A Wealth of Notions: Reflective Engagement in the Emancipatory Teaching and Learning of Economics

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DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree of diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of the candidate’s knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed: .................................................................

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Date: .................................................................
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Reflecting over the eight years of thinking, talking, researching, reading, teaching, collaborating and writing that have finally produced this thesis, I am astonished at the number of people who have been involved and have contributed in some way to this process. In many ways this is a community project while the final responsibility for its crafting lies with me as its creator and writer. I want to honour all those who have contributed to this crafting, whether that contribution be intellectual, practical, emotional or physical.

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And finally, my deep gratitude goes to all of the students who participated willingly and enthusiastically in this research process. Their stories come alive in the pages to come.
SYNOPSIS

The original impetus for the research on which this thesis is based was an inner call to action in the face of the dominance of the ideology of conventional economics on political decision making. The thesis investigates activism in the context of an empowering teaching of economics in two educational settings: TAFE and university. The chosen research methodology is critical action research and the thesis is framed as an emergent process, incorporating critical reflection on the researcher’s own assumptions from the outset.

The assumptions taken by the researcher into the initial research context provide a framework for investigation into the sources underpinning those assumptions in the first four chapters. The rationale for emancipatory action research is established in chapter 5, and chapter 6 ‘tells the story’ of teaching economics for empowerment to adult TAFE students. A multiplicity of understandings of empowerment emerged and the story demonstrates how relationships of power were mediated through reflective exchanges between teacher and students as well as the significance of relationship in the reflective process. Further, the approach taken in chapter 6 permits a deep examination of the assumptions made by emancipatory educators in their quest to ‘liberate’ their audiences, revealing similarities with the postmodern critique of critical social science. Given the centrality of critical reflection and its role in developing postmodern insights about contingency, openness and fluidity of subject positions, as well as embedded power relations, the emergent interest became this very process of critical reflection.

The research at university took place over two years, 1998 and 1999, and is described and analysed in chapter 8. The research showed that critical reflection requires a continual process of critical questioning, preferably with a critical friend, to explore and uncover deeply held assumptions and beliefs. It is not an immediately accessible skill, even with modelling and guidance, although it was possible to demonstrate considerable improvement with clear questioning and critical feedback. A key finding, supporting other studies, is the significance of relationship within an atmosphere of openness and trust in enhancing critical reflection. Furthermore, the research showed that incorporating critical reflection into studying a ‘rationalist’ or positivist discipline such as economics contributed to empowerment.

A significant finding was the emergent distinction between ‘critical reflection’ and ‘critical reflexivity’ and a significant implication from investigating the process of reflexivity is that an important role for activism may be that of the ‘reflexive inquirer’, the person who assists the deeper reflection, with no agenda other than to explore, to understand and to reveal deeper meanings. Such a process may offer a way through and beyond the postmodern, to ‘holistic reflexivity’ and ethical, engaged agency rather than a more ‘rational’, separate and personal agency. Activism informed by such principles may well offer empowerment of a very different kind—the freedom to experience the world free of materialist desire, valuing the building of communities through connectedness with others and the environment.
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Prologue

The Crown Casino

Melbourne. Outside. People are on the wet streets. They are young, old, middle class, poor, wharf workers, unionists, students, church-goers, farmers, Indigenous elders, academics, public servants. They link arms. They perform. They stay connected. They are organised. They have come to resist with their bodies. Their attention is focused on the Casino, a testament to individual greed and the windfall gain. It houses chairs in straight lines, poker machines, podiums, roulette wheels, men in dark suits, chandeliers. It has become a fortress.

Inside. The men need to be protected from the men and women and children Outside who would have them listen, who would have them notice. Those who are permitted Inside take extraordinary measures to make their way into the sanctuary of comfort and security and certainty and privilege. Helicopters. Rubber dinghies. Bullet-proof limousines. They are protected by anonymous blue leather and batons. The blue leather is all that stands between the Inside and the Outside. The blue leather must ensure the Inside can conduct its business unhindered.

Inside there is talk of the poor. They have benefited from ‘free trade’, from ‘opening markets’, from ‘economic growth’. The Inside thinks the Outside is blind to how good things really are. Those people Outside don’t understand the real benefits of opening up the world economy. They want to stop legitimate business. Don’t they understand how the economy works? Better marketing is required. Sell the message that globalisation is good for people. ‘Economic growth is the best poverty-buster there is!’ proclaims the Treasurer.

The Outside thinks the Inside is blind to how bad things really are. Haven’t those people Inside noticed how many people are living on the streets? Haven’t they noticed how many are addicted to gambling, alcohol, nicotine, television? Haven’t they noticed how hard it is to find a forest intact, a river unpolluted, air clear of poisons, soil rich in organic matter? Haven’t they noticed that people are saying, no, we do not want multinational corporations making decisions that adversely affect our communities and environments?
The Casino. What better symbol of the workings and movement of global financial capital? For three days the Casino becomes the House of World Economics. It is a House where men live. It is a House where men are made rich by making the right guess, making their plunge at just the right moment. What better place to discuss the business of the globe?

* * *

The media coverage of the World Economic Forum meeting at the Crown Casino in Melbourne in September 2000 portrays these images as I prepare this work for submission: the Casino-as-fortress dividing the Inside from the Outside. The language of the Inside incomprehensible to those Outside; the language of the Outside dismissed as naïve by those Inside. Attempts at real dialogue, deep listening and reflection would appear impossible across such a divide as we are presented with an apparently unavoidable dualistic tension, two sides in opposition. Inevitably, I feel the almost seductive pull to take a side, to place myself unambiguously alongside those activists linking arms Outside the Casino. I notice this is similar to the pull that placed me in opposition to the dominance of the ideology of free market economics many years ago, a position that led me to embark on the research journey outlined in this thesis.

The Inside/Outside dualism is perplexing and problematic. Without access to the language of the Inside, it seems the disengagement, alienation and powerlessness experienced by those Outside cannot be addressed. The possibilities for establishing creative relationships across the divide seem limited. What can be done to render the language of the Inside intelligible to the Outside? Are there possibilities for meaningful engagement with complex issues across the divisions? Is there a role for education? What is the role of activists in the face of the seemingly insurmountable problems facing humanity and our environment? These are the questions that inform this thesis.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The acceptance of economic thinking as unquestionable, and the current worship of free markets as the source of all good is, without doubt, the most extraordinary triumph of theory over reality in human history.

- Robert Theobald (1997)

The phenomenon of globalisation, or the unimpeded movement of capital around the world, can be seen as but one manifestation of the increasing dominance of a particular ideology that has held sway over Western governments and institutions since the 1980s. This is the ideology of free market economics, born out of classical and neo-classical economic theory and supported by neo-liberal political philosophies. Its dominance has also been apparent at national levels through the movement towards privatisation of public assets; deregulation of financial markets; corporatisation of services such as education, health and welfare; and the penetration of the language of economics into almost every sphere of decision making. At the international level, free market ideology has seen increasing dominance of multinational companies, export-oriented growth, unregulated capital flows and priority given to price stability in global macroeconomic policies. These processes, while offering economic prosperity for industrialised nations, multinational corporations and wealthy individuals, have been accompanied by social injustice and environmental problems on an unprecedented scale. Many critics have suggested that economics itself is unable to offer solutions to tackle these formidable challenges.

Such criticisms of economics are not new—writers and thinkers from within and outside the discipline have for years provided strong critiques of the approaches to problem solving adopted by conventional neo-classical economics which, despite the critiques, continues to dominate political decision making and continues to be taught to economics students as the accepted orthodoxy. It has been argued that not only has economics been unsuccessful in providing a useful framework for solving problems, it has also largely contributed to much of the destruction and injustice noted by many environmental and social scientists through the loss of much of its human dimension (Max-Neef et al., 1987). It is my contention that addressing the overwhelming issues of environmental destruction, gross social injustice, extremes of wealth and poverty and
the destruction of lifestyles and cultures that we have been witnessing at an accelerating rate since the 1980s, essentially requires tackling the problem of the current dominance of an ideology that was born in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

I maintain that the importance assigned to economics does not correspond with its capacity to interpret and solve the pertinent problems affecting humanity as a whole. Its many abstractions tend to be selective and discriminatory when it comes to the vast majority of human beings, particularly the poor and women, whose activities do not enter into the economics equation and whose lives are thus made invisible. Furthermore, the impact of economic decisions on ecological balance and environmental sustainability is rendered invisible through being left out of the economists’ models. Such invisibility is being challenged by the many voices of opposition, not only in the academy but also on the streets in the wave of protests against institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, World Bank and International Monetary Fund that began with the street demonstrations in Seattle in December 1999.

This thesis is an exploration of my positioning as one of these voices, as an activist committed to social change. It explores activism in a particular context, teaching economics to adults in two Australian tertiary education institutions. It is the story of a journey born out of a passion to see a world free of the dominance of a damaging ideology founded on unrealistic and out-dated assumptions. It is the story of a journey enlivened by a belief in empowerment of people and the ending of oppression. It is the story of a journey of self-reflection. It is the story of a journey that covers multiple theoretical territories—that of the dominant discourse of economics and of alternative perspectives that emphasise the primacy of values of ecological integrity and social justice; that of radical adult education informed by critical theory (the emancipatory project born of modernity); that of critical action research and its emphasis on empowerment and critical reflection; that of the postmodern critique of the ‘grand narratives’ of emancipation and empowerment; and that of the ‘new paradigm’ understandings of social action, such as Heart Politics, a movement grounded in values and processes informed by nonviolence and Buddhism.
1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The initial question guiding the research had a practical intent: how can economics be taught in a way that empowers rather than alienates? I was inspired by the work of the great radical popular educators—Miles Horton, Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, Jane Thompson, Tom Lovett—all of them passionate about empowerment and emancipation of people marginalised by the seemingly unforgiving march of global capitalism. The ‘logical’ methodology to employ emerged as critical action research, particularly as articulated by Carr and Kemmis (1986) in the field of education. After exposure to critiques which called into question the assumptions made by radical activism, new questions emerged. What sort of activism is possible in a postmodern era characterised by globalisation? How can the emancipatory project survive in the face of the problematic definitions of ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ that have been employed by activists and critical theorists? Is a transformation of economic processes through activism as hitherto conceived even possible in the face of the potentially alienating and disempowering effects of globalisation?

1.2 FRAMING THE THESIS

The thesis is framed in a way that reflects the emergent process that was produced through conducting action research. Therefore, it does not closely follow the conventional format of literature review, methodology, results and discussion. Literature is woven through the developing argument, reflecting how my reading informed different stages of the research process. The research occurs in two major cycles, one at TAFE and one at university, with the TAFE research comprising weekly ‘mini-cycles’ of plan, act, observe and reflect. Given my original focus on developing an empowering curriculum, my intention was to finish ‘data collection’ after completing the cycles at TAFE. However, the TAFE experience produced an emergent interest in the process of critical reflection itself, a central feature of action research, and the strength of the educational and research environment at TAFE.

When the opportunity arose to write a curriculum for university students, I decided to extend the research into another major cycle, this time with the focus on studying critical reflection in the context of an emancipatory teaching of economics. The cycle of
research at university was conducted very differently, without the collaborative involvement of the students in the research process that had been a feature of the TAFE cycles. I collected data through written work and in-depth interviews that focused on critical reflection. Collaborative reflection occurred within my critical community of peers.

When I reflected on how I conducted the research at TAFE, I became more aware of the assumptions I took unconsciously into the research domain. I discovered that these assumptions were deeply embedded in my activism and teaching. Exploring the assumptions produced from a critical reflection on my positioning in the research process at TAFE helped frame the early chapters. The assumptions I identified were:

1. that orthodox Western economics constitutes an ideology;

2. that this ideology is part of a dominant paradigm that causes harm to people and the planet;

3. that any ideology is transmitted and reinforced through language, and that the language of economics is alienating and mystifying for people outside the discipline;

4. that when the ideology of orthodox economics is presented as ‘this is how the world works’, it leads to unthinking/unconscious acceptance of its premises and conclusions;

5. that this acceptance (i) leads to alienation of those citizens who have limited access to power and resources; (ii) produces an incapacity to imagine how to change the way the world works or conceive alternatives; and (iii) constitutes a threat to genuine democracy;

6. that it is important for me to act in some way for the common good (i.e. be engaged in social action);

7. that one way to act is to raise awareness through a process of demystifying the language of economics and uncovering the real sources of power that underlie it, i.e. revealing the ideology for what it is;

8. that one of the ways to engage in this process of demystification is through an education process that is empowering for the learners; and

9. that empowering education occurs through participation of learners in dialogue and discussion that relates to their own lives and through an awareness of the power relationship that exists between teacher (as the ‘gatekeeper’ of knowledge) and student.
As well as this exploration and ‘unpacking’ of my assumptions, I also discovered how different discourses constructed me, while I was constructing my own discourse of inquiry and activism. I found this questioning was supported by critiques of the emancipatory project of critical social science, especially by Brian Fay (1987), feminist and postmodern writers. This challenge produced a shift in my thinking that impacted on how I conducted the research at university and that helped frame the insights I derived from that research cycle. This unfolding process of research, reflection and insight leading to further research and reflection provides the framework for structuring the thesis.

1.3 THESIS STRUCTURE

One of the contributions of poststructuralist and feminist theory to the research process is to insist that the researcher needs to be as clear about what she takes for granted as what she ‘foregrounds’ as research question and process (Stanley, 1991; Cotterill and Letherby, 1993; McIntyre, 1996). In the spirit of this type of reflexivity, chapter 2 is an attempt to acknowledge explicitly the position from which this inquiry is conducted, its permeation with values and interests and hence the politics that influence the inquiry. The chapter investigates assumption #6, the context that led to my own imperative to act to effect social change towards a more just, humane and democratic society. It draws on my personal story and the influences that locate my research journey in the modernist tradition of activism. The influences that shaped my activist identity include: the discourses associated with being raised a white, educated middle class Australian female; the discourses of adult education and critical sociology; those associated with grass-roots activism, especially that informed by Heart Politics; the discourse of ‘human potential’ movements, particularly co-counselling; and the discourses associated with ‘alternative lifestyles’ and living on an intentional community.

The assumptions above provide a starting point for the exploration of theoretical perspectives informing the TAFE research in chapter 3, which examines two main territories. The theoretical underpinnings of the first seven assumptions are located in the domain of critical social theory, and the first task of this chapter is to examine the concepts of ideology, demystification, emancipation and empowerment, concepts central to the ontology of critical social science. The second task is to explore the
context in which these concepts are applied in this research, the domain of radical or emancipatory adult education, reflected in assumptions #8 and #9. Given my activist aspirations, the radical tradition, with its focus on empowerment and emancipation, is close to my heart and greatly influenced the way I conducted the research.

Whereas the task of chapter 3 is to scan the theoretical territory that informs the research process, that of the following chapter is to step into the territory of economics, the content of the teaching activity engaged in at the two educational locations, TAFE and university. The purpose of chapter 4 is to demonstrate the ideological nature of the discourse of economics (providing support for my first assumption). This is done by showing that ideas that came to be incorporated into neo-classical analysis support the interests of the dominant classes. It draws on a number of the critiques of the neo-liberal ideology that has come to dominate economics discourse in universities, think tanks and political decision making in the major polities of the Western world. Alternatives to the dominant paradigm are investigated. These proposed alternatives still waver on the margins of academic economics, many from outside the discipline itself. Building this picture is important for understanding how the curricula were developed in the process of conducting the research in both educational contexts. In this chapter a view is offered of the landscape that the activist traverses.

Chapter 5 provides a link between the theoretical territories covered in chapters 3 and 4 that informed my emancipatory intentions and the actual research experience to be described and analysed in chapters 6, 7 and 8. It draws on the perspectives covered in chapter 3 in particular to explain how the validity of the knowledge gained through investigating the problem of critical activism in relation to teaching economics is to be demonstrated through the choosing of critical action research methodology (McIntyre, 1996). After examining the context of how economics is taught in institutions and the community to find a location for my own teaching practice, the territory of action research is scanned. Emancipatory action research is examined more closely and demonstrated to be the ‘logical’ choice of methodology, given the assumptions with which I entered the classroom as researcher. Seven major principles of emancipatory action research are identified from the literature and I show how I interpreted and applied the seven principles of critical action research methodology at TAFE.
With the research located in its theoretical and methodological contexts, chapter 6 explores the story of the TAFE research experience conducted with two groups of students studying Community Welfare in 1996. The primary goal of this research, as conceived at the time, was the exploration of empowerment. The question taken into the research at this stage was: what sort of processes lead to an empowering experience for the students in learning about economics through a collaborative curriculum development process? In keeping with the ‘emergent’ nature of this research process and the writing of the thesis, the story of the experience of ‘doing action research’ in the classroom is told in some detail in a way that maintains commitment to reflective practice through the narrative technique of using reflective ‘voices’ throughout. The three voices are: first, a relatively ‘neutral’ reporting voice that relays the ‘facts’ of what happened; second, the ‘reflective practitioner’, the voice I used in conversation with the students demonstrating my reflective practice at the time, informed by the requirements of critical action research and supported by a critical community of peers; and the third voice, the ‘critical reflector’, offers a ‘commentary’ on the sometimes naïve voice of the reflective practitioner from a vantage point that names the assumptions made and reflects on some of the silences and absences in the narrative. The chapter demonstrates how reflection in the context of relationship became central to the research process and how the relationships of power in the classroom became mediated through reflective exchanges between the students and me as teacher. The strategy of the three voices further demonstrates the effectiveness of iterative critical reflection in deepening understanding of how position, power and perspective continually influence research processes (McIntyre, 1996).

The narrative of chapter 6 sets the stage for chapter 7, which examines two questions that emerged out of the experience: (i) did students experience ‘empowerment’ in their learning of economics; and (ii) what sense can be made of the ‘critical reflector’ voice in its critique of the activist aspirations of the ‘reflective practitioner’? A number of different understandings of empowerment emerged, and it appeared that the reflective process, particularly the reflective exchange, was linked to empowerment outcomes: student empowerment in relation to the content was made possible by the reflective environment established through relationship, a relationship that featured sharing of uncertainties and vulnerabilities. The examination of the challenge offered by the critical reflector voice reveals to some extent the concerns and critique emerging from
the postmodern and poststructuralist paradigms, a critique that radical educators have found difficult to ignore, leading to calls for the remaking (rather than abandonment) of the emancipatory project. Such concerns revealed by the critical reflector voice included the problem of ‘multiple subjectivities’ and the myth of the singular autonomous self; the shifting nature of power relations in the classroom; the problematic of the ‘liberatory promise’ of the emancipatory project and the ‘grand narratives’ of empowerment, emancipation and oppression; the dubious ‘truth claims’ of critical theory; and the assumption of human beings as conscious and rational actors who will act for their own betterment once the veils of illusion have been lifted through the demystification process. Examining the way in which postmodernism interrogates the emancipatory project and the responses by critical educators to this challenge allows the TAFE project to be contextualised as an unfolding ‘postmodern critical educational process’ in the tensions produced when a postmodern perspective interrogates an emancipatory project.

The emergent focus from the action research cycle located at TAFE became the process of critical reflection itself, with a number of questions to be researched in relation to understanding more about the process; understanding the usefulness of critical reflection in teaching economics; interrogating the efficacy of critical reflection in an emancipatory project; and interrogating the relationship between critical reflection and activism. Chapter 8 examines the next major stage in the action research cycle in a different educational context, teaching economics to students studying politics at Southern Cross University over two years. The chapter describes and examines that research experience in two parts. Part I examines the evidence offered in all students’ written responses to the request to critically reflect on the underlying assumptions and values, gaps, biases and contradictions in their work and in follow-up in-depth interviews with a selection of students. It throws light on what students actually do when asked to reflect critically on their work and how they reflect on that experience. Part II ‘interrogates’ this data in the light of the questions emerging from the TAFE research.

Chapter 9 draws together the major conclusions from the research experiences at TAFE and university, including an assessment of the implications and the claims I believe the thesis can make in terms of a contribution to knowledge, indicating possible directions for further research. The chapter concludes with a reflective mapping of my research
journey and how it came to frame the thesis, incorporating reflection on my experience of practising critical action research over an extended period.

The research demonstrates the effectiveness of bringing critical reflection and critical reflexivity into the classroom offering ‘values engagement’ to an otherwise ‘value free’, positivist discipline. Critical reflection requires a continual process of critical questioning, preferably with a critical friend, to explore and uncover deeply held assumptions and beliefs. The process, when taken seriously, is time-consuming and often discomforting. I draw out the distinction between critical reflection and critical reflexivity, which permits recognition of one’s own position as a construction, and I maintain that this may be one of the more productive contributions of the postmodernist perspective. I suggest that there may be a productive role for activists, that of the ‘reflexive inquirer’, the person who assists the deeper reflection, with no agenda other than to explore, to understand, to reveal deeper meanings, maintaining openness to possibility. I suggest it may offer a way through and beyond the postmodern, to ‘holistic reflexivity’ and ethical, engaged agency rather than a more ‘rational’ separate and personal agency, leading to the sort of postmodern freedom articulated by ‘new paradigm’ approaches such as Heart Politics, where we transcend the tyranny of self-identification towards a deeper connectedness with others and the environment we share.

This thesis articulates an unfolding journey of a reflexive educational activist who moves from an uncritical position strongly influenced and informed by the liberatory promise and principles of emancipatory education to one which questions the assumptions of rationality and personal agency implied in such a position. The continual process of questioning and self-reflection that characterises this journey has not, however, led to an abandonment of the values that underpinned the initial motivation for the research. The search for an effective personal and engaged activism in the face of globalisation continues. The next chapter investigates the background to this journey, describing the influences that led to me to construct myself as such an activist.
CHAPTER 2
POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER:
THE CONSTRUCTING OF AN ACTIVIST IDENTITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the current era it is no longer possible to take a ‘neutral’ stance as a researcher in any inquiry, particularly in social science. The contribution of postpositivist and poststructuralist analysis, particularly feminist epistemology, has meant that the ‘objective’ researcher has been revealed to be a myth (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Reason, 1988; Guba, 1990; Schwabdt, 1990; Lather, 1991a; Weedon, 1987; Harding, 1991; Alcott and Potter, 1993; Cotterill and Letherby, 1993). According to critical theory’s critique of positivism, facts are generated by worldviews, values, political perspectives and ideology and therefore research can never be non-partisan because we choose the rules that guide us as researchers (Bronner and Kellner, 1989). The positioning of the researcher has a critical impact on the outcome of any inquiry, and not acknowledging the source of values and interests, the discourses from which the researcher speaks, renders the research incomplete at best and dishonest at worst. Being a reflexive researcher means ‘telling ourselves a story about ourselves’ (Steier, 1991: 3). According to one feminist researcher:

[Feminist] analysis would centre on an explication of the ‘intellectual autobiography’ of the feminist researcher/theoretician: it would produce accountable knowledge, in which the reader would have access to details of the contextually-located reasoning processes which give rise to ‘the findings’, the outcomes (Stanley, 1991: 209).

Articulating such ‘contextually-located’ processes involves revealing the sources of one’s assumptions, beliefs and values and requires the skill of critical reflection, a central preoccupation of this thesis. Critical reflection has become an important skill for any practitioner or researcher wishing to act in the world (Schon, 1983, 1987; Fook, 1996; Burns and Bulman, 2000) and has become central to researchers in the action research tradition (see chapter 5). As shall be seen, the process of critical reflection starts out as a
'given' in this research and emerges later as a concept to be interrogated further, itself being subject to critical examination.

My own critically reflective process therefore unfolded and developed throughout the course of the research. Embarking on research within the paradigm of humanistic inquiry in which social ecology is embedded (McIntyre, 1996) meant that from the outset I was required to reflect on personal sources of my passion for my chosen research area. This process itself was revealing as it allowed me to take a particular perspective on my life and identify a 'path' that had led me to my (activist) interest in demystifying economics and making a difference in the world by promoting alternative economic frameworks that incorporate ethics, justice and ecological integrity (Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992; Diesendorf and Hamilton, 1997). A deeper reflection, a year after the first major cycle of research conducted at TAFE, revealed some of the underlying assumptions I had taken into that domain, assumptions I had not consciously acknowledged at the time. This reflection was enhanced by a deeper appreciation of the problematic nature of activist engagement revealed in the ontology of critical social science (Fay, 1987). The reflective process continues as I become increasingly conscious of the way my positioning is a conflicted one of both privilege (e.g. as white and middle class) and marginalisation (e.g. as female).

The assumptions outlined in chapter 1 provide a framework for identifying the influences and discourses that combined to produce one of the stories of my life—the story of the making of an activist identity, the story of the 'modern girl'. The impetus for the reflection that unearthed these assumptions came from a request to present the ideas from my research at an informal seminar of people researching sustainable futures (at the Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS, Sydney). I realised that, in order to present my ideas from scratch to an (admittedly sympathetic) audience, it would be useful for me to identify what lay behind my motivation to do research into teaching economics for empowerment.

The first five assumptions demonstrate the impact of critical theory on my thinking about the discourse of economics as ideology. The theoretical sources for critical theory are discussed in chapter 3 and economics as ideology is explored in chapter 4. Assumptions 7, 8 and 9 reflect the ontology of the educative project that is central to critical social science
(Fay, 1987), also referred to as ‘the emancipatory project’. The main source of literature on this application of liberatory theory to education is found in discourses of the ‘radical’ and popular adult education movements, also examined in chapter 3. The sixth assumption is pivotal as it reveals a fundamental positioning about the significance of an activist intention in my work, an intention born of the modern Western mind. Activist understandings of the world are initially examined in chapter 3 and the place of activism in the postmodern era is revisited in chapter 7 and finally again in chapter 9.

This chapter tracks the sources of my framing of such an activist intention, identifying major family and cultural influences as well as the influence of discourses of adult education, co-counselling, living on an intentional community and Heart Politics.

2.2 THE MAKING OF A THOROUGHLY MODERN GIRL: FAMILY BACKGROUND AND INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

I was raised in a liberal university educated household in Queensland (Brisbane and Townsville), where the predominant values were those of the respectable and conforming middle class: a general acceptance of the status quo (to rebel was ‘indecent’ and common, not to mention unnecessary); the importance of being quiet, polite and generally invisible (as a woman), while at the same time aspiring to ‘make your mark’ by climbing to positions of power and influence, preferably in the educational hierarchy; being grateful for your privilege; and a strong belief in the morality and integrity of the capitalist economic system as the bastion of democracy and individual freedom, with its accompanying dread of communism and its restrictions on individual liberty.

My parents had each been raised in working class families, and as people living in the shadow of the Depression and World War II, like so many others of their generation, they had strongly incorporated the values of thrift and hard work, and the importance of education and security. However, their early experiences with poverty and relative deprivation led them to each develop a very generous spirit and I have no memories of being deprived of material comfort in any way. My mother sewed most of the clothes for my younger sister and me, my father made much of our own furniture and we had no car
until I was eight years old, but I do not remember any sense of not having ‘enough’ or living in any sort of real poverty. I think this is not an uncommon experience for many of the ‘baby boomer’ generation: our parents lived through the War and Depression as children, knew the terrible deprivations that those cataclysmic events endowed, emerged into the brave new world of the 1950s as young adults, determined to make a better life for their own children. We were coddled and protected and reminded of how lucky we were. We grew up believing in the absolute guarantee that education could provide us with the key to a secure and happy future.

Together my mother and father raised us with kindness and intelligence. My father was a successful university leader with a strong conviction in the rightness of his thinking, based as it was on intellectual rigour within a rational, scientific paradigm. He was trained as a scientist (in microbiology) and to my knowledge had no cause to the question the truth of how he interpreted what he saw under the microscope. He had a powerful impact on my worldview and belief in my own thinking—I was convinced of his wisdom and never questioned him. Sound and reasoned arguments were given for decisions made on my behalf. My parents always offered a united and reasonable front. My mother was also trained as a scientist, but stopped working when she married. She would tend to defer to my father’s judgement and rarely, if ever, questioned his wisdom or authority. The role model of femininity I received reflected the dominant social values of the time.

Perhaps because of my unquestioning acceptance of my father’s authority, supported by my mother’s acquiescence, I experienced no ‘rite of passage’ to adulthood through the youthful rejection of my parents’ views and values that was the common experience of my generation. I had developed no powers of critical thinking or analysis. Everything was very comfortable, reasonable, quiet and respectable. My school experience at a private grammar school offered me little contact with people of different views. The school was co-educational, a boarding school for boys (mainly from pastoral and grazier families) and a day school for boys and girls—the boys outnumbered girls eight to one! As there were no more than half a dozen girls in any one class, we hardly presented as a force to be reckoned with and the feminine experience was all but invisible. The occasional young female teachers who taught French or Commerce were treated mercilessly by the boys and I
remember no strong female role model in my young life. The burgeoning feminism of the late 1960s completely passed me by.

I had a socially and emotionally isolated and miserable adolescence that led me to immerse myself in study rather than hang out with my peer group. As a result I did well at school and fulfilled the expectations my parents had of me.

In summary, then, I was rendered passive by my acceptance of the values of modernity, which were at their most potent in those times of economic prosperity and American imperialism. I was indeed embodied, historical, traditional and embedded (Fay, 1987). I was mired in ‘false consciousness’. The capacity to think and reflect critically had not been fostered. Herein lies a fundamental contradiction: while I had been trained to believe in the power of human reason to discover truth about the world, which was indeed knowable, I was unable to use my own powers of reasoning to see behind the ideological veils that had been constructed around me.

Like a good, modern girl, I set out on a path that was determined for me.

In the spirit of this lack of critical awareness and unquestioning desire to do what was expected of me, I went straight from school to study economics in 1970 at James Cook University (Townsville), for no particular reason other than that my mother was also studying economics and I could make use of her notes and she could help me with it. I was no different from so many other young people who make major life decisions with very little idea of who they are and what they want to do with their lives. The education system gave no training in critical thought and very little opportunity to discover our passions, let alone permission to follow them.

I was also very much a child of my time. The period from the Second World War to the early 1970s was a time in history unlikely to be repeated. It has been described as a unique period in recent western history, and therefore should not be seen as a reasonable model for the future (Theobald, 1997). Despite this, many economists and others still believe that the patterns of success achieved in this period can continue into the future, and the difficulties experienced since that time represent ‘an unfortunate temporary phenomenon’. There was
full employment and enormous optimism that the prosperity that had been gathering pace since the end of the war would continue indefinitely (Theobald, 1997). Studying economics and commerce at that time was seen as a certain path to a lucrative career. Anyone with an interest in the social sciences was encouraged to study that most ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’ of social sciences, economics. It was at the height of its popularity as a discipline, because its predictions and models appeared sound and fitted the times. I did not have much of an idea of what I wanted to do when I grew up, but a path towards academia seemed to be being laid out before me, given my results at school, which I believed then were primarily attributable to a good memory rather than any analytical ability. I found the study interesting enough, although it paled beside the newly-discovered social life that university offered. In my second year I met my future husband, who was to remain my partner for the next seventeen years.

It took me until my honours year (1973) to find the spark of intellectual fire that gave me my first hint of critical thought—studying the history of economic thought and coming across the analysis of Marx for the first time. I wasn’t ready for it intellectually, but it gave me an inkling that there may be life beyond Smith and Ricardo and the neo-classicists. In the orthodox teaching I was receiving, however, there was little attempt to apply a serious critique to the development of classical and neo-classical economic thought, despite the many critiques that were in existence (discussed in more detail in chapter 4).

One discussion from our honours class stays in my mind. There were only two of us and I remember the other (male) student discussing the rationality of the consumer and that no matter how the individual acted in the marketplace, i.e. how they chose to spend their income, they would always be acting rationally, as they were behaving in accordance with their own preferences, i.e. there was no such thing as an ‘irrational consumer’. I remember wondering about this, but had no language to debate it. One critic has noted that this theory of ‘revealed preferences’ is just a fancy way of saying that individuals do what individuals do, which doesn’t make it a theory, it makes it a tautology (Thurow, 1983). It is possible that I may have been aware at the time that any attempt to question such a postulate would have been met with ridicule, but it is more likely that I was still willing to accede to male authority and certainty.
When I began my honours year, I converted to part-time because I became employed as a tutor in the economics department. This was my first experience as a teacher and I discovered I loved to teach. I enjoyed explaining complex concepts in a way that was readily understandable. I had a liking for the logical consistency of mathematical models and found I was much better at explaining the internal logic of the linear economic models of neo-classical theory than I was at making sense of what was really happening in the non-linear, chaotic world. I remember experiencing acute dissonance and embarrassment when I was faced with an all-male class of mature businessmen who were questioning the relevance of the microeconomic models for understanding what they were experiencing in their working lives. I had to hide behind arguments for abstraction, and was woefully ill-prepared for any application to real world occurrences.

This year (1973) marked the birth of two key themes in my intellectual and professional life that contribute to the motivations and assumptions underlying this research: critical analysis (through being introduced to Marxist thought) and adult education.

After completing my honours thesis, a project that again was determined by somebody else (a male colleague) and held no real interest or passion for me (a non-critical mathematical examination of the factors contributing to the consumption of consumer durables), I felt the stirrings of dissatisfaction. I was feeling bored and uninspired by the economics that was practised and taught at James Cook and thought I should try another university. I was still fairly uncritically and unconsciously following the path laid down for me by my upbringing: safe and predictable academia. I was advised to enrol in the much-respected one-year coursework Masters at ANU, a path I was prepared to take in the hope of rekindling my interest in economics.

After being exposed to a concentrated dose of neo-classical econometric dogma, delivered by an all-male, almost completely inaccessible and intimidating faculty for about two months, I started to question whether economics was really the best path to my future. I first believed that there was something wrong with me, that I just couldn’t understand this impenetrable discipline, that I was a failure. Then it dawned that perhaps it wasn’t my passion and I needed to look for another direction. I took the revolutionary step of ‘thinking
for myself” and dropped it. At the age of 24, I had made my first independent decision as an adult, with the voices of the establishment (including my father) railing at me to ‘consider my future’ and to ‘stick it out’ because of all of the opportunities that would open for me—like access to university departments, the Treasury and other important Areas of Influence. I discovered later that my father had strong leadership aspirations for me and this disruption of my training was a sore disappointment to him.

When I reflect on that time in my life, it is clear to me now that I was subjected first-hand to the very same alienating experience of that dehumanised, mechanistic, value-absent ideology that has provided the core motivation for this thesis. Despite my inexperience, my lack of training in critical analysis, my devotion to fulfilling father’s (and others’) expectations, I wonder if at some level I recognised that there was something seriously wrong with a social science that seemed so devoid of humanity, spirit, ethics and justice. However, it is also important to acknowledge that I found the mathematical content of the course so difficult at ANU that I couldn’t see myself excelling, despite having studied pure maths as an undergraduate. I was encumbered by very high expectations of myself and therefore I could not have tolerated a mediocre result. This could have been as much a motivating factor as any new found sense of independence.

I was at an important crossroads—what would I do now? I had decided to step off the path determined for me since birth. It hadn’t been very exciting or interesting, but at least it was known and I was moderately successful at it. A counsellor asked me the novel question: ‘what are you interested in?’ something I had never really thought about, and I feebly replied ‘um...people?’ He pointed me in the direction of the sociology department and the personal growth work offered through the Canberra Marriage Guidance Council.

The excellent sociology faculty at ANU provided me with a solid grounding in critical theory and ideology critique. I immersed myself in Marx, Althusser, Foucault, Marcuse and it started to become clear to me how neo-classical economics was more an ideology based on a particular value system and supporting the dominant classes than an analysis of the ‘true’ state of things (My position on ideology is discussed in detail in chapter 3). I experienced an intellectual paradigm shift. Slowly, I was becoming radicalised, becoming a
critical thinker, albeit within another framework, adopted fairly unthinkingly. When I read back over the papers I wrote at that time, I can see how I unquestioningly adopted the viewpoints of my tutors, and how difficult it was for me to break out of the pattern of uncritical acceptance of the views held by those I looked up to and respected, almost always men. This pattern still survives today and this project presented repeated challenges to it.

Despite this intellectual shift away from economics, my training and qualifications meant that I continued to work in the field, mainly as a research assistant to (male) economists at ANU. My new training in critique did not extend to examining my work. I had no idea how to straddle the two disciplines of sociology and economics and I continued to keep them separate in my mind.

While working at ANU I became pregnant. My partner and I made the decision to leave the security and seductiveness of Canberra and university life after the birth of our first child and we moved to the north coast of New South Wales in 1981. This represented a major turning point in my life and was a move that led me to embrace the values of community living, community-based schooling, feminism, spiritual and personal growth, ecological consciousness, social justice, political reform, Heart Politics and social action—a challenge to the values of my upbringing, the sort of challenge my peers had found in their teens and early twenties, but that had eluded me in my coddled and comfortable existence as a young person. This challenge proved difficult in my relationship with my parents—to choose consciously a simpler (‘primitive’) lifestyle with certain socialist overtones created quite a tension. Another ‘rite of passage’ was being forged.

This move marked the beginning of a journey towards my own kind of activism, even though I was not conscious at the time that this was where my interests were taking me. The rest of my story will trace this journey, identifying its key influences—empowering education; co-counselling; communal living; and Heart Politics.
2.3 THE MAKING OF AN ACTIVIST: INFLUENCES AND EXPERIENCES

2.3.1 Adult Education: a Locus of Empowerment

Ironically, my economics training again provided an entry into the workforce in 1982 after two years of intensive parenting. I gave classes in economics to accounting students at TAFE and rediscovered my talent for teaching. Despite enjoying the challenge of explaining the mysteries of economic models, I got to the point, inevitably, of being unable to continue to teach (by disciplinary requirements) what I saw as an ideology I did not believe in and was not permitted to critique. The separation between a critical sociological understanding and involvement in orthodox economics that I had managed in Canberra was no longer possible.

As I began to teach in other TAFE courses in the areas of sociology and communication, I noticed how much more effective I was as a teacher and how much more rewarding it was when I could teach what I was passionate about, when I could make a difference in people’s lives through opening doors to empowering information. I resolved I would never teach or have anything to do with economics ever again—that chapter in my life was closed.

For eleven years (1985-1996) I taught sociology within the Community Welfare course at TAFE, which provided the location for the classroom research described and analysed in chapters 6 and 7. The opportunity to work in an inspiring team with an intelligent and compassionate visionary as head teacher meant that I was able to explore the potential that teaching adults offers. I had the freedom to interpret the curriculum in a way that allowed me to revise and improve my teaching practice continually in response to feedback from students as well as from my own reading, learning and personal growth. I no longer experienced the dissonance that arose from teaching without critique. Critical sociology provided the theoretical foundations for my classes and fitted with the overall philosophy of the Welfare course whose ideological preference was for critical and structuralist
approaches to understanding and interpreting society, with a strong emphasis on social action.

A significant outcome of my developing process as a teacher of critical sociology was a deepening understanding of the influence of class background on formal learning. I was strongly influenced by the theory and practice of co-counselling (described in more detail below) in which I was involved for ten years from 1984. The class analysis of co-counselling has its theoretical roots in Marxism and was therefore consistent with critical sociology. I discovered that introducing the concept of class in the early stages of the course proved empowering for students as learners. Through a demystification process they could develop a picture of themselves within a social and cultural context. Gaining insight into how institutionalised education systematically disadvantages working class people could assist in reversing the internalised and personalised notions of being ‘dumb’ or ‘stupid’ that many working class students have to struggle against in developing their identities as learners in an institutional setting.

This experience of tackling the issue of class as it directly relates to students’ experience of learning and daily life also provided an opportunity for self-reflection. It was important for me to acknowledge the educational privilege that my middle class upbringing gave me and the extent to which it created barriers of power and status between me and working class students. I have had to be conscious of the language I use and its potential for maintaining divisions. This parallels the privilege inherent in the language of an overspecialised economics—those who have not been ‘initiated’ into its mysteries are more likely to see themselves as lacking in understanding and knowledge, rather than noticing there is a structural impediment to their access to information. Those with privileged access rarely acknowledge this and wish to speak only to others with the same privilege.

I discovered that the learning environment was enhanced when I was able to match vulnerabilities—to allow myself as teacher to be more of a participant and less of an authority. It would be naive not to recognise, of course, that because of the training the authoritarian education system has inculcated, as well as the class-based experiences of the education system, students inevitably held me as teacher in the role of ‘expert’, a label that
never sat comfortably, particularly as a teacher of economics, which I later became. These
dilemmas are brought to light more fully in chapter 6.

I became intrigued by the power of the processes of demystification and critical reflection,
which I discovered echoed Freire’s concept of ‘conscientisation’ and the ideology critique
of critical theory (see chapter 3). My direct experience showed that demystification allows
people to free up their thinking and creativity as they come to ‘have the veils lifted’ on the
reality of their situation and experience. It seemed to me that becoming aware that the
attitudes, beliefs and values one has always held to be true or ‘commonsense’ are, in reality,
part of an ideological superstructure that holds an oppressive system in place, can be
simultaneously a sobering and liberating experience. These ideas anticipate the theory and
practice of emancipatory education that appear in the writings of Freire (1973a), Mezirow
(1981, 1990, 1992), Shor (1978, 1987, 1992) and others that are explored in chapter 3, and
that provided the motivating force for the way I conducted the research.

2.3.2 The Influence of Co-counselling Discourse

My training and upbringing had instilled in me a strong belief in the power of human
reason and the vital role played by educative processes in liberation. While critical
sociology provided a theoretical framework, the theory and practice of co-counselling
provided a practical approach founded on similar theoretical arguments. Both were strongly
influential and persuasive and neither encouraged questioning of their underlying belief
structures or scientific basis—each assumed their methods would reveal ‘the truth’. In
chapter 3 I examine the theory and ontology of critical social science in more detail, but it
is instructive at this point to examine the particular role played by co-counselling theory
and practice as a strong discursive (and emotional) influence on my activist intentions.

I was introduced to the organisation known as Re-evaluation Counselling (RC), also known
as co-counselling, in 1984. It is a world-wide organisation based in Seattle, USA, and
identifies as a personal growth and social change movement. The development of its theory
and practice is associated with its leader Harvey Jackins (1975), who authored all its books
and oversaw all articles written for the many journals published by the organisation, until
his death in early 2000. The practice of RC centres on a particular process aimed at liberating individuals and society, a process defined by appeals to rationality. The process involves learning how to listen well to another person, a peer, in order to allow them to 'discharge' or release the emotional 'distresses' that have accumulated since childhood and have resulted in rigid, irrational behaviour patterns that interfere with the 'natural' healthy, rational, well-functioning, intelligent and co-operative human being. The discharge process, which involves emotional expressions such as crying, shaking, laughing, yawning and raging, is assumed to lead to the 're-emergence' of the human being from the stultifying rigidities of her or his patterns. Rationality of flexible responses in the moment replaces the irrational domination of patterns. The process is mutual, so that each person in the pair has the opportunity to take the role of counsellor and client.

As counsellors, we are expected to stand outside our own patterns in order to be there completely for the client, loving the human, but holding no truck with the patterns, offering 'contradictions' to the patterns to permit discharge. As clients we have permission to 'be in our distress' in order to get a handle on what it is and to discharge it in order to achieve re-emergence. The process is simple and effective. The theory has similarities to psychodynamic views of human behaviour, such as those of Freud, which associate behaviours in adulthood with particular experiences in childhood that have been repressed.

Apart from its intuitive appeal as a straightforward process that supposedly guarantees psychological health, it is also attractive for its strong social action focus. Based on a simplified Marxism, the theory encompasses an analysis of class-based power that leads to the oppression of disadvantaged groups. The co-counsellor becomes aware of the multitude of oppressions that operate in society (the oppression of the working class, women, blacks, immigrants, gay men and lesbians, Jews, Catholics, people with disabilities, young people, older people, and so on) and hence becomes part of a movement dedicated to the liberation of all humans from oppression. I found this analysis very attractive because of its connections with critical sociology and the valuable insights it offered that I could incorporate into my teaching. The aspects of class discussed above were very much influenced by the insights RC offered into the way that class affects people, particularly in the education system, where the majority of my work is located.
I became a leader in the local RC community, teaching ‘fundamentals’ classes (introductions to the theory and practice) and leading workshops. My involvement spanned ten years until 1994 when I had a complete rethink and became aware of aspects of the organisation and its theory and practice that had previously eluded me. I realised that many of the theoretical insights are not unique to RC and have been expressed by many theorists in many different contexts, especially those in the ‘radical’ or ‘emancipatory’ camps (e.g. Marx, Gramsci, Freire, Habermas). The counselling practice, based on attentive and positive listening, is also well-founded, a feature of well-established psychotherapeutic practice. The insights and principles developed in RC are used by people in any context that aims to improve the human condition and is concerned with social justice. Despite these similarities with other schools of thought, the organisation claims uniqueness for its theories and insights.

An early sign of my discomfort with RC was teaching a ‘fundamentals class’ and realising I could not incorporate my own critique. There is a strict adherence to the theory, with any attempts to include other insights being seen as ‘not doing RC’ and therefore not appropriate. I had been noticing the difficulty around critique in relation to leaders—a policy was being developed that identified critiques of leaders as ‘attacks’ on the leaders or on co-counselling. It appeared that any criticism of a leader’s behaviour (no matter how justified) could be labelled as an attack. The person responsible for the criticism had to apologise and ‘cease the attack’ or be expelled. As a leader myself, I was prevailed upon to be a ‘model’ and interrupt any ‘gossip’ and I was strongly warned when I raised concerns myself. This proved to be an extremely effective tactic to silence any discussion and to suppress information. However, it laid the seeds of my questioning and discontent.

This suppression of information is one of the aspects of RC that have led it to being described as a ‘psychotherapy cult’ (Tourish and Irving, 1994; Study Group, 1992). Other aspects include the idealising of a charismatic leader figure (with narcissistic and authoritarian tendencies) who is considered beyond criticism; assumptions that the belief system is superior to others and is the only way to ‘save the world’; cultivation of excessive use of common jargon leading to conformity of values and beliefs; discouragement of links with other groups; overwhelming displays of closeness between group members, which
make lonely and isolated people particularly vulnerable to recruitment; public displays of emotion, which lead to group commitment through artificially engineered peak experiences; transgressing of sexual boundaries particularly by leaders; and the monopolising of members’ free time that undermines their capacity for independent thought and insulates them from alternative sources of information.

Such features, all of which fit with my experience, mean that RC is in danger of negating its humanistic and social change aims. Critics are always careful to point out that the peer listening relationships and group support offered through RC have undoubtedly beneficial effects on participants and it is only at the group organisational level that the cult-like features become obvious. There is also little critique within RC of the content of the theories that outline the way oppression functions at the societal level. As I have already noted, the similarity with established social and political theory gives it strength and appeal. Another problematic aspect is the tendency to assume a ‘monopoly on truth’, imposing a particular view of human beings and how social structures should be changed, not dissimilar to assumptions made by conventional economics (Fay, 1987; Soros, 1997). Soros (1997) argues that any ideologies claiming to be in possession of the ultimate truth, especially those with an appeal to science, are fatally flawed, since the ultimate truth is beyond the reach of humankind. The lack of self-critique is a feature of many ideologies that lay claim to the truth and believe they know the sure path to liberation.

The following is an extract from my journal at that acutely uncomfortable time in 1994 when I was alerted to the cult-like aspects of the organisation:

*It has been slowly dawning on me over recent months that I have participated and colluded in what has been called a ‘psychotherapy cult’... It is a shock to admit this. It is the first time I have publicly acknowledged it... Due to the effectiveness of its silencing propaganda, I am feeling quite nervous and ‘a bad girl’ that I am publicly stating my concerns... I am now deciding to no longer be a member of the co-counselling community. This is a big decision. I have been so strongly identified with it for so long. I am having to come to terms with shame and anger. I can see it doesn’t make sense to go into self-blame about my own collusion with an abusive system that is held in place by a hierarchical and authoritarian structure... [but] I am having to come to terms with my own willing participation and lack of clear and critical thinking about it. Once again, my need to belong, and even more so, my need to be approved of by leaders, people in authority, have lessened my ability to see the truth of what has been going on.*
From my understanding of my experience with orthodox economics and orthodox RC, I have learnt that I need to be conscious and wary of any system of thought or organisation that offers simple answers to complex questions; which professes to be the ‘only way’ to the answers to life’s problems (i.e. lays claim to the ‘ultimate truth’); which offers liberation from all oppression; which does not tolerate or welcome critique; and which is organised along authoritarian lines with most of the power invested in one person or a small group of people who are protected from accountability.

The conclusion I reached from this experience is that activism based on assumptions of certainty about the way the world works and what is the best way to change it, assumptions that draw on beliefs in the superiority of rational thought and action, is to be viewed with some scepticism about its efficacy and ethics, particularly if it fails to incorporate critique of its assumptions, beliefs and methods.

2.3.3 A Different Path to Activism: Community Living

While I consciously saw myself as a (rational) change agent through teaching, I had a very different experience of activism through lived experience on an ‘intentional community’. There are many such communities, also known as ‘multiple occupancies’, on the north coast of NSW, all located on rural properties of 40 hectares (100 acres) or more. They are formed for different reasons, but in general the intention is to create community life through sharing resources and making low cost housing a reality for those on limited incomes.

I moved with my family to the community known as Bodhi Farm on the NSW north coast after being invited to join in 1987. What attracted me to community living? Having chosen a rural lifestyle in preference to the comforts and pace of an urban life, it became clear that living on the land demanded a commitment that was more enjoyably shared with others than carried out alone. Raising children (by then I had had my second child) is a job best shared with other parents and supportive adults. Children are naturally communal. I hold a belief that we are born with a predisposition towards relationship, being together, co-
operating. It has seemed to me that the many ancient and tribal cultures around the world are testimony to this. Living in isolation from one another goes against our ‘true’ natures, I believe. The process of industrialisation, with its accompanying ideology of individualism, has forced us to become separate, consuming entities. While offering the illusion of higher living standards (in the form of greater material wealth), I am convinced that industrial society has left us mourning the loss of our ancient, collective selves. Such beliefs and ‘convictions’ informed my passion for living in community.

Bodhi Farm was established out of the youthful idealism of the sixties and seventies. A group of young people, inspired by the deeply compassionate and gentle path of Buddhism, decided to build a community held together by a common commitment to inquiry and ‘walking gently on the earth’. A strong commitment to the land and the principle of stewardship rather than private ownership of land informed the basis of the communal structure. There is no individual ownership of housing, one of the main aspects of this community that distinguishes it from many others in this region, which has one of the highest concentrations of multiple occupancy development in Australia.

A demographic breakdown of age, gender, class background, living arrangements and occupations reveals an interesting diversity—single people in one-room dwellings, childless couples living together; partners living in separate houses with their own children from previous relationships; blended families; single parents; nuclear families; and extended housing where different households share gardens and bathrooms. People have varying occupations—full-time parents, students, part-time workers, full-time professionals, voluntary workers, small business people. There are university and TAFE teachers, workers in the social welfare field, environmental activists, health workers and craftspeople.

Decisions are made by consensus at monthly meetings. We eat together once a week on Sundays and work together on Saturday mornings. Many resources are shared and there is communal food buying, with each resident contributing to a weekly ‘kitty’. We have our own 12-volt power system, charged by a turbine, diesel generator and solar panels. Celebrations and rituals are part of community life—two examples are the ceremonies to
welcome new members and a welcoming ceremony for the first grandchild. Once a year the whole community goes away camping for a week for our Annual General Meeting (AGM). This is our opportunity to reflect more deeply on longer-term issues and connect with each other in an unhurried way that is not as possible during the busy year.

In what ways does this living experience constitute ‘activism’ and how does it reflect my assumptions about social action?

