developed project alternatives, though in *Heather’s* case this involved a break in study.
The timing in my changing jobs was the big issue. I would have preferred settling into my new job – it was a huge pressure. I came here and I didn’t know what I wanted to do because I didn’t know much about the place. [Clara]

In both cases the job opportunities had arisen without active seeking of new employment. Changed circumstances had implications for how the students managed their learning – an issue dealt with in the following section. They were often also the catalyst for specific changes in the expectations around their WBL in the organisation. The shift in the conditions of their learning was a common experience.

Shift

Most of the discussions I had were with the old boss and I made assumptions about what he’d passed on to the new boss. That wasn’t necessarily true. My previous boss said I could have time off. In the changeover I don’t think a lot was explained to the new boss. She wasn’t happy with the time I was having off. It never really got resolved. [Patrick]

Patrick is one example of the influence of an organisational change causing a shift in the arrangements, as understood by the student, around the WBL project and the study generally. His previous comments on the restructure and replacement of his boss directly affected his involvement in the GDSS. His issues over time are also typical - the most common form of shift related to changes in the time available at work or as study leave. Lack of resolution was also echoed in other examples. Throughout the data on shift there are examples where the understandings were informal or verbal, but shift is not limited to such examples. There were a number of instances where shift occurred despite formal arrangements about the conditions of study. Betty gives one example, again emerging from a change in management:

There were incidences throughout the course where they were trying to hold me back – the senior coordinator – refusing to give me leave for the course when it
had been approved prior to her appointment. She was just taking a position of power. [Betty]

Hers is an interesting example because, although she resolved the issue eventually, Betty’s recourse was not to the formal approval, but by inviting the head of the board to see the work she was doing in her WBL project. In essence she renegotiated what had already been agreed:

So I used another angle. Rather than meet with the head of the board, I invited him to a picnic the [client research] group was having. Because he had to communicate with the clients directly – to see for himself what feedback they had. [Betty]

Students experiencing negative shift sometimes made no attempts to counter the effects, but accommodated the changes into their study. Prashir provides an example of this:

So I applied [for study leave] through my coordinator and he said ‘I can approve up to four hours a week’, which he did. But I think someone complained and he reduced it down to two hours. I said how come and they told me ‘you’re getting an advantage because its not job related.’ But I was happy enough with the two hours. [Prashir]  

This was an example which also had no particular relation to organisational change, but was more idiosyncratic in origin.

Not all examples of shift were negative, though that was easily the most reported. Some students found that, after taking on the WBL project there was a positive reappraisal of organisational input and students experienced extra time, support or provision of input as a result. Valerie, Nola and Prashir, (despite the reduction in study leave), all reported shift in a positive direction from colleagues interested in their WBL project. Nor does

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17 There was some argument that her project was not strictly part of Prashir’s role – however her project, involving migrant women was in an organisation dealing overwhelmingly with migrant clients.
shift imply that the overall experience was negative, an issue taken up in outcomes. The essence of shift was specifically related to the conditions under which the student undertook the GDSS and how they changed.

Shift was, however, a major factor in the ongoing issues related to how students managed their learning. The whole process of how they approached this task was represented strongly in the data.

6.5: The story of Managing Learning.

It was bloody stressful. I mean I’ve still got the dent in my car from the last day. [Patrick]

I think it was a useful struggle – it’s just like searching for a needle in a haystack and when you find a glitter of silver you think ‘well I’m probably close.’ [Sarah]

Managing is a misnomer in some ways. The story of managing learning is, most often, a story of finding the time and energy, in busy lives, to include study - an exercise where, in many ways, logic suggested to the students that study would not fit. It is the reflected consequence of practical synergy – of the attempt to find a way to take up study through WBL. Managing learning is about students experiencing WBL in different ways as they try to manage it. They talk of experiencing learning as a stressful activity and as a challenge as well as relating stories of the utility of the GDSS structure, content and support mechanisms. There are also stories of ‘theory and practice’ of WBL – the way it
was intended and the way it actually took place. Their stories occasionally sound more like tales of survival than of management, particularly in relation to conflict, but they also reflect a process for which the outcomes, as the product of their learning, are overwhelmingly positive.

The GDSS

Students offered a range comments on the actual course, which focused on the structural arrangements, content and organisation of the learning by the teaching team and coordinators. Some aspects were seen as useful and helpful whereas others were more problematic from the students’ perspective. The attendance at blocks and peer groups featured strongly in the data as well as the role of the coordinator in assisting students to manage their learning.

While students generally found the blocks enjoyable, several commented on an initial feeling of intimidation, particularly in getting used to more ‘academic’ language:

*I felt very nervous at the first block and found it hard to keep up with things. I kept thinking ‘I hope I’m not out of my depth’. [Clara]*

*I used to think a lot at the beginning of the course about [my ability to cope]. I would listen to people talk and think ‘my god, I don’t know what you’re talking about – can’t you speak in English.’ [Nola]*

Both Nola and Clara talked of a gradual settling in to the block and reassurance from the teaching team, but their initial feeling of intimidation was a common expression of the students. As the course progressed students saw the block sessions as important parts of
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their WBL process. Some students found the blocks a positive experience from the start and most of the students saw the engagement with ideas as fundamental to their project work:

*I didn’t feel like I was drowning or anything – I just found it really stimulating.*

*It was really helpful in translating things into the work situation for me.* [Valerie]

Though this was a common theme for a few the process, while challenging, was also painful.

*All of a sudden I hit people who were challenging from everywhere. They challenged everything you said. They challenged who you were. It became such a heart wrenching exercise.* [Bonita]

Bonita’s case was the most extreme example of coming to terms with ideas being challenged - sometimes, from her perspective, unfairly. However she also reflected a common story of taking the ideas into the work context to strengthen her WBL project:

*When I came back from uni I would try out the new ideas and challenge the people at work. I kept hitting brick walls, but things were starting to change. For me it was a changing process, but it was for them as well as me.* [Bonita]

Taking into account the nervous beginnings the blocks played an important role in the students’ learning. The same is true of peer groups, though there was much more variety in the perception of the usefulness of peer groups. For a number of students the resolution of peer group problems took a large part of the course. Peer groups seemed to bring out both the best and the worst. On the one hand students saw them as extremely supportive whereas, on the other, they were a source of unnecessary tensions and stress. The following examples contrast the different perspectives:

*Yeah the peer groups! I’d not been exposed to that sort of learning before and didn’t know what to expect. For a while we seemed to be sort of wondering what*
was happening anyway. And I felt I wasn’t making the best use of that time. Towards the end, when, as a group, we decided what we were doing and started to set our own agenda, yeah, that was great. But initially I think I didn’t know how to make the best use of that time. [Mary]

When they’d just encourage you, you know, just that encouragement and having something to say about the experience of being stuck. And having some input [into your project] because they have ideas that you haven’t thought of. We’d always leave on a fairly high note after those groups. [Michelle]

A common comment was that students wanted more directed structure for the peer groups, especially in the early stages of the course.18

There was a strong sense that the course block content was useful and of good quality and that the general organisation and delivery of the GDSS was good. Kathy captures some common sentiments:

I really liked the level of staffing and the coordinator, as I mentioned. There was lots of variety and diversity, which kept my interest level. I also think the size of the student group was really just right19. I thought that was particularly useful for those who didn’t have tertiary experience. [Kathy]

Despite some reservations about the peer groups, the data shows a strong theme of student relationships carrying great importance as a means of managing or ‘coping’ with learning. Students constantly referred to the supportive nature of the relationships brought about by the collective nature of the block. These relationships often sustained students through crises in their workplaces or with the study in general. Dan gives examples of both. Of overcoming crisis:

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18 This has been consistent throughout the running of the course, but taken up only in part, as the process of the group setting its own parameters is seen as important.
19 The number in question was sixteen students, but this figure has consistently increased as the course has been offered each year.
I think some of the others thought my workplace was pretty awful but, for me, the more I talked with [other students] on the blocks the more it opened my eyes. So in that sense it gave me back the fight I’d lost… People were allowed to have their say and express their feelings. That was pretty important for people to learn. [Dan]

And of support for study:

Absolutely, because at two or three o’clock in the morning – when this gives you the shits or that crashes and they’d say ‘oh what a bastard’. And there’d be someone to talk to about it the next day and they’d let you download stuff on their computer or listen to your woes and vice versa. You believe you’re all on your own, but then you realise there’s a network of knowledge and empathy out there. That stuff was really important. [Dan]

Heather also sums up some general reflections on the course structure and the support from relationships with others:

I loved the blocks, I found all of them great. They were quite challenging, it was all new, but I was hungry to hear all that stuff. Just meeting with others, and some pretty smart people, who could just talk about stuff. And the different kind of work projects hearing about them all. [Heather]

She also provides an insight into the role of supportive student relationships, in the peer group context, in relation to non-study related issues impacting on learning:

We talked quite intensely and deeply about stuff like power and control and how to deal with those types of thing. The opportunity to talk for three or four hours was almost like therapy. Maybe it was a unique set-up, there were just three of us – one of us had just lost come through a breakdown, one had just lost a husband – we were all a bit shattered and we were all trying to get back.20 [Heather]

20 Heather had been forced to break her study to undergo major heart surgery.
While the specifics of such conditions were unique, there were several, general points about crisis, picked up in *stresses and challenges* below. Heather’s example demonstrates another facet of supportive relationship facilitated by the course structure.

A particularly notable feature of the data in relation to the course was the singling out of the role of the WBL coordinator as a highly valued and important role. Students consistently referred to the WBL coordinator as being a crucial element of their success on the GDSS. Descriptions of this role included a sense of being both supported, encouraged and pushed to achieve their learning. While this often accompanied positive comments about the teaching team in general, it was almost always comment about the coordinator specifically which appeared in the data.

> In terms of finishing this course, I think the [WBL] coordinator had a big role to play there. I think that the very personal interaction and objective, but personal encouragement… it was a very even handed thing and I loved it. Someone to remind me, to get me off my bum. That’s what was lacking in other courses I’ve done and it was a really pivotal role in this course. [Kathy]

Generally speaking, the student data reflected this sense of a strongly supportive learning process in terms of their experience of the course. Blocks, content and teaching team input were all highly regarded and there were no negative comments. One student, Valerie, whose project and WBL component were highly successful, suggested greater involvement by the university at the workplace. She commented that this would have been appreciated by her manager who, incidentally, had provided the most comprehensive level of supervision in any of the workplaces. Two students also suggested that they would have preferred to have their work graded in the assessment process. In both cases they were students who had ‘failed’ in academic terms in other educational experiences, but had done exceptionally well in the GDSS.

By and large the comments about the GDSS were affirming of the expectations expressed in data about access to the course. This data was about how the course was put together and delivered. However the comments on practical aspects of doing the course, reflected
a much more varied experience in the workplaces and broader environments of the students.

Practicalities of WBL.

In terms of managing learning, students often found that the ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ of WBL were not the same. The very reasons for which they selected WBL were often the reasons why much of the practical aspects of study were undertaken outside the workplace. In some cases it may not have been outside the workplace, but was outside their normal working arrangements. This was not the case for all the students by any means - many undertook their WBL entirely within the work environment - but it was a common phenomenon. In particular it was very common for at least some of the project work to be undertaken in this way. Time was the most significant aspect of managing their learning, much of the hoped for synergy, described in access not being fulfilled. However there were also strategic responses to time and other practical demands, which enabled students to achieve their learning goals.

Hei-Win is a typical case where work time and study time are hard to reconcile. Having described her uptake of the course as a strategic response to lack of time for study, she goes on to describe both work and domestic demands which forced her to put in long hours of study at home. She is one of a number of students who saw their work/study intensify. What she also says, despite this phenomenon, is that she actively considers further study:

*I had decided that I was not going to continue taking work home. Time and the effect on my health were a concern to me because of the intense process and the under-resourced position. It took a lot of my time and family time, but I had to*
give it priority. I say to myself ‘I have to look after myself, I have to quit this job’, but I don’t. But I still keep and eye on further study. [Laughs] Its funny isn’t it? [Hei-Win]

The idea that not just work, but family life is also a source of time for supporting the WBL process is echoed by Rita in a description of a typically busy regime:

And then one night about a quarter to nine the kids said ‘are we having dinner tonight?’ and I started laughing and I couldn’t stop. … Doing the project here didn’t actually work. I frequently said ‘I’m going to get on top of things here’ – the phone messages, the emails – ‘and then I’m going to work on my project.’ And then it was five thirty.

I remember when I realised that there was no ‘plan B’ that this actually was my work and the idea that I didn’t have time to do my project work seemed bizarre. I have a ridiculous workload. Being an isolated worker and only having about six hours support a week. Sometimes I say ‘if I was better organised…’ but I don’t know, I don’t know. [Rita]

Rita’s slight sense of hysteria is also a signpost to the notion of managing study as a ‘mismomer’. Most students, who reported the issue of time pressure, also gave no specific strategies as to how they managed their learning other than a kind of ‘endurance’ process of just doing it. Her tale of being brought back into ‘real time’ by her children’s request for dinner, and the effect of precipitating uncontrollable laughter, gives a sense of managing by a kind of ‘soldiering on’. There is also a sense of this in Hei-Win’s story where she recognises the contradiction of, on the one hand, giving up work because of the pressure of under-resourced employment, while on the other keeping further study opportunities in mind. In both cases the comments were made in the context of feeling well supported by their workplaces, though this was not always the case. Susan talks about time pressure as a direct result of not being allowed to spend time on her project at work. In her case she ‘manages’ with help from her partner:
I’m very fortunate because I have a really supportive partner who picked up the slack from me not having any time. Not only was I working in my nine to five position, I have another position as well, as well as my studies. I mean I took it on because we desperately needed money and my partner can’t get work. I was just doing so many things at once, it was a really hard year. But I got through it. I had so much work to do that I couldn’t do what I wanted to do, which was my project, because everything else would suffer. I did it all outside working hours, apart from the face to face stuff with my group, because that was part of my work. [Susan]

Another aspect of managing learning in a practical sense was dealing with the changes brought about by unexpected phenomena, (some of which are flagged in change), such as changing jobs and/or projects. For some students there was also a need to manage the scope of their project and make adjustments to project parameters and expectations in order to complete the WBL component of the GDSS.