When I reflect on what attracted me to community, I think that apart from the desires to share working and living on the land and raising children, I had a deep passion to live in connection, in relationship, rather than in nuclear family isolation. I was also attracted to ideas of using less, of living simply and cheaply, of being in control of resources such as power and water. I also wanted to live with integrity, living in as close a way as possible to my values and ideals. In the language of Argyris and Schon (1974), my aim was to bring my espoused theory closer to my theory-in-use, or my professed ideals closer to lived reality. This extended to my professional life—if I were advocating social change and living according to ecological principles in the classroom, I believed I would have more credibility as a teacher if I were living according to these principles. Perhaps it was an attempt to embody rather than to merely espouse.

It may be helpful at this point to consider two examples of this ‘lived activism’, examples that demonstrate living an alternative economics within community. The first tackles private ownership and the second income security.

As mentioned above, one of the crucial early decisions that made Bodhi Farm unique was communal ownership of houses. There have been many struggles with the legacy of this ideological commitment to challenge one of the most enduring principles of capitalism, the private ownership of land. At various times we have been confronted with the reality facing people who have decided to leave the community to encounter life in mainstream society, and who are themselves confronted with the poverty of their existence outside the community. Facing the stark material reality of no resources to make a life outside the security of the community, some have felt the need to ‘demand’ financial resources on leaving. We have been forced to examine and re-examine the original principles and
visions. Some people question the original values, seeing them as unrealistic, naive and unfair. For others, this process re-confirms the integrity of the original vision, which offers an opportunity to live according to values other than those dictated by dominant (materialist) ideologies.

For me, this debate has often been a fascinating and deeply satisfying process, despite the amount of distress experienced by many people involved. It goes to the core of our deepest values—we have to explore the depth of our commitment to the principles of community that conflict with the values of the dominant society. The ingrained effects of our particular backgrounds, especially our class backgrounds (and to a lesser extent our gender conditioning) become obvious. Our attitudes towards security, work, economic independence, relationship and responsibility emerge and have to be evaluated. Our everyday existence challenges the institutions that support the dominant economic paradigm—they are not only unsupportive of what we are doing, but actively engage in undermining it. Early attempts by the local council to demolish houses on the community and local laws restricting multiple occupancy development are two examples.

Engaging in this process of evaluating our values and our vision of living in this particular way means we are constantly confronting our old conditioning: when people speak of the ‘unfairness’ of putting money into housing that is left for others to enjoy, without any return, the ideology we were raised on, which says that individual effort should be (financially) rewarded and that shelter should be treated as a tradeable commodity, pulls strongly at us. It feels very hard to argue against something that we have been taught since birth. At times like these, the invisible and intangible benefits derived from shared labour, childcare, safety, sharing resources and so on are not measurable and there seems to be no way to bring them into the equation. In effect, we face the same dilemmas as those attempting to devise more realistic measures of national wealth than the GDP (discussed in more detail in chapter 4). At the same time we have all developed (to varying degrees) a consciousness that understands that the only way to planetary survival is through living with less, sharing resources and supporting each other. When we have been faced with direct (and aggressive) challenges, the tension between the old, ingrained ideologies and the newly adopted consciousness is acute. As long as this lifestyle is being challenged, it is not
possible to become complacent. We are constantly questioning and evaluating. When we do this it seems to me that we engage deeply with each other, and that the strength of the community is reinforced and our understanding and appreciation of what we are doing is enriched.

At one of our AGMs, in 1993, I co-led a workshop looking at the issues of economics on the community. We discussed aspects of our communal lives that touched on meeting our future needs and explored options such as a superannuation scheme in an attempt to face some of the issues that living our particular lifestyle raises for us, e.g. the issues raised by lack of equity in housing. Some interesting feedback was that the treatment of the topic was conducted in a very ‘intellectual’ and ‘dry’ way (a common complaint when considering financial and economic issues) and that it would be beneficial for us to explore our attitudes and feelings towards money and wealth. For various reasons, we have shied away from such a process. It seems to me that differing levels of wealth and different attitudes to money and income affect many of our discussions at an unconscious level, but to bring these to conscious awareness in our dialogues is strongly resisted.

Four years later, in 1997, we revisited the notion of a savings scheme designed to provide a safety net for individuals as we grew older. Part of the proposal was that people on higher incomes would contribute more, but everyone would draw the same lump sum in the future. Interestingly, this has created concerns for those on lower incomes, who feel some difficulty with benefiting from a scheme to which they have not been able to make an equal contribution. On the other hand, those with access to more financial resources are anxious to engage in a redistribution that balances their privilege. At the time of writing (2000), no decisions have been made. As with much of our process, ideas take time to take hold. We keep the ideas alive through informal discussions over cups of tea and workdays, and raise them again more formally at an AGM. Circumstances change, people’s perspectives shift, things move slowly and organically. There seems to be no escaping our traditional, embodied, historical and embedded natures (Fay, 1987). This lived experience of the alternative located within the inescapable mainstream domain produces an imperative to negotiate different values embedded deep within our heritages.
The discussion so far demonstrates how my experiences in emancipatory education, co-counselling and community living have contributed to my particular construction of social action. Each has been influenced by and has in turn influenced the fourth key influence on my activism and research practice to be explored in this chapter—social activism according to the principles of ‘Heart Politics’.

2.3.4 An Alternative to Confrontational Activism: the Influence of Heart Politics

During the 1980s, an organisation called Interhelp was formed, based on the work of Joanna Macy (Macy, 1983, 1991), an activist who tackled the issue of despair around the threat of nuclear war, developing a process called ‘despair to empowerment’ that allowed people to touch their deep grief about nuclear war and environmental destruction. The local branch of this organisation organised gatherings of people involved in activism around these issues (Shields, 1991). These were the forerunner of gatherings that have come to be known as ‘Heart Politics’, a term used to describe the work of people wanting to make a difference in the world without taking a confrontational or adversarial approach. The term is popularly attributed to social activist and comedian Fran Peavey (1986, 2000).

Heart Politics gatherings have been held since 1989 in Australia and New Zealand and have been very influential on ‘activist culture’, especially in northern NSW, where living out alternatives to mainstream society is a feature of the local social landscape. The roots of the Heart Politics philosophy and practice are in the non-violence movement and Buddhism. This philosophy recognises respect for life and the interconnectedness between all humanity and other forms of life, often referred to as ‘the web of life’, a term used by writers in the deep ecology tradition (Naess, 1973; Devall and Sessions, 1985; Seed et al., 1989; Capra, 1996). It also recognises that no barriers exist between the political, the spiritual and the personal. The twin values of respect for life and resistance to injustice form the basis of the non-violent attitude to social change. Courage to act against injustice requires compassion (meaning literally ‘suffering together’) and a clear understanding of our profound mutuality and interconnectedness. It involves recognising the humanity of the oppressors, while standing steadfastly against their actions. Reconciliation and peaceful
conflict resolution are clearly stated goals. Social action involves recognising injustice not only at the structural level but in interpersonal relationships as well. Personal transformation goes hand in hand with social change (Shields, 1991).

This underlying philosophy finds a comfortable home in the ‘new paradigm’ values discussed later in chapter 4, values that have been influenced by teachings from ancient spiritual practice. Heart Politics is an attempt to offer an alternative to the hard edges of adversarial politics, which create divisions and ultimately maintain oppressive structures (Edwards, 1998). There is explicit recognition that changes in consciousness come from our hearts, not from political positions or systems of power and control (Peavey and Hutchinson, 1990). The conferences or gatherings allow for what Vivian Hutchinson, a key leader in New Zealand Heart Politics, calls a ‘people’s oratory’ through the ‘heart circle’, loosely based on the Maori kawa (or protocol). The heart circle is viewed as an essential tool of communication in social change work.

The white western world no longer creates cultural spaces for a ‘people’s’ oratory to talk about the issues in our shared community lives ... we usually delegate this function to politicians, actors, TV personalities or conference speakers. As our collective mind and political consciousness is colonised by television and political Public Relations ... the ‘people’s’ oratory becomes a dying and forgotten art (Peavey and Hutchinson, 1990: 10).

It is through the telling of stories, stories that are contextual and particular, that the culture is built.

Another key process that has been identified as part of the heart politician’s tool-kit is that of ‘strategic questioning’, a questioning that allows for creative solutions to emerge (Peavey, 1994). According to Peavey, strategic questions create movement and options and hence are inherently empowering. By asking ‘what would it take for you to change on this issue?’ the person being questioned is invited to create the path for change. If the activist stands side-by-side with the forest worker and asks a question such as ‘what do we need to do to ensure that there will be forests for our children?’, s(he) immediately takes a non-adversarial stance and invites the worker to consider the problem in partnership. Such questions have no immediate answers. They may bring about unexpected insights and creativity.
Strategic questioning is political because it is a process that encourages people to find their own way through the rapids of change ... It is political because it can take political debates beyond dogma and ideology into fresh perspectives on common problems. It is political because it is a way of transforming attachment to your own goals and opening up options that are common goals (Peavey, 1994: 104-105).

The point is to cut across old adversarial lines, moving from a 'power over' dominator model to a 'power with' partnership model of relationship (Eisler, 1988; Eisler and Loye, 1990). Heart Politics assumes that this is the only productive path to take if we are to ensure a sane, just, humane and ecologically viable future.

There are strong connections between Bodhi Farm and its sister community Dharmananda and Heart Politics. The majority of the organising group of the Heart Politics gatherings held each year in northern NSW consists of people living on or with strong links to these two communities. The flavour and style of gatherings held in other parts of Australia have been based on the model developed by this group, which has produced a handbook describing the philosophy and how to run a successful conference using Heart Politics principles (Clough, 1995).

There is no doubt that there is strong appeal in these principles and I have been very attracted to them. Fran Peavey's gentle and disarming style captured my heart and hearing her speak in 1989 of finding our personal response to participating in social change in terms of 'lifting our particular small piece of a very large carpet' captured my imagination. The first direct lead into my current work and passion about changing the dominant economic paradigm came through listening to Vivian Hutchinson who spoke about unemployment at the second Heart Politics conference, which I attended in 1990. He eloquently revealed that 'putting the love back into economics' was the only way to overcome satisfactorily the problem of unemployment. It was then I realised that working towards changing the old paradigm and its values through Heart Politics principles was the contribution I wanted to make to social change. My experience with the values of Heart Politics, particularly those that emphasise the importance of connection, building relationships with those from different positionings and the necessity to act to rectify injustices, has helped shape and reinforce my own values. The Heart Politics paradigm offers a compassionate, reflective
and open-hearted approach that has helped to inform and mould my teaching practice, as the story in chapter 6 will demonstrate.

For me, much of the power of the Heart Politics approach to activism lies in its epistemological focus on the ‘heart’, rather than human reason, as the key medium for liberation, providing a path to true and lasting change. From my experience, ‘coming from the heart’ involves coming from a sense of our common humanity, from a deep sense of our connection and love for each other and the planet. Such a process evokes in me a spiritual or emotional response, rather than one based mainly on logic and ‘hard-headed’ rationalism, a feature of more adversarial approaches to activism. On the other hand, I have noticed a tendency in me and other proponents of Heart Politics to assume we have a ‘monopoly on the truth’, that social change needs to take a particular form in the places we choose to act. However, I have found that engaging in processes of deep reflection, supported by strategies such as strategic questioning, can counteract this tendency to see ourselves as ‘moral saviours’ (just as co-counselling encouraged me to do). Refusing to take a fixed position by staying open to ‘the other’ allows the incorporation of multiple perspectives into our worldview.

2.3.4.1 Roles of Activism

Before concluding this chapter, I will turn now to a particular analysis of social activism within the Heart Politics context that has been useful for me in framing an understanding of how I have constructed my own activist identity. It is the analysis provided by a social activist who has made a significant contribution to the Heart Politics discourse—Bill Moyer, a veteran of U.S. civil rights and environmental campaigns from the 1960s. From his experience, Moyer developed a model of activism that I have found useful in understanding the roles we take in social change, that I have drawn on in my teaching and that I reflect on in later chapters. Moyer describes four main roles that can be taken within social movements: the citizen, the rebel, the change agent and the reformer. For activism to be effective, all four roles need to be played, not necessarily by the same people. Each role can be performed effectively or ineffectively (Moyer, 1990).
The citizen role involves being active as a ‘good citizen’ who supports the values, traditions and symbols of society that support basic human rights, dignity and freedoms. Examples of an effective citizen supporting the environment movement would include signing a petition to stop mining on an indigenous sacred site; engaging in dialogue with ordinary citizens about the importance of supporting the movement because it is consistent with democratic principles; or voting for a minor party such as the Greens, which supports the goals of the environment movement. According to Moyer, ineffective citizens uncritically accept the claims of those in power that the society is fully democratic and that social change is unnecessary.

The rebel role is the one most commonly associated with activists, as it is often the most visible and the most reported in the media. The main role of the rebel is to say no to violations of primary values and principles and the rebel generally uses such means as direct non-violent action, mass rallies, boycotts, blockades, leafleting and civil disobedience. The role of rebels is to put themselves physically in the path of official institutions and power holders. Effective rebels put issues on the agenda (e.g. pointing out that forests are being destroyed by directly placing themselves in the line of bulldozers); cause creative tension by highlighting the gaps between what is and what should be (e.g. pointing out the injustice inherent in black deaths in custody); promote democracy by alerting the general public to the problem (e.g. campaigning to alert Australians to the exploitation of immigrant outworkers in the textile industry); and act as society’s ‘moral vanguard’ (e.g. by speaking out in the media about the violence faced daily by gay men).

On the other hand, ineffective or negative rebels, instead of directing their anger and frustration positively into imaginative and responsible action, use strident rhetoric and aggressive actions and attitudes that alienate the general public. They advocate change by any means necessary, which usually means militant protests that are disruptive and destructive. Moyer believes that such negative rebels are driven by a negative self-image and tend to view themselves as being on the margins of society and of the movement itself. They will often have a view of the world as being polarised between good and evil: ‘we’ who have the truth and are the vanguard of righteousness against ‘they’ who are the powerful outside enemy. Street demonstrations against globalisation in 1999 and 2000
have featured both effective and ineffective rebels, with the media focusing predominantly on the actions of negative rebels.

The effective change agent takes an educative rather than a protest role. This role involves educating the public about existing conditions and policies, participating in dialogue with those in power, creating opportunities for democratic processes that permit exchanges of opinions, promoting alternatives and involving the whole society in the long process of social change. Ineffective change agents do not engage with the wider community, living out their vision in isolation and preferring to assume their approach is the only valid one.

The purpose of the reformer is to have the movement’s goals and alternatives officially incorporated into the laws and policies of society’s economic, social and political institutions. The tools of the reformer are lobbying, referenda, political campaigns and legislative change and they make use of these through judicial, legislative and other institutional channels. An example of an effective reformer would be a feminist working within the public service to work for anti-discrimination legislation in the workplace. Ineffective reformers become co-opted by the mainstream and settle for minor ‘realistic’ reforms that will be acceptable to the dominant cultural groups, thus losing sight of the larger goals of the movement they originally saw themselves as representing (Moyer, 1990).

I have seen myself engaging in each of these four roles at various times: for example, as an ‘informed citizen’ I have twice been a candidate in Lismore local council elections (in the 1980s and 1990s) and was involved in the local ‘precinct committee’ that liaised with the city council on our local rural issues in the early 1990s; as a ‘rebel’ I was a member of a women’s protest camp that blockaded a naval base harbouring nuclear warships in Western Australia in 1984; and as a ‘reformer’ I was a consultant for the newly-elected Byron Shire Council in introducing community consultation methods in 1995. However, as the story in this chapter testifies, I see myself predominantly taking the ‘change agent’ role in social change through my educational practices.
2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced the sources that contribute to my positioning in this research, in particular my constructed identity as social activist in relation to demystifying the dominant paradigm of economics. A process of critical reflection revealed nine assumptions that I took into the research domain, and this chapter has focused particularly on the assumption that I believe it is imperative for me to act in the world for the ‘common good’. I accept the postpositivist position integral to Social Ecology (McIntyre, 1996) that it is impossible to be a ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ researcher and that the positioning of the researcher not only influences research outcomes, but is central to the research endeavour. This chapter has told a particular story of what I perceive to be the most significant sources of influence of this positioning, including my family and cultural background, educational and teaching experiences, choices in relation to pursuing personal growth and social change through co-counselling, lived experience in community and my involvement in grass roots social activism through Heart Politics. The telling of this story constructs a particular ‘picture’ of my identity and can only ever be partial. Reflecting on one’s life and experience changes through time and we seem to ‘reinvent’ ourselves anew as new insights and understandings unfold. Nevertheless, the reflections in this chapter serve to provide a frame for understanding the motivations underlying the research process as well as demonstrating a commitment to the reflective processes required by action research, a commitment that emerged as the most significant aspect of the inquiry, both as an ongoing process and as an ‘object’ of inquiry itself.

Having outlined the sources of my activist commitments and predispositions, arising from a reflection on assumption #6, it is the task of the next two chapters to examine more closely the theoretical sources underpinning the remaining eight assumptions. In identifying myself as belonging in the ‘emancipatory’ paradigm, as someone committed to liberation and social change, I turn now to a review of the main ideas, concepts and ideologies that inform the so-called ‘emancipatory project’ of critical social science.
CHAPTER 3
MAPPING THE TERRITORY I:
THE EMANCIPATORY PROJECT OF RADICAL EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I examined the influences that led me to the belief that 'acting for the common good' was an important response to the injustice and oppression that I witnessed in the world. I developed a perspective on my own approach to activism that informs this research, acknowledging the theoretical influences of critical social science and co-counselling, the lived experience of trying practical alternatives to the dominant paradigm and the appeal and power of Heart Politics as an alternative to confrontational activism.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to examine the theoretical underpinnings that lie behind the assumptions outlined in the previous chapter, the domain of critical social theory; and to explore the context in which these concepts are applied in this research, the domain of radical or emancipatory adult education. To reiterate, the nine assumptions are as follows:

1. that orthodox Western economics constitutes an ideology;

2. that this ideology is part of a dominant paradigm that causes harm to people and the planet;

3. that any ideology is transmitted and reinforced through language, and that the language of economics is alienating and mystifying for people outside the discipline;

4. that when the ideology of orthodox economics is presented as 'this is how the world works', it leads to unthinking/unconscious acceptance of its premises and conclusions;

5. that this acceptance (i) leads to alienation of those citizens who have limited access to power and resources; (ii) produces an incapacity to imagine how to change the
way the world works or conceive alternatives; and (iii) constitutes a threat to
genuine democracy;

6. that it is important for me to act in some way for the common good (i.e. be engaged
in social action);

7. that one way to act is to raise awareness through a process of demystifying the
language of economics and uncovering the real sources of power that underlie it, i.e.
revealing the ideology for what it is;

8. that one of the ways to engage in this process of demystification is through an
education process that is empowering for the learners; and

9. that empowering education occurs through participation of learners in dialogue and
discussion that relates to their own lives and through an awareness of the power
relationship that exists between teacher (as the ‘gatekeeper’ of knowledge) and
student.

The key concepts in my nine assumptions are ‘ideology’, ‘demystification’ and
‘empowerment’. Implied also is the term ‘emancipation’, which has come to be the
hallmark of Enlightenment thinking. All these concepts are central to critical social theory
which developed out of Marxism and a response to German fascism in the 1930s. They are
also central to critical action research, as we shall see in chapter 5. The chapter begins with
an examination of the critical social thought behind the concepts of ideology,
demystification, emancipation and empowerment. These concepts are central to the
educative project of critical social science, which aims to empower its audience to act for
social change. This discussion leads to the second task of the chapter, which is to place
these ideas in the context of education, and in particular, the education of adults. Following
a brief contextualising of different adult education philosophies, we will see that
emancipatory intention, informed by critical theory, is the foundation of radical adult
education, which forms the paradigmatic basis for the action research cycle at TAFE. I
review the work of some of the major pioneers of radical adult education to highlight the
major influences on the research strategies that I went on to undertake in the institutional
domain. The role of critical reflection in emancipatory education, so central to its
epistemology and to this research project, concludes the chapter.
3.2 KEY CONCEPTS UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS: IDEOLOGY, DEMYSTIFICATION, EMANCIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

3.2.1 Ideology as a Concept in Social Theory

The first use of the term ‘ideology’ was made by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy in 1796 to describe a new science concerned with ‘the systematic analysis of ideas and sensations’ as a way of understanding human nature (Thompson, 1990). It was an attempt to develop the ideals of the Enlightenment in the context of the social and political upheavals that marked the birth of modern societies. As we shall see in chapter 4, this period also witnessed the arrival of the modern science of ‘political economy’ in England. Thompson (1990: 30) argues that the term ideology itself, despite all the changes it has undergone in meaning:

remains tied to the ideals of the Enlightenment, in particular to the ideals of the rational understanding of the world ... and of the rational self-determination of human beings.

Because de Tracy was associated with the politics of the new republicanism in France at the time, Napoleon ridiculed the pretensions of the ‘science’ of ideology, claiming it was an abstract doctrine divorced from the realities of political power. He coined the term ‘ideologues’ to describe those he saw as plotting against the new regime and he used them as scapegoats for the regime’s failures. The term ideology ‘had become a weapon in the hands of an emperor struggling desperately to silence his opponents and to sustain a crumbling regime’. This process resulted in the meaning of the term undergoing change from simply the ‘science of ideas’ to a ‘body of ideas that are alleged to be erroneous and divorced from the practical realities of political life’ (Thompson, 1990: 31-32).

Two distinct classical versions of ideology, originating in the works of Marx and Mannheim respectively, emerged from these origins (Thompson, 1990; Watt, 1994). Marx’s conception was pejorative and particular (i.e. ideology is a negative force contributing to false consciousness and it is possible to be free of ideology under ideal
conditions), while Mannheim's was neutral and general (i.e. all systems of thought are ideological and it is impossible to think outside ideologies).

3.2.1.1 Marx's Conception of Ideology

Marx's unique contribution was to take over the negative, oppositional sense conveyed by Napoleon and transform the concept within a theoretical framework ‘deeply indebted to the spirit of the Enlightenment’ (Thompson, 1990: 32). The origins of Marxist versions of ideology derive from The German Ideology in which Marx and Engels criticised the Young Hegelians for failing to see ideas as connected to social and historical conditions, instead seeing them as autonomous. Thompson points out the irony of Marx’s position, which criticises the abstraction of de Tracy’s notion, while at the same time arguing for a ‘scientific study of science and society’, thus sharing de Tracy’s faith in the ideals of the Enlightenment and positive science in particular.

The notion of the dominant ideology is epitomised in the following quote from The German Ideology:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force in a society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force (cited in Watt, 1994: 12).

The application of ideology here applies to those societies in which there is a dominant group that exercises power over subordinate groups. The implication is that without conflicts of class interests, there would be no function or place for ideology. As Thompson expresses it, ideology is conceptualised as a ‘system of ideas which expresses the interests of the dominant class but which represents class relations in an illusory form’ (Thompson, 1990:37).

Watt uses the example of how economic value is viewed in the Marxist conception. When value is viewed in terms of labour (rather than profit reasonably proportioned to the value of an investment), thoughts of exploitation and injustice are possible. Marx does not present this as the worker’s view rather than the capitalist’s view of value, but instead that the former view is objective and free of ideology while the latter is ideological because it supports the interests of the dominant group. Marx seemed therefore to view his own
thought as non-ideological, despite his claim that all thinking and understanding is shaped by material and social conditions of the time (Watt, 1994).

Writers such as Watt argue that the distinction between science and ideology is taken for granted in Marx's work, rather than being expounded and defended in systematic detail. There is also the implication, expounded more systematically by later Marxists such as Lenin and Lukacs, that because the proletariat is a universal class and will be the only 'class' in a classless society, reality constructed from a proletarian point of view has a unique completeness and objectivity, and is therefore free of ideology. This particular view of ideology is expounded in modern times by Paulo Freire (see below) whose process of 'conscientisation' of the peasants results in a critical perception of the world, resulting in a 'correct' method of approaching reality in order to unveil it (Watt, 1994). Ruling class ideology is not replaced by workers' or peasants' ideology, but by an 'objective truth'. Watt (1994) maintains that this view is still present in those educational researchers who argue for the possibility of an approach to curriculum that frees people from ideology rather than inculcating them with one ideology or another. This position is implied in my assumptions above—demystify the dominant ideology of neoclassical economics to free people from its constraints and offer alternatives that are less likely to be contaminated by ideological illusion.

3.2.1.2 Extensions of Marx: Ideology, Demystification and the Frankfurt School

Marxist conceptions of ideology lie at the heart of the social theory of the Frankfurt School, which formed the foundation of the paradigm known as critical theory. The Frankfurt School, or the Institute for Social Research, was founded in Frankfurt in 1923 and under its most influential director, Max Horkheimer, its members attempted to revise both the Marxist critique of capitalism and the theory of revolution in order to confront the new social and political conditions that had evolved since Marx's death. The 'critical theory' of society emerged to deal with those aspects of social reality that Marx had ignored or downplayed. The term was not coined until 1937 when the majority of the Institute's
members had emigrated to the US, fleeing Nazism, and when any association with the term Marxism was highly dangerous (Bronner and Kellner, 1989).

In contrast to other social theories, the proponents of critical theory claim that it:

maintains a non-dogmatic perspective which is sustained by an interest in emancipation from all forms of oppression, as well as by a commitment to freedom, happiness, and a rational ordering of society ... it thus sets forth a normative social theory that seeks a connection with empirical analyses of the contemporary world (Bronner and Kellner, 1989: 2).

The Columbia University in New York is where the members of the Institute launched their inquiry into the roots of fascism, into socialising influences (especially the family) that led people to accept irrational forms of social and political authority. It is also where they developed their ‘ideology critique’ (Ideologiekritik), which demonstrates how ideologies serve particular interests through an analysis of their historical roots and assumptions, and also discloses the distortions and mystifications they perpetuate. The ‘inner circle’ of theorists consisted of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lowenthal, Pollock and Fromm. Its most well-known contemporary protagonist is Habermas, whose theories of communicative action have become the foundation for much of emancipatory social theory (Pusey, 1987; Geuss, 1981). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review the vast body of Habermas’s work, but it is important to note the influence of his concepts and theories on emancipatory educational thought (discussed below).

Brain Fay, whose analysis of the ontology of critical social science we shall return to in more detail in chapter 7, describes Marx’s critical theory of capitalist society as being supported by conventional economic thought:

the self-understandings of people in capitalist society are shown to be illusions in which they take forms of their own self-activity—such as God, the market, or the state—to be objects independent of themselves and which they must obey: and the thought of economists and other social scientists mirrors this alienation by reifying social relations (Fay, 1987: 34-36).

The Marxist theory of ideology shows how these illusions are derived and how they function to maintain the existing capitalist order. In other words, economists themselves, in the way they define different aspects of the economy as objective ‘facts’, contribute to ideological illusion by failing to identify these facts as derived from the inherent
exploitative nature of capitalist social relations. I will return to a more detailed analysis of the ideological aspects of economics in chapter 4.

If all capitalist social relations are permeated by ideology, an ideology that supports the interests of the ruling class, critical theory assumes that there is an ‘ideologically-free’ state that can be attained through the process of demystification, what Fay calls the ‘educative project of critical social science’. Such a process involves educating those with false consciousness by lifting ‘the veils of illusion’ through demonstrating the extent to which their own beliefs, practices and values operate against their own interests, being therefore the true source of suffering and distress. The central educative purpose of a critical social theory is one that will engender self-knowledge and hence liberate people from oppression, in keeping with the modernist belief that scientific knowledge can effect the transformation of the natural and social worlds. One of the reasons oppression exists is because people are systematically ignorant of their needs and the nature of their relationships and activities:

By helping to remove this unclarity by revealing to people how their false pictures of themselves and their world are a contributory cause of their unhappiness, the educator intends to be the catalytic agent which sparks these people into changing the way they live and relate to others (Fay, 1987: 89).

This notion of demystification through education lies at the heart of my assumption #7.

Gramsci extended Marx’s conception of ideology by viewing it as a system of ideas expressed not only in thought, but also in material relations, the practices and fabric of society (Allman, 1988). He is credited with first using the term ‘hegemony’, an encompassing system of ideas which is cemented together by ideology. Thus, the hegemony of the bourgeoisie (ruling class ideology) ‘takes of advantage of people’s commonsense conceptions of the world’ (Allman, 1988: 100). Hegemony is complete when all classes of society support uncritically those ideas and practices that favour the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, Gramsci conceives working class hegemony as:

more expansive, better able to articulate the interests of all groups in society, because the interests of the working class are not based on exploitation (Allman, 1988: 100-101).

Further, he saw Marxism’s educative role in terms of it being a mode of thinking capable of breaking through reigning ideology and eventually being free of ideology itself.
From the above representations of the capacity of education to remove ideological barriers and illusions, it would appear that Marxist views of ideology are not viewed by critical theorists as ideological in themselves. In Ideologiekritik (Geuss, 1981) ideology has a pejorative connotation, i.e. it blinds us to ‘reality’ and is therefore false or needing revision in order to see things ‘as they really are’, implying that objective reality is attainable. Bernstein (cited in Schwandt, 1990: 274) argues that while lifting false consciousness is the ideal of critical social science, it does not presuppose a conception of absolute truth:

we can show the falsity of an ideology without claiming that we have achieved a final, absolute, ‘true’ understanding of social and political reality.

I maintain that demystification is still important, but as educators we need to be careful not to take some implicit moral high ground, assuming that somehow those of us doing the demystifying have some access to a non-ideological, ‘truthful’ understanding of the world. If I take a position that supports those who are disadvantaged in the material sense, do I not therefore have my own ideology that attempts to present their ‘reality’ as being more ‘objective’ or ‘true’ simply because it does not support the interests of the power holders? Without acknowledging our own ideological position, we could be charged with being guilty of the same offence as the supporters of the status quo: presenting as reality ideas and beliefs that support our own interests. This interpretation of ideology may in fact be closer to that of Mannheim.

3.2.1.3 Ideology According to Mannheim

Mannheim (1991) identified that the primary way that thinking is shaped by society is through language, which facilitates some ways of thinking and closes others off.

Knowing is fundamentally collective knowing...It presupposes a community of knowing which grows primarily out of a community of experiencing (cited in Watt, 1994: 18).

He maintained that any group can use ideological language, not just those in the ruling classes. (This emphasis on language has influenced my assumption #3.) Mannheim observed that the problem implicit in the concept of ideology is the problem of determining ‘what is really real’.
It is impossible to conceive of absolute truth existing independently of the values and position of the subject and unrelated to the social context (cited in Watt, 1994: 19).

Clearly, this interpretation is in sharp contrast to the understandings of ideology proposed by Marx, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School and Freire. Watt identifies, however, that Mannheim moved from this completely relativist position (echoed in some postmodern writings, as we shall see in chapter 7), to one that views some groups as being closer to the ideal of truth than others. He finds this in a comparatively classless stratum of society, the ‘socially unattached intelligentsia’. Because members of this group see social reality from a number of different points of view, they are more likely to arrive at a fuller understanding of it. Interestingly, Mannheim himself belongs to this particular group. This seems to be a not uncommon phenomenon. The writer (so often male) believes his own position to be the most ideologically free and therefore closest to the truth. It seems to me that authenticity comes from an acknowledgment of one’s own beliefs and values and shortcomings, one’s own background and social influences, leading to as honest an assessment of one’s analysis as possible, based on one’s own processes of reflection.

3.2.2 Empowerment and Emancipation

One of the key concepts arising from the educative project of critical social science is that of ‘empowerment’, a concept underlying assumptions 8 and 9. In essence, the understanding of empowerment as articulated and assumed by critical social science could be described as follows—through a process of education that reveals the false consciousness under which the oppressed (the powerless) have been labouring, the oppressed gain a different conception of themselves that permits them to resist and undermine the power of those who oppress them. It is assumed that through the resulting transformative social action, new structures of social relations that lead to more satisfying and fulfilling human lives are ultimately possible (Fay, 1987).

The terms ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ tend to be used interchangeably within the paradigm of critical theory, but they can be usefully distinguished as being ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ dimensions of freedom (Szkudlarek, 1993). Positive freedom (‘freedom to’) is described by the notion of empowerment as it implies actions that people can take in terms
of control over their lives and actions within communities, while negative freedom (‘freedom from’) is found in the notion of emancipation, as it presupposes forces from which people need to be liberated. The definition of empowerment summarised above could perhaps be more accurately used to describe the negative dimension of freedom, emancipation. According to Szkudlarek (1993), the interrelationship of negative and positive freedom, emancipation and empowerment, is crucial to the emancipatory project of critical pedagogy. In contrast, in conservative pedagogies, freedom is constructed as ‘freedom to choose’ (usually to consume) within an existing social order, not freedom to resist or change those social structures. Liberal pedagogies construct freedom in relation to tolerance, i.e. ‘freedom to be the way one is’ without harming others. Within both the conservative and liberal discourses, however, there is silence concerning power. This silence permitted the broadening of the scope of education to incorporate critical pedagogy’s analysis of structures of domination from which individuals needed to be liberated (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991).

‘Empowerment’ is also a term that has developed a popular usage within modernist discourses and its ‘leap into the vernacular’ has meant it has been applied to anything from individual self-assertion to upward mobility (Bihl Dimitrov, 1994; Lather, 1991), weakening its conceptualisation within an emancipatory context. As Usher et al. (1997: 47) point out, there is a significant difference between:

the idealistic social empowerment that is central to a Freirian approach and the much more circumscribed personal empowerment achievable within the narrowly defined competence and vocational instrumentalism that is closely associated with serving the needs and interests of capital.

They go on to argue, however, that in education for citizenship, a more ‘circumscribed’ individualistic empowerment may be more readily achievable than the utopian social empowerment demanded by Freirian-inspired radical education (discussed in more detail later in this chapter):

Empowerment clearly needs to have situated meaning in direct relation to the living and working contexts of adult learner/citizens (Usher et al., 1997: 48).

One of the most prolific writers in the field of critical pedagogy, Peter McLaren, defines empowerment as:
the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live (McLaren, 1989: 186).

Banks (1991: 131) makes the connection between personal transformation and social action in his definition of empowering education:

A curriculum designed to empower students must be transformative in nature and help students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political and economic action.

Ira Shor, whose work we shall discuss later in this chapter, sees empowering education as:

a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change ... The goals of this pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change ... empowering education invites students to become skilled workers and thinking citizens who are also change agents and social critics (Shor, 1992: 15-16).

Incorporated into all the above expositions about empowerment in education is the development of a capacity for critical reflection, which I will return to in more detail later in this chapter. Furthermore, the problematic nature of some of the assumptions underlying such notions of emancipation and empowerment will be explored in more detail in chapter 7, which analyses the emancipatory processes undertaken in the TAFE action research cycle.

Having examined the main theoretical concepts underpinning the assumptions I took into the research context, I turn now to an exploration of the locus of action that incorporates these concepts, the domain of emancipatory adult education, beginning with the larger context of the philosophy and development of Western adult education.
3.3 ADULT EDUCATION

3.3.1 The Context: A Categorisation of Adult Education Philosophies

Adult education in western countries has a long history and has developed within different philosophical traditions. Galbraith (1990: 76-77) has categorised these traditions, based on the work done by Elias and Merriam (1980), into five major areas: liberal adult education, behaviourist adult education, progressive adult education, humanistic adult education and radical adult education. An Australian adult educator, Michael Newman (1993) has similarly categorised the traditions into four areas: liberal, mechanistic, psychotherapy and community development. Both categorisations stay well within the Enlightenment tradition and critiques of this tradition (particularly poststructuralist and postmodern critiques) will be discussed at a later stage, as part of the analysis of my own radical education practices in chapter 7.

Liberal (or traditional) adult education, a tradition associated with the development of adult education in Britain, aims at individual development to make a person literate and ‘cultured’ in the broadest intellectual, moral, spiritual and aesthetic sense. The teacher is an expert and transmitter of knowledge, using traditional methods such as lectures and discussion groups with a clear mandate to direct the learning process. This characterises most popular notions of adult education courses, generally run outside formal institutions, the evening colleges, voluntary community adult education centres and university extramural classes. It is the tradition of non-credit, non-vocational courses open to anyone.

It is a story peopled with powerful, patriarchal Victorian minds, charismatic teachers, patronising philanthropists, eminent scholars, committed self-educated people, and thousands of men and women striving after an education that in the normal order of events only the elite with access to school and university could enjoy (Newman, 1993: 46).

It epitomises the ‘banking’ concept of education, as described by Freire (1973a), discussed below.
Closely allied to liberal adult education in terms of its conservative focus, *behaviourist adult education* (or ‘mechanistic’ education) aims to bring about behaviour that will ensure survival of the human species, societies and individuals. This is the tradition, originating in the United States, that is associated with organisational training. The basic model involves identifying needs, setting objectives, designing courses, delivering training and evaluating ‘measurable outcomes’ in terms of ‘competencies’. The learner takes an active role in learning, practising new behaviour and receiving feedback. The teacher is a manager, a controller who predicts and directs learning outcomes, using contract learning techniques, technologically-assisted instruction, practice and reinforcement. Competency-based learning, which has come to dominate TAFE education in Australia since the early 1990s, is an example of such behaviourist adult education philosophy.

Critiques of conservative adult education appear in works by educators such as Thompson (1980) and Jarvis (1987a). Traditional adult education has a low position in the educational hierarchy because of its minimal contribution to conferring qualifications. It tends to be dominated by concepts of leisure-time satisfaction, which have low value in a meritocratic education system servicing a work-oriented society. The critiques are similar to those of the formal schooling system and the ‘framing’ of educational knowledge (Bernstein, 1971; Dale, 1976; Apple, 1979), that is, in many ways the adult education sector reproduces existing educational and social divisions. The critical sociology of education as exemplified by Apple (1979), embedded in the ontology and epistemology of critical theory, argues that the system of mass, formal, compulsory education arose out of the productive relations associated with the Industrial Revolution in its role of supplying a stratified and socialised workforce. Schools (and also uncritical adult education) provide the early transmission of an effective dominant culture and help create people who see no other serious alternative to the existing economic and cultural order. Schools define what is considered to be socially legitimate knowledge that is presented as ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’, giving no indication that the knowledge that gets selected reflects the perspectives and interests of the dominant groups.

Associated with notions of ‘quality of life’, liberal adult education attracts middle and lower middle class people who have experienced a certain amount of ‘educational success’
and who consider ‘organised learning’ to be valuable, but are not motivated by vocational aspirations (Newman, 1993). As well as being dominated by the middle class, it is also dominated by women, although the policy makers are generally male. Feminist critiques (Keddie, 1980; Westwood, 1980; Thompson, 1980, 1983, 1988) argue that despite claims about ‘responding to community needs’, there is a remarkable consensus about programs offered. According to Nell Keddie, many aim at enhancing women’s occupational skills in managing a home and servicing a family, despite being labelled ‘recreational’ and despite their claims to universality. In this way, adult education as ‘reproducer of social relations’ seeks to penetrate family life and play a role in maintaining the sexual division of labour. By claiming to meet needs of ‘individuality’, ‘personal development’ and ‘self-fulfilment’ (the hallmarks of so-called ‘liberal’ education), such programs render invisible the reproduction of social roles. Such claims are not used to legitimise vocational training or higher education where men dominate.

Another aspect of the critique of liberal and behaviourist adult education is the extent to which it champions the cause of disadvantage—the concept of disadvantage seeks to remedy social problems through the imputed inadequacies of individuals, e.g. the problem of ‘unemployment’ is defined as the problem of ‘lack of skill’ (an individual deficiency), which can be overcome through basic education. Hence most adult education is conservative, or reproducing of existing social relations, concerned with the transmission of skills, not the structure of society.

*Progressive adult education* seeks to transmit culture and societal structure, promote social change and give the learner practical knowledge and problem-solving skills. Key elements in learning are learner needs, interests and experiences and it is assumed that people have unlimited potential that can be developed through education (Cross, 1981; Jarvis 1987b). The teacher is an organiser, guiding learning through educative experiences, stimulating, instigating and evaluating learning processes that are often problem-focused and project-based. Such education is generally associated with what is called in the U.S. ‘citizenship’ education, involving community-based activity and groups (Dale, 1981).
Closely allied to progressive adult education is humanistic adult education which has a more individualistic focus as it aims to enhance personal development and growth. Newman (1993) refers to both progressive and humanistic traditions as coming from the ‘psychotherapy’ tradition, again originating in the United States. Learners are assumed to be highly motivated, self-directed and willing to take responsibility for their own learning. The teacher is a facilitator and partner, who promotes rather than directs learning. Emphasis is on concepts such as experiential learning, self-directedness, interaction through group processes, individualised learning, co-operation, authenticity and emotion. Much human relations training within the human potential movement involves this approach to adult education. The training I received in group leadership and interpersonal skills through the co-counselling movement was very much in this tradition. Humanistic principles have also been very influential in academic higher education that stresses the significance of learning processes (Gibbs and Habeshaw, 1989; Jacques, 1992).

According to Newman, academics such as Mezirow (1981, 1990) and Brookfield (1983, 1987a, 1987b) began writing about learning related to personal growth, using terms such as ‘perspective transformation’ and ‘transformative learning’ (Mezirow) and ‘critical thinking’ and ‘assumption analysis’ (Brookfield). Critical educators such as Newman warn that this type of education ‘can become self-indulgent, directionless and dangerous’ (Newman, 1993: 49) and contributes little to social change. Newman maintains that teacher-as-facilitator is not a radical position—her apparent ‘neutrality’ implies an implicit acceptance of existing power relations. As we shall see below, these two academic theorists have been instrumental in promoting critically reflective processes and practices in higher education. Progressive adult education has more of a social or citizenship focus than humanistic education, which is solely targeted towards the individual. However, they use similar practices and have a similar orientation towards student-centred learning.

Galbraith’s fifth category is radical adult education, (Newman’s community development tradition), the domain that is the focus for this research and that will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. Galbraith (1990) describes the purpose of radical adult education as bringing about, through education, fundamental social, political and economic changes in society. The learner is assumed to be equal with the teacher in the learning process and
has personal autonomy. The teacher co-ordinates, but does not determine the direction of learning. Key concepts include consciousness-raising, praxis, critical thinking and social action. Preferred methods are dialogue, problem posing, maximum interaction and discussion groups. Some of the best-documented work is that done with working class people in Liverpool and Ireland (Lovett, 1980, 1988; Lovett et al., 1983) and in feminist community development (Thompson, 1980, 1983; 1988; Fletcher, 1980). In Australia this tradition is associated with community development projects (Watson, 1985), TAFE outreach courses aimed at grassroots education and the work sponsored by the Centre for Popular Education at the University of Technology, Sydney (Foley, 1985; Newman, 1993, 1994). This tradition is a disparate one, consisting of a vast array of projects by different kinds of activists. It could well have been without a strong theoretical focus if the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire had not written his very influential books based on his literacy programs in South America, notably Brazil and Chile (Newman, 1993).

Before turning to a more detailed review of radical adult education and the work of Freire, the above categorisation of different philosophies of adult education can usefully be linked with the work of Mezirow (1981, 1992) who has identified three distinct ‘domains’ of adult learning.

3.3.2 Adult Learning: Mezirow’s Three Domains

Adult learning can be located within different domains, each associated with what Habermas (1972) has identified as the three primary ‘cognitive interests’: the technical; the practical and the emancipatory. Each of these interests is grounded in different aspects of social existence—work, interaction and power (Mezirow, 1981). Each domain requires a different mode of personal learning and encompasses different learning needs and can therefore be located within one or more of the traditions of adult education reviewed above.

The *technical/work* domain involves ‘instrumental action’ which Habermas (1972, 1984) defines as action based on empirical knowledge and governed by technical rules—action is determined by how much effective control one can exercise through correctly assessing alternatives. Learning involves mastery of technical skills determined by scientific
knowledge, with the emphasis on behaviour change. The empirically-based sciences have
developed as a result of human efforts to control and manipulate the environment, giving us
our basis for work, which drives the industrial process. This type of knowledge has come to
be defined as ‘true’ and ‘valid’ and commands the highest status in (Western) society. This
domain would encompass some of the liberal and all behaviourist and mechanistic
philosophies of adult education. Newman sums up this domain as being about ‘learning
how to perform a role better’ (Newman, 1993: 176).

The *practical/interactive* domain involves ‘communicative action’, i.e. understanding
meaning in communication (Habermas, 1972, 1984). Learning involves aspects such as
learning to understand the situation of others, developing empathy, acquiring conflict
resolution skills, participating in discussion, leading, listening, expressing oneself, asking
questions and so on. This learning comes about through the process of interaction and is
different from mastering technical skills. Mezirow points out that the dominance of the
technical approach has meant that interactive learning is often inappropriately seen as
mastering the ‘skills’ of empathy, listening, expression, etc., which is a misunderstanding
of the learning domain required. This domain would encompass much of the liberal and all
of the progressive and humanistic philosophical approaches to adult education. Learning in
this domain is about ‘learning to be a better person’ (Newman, 1993: 177).

The *emancipatory/power* domain involves an interest in self-knowledge, i.e. the knowledge
of self-reflection (Habermas, 1972, 1984). Emancipation requires liberation from forces
that limit our options and exercise control over our lives, but have been taken for granted as
being beyond human control. It requires gaining an in-depth understanding of our own
historical situation. It means becoming critically aware of how and why the assumptions we
make have limited the way we see ourselves and our relationships, changing these
assumptions in a liberating fashion towards a more discriminating and integrating
experience and acting on the new understandings. Mezirow calls this ‘perspective
transformation’, akin to Habermas’s ‘emancipatory action’ and Freire’s ‘conscientisation’.
Newman describes it as ‘learning not only to be better but different’ (Newman, 1993: 180).
This is the domain of radical adult education. It is also the domain of emancipatory (or
critical) action research, discussed further in chapter 5. (As we shall see in chapter 7, this
domain is also problematised by some of the postmodern critique due to its valorisation of reason and the autonomous self.)

Another important concept identified by Mezirow is that of ‘cultural competence’, a code that contributes to power—things like linguistic ability, social networks, knowledge of subcultures, academic qualifications, etc. Through these competencies, the middle and upper classes accumulate cultural capital. Literacy becomes an important system for decoding signs and thus certain members of the population develop the competence necessary to decode (or understand) the knowledge being offered (particularly instrumental knowledge). This becomes a determining factor in the exclusion of working class adults from university—they lack the cultural competence that the education and class systems provide, a major motivating influence for Paulo Freire in his literacy programs for peasants in Brazil (Freire, 1973a).

3.4 THE DOMAIN OF RADICAL ADULT EDUCATION

As mentioned above, the radical education tradition is disparate and diverse, based in action programs for mainly oppressed minorities in different parts of the world (Evans, 1987; hooks, 1994). One attempt to theorise radical adult education in the U.S. arose from Tom Heaney’s (1980) doctoral research into liberating educational projects in Chicago, cited in Facundo (1984). Facundo summarises the main features of Heaney’s theory of liberating education, as distinct from non-liberating adult education, as follows:

- the basis of power is found in collective rather than individual action;
- collaborative models are emphasised over competitive modes of organisation;
- an active role is assumed in relation to the production of culture and consumerism is rejected as both an insult and a source of impoverishment;
- conflict is preferred to compromise, and alienation is lived out instead of being disguised as self-destructive behaviour;
- liberating educators are first and foremost ‘doers’, and then talkers, valuing action over discussion, relating discussion to their need for critical reflection on what they have already begun to do; and

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- sectarianism is avoided by submitting all action to critical reflection, through the development of consciousness and through consensual governance (Facundo, 1984).

The identification of the practice of critical reflection as a key element of radical adult education is of particular interest to my research and I will return to a fuller discussion later in this chapter.

Two prominent radical education initiatives are worth mentioning here as part of the North American tradition that pre-dates Freire: the Antigonish movement in Canada and the Highlander Folk Schools in the U.S., each led by visionary theologians.

The 1920s and 1930s were a time when working class education based on democratic principles was thriving in different parts of the world: e.g. the British Workers Education movement, the Danish folk schools and the Scandinavian study circles (Peak, 1990; Brookfield, 1983). These programs provided the inspiration for the establishment of ‘real-life’ education for the poor and working class of Nova Scotia, Canada, through an extension department of the Saint Francis Xavier University. Father Moses Coady, a committed, radical visionary, gave the movement its force and stability. The governing principles of the Antigonish movement (named after the town in which its headquarters were located) included:

- the primacy of individual needs, to be met in social contexts;
- the root of social reform lies in education;
- education must start with the economic dimension of life;
- education is most suitable in a group setting;
- social reform both causes, and is dependent on, basic change in social and economic institutions; and
- a fully self-actualised life for all in the community is the aim of the movement (Brookfield, 1983: 109).

Problems of the people were identified in small study and discussion groups, after initial mass meetings, and provided the prelude and rationale for direct community action in the form of credit unions, co-operatives and other reforms. Coady saw that the educative
process was inseparable from a movement towards economic change, but change that occurred *within* the system, rather than a change *of* the system, as later envisaged by Freire.

In 1932 in Tennessee, a radical approach to the education of adults was established by another inspired theologian, Myles Horton, who, responding to the poverty and oppression resulting from the Depression and Southern racism, established schools known as the Highlander Folk Schools that were aimed at creating a conducive environment for social change (Peters and Bell, 1987; Heaney and Horton, 1990; Rennie, 1987; Heaney et al., 1991). The Highlander School continues to offer courses today, currently primarily associated with the environment movement, particularly struggles to take action around toxic waste. Highlander’s educational principles were later echoed by Freire: ‘learn from the people, start where they are’. According to Horton, education must be concerned with increasing awareness of the oppressed to take action to solve problems (Heaney and Horton, 1990). The Highlander approach is based on leadership development with the philosophy that if leaders are to learn to change a system, their learning experiences have to include critical analysis of that system and related systems:

For learning and change to occur along the Horton model, the relationship between ideology and shared principle must be clear and consistently employed by participants in the process. The crucial operating principles in a learning experience include clear goals, shared experience, respect for the individual and collective experience, trust in the learner, action and empowerment of the learner. These factors are constantly at play at a Horton workshop and are anchored in his vision of a democratic society and his concept of a democratic learning process (Peters and Bell, 1987: 262).

The Highlander approach is non-academic and processes include discussion, dialogue and sharing life experiences in groups; while telling stories, drama and singing feature strongly. Success is measured in terms of positive change within the community, in people’s realisation that they have resources that can be applied to community problem-solving and in the recognition that locally devised programs are not inferior to externally-based programs. Community action has come over the years in the form of involvement in union struggles and the civil rights movement. While based on principles grounded in critical theory, Highlander’s approach is very practical and aims at giving direct support to activists already engaged in social action.
3.4.1 Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’

Paulo Freire has been one of the most important writers and practitioners in the field of radical adult education and his work has inspired many educators committed to emancipation and social change. His practice came from a position that education is never neutral. While it can be a major transmitter of ideology and reproducer of social relations, education is also in a position to challenge the hegemony of the state and hence be a force for liberation. Freire challenged what he called the ‘banking’ concept of education in which teachers or educators make ‘knowledge deposits’ into students, who are passive recipients: the educator controls the knowledge and hence the students’ perception of reality. According to Freire, banking education domesticates and conditions people and is structured around a set of interlocking relations, all of which are characterised by domination and subordination (Freire, 1973a, 1973b, 1985; Shor and Freire, 1987).

Freire proposed that educators needed to initiate the transformation process by first recognising the oppressive and anti-educational nature of these relations and then challenging themselves and the learners to struggle together to create an entirely different set of interlocking relations. Teachers needed to engage in critical and liberating dialogue with the oppressed, leading to their ‘conscientisation’: i.e. a deepening awareness of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality, clearly an echo of Habermas’s emancipatory action (Freire, 1976).