Clara changed jobs prior to starting the course and had put a lot of effort into setting up the project in her previous employment. She experienced compounding issues of managing learning in terms of both time and change:

After changing jobs, when I came here, I didn’t know what I wanted to do because I didn’t know much about it. I tried to go further with my original project, but it wasn’t practical. My project [here] arose out of a staff need – it was something that needed to be done, but my heart was really in my first project…

It was acknowledged by work that I could take whatever time I needed. They were just words – they were sincere, but the fact of the matter was that my [other] duties took up every bit of time. [Clara]

The circumstances of Clara’s change were initially about helping out in a staffing crisis in her new organisation. Her response to time constraints at work was also to do much of her project work in her own time.
Heather gives an example where the adaptation of her project to the new work context was more successful. However, she too ‘manages’ by putting in lots of personal time. She rationalises this by putting forward views about ‘extra work’ in the community sector:

Well there was actually a reasonable link between my previous organisation and here, so I adapted the [project]. There’s a fair bit from the studies and research... I manage my own time, but I didn’t do the project at all in work time. That’s the thing of having a little funding and a lot to do with it. I did extra hours and I justified it by saying ‘it’s for my own learning as well’. I think lots of community workers work many more hours. I’m happy to do that if it’s something I’m learning. [Heather]

In terms of making adjustments to project parameters, some students commented on the fact that project boundaries could easily expand in the context of work. Kathy found that her project had to be significantly limited to achieve completion and, though successful, she found the process difficult to come to terms with:

I was really satisfied with the research idea, but the actual research left a few questions unanswered. I had to cut back what I could do and that felt a bit ‘sneaky’, but I’ve since managed to put that in the ‘that’s OK’ box and move on. It’s a sort of personal growth thing – ‘this bit is good, this bit is not so good, that bit’s great’. [Kathy]

Kathy’s story of feeling that the project was a somewhat ‘partial’ experience raises the issue of managing the learning from the point of view of how the requirements of the course could limit the opportunity to go further – that is, the work possibilities went well beyond the requirements of the WBL project. This was expressed in positive terms by Kathy in that completion was a significant achievement. However it also flags the related issues to practicalities of WBL – the issue of how these practicalities impacted on the
students, in particular the struggles involved in doing WBL in the ‘real’ (and stressful) situation of work.

**Stresses and Challenges.**

There were significant stresses and challenges experienced by the students of the GDSS and they run through the data stories in abundance. Notions of hostility and shift, reported in section 6.4, and of practicalities, reported in this section, are examples which might well, but for emphasis, be reported here in that they precipitate some degree of stressful or challenging experience. But there are aspects of stresses and challenges which are more than residual or repetitive features of the broader data. They are instances where the students are, first and foremost, reporting the experience as being stressful and challenging. The emphasis here is placed on these aspects of the experience.

In some ways the defining nature of stresses and challenges is the fact that the students made little or no comment on what it was that made the experience so. It was just that it was ‘hard’. In keeping with that sentiment, there was often no strategy to deal with this ‘hardness’ or analysis of it. In most cases it was just a sense of ‘hanging on’ or ‘riding the storm’. Few students expressed any sense of ‘how’ they dealt with these stresses and challenges:

*I found it really challenging. I didn’t know how to find out stuff – I had to learn how to learn. That was the hardest thing – figuring that out, feeling I couldn’t do it and getting stuck… In the end it was only the fact that others felt the same way that kept me going.* [Michelle]
While no one reported any regret at having done the course, this ‘toughness’ was clearly a significant strain for some. Patrick’s comments about denting his car, at the beginning of this section, were made within a more detailed description of the stressful impact on both his work and his personal life. With reference to his car accident he says:

_It was a lot of extra pressure that was required to do the project. I think I was feeling that pressure, especially towards the end. There was a lot of pressure and stress associated with doing the course within my personal life. It seemed to me that that particular year was a very stressful year – a year that affected my relationship and my work as well._ [Patrick]

_Nola_ also speaks of the common experience of ‘a stressful year’:

_Everything seemed to hit at the same time and I thought ‘I’ve overdone it – well and truly overdone it’. It was a learning experience for me, I felt like throwing in the towel many times and I thought, ‘I’m fifty-one years old why am I doing this? – I should be settling down a bit’. Everything kind of happened this year, but I guess that’s what normally happens._ [Nola]

_Nola_’s reference to age was made by a few students, but her recounting of a complex domestic/work, stress ridden pathway was a common story. It is echoed in _Heather_’s comments above, about peer group experiences and the crises of herself and her peers, and in _Susan_’s comments about lack of support and its impact at home.

It is also _Nola_ who offers a typical explanation of how this pressure/stress was dealt with:

_I needed to succeed, to be successful at study. That’s what kept me going._ [Nola]

_Stresses and challenges_ were the underpinning experiences of _Managing learning_ for many of the students. No one described the experience as easy, or without struggle, despite the ubiquitous framing of the overall experience as positive.
The descriptions of the course and how the students ‘survived’ it were reminiscent of aspects of *self and study*. There was an essence in the data of the GDSS being seen as a thing to be conquered and its structure being described in terms of the extent to which it facilitated the process of conquering. However, there was also a strong story, beyond the idea of ‘success’ or ‘conquest’ – the story of *outcomes*. This complex series of phenomena was often described as a direct consequence of the work-based nature of the course.

### 6.6 The Story of Outcomes.

![Outcomes Diagram]

*The [Chancellor] asked me “how long did it take you to get the degree?” – I said “fifty-four years!” [Dan]*

Just as the stories of *access* and *self and study* represent the description of the terrain on which the WBL journey, through the GDSS, began, so *outcomes* represents the extent to which the terrain at the end of the journey is different. *Outcomes* is *changed* terrain in the personal, practice and organisational domains. It represents concrete, specific and practical changes, as well as conceptual and experiential changes. In the former, examples include skills acquisition, new practices and changes in organisational architecture, whereas in the latter there are changes in perception, outlook and orientation.

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21 Dan relates his brief conversation with the UWS Chancellor when being presented with his degree at graduation.
The Tale of Personal outcomes.

Students experienced *personal outcomes* on three levels. On a practical level students describe the development of *skills* throughout the process. They also provide significant accounts of changed *perceptions* as a result of their experience. This is both in terms of perceptions about themselves and about the world around them. Additionally they experienced *positional outcomes*, that is, outcomes which placed them in a different position within the ‘terrain’.

**Skills**

Students reported on skills outcomes in several areas, but overwhelmingly the most reported examples were those skills broadly related to critical thinking and analysis. Many of the responses named this as such – students specifically reporting the development of critical thinking, or the ability to think critically. In other cases the naming was less direct, but the essence of the response was ‘critical’ in its nature. Examples included students discussing the development of insight or analysis. They also spoke of questioning the nature and operations of their organisations in a way which opened up the possibility of different ideas and actions. *Clara* describes this as a form of argumentation:

*I think very differently now. I seem to think in a process, in a pattern and an argument. I’m less easily convinced of things now – I weigh things up more, in a sort of researching style. Just my whole thinking pattern has changed.* [Clara]

*Valerie* describes this skill as critical thinking and expands its meaning for her which locates her within the process:
The critical thinking I was encouraged to do was really helpful in translating into the work situation. I had to think: ‘Hey what do I think of this? Is this the way to go?’ It added a whole other dimension to my work. [Valerie]

Valerie was one of several people who linked the skill of critical thinking to the opportunity to challenge and be challenged about work in an ‘out of work’ environment. Rita also makes this point:

It was a great opportunity for me to get out of the office and reflect on what I was doing with others. Because I’m isolated at work I get less challenging of my ideas. [Rita]

She describes a process of developing deeper understandings, not so much from ‘discovering’ critical thinking, but from honing the skill as a result of being on the GDSS. Critical thinking was a personal outcome for students both in terms of skills formation and skills development.

Other examples of skills included report writing, research and networking skills. To some extent students described skills outcomes in terms of ‘academic’ skills. In particular they saw research in this light:

I’m much more methodical now and use my academic research from the project. All the studies I’ve read, heaps of them, stuff like that. The work on literary studies has certainly added skills and knowledge. I look at my job, or the work we do, very differently. So, yeah, its changed my thinking a lot actually. [Heather]

Heather raises the issue of how skills were seen as making a contribution to other outcomes, both personal and practice based. Dominant among these connections is the way in which students describe critical thinking, not only as a skills outcome, but also as an applied skill in reshaping perceptions and actions. This is just one aspect of a significant theme within the data - that of changed perceptions and practices resulting from the WBL experience. Foremost in these are changed self-perceptions.
Self-perceptions

The sense of confidence derived from the undertaking of the GDSS is ubiquitous throughout the data. Despite significant tales of struggle, conflict and hardship, there were not only widespread comments on increased confidence, but also the expression of a significantly higher level of confidence. This was related to a broad range of positive experiences such as a sense of pride at having achieved academic success, affirmation of ideas and practices and the ability to verbalise arguments around which there were organisational differences. The general increase in confidence had an enabling effect on students, which, in turn, had impacts on practices and organisational issues discussed in following sections. These positive outcomes were often described as a result of the gains made specifically from the project and/or the research involved in its completion.

Betty and Hei-Win speak of several of these issues:

*I just think that without this degree I was lacking something – some sort of formal education. As the chance of me successfully completing increased throughout the course my confidence increased. [Since I finished] I feel much more confident. I just did a course recently, for work, and I felt really confident about my knowledge. So I was able to verbalise my ideas and that was really nice for me – having a viewpoint and being able to talk about it – thinking and questioning other people’s ideas. [Betty]*

*I’m the same person, but now that I’ve got this qualification I feel a lot more confident about putting my point of view. I feel like I have a right to speak my mind. [Hei-Win]*

For some the increased confidence was close to the most significant outcome of the GDSS. Rita gave an account of how the course was predominantly affirming for her, rather than informing. She describes a hesitant, but nonetheless definite, consideration of herself as ‘academic’ and the impact on her self assuredness. Of the impact of these things she says:
Huge. Enormous. The notion, not only that I could do it, but that I could function at this level – see myself as some sort of a researcher. [Rita]

And in viewing both the ‘informing’ and ‘affirming’ aspects of the course:

I can see very clearly how these two things come together very neatly. Like it fits naturally together that I still struggle to see myself as academic. But my confidence has definitely increased...

Actually I think one of the things that has happened is that I’ve become quieter, (laughs), because I think I’m regarded as a fairly loud person. I’m a little bit more self-assured like: ‘yeah, I know that, I understand that’. And it means I don’t have to shout my mouth off about it. A bit more self assured, which means deeper understandings. [Rita]

These comments also highlight a second aspect of self-perceptions, that of students making a shift in their view of academic study. The relative hostility towards academia and its construction as ‘other’ shifted towards a consideration of further study. In some cases this was in full recognition of how difficult the study process had been. It was often accompanied by recognition of the irony of this. Sarah relates a discussion with her husband in which the subject is discussed:

I’ve vowed I’m never going to do it again, (laughs). [My husband] shakes his head and says ‘yeah, I’ve heard all that before’. But I have a theory that while ever you’re doing things your health is better. So no, I don’t think I’ll stop, I just think ‘oh shit, where do I go from here?’. [Sarah]

For some, the change in self-perception was transformational and represented profound shifts in thinking. One student even described their shift as a reconnection with spirituality, while others commented on strong notions of personal growth as outcomes of

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22 Several students have, in fact, subsequently undertaken further study in the form of masters degrees.
the course. *Alex* expressed her experience in terms of catharsis, typical of several students:

*It was terrifically challenging on a personal and emotional level and it had a huge impact on me. It had deep ramifications for me in terms of confidence and self-esteem. I would say it was a catharsis, a lovely catharsis that I had been waiting for a long time. I feel that I’m more on a level playing field now after years behind the eight-ball.* [Alex]

For those in *Alex’s* position the comments were couched in celebratory terms and represented major outcomes. *Susan* gives another graphic illustration of this transformative, celebratory and major experience:

*It’s really hard to express this, but something happened to me that year. It was like I gave birth to a part of myself that I hadn’t ever met before. And I know that there’s still something there, there’s still something in me that has to come out, something in there that’s really good. I can’t express it any better than that.* [Susan]

Such comments contrasted starkly with comments made in *self and study*, especially for students entering the course through RPL. They not only break down notions of academic as ‘other’ but are strongly affirming of ‘hidden’ or ‘undiscovered’ talents which the students felt they had ‘found’ as a result of doing the course.

*Positional outcomes*

Students reported three types of *positional outcomes*, that is, personal outcomes which changed their position in relation to their circumstances. The first of these *positional outcomes* is in relation to organisation, the second is in relation to study and the third is in relation to employment.
Positional outcomes in relation to organisation represent a shift in the students’ influence and/or contribution to the organisation. This was influenced by both skills and self-perceptions, but whereas those things endowed students with the capacity to assert new ideas and practices, positional outcomes was the active or actual assumption of a new position. Although their specific role remained unchanged, several students spoke of their changed position within the organisation. The distinction being that they reorientated according to insights and ideas developed as a consequence of doing the course. Dan gives an example where this reorientation represents a shift towards more client focused work:

*I felt it [the course] brought me back to a very client focused position. I think I’d become focused on routines and the management of routines. I found it difficult to manage those needs with the needs of the kids and it was easy to lose focus on the kids. It brought me back to focusing on them.* [Dan]

Sarah relates a story of applying her new found confidence to challenging organisational culture in the context of restructuring. She specifically sees this as something she would not previously have done:

*Some of the changes I just couldn’t believe. You know, like I think what they did was purely for budgetary reasons, not for the better of the service or the clients. I think they took the easy way out. I disagreed with it and sat down and wrote ‘the memo from hell’ – three pages of it – to my boss. In fact it did have an effect and we did [some things better] as a result…*

*I wouldn’t have done that eighteen months ago. But I found it easy – I felt like I had the knowledge to challenge, that’s the difference. It’s really important to challenge.* [Sarah]

Sarah’s story is one of feeling liberated by her decision to challenge the organisational culture. In some cases the feelings were more complex. Bonita gives an example where the business of being challenged on the course, translates into taking up organisational
challenges. But, despite the sense of achievement, the process of getting to that point had some pain involved:

> It meant I was able to say what I meant. The experience of being challenged [on the course] was hard, sometimes it was heart wrenching, but it made me think about challenging things at work and how to do it. I became better at it, more focused about what I was saying. It was a changing process for me as well as them [work]. [Bonita]

The second type of *positional* outcome, that of change in relation to study, reflected not only a shift in attitude towards study, but also a change in access to study. Students felt they could go on to further study as a result of completing the GDSS and in some cases were already making concrete plans to do so.

While detailed accounts of study plans were not related in the data, comments were, nevertheless, firmly made. *Collette, Clara* and *Kate* were all examples of students actively seeking courses for the following year, although *Clara* was determined to seek out a specifically work-based option, which may have limited her access. Several other students related a strong inclination to do further study, but had not actively sought out options at the time of interview. There was also a significant desire to take on study which, like *Clara’s* example, had a strong connection with work:

> I’d like to do more study yeah. I don’t know what though. I’d like it to be involved in my work – I like having it apply to what I’m actually doing. That’s why I said this course was for me. So, if I could find something along those lines, I’d be really happy to do it. [Susan]

In keeping with their newfound access to further study, students also reported that the GDSS had created *positional outcomes* in relation to their job prospects and careers. Some commented that the expectation on them to gain tertiary qualifications had been fulfilled and expressed some relief at having achieved that outcome. In some cases

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23 In the case of *Collette* and *Kate*, they both undertook masters degrees.
students felt they had improved their prospects for improvement within their organisations, whereas in others there was a sense that their career prospects had improved beyond that arena.

**Betty** was one student who promoted to a higher position in a new organisation. She attributes her career change to having gained both confidence and a tertiary qualification through the GDSS. These were the key factors in applying for other jobs.

*I moved to a position as a coordinator and I probably wouldn’t have applied for such a position before. I didn’t have a qualification. But this time I felt confident – having a degree helped me look at another place.* [Betty]

**Betty’s** story is typically complex. She tells of how on the one hand she would not have left the organisation if not for having been involved in the course, while on the other hand the course was responsible for her being able to move on. In her case the incentive to move on was driven by differences in approaches to practice. Practice was the second significant story in relation to outcomes.

**The Tale of Practical outcomes.**

There was an abundance of comment in relation to practice outcomes for the students. In a general sense many of them presented a view that the impact on practice had been significant, without necessarily expanding on the specifics. Comments included seeing the impact as “huge”, *Nola*, and “a big increase in the quality of practice”, *Alex*, which typified this general notion of improvement. To some extent this reflected the aspirations of improved practice articulated in the context of *work as study*. However there were also more specific stories. Two significant themes in particular emerged - firstly there
was a strong story of *theorised practice* as an outcome of the experience and secondly there was a clear sense of *changed practice* for some of the students.

**Theorised practice**

Though expressed in several different ways, (‘research based’ practice, ‘named’ practice, ‘theorising practice’, and more ‘disciplined’ practice being some expressions), the theme of bringing a strong theoretical orientation to practice was well represented in the data. Students saw this as a more complex analysis of their work and derived both confidence *in* and confidence *about* their practice. That is to say that engaging in deeper theory, through their WBL experience, both affirmed and informed their practice. Students felt that their practical work was well founded and more considered as a result of undertaking the GDSS. *Kate* gives a good example in the area of social policy in relation to youth. She highlights a problem that existed in her practice of often representing views in a way which lacks theoretical substance:

> There’s a huge difference now in terms of how I have developed a framework for my practice. I think much more now about what I have to say and whether I can back it up. Like I think ‘can I prove that point or am I just ‘bravehearting’ and waffling on in my head here?’ And ‘if I can’t substantiate that, what right do I have to tell people that?’ That kind of stuff – it really affected my practice in a way that I’m really careful about what I say now. I think about what leads me to make decisions and what information I need, rather than risk bullshitting. It’s really interesting to think that I worked in an organisation that didn’t set up frameworks to prevent that. [Kate]

In *Kate*’s case the extent of the impact of developing a strong theoretical underpinning to her practice framework was profound. She eventually resigned her position after a period of secondment in an organisation where she had greater opportunity to theorise her practice. Her demeanour, however, was entirely positive in relation to the action.
Much of the practice outcomes in relation to theorising practice are articulated as critically reflective practice. Valerie is one example of this explanation – she talks at length about her development of critically reflective practice as a product of her work-based project:

*Sometimes you don’t really see what’s happening until you stand back. Often [my manager] and I would do that after project meetings with the staff. That forced me to write about what was happening and that, in turn, forced me to do a lot of research. I was learning as I was going and putting my research into practice throughout the process.* [Valerie]

In some cases the theorising of practice could more appropriately be termed praxis and students described engagement with theory and action in ways which increasingly located them in social change processes where the client/worker boundary blurred. In these cases the critical and theoretical also took on a significant political edge. Students described processes of increasingly taking up the issues in collaboration with clients.

Hei-Win gave an account of how study developed her theorising of practice and begins to describe an emerging praxis based on client advocacy:

*When you study you look at developments in other areas and you become more aware. The impact on your thinking makes you challenge yourself and your practice. I look at the positions of power of the clients and look at the impact of policy if we don’t advocate. I ask ‘how will we make the noise? How will we have input?’ I never consciously considered that before [the course], but now I look at what I can tap into.* [Hei-Win]

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24 The use of the word *praxis* can be problematic as it is open to a wide range of definitions and interpretation. Newman (1994) refers to praxis, as elaborated by Freire, as the politicisation of reflection and distinguishes reflection-in-action from praxis in that the latter is aimed at social change, rather than simply performative adaptation (1994:111). The data in these examples highlights theorised practice as much more directed at a kind of change for clients which is social. It is more akin to the kind of consciousness development of both client and worker associated with praxis in the Freirian sense.
Susan speaks at length about her theorising practice in a way which directly links to action around issues for young mums, with whom her project is constructed. Her practice consistently shifted from the framework of the organisation to a framework more exclusively aligned to the interests of the young women she was working with. Her strong praxis, which she attributes to her experience of the GDSS, shows how she takes up issues with the young women. These issues lie outside the original parameters of the project while, at the same time, they are a product of the project and Susan’s theorising in action.

Well it did have a really quite large impact on my practice… A lot of the instinctive things I felt about young mums I found in my research and reading. So I knew my instincts were right and I could back them up with academic writings. I put quite a few of these findings, from other people’s work and from my own, into practice – into the group…

Many of them [the young mums] went for days without food so that their kids could eat. So we introduced a free lunch into the program as a way of dealing with nutrition as an issue. [Susan]

Susan goes on to describe how the sharing of issues became the sharing of action and her role became one of taking action with the young women around shared issues. She gradually unfolded a story of the politics of being heard for these women and developed strong praxis. This story was one of significant shift from her starting point of ‘program development’.

A particularly striking example of the development of praxis is offered by Collette. She describes a process whereby a number of outcomes are drawn together which radically changed the way she worked. In talking about the influence of the course she describes how she made a choice to reposition herself with her client group on the basis of her own experience in common. In describing a meeting with a rural mental health group she finds herself challenged by the circumstances of the clients she is meeting with who, for
the most part, are distrustful of her as a ‘worker’. In talking about the GDSS in this regard she makes the following comments:

It’s influenced my work practice enormously and my confidence in work…
The job is very much about disability, which I’ve always worked in, but this was in mental health. When I realised they didn’t really trust me I decided to tell them that I had mental illness too. It just changed everything and made me think ‘what am I doing here?’ The reaction was amazingly positive, but I became concerned as to whether it was appropriate. [Collette]

Collette goes on to describe how she explored the ‘appropriateness’ of her actions by reference to the literature and research related to her project. Her strongly theorised ideas led her to develop innovative ways of implementing self-help practice for people with mental health issues:

I’ve been like a kid in a lolly shop. All the readings, the research, the articles – its so important. I loved the reading, the study, the research…
More than anything else the course has clarified so many issues for me. It’s given me the opportunity to actively look at what I’m doing every day – my politics, my ethics, the way I work with people and why. To be able to actively review all that gives me a better basis to work from. [Collette]

Collette’s example draws together several elements of practice outcomes. For some students there was less emphasis on the relationship between theory and practice, but there were still significant comments on changed practice.

Changed practice

Practice changes were highlighted both in terms of changed activities and behaviours and in terms of changed emphasis. While these may well have resulted from theorising processes it was the change itself rather than its generation that was the focus of comment reported here.
Examples of changed practice include changes in management style, and implementation of particular programs/activities. Some of these were part of the WBL project, such as pilot programs, which were sustained as practice beyond the GDSS. Others were the result of insights gained – not necessarily strongly theorised, as above, but resulting from reflective practice. In most cases of reported changes in practice there was also a change in emphasis to a more client centred approach. Alex makes a typical observation:

> There was a lot of activity because of my project. They were a really amazing bunch of women and they maintained connection throughout the whole year. They chose to work with me as an alternative to [the normal programs] and some of them repeated the program [with me] two or three times. So for me it was a fabulous opportunity to work very closely and intimately with women with their permission and their support. They were great and they got a lot out of it within the group. [Alex]

And Betty in relation to another group of women in Family Support:

> I was getting them to take on more of the role that I would have taken as a Family Support worker within the group setting. It was a really nice thing to be able to do and it made their input equal to mine. By the end of the course [GDSS] it was really working well...

> It gave us a much stronger argument against a case management approach, the one on one approach, which was the way management was going. [Betty]

In both cases the changed practice prevailed and, according to Alex and Betty’s accounts, yielded better outcomes for clients. Many of the descriptions of changed practice implicitly, if not explicitly, spoke of project success in terms of practice outcomes. The overall sentiment from the data was that practice outcomes were significant products of the WBL/GDSS experience. There were also significant organisational outcomes.
Organisational outcomes.

Organisational outcomes data reflected both positive and negative manifestations of the WBL/GDSS experience. On the positive side there were descriptions of project success and the implementation or continuation of ideas, programs, activities and the like. In some cases the favourable impact was in the form of positively realigned organisational views of study in the workplace.

On the negative side, some of the issues arising in relation to shift, inertia and hostility, reported in section 6.4, persisted beyond the course. This persistence occasionally precipitated alienation or isolation for the students concerned, even though the overall experience was reported in positive terms. On occasions the result of this was an entrenched desire to leave the organisation and in some cases the student had already moved on by the time of interview.

A small number of students commented that there had been no organisational impact.

Positive organisational outcomes

Some positive outcomes were the result of contested ideas which had occurred as a result of the course and arisen out of the debate and discussion. Others were reported as unequivocal positive outcomes where the resultant changes were welcomed. Heather, who changed organisations in the course of her study, presents an example of the latter. In relation to her former organisation she says:
They have a very comprehensive training manual which is well used and had a significant impact on the culture of practice. I think it meant going beyond ‘baby sitting’ for people with disabilities. I wasn’t one hundred percent sure it would be taken up, but it actually has been well used. [Heather]

In Heather’s case she also managed to successfully adapt the product of her WBL project for her subsequent organisation. In the range of responses on organisational impact Alex offers a story of organisational outcomes which are the product of tensions around practice and program development. The outcomes are not unequivocal, but are seen by Alex as a positive result for the organisation, as well as from her own point of view in the practice of creative therapy.

The manager’s position has come full circle. The creative approach is being valued again in the service and I’m recognised for that contribution. We’ve also taken on external supervision and that’s been fantastic. That’s upskilled people in being able to deal with internal issues… We’re doing alright – I don’t think we have a lot to worry about. [Alex]

Alex’s view was that the project had added to the agency’s respect and credibility with the major funding body. Other equivocal accounts detailed instances where the impact on the organisation had been less about the WBL project, but had involved a more positive organisational disposition towards the idea of study in the workplace. Valerie, Sarah, Nola and Clara, all provide examples of this. In Valerie’s case it came on top of a positive organisational impact derived from her project. In the other cases the project outcomes were more neutral. Sarah describes, in the following comment, a sense that her project, on staff morale, had a partial impact:

I think the manager is very much open to the fact that there are more solutions than just one and that, by sitting down and working around it, informed views will get a proper solution. Rather than just one person making a decision. [Sarah]
The sense from her description is that the organisation has moved towards, but not arrived at, a better position. However Sarah also recounts a positive circumstance in relation to the study process. She sees the WBL process as having high organisational value and ongoing support for future students.

**Negative organisational outcomes**

Though outcomes were generally reported in positive terms for the organisations, there were instances where the organisational outcomes were seen as negative. These negative outcomes broadly fell into two types. The first type was the experience of negative outcomes in a workplace where there was some degree of negativity already present, prior to the student doing the course. In these instances the negative outcomes were seen as ‘no change’ to a negative situation – almost that the GDSS had failed to have any positive impact on the existing situation. In the second type, which was reported by three students from different parts of the same organisation, it seemed that there was significantly increased negativity as a result of the WBL taking place. In some cases students had moved on from the organisations, whereas, in others they had continued to work.

Susan and Patrick were both in positions of enduring ongoing negativity, exacerbated by their WBL experience. In Susan’s case the project had been very successful and had resulted in positive feedback and support from the local government, as well as favourable coverage from local TV. The launch of her project (stories of ‘young mums’) at the local shopping centre was a great community success. However, there was no representation from the organisation or the board of management at the launch, despite Susan’s encouragement for them to lead the event. She comments on the question as to whether the organisation saw a benefit from the project:

*I don’t think so, even though I tried to get them involved... I think the project has been very successful for the young women concerned. They got the local mayor to launch the book which was great. The response from the management committee was a letter from their meeting saying that if someone was available on that date*
at that particular time then yes they might attend... In the end we just went ahead [without them]. [Susan]

Susan’s story continues to describe her retreat into work and eventual improvement in conditions when the management committee subsequently changed several members.

Patrick’s experience of ongoing negativity resulted in his feeling he had learned a hard lesson about the organisation through insights gained from his project:

*I guess I was naïve, but I didn’t expect to meet the brick wall I actually met. It was very political in that when I approached the department’s ethics committee I found it was completely unethical. I thought the job of the committee was to either approve or not approve my project, with the final decision being made by the [senior government bureaucrat]. The ethics committee did not have a say in it and the decision was based on politics rather than ethics.*

*I expected to develop the HIV unit when I moved into it years ago and found it was totally dysfunctional. So I felt the need to go back and operate on my own. From that point of view I didn’t have a lot of discussion about what I was doing. I was just doing my own thing in my own way.* [Patrick]

*Patrick* felt his project was derailed politically and felt it had a potential to reduce HIV infection in his organisation which was never realised. His continuing work was increasingly isolating – a testament to which was the almost deserted circumstances in which he worked, despite the design and capacity for several other workers.