Freire’s educational methods involved educators ‘tuning in’ to the vocabulary of the people and their world, using pictures of everyday scenes or objects for discussion. He developed groups called ‘culture circles’ that discussed the people’s own situations to the point of seeing them more clearly and critically, with the co-ordinator asking questions. Individuals, through critical awareness, cease to see themselves as objects, powerless in the face of their destiny, and start to see themselves as subjects with control over their own lives. Knowing comes through ‘problematising’ the natural, cultural and historical reality in which the individual is immersed. The methods of questioning, dialogue and discussion are essential for ‘peeling away the hidden structures of reality’ (Freire, 1973a). A significant factor in Freire’s teaching methodology is the recognition of two cultures, that of the teacher and
that of the learner, and the realisation that the teacher has to bridge the gulf between the two in order to offer a service to the learner (Jarvis, 1987c). So, for Freire, the major aim of education is to ‘put knowledge into practice’, and it is this combination of reflection and action that he calls ‘praxis’, very similar to the notion of praxis employed within the critical action research paradigm.

Freire’s ontology and methodology lie firmly within the paradigm of critical social science. He maintains that ‘all true education investigates thinking’, an idea that reflects a form of ideology critique, offering an approach ‘which enables us to challenge dominant ideologies as expressed and embedded in our thinking, feelings and actions ... a means by which conscious human agency would be constantly sustained’ (Allman, 1988: 95).

Freire has consistently encouraged learners to problematise everyday existence, question established policies and practices and theorise possibilities for building a better social world. The critical, dialogical, praxical human subject lies at the heart of Freire’s moral philosophy. The concrete manifestation of this ideal is to be found in Freire’s advocacy of collective action against oppression in countries such as his native Brazil. To be critical is, for Freire, not merely an option but an ontological vocation for all human beings (Roberts, 1999: 20).

This conscious critical agency is one that Freire believes is capable of planning and executing the transformation of society on all levels, although Freire’s lack of a clear analysis of ideology has left his work wide open to misinterpretation and misappropriation by humanist and progressive educators (Allman, 1988).

Freire’s work has therefore generated a robust debate among radical and progressive educators, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to track that debate in any detail. However, it may be useful to highlight the main points of critique that his particular approach has generated. For educators interested in clear exposition of ideas, Freire’s obscure and inaccessible language has proved a stumbling block and appears often to be a source of confusion about apparent contradictions between his theoretical position and his practice (Boston, 1972). There is difficulty with an implied arrogance that suggests that intellectuals have insight into the oppression of the peasants and have the capacity to engender their ‘conscientisation’ (Berger, 1974; Zachariah, 1986):

Do ordinary men and women need to be conscientized before they recognize that they lead desperate, oppressed lives marked by hunger, disease and the denial of
dignity? They know the score and do not need middle class do-gooders to tell them (Zachariah, 1986: 23).

Another source of concern has been Freire’s tendency to work with simplistic, dichotomised, black and white categories, such as ‘the oppressors versus the oppressed’, allowing little room for the complexity of multiple identities and ambiguous positionings (Elias, 1976; Griffith, 1972; Stanley, 1972; Elias and Merriam, 1980; Facundo, 1984; Schipani, 1986). Some writers have pointed to the theological basis for such a tendency:

Casting social reality in black and white terms is more characteristic of the religious preacher than the critical philosopher of knowledge and education (Elias and Merriam, 1980: 64).

A significant concern of both theorists and practitioners alike has been the presence of contradictions in Freire’s work, such as the issue of the language of the educator being different from that of the oppressed; the notion of ‘correct thinking’ on the part of the ‘enlightened’ educator becoming a form of social control, inhibiting the liberation of the students; the need for strong intervention in a dialogic process and the privileging of the teacher’s voice in dialogue that (theoretically) requires a democratic approach; and the claim that the educator can never be neutral, while arguing at the same time that teachers should never impose their own views on students (Giroux, 1993; Facundo, 1984; Walker, 1981). Feminists have had difficulty with Freire’s patriarchal language and focus on class as the sole source of oppression:

Not only are women erased in Freire’s language of domination and struggle, there is no attempt to even acknowledge how experience is gendered differently. A feminist re-reading of Freire has argued against his exclusive focus on class as the only form of domination (Brady, 1994: 121).

Freire’s lack of examination of his own privileged position has also troubled other feminist writers (Facundo, 1984; Weiler, 1994). Blanca Facundo’s (1984) critique is particularly strong as it comes from an educator working with Latino minorities in the U.S. (its ‘inner Third World’). Facundo, a Puerto Rican-born educator, created a disparate network of projects that attempted to apply Freire’s theories from 1978 to 1983. The frustrations and difficulties she experienced led her to offer a passionate questioning of Freire’s whole liberatory project. She found intolerable the lack of critique of those who have the moral
authority as champions of the oppressed and felt that educators should not escape reflecting on their own positioning:

We should not avoid an examination of our personal histories, our class position, our jobs, our salaries, our zone of residence, and why (and how) all these ‘fit’ or do not fit with our overt and perhaps not so overt objectives. Freire’s theory does not provide for this type of analysis (Facundo, 1984: 26).

Facundo faced the challenge of developing critical consciousness in a Western industrialised world, where acculturation to consumerist ideals is so subtle and pervasive, that the minorities she was working with saw ‘freedom’ in terms of acquiring a college education and a job, rather than any revolutionary ideals of liberation from oppression. For her, taking on Freire’s requirement to ‘start where the learners are’ meant being prepared to give up on emancipatory ideals. Her experience demonstrated to her the tendency of progressives to accept uncritically the ideas of a transformative ideology, such as Freire offered. She connected to this a criticism of what she terms the ‘transformation movement’ in the West, which advocates ‘new paradigm’ ideas (discussed in more detail in chapter 4) and which has influenced Heart Politics activism. Her criticisms make for disturbing and thought-provoking reading for those of us committed to social change according to these transformative principles:

The U.S. transformation movement believes itself to be integrated by individuals acting out of a ‘collective sense of destiny’, whereby humans can transcend material concerns … Ultimately, the U.S. transformation movement may have been financed by the dispossessed of the Third World. The élites in many Third World countries have allowed or sought the penetration of U.S. capital, perhaps wanting to have a chance at the very same ‘exploration of their inner psyches’ that is so much taken for granted in the United States.

The movement does ‘heal’ the cultural new class in the United States from the pain, frustration and alienation caused by its struggle against the old class. I have experienced the glowing feelings of sharing, well-being, warmth and affection that are transmitted among transformationalists. Yet, perhaps because I was born and raised in a colony, and because my cultural capital, acquired in adulthood, is coupled with many childhood reminiscences of unbelievably cruel stories of poverty and exploitation, I cannot help myself from thinking that all those nice feelings are only one more privilege afforded by my class position, and that the whole transformational thing may very well be very selfish, self-centered and a sort of anaesthesia not only against the confusion produced by U.S. society, but also against the much more cruel conditions in which most humans live in the world. If we ‘crossed the bridge’ towards inner growth, who paid the bill? Will those who
have not had the luxury of being freed from the struggle for survival want to cross the same bridge? Who is going to pay their bill? (Facundo, 1984: 51).

Facundo brings up painful realities for any of us attempting to engage in social action from a position of Western privilege. It seems to me that any attempt to engage in critical reflection must acknowledge the privilege from which I come, not only because I am white and middle class and articulate, but also because I live in the kind of material comfort only made possible at other people’s expense. It permits me the ‘luxury’ of inner exploration and, indeed, critical reflection.

Facundo’s experience provides a cautionary tale, one which suggests that a tendency to romanticise and idealise advocates of particular philosophies that speak to certain progressive values can lead to uncritical acceptance and ultimately unaware application of utopian principles to inappropriate situations. In many ways her reflections and her disillusionment echo my own disenchantment with co-counselling, described in the previous chapter – it is always painful to recognise we have been ‘taken in’ through our enthusiastic adoption of a particular dogma or ideology that offers simple answers to the complex problems that beset us.

Despite the problems and doubts raised by Freire’s approach, there are many examples of radical education that have benefited from an application of his principles. One such example is that of Ira Shor, one of his most devoted U.S. disciples, whose approach to empowering education in the classroom provided an inspiration for the educational philosophy and methods I took into my own teaching and research.

### 3.4.2 Empowering Education in the U.S.: Ira Shor’s Application of Freire’s Principles

Ira Shor (1987; 1992) has, perhaps more than any other educator in the radical tradition, articulated what empowering education looks like and what its obstacles are. A teacher in colleges and universities in New York since the early 1970s, Shor’s pedagogy is based on an analysis of the obstacles to critical consciousness in a culture such as that of the United States. He describes how mass culture interferes with the development of critical
consciousness in the way it promotes conservative notions of human nature. Scapegoat ideas like ‘blaming the victim’ reinforce the ideology of individualism that isolates people from their social and historical context; the ‘vocational culture’ socialises workers against intellectual life, feeling and autonomy; a lack of participatory democracy excludes people from policy-making; and the demands of private life, with all the roles that need to be played and the responsibilities that need to be taken, do not permit the time or space to engage in critical dialogue and reflection (Shor, 1987).

Shor’s (1992) tract on empowering education outlines in detail eleven values that need to be incorporated into the curriculum and the teaching process in order to overcome the powerlessness engendered by such mass cultural forces. Empowering education needs to be: participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocialising, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary and activist. He draws strongly on the educational philosophies of Dewey and Freire, Dewey for his emphasis on democracy in the classroom and Freire for his emphasis on processes leading to action and social change. Incorporating democratic processes may have overcome some of the more contradictory aspects of applying Freire’s principles discussed above.

Through ‘reflexive teaching’, where the ‘teacher poses questions, listens carefully, and represents to students what they have said for further reflection’, students find a voice rarely permitted in the traditional classroom and teachers learn from the students’ learning. This shift in power reduces the need for students to resist learning. In Shor’s words:

students can embrace education without fear of boredom or of a cultural invasion by an elite, remote curriculum. The empowering classroom can open their voices for expression rarely heard before. Their voices are an untapped and unexpected universe of words rich in thought and feeling (Shor, 1992: 54).

These notions support my own experiences and practices in the classroom and underpin assumption #9.

As far as transfer of ‘academic’ knowledge is concerned, Shor asks students to ‘own’ the academic theme by posing the subject matter itself as the first problem, e.g. what is history? what is mathematics? I did this in my first classes in economics by asking ‘what do you think economics is about?’ Shor describes a process of ‘dual transformation of subject
knowledge’ whereby a body of knowledge (in my case, economics) is introduced by the
teacher as a problem for the students to reflect on in their own language and at the same
time students are ‘challenged to go beyond themselves, into a new territory not generated
from their backgrounds’ (Shor, 1992: 77).

Together with problem-posing, dialogue is an essential string to the empowering educator’s
bow. According to Shor, dialogue is:

> a democratic, directed and critical discourse ... [that] becomes a meeting ground to
reconcile students and teachers separated by the unilateral authority of the teacher in
traditional education [and] is a mutually created discourse which questions existing
canons of knowledge and challenges power relations in the classroom and society
(Shor, 1992: 87).

Shor adopts Freire’s notion of the teacher’s role in dialogue as ‘radical democratic
directiveness’, which takes for granted the educator’s knowledge of the directions in which
critical reflection should go (i.e. analysis of the way social structures contribute to
mystification and false consciousness, contributing to oppression) while still allowing for
mutual exchange between teacher and student (Shor, 1992: 87). The sharing of authority
through the dialogic process allows for ‘codevelopment of the curriculum’ in a way similar
to the way I aimed to develop an empowering economics curriculum with my students.

Shor identifies limits to critical dialogue in the classroom as coming primarily from the
negative socialising experiences of traditional education. Students have learned to be silent
in classrooms dominated by ‘teacher-talk’ and have learned that their own language and
experiences are not relevant. Resistance from students, which generally comes in the form
of ‘playing dumb’ or ‘getting by’, Shor sees as a reaction to school culture that offers a
negative experience of education, and furthermore these strategies of resistance he
interprets as a rejection of intellectual life in the name of the students’ autonomy. Other
reasons for student resistance to critical thought and activism include vocationalism
(students are socialised into seeing vocation as the end of education, not social change);
acceleration and amplification of life through the mass media, making students
uncomfortable with the slow pace of the critical process; exposure to all the regressive
ideologies from racism and sexism to excessive consumerism and militarism; short classes;
alienating language of traditional disciplines; literacy problems; intensity of family life; and low health and nutrition (Shor, 1992).

As far as teachers are concerned, they have been trained to teach in the traditional way, lack power in their institutions to teach more radically, feel the need to keep a protective distance from their students or feel there is no other way to pass on information. In other words, the obstacles to critical dialogue encountered in the classroom are the result of the same oppressive structures that critical teaching aims to demystify. The empowering educator therefore aims not only to ‘desocialise’ students from mass culture, but also to desocialise them from traditional school conditioning through the processes of dialogue and reflection, creating within them a ‘critical consciousness’.

In a statement that strongly echoes Fay’s definition of the activist conception of human beings at the heart of critical social science, Shor describes the assumptions made by the critically conscious person:

society is a human creation, which we can know and transform, not a mysterious whirl of events beyond understanding or intervention (Shor, 1992: 129).

Shor, like many other liberatory educators, believes that the critical-democratic classroom can become a training ground for social action. Through the progressive impact of many such classrooms:

democratic learning may be felt broadly in education, and eventually outside education, by orienting students to democratic transformation of society by their active citizenship (Shor, 1992: 129).

Shor claims that teachers who help students develop as agents of change are what Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) call ‘transformative intellectuals’.

He also sees social change through education as one activist way among many to change society and the extent to which societal change will eventuate from critical education will depend on a number of factors: how many transformative educational experiences are available to the individual; how many organised social change groups are accessible; how much support and free time private life offers to develop the conviction to follow through on critical knowledge; and how open the political climate is towards social change (Shor, 1992: 188). Also, activism will take different shapes according to the particular situation of
each classroom. He acknowledges that ‘critical classrooms are easier to organize than the participation of students in change-agency outside class’ and that ‘single critical classrooms by themselves cannot transform school and the economy.’ In fact, it is generally the case that ‘students do not come to class with a transformative agenda’ and will often resent any disturbances to their passivity (Shor, 1992: 195-197).

Shor, like many other adult educators in the radical tradition, gives central importance to the role of critical reflection and while, like empowerment, it is a concept much used within educational and action research literature, it is rarely precisely defined nor are clear instructions given for its implementation. The following section reviews the various understandings of critical reflection, and its problematic nature is returned to later in chapter 8.

3.4.3 The Role of Critical Reflection in Adult Education

3.4.3.1 Definitions

The concept of reflection and its modern ‘reading’ can be seen as a product of Enlightenment thinking and the ‘Cartesian legacy’ (Bleakley, 1999):

The root of the word is the Latin *reflectere*. *Flectere* means ‘to bend’, so *reflectere* increases the inflection—‘to bend back’, or to bend again or double-take. Our usual reading of this, thanks to our Cartesian legacy, is to see reflectivity as an introspective bending in, to review mental life. We should note how our legacy of individualism rooted in Descartes’ cogito (‘I think, therefore I am’) has influenced the direction of this reflexive bending (Bleakley, 1999: 320).

Drawing on this Enlightenment tradition within the educative context, Dewey (1933) is considered a key originator of thinking about reflection. His early view was that ‘while we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn how to think well, especially acquire the general habit of reflecting’ (Boud and Walker, 1998: 191). It is a ‘special form of problem solving, thinking to resolve an issue which involved active chaining, a careful ordering of ideas linking each with its predecessors’ (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 33). From Dewey’s initial conceptualisations came the early work of Kurt Lewin (1948) and later David Kolb (1984) in the role of reflection in the cycle of experiential learning, informing
the reflective cycle of action research (discussed further in chapter 5). Hatton and Smith (1995) argue that a number of issues arise from Dewey’s conception and how it has been interpreted—for example, whether reflection can be separated from action, whether it is always connected to problem solving and to what extent it takes account of moral and ethical criteria.

Literature on reflection in the educational context appears to fall into two main camps, both growing out of Dewey’s ideas: that which draws on the work of Donald Schon (1983; 1987), concerned with reflection in relation to practices and actions especially professional practice in fields such as school teaching (Smyth, 1989; Lovat and Smith, 1991; Hatton and Smith, 1995; O’Donoghue and Brooker, 1996; Convery, 1998; Rodriguez and Sjostrom, 1998), nursing (Palmer et al., 1994; Burns and Bulman, 2000) and social work (Boud and Knights, 1996; Fook, 1996); and that concerned with adult learning processes (Boud et al., 1985; Mezirow, 1981, 1990, 1992; Brookfield, 1983, 1987a, 1987b, 1995).

3.4.3.2 The Reflective Practitioner

Schon (1983, 1987) introduced the concept of the reflective practitioner into current discourse. For Schon, reflection is intimately bound with action and involves demanding rational and moral processes in making reasoned judgements about how to act. He distinguishes ‘reflection-on-action’ implying post hoc contemplation (the focus of Dewey’s conceptualisation) from ‘reflection-in-action’ which implies instantaneous reflection, a more tacit form of ‘knowledge-in-action’ developed by skilled practitioners (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Matthews and Jessel, 1998). Reflection becomes the process by which this tacit, highly context-dependent form of knowledge can be made explicit (Matthews and Jessel, 1998).

Smyth (1989: 5-7), incorporates a critical perspective and seeks to make explicit the reflective practice cycle through elaborating a sequence of reflective processes (each of which he claims has its origins in the work of Freire) for the teacher to follow:
1. *describing* through a telling of the event or practice;
2. *informing* through reflecting on what the practice means by ‘unpacking’ the description in terms of pedagogical principles;
3. *confronting* through a critical reflection on assumptions, beliefs and values and the power relations embedded within practice; and finally
4. *reconstructing* through devising new ways of proceeding as a result of the foregoing reflection.

(It should be pointed out that some researchers have criticised Smyth’s approach because it does not take account of feelings that arise through the process of reflection, e.g. PhD research done by Hussin, 1999 and Sumson, 1997, cited in Smith, 1999; Hargreaves, 1998; Nias, 1996; ideas supported by Brockbank and McGill, 1998 who emphasise the importance of emotion in the reflective process, discussed below).

As we shall see in chapter 6, I incorporated a version of this reflective cycle in my teaching at TAFE.

Schon’s work is not without its critics, with increasing acceptance of reflective practice as an organising framework for professional preparation. Richardson (1990), cited in Matthews and Jessel (1998), notes that reflection-in-action is not a straightforward process as it may not be possible for the practitioner to describe the decision making processes leading to action. Greenwood (1993) argues that Schon neglects the importance of reflection *before* action and Eraut (1995) suggests that there is little evidence of reflection-in-action in the crowded setting of classrooms, although Smith (1999) suggests that this may be due to Eraut’s particular way of construing reflection-in-action compared with Schon’s. The unreflexive nature of Schon’s accounts of his ideas is a concern of Usher *et al.* (1997), who also raise doubts about his methodology as it applies to practice and draw attention to its insufficiently contextualised nature. Boud and Walker (1998) identify a number of problems associated with attempts to apply Schon’s reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action in real educational contexts, covering a broad range, from inexperience in how to conduct experience-based learning activities, to basic misunderstandings of the
nature of learning and reflection (Boud and Walker, 1998: 191). Influenced by the work of postmodernists such as Usher and Edwards (1994), whose work we will return to in chapter 7, Boud and Walker (1998) emphasise the importance of an awareness of context in overcoming some of the problems they identified:

It is necessary for teachers to be clear about whether they are really interested in fostering reflection and whether they are prepared to take a sufficiently contextualised view of it into account. If they are, they must confront themselves, their processes, and their outcomes. An honest self-appraisal conducted in conjunction with peers is one of the hallmarks of an effective promoter of reflection (Boud and Walker, 1998: 205).

As we will see, such self-appraisal conducted in conjunction with peers was a feature of this research from the outset.

While the literature on reflection as practice is important for the purposes of this research, perhaps more relevant is the work that has been developed in the field of adult learning processes, particularly those in adult education within the critical tradition.

### 3.4.3.3 Critical Reflection in Emancipatory Education

Drawing on the work of Habermas (1972) in specifying knowledge constitutive interests, Van Manen (1977) identified three types of reflection: the technical, the practical and critical. The technical is concerned with efficiency and effectiveness of means to achieve certain ends; practical allows for examination of goals and the assumptions on which they are based and recognises that meanings are negotiated through language; and critical adds moral and ethical criteria such as equity and justice, locating analysis of personal action within wider historical, political and social contexts.

The work of critical theorists has promoted interest in critical reflection, particularly as a focus for emancipatory education. Definitions of critical reflection arising out of critical theory reflect the underlying assumptions of critical social science discussed earlier in this chapter (Fay, 1987; Geuss, 1981). The following represents a selection of different definitions, each demonstrating how they incorporate these unquestioned assumptions of critical social science.
Geuss (1981: 61-62) identifies three kinds of statements about ‘self-reflection’ made by Habermas, statements reflecting the ontology of critical social science:

1. self-reflection ‘dissolves’ (a) ‘self-generated objectivity’ and (b) ‘objective delusion’;

2. self-reflection makes the subject aware of its own genesis or origin; and

3. self-reflection operates by bringing to consciousness (previously) unconscious determinants of action.

Kemmis (1985: 140) takes these principles further, expressing human agency in political terms:

reflection is a political act which either hastens or defers the realisation of a more rational, just and fulfilling society ... [it] is not a purely ‘internal’, psychological process: it is action-oriented and historically embedded.

Through reflection we therefore become aware of ourselves as agents of history. There must be access to the ‘thought-categories, commitments and action-orientations of the actor’. It must be ‘inwardly’ critical in the sense that it reviews actors’ own self-formative processes and ‘outwardly’ critical in that it seeks to identify ideological causes of self-misunderstanding and the collective misunderstanding of social groups. Therefore it must be participatory and collaborative. In terms of (school) classroom practice, Beyer (1989: 37) similarly argues that critical reflection ‘must include the placement of classroom practices within the context of larger social, political and ideological practices and values to which they lead’. He defines the aim of critical reflection as follows:

to develop critically oriented, compassionate and impassioned reflective and socially engaged practitioners who can aid in the process of educational improvement and social change; to encourage critical reflection on our own situations and those of our students, our futures and our social possibilities, that leads to actions favouring empowerment of teachers and a commitment to democracy, equality, and autonomy (Beyer, 1989: 40).

Within the critical domain, Mezirow (1991) has defined critical reflection for adult educators in terms of ‘perspective transformation’, which he defines as:

the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings (Mezirow, 1991: 14).
Based on this understanding of perspective transformation, Mezirow’s (1990: 1) definition of critical reflection follows:

Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built ... [Such critique involves] challenging our established and habitual patterns of expectation, the meaning perspectives with which we have made sense out of our encounters with the world, others, and ourselves (Mezirow, 1990: 1,12).

Presuppositions may be epistemic (related to the nature and use of knowledge), socio-cultural (belief systems that pertain to power and social relationships), or psychic (pertaining to individual psychological processes). Mezirow (1990) argues that while adult educators disagree on whether individual or social transformation is the ultimate goal of (emancipatory) adult education, he claims that there is general agreement that ‘we must begin with individual perspective transformation before social transformations can succeed’ (Mezirow, 1990: 363). He believes furthermore that individual perspective transformation includes taking action, often social action, and sometimes collective political action.

Brookfield’s proposals for encouraging critical reflection place emphasis on analysing assumptions; focus on learners’ perceptions of their own experiences (contextual awareness); encourage group analysis of relevant issues; suggest imaginative speculation through presentation of alternative meaning perspectives; and emphasise reflective scepticism (Brookfield, 1987b, 1988). Brookfield’s guidelines for critical questioning include: be specific, work from the particular to the general and be conversational. He suggests that critical reflection requires an environment where the self-worth of the learner is respected, where the curriculum is built around the needs and aspirations of learners and where learners are willing to have their own views challenged and feel safe to challenge others (Brookfield 1987b; Allen, 1992).

Barnett (1997) explores in depth the concept of ‘criticality’ and posits the concept of ‘critical being’ as central in higher education (Creme, 1999). Barnett defines criticality as a ‘human disposition of engagement where it is recognised that the object of attention could be other than it is’ (Barnett, 1997: 8). The three domains of criticality that Barnett poses are knowledge, the self and the world. Corresponding to each domain are the skills of critical
thinking, critical self-reflection and critical action which when integrated produce a ‘critical being’:

The full potential of critical being will only be achieved, therefore, through the integration of its expression in the three domains of knowledge, self and world, and in being lived out at the highest levels of critique in each domain. Through such integration of the critical spirit, critical but creative persons will result, capable of living effectively in the world (Barnett, 1997: 8).

Barnett’s understanding of critical reflection, one of eight types of reflection he identifies, is firmly immersed in the discourse of critical theory:

Here, the sense of reflection is called by terms such as emancipation, transformation and liberation. The theoretical underpinning is offered by critical theory. Through self-reflection, we can free ourselves from ideological illusion. Or, at least, we can start the process. The full process points to social action, to the removal of the formation of the surrounding distorted discourse which has produced that ideological contamination.

With a sense of self-reflection, higher education becomes a process of stimulating a self-learning, leading to a new way of perceiving oneself. This is challenging to the educator, since ideology—against which this aim contends—generates resistance. Students are unlikely to buy into this form of self-reflection. It will be too painful, bringing with it the challenge to divest old conceptions of the self, of the world, and of the self in relation to the world. Students will resist the personal responsibilities and rediscovery that such a transformative reflectiveness requires. Educators have, therefore, to address students’ self-concepts if this idea of self-reflection is to take off (Barnett, 1997: 96-97).

Building on the work of Barnett (1997) and Harvey and Knight (1996), who argue for critically transformative learning in the Mezirow tradition, is the perspective offered by Brockbank and McGill (1998) who argue for ‘critical reflective learning’. They propose a model of learning that gives equal weight to the importance of knowledge, self and action, but their contribution is to highlight emotion as the key to enabling the integration of knowledge with the self in such a way that engenders committed action and significant learning. They argue that continuously going beyond the instrumental in higher education is fundamental to society. They include the socio-political context in their model to account for its potential role in limiting the agency that the learner can experience, both through the power exerted by the teacher and through the wider context within which possible action needs to take place.
Brockbank and McGill argue that although reflection is a fundamental part of the learning process, self-reflection on its own is never sufficient to promote critical reflective learning. The possibility for self-deception is too great. In order for critical reflective learning to be achieved, a radical shift in both teaching method and teaching and learning relationship has to take place. Such learning has to be promoted through a process of reflective dialogue between teachers and learners and learners and learners where the relationship becomes a collaborative I-Thou relationship in which the person of the learner is respected. As one reviewer puts it:

... we are crucially challenged to move beyond an individualist, adversarial and hierarchical view of the teaching and learning process to one where the I-Thou relationship is central and forms the basis of a collaborative process of reflective dialogue. In this view, dialogue prevails over self-reflection, and personhood over impersonal and objectified individuality (Mann, 1999: 293).

This relationship highlights the importance of a ‘critical friend’ in the practice of critical reflection, widely recognised in the literature (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Kember et al., 1996; Brockbank and McGill, 1998; Smith 1999). Smith (1999) suggests that:

we each require some mirror that can assist us in looking at ourselves and our actions and beliefs. The mirror, however, must be someone who we can trust and risk with, someone with whom we feel comfortable (Smith, 1999: 9).

It is argued that particular skills may be necessary—a willingness to give constructive feedback, an ability to think outside one’s familiar frameworks and courage to identify the contradictions and assumptions in the other (Smith, 1999). The role of critical friend is thus a supportive yet challenging one. As I shall discuss in later chapters, I was fortunate in having a number of people who acted as very effective critical friends throughout the action research process.

To summarise, critical reflection essentially involves a process of examining assumptions and beliefs, an essential requirement for the demystification process and ideology critique central to the emancipatory project of critical social science. Mezirow’s perspective transformation, Brookfield’s contextual awareness and imaginative speculation, Barnett’s critical being and Brockbank and McGill’s reflective dialogue are all embedded within assumptions of critical social science, assumptions which fail to make human agency.
problematic. Further, it is not clear how the actual process of critical reflection is to be facilitated. These are issues I will return to in chapter 8.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the main concepts of critical social science particularly in their educative context as a way of identifying the underpinnings of the nine assumptions I have identified through critical reflection on my research practice. From tracing the historical development and understandings of the concepts of ideology, demystification and empowerment within the emancipatory tradition, I went on to examine the application of those concepts in radical education projects, particularly those influenced by Freire. While Freire’s philosophical and theoretical precepts have created significant debate amongst educators committed to education for social change, the educative practices of Ira Shor, a ‘disciple’ of Freire’s, proved to be an inspiring influence on my own teaching strategies at TAFE. The emphasis on critical reflection as essential to the emancipatory intentions and practice of radical adult education produced a requirement to explore its dimensions and practice in different contexts, revealing a lack of clarity in its definition and application, an aspect that becomes central to the emergent research process described in the remainder of this thesis.

While the main task of this chapter has been to lay the foundations of the process of my educational and research practices (based on an examination of what lies behind my assumptions), the task of the following chapter is to explore more fully the content of my teaching, i.e. the ideological foundations of conventional economics and possible alternatives to the dominant paradigm.
CHAPTER 4
MAPPING THE TERRITORY II:
ECONOMICS AS IDEOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I mapped the territory of emancipatory education and its theoretical foundations in critical theory as part of an investigation into the assumptions I took into my research at TAFE. In a continuation of that investigation, this chapter maps a quite different territory, a territory that encompasses the discourse of economics as an ideology to be demystified. As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, my motivation for undertaking the research was grounded in my strong conviction that unless economics was better understood and demystified, the alienation and powerlessness felt in the face of larger forces such as ‘globalisation’, legitimised by free trade and market rhetoric, would continue to paralyse citizens and activists alike. This chapter does not aim to provide a detailed analysis of the debates within the economics discipline or even of the growing literature on alternatives to the dominant paradigm. Rather, it scans the territory that I cover in my teaching, aims to provide a sense of how conventional economics has developed into a harmful dominant ideology and offers a selection of critical responses and alternatives to this ideology.

The chapter begins with placing the discussion in a broader context of what could be termed ‘the paradigm debate’, an understanding of the development of certain worldviews that come to dominate perceptions of a society or a discipline in a particular epoch. This is followed by a brief description of the development of modern economic thought, placing the ideas that currently dominate the thinking of political decision makers in their historical context. Included in this history is a selection of critical responses to the ‘science’ of political economy argued at the time of its early development and application, demonstrating that economics has had its critics throughout its development as a system of thought. Modern critiques of what has come to be the dominant economic orthodoxy, neo-classical economics, based mainly on its narrow assumptions, its limited application, its failure to take the environment into account, its gendered discourse, its impact on free trade and globalisation,
are followed by examples of how orthodox economists respond to such critiques. After scanning briefly the main features of alternative economic models, I use the example of Manfred Max-Neef’s model of ‘human-scale development’ to demonstrate the potential of such alternatives to provide more appropriate responses to such serious problems as ecological destruction and social injustice that are inadequately addressed by neo-classical orthodoxy. The chapter concludes with a story of how I applied this model in a small rural community.

4.2 PARADIGMS

In referring in my assumption #2 to the ‘dominant paradigm’, I am drawing on a term that has come to be used in much of the literature concerned with the change in thinking required to move from one world view to another (e.g. Milbrath, 1989; Henderson, 1988, 1991; Capra, 1983; Cotgrove, 1982). Milbrath (1989) equates the notion with worldview or story, i.e. that every society develops a story about the way the world works. He quotes a remark by Margaret Mead that she never found a primal people who lacked a cosmic story and describes such stories as ‘sets of cultural lenses’ that provide a structure for social learning and give meaning to reality. As reality changes, these lenses may distort some aspects of reality and lead some to completely ignore other aspects:

The particular belief structure (cultural lens) dominating society, then, may be made up partly of images that reflect reality and partly of images that are myth ... [the dominant paradigm] is the dominant belief structure that organizes the way people perceive and interpret the functioning of the world around them (Milbrath, 1989: 115-116).

Originating with Kuhn’s (1962) study of scientific worldviews, the term ‘paradigm’ has been adopted by social theorists and philosophers in describing such worldviews and belief structures and has now entered popular usage. The dominant belief structure is not generally conscious and only becomes so when there is a need for a change in the overall perspective because of inconsistencies and dysfunctions in the dominant paradigm.

It is the contention of a number of writers (Capra, 1982; Henderson, 1988; Douthwaite, 1996, Theobald, 1997;) that the Western world is undergoing such a ‘paradigm shift’ and the view is often expressed that without such a shift in consciousness, society will
completely break down. A paradigm is dominant not only because it is held by the majority of the population, but also because it is held and usually supports the interests of the dominant groups (i.e. the groups that hold power) in industrial societies. To the extent that paradigms serve the purpose of legitimating and justifying decisions and courses of action taken by the dominant elites, they function as ideologies (Cotgrove, 1982). Hence, the struggle to create a new paradigm is part of a struggle for power. It is Cotgrove’s (1982) contention that channels of communication between the belief systems become clogged because of the different cultural contexts and conflicting implicit meanings that underlie different paradigms. This is exemplified in debates between environmentalists and business leaders that are characterised by mutual exasperation and charges and counter charges of irrationality and irresponsibility. It is even more dramatically represented in the recent conflicts between civil opponents of globalisation in the Seattle and Melbourne demonstrations and the proponents of free trade representing the World Trade Organisation and World Economic Forum.

Milbrath (1989) participated in a study, conducted in 1980 and 1982, to determine empirical evidence for such paradigm differences and the so-called paradigm shift:

That study provided solid evidence that a new paradigm is emerging, one which differs significantly from the dominant social paradigm. This emerging paradigm is being developed by environmentally oriented thinkers who constitute a kind of vanguard (Milbrath, 1989: 118).

He identified the defenders of the current dominant paradigm as a ‘rearguard’, contrasting the two paradigms along dimensions of different values and beliefs. Moreover, other social change thinkers, futurists and writers on alternative economics also identify ways in which ‘old’ and ‘new’ ways of thinking and believing are contrasted (Henderson, 1988; Capra, 1982; Ekins, 1992; Rees and Rodley, 1995). The similarities between these alternative descriptions of the contrasting ways of thinking, from that dominated by the scientific, mechanistic and rational (the paradigm born in the Renaissance and nurtured through the Enlightenment), to one characterised by the systemic, ecological and holistic, are striking.

Table 4.1 offers a synthesis of the main elements of the two paradigms identified by these writers, organised under three main headings—values, knowledge and science, and social/political processes. Different writers take different aspects of the paradigm as their

Table 4.1: Contrasting Current and New Paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT PARADIGM</th>
<th>NEW PARADIGM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- low value placed on nature</td>
<td>- high value placed on nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- economic growth valued above</td>
<td>- environmental protection valued above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environmental protection</td>
<td>economic growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- compassion for those near and dear</td>
<td>- compassion for other groups, other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism)</td>
<td>species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- concern for current generation only</td>
<td>- concern for future generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no limits to growth</td>
<td>- resource and human limits to growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- primacy of individual</td>
<td>- primacy of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- wealth defined in material terms</td>
<td>- wealth encompasses all aspects of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>well being</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ethics secondary to efficiency</td>
<td>- ethical considerations primary</td>
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<tr>
<td>- industrialism good for society</td>
<td>- industrialism damages society and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>- spirit separate from social and economic</td>
<td>- integration of spirituality in all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world</td>
<td>aspects of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge and Science</strong></td>
<td><strong>Knowledge and Science</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- objective truth is knowable</td>
<td>- impossibility of objectivity—knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is socially constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- science claims to be ‘value-free’</td>
<td>- values inseparable from science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- dominance of the masculine principle—</td>
<td>- emergence of the feminine principle—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primacy of rationality</td>
<td>recognition of non-rational thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- preference for simple solutions</td>
<td>- complexity recognised and valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- mechanistic, reductionist, static models</td>
<td>- systemic, holistic, dynamic models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- linear, cause-effect reasoning</td>
<td>- non-linear, interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- emphasis on ‘hard’, quantitative data</td>
<td>- value placed on ‘soft’, qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- extrapolation from past data</td>
<td>data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- change viewed as disequilibrium</td>
<td>- creation of ‘what if?’ scenarios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- short term focus</td>
<td>- change recognised as normal part of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- morality separate from science</td>
<td>system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- economy separate from (and above) society</td>
<td>- long term focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- moral responsibility integral to</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>science</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- economy part of social and ecological</td>
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<td></td>
<td>system</td>
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continued ...
### Table 4.1: Contrasting Current and New Paradigms (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT PARADIGM</th>
<th>NEW PARADIGM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social / Political Processes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social / Political Processes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• relations of dominance</td>
<td>• relations of partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• hierarchical structures</td>
<td>• non-hierarchical, co-operative structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• emphasis on competition</td>
<td>• balance of competition and co-operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dominance of the market, private goods</td>
<td>• emphasis on planning, public goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• market and state in conflict</td>
<td>• market and state complementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• complex, fast lifestyles</td>
<td>• simple, slower lifestyles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• work is primarily for income</td>
<td>• work is for satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• emphasis on consumption</td>
<td>• emphasis on frugality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• large-scale, capital intensive technology</td>
<td>• small-scale, capital intensive technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dependence on global economy</td>
<td>• local self-reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• conflicts viewed as adversarial</td>
<td>• conflicts require negotiation, diplomacy, conflict resolution skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• participatory democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• consultation and participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• emphasis on the common good</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• pluralistic society—diversity of political philosophy</td>
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<td>• representative democracy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• reliance on experts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• emphasis on individual rights</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• political division on left-right axis</td>
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Most of these elements are self-explanatory. It would seem that in many areas of life, the new paradigm values and processes have already gained mainstream acceptance (e.g. in the debates around environmental protection), while in others they are in the realm of utopian visioning (e.g. moving from large to small scale technologies, adopting participatory democracy). Analysis of paradigms and description of the shift from old to new ways of thinking appear in the debates of an array of disciplines—e.g. physics, psychology, biology, political science, organisational science and economics. The evidence for a genuine paradigm shift appears to be strong, but it is important to acknowledge that advocates of the new paradigm, particularly writers such as Milbrath (1989), Henderson (1988) and Capra (1982), can be viewed as having their own agenda or ideology that influences their analysis.

Examples of two quite different critiques of new paradigm advocates come from Roberts (1997) and Anderson (1990). Roberts examines what she describes as the 'revival of communitarianism', a reaction to the dominance of individualist ideology, neo-liberalism.
and the destruction of community through the advancement of global capitalism. She describes this revival as a counter ideology:

which, like economic rationalism, seeks order, direction and certainty but suggests a radically different set of beliefs by which this is achieved. Namely, that order in social life can be attained primarily by revitalizing collective life, whereby an emphasis on a shared tradition and shared values will yield renewed importance for the common good (Roberts, 1997: 880).

Writers in the communitarian tradition emphasise civil society and social capital (Cox, 1995; Etzioni, 1990, 1994; Norton, 1997). The main thrust of Roberts’s critique is the assumption that community implies harmony of interests and fails to recognise the dimension of social inequality, central to structural analysis. This critique could also be validly applied to advocates of the new paradigm who call for a revitalisation of community values and participatory democracy without a rigorous structural analysis of what the ‘community’ embraces—a conflict between class, gender and racial interests that mere benevolence and good will cannot wish away.

Anderson (1990) discusses the coming of the postmodern world, a world that is witnessing ‘the collapse of belief’, a world in which people everywhere are internalising the understanding that reality is socially constructed, heralding ‘the first global civilisation’ in which this understanding becomes a central part of the worldview of most people. Anderson identifies three major processes that are shaping the transition to the postmodern world—the breakdown of old ways of belief; a new polarisation between those who hold to absolute values and certain truth and those ‘relativists and constructivists’ who hold that the truth is essentially unknowable; and the birth of a global culture. (The impact of postmodernism is discussed more fully in chapter 7).

Anderson’s analysis appears to support the notion that a new paradigm is being born, but his depiction of it seems at odds with the vision presented by the writers discussed above. Anderson offers a critique of those perspectives, or stories, especially those that argue for the rise of the feminine (Eisler, 1992; Stone, 1976), the Gaia hypothesis, New Age ‘spirituality’, and so on, describing them as ‘high-minded flimflam at best’ and characterising them as playwrights offering their version of what is happening, i.e. as no
more than social reality-constructors. In Anderson’s terminology, such stories are the stuff of the postmodern world, and as:

more people suspect that reality can be created, the world becomes a kind of theater in which competing groups offer competing plots, and people with political aspirations try to get themselves cast in good roles (Anderson, 1990: 12).

Of particular interest to my analysis is his contention that postmodernism produces a spectrum with those who believe in one true reality (from Marxist ideologues to true believers in Gaia) at one extreme, to those who hold all truth to be a human invention—the relativists and constructivists—at the other. In the middle are those who are more moderate ‘and most of them merely confused’. In applying this perspective to the comparison of the old and new paradigms in Table 4.1, we could say that elements of the constructivist view appear in new paradigm thinking, as do more ideological elements that represent fundamentalist thinking. The polarisation becomes apparent within the structure of the new postmodern paradigm.

As revealed in my personal story in chapter 2, my experiences have led me to consider myself part of Milbrath’s ‘vanguard’, holding much more strongly to the values he identifies as being part of the ‘new environmental paradigm’ than to those of the old social paradigm. I could also see myself as part of Anderson’s moderate and confused middle, showing tendencies at times towards ideological fundamentalism! My original motivation for undertaking this research was a deep concern that without a change in thinking and consciousness to one that supports environmental values and social justice (a change in paradigm), we as humans face a bleak future. My experience had led me to believe that the dominance of orthodox economics within the current social paradigm contributed significantly to the problems being faced. On exploring the literature on critiques of conventional economics, I discovered that this view had considerable support from critics within the discipline of economics as well as from without. It is to these critiques that we now turn, beginning with a brief look at the history of the development of modern economics.
4.3 THE DOMINANT PARADIGM

4.3.1 The Origins and Antecedents of Modern Economic Thought

The word ‘economy’ is derived from the ancient Greek word *oikonomikos*, which means the management of a household. In ancient and traditional societies, human economic activities were submerged in general social relationships (Capra, 1982). According to Henderson (1988) the motive of individual gain from economic activities was unknown in early societies as the focus was on production and storage for self-sufficiency of the group, household, village, tribe or manor. Early references to economic transactions have been traced back to Aristotle who distinguished between production for use and production for gain, arguing that trade was ‘natural’ as long as it was a requirement of group self-sufficiency. According to the Greek scholar Polanyi, Aristotle’s word ‘*metadosis*’ was incorrectly translated—in Greek usage it meant ‘giving a share’, but it was translated as ‘exchange’. Polanyi commented that this error led to Adam Smith’s belief that exchange and the propensity to barter must be a trait of human nature (Capra, 1982).

Even though human beings have engaged in economic activities, (or the ‘ordinary business of life’ to quote one of the most famous Cambridge economists, Alfred Marshall) for thousands of years, the modern study of economics is only three hundred years old. According to Heilbroner (1986), this was because the phenomenon of the market system did not exist in earlier times. Before the emergence of this system, decisions about production and distribution were made either according to tradition, or to the command of authorities (slave-owners, feudal lords, tribal elders, etc.). Heilbroner describes the way this ‘economic revolution’, a revolution ‘fundamentally more disturbing by far than the French, the American or even the Russian Revolution’ (Heilbroner, 1986: 21) was achieved. The prime force was the enclosure of common land, land that the peasants had access to for centuries, land that enabled them to survive through access to fields and woodland for livestock, game, peat and firewood. The first legal act to enforce enclosures was the Statute of Merton passed in 1235 in England. In the early eighteenth century over 4,000 Private Acts of Enclosure, covering seven million acres, were passed before the General Enclosure
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Act of 1845 enclosed about the same area, without application to parliament. Whereas in 1086 half the arable land in England belonged to peasants and villagers, by 1876 half the agricultural land in England and Wales was owned by 2,250 people (The Ecologist, 1992).

The demand for wool in Britain’s burgeoning overseas markets led laws to be passed that turned the commons into private property. This systematic dispossession over 600 years resulted in thousands of lives being lost through attempts to prevent the enclosures and defending the commons. Similar numbers of people were pauperised, forced to either work in the new factories of the Industrial Revolution (making their labour a tradeable commodity), become petty criminals and be transported to the colonies, or become inmates of the poorhouses, suffering the indignity of charity and abuse at the hands of unsympathetic landlords. Land was redefined as ‘property’, giving it the status of a commodity, and vast areas of woods and forests were destroyed with much arable land degraded (The Ecologist, 1992).

The essential components of the market system, land, labour and capital, were thereby created. It was a revolution:

born in agony—an agony that began in the thirteenth century and had not run its course until well into the nineteenth. Never was a revolution less well understood, less welcomed, less planned. But the great market-making forces would not be denied. Insidiously they ripped apart the mold of custom; insolently they tore away the usages of tradition (Heilbroner, 1986: 33).

It is interesting to note that Heilbroner gives these forces a mysterious power, forces that ‘would not be denied’. A more critical analysis would view them as the outcome of the use and abuse of power by the classes that had privileged access to the law and wealth. The Ecologist (1992) argues that this process of enclosing the commons continues to this day, with indigenous people being denied access to traditional lands as forests are destroyed, creating further dispossession. It could also be said that Australia’s white history was born in the same agony—enclosures, dispossession, pauperisation, overflowing prisons, transportation and colonisation. The disposessed in turn became the disposposers. The roots of the modern Australian movement towards reconciliation go back many centuries.
4.3.2 The Ideas and Philosophy of the Early Economists

This, then, is the context for the emergence of thought and ideas that relate to the phenomenon of the modern economy, particularly the modern capitalist economy. Adam Smith through his seminal work *The Wealth of Nations* is generally credited with being the first philosopher to systematically study the market. However, some economic historians place this honour at the feet of William Petty (1623-87) (Henderson, 1988). Petty, a physician and professor of music, invented ideas relating to the labour theory of value, differential rent between good and marginal land, the theory of interest (replacing the idea of usury with that of reward for abstinence and risk), distinctions between price and value, monopoly, the quantity of money and its velocity in circulation, national accounting, division of labour and economies of scale (100 years before Smith made it a cornerstone of his theories), and public works as a remedy for unemployment, anticipating Keynes by more than 200 years (Henderson, 1988; Capra, 1982). These ideas became the foundation for the work of the originators of modern economic theory—Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Alfred Marshall, and John Maynard Keynes.

As well as the birth of capitalism through the enclosures and later the Industrial Revolution, the context for the development of economic theory was the revolution in ideas and thought that began with the Renaissance, and continued through the Enlightenment. The new ideas replaced the worldview of Aristotle, the Church and Saint Thomas Aquinas, where questions relating to God, the soul and ethics were of the highest significance and the world was seen as an organic and spiritual universe. Medieval science was replaced by the new scientific method, which emphasised rationality, empiricism and a mechanical worldview as exemplified by Newton—a paradigm shift of unimaginable impact. The new scientists, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Descartes and Bacon, ushered in a reign of empiricism and measurement, scientific experimentation, reductionism, domination and control of nature, a belief in the certainty and ‘absolute truth’ of scientific knowledge and the primacy of human reason over religious belief. Descartes’ division between body and mind, *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am)—known as ‘Cartesian dualism’—had a profound

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influence on Western thought. Newton extended Descartes’ vision, inventing calculus and the scientific method. The principles of induction (observing empirical data and developing theories from it) were invented by Francis Bacon, while Descartes had emphasised deduction, the process of testing *a priori* truths through experimentation (Capra, 1982).

Another dominant figure in the development of Enlightenment thinking, John Locke, was strongly influenced by the ideas of Newton and Descartes and used reductionist principles to suggest that the basic building block of society was the individual. Locke believed all individual actions were motivated by self-interest. He believed that laws governing human society were similar to those governing nature. There were ‘natural laws’, e.g. freedom and equality of individuals and the right to private property. Fritjof Capra (1982) discusses the derivation of the word ‘private’, which comes from the Latin *privare*, meaning ‘to deprive’, an indication that property was originally communal (as in the commons) and privatising it necessitated deprivation. Locke’s ideas, so representative of the Enlightenment and such a product of the social conditions of his time, therefore enshrined the interests of property owners as ‘natural rights’. The ideological nature of these ideas are apparent—what is presented as ‘a natural fact’ in reality supports the interests of a privileged group, as we saw in our analysis of ideology in chapter 3.

These notions marked the birth of individualism, property rights, free markets and representative democracy, ideals that were very influential in both the French and American Revolutions. In effect Locke said that capitalism is natural and the unequal possession of property a right that people bring to civil society; it is not created by the state and not removed by it:

This inegalitarian tendency is the paradoxical result of all individualist doctrines; although starting from postulates of equality they reach contrary conclusions. The societies which emerge are not truly atomized but contain competing groups of insiders and outsiders; they are class societies, divided by ownership of property (Kingdom, 1992: 10).

Kingdom argues that this philosophy led to a political culture that portrayed the state in negative terms, as a denial of freedom, and that such an attitude contrasted starkly with the dominant tradition of Western thought until that time, a tradition originating in Greek society, which saw the state as:
the embodiment of civilized life ... In seventeenth century English thought the individual was lifted from community; the best life was the one lived outside the state, the best state was the one which kept out of life (Kingdom, 1992: 17).

Another philosophy that was very influential in the development of classical economic thought was that of ‘utilitarianism’, associated with a prominent intellectual of the time, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). This philosophy presented human beings as being motivated by the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Galbraith (1987: 118) quotes Bentham as identifying happiness (which he called ‘utility’) with ‘that property in any object whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness’ or similarly prevents ‘mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness’. It followed that the maximisation of pleasure or happiness came from maximising production and consumption of goods. Anything that encouraged production was a good thing—the prime goal was ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number’. The Utilitarians never doubted that the individual’s pursuit of happiness was satisfied by the consumption of goods and that this pursuit was best served when least hampered by governmental intervention, guidance, regulation or inhibition. As Galbraith put it:

Let one steel oneself against compassion for the few—or action on their behalf—lest one damage the greater well-being of the many (Galbraith, 1987: 118).

Such a philosophy legitimised the hard line attitude against the sufferers of the hardships wrought by the Industrial Revolution.