Turning to negativity as a product of the WBL process, *Dan* and *Michelle* both give examples, (though, as reported above, there is some evidence that this negativity was also a product of them highlighting issues in pre-existing organisational culture as a result of their GDSS experience). Both reported that WBL would not be an option for future employees as a result of the negativity, but both also felt strongly that their projects
would/could benefit the organisation considerably. Dan puts the following point in response to a question as to whether his project could be of benefit:

Absolutely. Absolutely, but it was never given the chance. Nobody was given any encouragement to implement it. There were several attempts to, but we never got the chance. It was incredible to me that the organisation could invest money in its staff and then virtually stifle any way of that [the project work] getting to the clients. I felt that for some reason every time uni was mentioned there was a barrier came up for him [the manager/director]. [Dan]

The three students from this organisation, (albeit from different sections), all expressed exasperation and incredulity at the hostility to the course and their WBL. While they felt that there may have been some issues about critique of organisational culture, they all felt strongly that their projects had derived positive outcomes for their clients and that the projects had no intrinsic negative impact on the organisation.

In several cases where negativity had persisted students had subsequently moved on. Betty, Dan25, Collette and Kate all reported changes in employment which had been assisted by the GDSS and which involved the application of skills, knowledge and practices born out of their WBL experiences.

One student, Kathy, noted that there were no outcomes for practice, or for the organisation from her project. She put this down to her choice of project and reported an apparent organisational and personal indifference to this. However she saw the course as a very positive and valuable experience personally and continued to work in a positive environment within the organisation. She changed jobs some months after completing the GDSS and attributed the work move in part to having completed the GDSS.

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25 Though not at the time of interview – this information was related informally at a later date.
6.7 Story endings – concluding comments.

As described in chapters two and three, WBL is a mode of study greatly impacted by the context of application (Gibbons et al., 1994). Some of the stories above are not entirely unique to the context of application or to WBL. All students, for example, face issues in relation to managing their learning and have outcomes related to their study.

Some of the stories however are significantly influenced by the work-based nature of the experience. The impact of work as curriculum and the effect of synergy derived from this are significant factors in determining access. Similarly, the nature of work as a social ‘place and space’, makes the inclusion of the workplace, as a stakeholder in the learning – formally or informally – a significant influence.

The following chapter seeks to discuss the stories with particular emphasis on what sets them apart as products of WBL specifically.
Chapter Seven:

Charting journeys: Locating meaning in data stories.

Our pasts direct us forward, while obvious futures rush back to meet us, and others wait unseen to waylay us. All we have is the present, a moment in which we can make choices, in which we can either give in to our pasts or face up to some, at least, of our futures. (Newman, 1999:8)
Chapter 7: Charting Journeys.

7.1 From where we stand.

The student stories are considered in this chapter for the way in which they give insight to the relationships of WBL. To that end the discussion is steered by ideas developed in chapter three (section 3.3) around the notion of ‘standpoint’ – i.e. the stories are discussed from the perspective of how they impact on/are influenced by the interests and circumstances\(^1\) of the stakeholders in the WBL relationship.

The discussion is aimed at locating meaning for the stories in the broader contextual ‘terrain’, which is described in increasingly specific terms in chapters two, three and five respectively. By viewing the stories in this way it is hoped to give a sense of direction to questions for practice arising from the research. In keeping with the metaphor it is an attempt to ‘take bearings’ from the experiential journeys of the GDSS students, which might inform the ‘navigation’ of the WBL terrain from a community services sector viewpoint.

In chapter three (section 3.3) it was suggested that any particular ‘standpoint’ for a given stakeholder, (learner, university or organisation), would be influenced by their interests and circumstances; the latter being a reflection of compatibility of interests with other stakeholders and capacity to assert one’s own interests. The discussion below considers how each of the five data stories influences the aspects of standpoint – interests and circumstances. As with the reflective and relational aspects of the stories, described in chapter six (see section 6.1), some aspects of the descriptions of stories as ‘standpoint’ are more focused on orientation, whereas others are more focused on interactions. The former pertain more to circumstances, the latter to interests and, more particularly, how they are played out.

\(^1\) Circumstances in this case is as described in chapter three, section 3.3, as opposed to the use of the term circumstances as a sub-category of the data story Access. The term access itself also has two usages – the data story and the general term in relation to accessing higher education. Though this is potentially confusing the decision was made to keep the data story headings, as they seemed the most appropriate descriptions of student accounts. Though the particular usage is generally self-evident, the data stories cited in this chapter are underlined and italicised to distinguish them. The five major stories are also capitalised.
The consideration of the data stories has been made being mindful of the epistemological approach outlined in chapter four (section 4.3). The application of critical/philosophical hermeneutics (Schwandt, 1990, 2003, Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003) and the emphasis on holistic sense making throughout chapter four, have provided an inclination to create an impression of what the data stories say as a whole. Taking this approach and the standpoint model combined, the stories are considered below through the development of two major ideas, which seem to have coherence in terms of this research and the broader literature:

1. The circumstances of the GDSS students and their stories reflect an overwhelming positioning as non-traditional learners (Marks, Turner and Osborne, 2003, Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003).

2. The experience of their WBL is mediated through interests primarily related to issues of access (Houlbrook and Wagner, 2004, Reeve and Gallacher, 2005, Clancy and Goastellec, 2007).

Figure 7.1 below illustrates how these major ideas are related to GDSS student standpoint and the influence of the data stories on each. Access, as the major interest, is largely informed by the data stories Access² and WBL and Organisation, whereas non-traditionality, as the major circumstance, is informed by Self and Study and Managing Learning. Outcomes informs both interest and circumstance to some extent.

The following discussion draws on the data stories to develop these ideas towards critical questions for practice presented in the final chapter. Dealing with the circumstances underpinning the student standpoint first, the non-traditional status of the students is discussed below.

² As per note one above.
7.2. Unfamiliar travellers on unfamiliar terrain – being ‘non-traditional’.

Though the GDSS students do not use the term ‘non-traditional’, there is a significant affinity with the term brought out in the data stories, in particular in the accounts of educational experience and academic as ‘other’. These are strong statements of the students seeing themselves as non-traditional. As the term implies an obvious antonym, it is useful to both comment on what ‘non-traditional’ means – as opposed to ‘traditional’ – and how it is constructed in the discourse on widening participation in higher education (Bamber and Tett, 2000, Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003, Yorke and Langden, 2004). Having done that, the intention in this section is to examine how the data stories reflect non-traditionality, what issues are raised by this status in the WBL relationships and what challenges are presented to practice as a consequence.

Non-traditional students

Whether defined as ‘widening access’, (McInnins and James, 2004, Gallacher, 2006), ‘participation’, (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003) or ‘equity of educational opportunity’ (Marginson, 2004), the policy agenda of the last twenty years has been one of inclusion in higher education of students who, for reasons of social grouping, have not been traditionally included. Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) cite several authors, making the point that these social groupings reflect “educational, and other
inequalities related to class, ethnicity, gender and age” (2003:598). McInnis and James (2004), referring to the Australian context, add the categories of people with disabilities, indigenous students, people from rural and isolated backgrounds and people from lower socio-economic status backgrounds (2004:34). Other authors include aspects of family educational background (Laing and Robinson, 2003, Clancy and Goastellec, 2007), and traditional concepts of class (Marks, Turner and Osborne, 2003).

Haggis (2004), cautions that non-traditionality is about complexity and difference as much as about specific categories, providing a notion of difference which takes a more postmodern view. However Martin (2006), while citing such a conceptualisation from the later work of Raymond Williams (2006:21), suggests that modernist aspects of power are still evident in such descriptions.

Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) offer a succinct explication of ‘traditional’ status which highlights issues relevant to both non-traditional students generally and the data stories of the GDSS students. They contend that within the access/participation discourse: “the construction of a ‘normal’ student persists, and is reinforced by the classification of others as ‘non-traditional’”. This ‘normal’ student is: “male, white, middle class and able bodied” and “an autonomous individual unencumbered by domestic responsibility, poverty or self doubt” (2003:599). This has a strong resonance with Shore’s (2001) description of non-traditionality as Otherness where ‘normality’ is privileged and “exclusion is framed in terms of individual differences and deficits on the part of the Other” (2001:50). In other words non-traditional students are compared to traditional students who are involved in higher education “as of right” (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003:599).

This point leads to two aspects of discussion of the GDSS student stories in relation to non-traditionality. The first is their demographic confirmation as non-traditional, the second is the “crisis of entitlement” (Bamber and Tett, 2000:67) derived from their non-traditional status.

On the first point, the student demographics outlined in brief in chapter five (see figure 5.1) emphasise the ‘non-traditional’ status of the GDSS students. As a group
they stand in stark contrast to the conception of ‘normal’ described by Leathwood and O’Connell (2003). They are more than likely to be women in their late thirties, who have overwhelmingly entered the degree through a process of RPL (having no formal tertiary qualifications) and often ‘first-timers’ to higher education in their families. They are also predominantly working class people, in relatively modest paying jobs, (Meagher and Healy, 2002) and frequently first generation migrants whose previous educational experience was gained in majority world settings. As discussed in the data stories, (work as study, section 6.2) they may well have been clients in the community services sector before becoming workers, examples including mental health and domestic violence instances. Though this research makes no detailed analysis of demographics, it is the case that all the GDSS students interviewed met multiple categories of ‘non-traditional’ status as described in the broader literature cited above.

Taking up the notion of ‘crisis of entitlement’, this point exemplifies several commonalities between broader research and the GDSS student stories. Bamber and Tett (2000) see this ‘crisis’ as a negative self-perception, based on personal experience, which encourages non-traditional students to think they are not worthy of entering the academy. Negative aspects of the stories of educational experience, and anxiety/fear for the GDSS students all concur with this idea, which is also featured in the research of Marks et al (2003) in their study of social class and gender in relation to non-traditional students. Invoking the phrase ‘not for the likes of me’ they record students perceptions as seeing higher education as “for the clever and/or rich” (2003:350) – linking closely with comments in the stories of academic as other and anxiety/fear.

There is a connection between the notion of ‘crisis of entitlement’ and that of ‘remote biography’ (Lofland and Lofland, 1984) described in chapter four (section 4.3). Student demographics and the consequent perceptions of higher education are strongly biographically and historically derived. They fit within the ‘deficit’ perspective, described above, and tend to highlight negative aspects of student experiences – i.e. inhibiting self-perceptions in relation to academic study (Bamber and Tett, 2000) – which perpetuate exclusion.
However there are also strong impacts from what might be called ‘current biography’ (Lofland and Lofland, 1984), which are less to do with crisis of entitlement and more to do with practical considerations in the ‘here and now’ of non-traditional students’ lives. These are impacts, for and against study, which find their expression in the data stories through situational demands, within the story of Access –circumstances, and stresses and challenges and in practicalities of WBL in relation to Managing Learning. These things are about what makes study feasible or not.

As with the students of the GDSS, Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) describe strong, ‘current biographical’ impacts on non-traditional students within the constraints of personal circumstances. They include domestic responsibilities, time pressures and the demands of finances (2004:3 12), all of which are in accord with circumstantial impacts related in the GDSS student accounts. Because of their immediate association with the learning process, there is also often a fine balance between what students are able to do and what is put in place within individual institutional environments and actions (Bamber, 2003, Osborne et al, 2004).

While time, money and other responsibilities all constitute potential barriers to study, other aspects of student experience present positive influences. In the data stories these are brought out in accounts within fit, reflecting the feasibility of WBL. They are also strongly evident in relation to recognition, RPL and gateway to critical practice, as well as practical synergy. In terms of the way in which these data stories describe students’ positive inclinations, they concur with the notion of disposition observed by Bamber and Tett (2000) as an important development in non-traditional students’ orientation towards academic study. They are also in keeping with the observations of Osborne et al (2004) highlighting positive influences on study which enhance the position of learners.

A good example of the way in which positive disposition is developed in the GDSS, is through the process and practice of RPL. Students comment on the importance of RPL, as an aspect of Access, for its provision of the opportunity to take up the GDSS. This is echoed by Gallacher and Feutrie (2004) in their work on accreditation practices, as well as by Harris (1999) who articulates the socially inclusive potential of RPL (see also Harris and Andersson, 2006). However there is even stronger
reference, through *recognition*, to the way in which RPL impacts on the valuing of students’ work and experience in terms of *Self and Study*. The essence of *recognition* is echoed in the ideas about accreditation of knowledge by Gibbs and Angelides (2004) who see it as not merely a credentialing tool, but as a valorising process. This is also reflected in the findings of Whittaker, Whittaker and Cleary (2006), who identify strongly valorising aspects of RPL for students:

_Evidence for this transformative aspect of participation in RPL is suggested to be increased self awareness as a learner, increased self-confidence and self-esteem... In most cases these outcomes are neither explicit, nor anticipated, but are in fact regarded by learners as the most valuable aspect of the RPL experience. (2006:301)._ 

As a central feature of WBL practice, recognition, as well as the related process of accreditation, is perhaps the best example of how WBL operates as an *enabling* pedagogy, tapping into positive aspects of student circumstances and facilitating access.

7.3 All roads lead to access.

*Access as process.*

The idea that that access is the pivotal interest for the GDSS students is based on two things. Firstly it is an argument drawn from the strong sentiments in the data stories that, without the opportunity offered by WBL, many of the students would simply not have taken up study. This is particularly evident in the story of *work as study* and the way in which students gain entry to the degree. The second point is drawn from the way in which the data stories create a sense of access as a *process*. In this sense it is not just a means of entry to university, but a means of achieving outcomes as a result of study. Access, viewed as a process, is manifest in the stories of *WBL and Organisation* and *Managing Learning* as well as in *Outcomes*. As with non-traditionality, there is also a broader body of literature concerned with the interests around access.
These stories of access as a process are about the way in which the WBL experience impacts on the students and about the way in which the idealised construction of WBL is impacted upon by ‘real world’ influences. On the latter point, it is about an idealised notion of WBL, as understood by the students prior to study, and how this is actually experienced in the process of study.

The arrangements for WBL, described in general terms in chapter three and in specific terms of the GDSS in chapter five, are constructed with a view to producing idealised outcomes – i.e. positive outcomes for all stakeholders based on ethical intentions. However, the data stories chart experiences which, although overwhelmingly positive, as described in Outcomes, also have problematic tensions which arise in practice. This conflation of idealised and real world perspectives reflects sources of interest which can be potentially incompatible with the access interests of the students.

In the discussion below attention is given to these tensions by way of the examples reflected in the data stories. They are dialectic in nature and reflect the lifeworld/system dynamics discussed in chapter four (Habermas 1984, 1989, O’Donnell, 1999, Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003) and summarised in figure 4.2 (chapter four, section 4.3). Two major thematic tensions are drawn out to exemplify access as a major interest from the students’ standpoint. The first is a series of policy/practice tensions, found in relation to WBL as a ‘new’ pedagogy. The second is a set of tensions around WBL in relation to critical practice and neo-liberal reforms.

Enabling pedagogy - policy and practice.

Taking up the first example, WBL is considered in the broader context of higher education policy discourse. From a policy/practice perspective, the idea of the GDSS students being ‘unfamiliar travellers on an unfamiliar terrain’ is an acknowledgement that the places where non-traditional students predominantly undertake their study are

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3 By way of brief elaboration on this point, the suggestion is that there is no general or specific evidence of intention to engage in conscious manipulation, as described by Habermas (1984:333), in the construction of WBL arrangements and partnerships. At the same time it is recognised that specific circumstances can bring out any number of reactions from stakeholders, some of which may not be ‘ideal’.
themselves ‘non-traditional’ institutions. ‘New’ pedagogies such as WBL are largely confined to the so-called ‘new’ universities (i.e. those which have most recently attained university status), which in turn are the places where the discourse on access/participation is most evident (Bamber, 2003, Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003, Gallacher, 2006). The ‘novelty’ of WBL is explicitly identified in the data stories, particularly in the accounts of work as study and UWS is certainly located within the category of ‘new’ university (Marginson, 2004).

This dual novelty sets up potential, systemic tensions which, while enabling in the general sense, may reinforce the status quo in regard to access. The implications of these tensions for practice are discussed below, following a brief description. At their heart is the complex nature of massification, already identified in earlier chapters as being both related to microeconomic reform and to notions of access and participation reflective of broadly socially progressive ideals (Marginson, 2004).

For some, the ‘new’ institutional status reflects a policy approach which positions access more as ‘education for the masses’ than mass access to higher education. Leathwood and O’Connell (2003), for example, highlight what they see as patronising attitudes in policy discourse which not only perpetuate ‘Otherness’, but see inclusion as a ‘dumbing down’ of higher education. They offer a critique where the policy response to students who say ‘not for the likes of me’ is framed as encouragement to attend universities which are for ‘people like us’ (2003:601). Describing the non-traditional student as the ‘new’ student they suggest that:

Constructions of the new student in dominant policy discourses appear to rest, however, on the assumption that ‘non-traditional’ students, the new masses, are only fit for the less prestigious post 1992 universities4 and vocational work-related courses at sub-degree level (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003:601).

Several ideas, derived from the broader research, highlight why such a view should not be dismissed. One such idea is related to the observation that access has increased

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4 This term corresponds to Marginson’s (2004) usage of the term ‘new universities’ in the Australian context.
in absolute terms (i.e. total numbers), but not necessarily in relative terms, such that inequities for social groups are still maintained. A number of authors make this point (McInnis and James, 2004, Yorke and Langden, 2004, Gallacher, 2006) as well as offering commentary on retention and withdrawal for students (who have crossed the access divide) and the segmentation of vocationalised and non-vocationalised study (Laing and Robinson, 2003, Clancy and Goastellec, 2007). This is related to a second point, which is the stratification/segmentation of higher education as a market, where students are engaging in the purchase of positional goods (Marginson, 2004, Gallacher, 2006, see also chapter two, section 2.5). This second point also corresponds to a kind of ‘ghettoisation’ through the relative paucity of resources and funding for the ‘new’ universities (Marginson, 2001a and 2004). Gallacher sums up this notion as follows:

*Some universities will strive to maintain their place among an international elite of research-led universities and will seek funding systems that enable them to pursue this goal. Institutions of this kind, which continue to be perceived as elite institutions, will also continue to be attractive to highly qualified, and often socially more privileged, applicants. In this context, they will be ‘selective’ rather than ‘recruiting’ institutions, in that they will be able to select students from a larger number of well qualified applicants.*

(Gallacher, 2006:362).

This notion of provision of enhanced positional goods, through a stratified system, and the parallel ‘dumbing down’ agenda, put forward by Leathwood and O’Connell (2003), is brought out in the data stories in different ways. Students identify positional goods clearly within the GDSS. They articulate this through *Access*, in the stories of *works as study* and *circumstances*, and through *Outcomes*, in the stories of personal-positional outcomes. Sarah’s comment regarding *academic as other* (chapter six, p.187), emphasising the difficulty with which she is able to acknowledge the value of her degree, is also a strong example where acceptance of ‘dumbing down’ is strongly implied. However, there is also substantial anecdotal evidence from practice in the degree that students don’t quite take their work seriously if it isn’t ‘academic’. One such, common example is the extent to which a ‘literature review’, introduced in the fourth year of the degree, was commonly seen as both the most
'difficult' and the most 'legitimate' assignment of the whole course. Intended to assist in grounding their project, students regularly described it as 'serious' academic work and regarded it more highly than the project work itself. While this has not been formally studied, it has occupied much discussion time in teaching team meetings, where angst over the assignment has been seen as way out of proportion to its value to student projects.5

A parallel discussion, familiar to most, if not all, practitioners of WBL and other 'new' pedagogies, is the expectation placed upon 'quality' which, informal discussion would suggest, is often felt to be more stringently applied to non-traditional approaches than to traditional courses of study. In policy terms this tends to follow a reductionist discourse on quality, which generally privileges traditional academic study (Barnett and Bjarnason, 1999, Winter, 2001, Meek and Wood, 2002).

It is not possible to make highly informed comments on comparisons between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' study on the basis of this research. However, in the context of looking at WBL as an enabling pedagogy, it is clear from both the demographic data (see chapter five) and the data stories – for example in Outcomes and Managing Learning – that the students on the GDSS have good outcomes and high completion rates as non-traditional students. It is also true that this sits in contrast to more common stories of non-completion and withdrawal, cited by others (Laing and Robinson, 2003, Yorke and Langden, 2004), where non-traditional students have been studied in more traditional settings. Both of these things mitigate in favour of WBL even though the tensions arising precipitate complex and difficult questions for practice.

Whether a case of participation in a ‘dumbing down’ process or accessing the benefits of higher education, the positioning of the GDSS students as non-traditional students in a novel pedagogy creates a number of questions for practice. As a potential reinforcement of the status quo, the hegemonic dangers in the ‘new’ university setting

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5 In current practice the 'literature review' has been forgone in favour of a 'book of readings', designed to inform the work-based project. Team discussions would seem to indicate that the production of this 'book' has the same effect in terms of project outcomes, and intellectual rigour, but causes far less angst for students.
are quite apparent, but the access to critical thought afforded by academic study\textsuperscript{6} - as evidenced by \textit{outcomes as critical practice} - highlights the dialectic tensions in the relationships around WBL. In the worst case this tension gives systemic licence to oppressive forces, where non-traditional students become the ‘poor relations’, while in a positive framing it adds to the critical potential of the student within their lifeworld.

Several authors address concerns implicit in the analyses given above. Avis (2004), for example, raises the question of WBL as a potentially hegemonic, socialising process, related to the fact that “the movement towards work-based learning (WBL) derives from a particular understanding of the economy and labour market needs” (2004:198). Gibbs (2004) also considers the exploitative potential of WBL, due to the nature of relationships between learners and employers and Houlbrook and Wagner (2004) have suggested that students, in positions similar to those of the GDSS students, run the risk of being manipulated by the relationships of WBL.

One of the areas of potential manipulation arises from the second of the major thematic tensions flagged above – i.e. the tensions arising from the application of critical practice to work in the climate of neo-liberal reforms across the community services sector. The problematic concerns arising from these tensions are manifest in the data stories in several ways. Despite the prominence of overall positive outcomes, the revealing instances of hostility in the stories of engagement, depict difficulties which, in some cases took on serious proportions.

\textit{Critical practice and conforming/resisting WBL discourse.}

This second thematic tension is a particularly useful lens through which to view the lifeworld/system dynamics of WBL. It represents the convergence of several facets of the WBL relationship; students experiences, captured in the data stories; stakeholder perspectives on critical practice; and broader concerns with critical practice and neo-liberalism. It also consolidates practice issues emerging from the combination of access and non-traditionality, in keeping with the holistic framing of the data.

\textsuperscript{6} As discussed in chapter three, this is not to imply that universities are the exclusive domain of critical thought.
These tensions are manifest in the data stories around students aligning themselves to critical ideas, on the one hand, and organisational resistance to this alignment on the other. In the story of *gateway to critical practice* and *Outcomes*, (in terms of *theorised practice* and *changed practice*), there is a clear student alignment with critical perspectives. However, from the student standpoint, in terms of *engagement-hostility* and its relationship to *shift*, there is also a significant level of negative experience attributable to organisational resistance to criticality.

What constitutes ‘critical’ for students is, of course, open to interpretation, but examples in the data generally fit with partnership perspectives on critical practice. In the main the defining characteristics are examples where students have clearly acted in the interests of their clients, based on what they see as good, ethical practice. Examples cited in the data stories (*hostility*) from Patrick and Collette in the previous chapter (section 6.4) typify student perspectives on critical practice. A good example from a recent student (not interviewed\(^7\)) includes resistance to the increasing medicalisation of social issues in relation to drug and alcohol abuse, in the context of safe injecting environments. From the student’s perspective, a purely medical approach fails to recognise social, causal factors which, if addressed, could increase the efficacy of the service.

Turning to the stakeholder perspectives underpinning these tensions, these are represented at two levels. Firstly they are outlined in chapter five in the partnership positions on critical practice. This involves both the industry and university partners promoting critical practice in the workplace (Spence *et al*, 2000) and the commitment to critical social pedagogy as an important pedagogical approach (Wagner and Childs, 2001, Wagner *et al*, 2001). At the second level - the individual organisations - it is more difficult to establish any specific position on critical practice, given the variety of circumstances under which students engage in WBL. However, the broader literature on work in the community services sector generally affirms a critical approach to practice.

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\(^7\) Cited with permission.
This affirmation is evident across the spectrum of practice in the sector, from bureaucratic and institutionalised – ‘professional’ – practices within social work (Allan, Pease and Briskman, 2003) to community development – ‘grass roots’ – approaches (Ife and Tesoriero, 2006, Kenny, 2006). Examples drawn from feminist practice (Thompson, 1995, Weeks, 2003), anti-racist frameworks (Quinn, 2003) and Freirian/Gramscian models of community work (Ledwith, 2001), all reflect a broad consensus around critical practice in the sector. The tensions around critical practice from the GDSS students’ perspectives are, thus, echoed in a generally prevailing, critical discourse found in community sector practice literature (Egan and Hoatson, 1999, Hough, 2003, McDonald, 2005).

Counter to this practice based consensus on critical practice, is the dominant policy perspective, underpinned by neo-liberal discourse. This is manifest in various economic rationalist and managerialist practices (Winter and Bryson, 1998, Dow, 1999, Ramia and Carney, 2000, Healy, 2004, Winkworth and Camilleri, 2004) and a re-casting of clients in contractual, ‘mutually obligated’ relationships. Everingham (2003) describes this in the following terms in the Australian context:

The policy of ‘mutual obligation’ provides the central theme for the politics of community in Australia. It means an explicit reference to the rhetoric of community via the notion of reciprocity while remaining within a liberal, contractual framework (2003:18).

This is not to say that organisations cannot have a commitment to critical practice, or that all responses to neo-liberal reforms represent ‘hard line’ economic rationalism. Everingham’s comment above is itself reflective of a level of ambiguity in the neo-liberal discourse. As with the varied experiences of organisational engagement for the students of the GDSS, the models of practice in the community services sector are dispersed across a range of examples (Hoatson, 2001, Brown, Kenny and Turner, 2002, Healy, 2004). Indeed, given the evidence for a general commitment to critical practice, it is arguably puzzling that hostility should occur.

What is clear, though, is that under the general march of neo-liberal reform, (precipitated from the conditions of political economy described in chapter two), there
is an abundance of practices that are at odds with the kind of critical engagement that is centred around solidarity with service users. The obverse of organisational resistance to critical practice is the extent to which neo-liberalism dictates the alignment of community sector organisations with market ideology (Conely, 2002, Welch, 2002). (In much the same way that higher education policy dictates the alignment of universities with vocationalisation, massification and marketisation).

Hough (2003) and Healy (2004), amongst others, identify the ‘fault lines’ of these tensions as existing at the interface between front-line workers and front-line managers – a positioning which is consistent with the experience of many of the GDSS students. Overwhelmingly they are front-line workers, with few occupying management positions. The natural solidarity derived from their characteristic status as non-traditional students, personal biographies, work status (Meagher and Healy, 2002) and intimate connection with people in crisis, all provide impetus for potential ‘fracture’ at this policy/practice boundary. It follows that such a site of tension in their work is a potential site of tension in their work-based learning.

_Lifeworld/System plate tectonics._

By way of seeking to understand the implications of these tensions for access, they are considered below from the perspective of lifeworld/system relations, outlined in chapter four (Habermas, 1984, O’Donnell, 1999, Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). The experiences of the GDSS students represent a re-shaping of their practice lifeworld, mediated through the intersubjective, practically orientated actions associated with WBL (Houlbrook and Wagner, 2005). These actions consist of the “recognition or rejection of problematic truth claims” (Carr and Kemmis, 1984:141) by which practice discourse can be resolved.

Conversely, the tensions arising out of hostility, attributed to neo-liberal strategies, can be seen as a form of systemic colonisation of this lifeworld (O’Donnell, 1999). O’Donnell (2004) gives a further explanation of the process of systemic colonisation, which throws some light on the implications of neo-liberal discourse for access. Citing Habermas, he argues that:
The instrumental, teleological, means-ends rationalities of the [system\textsuperscript{8}] are geared to profit, success, efficiency, control, or market share; in contrast the communicative rationality of the human lifeworld is geared to understanding and agreement (2004:298).

This brings into focus the alienating aspects of the system that characterise neo-liberal discourse and its colonisation of community. Morrow (1994) further describes the effect, providing a clear point of tension which elucidates the implications for access:

This discrepancy between systemic intrusion and lifeworld experience stems from the way instrumental rationalization introduces forms of distorted communication that cannot adequately comprehend the needs expressed in the lifeworld of everyday life. (1994:185).