The ‘science’ of economics, therefore, was a product of its time, largely influenced by Newtonian physics, Cartesian dualism, Benthamite utilitarianism and Lockean individualism with their accompanying methods of critical reasoning, establishing ‘laws’ and empirical experimentation. It therefore emerged very much in the spirit of the new paradigm that the Enlightenment ushered in. As the new social and political institutions that supported capitalism and destroyed the old traditions of feudalism emerged, they gave rise to specifically economic activities that needed not only description and analysis, but also rationalisation and justification. The ideological foundations for modern economics were laid.
It is not necessary to describe in detail here the economic theories that were born during this time. A brief summary of some of the notions that preoccupied them will suffice, as the basis for the critiques that will follow. These ideas, mainly those that have come to absorb neo-classical economists, include:

- the association of the public good with the growth of wealth;
- the notion of the ‘invisible hand’, Adam Smith’s famous metaphor, which described the workings of the market through the actions of innumerable individuals each acting according to their self-interest leading to the most efficient and beneficial outcome for all;
- the deductive method, advocated especially by Ricardo, which starts from *a priori* assumptions about the nature of human beings and their behaviour;
- the invention of *homo economicus* (‘rational economic man’) as a ‘utility maximising machine’;
- the twin assumptions that individuals will seek to maximise satisfaction (or utility) and firms will seek to maximise profits;
- the assumption of consumer sovereignty—the notion of the consumer as a ‘neutral actor’, independent of the social environment;
- the idea that society consists of the sum of individuals within it (echoed in Margaret Thatcher’s infamous comment: ‘there is no such thing as society, there are only individuals’);
- the assumption that ownership is an ‘immutable fact of the order of nature’;
- the development of marginal theory, influenced by Newtonian calculus, that allowed economic phenomena to be represented by mathematical equations;
- the conceptualisation of the ‘market’—from a place to a concept;
- the notion of ‘free’ or ‘perfect’ competition as the ideal locus for allocative efficiency;
- the centrality of the price mechanism in allocation through the operation of supply and demand;
- the division of labour and economies of scale; and
- the notions of ‘free trade’ and theories of comparative advantage.
4.3.3 Early Critics of Political Economy

It is important to note that political economy, as economic theory was known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had its critics from its earliest articulation. A particularly good example is provided by Sismondi (1773-1842) whose concern about the obtuse language of political economy is still entirely relevant today, and supports the sentiment of my assumption #3:

It is with regret that we see political economy in England every day adopting a more sententious language, enveloped in calculations increasingly difficult to follow, losing itself in abstractions and becoming, in every way, an occult science, above all in an epoch when the sufferings of humanity demand that this science should talk a popular language, that it should accord to the needs of all, that it should come nearer to the common understanding and that it should apply itself to realities. It should teach us the theory of general well-being. This has never been more necessary than at the present time when business has been afflicted by a universal languor, when all the industrial arts are in distress and, at least in some countries, agriculture itself seems to be menaced. In such a predicament, humanity should be on guard against all generalization of ideas that causes us to lose sight of the facts, and above all against the error of identifying the public good with wealth, abstracted from the sufferings of the human beings who create it ... There is perhaps no manner of reasoning that exposes itself to more errors than that which consists of constructing a hypothetical world entirely different from the real world, for the purpose of applying one’s calculations (from Simonde de Sismondi, Nouveaux Principes d’Économie Politique, first edn. 1819, cited in Routh, 1975: 4, my emphasis).

Sismondi foreshadows a Marxist critique, but from a non-revolutionary perspective. Another writer who anticipated Marx’s analysis, especially his concern for the plight of the proletariat, was William Thompson (1775-1833) who used the labour theory of value to demonstrate that the whole of the product of industry should belong to those by whose labour it was produced. He criticised the notion of ‘economic man’ who as a mechanical agent was devoid of intellectual power or sympathy and had no other object than wealth in contemplation. But the human is not a machine and without constant reference to the complexity of the human being:

the regulating principle of utility is sacrificed, and the grand object of political economy, the indefinite increase of accumulations of wealth or of its yearly products, become worthless objects consigning to the wretchedness of unrequited toil threefourths or ninetenths of the human race, that the remaining smaller portion

According to Routh (1975), Thompson was the first political economist to argue for the inclusion of insights from other disciplines and to warn against the dangers of excluding morality from economic analysis. Richard Jones (1790-1855) preferred an inductive approach to the orthodox deductive analysis favoured by Ricardo. In delivering a lecture on political economy in 1833, he argued that if the deductive approach were taken, two things would happen:

First, what we call general principles will often be found to have no generality; we shall set out with declaring propositions to be universally true, which, at every step of our further progress, we shall be obliged to confess are frequently false: and secondly, we shall miss a great mass of useful knowledge, which those who advance to principles by a comprehensive examination of facts, necessarily meet with on their road ... and if we will be closet philosophers, take a peep out of our little window, and fashion a world of our own after the pattern of what we see thence, however ingenious and clever we may be, we run a great risk of being sadly mistaken, and are sure to remain extremely ignorant (from *Literary Remains Consisting of Lectures and Tracts on Political Economy of the late Rev. Richard Jones*, 1859, cited in Routh, 1975: 8).

The warnings of these early critics went unheeded and the next generation repeated the criticisms afresh. Thomas Edward Cliffe Leslie (1827-82), concerned about economists' apparent obsession with abstraction (a criticism that continues to be levelled frequently at the economists of today), wrote:

The bane of political economy has been the haste of its students to possess themselves of a complete and symmetrical system, solving all the problems before it with mathematical certainty and exactness. The very attempt shows an entire misconception of the nature of those problems, and of the means available for their solution ... The human being or 'individual' from whose assumed tendencies the conclusions of the deductive system are drawn, and its predictions made, is a fiction, not a reality, a personification of two abstractions, the desire of wealth and aversion for labour, feelings differing much, for example, in men and women (from T.E.C. Leslie, *Essays in Political Economy*, 1888, cited in Routh, 1975: 9).

John Kells Ingram (1823-1907) identified four major defects in economic thought, relevant for the way political economy was developing as a science at that time, but still echoing down the ages:
1. the pretension of economists to isolate economic phenomena from social and political life;
2. carrying abstraction so far as to lose all hold on reality;
3. giving an immensely exaggerated role to deduction, despite the fact that social phenomena are in general too complex to allow for *a priori* determination; and
4. the *a priori* unhistoric method of the English school which led them to conceive the whole world in terms of modern England (Routh, 1975: 10-11)

The sentiments of Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) would find many contemporary critics wishing they were heeded at the time he uttered them:

There is indeed a kind of political economy which flourishes in proud independence of facts; and undertakes to settle all practical problems ... by simple deduction from one or two general assumptions of which the chief is the assumption of the universally beneficent and harmonious operation of self-interest well let alone ... I must be allowed to disclaim all connection with it; the more completely this survival of the *a priori* politics of the eighteenth century can be banished to the remotest possible planet, the better it will be in my opinion, for the progress of economic science (from H. Sidgwick, *Miscellaneous Essays and Addresses*, 1904, cited in Routh, 1975: 12)

While much of this type of criticism focused around the validity of political economy as a science, and was expressed by men equally concerned with explaining the economic and social upheavals of the time, it is possible to detect also the stirrings of a more ideological critique. It is interesting to notice that the sorts of concerns raised by the contemporaries of the originators of modern economic thought are similar to those being raised today by the critics of the dominant orthodoxy that still views the unfettered free market and the primacy of the individual as central to economic decision making. Whereas today we might say that these ideas are no longer relevant and there is a need for a change in paradigm, it seems that, even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, critics identified the ‘new’ political economy as significantly flawed and incapable of addressing the real issues of the times. It should also be noted that although much of Marx’s work was a critique of political economy as ‘bourgeois ideology’, he did not criticise it on the basis of its scientific method or assumptions of rationality.
4.4 CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM OF NEO-CLASSICAL ORTHODOXY

4.4.1 Institutionalist and Post-Keynesian Approaches: Critique from Within Economics

Criticism of neo-classical economics continues today as part of the landscape of economic theorising by writers who identify as economists and whose expertise pertains to the economics discipline, despite their orthodox opponents who attempt to relegate their work to the margins of economics or even claim it to be outside the proper realm of economic thought. These iconoclasts and visionaries have seen their main task as providing a more satisfactory (and less ideological) explanation of the workings of capitalist economies that takes account of such realities as power structures and class divisions as well as historical and social contexts, than neo-classical analysis provides. Such writers have seen their work as developing a new and more realistic paradigm of economic thought that moves beyond the restrictive and narrow assumptions of the neo-classical orthodoxy that dominates modern economic thought.

The non-mainstream critique is diverse and complex, but has been characterised as encompassing two major, related schools of economic thought: the Institutionalists and the Post-Keynesians.

Old institutional economics (currently distinguished from ‘new’ institutionalism, an extension of market theory focusing on transaction costs and property rights—Hodgson, 1998) has its foundation in American economic thought, originating in the writings of Veblen, Ayres, Mitchell, Commons and Clark (Stanfield, 1999). Its more recent exponents include Galbraith (1973, 1976) and Hodgson (1992, 1998; Hodgson and Scruppenti, 1991). The economy is defined differently as an ‘instituted process for provisioning society’ (rather than ‘choices made in the face of scarcity’); wants and resources are not given, but problematic (Stanfield, 1999: 230). Institutionalism examines dynamic interactions between socio-economic groups within economic systems, with the focus on conflict and change.
rather than balance and equilibrium. It describes the human social system as ‘fundamentally a system of power and habit’, i.e. innovation and change are endogenous to the system and occur as habits and customs are challenged (Hodgson, 1992).

‘Cumulative causation’ is a central principle first articulated by Veblen who emphasised the evolutionary nature of economic processes: changes build upon changes, often encouraging further departure from reliance on market forces, with an institutional build-up occurring in political and economic institutions. This dynamic aspect of institutionalism, together with its preference for more inductive reasoning processes, distinguish it methodologically from the deductive processes and the mechanistic and static nature of the epistemology of neoclassical economics (Argyrous, 1996). While presenting a serious intellectual challenge to neo-classical theory, institutionalist economics has suffered a decline in status since its heyday between the wars in the U.S. (Vonay, 1998). This has been attributed to its lack of specific analytical guidelines and an alternative model of economic behaviour, offering instead ‘plausible story telling’ (Argyrous and Stilwell, 1996).

It has been suggested that a productive alliance could be forged between the Institutionalists and another non mainstream group of economic theorists, the Post-Keynesians, whose loose collection of theories is linked to traditions associated with the vision and ideas of the unorthodox Cambridge economists, who rose to prominence in the wake of the Keynesian revolution (Kalecki, 1943). As these unorthodox economists in the 1950s were generally associated with a critique of orthodox economic theorising, the unifying feature of Post-Keynesianism was initially viewed as negative: an opposition to mainstream economics (Dow, 1990; Barber, 1977). However, Eichner (1979) claimed that a diverse set of ideas, broadly subsumed under the label Post-Keynesianism, contained the potential to become a comprehensive, positive alternative to mainstream economics. Since then Post-Keynesian economists have made extensive contributions to the history of economic thought, the methodology of economics and economic theory (Nell, 1984). Modern Post-Keynesians place a significant emphasis on the methodological distinctiveness of the Post-Keynesian approach—a commitment to ‘open system theorising’ (rather than the closed system theories of orthodox economics) stressing agency, transformation, organic interdependence and explanation, rather than prediction (Dunn,
Philosophical connections are also made with ‘critical realism’ as part of identifying its epistemological boundaries (Lawson, 1999).

Common themes include a concern for history, uncertainty, distributional issues, the principle of effective demand and the importance of political and economic institutions in determining the level of activity in an economy, suggesting a productive alliance with institutionalism. Institutionalism has been linked to Post-Keynesianism primarily because it emphasises the transformational nature of economic reality, with its focus on evolution and process (Hodgson, 1989; Dunn, 2000). Both schools of thought come under attack from mainstream economics, whose main argument is that the diversity of theories leads to incoherence and hence neither approach offers a substantive alternative to the orthodoxy—there is recognition that such radical approaches may not survive in the face of the hegemonic hold of neo-classical theory. Post-Keynesians such as Dunn argue that it is the methodological emphasis on open systems theorising that offers coherence, a difference that makes dialogue with the mainstream unlikely. Hence, he calls for alliances with other schools of thought such as institutionalism that share similar methodological characteristics, so that a robust alternative to the dominance of neo-classical orthodoxy can continue to be offered (Dunn, 2000). Other fruitful alliances that have recently been suggested include a ‘dialogue’ between institutionalists and postmodernists around theories of value (Garnett, 1999).

4.4.2 Critiques of Economic Rationalism in Australia

We will turn our attention now to critique from outside the discipline, starting with criticism of what has been termed in Australia the ‘doctrine’ of economic rationalism, considered to be the most ideological manifestation of neo-classical economic theory, with its undoubted support for the interests of the dominant groups and its presentation as ‘this is how the world works’. There is good reason for this focus of critique, given the way its approach and reasoning have been hijacked to ideological ends by politicians and business interests. Such critiques support the proposition made in my assumption #4.
The first serious critique of economic rationalism, particularly as it has been interpreted and practised in Australian politics in the 1980s and 1990s, was the work done by sociologist Michael Pusey (1991). One of the central findings of his study was that the orientation to policy of the senior bureaucrats in the Special Executive Service (the Departments of Treasury, Finance and Prime Minister and Cabinet) was strongly influenced by whether they had received neo-classical economics training in their degrees. Such people were much more likely to hold conservative, right-wing views about income distribution, the labour market, government spending on welfare, deregulation of the private sector and so on. They were also more likely to have not experienced much of the world beyond Canberra and have been educated at the elite private schools. In other words, they were much more likely to be ideologically disposed towards representing the interests of the elite and the power holders in society than were their counterparts with degrees in the humanities, social sciences and the law (Pusey, 1991).

Given that there is critique of neo-classical orthodoxy within the discipline of economics (as discussed above), Pusey points out that his:

shots are aimed not at philosophically intelligent economists but rather at the ideological cuckoos who have occupied the nests and endangered the species (Pusey, 1993: 14).

Horne’s (1992) publication is a selection of some of the comment made on the economy in ‘Ideas for Australia Week’ in that year, comment that comes predominantly from journalists and political scientists. The contributions focus on the inappropriateness of narrow market-based solutions and the naïve formula that market = good; government intervention = bad; the confusing and inexplicable jargon used by the media and politicians; the reliance on dubious indicators; and the way in which the media has become the apologist for the dogma and ideology that economic rationalism has become in representing the interests of the corporate elite. These commentaries demonstrate how the acceptance of such an ideology has led to alienation of those with limited access to power and resources, as articulated in my assumption #5.

As part of ‘Ideas for Australia Week’, a survey was commissioned to discover understanding of commonly used economic terms among blue and white collar workers.
The participants were asked to give their definitions of economic terms such as macroeconomic policy, microeconomic policy, fiscal policy, monetary policy, balance of trade, balance of payments, Gross National Product, economic growth, current account deficit, CPI, privatisation and corporatisation, followed up by discussions. The results showed generally very poor understanding of the meaning of these terms used in the media every day. One respondent commented in discussion: ‘I’ve just realised that I hear these words every day and I have absolutely no idea what they mean’ (Horne, 1992: 44).

Most respondents saw these words as being quite irrelevant to their lives—they were believed to refer to the bigger picture of the economy and not of any specific importance to the average person. There was also a belief expressed that these words are often deliberately used by politicians in order to avoid having to explain the real situation to the average person (Horne, 1992: 45). It seems that the idea that the language produces alienation, as I express in assumption #3, is well supported by evidence such as this, and as I will show, is further supported by findings from my research in teaching economics at TAFE and university.

Two other Australian volumes that examine various aspects of the legacy of economic rationalism as an ideology in areas of economic, social and environmental policy are Rees, Rodley and Stilwell’s (1993) Beyond the Market and its sequel, Rees and Rodley’s (1995) The Human Costs of Managerialism. Both include contributors from economics as well as other disciplines such as geography, social work, politics, education, regional planning and policy analysis. Commentators from such a wide array of disciplines have much to contribute to the debate—there is certainly no sense that their comment or critique is misplaced. Critics from outside the discipline are also well placed to identify the ideological assumptions underneath the analysis, as they are less likely to have been ‘indoctrinated’ through intensive immersion in the theory and culture of economics as a discipline.

One such commentator is historian and philosopher John Ralston Saul (1997) who tackled the issue of how the ideology that he describes as ‘corporatism’ has dominated Western
civilisation, rendering ineffective the role of the individual in democracy through its creation of passivity in the citizenry. He portrays a society addicted to ideologies and held:

tightly in the embrace of a dominant ideology: corporatism. The acceptance of corporatism causes us to deny and undermine the legitimacy of the individual as citizen in a democracy. The result of such a denial is a growing imbalance which leads to our adoration of self-interest and our denial of the public good. Corporatism is an ideology which claims rationality as its central quality. The overall effects on the individual are passivity and conformity in those areas which matter and non-conformism in those which don’t (Saul, 1997: 2).

He says economics ‘as a prescriptive science is actually a minor area of speculative investigation’ and that its elevation as a profession in Western society belies its poor performance in applying its models and theories to reality. ‘If economists were doctors, they would today be mired in malpractice suits’. He comments that the fact that he even has to make an argument that economics is subsidiary to democracy, rather than the other way round, suggests that ‘we are a dangerously unconscious civilisation’ (Saul, 1997: 4). Saul provides a strong argument that the way the ideology of corporatism has been presented as ‘this is how the world works—accept the ideology or perish’ has led to a passivity through unconscious acceptance of its premises and conclusions, strongly supporting my assumption #4.

In the area of public policy it would seem totally appropriate that a multi-disciplinary approach is fostered, one that is unfortunately absent with economics having been elevated to such an all-encompassing, primary position. And this is really the essence of much of the critique—not that there exists no place for economic analysis in policy-making, but that it needs to be considered as a partner with other considerations, particularly the environment, social justice and ethics. In the following section I examine in more detail some of the areas that critics have focused on in questioning the primacy of economic assumptions in problem solving and influencing policy making.

### 4.4.2.1 Assumptions about Human Behaviour

Clive Hamilton (1994) is an Australian economist who has taken up the critique of the assumed rationality of *homo economicus* as economic agent, an independent individual who makes autonomous decisions about the external world. The use of ‘indifference curves’ and
‘preference orderings’ to provide the criteria for behaviour assumes that individual choice is associated with the maximisation of happiness, and this choice covers all situations, including choices about the natural environment. Ethics are reduced to decisions made on the basis of whether the increase in utility of the gainers outweighs the decline in utility of the losers. Hamilton points out that despite sustained criticism of the theoretical abstraction of ‘rational economic man’, *homo economicus* remains firmly entrenched in the ontology of mainstream economics. Hamilton’s argument is that the essential distortion of the economist’s way of thinking about the world lies in:

the very construction of the individual and the relationship of individuals to their world rather than in the content or the logic of individual preferences (Hamilton, 1994: 21).

He points out that these notions derive from the philosophy of utilitarianism (discussed above), a philosophy long ago rejected by other social sciences because of its failure to take account of the complexity and contradictions of human behaviour. It seems that neoclassical economists do not recognise that this is a philosophical position, but assume that utilitarianism simply expresses the reality of how the world is. Economists have also been influenced by the Newtonian concept of causation, seeing the economy as a massive machine. Hamilton argues that drawing on understandings such as those developed in quantum physics, (e.g. nonlocal causation), the concept of morphic fields developed by the biologist Rupert Sheldrake together with Carl Jung’s notion of synchronicity lead to very different conclusions about causality:

In the mechanical view, we understand the world by separating ourselves from it, when indeed the deepest knowledge is had by immersing ourselves in it. We can really understand some of the great truths only by actively breaking down the barriers that we set up between ourselves and our worlds, beginning with that stubborn, deluding barrier called ego (Hamilton, 1994: 37-38).

The thrust of Hamilton’s criticism comes from a spiritual understanding and the need to establish a different relationship between ourselves and the natural world if we are to survive, a central notion in new paradigm thinking. The very title of his book, *The Mystic Economist* appears to be an oxymoron—it would be reasonably safe to speculate that in most people’s minds, economics and spirituality are unlikely bedfellows.
A strong feature of the critique of orthodox economics lies in its lack of a clear ethical base and understanding of human behaviour developed in other social sciences. The institutional economist Geoff Hodgson (1992) examines the notion of ‘rationality’, a central assumption about human nature in economics. He points out that psychological theories of the unconscious fly in the face of ‘consumer sovereignty’ and the central idea of the inviolability of individual judgement. Further, advertising executives take a very different view of what motivates consumer behaviour than do the neo-classical economists. Hodgson identifies different forms of rationality—deliberate, intentional action; ‘intention in action’; intuition; and habits. The existence of habits means it is important to study social institutions to see how habits and routines are formed (Hodgson, 1992). It is precisely the lack of social analysis in economics that contributes to its irrelevance—to make assumptions about human behaviour in the absence of a social context seems ludicrous. Hodgson identifies the following reasons to abandon orthodox assumptions of rationality:

- the unreality of Cartesian dualism (that the individual is divorced from society and nature);
- not all actions result from deliberate reason;
- the importance of the cultural framework of the individual in interpreting information; and
- the existence of habits requires an evolutionary, dynamic, non-equilibrium theory.

A significant contribution to the thinking about an alternative economics emerged from the combined work of an economist and a theologian: Herman Daly and John Cobb’s *For the Common Good* (1989). They too take up the issue of rationality in economics by arguing that assumptions about rationality have deep and conflicting roots in the Western theological understanding of human nature—Calvinistic scepticism about human virtue connected with suspicion of earthly authority in church and state. They argue that modern economic theory developed in the context of Calvinism. Both were bids for personal freedom against the interference of earthly authority, and both were convinced that motives of self-interest were overwhelmingly dominant. But economics celebrated as rational what Calvinists regarded as sinful. While Christianity was dominant, checks on self-interest could occur, but with the increasing dominance of neo-liberalism (a political philosophy
supporting neo-classical economics) any checks on self-interest were seen as harmful—government interference was to be avoided. With the displacement of traditional Christian thinking by the religion of economics, psychological, sociological and ecological problems have become acute.

The need for the paradigm shift in economics has been evident for some time, according to Daly and Cobb, who seek to re-define *homo economicus* as ‘person-in-community’:

> We do believe that economics can re-think its theories from the viewpoint of person-in-community and still include the truth and insight it gained when it thought in individualistic terms (Daly and Cobb, 1989: 8).

They argue further that there is no need to ‘junk’ its axioms, that they can continue to function, only with greater recognition of their limits. I suggest this is questionable, if the axioms themselves come out of the same ideology that places primacy on individual self-interest.

Amitai Etzioni (1990, 1992) addresses the notion of the independent individual by examining the moral dimension of economics—instead of being motivated by pure hedonistic self-interest, individuals have a commitment to live up to moral values. People select goals based on values and emotions, not just on whether they are ‘efficient’ or not. He challenges the notion of the ‘sovereign’ individual as independent of the community, when there exists a mutual dependence between the individual and the community. The function of the community is ‘to contain the conflict and limit the scope of market competition’ (Etzioni, 1992: 51), as well as to sustain its functioning.

One implication of the dominance of orthodox thinking, especially in economic rationalism, is to debase moral values, e.g. creating ‘rights to pollute’ undermines taboos against certain behaviours and normalises them. While claiming ‘moral’ positions like the sanctity of the family, individual rights, etc., adherence to the unregulated market means undermining of moral and ethical values, reducing every decision to one based on cost and self-interest (Dworkin *et al*., 1977; Vintila *et al*., 1992). Social bonds become seriously threatened. Also, it ignores the importance of social bonds and community for the market (or distribution system) to work effectively (Lutz, 1989).
4.4.2.2 Indicators of Welfare and the Debate about Economic Growth

For the earliest economists, particularly Adam Smith, the concern about ‘wealth’ and ‘welfare’ was central to their analysis. Economic measures such as GDP have been used since the Second World War as primary indicators of the wealth (and by implication, health) of the economy (and by implication, society). The gross inadequacy of GDP as an indicator is well documented in the literature (Ekins, 1986, 1992; Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992; Henderson, 1988, 1991; Caracas Report, 1989; Daly and Cobb, 1989; Anderson, 1991; Hamilton and Saddler, 1997). Anderson (1991) argues that if narrow indicators of economic growth (generally considered to be a ‘good thing’ in economic terms) are unsatisfactory, then they need to be replaced with something else, indicators that measure the social and environmental features of economies, not just financial measurements of their economic progress. He reviews a range of social and environmental indicators and examines data for fourteen major countries. Overall, he found there to be general improvement in social indicators, while overall environmental deterioration threatens to put these social improvements into reverse. He argues that the general social improvement is not recognised by the ‘anti-growth’ lobby, while the ‘pro-growth’ group generally plays down distributional issues and environmental consequences, and concludes:

a continuation of economic growth in its present form into the future would be disastrous, because of the environmental costs involved. Statistics for the main indicators used by economists—GNP, balance of payments, inflation, etc.—do nothing to convey the nature and seriousness of the situation we face (Anderson, 1991:93).

As part of the inclusion of concepts such as community and ecology within economic theory, Daly and Cobb (1989) point to the need for much more comprehensive indicators of economic welfare. They devised an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) that incorporates income distribution, net capital growth, natural resource depletion, environmental damage and the value of unpaid household labour. More recent developments have seen this index renamed the ‘Genuine Progress Indicator’ and recent work in Australia has shown a sharp divergence between the GDP and GPI since the 1970s, i.e. while the economy has been growing, crucial indicators of the quality of ecological and social aspects of life, such as environmental degradation and income inequality, have also
increased, suggesting a decline in overall well-being (Hamilton and Saddler, 1997; Hamilton, 1998).

The debate about economic growth is central to the differences between the current dominant paradigm and a new ecological paradigm. Economic growth has been the hallmark of industrial society since its birth two centuries ago. It is so embedded as a goal that it is rarely questioned, even by Marxists, whose critique only extends to forms of capitalist relations, not to the foundations of industrial society. As Steve Dodds (1997) points out, attitudes to growth ‘reveal the priority individuals give to environmental protection or improving material living standards’ (Dodds, 1997:99). Economists believe that growth is good and important to improve well-being of the community, implying increasing incomes and therefore living standards (Beckerman, 1974). Politicians echo this rhetoric and Treasurer Peter Costello’s claim that ‘economic growth is the best poverty-buster there is’ at the World Economic Forum in September 2000, clearly demonstrates the continuing political commitment to economic growth as a primary goal.

Weisskopf (1971) points out that preoccupation with growth (or what he refers to as ‘GNP fetishism’) has been fostered since the 1930s when Keynesian economics shifted emphasis from the price mechanism in particular markets to economic aggregates such as total production, employment, investment, saving and overall consumption spending. Weisskopf argues that ideas about economic growth on the individual and social level are ‘projections of the ethics of acquisition’, and that this aspect of growth gets lost in the debates because growth itself has become such an unconsciously accepted value. This is one of the key features of a dominant ideology—values that are unquestioned because they appear to be ‘self-evident’. Much of the language of economics features these types of unquestioned assumptions.

In contrast, many environmentalists believe that economic growth is harmful to the environment and that human well-being could be improved without economic growth through a transition to a simpler and less consumption-oriented society (Dodds, 1997). Ever since the Club of Rome’s Limits to Growth was published in 1972, there has been widespread awareness of the finiteness of the world’s resources. Economic policy,
however, currently makes no distinction between renewable and non-renewable resources, does not take future scarcity into account and does not routinely evaluate the costs of environmental degradation. Nowhere is the call for more growth and development stronger than in the debate about how to solve unemployment. The argument is that by stimulating investment and encouraging development, more jobs will be created as the economy grows. The reality is, according to green economists such as Ekins, Daly and Hamilton, that in most industrialised countries economic growth has meant an increase in capital and resource intensity and a consequent shedding of labour. Increased indebtedness and high interest rates, coupled with low savings rates has led to a corresponding inability of capital to grow fast enough to absorb the shed labour (Ekins, 1992; Daly and Cobb, 1989; Hamilton, 1994; Diesendorf and Hamilton, 1997).

Theobald (1997) argues that economists have performed an extraordinarily successful trick—they have convinced citizens and politicians that the real concern is how to increase production continuously, rather than being concerned with the ‘real question since the beginning of the industrial era ... how to use all of the stuff which could be produced’ (Theobald, 1997: 38). Since World War II, demand has been increased by encouraging people to buy (advertising plays a central role here), through consumers going into debt (the credit explosion) and through government expenditure. Theobald maintains that all these sources are running out of steam—people are reaching a limit to how much they’ll buy, they see the limit to their credit cards, and governments are reducing expenditure to reduce deficits. This leads Theobald to the conclusion that if we are unable to provide jobs for everybody by increasing demand, ‘then the socio-economic order created over the last 200 years is no longer viable’ (Theobald, 1997: 39).

Dodds (1997), in attempting to tread a ‘middle path through the economic growth debate’, concludes that ‘growth has little to commend it, and some compelling reasons exist to treat it with real caution’. He points out, however, that rather than directly discouraging growth, what is required are efforts to improve social and environmental performance, paying particular attention to addressing the structural causes of unemployment. He makes a call for a paradigm shift when he concludes:
In the longer term, the creation of a sustainable and just society is likely to involve a substantial shift from the expectations and norms of our quite individualistic and consumption oriented society (Dodds, 1997: 122).

A strong argument is put forward by some to distinguish ‘growth’ from ‘development’, instead of making them synonymous—getting bigger does not mean getting better, and policies that aim to improve quality of life and to revive ailing local economies are more likely to add to a community’s overall development than blind pursuit of growth for its own sake (Hamilton, 1998; Kinsley, 1989).

4.4.2.3 Economics and the Environment

The growth debate most frequently centres around the arguments put forward by environmentalists about the pressure on natural resources that unlimited growth implies, and one of the most stringent areas of critique in the literature has been the relationship between economics and the environment, specifically the failure of economics to incorporate ecological concerns adequately into its models (Jacobs, 1991, 1994). The relatively new branch of environmental economics is an attempt to apply neo-classical methods to tackle this failure. The argument is that in the unfettered market, current and future needs will be reflected in the price of all resources—the price of resources whose supply is diminishing will increase, which in turn will reduce demand, thus ensuring the availability of resources for future generations. Also, through the process of producers competing to meet the needs of consumers exercising their right to maximise their satisfaction through consumption, minimising the costs at which goods are produced and minimising the resources used in production, the unfettered market system leads to the efficient allocation of resources and results in the maximisation of economic well-being. Environmental problems are therefore an indication of the limited development of the market rather than a shortcoming of the theory. These ‘externalities’ arise because not all environmental goods are privately owned—producers or consumers do not have to pay to get access to them. The ‘obvious’ solution is to ensure that environmental goods are only available at a price (Pearce et al., 1989).

The main criticisms of the approach of environmental economics (Rosewarne, 1993; Hamilton, 1997) can be summarised as follows:
environmental effects are a pervasive feature of economic activity (not insignificant aberrations as suggested by environmental economics);

- when impacts on the environment are calculated, they are treated as partial or discrete—totally ignoring the systemic nature of ecological systems, and ignoring cumulative effects;

- environmental goods tend to be regarded as substitutes for one another, which completely ignores the uniqueness of the resource and its role in the integrity of the whole ecological system;

- endowing resources with property rights merely sanctions their exploitation;

- the problem of uncertainty in making observations about ecological systems is ignored—so many disasters have occurred because of lack of knowledge of how ecology works and allocation of property rights could mean that firms with the most wealth will buy up all the rights;

- the main reference point in mainstream theory is the market system organised for wealth creation, not the dynamics of ecological systems—the assumption is that individuals will seek to preserve the environment because of their self-interest in wanting to meet future needs, which in turn assumes perfect information about future options, requiring perfect futures markets, which do not exist;

- because individuals put more value on meeting present needs, they tend to discount the future (according to economists) and such discounting does not establish conditions for sustainability;

- the problem of irreversibility of degradation of the environment is not taken into account given the real nature of capitalist markets, and there is little scope for consumers to exercise much authority or sovereignty over what is produced; and

- the economic dynamic of capitalism does not correspond to the dynamics of ecological processes, which leads to ongoing degradation and environmental catastrophes.

Political factors that have contributed to the dominance of neo-classical approaches to the environment include the pressures to reduce government expenditure, the corporatisation of government enterprise, the requirement of authorities to make monetary returns, the desire of the private sector to secure unimpeded access to resources and the desire of trade unions to promote job creation (Rosewarne, 1993).
Another perspective on the inappropriateness of applying economic principles to environmental concerns is offered by philosopher Mark Sagoff (1988). He argues that environmental goals are *not* a matter of personal self-interest or willingness to pay, but represent:

national pride and collective self-respect ... [they are] not interests to be ‘priced’ by markets or by cost-benefit analysis, but are views or beliefs that may find their way, as public values, into legislation (Sagoff, 1988: 28).

In economic analysis, ethics and values are defined in the same terms as financial interests, and ‘preference’ becomes confused with ethical and practical judgement. Thus, the statement ‘I believe this is right because ...’ becomes interpreted as ‘I want this ...’ or ‘this is what I prefer ...’ What counts is not what why people believe what they believe, or value what they value, but how much they are willing to pay to satisfy those ‘wants’. Sagoff contrasts this approach with a Kantian notion of value that argues that a person making a value judgement claims to know what is *right* and not just what is preferred. A Kantian view therefore ‘maintains a notion of common good as an object posited and understood by reason’, treating people with respect as beings capable of discussing issues on their merits, rather than regarding them as ‘bundles of preferences capable of primarily revealing their wants’ (Sagoff, 1988: 44). When it comes to questions of preserving environmental quality, or any others that involve matters of ‘knowledge, wisdom, morality and taste that admit of better or worse, right or wrong, true or false’, economic analysis is just not conducive. Sagoff therefore argues strongly for viewing the individual as *citizen* in these decisions, rather than as *consumer*. This supports arguments put forward by Hamilton (1997) and John Ralston Saul (1997) that true citizenship has been lost due to the marketing of the individual as a consumer. The threat to genuine democracy becomes apparent, as I indicate in assumption #5.

The relatively new field of ecological economics offers an alternative to the narrow analysis of environmental economics. Ecological economics was launched in the 1980s as a critique of neo-classical environmental economics, which focuses almost solely on questions of efficient resource allocation. The fundamental difference that distinguishes environmental economics from ecological economics is that the latter considers the economy to be in the service of the ecosystem rather than vice versa, i.e. ecology rather
than the economy is the primary concern. Ecological economics is transdisciplinary, incorporating insights from ecology, politics, philosophy and a range of other disciplines into economic analysis (Howarth, 1998). One of its pioneers, Robert Costanza (1991), has long emphasised the biophysical foundations of economic systems and the need to address flows of matter and energy in economic analysis. Herman Daly (Daly and Cobb, 1989) has highlighted the inadequacy of monetary valuation as a criterion of social choice, calling for a renewed emphasis on the moral foundations of economic thought with an explicit focus on long-term sustainability. Richard Norgaard (1992) has stressed the interdependencies between natural and social systems, as well as the role of culture in constructing both scientific understandings and the prevailing values that surround economic decisions. Clive Hamilton (1997), as mentioned above, recognises that humans are both citizens and consumers, and respond to ethical as well as economic considerations.

Ecological economists attempt to bridge the gap that has developed between economics and the natural sciences by developing understanding of the interrelationships and interdependencies between human and natural systems. The motivation for incorporating humans into ecosystems is the scientific evidence that economic growth has already reached limits, evidenced by climate change, ozone layer disruption, land degradation and biodiversity loss. The conflict between the technological optimism of mainstream approaches and the evidence of environmental degradation is attributed to the intellectual separation of our study of humans and nature into the separate fields of economics and ecology (Costanza et al., 1997).

Ecological economics therefore encompasses a concern for: (a) sustainability, or the maintenance of human well-being and the services rendered by natural systems over time; (b) economic efficiency, or the satisfaction of human preferences as operationalised through cost-benefit analysis; and (c) distributional equity, or the just sharing of burdens and benefits between social groups. The primary objective of sustainability will not be attained through some miraculous but unknown technological development that obviates the role of natural systems as the singular source, sink, and renewal agent for the energy and materials that sustain life. It requires balance between ecological systems and the human enterprise. Balance requires careful consideration of scale. For economic systems to
be sustainable, the scale of the human activity must be constrained by simple principles: first, the harvest of renewable resources cannot exceed their rate of regeneration; second, waste generation cannot exceed nature’s assimilative capacity; and third, depletion of non-renewable resources cannot exceed the rate of development of renewable substitutes (Costanza et al., 1997).

Ecological economists argue further that, ultimately, sustainability may require a deliberate rethinking of the nature of human existence:

we must confront personal failure in our individual choices about consumption, lifestyles, habituation, and work styles, and recognize that these are the decisions that ultimately determine environmental quality. Furthermore, the more affluence and education we are privileged to enjoy, the greater our opportunities and moral responsibilities are for making personal choices consistent with sustainable civilization for the planet (Costanza et al., 1997: 242).

While these developments are welcome within the economics discipline, critics have raised questions about the primacy of the economic in their models. For instance, ecologists point out that the relevant aspects of complex adaptive systems, stability under uncertainty, non-linear dynamics and other ecological theories have yet to be assimilated into ecological economics (O’Neill, 1998). Philosophers such as Sagoff (1995) suggest that maintaining a focus on economics as the prime reason for protecting nature obscures moral, religious and cultural arguments for doing so:

Morality teaches us that we are rich in proportion to the number of things we can afford to let alone, that we are happier in proportion to the desires we can control rather than those we can satisfy, and that a simpler life is more worth living. Economic growth may not be morally desirable even if it is ecologically sustainable ... To argue for environmental protection on utilitarian grounds—because of carrying capacity or sources of raw materials and sinks for wastes—is therefore to erect only a fragile and temporary defense for the spontaneous wonder and glory of the natural world (Sagoff, 1995: 617).

The paradigm differences between economists and non-economists are exemplified by Daly’s response to Sagoff:

After we have recognized the intrinsic value of the natural world, then we have an obligation to protect and increase that value. That realization leads us to pay attention to instrumental value. From a philosopher, we might reasonably have hoped for enlightenment on the source and basis of intrinsic value. Instead Sagoff puts intrinsic and instrumental value in opposition to each other in another of his not this ... but that formulations. But in this case the relation absolutely has to be both-
and. Unless we have a notion of intrinsic value then there is nothing to which instrumental value can be instrumental. And unless we have a notion of instrumental value, we have no operational means of serving intrinsic value. It is a further mistake to identify intrinsic value with morality and instrumental value with prudence and then set up an opposition between them, as Sagoff does (Daly, 1995: 624).

Despite the obvious differences in worldviews, which may never be ultimately bridged, the presence of dialogues such as these is to be welcomed in any move towards a cross-disciplinary approach to environmental problems.

4.4.2.4 Feminist Critiques

Feminist critique of economic theory has been a powerful addition to the analysis we have been discussing. It would be surprising if much of the criticism of neo-classical assumptions in particular had not been influenced by feminist analysis (Blank, 1993). The areas that feminists have focused on have been a critique of the Cartesian model of objectivity, dispassion and detachment that underpins economic theory (Nelson, 1993; England, 1993; Cohen, 1981; Barrett, 1981); the patriarchal context for the historical development of economic theory that produced an androcentric (male-centred) view of human beings (Ferber and Tieman, 1981; Ferber and Nelson, 1993; Game and Pringle, 1993); the inadequacy of neo-classical theory in explaining non-market behaviour in relation to women’s activity, particularly the ‘new home economics’ that applies economic theory to household activity (Cohen, 1993; Strassmann, 1993; Barrett, 1981); the exclusion of household activity from the GDP (Waring, 1989; Cohen, 1981; Wheelock, 1992; Goldschmidt-Clermont, 1992); the neo-classical analysis of the labour market that fails to explain discrimination against women (Cohen, 1981; Ferber and Nelson, 1993); and the contribution of women to economic development (Boserup and Liljenkrantz, 1975).

A dense and complex poststructuralist analysis by Marxist-feminist(s) J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996) (a collective writing entity of two women) draws an interesting conclusion that offers a thought-provoking contribution to the paradigmatic perspective we are exploring. The author(s) explains how Marxist analysis views Capitalism (with a capital C) as an all-encompassing:
structural and systemic unity, potentially co-extensive with the national or global economy as a whole ... Capitalism is presented as the embrace, the container, something large and full. Noncapitalist forms of production, such as commodity production by self-employed workers or production of household goods and services, are seen as somehow taking place within capitalism. Household production becomes subsumed to capitalism as capitalist ‘reproduction’ (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 256-8).

The economy, which in the language of the dominant capitalist ideology defines the totality of society, is similarly enshrined in Marxist discourse. It is this seemingly inescapable totality, this impossibility of alternatives that makes the task of social transformation seem so hopeless. This is echoed in Robert Theobald’s (1997) critique that the dominant rhetoric is one that allows for no choice, which means that thinking inevitably stops—the challenge is to envision alternative approaches to our moment in history (Theobald, 1997).

This particular discourse, according to Gibson-Graham, leaves critics with no way out—how can a different view be articulated? The suggestion is to break free by turning such representations of Capitalism on their heads:

What if capitalism [small c] were not an entire system of economy or macrostructure or a mode of production but simply one form of exploitation among many? What if the economy were not singular but plural, not homogeneous but heterogeneous, not unified but fragmented? ... The question is, how do we begin to see this monolithic and homogeneous Capitalism not as our ‘reality’ but as a fantasy of wholeness, one that operates to obscure diversity and disunity in the economy and society alike? (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 260).

One of the ways this can be done is to recognise that despite capitalism being universally equated with market, and despite the inevitable descriptions of societies such as the USA or Australia as ‘market economies’, substantial portions of transactions and activities take place in these societies outside the market (the household being the largest of these). Recognition of this fact could therefore lead to a less monolithic view of capitalism and create more opportunities for thinking about possibilities of transformation. An interesting question is posed by Gibson-Graham in relation to liberation from oppression:

what if we could force Capitalism to withdraw from defining the economy as a whole? We might then see feudalisms, primitive communisms, socialisms, independent commodity production, slaveries and of course capitalisms, as well as hitherto unspecified forms of exploitation ... these diverse exploitations introduce
diversity in the dimension of class—and at the same time they make thinkable ... the possibility of socialist class transformation (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 262).

Since the ‘fall’ of communism, the New World Order is described in terms of political diversity founded on economic unity. The rhetoric of the ‘global economy’ gives a vision of the economy as ‘the last stronghold of unity and singularity in a world of diversity and plurality’ (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 263). If the economy, however, is also viewed as fragmented and diverse, there may emerge a large state sector, a very large sector of self-employed and family-based producers, mostly noncapitalist, as well as a huge household sector, with various forms of exploitation existing within it. Political action can then take place at the level of the household, the workplace, and the community, rather than at the daunting level of the whole monolithic structure of society, defined as the capitalist market economy.

There are some useful insights here in relation to the task of the shift to the new paradigm discussed in this chapter. While the focus of the shift may not be necessarily concerned with socialist transformation—many new paradigm thinkers see this as an outmoded and limited form of social change, regarding the key challenge as being industrialism itself with its exploitation of nature and resources—the move from viewing the economy as monolithic to pluralistic is very pertinent in a postmodern world (as I discuss in more detail in chapter 7). Gibson-Graham could be seen as challenging one of the ideologies of Marxism (equating capitalism with the whole economy), and offering an opportunity to change lenses. This is the sort of shift that may be critical for the paradigm shift being advocated here. It is not only Marxists who are caught in the grip of a stifling vision of the global economy as immovable monolith. I maintain that the sense of powerlessness experienced by many, not just ordinary citizens but business people and governments as well, in the face of the mysterious and seemingly inexorable forces of the global economy, is a significant obstacle to changing economic and social relationships in our society. Large-scale civil protests against the many faces of globalisation are a response to this powerlessness—and they are easily dismissed as disorganised and incoherent, without a ‘single platform’ of reform. The implication of Gibson-Graham’s analysis seems to be that we require a different ‘imagining’ of the invisible forces we perceive to be controlling our lives. The role of theorists and intellectuals here could be pivotal.
4.4.2.5 The Problem of Development: Critiques of Industrialist Ideologies

One of the most striking examples of how the dominance of orthodox economics has led to devastation on a monumental environmental and human scale is in relation to the paradigm of ‘development’. According to Sachs (1992), the era of development was ushered in by President Truman in 1949 when in his inauguration speech he defined the largest part of the world as ‘underdeveloped areas’:

For the first time, the new world-view was thus announced: all the peoples of the earth were to move along the same track and aspire to only one goal—development (Sachs, 1992: 157).

The diversity and richness of the world’s people and their living arrangements were to be reduced to a singular dimension, with the industrialised North being at the ‘most advanced’ end of the continuum. The language of development, unknown before Truman, has in the space of less than one human lifetime become a language that has penetrated every corner of the globe, and the majority of political, social and economic discourses. Economic imperialism has replaced political colonialism, with many countries now technologically and economically dependent on the industrialised countries, wiping out traditional activities and depopulating rural areas (Sachs, 1992).

According to Susan George (1988) the origins of Third World debt lie in the underlying ideologies of industrialism, growth and free trade. In examining the origins of the orthodox development model, George points out it has been dominated by economists, with little contribution from sociologists, historians, anthropologists, ecologists, political scientists and so on:

Largely funded and employed by major Western-controlled political institutions, most development economists must accept, consciously or not, some subservience to the goals of those who now dominate the world economy and derive the most benefit from it. Although in no sense the result of a conspiracy, the reigning paradigm does reflect a convergence of world views, a shared vision of the desirable society and a keen, common perception of economic and political self-interest. In sum, it is riddled with ideology (George, 1998: 256-257).

She summarises the development era as the ‘escape-from-poverty paradigm’, which has been bounded on the north by ‘growth’, on the east by ‘trickle-down’, on the south by
‘comparative advantage’ in trade and on the west by ‘modernization’ or ‘transfer of technology’. George lucidly identifies the primary ideologies at play, and asks why the evidence of such a failure of the development paradigm has not led to a revolution in theory as such a failure of evidence would have produced in the natural sciences.

George’s criticisms of the 1980s are no less relevant today where the processes she exposed have become more pronounced with the rapid changes occurring in the world economy due to increasing dominance of trade liberalisation policies world-wide. The ideological basis for free trade was theorised by Smith and Ricardo in the early days of the development of classical economics. Smith argued that free trade was in the general interest of the entire community, while Ricardo developed the theory of comparative advantage, which suggested that even countries that had an absolute advantage in the production of all goods could benefit from trading in those goods in which its comparative advantage was greatest. He thus went further than Smith by showing that free trade is in the interest of every country, because there is always something that can be traded. Modern neo-classical economists have taken the theory of comparative advantage as an almost hallowed creed, beyond question or criticism, and have used it to argue the case for increasing trade liberalisation policies world-wide. The principle is assumed to be applicable as a general law, for all times and all situations (Went, 2000). Today, free trade is accompanied by free capital flows, supported by international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and agreements such as GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). This ideology is well expressed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in the 1997 edition of its World Economic Outlook:

With open trade, domestic prices reflect world prices, thereby promoting the efficient allocation of resources. Open trade and capital account policies not only allow a country to exploit its comparative advantages in production, but they also promote the importation of lowest-cost products, often embedded with advanced technology. Trade also allows a country to employ a larger variety of intermediate goods and capital equipment that enhance the productivity of its own resources (IMF, 1997: 85).

Interestingly, Ricardo’s theory was based on two assumptions not reflected in today’s realities—that international economic relations are essentially harmonious (there are no losers, only winners) and that the immobility of capital was necessary for his theory to work
(Went, 2000). Both these assumptions appear to be overlooked by today’s protagonists of free trade and free capital flows. Other aspects overlooked by the ideologues include:

- the fact that comparative advantage is often shaped and manipulated by government interventions such as import restrictions, export subsidies or tax incentives;

- the reality that poorer countries are not benefiting to the same degree as rich countries from increasing internationalisation (i.e. the ‘convergence hypothesis’, that globalisation of trade will lead to a convergence between rich and poor, is a myth);

- that free trade increases environmental degradation through increased transportation, increased consumption and increased waste; and

- that the recent Asian crisis has seen the collapse of the development model, a conventional hallmark of the ‘proof’ that free trade policies work for developing nations (Went, 2000).

In the light of these realities, economists such as Went (2000) argue that protectionism needs to be resurrected and ‘destigmatised’—the question that needs to be asked is ‘what or who has to be protected against what?’ Given the way the world functions today:

the margins for alternative choices are almost nil, unless ways can be found to counter the discipline of free trade and of the financial markets. The question is therefore not being for or against international trade, but whether such trade strengthens or erodes a democratic and egalitarian project (Went, 2000: 667).

I argue that Manfred Max-Neef’s (1987) model of Human Scale Development, discussed below, is a powerful and rigorous example of one such alternative, but possibly because of the dominance of powerful elites, it has not yet been put into practice on a wide scale. The same rhetoric continues to be placed in front of a powerless citizenry to convince them that what is good for the global economy and major corporations is also good for them.

While this review has been selective, being beyond the scope of this chapter to cover comprehensively the literature on the critique of neo-classical orthodoxy, it has nevertheless served to provide a mapping of the limitations of conventional economics, particularly in its application to real-world problems and influence on political decision
making. Its limiting assumptions about human behaviour and rationality, its impenetrable language, its unrealistic faith in economic growth, its reliance on inappropriate indicators, its simplistic approach to environmental problems, its failure to account for the experience of women and people in non-Western cultures and its impact on Third World poverty through the all-encompassing ideologies of free trade and ‘development’ all demonstrate the need for a demystification of this ideology masquerading as ‘fact’, not to mention a dethroning of its influence. The preceding sections provide justification for the assumptions I make in relation to my perception of conventional economics as a harmful ideology.

So what of the rational economists? How do they respond to such severe criticisms levelled against them? Where is their voice in this debate? One economist has been reported as saying that he has given up admitting to people at dinner parties or on the golf course that he is an economist—he now tells them he’s a ‘kind of statistician’ (King and Lloyd, 1993). The next section gives an example of how some economists have responded to criticisms of economic rationalism.

4.4.3 The Response of the Economists

In response to the comparative silence on the economists’ side of the debate, a conference entitled ‘Economic Rationalism: Economic Policies for the 90s’ was held in February 1993 in Melbourne designed as ‘a forum for mainstream economists to meet and debate their critics’ (King and Lloyd, 1993). The conference was dominated by economists. The only non-economist critics represented in the proceedings were Michael Pusey (sociologist) and Robert Manne (historian and political scientist). From the proceedings of this conference, it appears that as far as the economists are concerned, the critics do not have a full understanding of neo-classical theory, nor the level of debate and disagreement within the economics profession itself.

It is interesting to observe how the orthodox economists perceive the critique: they see the alternative offered by the critics as conservative, i.e. reform that harks back to the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s, with re-regulation of financial markets and a return to fixed exchange rates; a return to centralised wage fixing and import replacement programmes.
The critique is viewed completely within the economists’ own paradigm. The ‘debate’ takes the form of discussion between economists about measures of efficiency, timing and sequencing of reforms, and the empirical analysis of markets—as Geoff Brennan (1993) points out, the debate should be seen as ‘a debate over alternative policy directions, rather than as a debate over economics as such’ (Brennan, 1993: 2). Brennan (1993: 3-11) goes on to say that the much misunderstood term ‘economic rationalist’ has become a term of abuse: ‘economic rationalists have been made scapegoats for the current economic distress and thereby become the objects of extreme prejudice’. He also portrays much of the criticism as ‘a rather simple-minded assault on economists’ arguments against protectionism’ and sees the critics as wanting to ‘accept us at our weakest and take us on at our strongest’. Interestingly, he identifies the ‘weak’ areas as:

   the (possible) inadequacies of consequentialist ethics, the arguably excessive claims of agent rationality, the presumed exogeneity of preferences, the almost exclusive focus on ‘invisible-hand’ mechanisms for social control and so on (Brennan, 1993: 11).

From my understanding and reading of the critiques, these are precisely the areas that are challenged, and it is his portrayal of the critiques that appears simple-minded and lacking in full understanding, especially of those that fall outside the discipline.

Economists being prepared to debate their critics publicly and end their silence is certainly to be welcomed, but it is important that they be prepared to take a step outside their own discipline and the rigidities of its assumptions and parameters in order to engage in the debate more fully and honestly. And, of course, serious critics need more than a populist and prejudicial understanding of neo-classical economics, and need to refrain from the temptation to attack and vilify as a substitute for serious debate.

The initial focus of this research was on the processes by which movement could be made to a new paradigm more congruent with the challenges faced by humanity at this time in history, a time when critics of the current paradigm, whose voices were rarely heard in earlier decades, are now receiving public prominence. Therefore it is the work of creative thinkers and visionaries willing to tackle the task of envisioning a new economics, free of the paradigmatic restrictions of Cartesian dualism, utilitarianism, reductionist science and
Lockean individualism, that is of greatest interest. It is to their contributions that we now turn.