In other words, the lifeworld discourse around critical practice is superimposed with the systemic discourse around neo-liberal policy. The effect of this is to render the student interests around critical practice and around access, potentially incompatible. For students who come up against hostility, as a response to alignment to critical practice, any form of resistance (i.e. continued alignment) potentially undermines their employment and, therefore, their learning. WBL that cannot ‘adequately comprehend’ critical practice, in the context of the GDSS, raises significant questions for practice.

Figure 7.2 summarises the dialectics of access in relation to neo-liberalism in the circumstances described above – i.e. organisational engagement as hostility in a prevailing neo-liberal discourse. In essence, this suggests that a student experiencing Organisational Engagement as hostility, (which is derived from conflict over critical practice, in a climate of neo-liberalism), is caught up in a tension where the outcomes of positional goods (i.e. access to successful graduation) and critical practice are in conflict. Under a conforming discourse, where there is acceptance of neo-liberal strategies, positional goods are obtained at the expense of critical practice, whereas the opposite is true under a resisting discourse.

\textsuperscript{8} In the specific point O’Donnell divides system into constituent components of money and power, but in the broader context of the point he is referring to a more general usage of system.
Figure 7.2 Access/WBL tensions within neo-liberal discourse.

- decreases potential to acquire positional goods (reduced access)
- increases potential to develop critical practice
- increases potential to acquire positional goods (access)
- decreases potential to develop critical practice

Organisational Engagement - hostility

Conforming discourse

Resisting discourse

The following section takes up the questions for practice which emerge from the combination of non-traditional status and the interests around access.

7.4 Questions for practice - navigating WBL.

The relationship between non-traditional student status and access, as expressed through the tensions around criticality and neo-liberalism, poses some important issues for the practice of WBL. Inasmuch as this practice is a product of the partnership between the university (UWS) and the industry peak body (ACWA) the questions arising are considered below, firstly by reference to the partnership principles.
In the GDSS, the model of practice, outlined in chapter five, is aimed at providing industry benefits, both through the development of critical practice skills in students and through practical outcomes for their organisations. The data stories show that, in most cases, the outcomes are mutually beneficial and that the students’ experience is overwhelmingly positive. The most pertinent questions for practice, therefore, are ones where this mutuality is not achieved, as with hostility.

Organisational diversity and size within the industry has created a model where the essential elements of the partnership are left to representation by a peak organisation. This has benefits for managing aspects of the partnership, as well as providing access to workers in a wide-ranging, functionally disparate and resource poor industry – albeit broadly characterised as a human services industry. Some disadvantages, however, stem from the fact that the principles of the partnership are difficult to ensure at any specific workplace, other than through the representative authority of the peak organisation. While these things are not considered as a detailed part of this research, they do impact on practice considerations taken up below.

The ‘core’ principles of the ACWA/UWS partnership place it in broad opposition to neo-liberalist strategies. The adoption of critical social pedagogy (CSP) and aspirations towards critical development within the industry are inherently at odds with the neo-liberal discourse and to claim otherwise would be deceptive. The justification for such a stance lies in the arguments which have substantially been made in the previous chapters and the object of this discussion is to be clear about the questions for practice arising from this viewpoint, rather than defend it.

It follows that GDSS students may find themselves located in workplaces that are variously aligned to these partnership ‘core’ principles to a greater or lesser extent. Figure 7.3 (below) captures the influences on workplace alignment to the core principles of the partnership. Under this consideration proximal organisations are closely aligned to the partnership principles whereas outlying organisations have less
alignment. This relative difference will, in turn, impact on the compatibility of interests and the degree of lifeworld/system influence on relationships.\(^9\)

This is not to say that outlying organisations will always produce conflicted WBL or hostile responses, but that it would be reasonable to assume that WBL in such organisations should take account of an increased potential for such an occurrence.

Though this might be seen as a weakness in the ACWA/UWS partnership, it also reflects the difficulty of trying to establish ‘perfect’ partnership arrangements, especially in the face of diverse industry ‘demographics’.

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\(^9\) With reference to the partnership. It is acknowledged that organisations may have a range of other associations not accounted for here.
Several authors have raised difficulties in establishing partnerships. Reeve and Gallacher (2005), having identified WBL partnership as ‘problematic’, pose the question: “to what extent can the teaching goals of employees be regarded as synonymous with organizational objectives?” (2005:223). In the case of students located in outlying organisations (figure 7.3) this question is highly relevant. In particular it is relevant for those in the core partnership advocating access and critical practice development. A fundamental question then, becomes the extent to which the key/core partners advocate for access to WBL which may well yield hostility and organisational conflict. For some students at least, the positive accounts of personal outcomes in the data stories are accompanied by significant material consequences in employment terms; not to mention the difficulty of enduring hostile experiences.

Gibbs (2004) highlights problematic tensions in WBL which have relevance to this question. Focusing on intellectual capital appropriation, he suggests that WBL can be exploitative of the learners, in particular in the construction and common use of learning contracts (Gibbs and Costley, 2006). Gibbs (2004:473) cautions against the university acting as an accomplice in this exploitation, highlighting the way in which universities are positioned in relation to competing interests. His critique of learning contracts builds on longestablished criticism about their ability to meet competing interests of the ‘parties’ to the contract (Tennant, 1986, Usher and Johnston, 1988).

Avis (2004) also makes the case that WBL is problematic, suggesting that access is contradictory because there is an underlying assumption that differences or tensions will be resolved by consensus. Looking in particular at younger, non-traditional students he suggests that consensus is less likely to be the resolving process than is compliance (2004:212). This perspective presents hegemonic socialisations of work as the barrier to consensual relations. It also highlights the fact that, while WBL has a set of relations of its own, the relations of work still exist.

A number of authors have commented on the important, related struggles around concurrent identities of learner and worker (Tennant, 2001, Chappell et al, 2001, Boud, 2005), though there has been less commentary which takes a relations of production perspective in the way that Avis (2004) presents. Taking this perspective, practice within the GDSS has been one of resisting formal learning contracts
(Houlbrook and Wagner, 2004) in favour of less formal arrangements in individuals’ workplaces. This has been seen as useful, especially in terms of the insights gained from shift and the unpredictable nature of some changes in WBL arrangements. It seeks to allow students of the GDSS the ‘flexibility’ to avoid the dynamics of which Avis and Gibbs caution and the potential for ‘rigid’ adherence to contracts which might not serve their interests when changes occur in a hostile environment.

Of course, the problem does not disappear simply as a result of removing potentially coercive learning contracts. The lack of guaranteed consensus about WBL objectives, the possibility of exploitative relationships and the danger of complicity in coercive processes still present challenges for practice, including the added dimension of inability to easily predict such difficulties. On balance, based on the data stories, the support for access needs to be maintained and students need to be given the opportunities to engage in WBL, even if they take up those opportunities within outlying organisations (figure 7.3). Given the reservations expressed above, one solution, consistent with the GDSS approach and supported by several authors, is the extension of critical development, beyond work practice and into the realm of the relations of work more generally.

**Criticality as ‘compass’**

Haggis (2005:236) has identified this as a generally more critically questioning approach, necessitated by higher education, particularly when diversity is challenged by the inclusion of non-traditional students. Avis (2004) makes the link with Dewey’s concern with interests (as presented in chapter three, section 3.3) and suggests that:

> Such a practice would be dependent upon WBL being aligned to a pedagogy that was able to move beyond the workplace, connecting social relations of work to those of the wider society (2004:213).

He goes on to make a point which resonates strongly with the experiences of the students in the data stories who experience hostility:
Those learners who are currently dissuaded from such questions, but are concerned with the immediacy of practice, would have access to alternative understandings that problematise social relations. It is within this area that the critical potential of WBL resides. Without such an orientation WBL will be no more than ‘learning to labour’ and will fail to address the issues of social justice in a serious fashion. (Avis, 2004:214)

Given the common concern with broader social relations expressed by critical CSP, as outlined in chapter five (section 5.5) ‘access to alternative understandings’ is perhaps the most effective way to deal with the tensions for GDSS students described above. In terms of the warnings offered by Gibbs (2004:273) in relation to ‘university as accomplice’ this may also give students some protection against coercive behaviour on the part of the university.

In order to summarise the practice challenges for WBL in relation to access and non-traditionality, it is useful to return to the lifeworld/system considerations introduced earlier and to the concept of social action as conceived by Habermas (1984). Figure 7.4 outlines Habermas’ schema on social action, whereby communicative action centres on understanding and strategic action centres on outcomes (Habermas, 1984, O’Donnell, 2004).

Though recognising that the boundary between lifeworld and system is not always clear cut, O’Donnell, (2004:298) makes the point that communicative action, built on intersubjective understanding and agreement, largely takes place in the lifeworld relations. By contrast strategic action is largely a product of a systemic perspective. Strategic action, according to Habermas, allows orientation to success (outcomes), based on “opponents acting in a purposive-rational manner” (1984:286). He establishes strategic action as a means of resolving different interests in respect of outcomes (figure 7.4) rather than developing communicative action (understanding):
We call an action oriented towards success strategic\textsuperscript{10} when we consider it under the aspect of following rules of rational choice and assess the efficacy of influencing the decisions of a rational opponent. (1984:285)

This is arguably the reality of the workplace where policy discourse is at odds with practice. Students in this situation are faced with the pragmatics of the ‘real world’ where both lifeworld and system must be accounted for.

From the descriptions above; the data stories, the partnership framework of the GDSS and other writers, the social actions in relation to WBL, therefore, involve both communicative and strategic action. The meaning making and development of understanding associated with critical practice and personal learning journeys, on the one hand, are carried out in conjunction with the strategic requirements of the

\textsuperscript{10} Emphasis in original
workplace on the other. Under this characterisation critical practice is positioned as a form of *communicative action*, whereas neo-liberalism, and its reforming strategies, is positioned as a form of *strategic action*.

The usefulness of Habermas’ schema is the recognition that strategic action, while inevitable in terms of the lifeworld/system dynamics of WBL, can take the form of either *open* or *concealed* strategic action (figure 7.4). It allows, by their recognition, the avoidance of both *unconscious* and *conscious* deception in WBL relationships. More to the point, the framework provides a basis for the recognition of open strategic action as a means of ethical practice – i.e. a basis for action which can acknowledge the need for strategic outcomes while resisting hegemonic or coercive systemic or organisational forces.

![Figure 7.5 – Intersecting relations of engagement in WBL](image-url)

- **A** – lifeworld/system relations
- **B** – social action orientation
- **C** – organisational alignment to partnership
Figure 7.5 summarises the intersecting relations of WBL which must be negotiated in order for students to succeed. To that end they all potentially impact on the primary interest of access.

7.5 Directions?

The suggestion at the beginning of this chapter was that the principle circumstance of the GDSS students was that of being non-traditional and that their overriding interest was one of access to higher education. Drawing on the data stories, literature from other research and the ideas developed in the preceding chapters, WBL has been discussed as an enabling pedagogy, capable of facilitating access. However, WBL can also be problematic and the data stories have been considered with a focus on problematic tensions, in particular around access, critical practice and influences which impact on these things. Partnership, lifeworld/system dynamics and WBL as social action have all been highlighted as potential influences on competing interests, the effects of which have to be navigated by the GDSS students as both learners and workers.

In terms of practice it has been suggested that developing a ‘critical compass’ for students to navigate these, potentially problematic, relations is one way of supporting their interests. The resultant access to ‘alternative understandings’ was suggested as useful, especially as the conjoint positioning in learning and work brings into play broader aspects of the relations of production.

In the final chapter some points are raised as to what useful questions this poses of a more general nature. As suggested in chapter four, these are limited to insights rather than generalisations. Two broad points are raised: firstly insights that might inform practice in the community services sector in light of the knowledge economy paradigm and secondly the critical theorisation of partnership in the face of neo-liberal reforms.
Chapter Eight:

Destinations: A sense of place on WBL terrain.

From the perspective of a critical theory of dialogue, the fundamental problem with the political order is insufficient “dialogic justification” of elite decision making and power. Welton, 1995:153.
Chapter 8: Destinations.

8.1 Political landscapes?

Having used the metaphor of landscape and geography throughout the previous chapters, this final chapter deals with what might be called the political dimensions of the WBL terrain. As with maps in an atlas, much can be learned from the geomorphologic representations, but there is also a significant account of the landscape derived from settlement, colonisation and demarcation, to be found in the ‘political’ maps. These maps tell the stories of utility – of the shaping of the terrain from a social perspective. This chapter attempts to draw some of the boundaries that inscribe the territory of WBL on the HE landscape, particularly in the domain of the community sector. In keeping with the framework of the research in general, the overriding argument is in favour of ‘self-determination’ in relation to models of practice and against unnecessary ‘colonisations’ and ‘occupations’ by dominant WBL discourses. It is especially focused on the space inhabited by the students of the GDSS and their needs as defined within that space, told in the data stories and represented in the case study.

Considering the previous discussion on access and non-traditionality, two broad ideas are put forward in conclusion to this research. The first is the idea that WBL, in this context at least, should incorporate a defence of knowledge production as a public good. The second is the argument for acknowledging lifeworld relations as a fundamental aspect of partnership.

8.2 Private property? - Knowledge as a public good.

Amidst the ideas and concerns around the privatising processes in HE, described in chapter two, there is a related concern around the status of knowledge as a public and/or private good (Marginson, 2001a, Peters, 2003). In keeping with the notion of HE and the CS sector as a point of confluence, the concern over private/public goods status is also a characteristic of the discourse on welfare provision (Minford, 1991, Freeman, 1992, Rothstein, 2002). In order to clarify the relevance of this to WBL, it
is useful to first describe public and private goods and how they are produced and distributed.

**Public and private goods.**

The defining features of public and private goods centre on how they are accessed and consumed. Freeman (1992) provides a clear definition:

> A good is said to be “private” if its benefits can be captured by the investor-owner and denied to those of the community who do not invest in it. A “public” or “collective” good is one that has a significant benefit that cannot be denied to those who do not help bear the cost… Pure public goods are characterized by two attributes: (1) nonrivalness of consumption, meaning that the quantity of a good available to others is not diminished by any one person’s consumption of the good; and (2) nonexclusiveness of consumption, meaning that if a good can be consumed by one person it can be consumed by others in the community at no significant marginal cost. (1992:72).