4.5 CONTRIBUTIONS TO A NEW ECONOMICS

Within the discipline of economics there have been many debates and revisions and critiques. If the neo-classical school had not had such a powerful ideological hold over power elites, economics, whether it be in the form of a critical political economy or institutional economics or Post-Keynesianism or any other of its possible manifestations, may have survived as a vibrant and relevant discipline (Argyrous and Stilwell, 1996; Ormerod, 1994, 1998). However, the pressures for interdisciplinary co-operation and systemic approaches are gathering momentum, and the most exciting possibilities are emerging from the cross-fertilisation of ideas from a wide variety of related areas of interest: sociology, ecology, theology, political science, anthropology, economics and psychology.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in depth the range of theories and models emerging from this process. I will confine myself to summarising the main features of the ‘new economics’, also called ‘alternative’ or ‘green’ or ‘ecological’ economics, and to exploring one model in particular that offers a genuine shift in thinking about economic activity and so-called economic behaviour, a model that I believe has great practical, ethical and ecological integrity. I include a description of how I applied this model in a small community.

4.5.1 Main Features of a New Economics

Broadly speaking, the main contributors to attempts to redefine and reconceptualise economics have consciously located their models within a different paradigm, a paradigm based on the range of principles outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Their frameworks thus incorporate systemic principles and behavioural complexities that are ignored or assumed away in conventional economics. Briefly, the main features of such a new economics that incorporates ethics, society and the environment, as outlined by authors

- the economy is viewed as part of a broad social, ethical and ecological system, rather than being separate and ‘above’ society;

- a broad definition of wealth that incorporates the notion of well-being, including material and non-material aspects;

- an emphasis on optimal systems size (rather than continuous growth);

- a return to independence and self-reliance at the local level;

- the satisfaction of fundamental needs, rather than endless ‘wants’, as the impetus for development;

- a call for redistribution of resources and power;

- a recognition of the central importance of the non monetary, ‘informal’ economy and the development of meaningful indicators;

- an emphasis on small-scale, appropriate technology;

- a structural transformation of social relations;

- an emphasis on co-operative, participative decision-making structures;

- a recognition of the complementarity of market provision of private goods and state provision of public goods;

- monetary reform and the importance of the role of ‘local’ currencies;

- the centrality of values and ethics (there is no possibility of being ‘value-free’); and

- a recognition of the complexity of human nature that goes beyond the self-interested, utility-maximising individual.
4.5.2 The Max-Neef Model of Human-Scale Development

Manfred Max-Neef is a Chilean economist who has worked for many years with the problem of development in the Third World, articulating the inappropriateness of conventional models of development that have led to increasing poverty, massive debt and ecological disaster for many Third World communities. His work on new development models was based on research done at the Centre for Development Alternatives in Chile, an organisation dedicated to the reorientation of development that stimulates local needs, researching new tools, strategies and evaluative techniques to support such development. Max-Neef’s (1987) publication outlines the results of the Centre’s research and experiences.

Max-Neef and his colleagues developed a taxonomy of human needs and a process by which communities can identify their ‘wealths’ and ‘poverties’ according to how these needs are satisfied. This model provides an important link between alternative economics and educational processes, and has provided a basis for some of my own work in the community and the classroom. Human Scale Development is defined as:

focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the construction of organic articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with the state (Max-Neef et al., 1987: 12).

The main contribution that Max-Neef makes to the understanding of needs is the distinction made between needs and satisfiers. Human needs are seen as few, finite and classifiable (as distinct from the conventional notion that ‘wants’ are infinite and insatiable). Not only this, they are constant through all human cultures and across historical time periods. What changes over time and between cultures is the way these needs are satisfied. It is important that human needs are understood as a system—i.e. they are interrelated and interactive. There is no hierarchy of needs (apart from the basic need for subsistence or survival)—simultaneity, complementarity and trade-offs are features of the process of needs satisfaction. The fundamental human needs are classified as: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, recreation (in the sense of leisure, time to reflect, or idleness), creation, identity and freedom. Needs are also defined according to the existential
categories of being, having, doing and interacting, and from these dimensions a 36 cell matrix is developed that can be filled with examples of satisfiers for those needs. Table 4.2 is an example of such a matrix.

Table 4.2: Matrix of Fundamental Human Needs and Possible Satisfiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental Human Needs</th>
<th>Being (qualities)</th>
<th>Having (things)</th>
<th>Doing (actions)</th>
<th>Interacting (settings)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>subsistence</td>
<td>physical and mental health</td>
<td>food, shelter, work</td>
<td>feed, clothe, rest, work</td>
<td>living environment, social setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protection</td>
<td>care, adaptability, autonomy</td>
<td>social security, health systems, work</td>
<td>co-operate, plan, take care of, help</td>
<td>social environment, dwelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affection</td>
<td>respect, sense of humour, generosity, sensuality</td>
<td>friendships, family, relationships with nature</td>
<td>share, take care of, make love, express emotions</td>
<td>privacy, intimate spaces of togetherness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>critical capacity, curiosity, intuition</td>
<td>literature, teachers, educational policies</td>
<td>analyse, study, investigate, meditate</td>
<td>schools, universities, communities, families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation</td>
<td>receptiveness, dedication, sense of humour</td>
<td>responsibilities, duties, work, rights</td>
<td>co-operate, dissent, express opinions</td>
<td>associations, parties, churches, neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leisure</td>
<td>imagination, tranquillity, spontaneity</td>
<td>games, parties, peace of mind</td>
<td>day-dream, remember, relax, have fun</td>
<td>landscapes, intimate spaces, places to be alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creation</td>
<td>imagination, boldness, inventiveness, curiosity</td>
<td>abilities, skills, work, techniques</td>
<td>invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret</td>
<td>spaces for expression, workshops, audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identity</td>
<td>sense of belonging, self-esteem, consistency</td>
<td>language, religions, work customs, values, norms</td>
<td>get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself</td>
<td>places one belongs to, everyday settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>autonomy, passion, self-esteem,</td>
<td>equal rights</td>
<td>dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness</td>
<td>anywhere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Max-Neef et al., 1987)
Satisfiers also have different characteristics: they can be violators or destroyers, pseudo-satisfiers, inhibiting satisfiers, singular satisfiers, or synergic satisfiers. Max-Neef shows that certain satisfiers, promoted as satisfying a particular need, in fact inhibit or destroy the possibility of satisfying other needs: e.g. the arms race, while ostensibly satisfying the need for protection, in fact then destroys subsistence, participation, affection and freedom; formal representative democracy, which is supposed to meet the need for participation, often disempowers and alienates; commercial television, while used to satisfy the need for recreation, interferes with understanding, creativity and identity—the examples are everywhere. Synergic satisfiers, on the other hand, not only satisfy one particular need, but also lead to satisfaction in other areas: some examples are breast-feeding, self-managed production, popular education, democratic community organisations, preventive medicine, meditation and educational games.

This model forms the basis of an explanation of many of the problems arising from a dependence on mechanistic economics, and contributes to understandings that are necessary for a paradigm shift which incorporates systemic principles. Its use as an educational tool is also of interest for my research. Max-Neef and his colleagues have found that this methodology:

allows for the achievement of in-depth insight into the key problems that impede the actualization of fundamental human needs in the society, community or institution being studied (Max-Neef et al., 1987:40).

The model also offers a useful approach that meets the requirements of small group, community-based processes that have the effect of allowing deep reflection about one’s individual and community situation, leading to critical awareness and action at the local economic level.

In the South American context, when working with a group, the first step undertaken by Max-Neef and his researchers is to construct the needs matrix according to the destructive elements affecting their society or community. Each of the existential categories, being, having, doing and interacting is considered separately, for each of the nine needs. It takes a day to do this. Each sub-group of about ten people comes up with its own 'matrix of
destruction’, and all matrices are then consolidated into one. The next stage is to divide the
group into nine sub-groups, one for each fundamental need, and the groups are asked to
identify which of all the negative satisfiers for that need is the most destructive—the
consensus to reach this decision takes as long as it requires. This process leads to a deep
understanding and reflection on the problems facing the society and the final result of this
profound reflective engagement is a representation of the most fundamental problems that
need to be tackled in the society or community.

When there is ongoing work within the community, a period of a month elapses and the
group goes through a similar process by producing its utopian matrix. The two final lists
produced will allow for bridges to go from an undesirable situation to a desirable one, with
the community inevitably selecting new satisfiers, which need to be analysed according to
their characteristics: do they come from inside or outside the community; are they singular,
synergic or destructive?

4.5.2.1 Action in the Local Community: An Application

When using this model myself with a small rural community in 1993, I followed a different
methodology. I began with introducing the notion of inquiry—I did not come as an
‘expert’, but as an inquirer, hoping to engage others in the same process of asking questions
and reflecting together. After a general introduction to the shift in paradigm required for
economics to become more relevant to fundamental needs, and introducing the concept of a
new way of thinking about economic issues that placed them in context and not separate
from social, political and ecological aspects, I moved to discussing the concepts of needs
and satisfiers, giving people the opportunity to come up with their own examples. I also
explained the ideas of violating satisfiers, pseudo-satisfiers, inhibiting satisfiers, singular
satisfiers and synergic satisfiers.

In introducing the Max-Neef matrix, I attempted to fill in the cells of the matrix through
asking the following questions:
a) what satisfiers are present in this community for each need, within the four dimensions?
b) for unmet needs, what would be required?
c) can the satisfiers be created from within the community, or is outside input required?
d) what are the positive and negative effects of the satisfiers?
e) what access exists to the necessary economic goods and material resources?

I went through one of the needs (subsistence) with the group as a whole, which raised questions about how to think about needs in this way. The process itself clearly provided a conceptual challenge to all of us. I then divided the group into three, with each group examining two or three needs. The process generated much reflection about the nature of their community and how well key needs were satisfied. The issue of the division in the community between the established farming community and the ‘new settlers’ with different views on agriculture, the environment, schooling, consumption, lifestyles, etc. was frequently mentioned—the participants, who mainly represented the latter group, often reflected on whether the farmers would produce the same answers, and how well could this small group speak for the rest of the community.

The most significant outcome from my point of view came at the end of the day, after discussing the need for ‘affection’. A man spoke about his own emotional isolation after separation and his awareness of other men in a similar situation from the conservative farming community, who seemed to get no support or affection from anyone in the community (nor knew how to reach for it). This came as a great surprise to the other (predominantly female) participants, who immediately began to reflect on ways to reach out to vulnerable and isolated men in their community. After this unexpected self-disclosure, the feeling in the group became much closer and more respectful. I was intrigued by the depth that this process seemed to produce.

Max-Neef et al. (1987: 38) claim that the ‘outcome of the exercise will enable the group to become aware of both its deprivation and potentialities’ and that the value of the exercise is twofold. First, it makes it possible to identify at a local level a strategy for development
aimed at the actualisation of human needs. Second, it is an educational, creative and participatory exercise that brings about a state of deep critical awareness: that is to say, the method is, in itself, a generator of synergic effects. This second aspect was certainly borne out by my own experience; the first aspect would require a much longer time to be realised, as well as a larger group with a greater representation from different sections of the community. Overall, I felt that this process had great potential to meet the requirements for a critical, demystifying approach to education and economics.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The task of this chapter has been to examine the proposition that economics operates as a harmful ideology, an assumption that was the original motivation for this research. Having discussed the epistemological and ontological foundations of ideology critique in chapter 3, it remained to demonstrate how orthodox economics has developed into a dominant ideology historically. Through examination of the social and historical conditions that led to the development of modern economic thought, I showed that the ideas that came to be incorporated into neo-classical analysis originally supported the interests of the dominant classes. My analysis also showed that the ideas and philosophy of the early economists were embedded in the Enlightenment tradition, the hallmark of the mechanistic paradigm that is now seen by many thinkers as an inappropriate framework for thinking about the problems currently facing humanity.

The review of the critiques of the dominant paradigm that have been written since the arrival of political economy on the intellectual stage shows that through the limitations of its assumptions; the obtuseness of its language; its failure to incorporate ecological concerns, ethics and social justice; and its dominance in political discourse, economics has become a harmful ideology that has produced an alienated and disempowered citizenry. A brief coverage of the responses of the economists to criticisms showed the difficulty of attempting to ‘dialogue across paradigms’ with the familiar charges and counter charges of irrationality and irresponsibility.
Through examining how models such as those proposed by Max-Neef can offer a deeper and more meaningful analysis and (possibly) more successful solutions to problems of ecological destruction and gross social injustice, I have shown that there is emerging, phoenix-like, from the ashes left by the scorching critiques of conventional economics, an articulation of alternatives, loosely comprising the domain of a ‘new economics’. Such developments can be considered to belong within the scope of the new environmental paradigm as articulated by Milbrath (1989), Henderson (1991), Ekins (1992) and others. Central to any ‘ideology critique’ is action. The inevitable questions arise: what is to be done to improve the situation? What can I do? My description of my own attempts to apply the Max-Neef model to a specific local community illustrated this embedded ‘imperative to act’ that ideology critique presupposes.

While working in local communities offers great potential for research in the process of demystification and action, my research journey ultimately took me on a different path, that of teaching economics in institutional classrooms. The next chapter provides the link between chapters 2, 3 and 4, which have examined the foundations of the assumptions I took into this research domain, and chapters 6, 7 and 8 that tell my particular research story, by developing a rationale for my chosen research methodology (critical action research) and locating my own practice within the context of how economics is currently interpreted by those teaching in tertiary institutions.
CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH STRATEGIES: APPLICATION OF CRITICAL ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

My original research goals were to develop an empowering curriculum for teaching economics, to demystify the orthodoxy that has come to dominate the discipline and to introduce alternative ways of thinking about economic issues that affect everyday lives. The foregoing chapters sketch the theoretical territory arising from the assumptions that informed my emancipatory intentions. The task of this chapter is to build on this theoretical positioning by arguing why critical or emancipatory action research was the methodological choice for this research.

The chapter begins by providing a link with the previous chapter by putting economics education in context, briefly examining how it is taught in institutions and the community, finding a location and rationale for my own teaching practice and research. Following a scan of the territory of action research, I then examine more closely emancipatory action research, demonstrating the ways in which it was the logical choice of methodology, given the assumptions with which I entered the classroom as researcher. Seven major principles of emancipatory action research are identified from the literature and I show how I interpreted and applied the seven principles of critical action research methodology in the context of teaching economics at TAFE, the location of the first cycle of research.

5.2 THE CONTEXT: TEACHING ECONOMICS

In chapter 4 we briefly scanned the territory of orthodox economics, the critique offered by non-orthodox economists and the ideas of the new economists grounded in the so-called ‘new paradigm’ values. My research goal of teaching an empowering economics within an institutional context was motivated by a sense that as long as economics continued to be taught in the absence of critique, the ideology would continue to
maintain its dominance. The quality of economics education, particularly as it is taught at universities in the U.S., has recently become a focus of attention in response to the steady decline in the numbers of students taking economics as a major the early 1990s (Margo and Siegfried, 1996; Salemi and Eubanks, 1996; Siegfried et al., 1991). Studies have revealed that economists have failed to introduce more innovative teaching methods at the same rate as teachers in other academic disciplines (Becker, 1997; Becker and Watts, 1996; Benzinger and Christ, 1997):

As much of the rest of higher education implements new approaches to teaching, traditional economists may be stuck in the rut of doing to undergraduates what their instructors did to them. In response, students may be voting with their feet when they abandon economics (Becker, 1997: 1354).

Becker and Watts (1996: 450) described the typical American undergraduate economics professor as a ‘male, who lectures to a class of students as he writes text, equations, and graphs on the chalkboard, and who assigns student readings from a standard textbook’. Recent attempts to improve the quality of education in economics have included cooperative learning (Carapreso and Hagerty, 2000; Moore, 1998); Internet technology (Katz and Becker, 1999); classroom experiments (Holt, 1999); case studies (Carlson and Schodt, 1995); experiential learning (Truscott et al., 2000); simulation games (Holt and Laury, 1997) and so on. While such innovations are to be welcomed, it is interesting to note that the response to the concern about declining enrolments is predominantly in terms of changing the way economics is taught, rather than changing the content of what is taught. There seems to be an acceptance that economics is difficult and dry and the focus from committed educators is on how can it be made more exciting and relevant for students (Block, 1999).

Literature on a radical or empowering teaching of economics at university level is more difficult to find. An early exception is Meeropol (1978), who taught orthodox principles within the context of a Marxist critique. Feiner and Roberts (1995) introduced critical thinking into an introductory course through developing a ‘raceless and genderless economics’. Feminist-institutionalists such as Lewis (1995) and Shackleford (1992) offer a strong critique of conventional teaching of economics: its pedagogy lacks active and critical engagement, it fails to make contemporary economic issues the focus of analysis, it uses inappropriate reductionist methodology and it defines economics within a narrow neo-classical framework. Through incorporating student experiences, situating
content in the real world of contemporary economic issues, using frameworks that incorporate values and habits and using an institutionalist definition of economics, it is possible to:

create a site of social action in which our students learn how to use economics to engage the world as informed, critical citizens (Lewis, 1995: 564).

Feminists and economists in the institutional tradition offer the strongest evidence of providing empowering curricula for students studying economics within educational institutions. However, their marginalisation from mainstream economics means that conventional economics teaching is unlikely to shift in response to their critique. The shift to managerialism within universities makes the inclusion of non-mainstream approaches to economics even less likely (Harley and Lee, 1997).

Outside the institutions, popular educators use Freirian processes to take economics to the people (Barry and Dougherty, 1997; Highlander Research and Education Center, 1997). U.S. organisations such as the Highlander Center in Tennessee (discussed in chapter 3), the Center for Ethics and Economic Policy and the Center for Popular Economics aim to demystify economics and give social change advocates a framework for understanding the economy, as part of building economic justice movements through popular education. Union and labour organisations have become key advocates for teaching economics through popular education methods. Through processes of demystification and critical analysis, the focus is on action:

The economy is often portrayed as a global juggernaut crushing any resistance to the almighty forces of the free market. How to counter that image and encourage people to organize for social change is a basic problem for popular educators. They don’t just want to rally their troops to embrace a limited reform or short-term goal, but expose the underlying causes shared by different sorts of problems. This fosters coalition building and nurtures the critical analyses needed to act (Barry and Dougherty, 1997: 32).

As discussed in chapter 3, the model of radical and popular education provided the inspiration for my educational goals. The challenge was how to incorporate these principles, developed in community and grass-roots contexts, into an institutional setting to accomplish these goals. The opportunity came unexpectedly in 1996 when I was asked to teach Economics and Community Welfare, a subject that was then a requirement for the completion of the Associate Diploma in Community Welfare in TAFE NSW, Australia. This teaching offer emerged as the first real opportunity to
realise these goals and I decided to employ critical action research methodology as the most appropriate research design, given my emancipatory intentions. Before exploring the main principles of critical action research, I will briefly review the literature on action research as a methodology in social science.

5.3 A BRIEF REVIEW OF ACTION RESEARCH

Action research as a method of inquiry has its roots in a number of different social and philosophical movements: the *science in education movement* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the *experimental and progressive educational philosophies* influenced by John Dewey (1933); the *group dynamics movement* in social psychology and human relations training, which used action research to address social problems resulting from post-war reconstruction (Kurt Lewin was the first to theorise action research in this context); post-war *reconstructionist curriculum development activity*, which employed professional researchers in consultation with teachers; and the *teacher-researcher movement* originating in the UK (McKernan, 1991).

Education and social change have offered the most fertile territory for the application of action research methodology. As its name implies, it has been favoured by those researchers and practitioners interested in activism for change or improvement, i.e. by those who adhere to an ‘activist’ conception of human beings (Fay, 1987). Within any of the definitions of action research which can be found in the literature, the common elements that emerge are: empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge and social change. The process that the research goes through in meeting these requirements is a ‘spiral’ of action research cycles: planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992), discussed in more detail below.

Grundy and Kemmis (1981: 326) identify the following minimum requirements for action research:

- a project takes as its subject-matter a social practice, regarding it as a strategic action susceptible to improvement;
• the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated; and

• the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice and maintaining collaborative control of the process.

5.3.1 Paradigms of Action Research

Three main types of action research are identified in the literature, corresponding to different paradigms of inquiry (Grundy, 1982; Guba, 1990; McKernan, 1991; McCutcheon and Jung, 1991; McTaggart, 1991). They are aligned with Habermas’s typology of constitutive knowledge interests: the technical, the practical and the emancipatory, as discussed in chapter 3.

Technical action research, usually conducted within a scientific/positivist framework, involves a technical collaboration between researcher and practitioner. The ‘problem’ to be addressed is determined by the researcher, considered the ‘expert’, according to a pre-specified theoretical framework. Practitioners (e.g. teachers) are involved in the process of improvement as part of the research, but it is the (academic) researcher who holds the power over the theoretical contributions and the results (Grundy, 1982).

Practical action research, influenced by the interpretive paradigm of social inquiry, allows for a more flexible approach to the research, not allowed for in the positivist paradigm. Interactive and phenomenological perspectives are central to practical action research (McCutcheon and Jung, 1991). Researchers and practitioners identify problems and possible interventions together through a dialogue process. Emphasis is on understanding practice and solving immediate problems through autonomous, individual, deliberative, action based on reflection. Power resides with the individual researcher and practitioner (McKernan, 1991; Grundy, 1982; McNiff, 1988).

Critical (or emancipatory) action research is located in the domain of critical theory outlined in chapter 3, corresponding to Habermas’s emancipatory action. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986) it best embodies the values of a ‘critical educational science’.
A critical social science goes beyond the technical, which is limited because it fails to take account of interpretive understanding, and it goes beyond the interpretive or practical, which fails to take a critical account of understanding by ignoring the underlying distortions that social, cultural or political conditions impose. Emancipatory action research attempts to get around the limiting aspects of power in technical and practical action research by its claim that power resides in the group, not with the facilitator (practitioner) and not with the individuals in the group (Grundy, 1982). The main way critical action research is distinguished from technical/positivist and interpretive approaches is in the role of the researcher—in critical social science, participants become researchers, as distinct from the detached ‘objective’ positivist researcher and the empathetic observer of interpretive science who only sees the exterior of the action. The researchers become ‘reflexive’ through their reflection on their own positions in the research process and how they are likely to influence the research outcomes (reflexivity is discussed in more detail in later chapters).

Critical action research involves a commitment to political action by acting on the radical critique of current social and political conditions to gain understanding and improve those conditions. Therefore, a criterion of ‘success’ of an action research process is the politicisation of the participants. McTaggart (1991) claims that Freire’s ‘conscientisation’ (discussed in chapter 3) captures the spirit of emancipatory action research. Therefore, unlike other paradigms of research, critical action research makes its values and political intentions clear and transparent from the outset. This has been illustrated in the story of the formation of my ‘activist’ identity in chapter 2.

The process of critical social science is ‘a form of disciplined self-reflection aimed at enlightenment and improvement of the social and material conditions under which the practice takes place’ (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 145). In relating critical theory to educational research:

the teacher needs to develop a systematic understanding of the conditions which shape, limit and determine action so that these constraints can be taken into account. And this is seen to require the active participation of practitioners in collaborative articulation and formulation of theories immanent in their own practices, and the development of these theories through continuing action and reflection (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 152).
Given the assumptions outlined in chapter 2 and my preference for critical and emancipatory education, emancipatory action research therefore emerged as the ‘logical’ mode of inquiry for the educational research undertaken at TAFE. I will now examine in more detail the key principles of an emancipatory action research, with a view to identifying their particular application to my research later in the chapter.

5.4 PRINCIPLES OF CRITICAL ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

What follows is a representation of the principles of critical action research (not in any order of importance) as articulated by theorists such as Carr and Kemmis (1986), Grundy (1982) and McTaggart (1991). It represents a discourse grounded in the critical modernism of Habermas. As Jennings and Graham (1996) note, it has its own particular story, with its own representations and metaphors, underpinned by particular political and ideological assumptions. It has its own definitions of what is false and what is true, what constitutes oppression, what is encompassed by emancipation.

a) Engaging in the Lewinian Self-Reflective Cycle

Any action research process must feature the cycle first explicated by Kurt Lewin (1952) of plan/act/observe/reflect (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). Such cycles reflect similar processes to the experiential learning cycles explicated by Kolb (1984), Kolb and Fry (1975) and Honey and Mumford (1986). The project becomes a program of controlled intervention and practical judgment based on the self-reflective spiral, involving retrospective understanding and prospective action (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988), as demonstrated by Figure 5.1.

A project will generally go through two or more cycles in an iterative process and improvement occurs as lessons from each cycle are incorporated. Advocates of action research argue that it is not ‘soft’ or imprecise because rigorous, systematic inquiry is as integral to the action research paradigm as it is to other research paradigms (Dick, 1992; Kember and McKay, 1996).
b) Promoting Critical Consciousness Through Critical Self-Reflection

The action research process involves the development of understanding of how one’s own practices and understandings are shaped by broader ideological conditions (Grundy, 1982). The mechanism by which this occurs is critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection essentially involves ‘ideology critique’ in which teachers identify how
institutionalised patterns of practice ‘limit the achievement of more rational communication, more just decision making and access to an interesting and satisfying life for all’ (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 194). As we have seen, critical reflection is key to the emancipatory project of critical social science and has therefore become central to the process and application of critical action research methodology.

The aim of critical action research is to form a self-reflecting community in which history is made self-consciously, its emancipatory interest being to transcend relations of dominance, through reciprocal and symmetrical communication, the essence of critical consciousness (McTaggart, 1991). There is a strong connection, therefore, between the process of critical action research and the spirit of Freire’s ‘conscientisation’. According to McTaggart (1991), critical consciousness is collective and involves deliberate action guided by reflection, particularly reflection that rethinks values underlying habitual and traditional ways of behaving. In asking how consciousness is to be transformed, McTaggart suggests that intervention may be required to help ‘reveal distorted consciousness’—i.e. people need support to develop a critical perspective. Strategies might include: talking about contradictions among values; studying historical origins; and recognising habit, tradition and custom as such.

While the notion of a collaborative process and the involvement of critical peers is central to critical action research, it has been argued that it is possible to carry out this reflection as an individual (Elliot, 1993). However, following Brockbank and McGill (1998) I would argue that the possibilities of self-deception are too great and that reflective processes central to critical action research are unlikely to be as productive without such collaborative relationships.

As discussed in chapter 3, critical reflection essentially involves ‘perspective transformation’ through reflecting on underlying assumptions (Mezirow, 1990, 1992) and a capacity to envision alternatives and act on the basis of such capacities. It is only through such reflection that liberatory social change is possible. Kincheloe (1991: 17-18) argues that teachers engaging in research as a source of empowerment find that their own empowerment results from critical reflection:

A more textured reflection on one’s teaching involves a teacher’s understanding of his or her practices, especially the ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions implicit in them ... Teachers as researchers gain the skill to interrogate their own
practices, question their own assumptions and to understand contextually their own situations.

c) Identifying Practice as Central to Research

The main ‘objects’ of critical educational action research, according to Carr and Kemmis (1986), are:
- the teacher’s own educational practices;
- the understandings of these practices; and
- the situations in which teachers practice

with a view to transforming them. As the action research process gets underway it becomes a project aimed at transformation of individual and collective practices, individual and shared understandings, and the situations in which the participants interact.

d) Engaging in Committed Activism

Critical action research results in practical action to promote change—action researchers are deliberately activist; actions are rooted in concrete social experience; and the process of action research involves moving from mere ‘practice’ (based on habit and custom) to ‘praxis’ (informed, committed action) through critical self-reflection (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Grundy 1982).

e) Offering Rational Alternatives

In the process of engaging in a critical action research project, the researcher/practitioner creates an alternative set of values to the irrational and unjust values of institutions by practising values of ‘rationality in communication, justice and democratic participation in decision making, and fulfilment in work … [replacing] one distorted set of practices with another, undistorted set of practices’. This is the essence of the political activism of emancipatory action research: ‘a realignment of tendencies towards empowerment and emancipation on the one hand, as against tendencies towards the entrenchment of sectional self-interests, on the other’ (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 197).
f) Involving a Collaborative Critical Community

The action research literature defines as an essential component the involvement of a critical community of self-reflective participants (Aspland et al., 1996; McTaggart et al., 1997; McTaggart, 1991; Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Collaboration is critical to the process. Disciplined self-reflection aimed at enlightenment and improvement of conditions can be best achieved through collaboration of peers. As argued earlier, without such collaboration, or a critical community, it is unlikely that authentic reflective practice can occur, given the strength of belief structures, values and assumptions that support particular educative practices.

g) Developing Theory

Contribution to knowledge comes about through the development of theories immanent in one’s own practices arising from continual action and reflection. Action research involves the development of ‘language frameworks’ or ‘interpretive categories’ by which practitioners (teachers) can understand their own practice. Theories are therefore based in ‘personal knowledge’, arising from critical reflection on praxis (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Given the aspirations I had for my research, i.e. an empowering experience of learning economics that would involve both teacher and student reflection, and given the (modernist) assumptions I was operating under, critical action research emerged as the most appropriate choice of methodology.

5.5 APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF CRITICAL ACTION RESEARCH AT TAFE

5.5.1 Description of the Research Context: The TAFE Welfare Course and Students

Since 1985 the TAFE Welfare course (as it is known) has been offered to students in New South Wales who have some experience within welfare related fields, or who are already working in the industry. TAFE courses have centrally-designed curricula with a
certain amount of autonomy for teachers at the local college level, mainly with regards to interpreting the curriculum and setting appropriate assessments. The Lismore course developed a solid reputation within the welfare industry as providing excellent training for workers in the skills of counselling and group work, interpersonal communications, professional development, agency management, social research and community work; as well as a sound working knowledge and theoretical understanding of social processes, social policy, psychology, welfare law and economics. I was a regular part-time teacher in this course from its inception in 1985 until 1997, teaching mainly social processes, social research and communications related subjects. After 1997, the course underwent significant restructuring, with emphasis on ‘competency-based training’, and understanding economics was no longer seen as an essential ingredient of a welfare worker’s training. Economics and Community Welfare as a subject was dropped from the curriculum. Unfortunately, the significance of the fact that every decision currently made in the Australian welfare context is determined almost exclusively by economic criteria, based on economic rationalist assumptions, appeared to elude the course designers.

For my research purposes, the TAFE welfare course in 1996 was a ‘safe’ place to explore a different curriculum for the teaching of economics, a curriculum that empowered rather than alienated, as the curriculum design was at that time dominated by structuralist analysis and commitment to social action. I had the support of the head teacher to interpret the economics curriculum flexibly, which allowed incorporation of alternatives and a certain amount of negotiation with students. She was pleased to have the students exposed to an empowering experience of learning economics combined with an opportunity to participate in emancipatory research.

The students I worked with for the eighteen week semester in 1996 were divided into two groups. Group 1 consisted of eleven students undertaking part-time study—the majority were into their fourth and final year of studying welfare. With the exception of one 19 year old, the group consisted of mature-age people; there were two men and ten women; three students were from non-English speaking backgrounds (Swiss, German and Indian), one had Aboriginal heritage and identified as Aboriginal; and all were from working class backgrounds, as are the majority of TAFE students.
Group 2 was comprised, with one exception, of students doing the course full-time, so they had already completed one year of full-time study, and were in the third of the full four semesters required for completion of the associate diploma. Again, the students were mature aged, with the youngest in her mid-twenties; there were eight women and six men; one student had a physical disability; all were of European heritage, with one from a non-English speaking background (Swiss); and all identified as being raised working class or currently working class.

All the students were previously known to me as I had taught them earlier in the course, and I was also teaching most of them another subject concurrently, Social Inquiry (an introduction to social research methods). I would describe my relationship with both the groups as positive—our interactions were generally lively, with a lot of humour. I had had a longer association with the students in Group 1, as I had taught most of them more than once over the years they were doing the course, and my sense was that I was more immediately trusted by these students than those in Group 2, whom I had only taught once before. The students in both groups knew each other well, so there was no need for a great deal of time to be spent on group maintenance.

The two classes were timetabled consecutively, so I went straight from one class into the other, with a short break in between. The part-time group, Group 1, was first, always a lively and enjoyable class, and it often provided a fertile ground for ideas and discussion that I would take into Group 2. The full-time group faced more challenges and proved less responsive to the demands of reflective learning as the semester developed. The pressures of institutional requirements made stronger demands on these students than on those in Group 1.

Having decided to invite the students to be collaborators in the research, I outlined my agenda from the outset, telling them the story of the experiences that had led to my resolve: learning undergraduate economics; my disillusionment with it at the postgraduate level; my switch to studying sociology; my growing interest in ‘social activism from the heart’, leading to my reclaiming the old economic knowledge in a new way; and my interest in researching educational processes that contribute to empowerment of all people in the community with respect to the role of economics in their lives. In short, I made the modernist intention of the project very clear.
I now turn to a summary of how the seven principles of critical action research outlined above were applied in this context. The detailed ‘story’ of the research process told in chapter 6 demonstrates more fully how these principles were applied.

**a) Engaging in the Lewinian Self-Reflective Cycle**

Any action research process must feature the cycle first explicated by Kurt Lewin (1948, 1952) of plan/act/observe/reflect (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). The project becomes a program of controlled intervention and practical judgment based on the self-reflective spiral, involving retrospective understanding and prospective action (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Cycles of plan/act/observe/reflect were iterated each week during the semester. For this reflective cycle, I had chosen a friend and colleague to be a critical friend—she was an experienced adult educator, understood the dynamics of power relations in the classroom and was willing to challenge my assumptions thoughtfully and supportively. In the first class, after asking the students how they felt about learning economics and what they understood economics to be about, I invited them to be collaborators in the project of developing an empowering curriculum. After they responded positively, I wrote reflections based on that experience in the classroom, incorporating comments from my critical friend and feeding back comments and responses from the students. After the third week, at the instigation of the students, we engaged in a reflective exchange that took the following form: I would write up what happened in the class in terms of the content covered and the process we engaged in. I would also write my understanding of what I had heard in the reflections that each of them articulated at the beginning of the class (reflections on both process and content) and my reflections on their comments. I would also write a summary of the content covered in the class and my thinking about how to tackle the next topic and what I thought should be covered next. These writings would be handed out to the students in the following week and they would then become the basis of further reflection. Figure 5.2 demonstrates the application of the action research spiral.
This reflective process itself became empowering for the students as they felt part of the development of the curriculum and their voices were acknowledged and validated, as the research story reveals in the next chapter. Hence, in the language of critical action research methodology, the project became a program of controlled intervention and practical judgment based on the self-reflective spiral, involving retrospective understanding and prospective action.

**Figure 5.2**

The Action Research Spiral Applied at TAFE
b) **Promoting Critical Consciousness through Critical Self-Reflection**

McTaggart (1991) asks: what contributes to transformation of consciousness? My research framed this question as ‘what educational processes will lead to a critical understanding that will inform action around changing the economic system and dominant ideology?’

Critical consciousness was developed through peer consultation with critical friends and reflective exchange with students—awareness was raised about power relationships through making them visible and through offering alternatives to habitual practice. The focus on ideological conditions was demonstrated through the content of the course, which continually stressed the ideological basis of economics (as described in chapter 4) and the process which allowed challenging of existing power relationships in the classroom. The classroom became the ‘laboratory’ where attempts at more ‘rational communication’ and more democratic decision making were made. There was little interaction with the institution however—consciousness raising was confined to the classroom.

Following Kincheloe (1991), I incorporated my own reflections throughout the research, explicitly identifying the ‘ambiguities, contradictions and tensions’ implicit in my teaching practice which contributed to a ‘contextual understanding’ of my own situation. As we shall see, these reflections led to a deeper questioning of the process of critical action research itself.

c) **Identifying Practice as Central to Research**

The main ‘object’ of my research in the TAFE setting was the ‘practice’ of teaching economics for empowerment. The questions that came to inform my practice were:

- what extent to involve students in the development of the curriculum?
- how to demystify an ideology that has such a grip on the consciousness of individuals in our society?
- how to make the process as inclusive as possible?
- how to make power relationships in the classroom transparent?
- how to empower students in the management and control of their learning?
My ‘understandings’ of these practices developed through a process of reciprocal reflective exchange with both students and peers. The situation in which I was practising was also an object for research—the classroom setting, the TAFE Welfare course and its structure and requirements, the TAFE educational system and the wider political, social and economic context.

d) Engaging in Committed Activism

My ‘deliberate activism’ and praxis revolved around consciously involving the students as collaborators in the research from the beginning; writing up my reflections together with their reflections and sharing my observations with them, which in turn became the basis for further reflections; making visible power relationships; and challenging students to design their own assessment process. My activist intent was always made transparent. I acted on the assumption that raising consciousness changes awareness and leads to action in the world. While the reflective learning experience occurred almost exclusively in the domain of the classroom, students took their understandings of economics into their own lives and communities. Each week they reflected on their economic lives, developing new understandings of how they could act to change their disempowered relationship with the larger structures of the economic lifeworld.

e) Offering Rational Alternatives

The students were very aware from the first week that they were being offered a radical alternative to traditional practice. My interpretation of ‘rational practices’ included equalisation of participation through allowing each student in turn to be heard at the beginning of each class and for these reflections to be written down and reflected back; through giving students power in decision making, particularly in relation to assessment and participation; and through involving them in my thinking about the content (in my role as ‘knowledge gatekeeper’).

f) Involving a Collaborative Critical Community

I interpreted this principle at two levels. Firstly, I saw the students as collaborators and engaged them in thinking about the practice of how they were being taught, how they were being empowered or not empowered and how the curriculum process was
developing. Of course, this is problematic given the power issues, as will be seen in chapter 6. Action research literature interprets ‘collaborative community’ as comprising peers, other practitioners and critical friends. As most of the educational action research literature comes from teachers in primary and secondary schools, the notion of students as collaborators rarely arises. However, researchers such as Boomer et al. (1992) have collaborated with school students in negotiating the curriculum. The literature on action research in higher education (e.g. Zuber-Skerritt, 1992; Kember and McKay, 1996; Kember et al., 1996) also places strong emphasis on peer collaboration.

I did have a critically reflective community that I drew on as well. This community did not consist of TAFE teacher peers, but of trusted colleagues with university teaching experience and committed social activists, with interest in the research. We continue to meet as a group: four women, all teachers and facilitators who know each other well, supportively challenge each other in our personal and professional endeavours and collaborate on our projects. Our process involves ‘sharing the time’, so each of us has the benefit of focused attention of the group for periods of up to one hour. Attention to process is a key to the group’s success. It requires time and commitment, but all participants recognise the value of the simple acts of being deeply listened to, thoughtfully questioned and lovingly challenged. I took the challenges and insights from this peer group into the classroom and shared them with the students. The influence of peer critique becomes evident in the unfolding story in chapter 6.

**g) Developing Theory**

As will be discussed more fully in the following chapters, theories and understandings arising from my praxis in the classroom, grounded in my personal knowledge, revolved around the centrality of relationship in the empowerment process; the multiplicity of understandings of empowerment that emerged from such a process; and the significance of activism ‘from the heart’ in creating conditions for empowerment.

**5.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides the link between the theoretical territories explored in chapters 3 and 4 and the research stories to follow in chapters 6, 7 and 8. I have argued that the principles of critical action research methodology were consciously applied in the
TAFE classroom, a methodology deemed most appropriate given the modernist emancipatory assumptions, articulated in chapter 2, which informed my research intentions in 1996. This methodology, however, is not unproblematic, and the critically reflective process I undertook as part of the research requirements of action research rendered my (previously unexamined) assumptions open to question. While the ideals of critical educational science, as outlined in this chapter, appealed to my own ethics and moral ideals, the practical reality tells a more complex story. In keeping with the ‘emergent’ nature of this research process and the writing of the thesis, the story of the experience of ‘doing critical action research’ in the classroom is told in some detail in the chapter to follow, demonstrating in greater detail the attempted application of the principles outlined in this chapter. The story is told in a way that maintains commitment to reflective practice through the use of reflective ‘voices’ throughout. These voices highlight some fundamental questions about the ontology and epistemology of the critical theories underpinning critical action research that have concerned critics in the postmodern tradition. They also highlight some of the difficulties experienced by teachers who find the ideals of the educative project of critical social science impractical and unattainable (McKinlay, 1993). Through taking up the emerging questions in chapter 7, new research questions emerge to inform the subsequent research cycle at Southern Cross University, analysed in chapter 8.
CHAPTER 6

TEACHING ECONOMICS AT TAFE:
THE STORY OF EMPOWERMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I outlined the rationale for and application of critical action research principles in the TAFE context. This chapter tells the story of the TAFE experience. In chapter 2 I presented a picture of myself as an ‘activist’ in relationship to my teaching of economics for empowerment, and I demonstrated how critical reflection became central to my teaching practice. As explained in the previous chapter, I kept a reflective journal week by week (up until week 15) that I shared with each group of students, and which became the pivot around which the classes revolved. The ‘narrative’ of the classes, in a chronological sense, is to be found within those writings.

As I came to develop this (critical) reflective writing process, a number of regular features evolved which loosely followed Smyth’s (1989) four steps, discussed in chapter 3:

1) a summary of the content covered in the previous class and how the students responded to it (describing);
2) a summary of the reflections offered by the students in the class, largely my feeding back what I had heard them say, having taken notes or taped their comments (describing);
3) my reflections on their reflections (informing);
4) my reflections on the process of the class and how the students were responding to the collaborative approach, based on my own questioning and that of critical peers (informing and confronting); and
5) my thinking about how to proceed with the next topic (reconstructing).

The story that emerged from this reflective exchange is told in this chapter. In keeping with my commitment to critically reflective practice as part of the action research process, I offer this ‘story telling’ in through three voices:
1. the ‘neutral reporter’ (NR)—relays the ‘facts’ of what happened in the classes, offering a chronological narrative of the classroom experience, based largely on my writing in 1996, and supported by additional information written in hindsight for clarification purposes;

2. the ‘reflective practitioner’ (RP) (in bold)—reproduces my reflections as I wrote them and handed out to the students in 1996, demonstrating my reflective practice at the time (as described above), informed by the requirements of critical action research and supported by a critical community of peers;¹

3. the ‘critical reflector’ (CR) (in italics)—offers a ‘commentary’ on the sometimes naive voice of the reflective practitioner from a vantage point that names the assumptions made and reflects on some of the silences and absences in the narrative, after a distance of some three years.

The chapter is divided into four parts, which represent the stages of the development of the two groups throughout the semester. As previously described in chapter 5, Group 1 was a group of part-time Welfare students, in their fourth year of study, with well-established relationships and a history of a relationship with me as teacher; while Group 2 were almost all full-time Welfare students in their third semester of the two-year course, having been together intensely as a group for eighteen months, with little experience of my teaching. The stages of development of the two groups are described in terms of Tuckman’s familiar model of group development (cited in Tyson, 1998): forming, storming, norming, performing and mourning. As is often the case, each group did not follow a strictly linear path of development as suggested by Tuckman’s model, but the story of the experience throughout the semester can be structured loosely around these stages for narrative purposes.

Part I covers the first three weeks, when the research process was initiated and the activist agenda was established (the ‘forming’ stage). Part II covers weeks 4 to 8 when

¹ In keeping with my desire to maintain an authentic narrative, I have reproduced the language of this voice exactly as it was ‘speaking’ at the time, which explains why the tense I used moves between the past when I am describing what happened in the class, and the present when I am reflecting on the experience.
there was a divergence in the experience of the two groups—Group 1 complied fully with the research agenda (the ‘norming’ stage) while Group 2 resisted (the ‘storming’ stage). Part III covers weeks 9 and 10, a break and a change of scene in which I reviewed the state of play for both groups (an attempt to bring the groups, especially Group 2, into the ‘performing’ stage). Part IV covers weeks 11 to 14, a period characterised by engagement with alternative ideas and reflecting deeply on empowerment; culminating in a consolidation of learning and application of understanding with debates, student presentations and interactive discussions (both groups reaching the ‘performing’ stage). Both groups entered the mourning stage through a course evaluation and closure at the end of the semester (week 18). While the semester was 18 weeks long, the reflective writing I used to communicate with the students ceased after week 15, the end of the critical action research process for the purposes of this part of the research study.

6.2 PART I – INSTIGATING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

(WEEKS 1-3)

This initial three-week period offered the most productive ground for reflective practice, as the students were introduced to the research agenda and offered opportunities to negotiate both curriculum and assessment. By the third week (the third cycle of action research), the two groups had begun to diverge in their responses and experiences. For this reason, the amount of material covered in the first part is more detailed than in the other three parts, as I was confronted with the complexities of how to conduct the research and how to respond to the diverse concerns expressed by the students.

6.2.1 Beginnings: Making the Research Proposal in Week 1

Neutral Reporter: When I realised I had the opportunity to teach economics in the way I wanted to, I made a decision to involve the two groups of students actively in my research. This meant proposing to them that we engage in a collaborative action research process to discover what educational processes lead to an empowered relationship to economics. Before making this proposal, however, I asked each class how they were feeling about embarking on a class in economics. Many expressed
apprehension. Fears seemed to be related to the ‘mathematical’ nature of economics and its incomprehensibility. There were doubts about whether they had the necessary capacity to comprehend its complexity. Others were interested and excited about learning some new ideas. This appeared to be associated with the fact that they knew that I would be taking an ‘alternative’ approach, as some of them had been in other classes where I had introduced some ideas about a different way of thinking about economics.

After exploring some of these feelings, I introduced an exercise which involved handing out cards to each student. On one side they were to write ‘what I think economics is about is...’ and finish the statement; and on the other side they were to write ‘what I would like to know more about is...’ and finish the statement.

Reflective Practitioner: This gave each student an opportunity to reflect on her/his own knowledge and where they felt there were gaps. I chose this approach for three reasons: one was to give each person the chance to express a view (rather than in a group brainstorm where the airspace can become dominated by a minority of enthusiastic and articulate students); another was so I would have a record of the position students were in at the beginning of the class as a basis for comparison with how their learning was progressing throughout the semester; and finally there could be a reference for content for the course outline to be devised with the students.

Critical Reflector: What I did not seem to recognise here was that asking students about their knowledge about a subject that I knew was to them inherently mysterious and alienating was not likely to lead to feelings of ‘empowerment’: rather, it put them in a position of humiliation, having to ‘declare their ignorance’. As it turned out, I did not use the material again, nor did I use it to evaluate learning—possibly this could have led to the students feeling I was less trustworthy. As for using the material for the course outline, I only used that which happened to fit with my own ideas about what should be taught! I seemed to be unaware of my use of power in this situation. What appeared to be collaborative may have been illusory.
NR: After gathering up the cards, I read out the anonymous answers to the class, summarised the main points coming from them, and moved on to the next step. Student responses to these questions appear in Appendix 1.

RP: I felt it best to leave the class with a sense of where they were as a group without further discussion, which may have left some students feeling that they had ‘got it wrong’ if I had discussed my own interpretations of their answers.

CR: According to Brookfield (1995) this is a common assumption made by teachers aiming for democratic classrooms. Teachers who refuse to offer their opinions can be seen as being manipulative and untrustworthy. This was not a common feature of my teaching practice at the time, but in this instance, my thinking may have been distorted by an unexamined ‘hegemonic’ assumption about democracy in the classroom, supported from my particular ‘reading’ of the democratic radical educators, such as Shor (1987, 1992).

NR: I then took the opportunity to give some information about my own journey in relationship to the complex and perplexing subject of economics. I relayed much of the story that I have described in chapter 2, from my early studies in economics in the 1970s, through my disillusionment with the discipline and moving into different territory, and finally my ‘reclaiming’ of my old economic knowledge through an activist commitment to ‘teach for empowerment’, which provided the motivation for my PhD research. At this point I took the plunge and asked each of the classes if they would be prepared to be my co-collaborators in this research. I described this as being engaged in the formation of a curriculum that would encompass a radical (in the sense of empowering) teaching of economics. It would mean reflecting on the learning process as they were engaged in it. It would mean jointly deciding what they would be learning and how.

RP: To my surprise and delight, many responded to this challenge willingly and enthusiastically. The first inkling of the differences between the two groups emerged at this point, however. Students in Group 1 appeared unreservedly positive—willing to embark on a different journey of learning, and trusting that the experience would be beneficial. I think they were relieved that their fears about the dryness and the difficulty of the subject matter would not be realised, and that
they might even have some fun. Group 2 was definitely interested and intrigued on
the whole, but the students were more diverse in their reception. There was more
scepticism and concern about assessment. After receiving such a positive response
from the other group, I was charged with enthusiasm on entering this class, and
they may not have had the heart to disappoint me. On the other hand, there were
members of this class who had a more radical approach than anyone in the
previous class. In a way, this group comprised a broader cross section of
backgrounds: radical activists, a gay man, orthodox Christians, commune
dwellers, housewives ... a complex mix. Discussions were often heated and
challenging to facilitate.

I assured the students that they would be able to read and comment on my own
reflections on the process as it unfolded, as well as writing their own reflections.
Some students from Group 1 commented that to be involved in such a project was
a privilege. I felt very grateful that I was working with a group of people willing to
take risks and who were enthusiastic about their learning.

CR: My agenda and enthusiasm for the project was very apparent and made
transparent to the students from the outset. Students would not have been under any
illusions about my motives. It is quite possible that I unconsciously took advantage of
my charismatic influence, particularly with Group 1, to convince them to take part in
the project. It is also possible that students in Group 2 did not really have an
opportunity to voice their scepticism. TAFE students are used to accepting what the
teacher offers. Negotiating the curriculum is not an option generally. As noted by
authors such as Apple (1979, 1996), McLaren (1989) and Boomer et al (1993), this is a
feature of institutionally-inspired passivity due to the power held by the controllers of
knowledge, as well as the formal power invested in teachers by virtue of their
employment contracts. I had not set enough of a tone of critical thinking or inquiry with
the class so that they would have felt safe to refuse to take part, or would have had
language to offer a critical questioning of the process.

6.2.1.1 Designing a Curriculum

NR: The next step was to determine how to plan a curriculum or course outline. I had
made copies of the ‘official’ TAFE curriculum for the subject Economics and
Community Welfare, as well as a list of topics that I had come up with, which incorporated those in the course outline and extended further into alternative approaches.

**RP:** The TAFE curriculum at that time took a radical structuralist approach, in the form of adopting the principles of radical political economy, placing emphasis on demystifying economics as an ideology. Fortunately, a basis of critique existed within the formal curriculum, making the changes we proposed an extension of its underlying values and philosophy, rather than a radical departure. The addition of ‘new paradigm’ ways of thinking, the creative alternatives offered by many thinkers from within and outside the discipline, would have been an addition not envisaged by the original curriculum designers.

**CR:** At this point I was taking on the role of ‘gatekeeper of knowledge’, because it seemed unlikely that many students would have been exposed to these ideas in the course of their studies or their lives. This ‘control’ over the curriculum by the ‘gatekeeper’ links into the debate about empowering education which makes the role of ‘expert’, or imparter of information, problematic (Freire, 1973a). It is unlikely that the students would have had enough information to judge whether the topics I was proposing would satisfy their needs (or my need) for their empowerment. Again, the dynamics of power in the classroom permitted only an illusion of collaboration (Apple, 1996; Boomer et al, 1993).