While this is a useful definition, subtleties in relationship of public/private goods are important. Marginson (2007) cautions against simple dualities, in favour of complex understandings of the way private and public goods are produced in HE, suggesting that there are elements of traditional, definitional attributes existing in each.\(^1\)

Taking these definitions, private goods would be exemplified by those things which are normally exchanged under market conditions. In this case, one consumer purchases the good or service to the exclusion of all others – whether, for example, a car or private tuition for a musical instrument. On the other hand, a public good, such as clean air, public highways etc. can continue to be consumed regardless of the involvement of a consumer in its production cost and with no effect on other potential consumers’ access.

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\(^1\) Marginson (2007:315) establishes a detailed and persuasive argument as to why definitional attributes of public and private goods should be treated as points of emphasis, rather than mutually exclusive, rigid definitions. Given that Marginson’s emphasis is on the concept of globalised notions of the private/public divide, only the arguments relevant to this research are discussed in detail in this section.
This is not to say, however, that public goods are immutable and cannot be commodified. Indeed, the examples given in the previous paragraph, reconfigured in the form of highway toll charges and carbon trading, become commodities in the traditional sense. Commodification, as argued briefly in chapter two, is a principle effect of the marketisation of HE and its focus, in the knowledge economy, on the utility of knowledge (Parker, 2004). HE has been substantially privatised through the introduction of fees (Marginson, 2001b) and both HE and the CS sector have been subject to arguments from both sides about the merits of this process (Marginson, 1997, Barr, 1998, Rothstein, 2002, Daniels and Trebilcock, 2005, Naidoo, 2005). Marginson makes the point that underpins the logic of private goods in HE:

For economics, allocative efficiency is primary and this predisposes us to market solutions. Hence, the neo-liberal policy maker concludes that for the most part, higher education is a natural private good and should be marketised (2007:314)

The significance of the public/private status, for the purposes of this discussion, however, is that public goods do not fit the rules of the ‘market’. They present dilemmas in a marketised system of knowledge production, as well as community services provision, especially on questions of distribution. This, in turn, leads to the all important question for the GDSS – what is ‘good’, in this context, about public goods, and why are they worth defending?

Public goods, and access.

There are two factors impacting on the arguments in support of knowledge production as a public good in relation to access. The first is the accessibility of public goods and the notion of ‘social dilemmas/collective action’ versus the ‘market’ (Rothstein, 2002). The second is the nature of the knowledge economy and the way GDSS students are positioned within it. Each of these factors will be discussed in relation to the production of public goods in HE (Peters, 2003, Marginson, 2001a, 2007) as well as the CS sector (Rothstein, 2002, Daniels and Trebilcock, 2005).
Taking the first point – accessibility of public goods in the social/market context – the strength of public goods lies in their provision of benefits across the community - i.e. a social benefit – in comparison to private goods (Rothstein, 2002). In this regard they present as externalities – i.e. costs and benefits which lie outside the individual consumer/producer exchange, characterised by private goods (Freeman, 1992, Rothstein, 2002, Marginson, 2007).

The salient point about public goods is that, because of their social nature and externality to the market exchange, they are not efficiently dealt with by the market. As Freeman puts it: “In collective-good situations, the logic of the individually rational decision maker is irreconcilable with the logic of the community” (1992:73). In support of this point he identifies the ‘efficient’ nature of market relations as being geared towards the exclusion of external costs from the exchange relationship and the inclusion of external benefits within it. In other words, markets seek advantage in competition which excludes social benefits (Freeman, 1992, Rothstein, 2002).

Unfortunately, not all external benefits are capable of being brought into market exchanges, because some social benefits are more than the sum (aggregate) of individual exchanges. Public goods convey a benefit which can only be social, for example the collective benefits of literacy derived from education in general, (discussed below). Here again Freeman provides some clarity:

*Laissez-faire economic philosophy assumed that what was good for individuals as they rationally sought economic advantage in markets would aggregate to that which was good for all society. This simply does not hold in matters of public goods (1992:73-74).*

As Marginson (2007) points out, HE delivers benefits to students in the form of both public and private goods. He argues that the acquisition of private goods takes the form of positional goods (see also chapter seven, section 7.3), which is borne out in

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\(^2\) A full explanation of the relationship between externalities and public/private goods production is not practical in this context. Some concepts have been simplified in order to make the points in relation to the GDSS and WBL clearly. One such example is the definition of externality which is more complex, especially in Freeman’s (1992) account. However, for the purposes of this explanation the definition retains its integrity in the less complex form, as used by the other authors.

\(^3\) Synonymous with public goods in Freeman’s usage.
the GDSS data stories relating to *Outcomes*, as well as some aspects of *Access*.
Conversely he also points to important public goods produced by HE:

*Higher education produces certain public goods whether marketised or not. The classic public goods are knowledge, collective literacy and common culture (Marginson, 2007:318).*

However, in terms of this discussion, Marginson also provides insight into the prime public good that is relevant to the students of the GDSS: that of “social opportunity provided by higher education” (2007:319). Herein lies a complex, but important argument which directly relates to the issue of access for the students of the GDSS and, as will be subsequently discussed, their position as non-traditional students. The essence of this argument and its distributional consequences is captured by Marginson in the following passage:

*For example by improving the access of under-represented groups, affirmative action creates a more equitable system, which is a public good. Affirmative action is ambiguous: it has both a common public good aspect (it contributes to fairness) and a private good aspect subject to rivalry and excludability (access to scarce university places). It also invokes a contest about which aspect of the public good, fairness, is more important: the principle that higher education should [be] more representative of the population, which favours affirmative action; versus the principle that all applicants should be subject to identical treatment (2007:319).*

The issue for students of the GDSS is not a debate about equity versus identical treatment – from the overwhelming discussions in previous chapters it is clear that access is seen, in this argument, as an equity issue⁴. What is significant about access as a public good is the extent to which it becomes undermined in a marketised situation. Because the inevitability in markets is to emphasise the production of private goods, as argued above, then the aspect of access which is public – equity - is

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⁴ It is worth mentioning in passing, however, that the barriers to access, as described in the data stories of *practical synergy* and *fit* are not based on lack of merit, as evidenced by student outcomes. Rather, they are based on financial, temporal and circumstantial factors.
diminished. In Marginson’s argument above this would see equity decreased and scarcity increased if access were subject to increasing marketisation. As he puts it, in terms of public goods as knowledge, they are “always under-produced in markets” (2007:319). Andrews (1999) makes precisely the same argument in his research into educational access and black Americans⁵, pointing to market failure in the provision of education.

The ideas flagged by Gibbs (2004) in the previous chapter, in relation to intellectual property and potential exploitation in WBL, highlight the way in which an increasingly marketised approach to WBL could jeopardise knowledge production as a public good. Looking at the value placed on recognition by the GDSS students it is also easy to envisage how market incursions into the practice of WBL could render such a beneficial ‘externality’ part of an individual exchange process through the charging of fees⁶ for the consideration of RPL.

In terms of a strategic response, Duke (2003) maintains the importance of keeping access at the forefront of the higher education agenda because of persisting inequity in the HE system, borne largely by non-traditional students. The potential for marketisation to reduce access by undermining those aspects configured as public goods is an important process to guard against. However, it is especially important in the context of the GDSS, due to the particular positioning of WBL in the CS sector. In this respect students experience yet another ‘double bind’, akin to that described in chapter two (section 2.5, p21) in relation to HE. This second double bind is that of the significance of the public/private goods discourse within the CS sector in the additional context of the knowledge economy.

Public goods in the CS sector.

Rothstein (2002) defends the provision of public goods, in the context of the welfare state, for many of the same reasons provided above. In particular he highlights the

⁵ Andrews’s (1999) book covers a broad set of issues in relation to systemic problems in relation to black Americans. In particular chapter 2, (p57-113) gives a detailed account of market failure. His comments on education have a central focus on non-traditionality viewed through the prism of access as affirmative action.

⁶ In fact, in my own experience, the charging of fees for RPL is already practiced in some parts of the VET system.
averseness of the market towards selecting ‘bad risks’ for investment in welfare provision. The essence of Rothstein’s argument is that people ought not to be excluded from welfare services on the basis of cost and that, as with the examples above, this requires some socialised response to their needs. What Rothstein describes as “bad risks” (2002:207) could easily be applied to many of the clients that students of the GDSS work with. The general descriptions of work listed in chapter five (section 5.3) incorporate clients in settings such as refuges, mental health services, public housing, disability and torture and trauma services; all of whom are likely to experience crisis and ‘failure’, at least some of the time, in the course of their engagement with the services at which the students work. Both Rothstein (2002) and Freeman (1992) point to problems that this presents in a market based system of welfare provision:

*A central tenet of marketplace theory is that free people, making uncoerced and mutually beneficial exchanges, will advance their welfare and therefore that of society. Unfortunately, the capacity to drive an advantageous bargain depends in large measure on what one possesses and can offer potential exchange partners. One with little to offer tends to be ignored or exploited. The marketplace adjusts to those with assets. Those who control key assets coerce those who do not (1992:75).*

The clients of the students of the GDSS, in short, ‘have little to offer’ in *market* terms. In terms of critique of market based models, offered by several of the authors above, it is also the case that they have less choice than a ‘free market’ would imply, especially where they are not acting from a voluntary position or live in areas where there is effectively only one service provider. Brown, Kenny and Turner (2002) emphasise this as an outcome of extensive research on welfare clients:

*Unlike real markets, welfare recipients, reconfigured as ‘consumers’ have no real choices, and no way of obtaining recompense for shoddy service… Active citizenship is constructed as ‘consumer citizenship’ in which active engagement and autonomy of action are constrained by the lack of fiscal power and information resources of the welfare ‘consumer’ (2002:172.)*
Of course, many CS workers (including students of the GDSS) work from a strengths or assets based approach in relation to their clients (see for example Ife and Tesoriero, 2006, Kenny 2006), but it is precisely the framing of these characteristics in a community setting which is undermined by the encroaching market. What is significant about this for WBL in the CS sector is how the ‘work’ of the GDSS students is positioned in the knowledge economy paradigm, described in chapter two.

Public goods in the knowledge economy.

The relationship between the knowledge economy and WBL brings together several issues. At the centre of this relationship is the positioning of ‘welfare’ services as public goods - or at least the defence of that idea, based on the critique of neo-liberalism above (Freeman, 1992, Andrews, 1999, Rothstein, 2002, Daniels and Trebilcock, 2005) and in chapter two. Whereas the emphasis in the previous section was on the nature and circumstances of the clients, the emphasis in this section is on the services themselves. Several points come to bear on the knowledge economy and the consideration of public goods.

The first consideration was put in chapter two (section 2.5), where Reich’s (1991) notion of key job categories in the knowledge economy was raised, noting that the work of the GDSS students is largely in-person services work. Briefly recapping, this work involves client/customer relations – i.e. actual person to person relations. It is, therefore, locally bound and not subject to globalisation in the same way that routine production and symbolic analytical services are (Reich, 1991:176).

Following from this point, the emphasis within the knowledge economy is, self-evidently, about viewing knowledge in economic terms, but some authors have raised questions about the extent to which this is taken. These questions are about the ability of the knowledge economy to conceive of knowledge as a global public good. Marginson makes the point strongly that: “National higher education is public, global higher education is private.” (2007:314). Peters (2002) also highlights this as a deficiency in policy formation on the knowledge economy arguing that: “The policy constructions do not recognise, for instance either knowledge as a global public good or the key role governments have in promoting public education…” (2002:98). He
goes on to describe a further point of relevance to this discussion, which is that policy has a “narrow instrumental approach to the economics of knowledge and to intellectual knowledge in general” (2002:98). Bullen et al (2004) articulate this as the knowledge economy being dominated by a techno-economic paradigm. They argue that this is only one view of social and economic change and that other theorisations of the knowledge economy should be considered.

*A different theorization does not alter the material conditions to which we are currently subject, but it does provide opportunities for envisaging different ways of responding to these conditions, and so a different future (Bullen, Robb and Kenway, 2004:17)*

Building on the ideas above, Barnacle (2004) brings a perspective which begins to link several of these points. She criticises both policy and the limitations of instrumental approaches to knowledge:

*The logic of economic growth through the creation and transfer of knowledge is both persuasive and pervasive. But are other benefits of a renewed emphasis on ‘applied knowledge’ getting overlooked? What other reasons might there be for reasserting the value of knowledge that emerges through and is relevant to practice that [is] not reducible to economic value? (2004:358)*

One might easily rephrase the question in terms of knowledge reduced to the status of private goods which ought to be preserved as public goods.

These issues, then, converge by way of positioning CS work in the local context, in a world which increasingly globalised and in which knowledge is increasingly privatised, marketised and technically/instrumentally focused. The concern for WBL practice in the CS sector is that, as a form of knowledge production with significant orientation to public goods, incorporating person to person services and locally bound, it does not fit the dominant discourse of the knowledge economy. Taking Freeman’s (1992) comments in relation to ‘what one has to offer’, within the knowledge economy, as described above, the students of the GDSS do not have a lot. They are
producers of knowledge which is not easily “codified in intellectual property” (Marginson, 2007:318) or subject to licensing, or patents (Barnacle, 2004, Powell and Snellman, 2004).

By contrast, in developing critical practice skills, for application in the interests of their clients, they have an abundance of knowledge in the form of public goods. These critical skills however, as discussed in chapter seven, may not even be welcome in their organisations. Even when not precipitated as conflict, critical knowledge often has tenuous acceptance. Garrick and Rhodes (2003), for example, observe that the level of industry support for ‘critical’ knowledge – while often espoused – can be vague and/or ephemeral in terms of ongoing commitment.

The emphasis on economic knowledge to the exclusion of other forms is a potential danger for WBL in a CS sector setting. To paraphrase Pettman (1991:106), who contends that ‘dominant discourses determine the norm’, such forces run the risk of consigning WBL in the CS sector to the status of ‘Other’ (Shore, 2001), along with the students who undertake it, as non-traditional ‘Others’ (Duke, 2003, Houlbrook, 2007). Nor is it easy to counter the techno-economic discourse from a resources perspective. The ‘Othering’ can be compounded by financial realities, related to employer ‘type’ as discussed in chapter seven (section 7.2) and in chapter five. Whyte (2001) points out, in this regard, that 80% of the Australian workforce work in small to medium enterprises “where access to company supported learning and development is limited” (2001:128). This is consistent with the observations of Boud et al (2001), made in chapter three, on the relative under representation of the community sector in WBL.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the interests of the students of the GDSS are bound up with the idea of public goods. The relationships which underpin the idea of defence of public goods are summarised in the following way:

1. Reliance on public goods in HE as a basis for access, through equity and recognition principles.
2. Reliance on public goods in the CS sector as a basis for social justice, through critical practice.
3. Resistance to the dominant paradigm in the knowledge economy, which undermines public goods through techno-economic emphasis on knowledge production.