**NR:** The next step was to go through the formal curriculum and the additional topics. I asked the students if they had any suggestions to add. One student hoped there would be an emphasis on feminist approaches, while another was particularly interested in exploring all the different alternative theories. When it came to deciding how we would proceed from there, there were differences between the two groups. Group 1 proposed that I come up with a course outline that could be discussed the following week; while Group 2 proposed that they come up with an outline, as well as me, and we would negotiate the final curriculum the following week. We touched briefly on the topic of assessment at this point. People in Group 2 felt the keeping of a journal would be essential, and that it could form the basis of an assessment event. Neither group was ready to make firm assessment agreements until the course outline had been determined.
6.2.1.2 Reflections on the Initiation of the Research Process

NR: In my reflective response to this research process, which I shared with the students the following week, my enthusiasm was transparent:

RP: I felt extremely elated after the two classes, as it seemed my dream of tackling this challenge of writing a radical curriculum for economics in an empowering context for learners was to be realised. I also feel extremely appreciative of my students whose generosity in being prepared to embark on this journey with me seems exceptional. I am also aware that they have much to gain from the process as well: many of them have expressed a deep desire to understand the mysteries of this alienating subject, as well as looking forward to a break from the familiar format of learning within the TAFE institutional context. I expect they feel they have nothing to lose. I also get the feedback that my enthusiasm is infectious—could it be possible that they are being unconsciously manipulated?

CR: I was aware of some discomfort at the time about imposing my agenda. I was also aware of the power dynamics present in the classroom. The fact that I was prepared to share these discomforts with the students indicates a willingness to model critical reflection, even if I was unlikely to be swayed from my path. I was determined to convince them that this would be a good thing to do, such was my conviction of the ‘rightness’ of the cause.

My ‘contextual understanding’ (Kincheloe, 1993) involved a perception of the effect of my own style, grounded in the existing relationships I had with the students. It would be misguided to assume that the students’ willingness to engage in this project was derived solely from their (independent) desire for learning. I was always conscious that a combination of my public personality (confident, funny and lively), my position as teacher within the institution (although often an unusual one, at times giving my colleagues cause to raise an eyebrow or two), and my attitude towards orthodox instrumentalist approaches to learning would combine to influence the interactions and involvement of my ‘co-researchers’. It would be dangerous and naive to assume that this did not raise ethical dilemmas. The way around this for me was to share openly such thoughts and reflections, like the one above, with the students each week.
NR: As well as the immediate emotional response, I reflected more deeply on the process I was embarking on after consultation with critical friends who were experienced in the dilemmas offered by research of this nature, and as required by critical action research (McTaggart, 1991).

RP: Through this experience of critical reflection I realised that I needed to be aware of my particular role in this situation, and that I was in a position of power in relation to the students, particularly as I was assessing them. I was the person with the knowledge and institutional power—in this way I could never be seen to be an ‘equal’ collaborator with the students. [In consultation with a critical peer, I] developed a model to illustrate the situation that looked like this:

Figure 6.1

Radical Education: Student/Teacher Interaction

The point of interaction between the power and knowledge gatekeeper and the community (in the form of the students and their experiences and backgrounds in the community) is the place where radical education and reflection can occur. The broader context within which this takes place is the shifting social and economic paradigm. It seemed that the important initial task was to clarify a structure that would make the process possible within the hatched area of interaction. This
meant being clear about roles, i.e. those of student/community member and teacher/information gatekeeper; clarifying the context within which this all happens; and also making conscious the power relations issues present within the classroom.

The three main tasks that I needed to achieve within the context of this research process emerged as:

- *information exchange*, coming from the knowledge location (i.e. me as teacher);
- *radical education* as a process—negotiation between the teacher and students (the shaded area in the model above); and
- *community empowerment*—how the students go out and make use of their knowledge, and what implications there are for the broader community in relation to economics as a result of this process.

This analysis made it possible for me to consider how to proceed into the next class, and also showed the ‘blind spots’ I was in danger of carrying with me into the classroom. I can see that this ongoing discussion and analysis throughout the research is going to be an essential component in maintaining my own integrity as well as the integrity of the work itself.

CR: The above analysis and reflection is the clearest example of genuine critical reflection (particularly the processes of informing, confronting and reconstructing as described by Smyth, 1989) to emerge from the process of teaching these classes throughout the semester. It made my ‘good intentions’ clear, and modelled critical reflection for the students. The role of ‘community empowerment’ was not really clear and did not come to figure strongly in the teaching process—it was part of the ‘unknown’ outcomes of the research. This reflective feeding back to the students also demonstrated critical action research in practice and set the tone for the reflection that continued in the following weeks. Identifying my own ‘blind spots’ was an attempt to uncover ‘hegemonic’ or paradigmatic assumptions (Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow, 1990). I was still unaware of the assumptions underlying a commitment to radical education, assumptions that fail to critique the notion that ‘liberation for all’ is a good thing.
6.2.2 The Cycle Continues: The Second Week of Classes

NR: For the second class, I prepared a suggested course outline for discussion as agreed on the previous week. My thinking behind the proposed list of topics was to begin with an historical perspective, putting economic thinking in its historical and social context, before going on to examine the basic theoretical principles and assumptions upon which much of the standard neo-classical theory is based. I then suggested moving into a critique and demystification of these principles, and introducing the insights and principles of the proposed ‘new paradigm’ theories. I proposed that during second term, we would move into a discussion of major topics which lend themselves to a comparison between traditional and new approaches, especially those which have relevance for welfare. The outline I proposed is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.2.96</td>
<td>History and development of economic thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.2.96</td>
<td>Basic introduction to economic theory as ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3.96</td>
<td>Underlying assumptions of economic theory—critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.3.96</td>
<td>The Australian economic system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>19.3.96</td>
<td>Government vs. the market in the Australian system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.3.96</td>
<td>Government economic policy and welfare; inflation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.4.96</td>
<td>Alternative approaches to economics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-------------Easter Break-------------

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.4.96</td>
<td>Measurement: indicators—formal, informal economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.4.96</td>
<td>Economic growth, development and welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>30.4.96</td>
<td>Wants vs needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.5.96</td>
<td>Employment and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.5.96</td>
<td>Values and ethics in economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>21.5.96</td>
<td>Economics and the distribution of power and wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>28.5.96</td>
<td>Economics and the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.6.96</td>
<td>Wealth creation—the Ekins model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.6.96</td>
<td>Third World connections: free trade policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>18.6.96</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I handed out the suggested course outline and asked for comments, additions, etc., both groups of students murmured their general approval and many appeared
excited and interested in the content. I then illustrated the ‘model’ above, emphasising the importance of being clear about the time spent on information exchange (or content) and time spent on radical education (or process).

RP: I was mindful of the fact that the topics I had devised would form the basis of the information exchange identified as a key component of the educational process, and for which I would take major responsibility. The students had indicated the week before that this was what they expected of me. It would seem that this is an appropriate and required role for me to take, even though on the surface it may appear that it does not conform to a true ‘emancipatory’ approach to education (in the Freirian or Habermas sense). This may be a continuing and ongoing dilemma in this research—how much of a balance between a ‘telling’ style of teaching, and an ‘empowering’ style where my role as educator is much more facilitative. The students’ desire for guidance is being clearly expressed. The question for me is: how much is this an outcome of a well-thought out position that takes into account the realities of the teaching situation, and how much is due to an inherited pattern of passivity in the institutional context?

The students seemed relieved that I was willing to take responsibility for giving information as they all felt inadequately informed in this field of economics and were definitely looking to me for guidance. I acknowledged that I am the knowledge ‘gatekeeper’, even though I do not feel anything like an ‘expert’ in the field. They found the explanation of the model [above] very helpful, and for some, it was quite enlightening, especially as the power relationships that were inherent in the classroom situation were being made explicit and consciously acknowledged.

CR: Again, I was making my thinking transparent, consistent with my democratic principles. What is also apparent to me now is that from the outset I was experiencing the tension of ‘role conflict’ in attempting to come to terms with the contradictions in my positions both as teacher and as a ‘co-participant in social transformation’. The assumptions that I took initially into the classroom—based on my understanding from critical social science that power needs to be equalised in settings where empowering education occurs—did not take account of the realities of power dynamics that exist in a setting such as this where the practitioner/teacher inevitably holds more power than the participants. In this classroom situation, the students required me as teacher to set
boundaries and limits and to ‘act like a teacher’ in order for them to be empowered in their learning.

NR: The next step was to give the students the opportunity to come up with processes that would enable them to be more empowered in their learning about economics. For this, they broke into groups of 3-4. The previous day, each group had been involved in a discussion with me in the subject Social Inquiry about ‘ways of knowing’ and I reminded them to reflect on their own preferred methods of learning and the ways that they acquired knowledge as part of their discussions. I noticed as I was moving between the groups that their discussions involved some of the issues that were coming up for them as a result of having to discuss the processes of their own learning, something they were unused to doing. I suggested that they make note of these issues, as well as attempting to stay with the task of coming up with suggestions about how they could best learn the material. Both groups were engaged and very challenged by this exercise. When it was time to report back to the class, the processes and issues were recorded.

The types of processes that Group 1 came up with included:

- journal—what you understand, what you don’t, reflections
- minutes at end of class for reflection and writing time in journal
- out of classroom—observe an intentional community
- listening/information exchange
- working sheets/group research project
- critical analysis

- handouts with questions—have you understood?
- discussion time—read ahead
- students bring home information
- discussion groups
- debating
- role play
- workshop model
- individual research

Group 2 came up with these suggestions:

- games/simulations
- readings on an issue (different perspectives/debate)
- individual group research/presentations
- videos_MULTI-MEDIA_visual
- debate
- presentations
- guest speakers
- small groups

- learning by investigation into an everyday object
- outings/excursions
- newspaper articles/discussion/critique
- support notes
- role play/interactives
- market links and pathways of money
- design a new economic system
- displays/charts
Issues raised by Group 1 included questions such as:

- what is radical education?
- how do we know what we have to offer?
- how can I relate information to my work and practicum?
- time management and structure
- legitimacy of knowledge coming from students

Issues raised by Group 2, on the other hand centred on assessment, keeping the content simple and concerns about how time would be structured.

**RP:** The issues and concerns [raised in Group 1] are very revealing, and show a real attempt to come to an understanding of what sort of process they are actually being involved in. Some [small] groups [in Group 1] spent nearly all their time discussing these questions, which are the sort of questions that are very relevant for this whole research process. It seems to me that these students are taking up the challenge of being co-researchers, and are taking the task very seriously. For this I am very grateful and heartened.

**CR:** It seems naïve now to assume that the students’ concerns in Group 1 were a reflection on how seriously they were taking the research process. I still feel confident that they trusted my intentions, because of the relationships we had built over the previous three or four years. However, it could be that they were expressing fears based on the tensions experienced from the fragmentation and role conflict mentioned above. It is also possible that the lack of real scepticism (more apparent in Group 2) reflected institutionalised passivity and unquestioning acceptance of authority.

**NR:** After assuring the students that we would be discussing assessment the following week, I moved into my role as ‘information gatekeeper’ and took the class on an excursion back into history. I used material from Hazel Henderson (1988, 1991), Guy Routh (1975), James Robertson (1990) and an issue of *The Ecologist* (1992), which examined the history of the expropriation of the commons and its relationship to the Industrial Revolution, through the provision of a mass of dispossessed labourers for the
new factories. The ‘lecture’ covered economic concepts from the time of the Greeks (Aristotle’s concepts of ‘just price’ and the nature of exchange); through to the Middle Ages and the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas (the ‘moral’ issues of usury and prices); and then the birth of modern economics which coincided with the Age of Enlightenment with its positivist science, philosophical foundations of individualism and democracy, and the rise of modern European capitalism and imperialism. I finished with the beginnings of modern economic thought, attributed to Sir William Petty and Adam Smith.

RP: The level of interest and attention appeared very high—people are always very eager, it seems to me, to deepen their understanding of themselves through placing their current situation in an historical context. If this is meaningfully presented, history ‘comes alive’ in the present. I reminded the class that this really was ‘our’ history (in the sense of our Anglo and European origins)—in fact, the British settlement in Australia could be directly attributed to the process of the enclosures and their social consequences.

CR: I still hold to this belief that historical understanding is key to critical reflection and an appreciation of our present circumstances. I did not, however, examine the ideological nature of the particular histories I was presenting. I was attracted to these versions of history because they accorded with my own beliefs about the oppressive nature of economics as an ideology. I was guilty of presenting these perspectives as ‘fact’, which did not give the students the opportunity to think critically about them, as they were alternatives to the dominant story. In my subsequent teaching at University, I incorporated critical reflection on these historical texts into my teaching.

6.2.3 The Third Cycle: Week 3 – the Groups Diverge

NR: From this point in the process, the experiences of the two groups started to diverge significantly. From the first week I had been writing up a report of what had happened in the class along with my reflections. I found I needed to keep comments on the processes in each of the classes separate, and decided that ethically it did not make sense to reveal what was happening in one group to the other, even though they no doubt compared notes at times informally outside classes.
6.2.3.1 The Process of Negotiating Assessment: A Step Towards
‘Empowerment’ (Group 1)

NR: In keeping with the principles of empowerment, I wanted the students to have some
sense of ‘ownership’ of the assessment process, even though the ultimate responsibility
for assessment in the TAFE institutional setting belongs with the teacher. The usual
procedure is for the teacher to adopt the assessment events that are centrally set by the
TAFE Commission, and any changes need to gain approval from the assessment
authority. The students had come to accept this as the norm.

I referred the class back to the previous week when we had identified the keeping of a
journal as an essential component of the process we were engaged in. I suggested that
this could form the basis of an assessment item, perhaps a written reflection of their
learning over the semester, with particular reference to the processes that led to them
feeling a sense of empowerment in relation to economics. This sparked a discussion
about what the journals should contain. I reminded them that the emphasis in the journal
needed to be reflections about their learning, i.e. they needed to consider questions like:
‘what has my learning been?’ and ‘what has facilitated my learning?’

RP: As the discussion developed, with the students debating what a journal should
ecompass, it seemed to me that the students were looking to me for answers. I
realised that as long as I was out the front, marker in hand, the focus was
definitely on me as the leader and all the communication was going through me. As
soon as I identified this, I said what I perceived was happening, and suggested that
the class break into small groups to come up with a question that they could keep
in mind as they wrote their journals and which would form the basis of the
‘reflection piece’ they would write at the end of the semester.

As soon as the familiar power dynamic was broken, and the students were thrown
back on their own resources rather than looking to me for guidance, I observed
restlessness and some resistance. One woman cried out in frustration; ‘I can’t cope
with the responsibility!’ And another: ‘this is so complicated!’ And yet another
asked: ‘Kath, what is your PhD about?’ This came from a genuine desire to
understand, to be helpful, and above all wanting the research to work, which to me
was very satisfying. It seemed that the answer to this question was essential for
them to devise an appropriate question [for the journal]. I realised then that the desire for a genuine collaboration was very strong, and for this group in particular, apparently more important than the marks they would get at the end.

CR: Again, the presence of the naive assumption that the students were as enthusiastic about the project as I was is apparent in this extract. I also made a leap in assuming that the research project and the desire for collaboration were more important to the students than the assessment result. I made no real effort to check this assumption out, although the students had the opportunity to question my conclusions through reading these thoughts each week. Given the ever-present power dynamics, this sort of questioning is unlikely to emerge of its own accord, however. I did not really recognise these expressions as a genuine need for clarity about the nature and boundaries of collaboration—I failed to adequately establish the collaborative territory nor respond to the frustration being expressed as a result. My enthusiasm for the project made me unaware of my responsibilities to the learners.

NR: The three small groups arrived at the following questions to consider for the journal:

Group (1): How could you empower clients through an understanding of economics? How do you demystify economics in the community? Design an alternative economic system.

Group (2): How has the content and process of this class empowered me in my application of economics to life?

Group (3): How did the topics discussed in class allow you to learn and what has facilitated this learning through the use of your journal?

When we discussed these as a whole group, I pointed out that while the questions from group (1) were excellent, they involved application rather than reflection. On the other hand, questions from groups (2) and (3) would elicit reflective responses. These latter questions therefore formed the framework for the journal reflection to be assessed at the end of semester. As the class was taking on its task, I had reminded them to be aware of their emotional responses to being involved in this process as they were doing it—in effect, I was saying as much as we can, let’s bring what is generally hidden or unconscious into our more conscious awareness. I also realised that I had not made it clear that this assessment item was not the sole form of assessment for the class—
indicated that they would also be assessed on an individual project that we would discuss next.

NR: When asked for their responses to being involved in this way, most students were very positive—a sense of empowerment through participation and involvement; it ‘makes your brain work’; ‘I’m a better learner when it’s experiential’; ‘I like to discuss’; a sense of satisfaction through bringing in ‘application to other things in my life’. My observation was that in general people seemed to appreciate ownership of the process. On the other hand, one student felt that she learns more from ‘listening to the person who knows’, an indication that she was wanting more input from me.

RP: My own emotional response was also revealing: as I was handing responsibility back to the learners, I experienced a very strong tightening in my chest and stomach. It was an almost unbearable tension as I felt gripped by fear and uncertainty. When I shared this experience with the class, some speculated that I may have some resistance to letting go control (who me?). I recognised that this tapping into the emotional climate potentially had many benefits: I could monitor what was going on and have an excellent feedback mechanism for keeping everything conscious—extremely unusual in the classroom.

CR: My sense is that this emotional component is still rare, even among teachers who are consciously democratic and critically reflective. For many, the institutional setting makes such exposure inappropriate and unnecessarily risky. In fact, my feelings of apprehension could well have reflected my sense of being ultimately answerable to TAFE. As argued by Habermas (1972, 1984), there are systemic realities that have a powerful determining effect on professional practice—practices such as requirements to record attendance, assess performance and provide certification of ‘competencies.’ I acutely felt the power of these constraints and the reality of the system that placed me in such a conflicted position. I would argue, however, that this willingness to share vulnerabilities was a key element in the building of relationship that became central to the empowerment process. I would argue further that the capacity for critical reflection is enhanced when it is supported in an environment of openness and trust, permitting reciprocal expression of feelings and vulnerabilities and where power relations are explicitly explored.
NR: One student asked a very perceptive question about how this process of reflection that we were all engaged in could be made conscious and ongoing, rather than relying solely on a write-up at the end which would not allow for ongoing feedback and transformation. This led to the suggestion that at the beginning of each class we could hear reflections from the previous week, as it was thought this might produce insights about how the learning process could be improved.

RP: Questions such as these indicated to me that the students in this class were beginning to think like researchers as well as learners, which I found very exciting, and an indication that the action research process has an emergent quality—the cyclic nature of it emerged naturally as a result of the students’ reflections.

CR: This experience seems to bear out Kemmis’s (1996) requirement that ‘first-person’ relationships are central and critical to the task of a ‘critical reconstruction of education’, i.e. it is essential that teachers and learners think about the issues of educative practices and make changes to these practices together. In my experience, the development of a relationship of trust through open exchanges such as this one was fundamental to such a task. It also lays the foundations for understanding the emergent nature of action research, evidenced by the framing of this thesis.

RP: Having given over ownership of the assessment process to this degree, I then grabbed back some power and said that the other assessment item would take the form of an individual project. The previous week’s discussion had revealed a preference for some individual research. I suggested that each student could devise her or his own project and decide how they wanted it assessed (i.e. whether they wanted to be assessed on a class presentation, written report, video, etc.). That went down quite well and there appeared to be general agreement. These principles established, the next decision was whether to include any other forms of assessment and, if so, how they should be weighted. A decision was reached fairly easily that a self/peer assessment component could be included; someone then suggested a 40-40-20 division and there were no arguments! (By this stage people were anxious to move on to some content, I think).

CR: It is interesting to observe how I quickly I reclaimed the reins of power. This seemed to be an example where being an ‘agent of control’ was more important than
being an ‘agent of change’ at that particular moment. Moving between these positions appears to demonstrate the fluidity of the power relationship in such situations where democratic practices are the professed goal. I was also aware of my position as teacher responsible to my employer—my actions were ultimately determined by my cultural positioning.

NR: This process of negotiation took well over an hour, and there was only a short amount of time left for the theoretical discussion I had prepared, as I wanted to make sure the reflection time at the end of the class was not lost. The content involved essentially building on the story of the previous week, identifying the main principles that concerned the early economists, principles that still occupy neo-classical economists today, and those which have been subjected to the most rigorous critique, both from within and outside the economics discipline. It was necessary to discuss how Adam Smith built on the ideas of Petty—without, according to Henderson (1991), acknowledging his source—and how the enduring classical principles were laid down by the stockbroker David Ricardo. It seemed to me essential to try to convey to students the main underlying principles and assumptions that the discipline of ‘political economy’ was built on. I also intended to include in the discussion examples of the criticism that was being levelled at political economy from its earliest articulation.

6.2.3.2 Negotiating Assessment: Resistance (Group 2)

NR: Having had such a positive experience of democracy and empowerment with Group 1 in the process of negotiating assessment, I went into Group 2 with high expectations. However, given their general anxieties about assessment in the context of full-time study, their responses were quite different. The reactions of Group 2 to taking responsibility for coming up with an assessment question for their reflection piece indicated this general level of anxiety: they described ‘discomfort’; ‘resistance’; feeling ‘brain dead’ because they were not used to thinking in this way; ‘panic’; and one person said, ‘I can’t handle it’. A few people felt that if they were going to do all this work writing a journal, they wanted it to be assessed. They also questioned why they should have to write the same thing more than once.

RP: It is very interesting going from one class to another with the identical agenda, but with the benefit of having experienced how one class handled the process. I use
the experience to streamline what is happening and to remember to do or say the things I forgot before. However, it is impossible not to have expectations and the inclination to steer the second class on a similar path has to be resisted. Group 2 is very different, as I keep discovering, and I am not always adequately prepared for it. They are under more pressure because they have twice the workload and have less experience of TAFE. They appear to have more anxiety about their results and general performance. They want to ‘get on with it’ and feel concerned about too much ‘time wasting’ on process.

The attitude towards this task seemed different—more of an institutionalised student response than a researcher response, as I had experienced with the previous group. They recognised the power issues involved, however, and were able to analyse their reactions thoughtfully, reactions that were of course quite legitimate. This group is more likely to ‘keep me honest’ and perhaps be more critical of my motives and agenda.

CR: It is interesting that my interpretations of these students’ resistance to collaborative assessment negotiations centred on their workload and inexperience of TAFE. I was not so prepared to consider that their resistance might have to do with other factors, such as wariness about being manipulated in the guise of liberatory promise (Fay, 1987). I also failed to recognise the institutional forces that shaped the students’ responses in this group. As full-time students they were more vocationally-oriented, concerned about getting their qualifications to enter the workforce, and were more likely to resist time-wasting or any attempt by the teacher to avoid playing her part in the rules set by institutional requirements. The part-time group, on the other hand, were more interested in integrating their learning and were not so strongly influenced and constrained by institutional pressures. The two groups were thus located differently in the institutional context and their disparate responses may reflect these different positionings. I experienced more discomfort in Group 2 than in Group 1 because there was more often an element of criticism and hostility that I did not directly confront. I attempted instead to ‘make everything all right’ as much as I could, to neutralise this perceived hostility.

NR: Once they had pushed through their resistances, however, excellent questions emerged from the four groups that worked together. They were:
Group (1): Write an evaluation of your learning journal reflections—personal strengths and weaknesses (individually and in a group).

Group (2): Analyse the learning of the class and yourself and discuss which methods assisted your learning; which methods inhibited your learning and how you would have changed the process.

Group (3): What processes helped you to learn economics? How have your feelings changed towards the subject?

Group (4): What did you learn? How did you learn it? Which way did you learn best? Which were the most effective methods?

Questions from groups (2), (3) and (4) are very similar, asking the same question in slightly different ways. Question (1) seems to be asking for an evaluation of the journal, which does not necessarily give a guideline for the writing of the journal itself. I suggested that any of the other three questions would be fine as a guideline, and students could choose which question suited them best.

The suggestion of an individual project, with the assessment criteria determined by each student, was very well received. One student made the additional excellent suggestion of each person making the goals they wanted to achieve explicit at the outset of their project, and the assessment could be based on how well those goals were met within the project.

The most controversial part of this process of determining assessment for this group was the issue of weighting. After quite a lot of discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of a class participation mark or a self/peer assessment mark, the group was able to agree to confine the assessment to the two items. There followed considerable debate about how the two should be assessed in relation to one another. The 50-50 option was advocated by many, while others felt that the relative workloads needed to be taken into account. Some wanted the reflection to be weighted more heavily because it was more work (involving weekly journal entries); while others felt that the project was likely to involve a greater commitment of time and effort.

One student put a strong case for a variable weighting; i.e. that once the relative weights were determined (e.g. 60-40), each student could decide which item was to receive which weighting, according to which they wanted more credit for, based on the amount
of effort put in. I pointed out that this suggestion may not be allowable within the institutional context and I would have to check that out. It seemed to be impossible to reach consensus and it was left with me coming back to the class with information about what was possible within TAFE rules.

One woman in the class made the comment that the arguments over the relative weightings seemed to reflect the differences between people in how they valued content and process. Those who were more interested in process would spend more time on their journals and hence would want their reflections to be more highly valued, while those who valued content were more likely to prefer a higher value put on the project. The whole class reflected this tension—as the time was running out for some theory input, some students were getting very restless and frustrated. In the end, people were so exhausted from the discussion that they pleaded for an early lunch. As there were only 15 minutes of class time left, I suggested they write in their journals and then leave when they were ready.

**RP:** I also felt the anxiety and frustration of not being able to cover the material I had prepared. [My critical friend’s] warnings echoed in my mind. She had talked of the dangers of getting too involved in the process and losing the vital opportunity for information exchange that my role as knowledge ‘gatekeeper’ demanded. My sense is that now the thorny issue of assessment is (almost) dealt with, we will be able to return to a more satisfactory balance.

**CR:** It seems that, once again, what I was not really aware of in this class was that I had set a task without adequate foundations. Brookfield (1995) points out that this is a common mistake made by teachers who believe in democratic negotiations in the classroom:

> Students can make informed decisions about what they need to know, how they can know it, and how they can know they know it only on the basis of as full as possible an understanding of the learning terrain they are being asked to explore ... Students will feel happy with their role as coteachers only after the teacher’s credibility has been established to their satisfaction and after they have learned what she stands for (Brookfield, 1995: 5, 6).

*I had neither adequately established the learning terrain nor my credibility with this group to establish the nature and boundaries of what was required in ‘authentic collaboration’.*
6.3 PART II – DISCOVERING ECONOMICS (WEEKS 4-8)

This five-week period saw the research process develop momentum, with very different responses from the two groups. Serious subject matter in the form of basic economic theory was tackled and the process involving students reflecting on their learning in the class began. The students made decisions about their individual projects and started work on them, work which informed their reflections and involvement in the class discussions. Group 1 responded positively to both process and content, comfortable with my leadership and agenda. They appeared to skip the storming stage and moved quickly into norming and performing. On the other hand, Group 2 struggled with the process, questioned my agenda and leadership, became very resistant and restless and demanded ‘more content, more content!’ For much of this time they were storming, relieved once I changed the format in response to their concerns. My self-doubts and struggles with the research dilemmas surfaced strongly and, in the spirit of keeping the whole process transparent, these were shared with the students week by week.

I will return to the three voices in this continuing narrative. The neutral voice (NR) will describe the way I tackled the content in my agreed role as ‘gatekeeper of knowledge’ and summarise and illustrate with examples the student reflections on both process and content. The reflective practitioner (RP) will demonstrate and sample my continuing reflections on the teaching and research processes as shared with the students. And the critical reflector voice (CR) will continue to comment on my assumptions and process. To facilitate comprehension, I will separate out discussions relating to content and those about process, even though these were interweaved in the material the students received from me each week. While this has the effect of ‘breaking up’ the original narrative, my rationale is that this ‘amended’ or ‘reconstructed’ narrative will produce a clearer picture of the unfolding classroom dynamics central to the research.
6.3.1 The Emerging Curriculum: the Development of Content

6.3.1.1 Neo-classical Theory

NR: After the slow-down in coverage of the content due to the focus on the process described above in Part I, I decided to prepare more solidly the material on the development of economic theory, particularly the philosophical foundations. Even though there was no ‘requirement’ for the students to become fluent in economic theory, I believed it was important to explain what some of the concepts mean and how they were derived in order to develop a strong basis for demystification. For these students in particular, whose concerns primarily related to social justice and distributional issues, there appeared to be a strong need to understand the thinking behind ideas such as ‘efficiency’ and ‘competitive markets’ as these are the terms frequently used to justify cuts in welfare expenditure or privatisation of public assets. The 1996 federal election had heightened this concern. Even though the majority of students professed not to be interested in politics, the predominant feelings on the Monday morning following the (conservative) Coalition’s landslide win on the Saturday were despondency, fear and concern.

In preparing the content for this class, I found the critique in the early chapters of Daly and Cobb (1989) particularly useful. The main points I wanted to make included:

- the relationship of the development of political economy to mechanistic physics;

- the relationship between optimum resource allocation and individual self-interest;

- the concept of ‘the market’ and some of the problems associated with it, in particular, the tendency towards concentration that eliminates competition, the market’s dependence on ‘moral capital’, market failure in relation to public goods, and the problem of ‘externalities’;

- an introduction to marginal theory, particularly as it relates to marginal utility developed from utilitarian philosophy, and how this development permitted the use of differential calculus in microeconomics; and

- the main assumptions underlying the notion of *homo economicus*. 
RP: This is a huge area to cover, and my constant dilemma is how to keep the content manageable without sacrificing process, always keeping in mind the goals of empowerment and demystification.

CR: This reflection is an example of how seriously I took the role of information gatekeeper and the responsibility that went with that. I had no clear idea of how the goal of ‘empowerment’ was to be achieved other than a vague notion that the process was the key to it.

NR: Most of the time taken with this theory centred on explanation of the notions of marginal utility and principles of resource allocation. The more that simple examples were used, the easier it was to grasp—eating ice-creams is a useful way of explaining the law of diminishing marginal utility, which no-one has real trouble grasping because it is part of everyday experience. Explaining allocation decisions based on marginal principles is more demanding—the important links to establish, I felt, were the leaps that the deductive theorists made between simple decisions about what to consume at any moment and major investment decisions. I’m not sure how well these ideas were conveyed or really how important it was for students to understand the finer points of the theory, when what I was trying to get across was an appreciation for the basics of the theories on which modern economic decision making at the macro level is based.

6.3.1.2 Keynesian Ideas: The Circular Flow of Income

NR: After this incursion into the fundamentals of neo-classical microeconomic theory, I decided it was time to move to an introduction to Keynesian economics. I spent a long time thinking about what was the next logical step in the process of ‘filtering’ empowering content in the short time available. Understanding what lies behind neo-classical theory, i.e. its history and assumptions, seemed to be very important in the process of demystification because of the enormous influence this theory has exerted on political decision makers since the early 1980s. We only scratched the surface, of course, but we would be returning to neo-classical theory in later classes when we would compare it with alternative ways of approaching complex problems such as the effect of economic decision-making on the environment.
People in the wider community are generally not aware of the debates that exist between major schools of economic thought, other than being left with a vague sense that ‘economists never agree’. It seemed to me important to make people more conscious of the source of the differences in approaches to economic thought, and for our students, the difference between micro and macro, or neo-classical and Keynesian, was a significant distinction to comprehend. The most important point to make was the emergence of Keynes’ thought in the context of the 1930s and the Depression when the failure of laissez-faire economics became apparent.

Without explaining the basics of the Keynesian theoretical model, I took the students through the development of the ‘circular flow of income’ model, which has its roots in Keynesian theory and appears in every elementary economics textbook and provides the basis of much political discussion about the economy. The very abstracted and simple explanation proved to be an engaging exercise for the students—it was clear that there was a strong desire to understand, and to make sense of the real world.

RP: I find myself being very challenged by the eagerness for explanation, which sometimes feels beyond my expertise and knowledge. The model itself is fairly simple to explain, but for me it always falls down when people try to use it to explain what is happening in the real world, and I’m never sure whether my interpretations are ‘accurate’ or even make sense, given the model. Sometimes making things simple results in important complexities being ignored or glossed over, which, of course, is what characterises media discussions of economics a lot of the time!

CR: Here I was starting to feel the challenge of being put in the role of information gatekeeper, one that never sat easily with me, but one which the students insisted on my taking. I was much more comfortable as an agent of change than an agent of control in respect to teaching the content of economics, a role about which I felt constantly ambivalent. On the other hand, I felt little of this tension as an agent of control with respect to the process, although I did feel it to some extent with Group 2 as the semester progressed.
6.3.1.3 The National Accounts: Waring’s Interpretations

NR: Having introduced the class to the basics of the ‘circular flow of income’, derived from Keynesian understandings of the workings of the economy, I decided to embark on a discussion of the derivation of the National Accounts. I found Marilyn Waring’s (1988) book Counting for Nothing very useful for this purpose, as she explains the history of how the categories were determined and provides a straightforward explanation of what each of the categories means. She makes the point that information collected is highly selective and is also collected in such a way that predetermines public policy.

Waring also explains the distinction between GNP (gross national product) and GDP (gross domestic product)—whereas GNP measures income generated from production within the market economy for a country’s residents, GDP measures income generated within the market economy, whether the resources are owned by that country’s residents or not. She points out that the UN adopted GDP as the favoured measure, as figures for GNP did not reveal the desired growth levels. Few people are aware of the significance of these distinctions, especially for Third World economies. It is important to recognise that both figures monitor rates and patterns of growth in the market economy, which enable governments to set priorities in policy-making, to measure the success of policies and to measure so-called ‘economic welfare’. Because of what the figures leave out, distortions in policy decisions can occur. This is one of the key problem areas of orthodox economic practice that alternative economists are attempting to redress.

RP: Discussion of the National Accounts and their history seemed to generate a lot of interest. Taking the critical perspective appeared to give the discussion more ‘life’, rather than a drier approach to the theory, which could leave most of us pretty cold. As I don’t take notes during the ‘teaching’ segment of the class, I don’t necessarily make conscious the explanations and processes which lead to a sense of empowerment in relation to the material. I should comment here that week by week I feel more and more daunted by the task of how to make this the most interesting and exciting course in economics anyone has ever written in the history of the universe. The amount of material that is available, my own sense of
inadequacy to answer all possible questions, the fear of making the ‘wrong’ decision about content, getting the process/content balance right, and so on, all weigh heavily upon me. It’s all the stuff that goes with being the ‘expert’; Sharon’s [Group 1 student] ‘person out the front who thinks they have all the knowledge’. Does this ‘empowering’ of the ‘learners’ through a challenge of the traditional power dimension lead to the ‘teacher’ being completely disempowered? And does it really matter anyway?

**CR:** Here I demonstrate again my willingness to share my vulnerabilities with the students. I think the effect this produced was to ‘demystify the expert’, making clear what a ‘house of straw’ the expert’s apparent confidence really is. A strength is that this modelling of my dilemmas and questioning of my assumptions set a critical tone for learning for the students—they are experiencing a teacher modelling critical reflection, which encourages them to do likewise (Brookfield, 1995). On the other hand, this could also be perceived as ‘false modesty’ on my part, my disavowals potentially having the effect of undermining student confidence. It is interesting to note the acute tension resulting from my disavowal of being the ‘expert’ while at the same time holding so strongly to this role by expressing my desire to be a brilliant economics teacher.

**RP:** I also found it difficult to explain adequately how the way the National Accounts derived in World War II were based on a mission of ‘how to pay for the war’. Technicalities often challenge me, and this is when I feel most vulnerable in my role as so-called ‘expert’ in the field. I need to remind myself (and the class) that I do not profess to be an ‘economist’, but identify much more as an ‘educator’, trying to help make sense of some of the mysteries. Well, I guess I don’t always succeed. Some weeks I feel more acutely the dilemmas of the conflicting roles of teacher/facilitator/learner, and this was one of them.

**CR:** The tensions resulting from my different positions and roles were acute at this time. The only way I could figure out how to get around these was to make them visible and explicit. It is interesting that I did not really see that there could be ‘resolution’ of these dilemmas—they just came with the territory.

**RP:** Another revealing experience for me was finding that the definitions of GDP and GNP given in the orthodox text books and *Dictionary of Economics* did not
indicate the key difference that Waring identified in her analysis. I then start to think: which reality do we stay with? The orthodox definitions are confusing and alienating, while the critiques are often not very thorough or consistent. It seems to me that this is where my role as ‘filter’ becomes very important. I feel I have to wade through the material, make sense of it for myself, decide on which perspectives are most relevant for this group of students, figure out how to explain it, and then be prepared to stick with the analysis or adopt a more flexible approach. With this group of lively, curious and questioning students, the challenges come thick and fast, and I’m never sure how well I’m meeting them.

CR: There appears to be a marked contradiction here with my previous reflection, where I stayed with the tension of feeling inadequate in the role of ‘expert’. Here I appear to be taking the role very seriously and assuming responsibility for ‘getting it right’ so the students get the ‘correct’ view and I am seen to be impeccable in my role as teacher.

6.3.1.4 Measurement of Wealth: The GDP and its Problems

NR: After taking a look at the development of the National Accounts and the measurement of GNP/GDP, I decided to extend the discussion to look at some of the major problems with the use of GNP/GDP as measures of economic welfare, as well as some of the attempts to overcome these problems (our first real look at what the ‘green’ economists are doing). I emphasised that for economists, growth in GNP/GDP is a sign of a healthy market, which means a healthy economy. It has come to be the most widely used and interpreted indicator of general economic welfare, and for many, an indicator of overall welfare of the community.

There has been very little public dissent on this issue—both major political parties adhere to the principle that economic growth is a ‘good thing’. The original intention of measuring GNP/GDP was not as an indicator of welfare, but as a measure of aggregate demand, or a measure of how well the market economy was performing, in terms of marketed production (the production of new goods and services provided through the private market) and government expenditure. After identifying some of the problems associated with conventional measurement (such as ignoring non-monetary activity, ignoring distribution of wealth, ignoring social and environmental costs of production,
etc.), we looked at areas of reform such as adjusting the GNP to take account of its worst omissions, replacing it with an index of welfare or a ‘genuine progress indicator’, and developing a framework of indicators that measure different components of wealth and well-being.

6.3.1.5 New Paradigm Perspectives

NR: Following on from the previous week’s exploration of indicators and their alternative measurement, I decided it was time to introduce the ‘new paradigm’ thinking in economics, in the form of a comparison of its major features with those of orthodox economics. I had developed a list of features, based on some of the recent developments in alternative economics by authors such as Henderson (1991), Ekins (1992), Max-Neef (1987), Daly and Cobb (1989) and Robertson (1990), which formed the basis of the class. These features of new economics appear contrasted with orthodox economics in Table 6.1 (note that some of these features are similar to those in Table 4.1).

RP: After viewing the debate between alternative and orthodox economists on a video of a current affairs program, a long discussion ensued [in Group 1] about how things could change—what was it going to take? One of the difficulties of raising awareness and demystifying economics is that it can become profoundly disempowering once a more realistic picture emerges. The challenge is to balance knowledge and understanding with a sense of how to act.

CR: Herein lies the dilemma of many an activist—how do we give the ‘bad news’ without paralysing people into inaction? The assumption that to take action is imperative is very apparent here.
Table 6.1

Comparison of Orthodox and New Approaches to Economics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORTHODOX (REDUCTIONIST)</th>
<th>NEW (HOLISTIC, SYSTEMS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• economy as machine</td>
<td>• economy as system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• building blocks—basic units of production and consumption</td>
<td>• basic principles of organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• linear cause/effect model</td>
<td>• interdependence of all parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ‘objective’, ‘value-free’</td>
<td>• centrality of values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• simple assumptions about human nature</td>
<td>• recognition of broader human qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• human beings have endless wants</td>
<td>• human beings have fundamental needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• wealth measured in money terms</td>
<td>• wealth is a broad definition of well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• separation of the economy from society, ecology and ethics</td>
<td>• the economy is part of a broad social and ecological system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• industrialism is the single model of development</td>
<td>• many forms of development are possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• national economy as focal economic unit</td>
<td>• world economy as a multi-level system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• focus is on growth</td>
<td>• focus is on development and optimal size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dependence creation</td>
<td>• independence/self reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• maintenance of existing power base</td>
<td>• redistribution of resources and power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dominance of competition</td>
<td>• balance of competition and co-operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• large-scale, capital intensive technology</td>
<td>• small-scale, capital intensive technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• use of static, equilibrium models</td>
<td>• dynamic systems model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• economic activity governed by impersonal mechanisms</td>
<td>• opportunities to exercise moral responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• environmentally destructive/wasteful</td>
<td>• environmentally conserving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3.1.6 Student Responses to the Content

NR: To this point in the narrative, there has been an absence of student voices, apart from my summary of their reactions and comments. From week 4, when students began reflecting on their experiences in the classroom, I recorded their reflections mainly through notes and occasionally tape-recording. Brief profiles of the students whose voices will start to make their appearance in this narrative are summarised in Table 6.2 and 6.3 (names used are pseudonyms). The categories chosen reflect the primary identities of gender, age and class as well as minority identities such as ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and parenting role. I have included these identities as they help to contextualise the voices of the students—they form a more complete picture of their positioning and what social experiences may impact on their responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Della</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsten</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>German Swiss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margret</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanti</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.3
Profiles of Group 2 Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td>Gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust</td>
<td>Physical disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jules</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust</td>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renata</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Anglo-Aust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In week 4 the classes began with students reflecting on their learning and experience of the previous week’s content and process. For Group 1, this format continued throughout the term. On the other hand, Group 2 expressed impatience with this process and in week 6 we diverged from this strategy and incorporated reflections at the end of the class so as not to sacrifice content. For this reason, their reflections were not as detailed and were often rushed. Some students tended to focus more on process reflections, some primarily reflected on their learning about economics, while others reflected on both.

What follows are some examples of the types of reflections on content the students produced over this five-week period. It is important to note that these are reproduced as they were presented to the students—rather than directly quoting what the students had said, I paraphrased their responses based on the notes and tapes I took during the classes. They had the opportunity to read my interpretations of what they had said and correct them if necessary. I have combined individual students’ comments made in different weeks for purposes of clarity and conciseness. The goal here is to exemplify
how the students responded to their induction into economic theories, concepts and ideas.

Much of the response to the content was at the emotional level – puzzlement, excitement, confusion, amusement and anger (students’ own words are in italics):

*Shanti* found the theory ‘entertaining’, and was intrigued that irrational thought made sense within the context of the theory. She commented that it is amazing that the theorists make such conservative assumptions about human beings, and that ‘*spirituality seems insignificant*’ in these models. [Week 5] ...[In] sharing some of her thoughts about [the foundations of economic theory, she reflected that] economics does not seem to leave room for ethics—how did this happen? She asked how did we learn to accept it, without investigating other models? Her sense was that the early economic theorists seemed to be ‘*thinking in a vacuum*’. [Week 6]

*Gary* expressed that he was still having trouble ‘*getting my head around the content*’, and felt that he still had not focused clearly on what it was all about. Although he is very interested in the content, he has difficulty grasping the ideas, with the result that he gets frustrated and feels stupid [Week 5] ... He wants to understand more, to ‘*cut through the bullshit*’ and spend more time on reading and discussing ... and realises that by far the majority of people do not have any idea about what is going on. [Week 8]

*Della* is getting angry about the content of economics: ‘*so selfish, so full of lies and deceit*’. She describes the theorists as ‘*famous arsehole capitalist exploiters extraordinaire*’ (now did I say that?), and feels herself getting very angry as the content and the story behind the content is revealed. As she becomes more aware of the impact of economics on our lives, she gets more frustrated than ever. [Week 7]

*Joan* said that she was really angry about the present system, and that anger stayed with her for quite some time. She has been reading a lot of conventional economics, and when she learnt about what was behind it, she questioned whether she should be reading ‘*this bullshit*’. [Week 8]

*Layla* was surprised that she is excited about economics. She had formed judgments about economics without knowledge. Her learning makes her empowered and leads to more informed decisions. After the discussion about marginal utility, she reflected on the extent to which her life is driven by the desire for pleasure or avoidance of pain. [Week 5]

Responses also entailed insights into their own lives and the wider world:

*Jenny* had just seen the movie *Sense and Sensibility* and came to reflect on women’s powerlessness in relation to ownership of land and resources in those times. She feels we’ve been ‘*conned by the rich and powerful*’ and expressed indignation that the early theorists equated happiness with the accumulation of wealth. [Week 6]
Angela finds the content exciting and interesting. Discussing alternative indicators for measuring the nation’s wealth caused her to reflect on the effect of the marijuana economy in Mullumbimby—how the whole town suffers when people get busted because there is so much less money around the local community. [Week 8]

Della found that being aware of the impact of our economic lives on the earth has made her so much more conscious of what she consumes, how she recycles, etc. She reflected on people’s consuming habits in supermarkets, particularly that few people actually know what it is they are buying or where it comes from. [Week 8]

Kirsten is applying her understanding of what she is learning in class to her awareness of current affairs and what is being reported in newspapers and on the radio: opening up mines in Kakadu; and a report about Russia’s privatisation of factories and the fact that workers are paid in goods, not money, goods they then have to exchange for money in local markets. [Week 7]

The content also produced more generalised insights:

Noel reflected on a contradiction he felt occurred in the development of economic theory; whereas Australian law and government is based on an Anglo/Christian ethic, economics has developed without an ethical or Christian base, and he wondered whether that was the reason why politicians, caught up in the dominance of the economic imperative, had such difficulty in coming to terms with and solving social problems. [Week 6]

Aaron in learning about what drives the economic market, could see how it corrodes the spirit of the small community, especially with people motivated by self-interest. [Week 5]

Graham likes understanding the history of ideas and how rare it is for ideas to get challenged. He feels that he can be easily ‘taken in’ by ideas and feels it is good to have unexamined ideas challenged. He likes that alternatives are being offered, and says it is good to be learning about economic indicators. He has always felt that there has been something ‘left out’ in measurement of economic welfare. [Week 7] ... [He] feels empowered that an alternative economics exists. [Week 8]

Sue is finding that the subject is becoming less mysterious. She has always tended to accept expert opinions—‘they become yours because you don’t know any different’. It seems to her that the system is designed to protect vested interests. [Week 7]
6.3.2 The Unfolding Process

While the task of teaching economics was being undertaken during these five weeks, the research process, i.e. collaborative critical action research, was at the forefront of the teaching and learning experience. As I indicated earlier, the critically reflective process I was encouraging from the students became a markedly different experience for each group. What follows is a comparative telling of these stories, together with samples of the students’ discussions and reflections and my responses during this key period.

6.3.2.1 Group 1 Plunges in

NR: For Group 1, the experience was almost universally positive and challenging—they responded with enthusiasm and a willingness to push through their resistances and difficulties. As a committed activist, I felt inspired and hopeful working with this group of students. Empowerment seemed to be unfolding before my eyes. The students in this group had suggested starting each class with reflections, and from week 4 they threw themselves into the task with much enthusiasm.

They made comments on their enthusiasm, such as ‘I’m excited, stimulated and thirsty for more’ (Della comparing feelings of powerlessness and boredom in the schoolroom); ‘I’m excited about taking responsibility for my own learning’ (Sharon); and ‘I feel a sense of integration when I’m involved as an equal participant’ (Margret). They reflected on their feelings about economics: ‘I’m scared about learning economics—all those theorists are a worry’ (Sharon); ‘I have a resistance to economics because it’s like it’s all about running after money, the dishonesty, the cheating, the decisions made on behalf of people who have no say in them’ (Kirsten); ‘I thought economics was a dry subject but this process is demystifying it’ (Shanti); ‘I’m very interested and excited about the connection between politics, economics and welfare (Noel); and ‘I feel angry that economists are using theories in the way they are (Joan)’. And they reflected on their learning experiences, describing the excitement of investigating their own projects; feeling relieved when the teacher takes her ‘rightful’ position at the front of the class; ‘feeling like a fool’ when the language and ideas are unfamiliar; finding small group work empowering and inspiring; feeling validated for their own thinking in small
groups; and finding the participatory processes in the class empowering. After hearing these responses, I reflected:

RP: It appears that for this group, learning in this way is exciting, stimulating and challenging. Each person is willing to take responsibility for her or his own responses to the challenge. The opportunity taken to reflect on learning is giving valuable feedback to me as ‘knowledge filter’ as well as making the learning process itself more conscious.

I realised [at the end of this round] that I had left my own reflections at home. I need to be aware that an important part of this cycle is the inclusion of my own analysis, otherwise there is the temptation to continue to see me as the controller of the research process. Withholding of information is a common method of maintaining power and control. My intention, of course, is to interrupt this dynamic as much as possible; but I am becoming aware of my inclination to want to draw things out of the students, without necessarily sharing my own thought and analysis. This is partly due to my concern about balancing content and process; and partly because of a hesitancy on my part to involve the students too much in my own deliberations. I recognise that there is a pull for me to claim ‘ownership’ here—this is my PhD! I am also aware that with this group in particular, there is a tremendous willingness to engage in this as a collaborative reflective action research process.

CR: Here the tensions around power and control are being made quite explicit. After this reflection, I became more open about sharing my concerns and vulnerabilities, in an attempt to overcome these tensions. For this group, this openness had the effect of deepening trust and developing a greater understanding of how a democratic classroom can operate. The confidence and trust they had in each other, after three or four years of studying together, was also a contributing factor to their willingness to engage.

NR: The engagement from this group was also demonstrated by a willingness to participate in thoughtful discussions, which contributed to increasing levels of self-awareness and insight. The following is a sample of a documented discussion in Week 5 that was incorporated into the written feedback the students received from me the
following week. It demonstrates the levels of insight and awareness that emerged for the students through critical reflection and discussion:

Following [a round of reflections at the beginning of the class], I handed out my write-up of the previous class, to get some feedback about the accuracy of the record, as well as to generate further discussion about the process. One student (Sharon) needed to have my interpretation of what she had said corrected. I had missed her point that in traditional teaching there is a person 'out the front who thinks they have all the knowledge' which ignores the fact that the students themselves have a wealth of knowledge to draw on. Margret made the comment that this whole process was showing how students are important by involving them more in the teaching and learning process, which is very empowering. Whatever is happening is being brought into the open and being made visible. It seems that reflecting back to the students what I had heard them say was a validation of them and their process.

Another student, Gary, said that he appreciated the willingness to share my process [as above] with the class, that it creates an ‘equalising experience’. Shanti used the creative and interesting word ‘intimate’ to describe what has happened—a sense that we were all much closer as a result of being engaged in this way. Then Noel had an insight that what he is learning about is how the process of education works and for him, that seems to be the most important thing he has learnt since he has been at TAFE. Margret then commented that it gave her insight into how decision-making becomes entrenched, and how important it is to involve both process and content. Economics has evolved in this way, where content has become divorced from process, and in this way it has become powerful and dangerous. She realised that economics should not be practised without an empowering process and consultation with the people who are affected by its decisions.

6.3.2.2 Group 2 Holds Back

NR: Group 2 had a very different reaction to the sharing of reflections at the beginning of the class in Week 4. Some chose not to share their thoughts, a number were quite negative and most were fairly brief—I sensed their anxiety to ‘get on with the content’. However, a number demonstrated critical self-reflection, despite discomfort. Here is a sample:

Don’s experience in last week’s class made him realise his conditioning. It’s hard to be free thinkers when you’ve been trained to learn in a particular way ... hard to be innovative and think of new processes of learning because of this conditioning.

Louise ‘didn’t learn a thing about economics’ last week. This started her on some reflections about learning and studying. If we really wanted to learn about economics, we could learn it from books, but instead we have expectations that the teacher will provide this for us. Through the experience of having to come up with our assessments and curriculum, she came to see what student
expectations of teachers are in terms of planning, preparation and setting assessments.

Lucy [found that in] having to come up with assessment questions, she felt uncomfortable, 'brain dead'. She came to see how she was a passive learner through the discomfort she felt in having to do something different. The whole process made her angry. She felt that the expectation was unfair—it was out of context; it was 'put on us'; she had to act 'out of role' and it didn’t feel right. She asked in her journal: 'how does Kath’s honesty affect me?’ She experienced a real tension between the learning process and the need for content.

Sue feels excited to be in charge of her own learning. She felt uncomfortable with the changes in roles [having to set own assessment], described it as her conditioning making this difficult. She was also uncomfortable having to work with the group in its decision making—she would have preferred to work individually.

Elly [found] the issue was around change—having to act in ways that were not familiar. She experienced initial resistance, and wanted to change back to a plan where the teacher was more in charge.

Layla explored in her reflections the issue of process versus content. She was interested in the discovery that people placed different value or importance on each. For her, she felt that she valued them equally. She also discovered that for her she finds it very easy to 'give away power'.

My reflection in response:

RP: The opportunity to take more control of learning and assessment seems to have produced a deal of anxiety for this group. The feelings of empowerment are not readily apparent, as many feel they ‘do not know enough’. For this class, empowerment may be more realiseable in hindsight, rather than in the present, which is dominated by concern about being able to handle the tasks. Self-reflection appears to be producing some observations about old tapes and conditioning about learning as well as the expectations of the roles of student and teacher that are brought into the classroom. The concern about ‘learning something real’ is very apparent, and it is ironic that a class so focused on content has spent so much time wrestling with the process issues. This produces a strong conflict within me as well: I do not feel like a ‘real’ teacher unless I am out the front ‘impacting knowledge’ (this is apparently what I am supposed to be paid for!). And yet I know (as do the students as well) that this is not an effective way to promote learning, and especially is not an empowering way to learn. Struggling with this dynamic is keeping the research process very much alive within the class—it is certainly
producing the most response. It will be interesting to see whether the content can engage people as effectively!

CR: This passage is revealing in the way it embeds a number of possibly naïve assumptions I held at the time. Firstly, there is an assumption that empowerment will happen, even if only ‘realisable in hindsight’. I wanted to see evidence that the students were having a positive experience as they were in Group 1. I was not willing to see that uncomfortable experiences can be indicators of change as much as enjoyable ones. It also reveals my own assumptions about what empowerment looks like, despite not making these explicit. In commenting on the ‘irony’ of a class clamouring for content in the midst of struggling with the process, I appeared to ignore the possibility that resistance can be evidence of a power struggle. My naïve assumptions about claiming knowledge about what is empowering education and what is not (and my insistence that the students know this too) possibly demonstrates a lack of critical understanding about the hegemonic assumptions (Brookfield, 1995) I was carrying at the time.

NR: I took a risk in conveying to the students what I perceived was happening for them, producing some defensiveness as the following discussion extract demonstrates:

I handed out my written reflections, commenting that I only included what was relevant for this group, as it was not appropriate to divulge what was being discussed in the other group.

In response to a request for comments, Aaron pointed out that anyone reading this needed to understand the conditions under which the students were studying welfare. The high workload of eight subjects meant that students were under constant pressure with assessment deadlines, and they were therefore necessarily very task focused. The general sense of confusion and anxiety needed to be related to the concern about the full-time workload. Sue picked up from these comments, and talked about her concern that process was ‘eating into class time’, given the amount of work that had to be covered. She felt that content was being sacrificed for process, and wondered whether it would be appropriate for this class to be a ‘control’ group, to be given traditional teaching, while the other group could have the more ‘experiential’ approach, and then be compared. She wanted to know was there any room for negotiation about this.

Renata commented that she would find it more stressful if it was being taught in a traditional way, and found the approach refreshing compared to other classes. Graham said he was happy to ‘let the content come’. Harriet thought that Sue’s desire to return to a traditional teaching format may have been a response to the change process—after change has been implemented, there is a desire to ‘go back’ to more familiar conditions.
RP: I found this discussion very interesting, and would have loved to explore it further, as it seemed to be getting to the heart of the education process that the students have come to accept. I think one of the problems involved in this high-pressure full-time approach to the Welfare course is that students do not really feel they can afford time for reflection on what is happening and how they are actually learning. They do not have time to critique the conditions under which they are working. It reminds me of the conditions workers experience under capitalism—as long as they are flat out working to survive, they are not going to have the time or energy to reflect on their conditions and question the structures they are labouring under.

CR: While I still believe there is some accuracy in this critique of the students' conditions, the ideological nature of my interpretation is evident. It was in my interests to view the students as an oppressed group to explain their resistance. From my position I could not see that this resistance could have another explanation, or that students have power and exercise it in particular ways—it seems the critical theorist lens provided the only story in town. This reflection also reveals one of the dilemmas of incorporating critical reflection into the learning process—it takes time, and does not always lend itself to the high-pressured environment of institutionalised learning.

6.3.2.3 Summary Comments

NR: These divergent experiences continued in a similar vein for the rest of the term (until the end of Week 8). The students in Group 1 responded fully and positively to both the content of their learning (as described above) and the process of critical reflection they were engaged in. They moved easily into the 'performing' stage during this period. While there were some hesitations about the amount of time devoted to reflection—one student described it as 'new age and time consuming'—by and large the reflective process was appreciated. Students commented on how reading the written feedback each week was a validation of their learning and their experience; that hearing the contributions of others was terrific; that my disclosure was very helpful as it made explicit all the roles involved in the process; that having time to digest the content rather than 'rushing through it' as in other classes worked well; that the process empowered through 'teaching me how I am being educated'; that being challenged with questions
was empowering; and that the exchange permitted trust building and a developing intimacy. My reflections on this group’s progress were summarised thus:

RP: Things appear to be going well for this class. Many are enjoying the content and applying it to their understanding of what is being reported in the media about economic affairs. It seems that the ‘mystique’ surrounding the subject is thawing out. Even though only one student raised the process/content dilemma, I am very aware that the correct balance is very important and am endeavouring to redress this ... I was ... impressed with the response to the content in this class—it indicated to me that people are reading and thinking and are grasping many of the concepts quickly and with interest and enthusiasm. We could say that empowerment appears to be happening through the presentation of demystifying content.

CR: Implicit here are my assumptions about empowerment, without opening such assumptions to scrutiny.

NR: On the other hand, Group 2 moved from storming into a (still hesitant) performing stage once I changed the format to include reflections at the end of the class instead of the beginning. This meant that the reflections were generally rushed or there was no time for them at all. This had the effect of reducing the impact of the process and classes became ‘flat’ in comparison with the more enthusiastic tone of the other group. I commented on this observation in Week 8:

RP: Even though the content planned for the day was interesting and relevant to an opening up of new economic thinking, the class seemed ‘flat’ and did not have an enthusiastic response. It seems it may certainly be timely to move away from traditional ‘chalk and talk’ teaching into some more creative classroom methods. Interestingly, I have found this to be the case since we have moved to putting the content at the beginning of the class. Leaving the reflections about the previous session until the end of the class seems like an afterthought, and the class appears to have little energy for the process. It may be time to initiate a different sort of review process.
NR: These thoughts about a need for review, now that we had reached the half-way point at the end of Term 1, anticipated the next stage, a time for taking stock and going back to my critical community of peers.

6.4 PART III – A CHANGE, A BREAK AND A REVIEW
(WEEKS 9-10)

NR: I believed that one of the reasons the classes were feeling ‘flat’ at the end of the term was that despair was creeping in as we started to confront some of the legacy of the dominance of the orthodox economic paradigm—global environmental destruction and increasing impoverishment of the peoples of the Third World. I decided to offer a fresh perspective on the situation by inviting a guest to speak to the class about his experiences with international aid as an antidote to the gloomy turn the classes had taken. My guest (a friend who had worked for many years for Community Aid Abroad) had a positive view of the international fight against poverty and offered a much-needed change of scene for the students. Both classes responded well to his talk.

The next week offered an unexpected break when there was a teachers’ strike. I took this opportunity for a reflective review following my visit to Hawkesbury in the term break where I shared my dilemmas with my supervisor and peers. In Week 11, I shared the following reflections with the students:

RP: I have come to the point of needing to think and reflect deeply on the process of developing this curriculum with you, in a way that it produces empowerment. My experience at the end of last term was telling me that this goal was perhaps not being met. The classes were starting to feel ‘flat’ and tinged with despair. Was this the process or the content? Studying economics can indeed be a depressing experience, especially when we begin to read about some of the realities that seem, in many ways, to be a legacy of the dominance of the economic rationalist paradigm. One of the reasons that I jumped at the opportunity to have Garth [the guest speaker from CAA] come and speak to you about what is actually possible and what hopeful and empowering trends exist in many areas of the world, was that I could see it was important to create some sort of shift in this creeping despair.
I could see that I was probably contributing to this by the type of information you were being presented with and the way it was being presented. I seem to have set myself an extremely challenging task, and I cannot see any immediate or obvious ‘solutions’. In response to input from my university research community in Hawkesbury, I have returned to my fundamental values and visions for what I want in the world. It’s important to me that my work is consistent with these values and visions. My visions for the world are for a just and sustainable economic system that is in harmony with the planet’s ecology and is based on deep ethical principles. My values include honesty and integrity in my interactions with people. This includes an awareness of the way my class position and race impacts on those interactions. I am committed to education in the broadest sense of ‘life-long learning’ and want to work towards creating a learning environment that empowers and inspires. This necessarily involves being taught by the people I am supposedly teaching.

Of the many things I am learning from you as students and as people, I have found that ‘empowerment’ has many dimensions. Firstly, gaining knowledge is in itself empowering. Secondly, empowerment needs to have an action dimension—it comes through a sense of feeling ‘empowered to act’, in this case in our economic lives. It seems to me that this means being transformed from people who are being acted upon, to those who can act consciously to take charge of their lives. As we have discussed, the economic system as it is currently structured creates dependence, and finding a way to move outside that dependency to a position of independence or empowerment is not easy.

CR: This was an important moment in the research process. It was an opportunity to reflect on my deepest values, which I still hold. These values formed the motivation for my activism, and while critiques may suggest a cultural relativism of such values, I would still maintain that without them our actions in the world have little meaning. It is interesting that stating a values position, upheld by critical theory as being essential for activism that moves us towards a more just and sustainable society, is sandwiched between positivism’s avoidance and postmodernism’s scepticism of taking such a stand (explored further in the next chapter). I am still, three years later, reasonably confident that speaking from the heart in this way about what I believe to be possible for human
society contributed to my effectiveness as a teacher in this setting. Students were in no doubt about where I stood. The question that stays with me, however, is whether this produced an atmosphere in which a dissenting view could be freely offered. It is possible that the strength of my ideological commitment produced ‘followers’ rather than free, inquiring thinkers.

In making this statement, I was also taking responsibility for the feelings of the students to a certain extent. It is possible that the ‘flatness’ which I was so concerned about (much more apparent in Group 2 than Group 1) had more to do with the dynamics of the group (who spent four days of the week in a room together struggling with challenges to their values and attitudes) or the pressures of other work and family commitments. I was so focused on the process of teaching for empowerment in my class that I did not take much account of the broader context in which the students were functioning.

Finally, I started tentatively to define my ideas of ‘empowerment’ which I had not defined explicitly earlier in the process. These ideas at this stage were still fairly narrow and influenced by my activist position. However, it seems to me that making the links between our personal passivity and the passivity engendered by a dependence-creating economic system was important. (Understandings of empowerment will be explored in more detail in the next chapter).

6.5 PART IV – ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS AND EMPOWERMENT (WEEKS 11-18)

The main features of this period were a focus on alternative economic ideas which led to thoughtful reflections on many aspects of daily living as well as how to debate social and environmental issues with economic rationalists; a return to a focus on process for Group 2 in week 12; both groups facing the challenges of self-directed learning through the individual projects in Week 13; and deep reflections on empowerment in Week 14, which proved to be the last week of disciplined, recorded reflection. Following the format used in Part II, content and process are separated in the account given below. A significant change is that the voice of the reflective practitioner is largely absent during these weeks. I gave more space to summarising content and student responses in my
feedback, feeling that my own reflections had served their purpose, it would be repetitive to continue to voice them and would not be of great use to the students in their learning. In the light of this absence, the critical reflector voice occasionally takes on aspects of the reflective practitioner voice, i.e. through reflecting on pedagogical principles and power issues.

6.5.1 The Content

6.5.1.1 Wants vs Needs (Week 11)

NR: In the light of the talk in the previous class about international poverty, which focused primarily on basic needs (health and nutrition), it seemed to be appropriate to follow with a discussion of fundamental needs, which is a cornerstone of alternative economic thinking. In orthodox economics, human beings are assumed to have ‘unlimited wants’—i.e. the desire to consume endlessly is presumed to be part of ‘human nature’. The economic problem becomes how to allocate scarce resources to satisfy the rampaging appetites of homo sapiens. This sort of thinking assumes that there is no such thing as ‘enough’. It has been recognised by alternative economists (Ekins, 1992; Max-Neef, 1987) that this assumption is deeply flawed, and fails to recognise an important distinction: that between a need and the means to satisfy that need (its satisfier).

The Max-Neef model (discussed in chapter 4) which identifies nine fundamental needs for which there are endless possible satisfiers, provided the foundation of a process I devised to relate the theory to everyday life.

The steps in the process are outlined below:

1. Write down all the things you want. What are your desires? (Anything from new undies to spiritual enlightenment.)

2. Take this list and divide it into things that can be bought and things that money can’t buy.
3. Find a partner, and with their help, take the list of things that money can buy (commodities, services, etc.) and identify what fundamental need they are satisfying.

4. Ask yourself whether this need could be satisfied in any other way. Reflect on why you think this ‘thing’ is what you ‘need’.

5. Reflect on the extent to which the things that you want to buy are ‘socially determined’ and to what extent do they come from within?

6. Take one of the things on your list and see if you can come up with answers to the following questions [based on Shor’s (1992) ‘learning by investigation’ process):
   - What is it made of?
   - Where do the materials come from?
   - Who made it?
   - How is it designed?
   - How does it get to us?
   - Who decided we should have it?
   - Is it a good thing to have?
   - When did it enter human history?
   - How did people live before they had it?
   - Could we do without it?
   - Would it be something that everyone (including people in the Third World) would want?

7. Look at the list of fundamental needs. Identify which of the needs are well satisfied in your life. These are your ‘wealths’. Identify which of these needs are poorly (or not at all) satisfied. These are your ‘poverties’. This may broaden your definition of yourself as being ‘poor’ or ‘wealthy’.

8. Identify what would have to happen in your life, in your community, or in the society to allow these needs to be satisfied.
CR: Once I moved away from demystifying the orthodoxy to introducing alternatives, I felt more confident to introduce more creative processes that would help ground the content, demonstrating that economics is about the decisions we make in our daily lives, and can engage us as citizens, not just as consumers. I felt less tension about having to be an ‘expert’ on content, and I could therefore more confidently take on the role of facilitator, a role more in keeping with my assumptions about what makes a democratic teacher. However, I did not offer opportunities for critical reflection on the alternative models themselves, as I saw them as being appropriate, radical and offering a way out of the dilemmas posed by economic fundamentalism.

NR: The students responded positively to the opportunity to be engaged in a process that offered reflection on their own consumption habits, and below is a sample of responses from students in Group 1:

Della reflected on how much the media pressures people into consumption—‘you need this, you need that...’ and that people were not really given the option of whether to consume or not. When thinking about the chest of drawers that she wanted, she was aware that she wanted to buy a locally-produced item made from recycled materials, but was not sure how to answer the questions about where it came from, or how people do without them in other countries, etc.

Kirsten asked herself ‘where do I fit in the consumer society?’ and reflected that she was not really interested in consumption beyond the essentials, was content to maintain her existing consumption which fitted into her chosen lifestyle. ‘What is the use of a brand new computer, if we have to turn on the generator every time I want to use it? ... Is this part of the process of deep thinking about where I fit into the world or is it my own value and belief system?’

6.5.1.2 The Nature of Work (Week 12)

NR: The discussion the previous week that had outlined the difference between fundamental needs and satisfiers, had identified ‘work’ as a major satisfier for a number of fundamental needs (subsistence, affection, creation, participation, identity). We had a look at some of the ways alternative economists define work, in contrast to conventional economics which defines work as a means to gaining an income, and often considers it to be unpleasant. Alternative economists such as James Robertson (1990) regard work as a crucial satisfier in meeting fundamental human needs and argue that it has a direct role in generating welfare.
A number of alternative policy options have been suggested by different writers to improve the situation for work in the future, which represent departures from conventional approaches that centre on employment creation schemes and government policies that stimulate investment and economic growth, which ‘trickle down’ to jobs. Examples include work portfolios, raising skill levels, local development strategies, guaranteed minimum income schemes, changing ownership (large-scale organisations are publicly owned; small to medium enterprises become worker co-operatives; and small businesses are privately owned), reducing wage inequalities and increasing flexibility in the workplace (Stilwell, 1993).

This topic generated a lot of debate, reflection and discussion, of course, because of its relevance to the lives of students caught in the employment and unemployment dilemmas produced by capitalism.

Some comments and reflections from students in Group 2 included:

Felicity reflected on the fact that work has certainly changed over the centuries, but some basic things will never change: ‘there will always be a boss and there will always be people who work and the only things that will change will be what we actually work for and what makes us feel good’.

Renata commented that the strongest thing for her is that specialisation and alienation have had their ramifications. She has seen it with people she knows who are not just out of work because they can’t get a job, but because they choose to be: they have tremendous skills and talents for which the market does not offer money (e.g. artists), so they choose to be on the dole and do what their hearts desire rather than do ‘shit-kicking’.

Layla feels she has been fortunate in being able to combine work, creativity and fun throughout her life, and because she has no dependants, the money she makes is adequate for her needs. She reflected on the work ethic inherited from her working class background—‘unless you work, you’re nobody’.

6.5.1.3 Values and Ethics in Economics (Week 13)

The next topic we covered was ‘values and ethics in economics’, which followed on well from our discussions of fundamental needs and the nature of work. There are not many places where the issues of morality and ethics get explicit treatment in the literature. Rather, they tend to be given attention within the context of an overall
critique of assumptions made in conventional economics (Etzioni, 1988, 1992; Sagoff, 1988; Dworkin et al., 1977; Hamilton, 1994).

We looked at the way neo-classical economics invests all moral rights in the individual. Any attempts to intervene in individual tastes are seen to be inappropriate, violating ‘consumer sovereignty’. Those who argue for the ‘moral dimension’, such as Etzioni (1988) claim that in contrast to the radical individualism of neo-classical economics (and New Right political ideology), the communitarian movement recognises that the individual and the community are mutually dependent. The moral philosopher Sagoff (1988) makes a distinction between human beings as consumers and citizens, which necessarily arises from the distinction between values and preferences. Sagoff argues that our preferences as consumers and our preferences as citizens (often expressed more appropriately as values) are often incompatible and we are constantly subjected to the inner conflict this produces in our consumption decisions.

The consumer/citizen conflict represents the relative importance of the private and public worlds. Economists have elevated the private world to centrality in decision making. Sagoff argues that to attempt to put citizen judgment and personal preferences into the same ordering is logically incorrect because of the fundamental confusion between judgment and preference that (neo-classical) economics makes. The worth of things may better be measured by our unwillingness to pay for them—these things have a dignity rather than a price. His view is that the things which have a dignity are those which help define relationship.

Ideas such as these provided a fertile ground for the students to reflect on their own conflicts as consumers and citizens and the ethical basis of their consumption. For instance, one student, Gary, commented

_in our culture and society, to be conscious of ethical issues with respect to consuming and living in the community takes so much energy. Having awareness about different issues such as the consequences of buying something (where has it come from: who has been manipulated in its production, etc.), which in a way is about empowerment, or living ethically and consciously about the effects of living on the planet, is not rewarded in any way in our society. In fact, it's the opposite. We are encouraged to be unconscious: we are rewarded for consuming and being quiet and not caring. To be anything other than this is really hard work. It's exhausting._
6.5.2 The Process

For Group 1 during this period, the process of reflection continued with the students accepting the norm that we had established from Week 4. Their developing maturity and understanding were reflected in the quality of discussions which reached a peak in Week 14 with reflections on the empowerment process and a discussion on debating with economic rationalists, discussed below. Analysis of the empowerment process, which forms one of the central arguments of the thesis, is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The students in Group 2 also matured after the reflective process, which underwent a slump during weeks 9 and 11, was revitalised with a major review of the process of learning in Week 12. This review proved to be a turning point for the group, enabling them to move quickly into the performing stage of development. Their maturity was demonstrated in Week 14 when a ‘fishbowl’ discussion of how to debate economic rationalists produced significant insights and moments of critical thinking.

6.5.2.1 The Group 2 Review

NR: During Week 11, I had suggested to Group 2 that we set aside time in Week 12 to reflect on how the class was going, to give some time to ‘process’, and asked whether people would be willing to give a commitment to coming back to the class on time. Everyone had agreed to do this, and the class indeed kept this commitment. I began with saying that it had seemed to me that the class had gone through a period where there seemed to be resistance to spending time on process, accompanied by an anxiety about content, and therefore we had introduced a system of ending the class with reflections from the previous week. From my point of view, this did not seem to work, because there was confusion about whether to reflect on the current class or the previous one, and the reflections seemed ‘out of order’ and not really a useful transition between the two weeks. Because of this unsatisfactory situation, I had not made space for reflection in the previous two classes, so in a sense we had lost the process focus of the class altogether. I expressed interest in hearing from everyone about how they felt about the process and how their learning was progressing. I indicated that from my point of view, the research was very important, and there was a rewarding opportunity here that would be a shame to lose.
CR: This is an example of my taking charge of the process, exercising leadership and authority in my role as teacher. Despite student resistance to my research agenda, I insisted on it taking priority. Partly this insistence was out of my own need to resolve the tensions of my multiple roles as teacher, leader, researcher and facilitator. I also needed reassurance that I was not imposing my agenda too much and that the process had meaning for the students. One student in this class (James) had earlier (in Week 7) expressed misgivings about being part of my agenda and PhD and wondered ‘is it going to have an effect on me and my learning?’ Expression of this sort of scepticism weighed heavily on me and did not sit easily with my high-minded ideals about empowerment.

NR: The diversity in this class was reflected in the range of their responses. There were those who were more interested in the process and those who only wanted content.

Some felt the balance between the two was crucial:

I’m excited about finding out new ways of learning, and finding out how I’ve been learning and how I’ve been taught in the past … I may find out something new about myself (Don).

James reiterated that he is very content-oriented and a ‘traditionalist’:

I like a lecturer to lecture, giving heaps of notes and lots and lots of content.

Louise on the other hand, commented that she reacts to this style of delivering content by thinking:

Here we go, we’re back at school … so I go into that mode—take the pen out, write the notes and see what you can pick up, but I survive with that, because I’ve always done it that way. I’ve enjoyed the process, but sometimes I felt it got out of hand because my mind was processing too much!

Harriet liked the balance:

I appreciate having the space to talk about how we are feeling and how our learning is going and listening to other people’s feedback. It’s a good way to review what we’re actually learning.

NR: A number of students commented on how their learning about economics was developing. For Ross, it was slow and gradual:

I keep coming and I keep hanging in and I keep trying to let it sink in ... There’s a lot involved in this course and some days are harder than others.

For Sue, on the other hand, there was a lot of movement:

My learning about economics has just taken off, especially understanding the relationship between economics and the world—for instance, watching an
economics discussion on Lateline and understanding most of it was to me real proof that I’ve learned a lot of things.

Aaron commented that it took him a while to understand the link between economics and what we were actually studying:

*Why am I studying economics? What does it have to do with social science? Now that it’s sunk in how much a part of it economics is, I’ve been really enjoying it. Economics is the only assignment I’ve started—I’m really enjoying getting into it.*

Robyn wasn’t sure what she felt about economics and had her expectations challenged:

*It’s an achievement just to get here ... I’m content-focused and when I realised we had reached week 11 I started to ask myself, ‘what have I learnt?’ I realised that yes, I have learnt something, but the class is very different from what I thought economics was going to be.*

Some students offered some thoughts on the reflection process itself, for example, Sue noted the time it takes to reflect effectively:

*It is quite difficult to reflect immediately on what you’ve learnt and write things down ... that often comes later, when things have had time to sink in.*

and Renata noticed that allowing a ‘space’ for reflection eased the process of learning for her:

*The process is good for me psychologically because economics is one of the subjects I was a bit worried about. It’s good for me to know that there’s a space where you can talk about how you’re learning, what’s working for you and what’s not working for you.*

NR: A number of students suggested returning to the process of reflecting at the beginning of the class, with a time limit to ensure that content was not sacrificed. This was done, and continued for the next two weeks, after which recorded reflections ceased.

RP: The significance of this review was that it allowed for a return to the familiar process, resolving the ‘tensions’ experienced as a result of the loss of focus on the process, and that it permitted students to reflect that they were in fact learning a great deal about economics, despite their anxieties. A number commented that they were making progress on their own projects, which was demonstrating that they were able to apply their learning.
CR: While this reflection from the students was undoubtedly helpful for them, I did not make totally transparent at the time my own need to be reassured that the students were learning and were not suffering unduly from the imposition of my research agenda.

6.5.3 Integration of Content and Process: Debating Economic Rationalists

As mentioned above, Week 14 saw the beginning of a process that was to continue until the end of the semester—an application of critical thinking to the learning about economics and how it connected with the big issues facing us in our time. The following extract gives an indication of how this was demonstrated in Group 1 (the discussion was taped and I took notes from the tape). My multiple roles as teacher, facilitator and activist, particularly in the way I controlled and led the discussion, are very apparent throughout. (My contributions are in **bold italics**).

*I asked the question: how could we debate economic rationalists? What sort of arguments could we bring in and stand our ground? How can we stand our ground in the face of arguments which say that efficiency is the most important thing, we have to run the government like a company, etc.? How can we express our opposition to this dangerous ideology and be taken seriously? Or should we have to do that?*

Shanti pointed out how intimidating and confusing the jargon can be and how it keeps the debate exclusive. She realised that a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing, and acknowledged that she would need to do further research to be able to handle a debate.

*I said that this was an incentive for us to get informed; we have to get smart. I remember that as an economics student I was silenced; I didn’t have the language to engage in this discussion, because it was just dogma—‘this is the way it is, this is the way you have to think, these are the models’.*

Margret related her observations of a debate she caught on late night television between neo-classical and alternative economists, and how important it was that the latter had the language. When the conservative economists used one of their terms or concepts, the alternative economists were able to ask: where does that idea come from, what does it actually mean? And then they were able to ‘unveil it from there’. She observed that in responding, the classical economists would ‘run themselves into a dead end road’, they would get stuck. She commented that this would be obvious to anyone, whether they understood economics or not, that the economic rationalists had become dead, they were stuck, as they kept repeating their terms, on the other hand the alternative economists took account of broader issues, were more relevant, their arguments had more life [it
seemed to her]. They seemed to be suggesting more of a way out, whereas the conservative economists appeared to be ‘keeping something together for the sake of keeping it together—it seemed like a totally dead structure.’

She raised the issue of whether a debate is possible if one side is very fixed and doesn’t want to debate, there is no possibility of real interaction. From her observation there was no real communication—the alternative economists would present their arguments and wouldn’t lose strength by buying into the neoclassical dogma and fruitlessly arguing. Making their points about what they saw was relevant had its own strength and people could make their own decisions about what they were presenting.

**I raised the question: is debate the right way to go?**

We talked about Della’s discussion with a law student at university [who was arguing a conservative line]—she could be so much more effective because she was informed. **Della** realised that he had not really thought about his arguments, ‘it was just something he had learnt, and he was regurgitating it’ and that he didn’t really have many answers to her questions and challenges.

**Shanti** raised the question of the motives behind the debating—are we arguing for the sake of it, do we just want to win? ‘Would it be different if we were there for change?’

**Jenny** reflected on the devastation to the environment that has happened in her lifetime. For her, **that** becomes more important than the ideology which has contributed to it.

**I pointed out that yes, it was important to be informed, but will the debates go anywhere, or will we just have ideologies missing each other?**

**Noel** commented that TV debates are set up for entertainment, they’re not set up to teach you anything. The facilitator or journalist does not act as a true mediator, who tries to **find common ground.**

**This proved a turning point in the discussion and moved me to ask: ‘how could we find common ground?’**

**Noel** suggested that a possible common ground could be that everyone wants to live a ‘comfortable’ life. This produced an argument about ‘whose definition of comfortable?’

**Kirsten** commented that the difference between an economic rationalist and an holistic economist is that the holistic economist thinks of the future, whereas the economic rationalist thinks only of the present.

**I commented that we had fairly clearly staked out what the non common ground is, so what is the common ground? We can only have a productive debate when we can find where we agree.**
Some thought that the common ground may be the individual or the family.

*I expressed the view that if we come back to the family as common ground then we must remember that we are thinking in the Western mould. A non-Westerner may think of the tribe and the planet before the individual, whereas we have been divorced from nature and the community—the best we can do is family.*

Others suggested the common ground may be finding joy in nature, *I noted that this too can be an assumption—not everyone finds nature pleasurable.*

**Jenny** was concerned to put the argument strongly to the economic rationalists that their ideology has produced environmental catastrophe.

*I offered the information that the economic rationalists have an argument that says that environmental decline is a result of inadequate government response, that if private property rights were allocated to environmental goods, then the decline would not occur. We need to get past these arguments and point out that seeing the world in terms of ownership of private property may not be the only way of seeing things. I then asked do you therefore find common ground by going to the heart of assumptions?*

**Shanti** raised the issue of ‘rationalism’ being such an inappropriate term for such an irrational ideology.

*I suggested that this comes from the notion of rationality of the individual consumer expressed through exercise of preferences in the market and maximising satisfaction—emotions and the heart don’t come into such decision making.*

**Margret** reflected that the common ground is obvious. We are all living on the same planet, and that is why we have to open up the language to include everything. TV debates are useful because they point up the stinkness of the economic rationalists and the importance of broadening the debate to include social justice and the environment. In this way, through the televising of the debates, it becomes obvious to people what has been invisible, the unveiling process can begin.

*I wondered whether strategic questioning would be a useful strategy to employ in a dialogue with economic rationalists. Perhaps we could ask them whether they recognised if their ideology supported particular vested interests.*

**Gary** made the insightful comment that interests are not just financial. People have vested interests in their positions and belief systems, and asking them to question their own position is very challenging as it questions the fundamental beliefs that give meaning to their lives.

This led on to a discussion about social movements as a means for social change—we came up against the power interests and once again we were throwing up our hands.
I talked about the ideas I had read in an interview with a Czech economist Jaroslav Vanek who talks about ‘economic democracy’ which implies that economic life is governed by people who are involved in that economic life. He says that ‘one of the main reasons why the western world is so schizophrenic is that we have political democracy and economic autocracy’ (New Renaissance, 1996: 6). For capitalism, this would mean everyone who works in an enterprise is a member of the enterprise which is run democratically. Directors are elected democratically and stockholders have no control.

The tape ended at this point of the discussion.

CR: It is clear from this discussion that the students in this group had almost all developed an ‘activist consciousness’—they had been convinced by the demystification process I had devised that economics was an ideology and that it was a major contributor to the world’s problems. Would I have allowed a dissenting voice? Would democracy have been sacrificed if the students did not agree with my analysis and position? The politically committed teacher is often at risk of granting legitimacy to ‘correct’ positions and marginalising those which do not accord with her values, despite espousing values of democracy within classrooms and society (Fine, 1993). On the other hand, according to the values and strategies of the committed activist, I had achieved my goal—demystification had produced alert, critical thinkers who, by their own admission, had experienced new understanding and realised empowerment.

NR: I went from this discussion into Group 2 and after their reflections on empowerment (discussed in chapter 7) I decided to trial a discussion process using a ‘fishbowl’ technique with the same question as a trigger—how do we engage an economic rationalist in debate? Again, the students engaged intelligently and thoughtfully with similar issues, enjoying a different process that allowed for more equality of participation. Due to space constraints, I have not included a record of this discussion.

6.5.4 The Final Weeks …

During weeks 15 and 16, the focus was on discussions around the environment and social justice and the implications of economic rationalism for welfare, with student presentations and interactive discussions continuing. Week 17 was spent on working on individual projects and Week 18 consisted of a course evaluation and farewell party. The process of recording reflections ceased after Week 14, as the action research
process seemed to have found its own completion or closure point after the reflections on empowerment in that week.

6.6 CONCLUSION

The story told in this chapter reflects an attempt to apply the principles of critical action research to an emancipatory teaching of economics. As teacher and researcher, I aimed to apply the principles of radical adult education informed by the ontology of critical social science, as outlined in chapter 3. The features of this educational experience that I believe conform to such principles include:

- handing over ‘power’ to the students to decide on how they wanted to be assessed and what material they wanted covered in the course;
- refusing to see myself as an ‘expert’ in the field, but more as a ‘learning facilitator’ and ‘information gatekeeper’;
- incorporating reflection on learning as a conscious process throughout;
- engaging in critical reflection on my own assumptions and practices; and
- building an iterative reflective exchange built on trust and honesty which helped make visible what is usually invisible in classroom power relations.

The voice of the ‘reflective practitioner’ demonstrates how I placed myself firmly in the critical/emancipatory camp, favouring those discourses which reinforced that view and acting from those understandings. It (loosely) follows Smyth’s (1989) steps for critically reflective practice, describing, informing, confronting and reconstructing. While the ‘critical reflector’ voice demonstrates the naivety of much of the discourse of the reflective practitioner, offering a ‘deconstruction’ of its assumptions and positionings, it also acknowledges its strengths as a model of critical reflection. For example, the reflective practitioner makes transparent the dilemmas, tensions and vulnerabilities experienced by the teacher committed to democratic practices and empowerment of her students (informing and confronting); it commits to open sharing of the researcher’s thinking about the research process; it makes visible the power relations usually not acknowledged in the classroom; and it also makes visible the process of teaching through sharing thoughts behind the decisions to include or exclude certain content and to provide justifications for particular teaching practices (reconstructing). The reflective practitioner also demonstrated respect for the students and transmitted enthusiasm for their involvement in and commitment to the research

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process. Its relative absence in Part IV suggests that its job had been done and the focus needed to turn to student voices. However, it is also possible that this relative silence is a limitation of the research process, and weakens its potential impact.

The main task of the ‘critical reflector’ voice was to critically examine and reflect on the underlying assumptions, contradictions, absences and illusions evident in the reflections of the ‘reflective practitioner’, revealing an activist not necessarily aware of some of the ontological and epistemological dilemmas posed by her positionings on empowerment and activism, and observing the inevitability of her own complicity in a possible manipulation of her audience in the name of liberation (Fay, 1987). This deconstruction revealed a tendency to make unaware assumptions about the sources of student empowerment and enthusiasm, about an imperative to take action in the world; about the inevitability of empowerment and about what an empowering education looks like. It uncovered illusions about collaboration in a context of unequal power and differential access to knowledge, and about ‘democratic’ practices which failed to offer genuine opportunities for dissent and which failed to confront expressed scepticism. It pointed out significant absences in relation to a lack of critique of alternative visions, a lack of critique of emancipatory discourse and a lack of appreciation of the fluidity of power relations. It noted contradictions in relation to taking on the role of ‘expert’ and demonstrated the tensions involved from the conflicting roles that are often taken in emancipatory action: that of being an agent of change and an agent of control (Healy and Peile, 1995).

Despite this critique, I maintain that the project of demystification led to significant experiences for the students, enhanced considerably by the way relationship was developed through a reflective exchange. Therefore, two primary questions emerge from the analysis in this chapter:

1. given the emancipatory aspirations that have been made transparent in the telling of this story, to what extent did students achieve ‘empowerment’ in their learning of economics?
2. how do we make sense of the ‘critical reflector’ voice in its critique of the emancipatory intentions made explicit by the ‘reflective practitioner’, and what are the implications of this critique for the emancipatory project?

These questions become the focus for chapter 7.
CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS ON THE TAFE EXPERIENCE:
CHALLENGES TO THE EMANCIPATORY PROJECT

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented a ‘narrative’ of the unfolding research process as well as of the teaching and learning of economics in the TAFE context. The activist intention of this research project was very clear—I placed myself firmly in the camp of critical pedagogy, with emancipatory aspirations. The clear and transparent goal was empowerment of the students as research participants and as learners of economics. Two questions emerged from the narrative and this chapter examines each of them in turn.

The first task of this chapter (in part I) is to determine whether the emancipatory aspirations of the TAFE project were realised—did students experience ‘empowerment’ in their learning of economics? To make this assessment, the data from students’ journal reflections as well as their class reflections are examined after a review of the problematic concept of ‘empowerment’ itself. A number of different understandings of empowerment emerge, and it appears that the reflective process, particularly the **reflective exchange**, is linked to empowerment outcomes, i.e. student empowerment in relation to the content was made possible by the reflective environment established through relationship, a relationship which featured sharing of uncertainties and vulnerabilities. The importance of demystification emerges as a key component of empowerment, as does the influence of individual desires and needs on how students view empowerment. The connection is also made here with the influence of Heart Politics on my teaching practice.

The second major task of the chapter (in part II) is to examine more closely the reflective voices that helped construct the narrative in chapter 6. Both voices, the ‘reflective practitioner’ and the ‘critical reflector’, were incorporated as the reflection component of the action research—the reflective practitioner, reflecting on the research
as it was proceeding; and the critical reflector, a ‘meta-reflector’ on my activist assumptions and practices.

The ‘critical reflector’ voice appears to challenge some of the fundamental assumptions of the emancipatory project, especially as practised by critical educators. When examining this challenge that the critical reflector voice offers, issues raised echo to some extent the concerns and critique emerging from the postmodern and poststructuralist paradigms, a critique that radical educators have found difficult to ignore. It also raises similar issues that concern Fay (1987) with regard to the ontology of critical social science, particularly with respect to the limits on rationality required for critical reflection. Examining the way in which postmodernism interrogates the emancipatory project and the responses by critical educators to this challenge allows the TAFE project to be contextualised as an unfolding ‘postmodern critical educational process’ in the tensions produced when a postmodern perspective interrogates an emancipatory project.

The emergent focus from the action research cycle located at TAFE is the process of critical reflection, a process central to the emancipatory project (as we saw in chapter 3), a process that needs further interrogating in the light of my emancipatory intentions in the classroom. While reflection was incorporated consciously into the TAFE learning experience, students were not asked specifically to critically reflect. Rather, I encouraged a process of reflection with a focus on ‘empowerment’. The question arising for the next cycle at university emerged: is it useful to incorporate critical reflection into the learning process deliberately with more specific definition, and study its potential contribution to empowerment in the teaching of economics?

The chapter concludes with introducing the next cycle of action research located at the university, arising from this emergent interest in critical reflection for teaching economics. It outlines what will be different about the university research, how it was planned and what research questions emerge to be explored.

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1 While this expression may seem awkward as a split infinitive, my preference is to maintain consistency by keeping the adverb ‘critically’ before ‘reflect’ in this case.
7.2 PART I – LEARNING ECONOMICS: WAS ‘EMPOWERMENT’ REALISED?

As discussed in chapter 3, empowerment is a central goal of emancipatory education. However, practitioners in the critical tradition have questioned whether it is a realistic or achievable goal, especially as conceptualised in Freirian-inspired radical education projects, and have discovered that assumptions about the nature of power implicit in the emancipatory project may be naïve (Facundo, 1984; Ellsworth, 1992). For instance, in attempting to achieve student empowerment in a university setting beset with racism, Ellsworth (1992: 98) found that empowering students in the sense of ‘sharing, giving, or redistributing power’ was illusory, given that the strategies she attempted invariably left the ‘authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact’. The conclusion she came to was that given that critical pedagogy makes empowerment dependent on rational dialogue, the impossibility of achieving such rationality in the face of reproduction of relations of dominance within the classroom makes such empowerment an unachievable goal. Further, as we shall discuss in part II, a postmodern interpretation of power, i.e. that power exists everywhere, internalised in the body, language, emotions and desires, has led to claims of the ‘impossibility of emancipation’ in any modernist sense (Fay, 1987; Szkudlarek, 1993).

Making power relations visible and open to scrutiny in the TAFE classroom was an attempt to ameliorate some of the concerns raised by practitioners such as Ellsworth (1992). The ‘critical reflector’ articulated the naivety of the accompanying assumptions that this process would open up possibilities for genuine collaboration. While the stated goal of the TAFE cycle of research was empowerment of the students in relation to economics, I did not offer any specific definition of ‘empowerment’ for the students to check their experiences against. My expectation that socially transformative action would result (perhaps held ‘privately’ as a utopian goal) was not articulated overtly to the students. Hence, there was no ‘privileging’ of any particular notion of what empowerment should look like. For some students, this meant they were not able to express a clear understanding or even demonstrate a capacity for self-reflection in response to my specific questioning. For others, their own interpretations were given expression, understandings which reflect the way the term has come to have a range of meanings in popular usage (Bihl Dimitrov, 1994).
7.2.1 Meaning Making: Student Experiences of Empowerment

The opportunity to exchange reflections between the students and me as teacher as part of the action research process permitted an explicit exploration of the experience of empowerment throughout the semester. Evidence of the students’ understandings of their learning in relation to empowerment was also revealed in their written reflections handed in at the conclusion of the semester as part of their assessment.

I will firstly offer my reading of a selection of the multiple meanings of empowerment as conceptualised by the students. Secondly, in the spirit of allowing a space for the hearing of students’ ‘authentic voices’, I will include a selection of responses taken from the discussions in the classroom and the students’ own writing which I believe demonstrates diversity of experience, not consistent with a single over-arching notion of emancipation or empowerment of the kind often suggested by critical social science.

This reading of student responses is an interpretive process grounded in my own values and research interests (Kemmis, 1996). This interpretive tradition, which uses ‘practical reasoning’ suggests that ‘what can be represented is a matter of interpretation of the world’ (Kemmis, 1996: 207) and its nature will be influenced by who is doing the interpreting. As students were asked, both in class and in their assignments, to reflect on their experiences of empowerment, their responses to these questions provided material to interpret. It essentially involved a process advocated by the ‘grounded theory’ approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967). I immersed myself in the student responses, reading them as if for the first time, encountering common themes that emerged through this process of immersion, re-immersion, reflection and interpretation. The categories therefore ‘emerged’ from the data as part of my interpretive process, and as far as possible, I have allowed the student voices to ‘speak for themselves’ while keeping in mind the dangers of presenting ‘disembodied’ voices, separate from their cultural histories (Lather, 1991a).

The diversity present in these reflections does not only reflect diversity among individuals, but also illustrates a difference between the two groups overall. As was revealed in chapter 6, the part-time group (Group 1) was generally much more willing to engage in the process of reflection and was less concerned about assessment and time
constraints. The full-time group (Group 2) was more anxious about assessment and ‘getting enough content’ and members were generally more impatient with the process and less interested in reflecting on their own empowerment process, with a few notable exceptions.

The reflective process in both face-to-face contact in class and in written form in journals handed in at the end of semester revealed the following diversity of interpretations of empowerment: empowerment as ‘enlightenment’ through demystification; as becoming an ‘informed citizen’; as having control over learning; as having control over daily life decisions; as involving practical action; as ‘living consciously’; as reassessing values; as inclusion in debate; and as self-understanding. Comment will also be made on whether student conceptions of empowerment reflect negative or positive aspects of freedom, i.e. ‘freedom from’ constraints (emancipation) or ‘freedom to’ take control of one’s life (empowerment), as discussed in chapter 3 (Szkudlarek, 1993).

(a) Empowerment as ‘enlightenment’ through demystification

A significant number of students found that gaining knowledge about a subject with the ‘mystique’ that economics often holds, experienced in a supportive environment that allowed for reflection on personal experience, produced feelings of satisfaction related to a sense of empowerment. For Della, gaining knowledge was the key:

The demystification of ‘economics’ and its environment played a pertinent role in my ability to learn about a subject that had always held an almost ‘holy’ aura … Here is where I really started to feel empowerment. The power of knowledge. The knowledge and space that Kath had given me created an avenue to explore and examine my life and my life decisions more closely and more analytically (Della, journal reflection, Group 1).

While for Sue, the reduced mystery meant new connections could be made in understanding her place in the bigger picture:

Initially the thought of studying economics terrified me—lots of figures, jargon, meaningless phrases. In short, it was mysterious—a dry, boring subject which was removed from my existence. … Economics is now less mysterious to me; it (I realise) is an integral part of my existence. From the subliminal manipulation of ‘my’ value in the supermarket to the impact of environmental degradation, I see relevance and connections (Sue, journal reflection, Group 2).
For yet another student, demystification through understanding the development of economic thought produced a lot of anger:

*Working through that anger has been empowering. I see that the more that people understand, and the more that economics is demystified, the more that changes can be made* (Joan, class reflection, Group 1).

A student raised in India, who felt economics would be completely beyond her, experienced the elation of realising she could understand it, and that the process in class made this possible:

*For me, the process has been very liberating, as I am realising that it [economics] is understandable, it’s not just for the chosen few. The demystification is very important and now I feel passionate about asking questions and I feel very enlightened. I thought I would hate this subject and just scrape through ... and that I wouldn’t understand the jargon, but I feel that Kath has made it very understandable and that it is part of our life. I’m amazed at myself that I’m asking these questions and I feel ... that my opinion does matter. All this is a result of the process, and if Kath had just stood out the front and rattled off a lot of names, it would have all gone over my head* (Shanti, class reflection, Group 1).

The results of demystification appear to offer aspects of both positive and negative freedom—freedom from illusion and alienation and freedom to engage in applied understanding.

**(b) Empowerment as becoming an ‘informed citizen’**

A number of students commented on the empowerment that resulted from being able to understand discussions in the media that were previously alien and mysterious, producing a greater sense of being informed and empowered citizens. Again, the demystification process was central, as the following responses indicate:

*So for me it has not been the process of learning that has been empowering but having that knowledge. Being able to listen to the media and make sense of what they are saying and being able to critique and come up with alternative ways of looking at an issue—recognising the dominant ideology* (Harriet, journal reflection, Group 2).

*I now watch things [on television] that previously I would have just blocked out if it had anything to do with economics, [feeling it was] too far away. For me, empowerment means opening up that space where from now on I will be more aware of my life, knowing why I am where I am, and what things can be done to change it* (Grace, class reflection, Group 1).
I find that I am more interested now in things like the current account deficit, GDP, GNP, and economics in general, before this subject ... it went in one ear and out the other (Jules, journal reflection, Group 2).

Economic rationalist, neo-classical, capitalism, inflation, utilitarianism, globalisation, GDP, GNP, macro-economics, trade deficit, foreign debt, etc. still leave me confused but over the last few weeks I’ve found myself looking at economic shows on TV, reading articles, etc. If I see a book on economics I don’t automatically avoid it. I have learned familiarity in hearing certain terms so pick up the book to see if it can teach me more (Louise, journal reflection, Group 2).

Once again, elements of both emancipation (freedom from fear arising out of mystification) and empowerment (freedom to participate as an informed citizen) are in evidence here.

(c) Empowerment as control over learning

For a number of students, having the opportunity to take charge of their own assessment process was very empowering, offering a significant departure from the familiar teacher-directed control. Being responsible brings with it that sense of power that comes with ‘taking charge of one’s own life’. For these students, this was the essence of the empowering effects of ‘radical education’, as much as the content of what they were learning about economics. It is interesting to observe the language relating to empowerment in the following responses, the language of positive freedom, particularly related to real experience:

I thought that there was no way I would be able to understand or comprehend that subject [economics]. What was empowering for me was taking up that challenge and having total control of what I wanted to learn and how I wanted to learn it, doing research, and deciding which way to research (Joan, class reflection, Group 1).

The process of discussing how and what we were going to learn about economics I found empowering....gave me a sense of being responsible for my own learning (Don, journal reflection, Group 2).

What I have learned within the class [is] that I can have some ‘power’ in my learning, that I don’t have to feel uncomfortable with this shift. That I actually enjoy participating in class when ... issues can be related to my personal experiences (Lucy, journal reflection, Group 2).

Being told that I can design my own assignment and develop my own learning objectives got me off guard, but in the event of doing the assignment I was very empowered by the experience (Layla, journal reflection, Group 2).
Right from the beginning of the class I noted the uniqueness of being an adult learner. I had a history of economic experience to draw on, working at a secular job, running a household as a sole parent and my interest in general reading. Also as an adult I expect and demand time to voice my opinion and my life experiences around economic issues … [Having control over setting my own assignment] was … a challenge as I had never been given such control over my learning. I appreciated the opportunity and decided early on my subject. This gave me a mental outline to take into class. How would today’s lesson apply in a small community? How can I apply this knowledge in my life? (Aaron, journal reflection, Group 2).

(d) Empowerment as control over daily life decisions

Another way in which empowerment was experienced was through gaining a sense of more control over daily-life decisions, especially in relation to consumption. A greater understanding of economics therefore produced a stronger experience of positive freedom:

I am much more aware of my consuming habits and their effects on the country of origin and its people … Decisions to buy locally or not, decisions to accept the plastic bag at Woolies or not. These daily decisions affect the perceptions I have of my responsibilities for my life, and the environment … To be able to integrate this information into my daily decision making has made me feel so much more connected and in control of my life. To be able to act on these choices has given me feelings of empowerment and satisfaction (Della, journal reflection, Group 1).

One woman, a single parent, spoke of the impact on decisions about where to live:

The main thing that impacted on my life was the day that the class was discussing how to creatively work within this system … this gave me the push that I needed in relation to looking at my life style … [Instead of moving to Brisbane] I am now considering looking at an alternative way of life … explore the co-operatives … of Mateny … exploring the advantages and disadvantages of community living … The class process has inspired me to seek out a more fulfilling way of life. One that will allow me to contribute to a community. One where I can consider creative alternatives where equality and social justice can be practised (Joan, journal reflection, Group 1).

One student at first felt disempowered in her learning about economics, but then she realised that:

… to become empowered I had to look at my own benchmark of what I felt was making me empowered or not making me empowered. Economics has often just offered pieces of the puzzle which has been frustrating as I haven’t been able to understand the whole picture. For me, economics is my day-to-day life, paying my bills. If I read the paper and I hear about how the country’s got a deficit, I really don’t give a damn, it’s how my deficit is in my bank book that really
matters ... how I budget and how I deal with economics in my own life is probably more important to surviving (Louise, class reflection, Group 2).

(e) Empowerment as practical action

Yet another example of positive freedom encompassed practical action in daily life. One male student indicated the way he knows he is empowered is through a greater confidence in what he is doing, dealing with the subject or problem in front of him:

I’m still not clear about exactly how I’m empowered. I feel I learn more from informal rather than formal methods, like people I talk to, the papers I read, etc. ... I’m much better at learning when I’ve got a particular focus and I’ll go and empower myself by talking to everybody and anybody (Noel, class reflection, Group 1).

Another student felt her biggest empowerment was:

... starting my own project on the economics of sustainable energy, and through that process got a grasp of some very practical stuff, like other ways of looking at the world, and other ways of healing the world. To me it is very encouraging to see what can be done and what is in fact being done (Kirsten, class reflection, Group 1).

(f) Empowerment as ‘living consciously’

Related to control over daily decisions is empowerment connected with ethical awareness, which, while satisfying, can take its toll, according to one student (similarly quoted in another context in chapter 6):

Having awareness about different issues such as the consequences of buying something (where has it come from: who has been manipulated in its production, etc.), which in a way is about empowerment, or living ethically and consciously, about the effects of living on the planet, is not rewarded in any way in our society. In fact, it’s the opposite, we are encouraged to be unconscious; we are rewarded for consuming and being quiet and not caring. To be anything other than this is really hard work, it’s exhausting (Gary, class reflection, Group 1).