The opportunity to defend public goods, within WBL, is partly about the possibility of making them visible in the face of potentially hegemonic – taken-for-granted – constructions of WBL which conform to the dominant representations of the knowledge economy. The following, and final, section outlines aspects of WBL partnership which provide possibilities for this.

8.3 Partnership as Lifeworld.

This penultimate section builds on arguments about lifeworld/system dynamics, put largely in chapter seven, in order to make the case for a strong lifeworld perspective on partnership, as a means of advocating for the interests of WBL participants. The argument draws on experience of ‘partnership lifeworld’ from the GDSS, suggested limitations to strategic/systemic theorisations of partnership in other research, examples of systemic ‘imperatives’ that challenge WBL practice and perceived benefits from taking a strong lifeworld perspective.

Strategic aspects of partnership – i.e. those with a more *systemic* orientation, and geared towards *strategic action* (see figure 7.4, p266) – are well represented in the literature. Several examples of ‘systemic’ theorisation of partnership were offered in chapter five (section 5.2), including aspects which give rise to questions for practice. Shipley (2001) describes various approaches to WBL partnership in terms of strategic questions, including *value adding* and *cost effectiveness*, as well as issues related to the scope of partnership arrangements. Gustav and Clegg (2005), as well as Kruss (2006), identify institutional characteristics and tensions in partnership, which are also strategic and concur with general strategic aspects highlighted in chapter five (section 5.2).

However, there is increasing evidence that much of what, purportedly, constitutes effective partnership, from a strategic/formal perspective, is found wanting (Rhodes and Garrick, 2003, Tett, 2005, Reeve and Gallacher, 2005) and that more
interpersonal aspects of partnership are important (Bringle and Hatcher, 2002). Personal elements of the ACWA/UWS partnership, described in chapter five, arguably fit into this domain and constitute lifeworld relations. *Cultural dialogue, open and like-mindedness, facilitation of conflict* and *individual commitment* all represent characteristics of the partnership with a strong investment in lifeworld relations, aimed at *communicative action*.

Figure 8.1 puts forward a view of these ‘partnership lifeworld’ relations, suggesting a strong sense of the partnership existing synergistically and independently of both the university and the industry partner at some level, as well as locating the GDSS within its boundary.

These relations might also be described as a form of ‘partnership solidarity’ where understandings are developed primarily around social actions of the partnership. This is akin to Habermas’ notion of *social solidarity* and his contention that “communicative action is a switching station for the energies of social solidarity” (1987:57).
Some examples of social solidarity from within the lifeworld of the partnership are related in chapter five (section 5.2). One such example is the defence of WBL by the CEO of ACWA in the face of some resistance of the board in the early stages of the degree. Likewise the action of the academic coordinator, in taking the secondment at ACWA, represents a stepping towards the industry partner into an area of mutual experience. Both examples represent actions where the partners act in a manner orientated to the partnership specifically.

Practices, also outlined in chapter five, such as Joint teaching, assessment and regular planning and review all contribute to the notion of ‘healthy interdependency’ cited above, (Bringle and Hatcher, 2005)\(^7\) and a strongly shared approach to practice.

The usefulness of these communicative ties lies in their role in facilitating mutual understandings for the coordination of action (Habermas, 1987:137) from within the partnership. Habermas describes these processes as a means of ensuring that “newly arising situations are connected up with the existing conditions within the world” (1987:140). The ‘newly arising situations’ in WBL practice include the need to deal with systemic influences that “turn back upon the contexts of communicative action and set their own imperatives against the marginalised lifeworld” (Welton, 1995:143).

A common manifestation of action in relation to WBL practice is the need to operate within a framework of flexibility. Usher (2000:108) makes the point that a key feature of WBL is flexibility of both content and process. This requirement stems from aspects of both work as curriculum and the context of application, characteristic of WBL, and discussed at length in chapter three. Bearing this in mind, flexibility is a useful prism through which to view further examples of potential systemic colonisation. Two examples are offered below with particular reference to communicative action and flexibility in WBL practice - quality and assessment.

The usefulness of a lifeworld perspective is particularly evident in relation to quality because of its links firstly, to assessment and secondly, ‘standards’. Quality Assurance (QA) has a substantial systemic/bureaucratic presence in HE through the

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\(^7\) Chapter five, section 5.2.
development of QA agencies both in the Australian context (Baird, 2007) and internationally (see for example Aelterman’s, 2006 review of a number of QA agencies across several countries and global regions). The role of these agencies is, in part, an engagement in an international discourse on academic standards (Aelterman, 2006:228).

Dill (2005) looks at the regulatory impact of academic standards and addresses the way in which the discourse on ‘quality’ is shifting away from the notion of academic self-regulation towards external review which takes on a consideration of market forces. His contention is that:

"We are already seeing an emergence of an international arms race based upon measures of academic prestige and faculty reputation (2005:190)."

WBL is caught up in the standards debate and some authors have addressed the issue in terms of its systemic dimensions. Lyons and Bement (2001) engage with the notion of “setting the standards” (2001:167) and provide a formalistic typology of cognitive attainment and skills development. In the same volume however, Winter (2001) makes the point that the tendency is to frame quality in WBL from the position of asking how WBL can “ensure that such learning can enjoy the same level of quality assurance as currently characterizes the ‘traditional’ method of tuition” (2001:163). As Winter himself seems to recognise, this immediately requires the tacitly imbued WBL to account for itself in explicit academic terms. He makes the point that WBL is “not just an uncouth intrusion into higher education from an alien realm” (2001:163).

The implications of the ‘systemic imperatives’ of QA and standards impact directly on assessment. This is not only in terms of assessment of WBL projects, but also the practice of RPL/APEL on which WBL fundamentally relies. Such perspectives do not easily accommodate, for example, the importance of recognition, as recorded in the data stories, and its role as a valorising phenomenon, discussed above8 (Harris and Anderson, 2006).

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8 Chapter seven (section 7.2)
Gibbs and Angelides (2004), looking at experiential learning, APEL and accreditation, also take up this point strongly in relation to the requirement for flexibility. They argue for a flexible approach to avoid hegemonic forms of education, determined by economic rationalisations. The also make a particularly valid point of relevance to WBL - suggesting the development of forms of assessment where “outcomes have a role but the unpredictability of engagement precludes a predefined form of content and assessment” (2004:342).

The examples of quality and assessment represent some general questions for the practice of WBL. However there are also specific examples where flexibility, based on mutual understandings, is called upon in relation to systemic imperatives. The ‘unpredictable’ nature of change/shift, in the data stories, is one such example. However, non-traditionality of GDSS students, representations of knowledge constituted as public goods and neo-liberalism and critical practice, are all examples where the lifeworld of WBL is potentially marginalised.

*The benefits of partnership as lifeworld and social solidarity.*

From the examples above, there are dangers for practice of WBL within the GDSS (and arguably in other contexts). If practice only takes its cue from systemic/traditional constructions of phenomena such as quality and assessment, then it runs the risk of privileging forms of WBL which conform to the dominant discourse. The very act of facilitating WBL as a means of access requires dominant discourses to be challenged.

In taking up such a challenge, a strong lifeworld orientation provides two benefits: firstly, in developing a sound basis from which to act and secondly, in taking action (to borrow from Welton (1995)) in defence of the lifeworld. On the first point, Welton (2005) makes the following observation:

*For actors to speak with confidence, verve and intelligence, their lifeworlds must provide them with the right nutrients for growth (and unfolding) of sense-
making in the midst of the hurly-burly of life. The bedrock of the lifeworld is the provision of safety, security and sustenance… (2005:183).

The development of a WBL degree places considerable demands on the partners to engage with a system which, as has been argued, is not always easily accommodating of unorthodox/non-traditional approaches. The establishment of a ‘confident’ base from which to approach such a task is an important starting point. Though not investigated formally in terms of this research, there is also a sense that the establishment of ‘social solidarity’ within the teaching team of the GDSS is a useful model for the students. In particular comments in Managing Learning about peer groups and the role of the WBL coordinator, concur with the notion of ‘social solidarity’ and with the sentiments of Welton’s comments above.

In summary, returning to Habermas’ (1984), conception of social action as constituted from communicative and strategic action (chapter seven, figure 7.4, p266), the ideas above represent an argument for strategic action which is well informed by the mutual understandings of the lifeworld. The hope is that this will promote open strategic action, as opposed to concealed strategic action which is either hegemonic or coercive (Habermas, 1984:333). Indeed the risks of not recognising the need for partnership to be underpinned by strong lifeworld relations present some issues which, while not the subject of this research, are flagged in the final section as possible future areas of research.

8.4 Fences not borders – inclusivity and the diversity of practice.

Practice as subversion?

Before turning to some concluding reflections, further research, on flexibility and its facilitation through lifeworld relations, is briefly considered here. There are two aspects to this which have emerged from the experiences of the GDSS teaching team. As these ideas are based on somewhat anecdotal/informal discussions they are presented here with that in mind.
The first area of possible further research is the way in which flexibility itself is potentially marginalised under the influence of systemic rigidities. In the kinds of environment described above, flexibility of practice runs the risk of becoming an act of ‘subversion’ if there is no way in which it is ‘legitimately’ accounted for. From discussions within the teaching team about flexibility in practice - aimed at accommodating non-traditionality, creative and alternative representations of tacit knowledge and dealing with such things as change/shift - there seems to be an increasing discourse of ‘finding a way around’ rigidities. The long term, cumulative effects of such action in this context has not been studied, but foreshadows a possible uncoupling of system and lifeworld (Habermas, 1987:153).

The thoughts underpinning this idea, stem from a concern that long term ‘subversion’ may undermine the sustainability of practices such as those within the GDSS. These practices, on the basis of arguments put in the previous chapters, seem to be both legitimate and successful, and therefore worthy of further useful research. A second feature of this is that, where such practices continue, they might become increasingly taken on as ‘informal’ practice which is either not resourced and/or recognised.

The latter point above raises the second possible area for further research; the political issues which flow from these shifts. Fenwick and Rubenson (2005) make the observation that “power and politics is not a topic that is receiving much attention in research on workplace learning” (2005:7). Though there is some focus on politics in relation to access (for example Marks, et al, 2003, Osborne et al, 2004) and a little on politics and power in the relations of production in WBL (for example Avis, 2004), the observation of Fenwick and Rubenson seems to apply to WBL as much as to other areas of work and learning.

In the broader field of adult learning Fieldhouse (1991) provides an excellent historical perspective on the accommodation (or not) of particular political perspectives in education and the processes of marginalisation. Welton (1995, 2005) also constructs a strong political framework for his defence of critical education. Both authors provide useful insights into the importance of understanding political influences on the educational process. Given the firm positioning of WBL within the discourse of HE and political economy, as well as the association with work, the
opportunity to explore the politics of WBL further would be useful. Having made the
claim for the special positioning of the GDSS within both the HE and CS sectors, it
provides an example of a context which would benefit from greater clarity about such
things.

On fences and neighbours.

Most of the literature on WBL has been produced within the last decade and the tag of
‘novel pedagogy’ is still justified, albeit with a caution against historical amnesia. An
abundance of activity around WBL in Australia, focused by ideas from an
international perspective, captured by Symes and McIntyre (2000), and by Boud and
Solomon (2001), created a sense of optimism and expectation about its potential. As
Boud and Symes put it: “WBL is, in many respects, an idea whose time has come”
(2000:15). However, Reeve and Gallacher (2005), also representing a similar
concentration of ideas around WBL in the UK, note that WBL has perhaps ‘stalled’
and offer some speculation as to why. In both contexts the importance of partnership
is emphasised, as a central feature of WBL development.

The ideas presented in this work concur with both the general views around practice,
in the contexts above, and with the view that WBL has not quite reached the
optimistic potential formerly expressed. My own view, based on the arguments made
in previous chapters, is that complex systemic expectations have brought with them as
much constraint as they have opportunity. These things are derived from the political
economy of recent years and accompanied by the positioning of HE as both a
reforming and reformed entity. In addition, this particular study presents the idea that
WBL in the CS sector is further impacted by parallel phenomena in the continued
‘reform’ of the welfare state. This additional dimension has led me to take the
position that context is all important for WBL and that contextual needs must be
addressed, along with general principles of practice.

In the case of the GDSS it has been argued that these needs include the recognition of
non-traditionality and the strong positioning of WBL as a means of access. It is also
an important site of public goods production and all that goes with that; including the
need for critical practice in the CS sector. As such WBL in the GDSS is also
positioned in a somewhat oppositional stance to the dominant discourse on knowledge production.

Some WBL contexts are more easily accommodated. For example, Lyons and Bement (2001) present a model of WBL, based on electrical engineering in a military context, which meets many more of the traditional understandings of this dominant discourse than does the GDSS. However this particular example is one which provides a number of excellent insights into WBL practice and I would be happy if this research provided the same level of insight.

The lesson to be learned from this is about the importance of diversity of practice in a pedagogy which is so imbued with contextual influences. My concluding reflections are that the contextual influence on models of practice should promote the further development of diversity and that there is some legitimacy in ‘fencing off’ a patch of ground on the WBL landscape.

However ‘fences’ are not ‘borders’. They allow for uniqueness to be delineated, but do not create ‘territories’ which are highly protected – let alone the basis for launching colonising invasions! The ‘fence’ metaphor lends itself to neighbourly relations of practice – a structure over which conversations can be had and where we can view, and take inspiration from, each other’s contextual ‘products’. In opposition to this is a model where privilege is conveyed according to conformity with dominant discourses. In such a climate, projects like the GDSS would disappear.

In this research, there is no intended opposition to serious, rigorous engagement with practice issues such as ‘quality’ or ‘standards’, or with policy issues such as ‘efficiency’ or ‘productivity’. However, there is a legitimate, fundamental objection to reductionist impositions of instrumental methods or systemic pathologies. The GDSS is a model of WBL which, hopefully, contributes to ‘neighbourly conversations’ about good practice in a diverse landscape.
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