This response seems to encompass aspects of both negative and positive notions of freedom—freedom from ignorance and freedom to live with awareness, albeit freedom that is accompanied by pain.

(g) Empowerment as reassessing values

Some students had the experience of a shifting awareness of what was of real value in their lives, in contrast to the way ‘wealth’ is measured in the dominant paradigm,
producing a deeper sense of empowerment and personal satisfaction. Being introduced to concepts such as Max-Neef’s theory of ‘fundamental human needs’ contributed to this. Emancipation from a limiting view of what is of value is accompanied by empowerment to notice the blessings of simple, non-consumerist qualities of life. One student experienced empowerment through realising a different interpretation of her ‘wealth’ as she lived it in her community:

*Being a student and having to live with very limited finances has also influenced my interest in economics. I actually feel quite positive about my wealth. I share more with people, and I notice how people in similar situations are ready and happy to support one another in small but meaningful ways ... The best times I’ve had have been where all those broke to go out have pooled what they have in food, a place, talent, music and money to create entertainment (Renata, journal reflection, Group 2).*

A woman of Aboriginal heritage spoke in the class about an experience of gathering food, ‘Koori-style’, with a group of Aboriginal women, and then going back to cook it. On reflecting on the simple joy of this very positive, natural (and ancient) experience, she realised:

*how horrible it is that the industrial world has come in and taken over and made us into consumers*

She went on to talk about ‘reflecting in the shower’ about how much she was consuming:

*coffee, cigarettes, soap, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, perfume, make-up, tissues, power, petrol, and the rubbish I threw away in the process. When I thought back to the experience of well-being with the group of food-gathering women I asked myself ‘how can I measure that?’—it was in hugs and smiles and it was just wonderful and then I thought is perfume, is make-up, etc. making me happy? (Sharon, class reflection, Group 1).*

One man appreciated the opportunity to reflect on the importance of his own community

*An interesting aspect of this class has been that it has helped me to focus more back into the community I live in (the Nimbin area)—feeling as settled as I ever have, I want to focus my energy more where I live locally—help build community and at the same time get my needs met (Graham, journal reflection, Group 2).*
(h) Empowerment as inclusion in debate

For one woman, a German immigrant, the most significant experience of empowerment came with a sense of her voice being valued and being allowed to participate in economics discussions, something she had felt excluded from previously:

[Learning economics] is like being allowed to play tennis in Germany; it’s a class thing ... For me, learning economics is contradicting the despair and disempowerment that goes with this [exclusion] ... [Understanding discussions on television] gives me a sense of importance ... I’m not really shoved on the side ... I actually can be in there ... it’s not just like the big people on the top who can understand it all and make it happen ... I can be involved (Margret, class reflection, Group 1).

In her journal she wrote:

Personally I felt included and empowered in the learning of a science which otherwise has the opposite effect on a big part of the community ... To be taught economics in this way had a profound effect on me I feel [is] difficult to transmit. It was not so important to become knowledgeable in economics, rather it was important to be valued of my input, and that it counted what I believed in. This encouraged me on a much deeper level, that it is possible for me to understand anything. This was a crucial moment for me, economics entered my real life, life that matters, my life (Margret, journal reflection, Group 1).

The predominant theme here appears to be emancipation from the constraints accompanying exclusion, while empowerment seems to result from the freedom to participate in debate.

In trying to come to understand what made a difference for her in developing an interest in economics, one woman identified a similar sort of inclusive, non-judgmental process, predominantly a freedom from oppression and marginalisation:

I can’t quite understand what triggered my interest [in reading books and articles, etc]. The only word I can come up with is FAMILIARITY, and an encouragement produced to allow one to speak about economics in our own limited way without fear of condemnation or ridicule (Louise, journal reflection, Group 2, original emphasis).

(i) Empowerment as self-understanding

Through gaining insights into past experiences, reflection permitted a deeper sense of empowerment through a heightened sense of self-understanding. A reading of the following three extracts from different life stories allows an appreciation of the multiplicity of experiences that emerged from the education process:
Reading about the basic principles behind these theories gave me understanding of the economic times during my growing years. As I was reading various bits of information, childhood flashes would appear before me. Now I could piece together parts of my own past. I could remember my father sitting around the kitchen table discussing changes that were occurring within the industrial law regarding the lifting of tariffs. My father was very passionate about this subject and he disagreed fully with the changes that were being introduced into the working system. This gave me greater understanding of my father ... I felt empowered by being able to understand these issues and I also felt as though I could now join in conversations relating to these issues (Joan, journal reflection, Group 1).

Economics took me back to India and our lifestyle there. With the scarcity of material possessions which included electricity, ‘space’ and at times food, we had little in comparison to what we have here in Australia ... capitalism became part of this culture through the force of its ideology telling us we were not happy because we did not have many possessions ... [we had other things we had less of such as] less paranoia, less money worries, less anger, less prejudice, less judgemental [attitudes], less burden and less greed. What we had more of was patience, tolerance, empathy, caring understanding, love and more time to play, dream, philosophise, to talk and nurture, to notice, to contemplate, to think and feel. These things have no price and money cannot buy [them] ... It made me appreciate that part of my life ...which gave me substance and a strong character and spiritual beliefs that [have] ... made me who I am (Shanti, journal reflection, Group 1).

Economics is not only about money, it is about the effects of political decisions, the science, the technology and the values and attitudes of the late twentieth century on the environment and humanity. Looking at a broader picture made me think about my past. [describes working hard in her father’s business in Switzerland as a child, as well as helping her mother raise her four younger sisters]. In rational economic terms there was an increase in wealth [as the business expanded], but ... it came at the price of leisure, social life and family relationship ... these were the wealths I was lacking (Kirsten, journal reflection, Group 1).

From examining these different understandings and experiences of ‘empowerment’ we can see that they represent both positive and negative aspects of freedom, often very specifically articulated. They also appear to depend on issues arising in individual lives—the desire for greater control; the desire to understand impenetrable discourse; the need to feel valued and included; the desire to live with awareness; the desire to achieve practical results; the need to make sense of the past. Such experiences seem to go deeper than the ‘enlightenment’ that follows a rational unveiling of ideologies, ideologies pointed out to them in the context of the teaching environment, ideologies which are presumed to contribute to ‘false consciousness’. Empowerment as experienced by some students goes beyond the rational, involving a deeper sense of
their connections with their own stories and the dominant story of economics. However, it should be noted that the demystification process that revealed the ideological underpinnings of the dominant discourse of economics undoubtedly contributed to a powerful new awareness for a significant number of students. I would argue that the part played by demystification would appear to be essential in any education process aimed at empowering its participants.

The responses also reveal the significance of the reflective relationship that was established in the classroom. It will be recalled that in chapter 2 I identified the social change movement known as Heart Politics as a significant influence on my approach to activism. The core strategy that underpins this type of activism is relationship building, particularly at the local level. Processes such as non-violent action, deep listening, sharing vulnerabilities and strategic questioning are aimed at building relationships not only with allies, but also with those from ‘the opposition’. My teaching strategies were informed by Heart Politics activism—being willing to listen to the students’ personal and academic concerns, sharing my own doubts and uncertainties, engaging in a mutual reflective exchange, giving each person a chance to be heard. I maintain that this approach contributed to the relationship and trust building that allowed for understandings of empowerment to emerge. Comments from students in Group 1 in particular, described in chapter 6, support this contention. For instance, Margret made the comment that it was empowering for students to be involved in the learning process, through bringing things into the open and making them visible. Gary said that he appreciated my willingness to share my reflective process with the class, that it created an ‘equalising experience’. Shanti used the word ‘intimate’ to describe what was happening—a sense that we were all much closer as a result of being engaged in this way.

I would argue that this research experience bears out the problematic nature of empowerment as it has been conceived by critical social science. It would be difficult to contend that such a multiplicity of understandings articulated by students in the context of a project which was consciously aimed at empowerment and emancipation demonstrate a solidarity leading to radical social action, a solidarity produced by rational dialogue (Ellsworth, 1992). However, the students were able to articulate what empowerment and emancipation meant to them, and were able to develop meaning
grounded in their life experiences. The students may not have all experienced 'solidarity' in the activist sense, but the seeds for action were sown for some. We could also argue that the mutuality of the experience, fostered by a type of reflection that offers more than mere 'rational dialogue' (as the word 'intimacy' suggests), goes beyond a notion of solidarity, producing deeper senses of connection with the environment and other people. While empowerment for many of the students involved increasing self awareness and decisions about changing the way they live and consume, it is perhaps difficult to argue that such empowerment would necessarily lead to radical action, as required by the activist intention of critical pedagogy.

These understandings arising from student reflections—multiple, contingent, partial and contextual—in some ways problematise the emancipatory intentions of critical pedagogy. The 'critical reflector voice' also challenges the assumptions underlying these intentions. To permit an understanding of how this project supports and challenges the goals of critical pedagogy, the next step is to place this project in the theoretical context of the postmodern critique of the emancipatory project of critical social science. This is the task of the second part of this chapter.

7.3 PART II – EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION AND POSTMODERNISM: TAFE IN CONTEXT

The role of the critical reflector voice in the narrative of chapter 6 was a questioning of some of the assumptions being made by the activist/researcher in her quest for empowerment of her students, as part of the reflective requirements of critical action research. In a bid to locate this questioning in a broader theoretical context, it emerges that this voice provides a similar critique of the emancipatory project to that provided by poststructuralist and postmodern inquiry. This thesis does not seek to wade too deeply into the confused, complex and sometimes impenetrable formations of the vast theoretical landscape of postmodernism. However, no project that locates itself within an emancipatory paradigm can ignore the rumblings of this earthquake that threatens its very foundations. There are some adventurous navigators who have attempted to chart these territories (Jarvis, 1998; Rosenau, 1992; Foster, 1985), and drawing on their work provides a useful map for our purposes.
After attempting to locate the ‘postmodern’ in historical context, I make use of Jarvis’s (1998) typology and critique to identify which aspects of postmodern inquiry are most relevant for our purposes and which find resonance with the critical reflector voice. Following an examination of how postmodernism has influenced critical education, the meticulous work done by Brian Fay (1987) further assists in the task of making sense of the TAFE project.

7.3.1 Modernity and Postmodernity: Has a ‘Postmodern’ Era Arrived?

There seems to be little disagreement that the period known as the Enlightenment revolutionised conceptions of truth and ushered in the period that is now referred to as ‘modernity’ in Western thought (discussed in relation to economic thought in chapter 4). The modern vision held that there was one knowable truth and that through rational investigation of universal laws, the deeper reality which underpins the appearance of things, and which exists independently of the observer, could be discovered. Modernity produced the authentic self with a private identity who could free itself from the constraints of authority. Key to this notion was that progress in human affairs was possible—the social world can be made better through conscious human design. Our modern striving towards social change is firmly rooted in these assumptions about individual autonomy and the possibility of social progress (Howe, 1994).

While it is the view of many thinkers that we have entered a ‘postmodern’ world, there is no agreement about when the (Western) world entered this phase. Some believe that Nietzsche’s writings last century introduced the postmodern era, while others claim postmodernity is a post World War II phenomenon (Howe, 1994). Many point to the rapid transformations in communications, transportation, trade and electronic images as indicators that we have entered a ‘new age’ of transformed political, social, economic and transnational realities with the restructuring of global industry, the rise of transnational finance, the new international division of labour and so on (Drucker, 1986; Andrews, 1982; Thrift, 1986). According to one writer:

Technological developments have shifted the balance away from purely territorial political forms to a greater role for non-territorial organizations and identities (Elkins, 1995, cited in Jarvis, 1998: 101).
For Elkins, the ‘withering away’ of the nation state means we have entered an age which takes us ‘beyond nations’ and ‘beyond sovereignty’.

However, there is no agreement about whether modernity has been transcended. For instance, it is argued by Giddens (1991) that the so-called ‘postmodern age’ is actually ‘part of the unfolding tapestry of modernity’ and that the forms described above are more a feature of the universalisation of late capitalism than any indication that we have entered a new, distinctive age:

In other words, talk of a ‘postmodern age’ is merely talk of the consequences of modernity, particularly developments in its constituent parts, namely liberal democracy, industrialism, capitalism, technology, and science. What postmodernists mistake as ‘new’ cultural forms, or as ‘new’ modes of production, are really consequences of old and well-established modernist practices: a case of old wine in new bottles (Jarvis, 1998: 104).

Others argue that the idea of postmodernity is a Eurocentric concept and that many societies have not even reached modernity by Western standards. Arguments are made that the power and influence of fundamentalist ideas, particularly in religion and economics, indicate that the ‘grand narrative’, a feature of modernity, is alive and well (Taylor-Gooby, 1994). For these writers, modernity continues on its progressive march, having lost none of its transforming vigour.

### 7.3.2 Making Sense of ‘Postmodernisms’

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the project of postmodernism is that it is marked by contention. Disagreements about definitions, concepts, ideas, meanings and political agendas have left postmodern writings described as:

an intellectual maelstrom and the postmodernist movement a diverse collection of followers who are neither united in intent, similar in focus or method, nor canonized in terms of theoretical precision (Jarvis, 1998: 95).

Writers wanting to make sense of this intellectual phenomenon have attempted classification of ‘postmodernisms’, risky though such a task may be given the hazards of using ‘simple dichotomised categories that are restrictive and exclusionary’ (Jarvis, 1998). Classifications include: ‘neoconservative’ and ‘post-structuralist’ postmodernism (Foster, 1985); ‘affirmative’ and ‘skeptical’ postmodernism (Rosenau, 1992); ‘deconstructionist’ and ‘bourgeois’ postmodernism (Rorty, 1980); and ‘critical postmodernism’ and ‘radical interpretivism’ (Hoffman, 1991).
Jarvis (1998) has produced a helpful typology in his attempt to determine the usefulness of postmodernism for the project of social science. As our aim here is similar, that is, to determine the extent to which the critical reflector voice echoes the postmodern critique, using his classification as a ‘heuristic tool’ may assist us in not becoming too lost in confusing and contradictory territories. While acknowledging that his classification is by no means all-inclusive, or can ever exclusively categorise theorists, and that there is inevitably much overlap between categories, Jarvis argues that the dominant themes in postmodernism lend themselves to a useful categorisation: subversive/deconstructive postmodernism; critical postmodernism; and technological/productionist postmodernism.

Subversive postmodernism relates to the themes of ‘negation’ and ‘resistance’, prevalent in much postmodern writing. Its familiar attack on Enlightenment reason, scientific objectivity, processes of logic and universal truths claims aims at an ‘unmasking of the Western mind’:

I say ‘unmasking’ though other terms are now de rigeur for instance, deconstruction, decentering, disappearance, dissemination, demystification, discontinuity, difference, dispersion, etc. Such terms express an ontological rejection of the traditional full subject, the cogito of Western philosophy. They express, too, an epistemological obsession with fragments or fractures, and a corresponding ideological commitment to minorities ... To think well, to feel well, to act well, to read well, according to this episteme of unmasking, is to refuse the tyranny of wholes; totalization in any human endeavor is potentially totalitarian (Ihab Hassan, cited in Jarvis, 1998: 118).

The aim then is to disrupt, disturb, deconstruct. Subversive postmodernism deconstructs ‘privileged representations’ of knowledge, totalising notions of empowerment in emancipatory projects and ‘grand’ or ‘meta’ narratives of ‘progress’, ‘liberation’ etc. It rejects notions of universal human emancipation, a universal human history, in fact any humanistic aspirations. It deconstructs ‘the magnificent Enlightenment swindle of the autonomous, stable and self-contained ego that is supposed to act independently of its own history’ (McLaren, 1994: 27). It claims that no discourses should be privileged above others and celebrates diversity and difference, producing a ‘politics of inclusion’ for marginalised groups. As it attacks any ‘absolutes’, all positions are relative—all knowledge is socially constructed through language and therefore is located in subjective, individual discourses rather than universal sites. It draws on Foucault’s
poststructuralist analysis of power as intricate, localised and divergent, rather
than being solely located in larger social structures.

Critics of subversive postmodernism (Norris, 1990; Callinicos, 1989) point to its ethical
and logical inconsistency, unavoidable because of its extreme and ‘specious relativism’:
while attacking privileged discourses, it privileges postmodern discourse; denouncing
foundationalist theory is itself a foundationalist position (claiming a ‘superior’ insight to
modernist understanding); championing marginalised groups draws on modernist
themes of social justice and emancipation; using language and scholarship itself to
denounce modernist language and scholarship.

Given these criticisms, Jarvis, who acknowledges his own position as committed to
modernist referents like ‘rationality,’ ‘progress,’ ‘justice,’ ‘emancipation,’ and indeed
conceptions of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’, finds little that subversive postmodernism can
effectively offer social science. He does acknowledge, however, that it is useful to
question the ontology and epistemology of social science and identify its silences and
omissions. But modernist discourse itself ‘is not unreflective’ and he argues that it can:
make autonomous corrections, engage in revisionist history, identify injustices
and crimes of exclusions, and extend representation to groups that were
otherwise not previously represented (Jarvis, 1998: 126).

This sort of reflective critique that does not abandon epistemological foundations of the
modernist emancipatory project in particular, is characteristic of critical postmodernity.
Politically, critical postmodernism maintains its commitment to social justice through
recognising that old modernist discourses contributed to privileging groups such as
white working class men in its emancipatory agenda. This strand of postmodern thought
can be seen as an extension of the Frankfurt School and has taken the poststructuralist
critique of Marxism’s reductionist, essentialist, determinist and structuralist ontologies
seriously, particularly following the failure of left politics and the triumph of late
capitalism. According to Morrow (1991: 27), critical postmodernism represents ‘the
best of what is left of the left’. Through shedding traditional Marxist reductionism,
critical postmodernism has integrated theories of cultural forms and, like subversive
postmodernism, has moved to incorporate a ‘politics of inclusion’ with its recognition
of marginal social movements (indigenous, green, feminist, black, gay, etc). This new
‘identity politics’ results from abandoning pretensions of objectivity and celebrating
diversity and subjectivities. The writings of feminist(s) Gibson-Graham discussed in chapter 4 provide an example from this critical postmodernist tradition.

Critics of critical postmodernism tend to come from the ranks of traditional Marxists like Morrow (1991), Norris (1990) and Callinicos (1989). The latter is unforgiving of the attempt by what he sees as the ‘1968 generation’ to rid themselves of their consumer guilt:

The discourse of postmodernism is best seen as the product of a socially mobile intelligentsia in a climate dominated by the retreat of the Western labour movement and the ‘overconsumptionist’ dynamic of capitalism in a Reagan-Thatcher era. From this perspective the term ‘postmodern’ would seem to be a floating signifier by means of which this intelligentsia has sought to articulate its political disillusionment and its aspiration to a consumption-orientated lifestyle (Callinicos, 1989: 170-171).

However, Jarvis (1998: 128) argues that critical postmodernism has an important role to play in social science for its ‘critical-analytical commentary on the condition of late capitalism and late modernity’.

Jarvis’s third category, technological postmodernism, draws on the theme of epochal change that has characterised late 20th century society, as discussed above. As Jarvis is a theorist in international relations, from his perspective this aspect of postmodernism is most relevant for the social sciences, because it:

most closely approximates a traditional social scientific research agenda, providing a methodological guide for assessing critically systemic change and theorizing its objective effects on our social institutions (Jarvis, 1998: 128).

Discourses based around these themes include theories of post-industrial society, post-fordism etc., which analyse late capitalism and how its systemic bases have changed. These discourses recognise the importance of political/economic processes that deconstructive postmodernism’s emphasis on language and text is in danger of marginalising (Lather, 1991a). They examine how technological change has fuelled multiple sites of transformation—economic, political, cultural and social. In its revisioning of capitalism, technological postmodernism demonstrates how early modern dialectics of capital, class and state have become increasingly redundant. The new dialectics include: new structures of power; class culture replaced by multiple identities not able to command a collective loyalty; and a reconsideration in national political practices in order to take account of identity group politics (e.g. witness recent political
strategies in Australia to incorporate disaffected groups in rural and regional areas. Recognising that the new dialectics require new analytical tools does not mean an abandonment of the issues of control, profit, power and wealth as central to the project of social scientific analysis. According to Jarvis (1998), the contribution of technological postmodernism comes in its ‘affinity for Gramscian method’ in seeing that power is located not only in the means of production, but in control over cultural goods, patents and aesthetic commodities such as film and television. It also understands the contradictory trends of ‘globalisation’ and the concentration of wealth and power in a few hegemonic centres.

In summing up postmodernism’s overall contribution, Jarvis comments that it is perhaps best understood in terms of our loss of confidence in reason and logic and scientific endeavour. However, as a committed modernist, he points out that we still need to make sense of events, and so we still need theory—if we completely abandon theoretical practice, he claims, it is not possible to make judgments and decisions about how to act in the world we live in. For the purposes of this thesis, I would suggest that the constructive aspects of postmodernism include its challenge to look at things in less fixed ways, its strategies of challenging dominant discourses and its offer of ways of avoiding dogmatism. Its most unhelpful features are those of subversive postmodernism—the lack of recognition of global economic/political structures that lead to a significant maldistribution of resources (Lather, 1991a); the lack of an effective theory of agency which tends to undermine collective action for social change; and its lack of accessibility through its specialised and marginalising language.

How does this brief appraisal of postmodern theory help make sense of what the critical reflector voice reveals in chapter 6? Given it is located in the micro context of a TAFE classroom, it would seem that the voice draws little on the macro concerns exhibited by the technological postmodern analysts, although the content of what the students were tackling, how economics and capitalism control their lives, would certainly benefit from the insights of these theorists. It is also not a voice of negation, disruption and deconstruction in that it does not attack foundations, language, reason or logic claims. To a certain extent it questions the ‘privileging’ of the teacher’s voice and the problematic of classroom power relations, but this would also find a place within the critical postmodern approach. It would seem useful to argue, then, that the critical
reflector voice reflects a critical postmodernist stance, as it maintains a political commitment to the emancipatory project, while questioning aspects of the reductionist, essentialist and determinist foundations of critical theory.

7.3.3 Postmodernism and Education

The above summary gives a general outline of postmodernism as an intellectual project. The way it has influenced theoretical endeavour in different disciplines varies according to the discipline and the particular form it takes. Jarvis (1998: 98) notes its unique feature of being able to be understood:

concurrently as a means of reading texts, a method for theoretical deconstruction, a form of political-economy, a variant of feminist writings, an epitaph to modernism, a post-avant-garde postexpressionist form of aesthetics, or a new hyperconsumer culture riven by image.

What impact has postmodernism had on the theory and practice of education, particularly radical education? Can it throw further light on the concerns raised by the critical reflector voice? The theory and practice of education is strongly wedded to modernist faith in individuals as self-knowing, self-motivated subjects and a belief in a progressive unfolding of history:

Education is very much the dutiful child of the Enlightenment and, as such, tends to uncritically accept a set of assumptions deriving from Enlightenment thought. Indeed, it is possible to see education as the vehicle by which the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, humanistic individual freedom and benevolent progress are substantiated and realised (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 24).

The goal of education is to produce a rational, self-directing and self-motivated subject capable of exercising individual agency. The practice of critical educators in particular is grounded in the Enlightenment values of freedom, liberation, democracy and citizenship (McLaren, 1994). Postmodern critique challenges the very notion of progress, attachment to hopes for a better world and the idea that change is possible through political action, so fundamental to an emancipatory pedagogy. There have been many attempts to respond to and incorporate postmodernism into the educational emancipatory project, and a full coverage of these responses is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, examination of a selection of these responses relevant to this project will assist in contextualising the TAFE experience and offer a perspective that informs the next stage of the research cycle at university.
In reviewing the contribution of poststructuralism to writings on critical pedagogy, Yates (1994) summarises the main characteristics of this contribution as a concern about *difference*; a suspicion of ‘truths’; a belief in ongoing *reflexivity* on the part of the teacher/writer; and an interest in *context*.

One of the relatively few examples of postmodernist educational research (Maclure, 1995) is the work of feminist Patti Lather (1991a, 1991b). Writing from ‘within but against the grain of the emancipatory tradition’ (Lather, 1991a: 4), Lather explores the territory where emancipatory education meets the postmodern. She argues that postmodern critiques open spaces where new understandings may emerge. Through the process of ‘interrogating’ the emancipatory intentions of critical educators, Lather raises such questions as:

- how to maximise self as mediator between people’s self-understandings and the need for ideology critique and transformative social action *without becoming impositional* ... how can we position ourselves as less masters of truth and justice and more as creators of a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf? How can we do so without romanticizing the subject and experience-based knowledge (Lather, 1991a: 64,137, original emphasis)?

Questions such as these demand that research designs demonstrate a ‘vigorous self-reflexivity’ (Lather, 1991a: 66). As we shall see later, this reflexivity is central to the critique offered by the critical reflector voice of chapter 6.

A detailed and complex vision of redesigning critical pedagogy within the postmodern is the project articulated by critical educators Giroux, Aronowitz and McLaren (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, 1991; Giroux and McLaren, 1994; McLaren, 1989, 1994), a project which Giroux has termed ‘border pedagogy’. The argument is for a pedagogy that incorporates the best of modernist and postmodernist discourses through linking modernism’s emancipatory notions with postmodernism’s theory of resistance. The utopian goal is the creation of critical citizens working towards a ‘radical democracy’. One of the key practices in this postmodern pedagogy involves the postmodern questioning of the unified subject, so that students are encouraged to affirm their experiences, while at the same time questioning their autonomy, accepting their uncertainties, vulnerabilities and openness, being prepared to identify with new subject positions. This openness of identity is seen as a key to citizenship—‘it is only because I doubt, that I am therefore a democratic citizen’ (Coppiec, cited in Szkudlarek, 1993;
115). My own questioning through both the reflective practitioner and critical reflector voices can be seen in this light—a questioning of my multiple subjectivities within the problematic of different power relations. Students, however, were encouraged to reflect on their ‘empowerment’ rather than on their subject positions (which were nevertheless affirmed). This opened up the possibility for an extension of this process, through critical reflection, in the university context, which we shall come to in the next section.

Giroux and McLaren do not clearly identify the processes by which this interrogation of the autonomy of the subject happens for the students, one of the criticisms of border pedagogy levelled at it by feminists such as Luke and Gore (1992). The student ‘voice’, as a condition of emancipatory articulation, must be both affirmed and questioned:

Identities constructed in relation to power carry with them some aspects of domination they tried to cope with or resist in their histories. If education is to question domination, it has to interrogate people’s voices, along with conceptually protected, closed, inaccessible spheres of individual freedom elaborated in individual relations to the structures of power (Szkudlarek, 1993: 114).

This is the aspect of border pedagogy that draws most strongly on postmodern discourses. Where postmodernism fails, according to Aronowitz and Giroux (1991: 73) is that it does not interrogate ‘how dominant and subordinate voices are formed in the ideological and material contexts of real conflict and oppression’. They argue that it is important to maintain a ‘metadiscourse’ that analyses the larger social and cultural forces that produce relations of domination and subjugation. This maintenance of emancipatory intention and aspects of structuralist analysis would locate their pedagogy within the discourse of critical postmodernism. McLaren (1994) in particular specifically rejects subversive postmodernism for its ‘ontological agnosticism’ and ‘epistemological relativism’, bringing with it dangers of nihilism and abandonment of political possibilities for liberation and social change.

In responding to Ellsworth’s (1992) criticisms of critical pedagogy’s inability to deal with entrenched power relations in the classroom alluded to earlier, Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) argue that the role of the teacher can be to interrogate that power dynamic, thus assuming a position which does not:

practice forms of gender-, race-, or class-specific imperialism, as Ellsworth suggests; rather, such an assumption creates conditions within particular institutions that allow students to locate themselves and others in histories that

On the other hand, Lather (1991a) sees Ellsworth’s contribution in the face of the strong attack from these ‘architects of critical pedagogy’ as an:

example of how deconstruction can serve to problematize critical pedagogy in ways that *resituate* our emancipatory work as opposed to destroy it. Making the workings of pedagogy more apparent, Ellsworth’s project demonstrates how deconstructing our own practices can animate and expand our sense of the structure of possibilities in regard to change-oriented practices. ... [Her work is] an act of courage in taking on such dominant architects of critical pedagogy (Lather, 1991a: 47-48, original emphasis).

This point is further highlighted by Gore (1993) who criticises Giroux and McLaren for their lack of reflexivity with respect to themselves as pedagogues. She argues that their high level of abstraction and the lack of reflexivity about the basis from which they themselves speak, means that their work functions more as a discourse for academics than one which speaks to teachers. However, Yates (1994) points out that Gore herself is guilty of the same abstracted academic discourse with an over-emphasis on the relativism that is so problematic in subversive postmodernism. Yet it seems that the work of feminists offers the most productive sites for genuine reflexivity—as Yates argues, ‘they elaborate and bring to life what it means to be reflexive’ (Yates, 1994: 435), in the sense of being willing to interrogate their own practices (as Ellsworth and Lather clearly do), giving attention to difference and context.

As well as affirming the validity of students’ experiences which have created their identities, and interrogating those experiences and identities in the light of larger forces of power and privilege, the utopian task of border pedagogy involves the liberation of public life, a radical democracy which features ‘dialogue, vision and compassion’ oriented towards solidarity and responsibility in community, in social structures open to democratic participation. This is why Aronowitz and Giroux describe their pedagogical project as one which combines a (modernist) ‘democratic public philosophy with a postmodern theory of resistance’ (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991: 82). It is this latter aspect of building open relationships within democratic communities that is of particular interest in this research.

Szkudlarek (1993) describes a strategy of ‘deconstructive teaching’ advocated by Leitch (1986). While his method is described in the context of school-based literary education.
there are elements that are similar to the strategies I took into economics teaching in both TAFE and university classrooms. Leitch’s strategy involves three steps:

1. changing the students’ attitudes to knowledge through seeing it as partial and open to criticism;
2. critically interrogating texts through making them open to various partial interpretations and therefore transforming knowledge; and
3. making the teaching strategy open to criticism as well.

Leitch’s final strategy, similar to Lather’s notion of ‘deconstructing our own practices’, reflects my own intention to critique my teaching practice by making it transparent to the students through the ‘reflective practitioner’ voice, and offering my practice to further critique through the ‘critical reflector’ voice, which could be interpreted as a (partially) deconstructive voice. However, Leitch leaves open any political or emancipatory intention, an aspect that is unacceptable to Giroux and McLaren. It would seem that the process called ‘deconstruction’ in some contexts is similar to that of ‘demystification’ in making transparent sites of power and how knowledge construction serves particular ideological interests. As Jarvis and others would argue, this is no different to the activist intention behind critical social science—freeing individuals of illusion about their subject positions in relation to larger forces of domination. Whatever the intention, the processes seem similar, and have a place in emancipatory pedagogy.

As well as discussing deconstructive teaching, which may have relevance for this research project, Szkudlarek looks to the pedagogy of the ‘new science’ or the ‘new gnosia’, which encompasses the ‘new paradigm’ thinking we discussed in chapter 4. Collapsing old dualities and touching a spiritual, ecological dimension, drawing on discourses like the ‘depth’ psychology of Hillman and Jung, Szkudlarek also believes is a postmodern education project. The autonomous ontological subject dissolves as freedom is revealed as freedom from separation from ‘all that is’. Szkudlarek argues that Heidegger’s notion that human beings are grounded in freedom is the concept of freedom that may be most relevant for a postmodern emancipatory pedagogy:

  Freedom is here not a property of man, but the other way round: man is at best the property of freedom. Freedom is the encompassing and penetrating nature, in which man becomes man only when he is anchored there. That means the nature of man is grounded in freedom (Heidegger, cited in Szkudlarek, 1993: 108).

In postmodern education, Szkudlarek argues, freedom becomes:
a state of the world rather than an attribute of an individual ... in order to overcome the structures of domination, one has to give up a scope of secure freedom guaranteed by them (Szkudlarek, 1993: 121).

Giving up one’s sense of ‘identity as self’ provides an opportunity of openness to the ethical, to responsibility and to solidarity. This is similar to the Buddhist teaching that transcending the ego enables full immersion in relationship. The ecological human being is responsible for the world, not free from others (Bleakley, 1999). These notions became central to the alternatives presented to students to assist them in their visioning processes at university.

Another important contribution to the postmodern debate in education centres on the notion of critical pedagogy’s assumption of ‘unproblematic agency’ in relation to empowerment of learners (Usher and Edwards, 1994; Scott and Usher, 1996; Usher et al., 1997). The critique distinguishes between ‘reflective’ practice (which assumes transparent personal agency, as evidenced in theories of empowerment) and ‘critical reflexivity’, which investigates the possibility of construction of a ‘plurality of situated identities’ (Bleakley, 1999), similar to the processes discussed by Giroux and McLaren (1994). Based on Foucault’s analyses of power and knowledge, Usher and Edwards (1994) call for a reflexivity in educational research which incorporates the embodiedness and embeddedness of the teacher/researcher; the culture and interpretive traditions that inform the research; and the professional paradigms and discourses that lie behind the researcher’s constructions. They argue:

In education it is important to be aware of reflexivity because even when we have some confidence that our research is useful or even emancipatory, we are still ‘objectifying’, still speaking for others in the name of doing good by them. We are still attempting to mould subjectivities in a modernist way, still attempting to bring about changes in the name of ‘progress’. Thus an awareness of reflexivity enables us to interrogate our own practices of research, in terms of how they can become part of dominant and oppressive discourses through a ‘reflexive’ acceptance of the neutrality of the research, and in terms of how we, as researchers, are implicated in such discourses despite our best intentions (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 152).

Stephen Kemmis is a critical educator who believes that the postmodern critique needs to be taken seriously, but our emancipatory intentions need to be maintained, given the necessity for the continuance of political struggle in the face of unrelenting injustice (Kemmis, 1996). He calls for a ‘remaking’ of the emancipatory project, arguing for improved social practices of education that will ‘engage, challenge and develop
people’s ... practical understanding and interpretations of their circumstances’. Furthermore, he argues strongly for the reconstitution of relationships within education in a way that allows us to ‘reproduce those aspects of our social life that are of value and transform those that contribute to our difficulties’(Kemmis, 1996: 233). In particular, he argues for first-person relationships and the notion of solidarity which does not, as Lyotard (1984) suggests, constitute ‘grammatical violence’, i.e. it does not obliterate difference or disagreement, but engages it:

There is a danger that sensitivity to difference is being fetishised in social theory, policy and practice today, making us more than reasonably hesitant about the possibility of solidarity and shared commitment to social action capable of changing our circumstances. At times, this attitude can itself be imprisoning: like-mindedness has its own dangers, including the danger of being divided and conquered (Kemmis, 1996: 232).

Kemmis argues that the remaking of the emancipatory project depends on communicative relationships, collaboration and engagement in social movements. I argue that a major contribution of Heart Politics to social change is its understanding of the importance of building relationships, particularly across oppositions, in the context of reflective inquiry and therefore, it has the potential to assist in this remaking.

The work by Brian Fay (1987) in critiquing the emancipatory project at the level of its ontology provides a useful perspective in the context of analysing attempts by critical educators to incorporate the postmodern, and it is worth looking at his analysis in some detail, as it also offers a framework to take into the next stage of research, as well as helping to put the ‘critical reflector’ voice into perspective.

7.3.4 Fay’s Critique: The Limits to Rationality and the Utopian Vision of Critical Social Science

Fay’s contribution is to analyse painstakingly the ontology of critical social science from the perspective of the limits to rationality upon which its emancipatory aspirations are based. This critique in many ways draws on postmodern insights and methodology, but Fay does not reject the political project of critical social science. In fact, he argues that:

there is no necessary conflict between science and political commitment, no compelling reason to reject the idea of a social theory which attempts to grasp the nature of certain sorts of oppression with the intent of liberating those who suffer from it (Fay, 1989: 212).
Fay (1987: 47-65) argues that the ontology of critical social science is based on what he describes as ‘the activist conception of human beings’. In his analysis, an active being consists of four fundamental dispositions: intelligence, curiosity, reflectiveness and wilfulness. One of the essential values which support the activist conception is ‘rational self-clarity’, a state which allows people, as a result of their intelligence and curiosity, to realise the true nature of their existence. One of the main ways that this is achieved is through the ‘construction of an historical narrative in which the possibilities of the present are revealed by disclosing the meaning of the past’. Enlightenment occurs when a group of people uses rational reflection to identify the truth of such a narrative, under the crucial condition that an environment is created which permits rejection of the constructed narrative (i.e. there is no possibility of coercion). This is the main challenge to anyone wanting to engage in any kind of emancipatory educational activity. The importance of reflexivity on behalf of the emancipatory educator becomes critical.

The prime thrust of Fay’s work is to identify the limits to the power of reason and therefore rational self-clarity so fundamental to the assumptions and ontology of critical social science. He identifies the limits on the rationality of human beings—their embodiment, tradition, historical natures and embeddedness—that throw serious doubt on whether the goals of critical social science can be achieved.

Fay draws on the work of Foucault (1977) as well as the tradition of ‘body therapies’ to argue that people learn with more than their minds, they also learn with their bodies. Oppression leaves traces not just in their consciousness but in their muscles, nerves and skeletons as well. *Embodiment*, therefore, means that enlightenment and insight at the level of rational consciousness is not going to be enough for personal and social transformation. There are also limits to the extent that human beings can divest themselves of the power of *tradition*, as though it were something external to themselves, as the relationship between personal identity and tradition is more intimate than the revolutionary attitude would have it. This relationship has produced popular resistance to revolutionary intent and thus provides a moral impediment to activists who claim to have insight into what is in the best interests of the oppressed. Moreover, because of the *historical nature* of the lives of human beings, whose stories continually shift and change according to their historical location and according to the ever-changing perspectives of those telling the story, it is not possible for there to be a
‘genuine narrative’ which definitively reveals our identity. Finally, humans are too *embedded* in the world, in a system of interdependent and contingent relationships, too dependent on events outside of themselves and their control to have the ‘autonomy’ presupposed by assumptions of ‘communicative rationality’ and ‘ideal speech’ (particularly as exemplified by Habermas, 1984).

The limits to rationality of embodiment and tradition would also seem to suggest a limit to the capacity of human beings to ‘interrogate identities’ called for by postmodern pedagogies discussed above. On the other hand, historicity and embeddedness concur with a postmodern view that human beings are not autonomous agents and have multiple narratives and perspectives informing their lives. Fay argues that what is required is not an abandonment of the emancipatory project, but a synthesis of the ontology of activity with the ontology of tradition, embeddedness, historicity and embodiment. ‘The result would be theories which were self-consciously local, particular, situated, experimental and physical’ (Fay, 1987: 212). He calls for a theory which has ‘a deep sensitivity to the interrelatedness of all things’ and a systemic understanding of the effects of change and hence asks for recognition of the inherently contradictory and ambiguous nature of human life, that illumination and concealment, activity and dependency, change and stasis, possibility and limit, gain and loss, necessarily co-exist in any situation.

It would seem that Fay’s proposed alternative combines postmodernist calls for local and contextualised theories with ecological understandings inherent in the ‘new science’ or ‘new gnosis’ theories discussed above (Szkudlarek, 1993), but without postmodernism’s nihilistic or conservative attitudes. I would suggest that Heart Politics partially meets some of Fay’s requirements: it explicitly acknowledges the notion of *embeddedness*, i.e. the ‘deep sensitivity to the interconnectedness of all things’. Indeed, such a notion is the starting point, or core value, which informs its practice. While it does not include a theory of *embodiment* in its approach to social change, it nevertheless encompasses understanding of the need for personal transformation through a range of therapies, which would include those dealing with the body. However, there is no attempt to theorise how embodiment produces limits to the social change we seek. In terms of *tradition*, there is a recognition that different cultural practices need to be respected, that much can be learnt from how traditional cultures resolve conflicts,
especially nonviolently. The practice of the heart circle, based on Maori tradition, is an example. Again, there is no theory that allows for making distinctions between traditions that need to change and those which could or should not be changed, other than judgment which relies on the heart or core values that value life. Nonviolence recognises the limitations of force and attempts to counteract it through nonviolent and compassionate action. Understandings of power are confined to a recognition that a ‘power with’ model is preferable to ‘power over’, but there is no real theorising about how to combat the limitations of coercion. It seems that what Heart Politics offers is guiding principles, rather than a specific methodology informed by a theoretical framework (Shields, 1995).

As with all praxis, the challenge is how the practitioner ‘on the ground’ is to make sense of the theoretical territory and apply it in her own context. In this case, the challenge emerging from the action research process is how to contextualise the TAFE teaching experience within the debate between critical pedagogy and postmodernism and how to take this understanding into the next cycle of research.

7.3.5 TAFE: A Critical Postmodern Educational Project?

Demystifying economics is essentially a deconstructive project. Students are exposed to the ‘language’ of economics in a way that transforms it from being alienating and mysterious to being readily understandable and applicable to their real lives. The power inherent in the language is also unveiled, as are the interests served by that language. Alternative discourses to that of the dominant, totalising discourse of neo-classical economics are also presented.

Both reflective voices, demonstrating reflexivity (Usher and Edwards, 1994; Shacklock and Smyth, 1998), reveal awareness of postmodern concerns. The ‘reflective practitioner’ attempts to make visible what is usually invisible in classroom relations—students are made conscious of these power relations through the reflective exchange. The ‘critical reflector’ voice takes this further through an interrogation of the teaching practice itself. To illustrate, the following excerpts from the ‘critical reflector’ voice in chapter 6, emergent from within the action research process itself, demonstrate awareness of assumptions underlying critical social science that reflect particular postmodern concerns:
a) Multiple identities/subjectivities

Again, I was making my thinking transparent, consistent with my democratic principles. What is also apparent now is that from the outset I was experiencing the tension of ‘role conflict’ in attempting to come to terms with the contradictions in my positions both as teacher and as a ‘co-participant in social transformation’.

The tensions resulting from my different roles were acute at this time. The only way I could figure out how to get around these was to make them visible and explicit. It is interesting that I did not really see that there could be ‘resolution’ of these dilemmas—they just came with the territory.

I was much more comfortable as an agent of change than an agent of control in respect to teaching the content of economics, a role about which I felt constantly ambivalent. On the other hand, I felt little of this tension as an agent of control with respect to the process.

b) Power relations

It is interesting to observe how the reins of power were reclaimed so quickly. This seemed to be an example when being an agent of control was more important than being an agent of change at that particular moment. Moving between these roles appears to demonstrate the fluidity of the power relationship in such situations where democratic practices are the professed goal.

In commenting on the ‘irony’ of a class clamouring for content in the midst of struggling with the process, I appeared to ignore the possibility that resistance can be evidence of a power struggle.

Here the tensions around power and control are being made quite explicit. After this reflection, I became more open about sharing my concerns and vulnerabilities, in an attempt to overcome these tensions.

c) The ‘liberatory promise’ of the emancipatory project

It is interesting that my interpretations of this class’s resistance to collaborative assessment negotiations centred on their workload and inexperience of TAFE. I was not so prepared to consider that their resistance might have to do with other factors, such as wariness about being manipulated in the guise of liberatory promise.

d) The activist conception of human beings

Herein lies the dilemma of many an activist—how do we give the ‘bad news’ without paralysing people into inaction? The assumption that to take action is imperative is very apparent here.
e) The problematic nature of empowerment

_There is an assumption that empowerment will happen, even if it be ‘realisable in hindsight’..._ I was not willing to see that uncomfortable experiences can be indicators of change as much as enjoyable ones. It also reveals my own assumptions about what empowerment looks like, despite not making these explicit.

_I had no clear idea of how the goal of ‘empowerment’ was to be achieved other than a vague notion that the process was the key to it._

_My naive assumptions about claiming knowledge about what is empowering education and what is not (and my insistence that the students know this too) possibly demonstrates a lack of critical understanding about the hegemonic assumptions ... I was making at the time._

f) The ‘grand narrative’ of oppression

_While I still believe there is some accuracy in this critique of the students’ conditions, the ideological nature of my interpretation is evident. It was in my interests to view the students as an oppressed group to explain their resistance. From my position I could not see that this resistance could have another explanation—the critical theorist lens provided the only story in town._

Hence, reflexivity allows my own positioning as teacher and researcher to be interrogated, revealing its ‘hybridity’ (Szkudlarek, 1993) and openness, its uncertainty and vulnerability. The openness and critique that results is facilitated by the process of critical reflection. Furthermore, the process of reflective exchange in the context of relationship that makes transparent (some) power relations, assists in creating an environment conducive to reflection, in this case, student reflection on empowerment.

It could be argued, then, that the action research undertaken at TAFE, while consciously designed within the paradigm of emancipatory education, has elements that place it in the tension created when the emancipatory project is faced with a postmodern interrogation. It incorporates critical reflexivity and forms of deconstruction which make power relations and claims of empowerment problematic. It also demonstrates the power of a reflective process in producing empowering outcomes for students, even though ‘empowerment’ is realised in a multiplicity of forms, and is not necessarily associated with action. It also reflects Kemmis’s (1996) call for the ‘building of first-person relationships’ in the remaking of the emancipatory project, particularly as a means of establishing solidarity for social change. There was little opportunity, however, to interrogate the reflective processes of the _students_, which were not a focus of the research. This becomes the emergent interest of the next cycle.
7.4 THE NEXT STAGE OF THE RESEARCH CYCLE: EXPLORING CRITICAL REFLECTION

As we have seen, critical reflection is key to the emancipatory project. While my own critical reflection was deliberate and conscious at TAFE, for the students it emerged as an outcome of an environment that encouraged reflexivity. Given this centrality of critical reflection and its role in developing postmodern insights about contingency, openness and fluidity of subject positions, as well as embedded power relations, the emergent interest becomes this very process of critical reflection. Can students engage in a conscious and deliberate process of critical reflection that reveals their historical and contingent ‘selves’ as part of empowerment and/or emancipation? Is it therefore useful to incorporate critical reflection into the learning process deliberately with more specific definition, and study its potential contribution to empowerment in the teaching of economics?

Further, with the TAFE experience now in context, how could insights from the postmodern critique, which do not detract from the emancipatory intention of critical education, be incorporated in a way that informs the next part of the research cycle? The following aspects emerge as central:

a) economics needs to continue to be ‘deconstructed’ as a totalising discourse;

b) the development of students as ‘critical citizens’ (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991) through the creation of doubts and uncertainty can be facilitated through a conscious process of critical reflection, encouraged in the context of relationship; and

c) given the lack of alternatives offered in terms of freedom (Szkudlarek, 1993) part of the empowerment process is to envision (non-consumerist) alternatives.

This ‘postmodern emancipatory educational project’, a combination of deconstruction, critical reflection and visioning, also needs to take account of the limits that Fuy (1987) articulates, limits that may well constrain the liberatory potential of the education process, particularly critical reflection.
7.4.1 Planning the Next Cycle

In taking the research into a very different educational site, I had to take account of the particular context I was moving into (as discussed in chapter 5). The content would be similar, but organised differently (details are given in the next chapter). I would no longer engage in the sort of reflective exchange I did at TAFE, but explore how students undertake critical reflection in relation to their learning of content and their specific learning practices, i.e. the practices of critique of economics and visioning alternatives to the dominant paradigm and whether this produces empowerment. Therefore, I planned to make the critical reflection process transparent and conscious as a result of its emergence from the action research process described in previous sections.

I set this up through giving guidance on critical reflection; encouraging the establishment of critical relationships; designing critically reflective activities; engaging in critical questioning when interviewing students; and giving specific critically reflective questions to address in assignments. The details are outlined in chapter 8.

7.4.2 Emergent Research Questions

From the interrogation of the TAFE experience and the emergent interest in critical reflection, research questions from the following four areas of interest evolved: understanding the process of critical reflection itself; understanding the usefulness of critical reflection in teaching economics; interrogating the efficacy of critical reflection in an emancipatory project; and interrogating the relationship between critical reflection and activism.

a) Understanding the process of critical reflection: addressing gaps in the literature.

- How do students respond to the request to critically reflect on their work?
- How do students do ‘critical reflection’ (i.e. what is the process)?
- What contributes to enhancing critical reflection?
- How significant is a ‘critical relationship’ in enhancing critical reflection?
- How does this study compare with other findings about critical reflection in education?
b) Examining the emancipatory effects of critical reflection in teaching economics: applying understandings.

- How does the process of critical reflection enhance an understanding of and/or engagement with economics?
- To what extent does research on critical reflection done in this way meet the requirements of an emancipatory project, i.e. does it lead to empowerment and/or emancipation of the participants in relation to economics?

c) Interrogating the efficacy of critical reflection in an emancipatory project: what role in the postmodern era?

- Given the doubts raised by critics of the emancipatory project, what evidence exists that there are limits to the rationality required for this sort of reflection?
- What can we learn about the efficacy of critical reflection in the emancipatory project from this experience?
- What are the implications for teachers wanting to promote critical reflection for emancipatory purposes?

d) Interrogating the relationship between critical reflection and activism: relevance for the emancipatory project.

- Given the centrality of critical reflection to the emancipatory project, which is focused on action, how do students make the connection between critical reflection and activism and to what extent does critical reflection impact on the students’ sense of themselves as ‘agents for change’?
- What are the implications for activism in the postmodern era?

In the next chapter, we return to the literature on critical reflection for guidance and then analyse the responses of university students to the task of critical reflection in the light of the above research questions.
CHAPTER 8
TEACHING ECONOMICS AT UNIVERSITY:
THE STORY OF CRITICAL REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION

The task of chapter 7 was to locate the initial action research cycle at TAFE within the tension between emancipatory pedagogy and postmodern perspectives and critique. The critically reflective process, so crucial to action research’s inherent reflexivity, was pivotal in this positioning. The emergent interest in terms of researching empowering teaching and learning of economics, therefore, became the process of critical reflection itself. An understanding of the role of critical reflection in emancipation and empowerment, and its actual practice in the context of learner relationships, may be a crucial link in the process of rebuilding the emancipatory project in the postmodern era (Kemmis, 1996), particularly in the context of classroom practices and educational research.

Armed with the understandings and contextualisation derived from the TAFE educational action research experience, I embarked on a new cycle of research in a different context, that of teaching economics as part of a major in politics at the Southern Cross University, with the aim of learning more about critical reflection and its potential role in social change and activism. This chapter describes and examines that process in two parts.

Part I begins with revisiting the literature on critical reflection covered earlier in chapter 3, expanding on it to incorporate responses to the postmodern critiques. While the theoretical territory is well documented, there is still a marked lack of studies examining the process of critical reflection in educational settings, how students do it and how they interpret the task. Studies by Hatton and Smith (1995) and Smith (1999) are the exception and offer opportunities for comparison. Recent literature (Bleakley, 1999) also suggests that types of reflection not considered by either emancipatory or postmodern paradigms may be possible and offer a way through the dilemmas posed by the postmodern critique of the emancipatory project.

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Following this brief excursion into the recent literature, I describe the university educational context and the course design. I then offer my own interpretation (or ‘reading’) of critical reflection that I took into the classroom and demonstrate how I guided the students through the process. Following this, I proceed to examine the evidence offered in the students’ responses to the request to critically reflect on the underlying assumptions and values, gaps, biases and contradictions in their work. It throws light on what students actually do when asked to reflect critically on their work.

The research findings based on students’ written work are then expanded through examining how a selection of students reflected on the process of critical reflection in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The data emerging from these conversations further point to the range of experience and interpretation of critical reflection as practised by the students. The telling of two ‘stories’ of the reflective experience, contextualised and embedded in the lives of two young students from very different backgrounds and perspectives, offers a deeper and more complex reading of the experience of critical reflection. It is speculated that these stories demonstrate the possibilities of a more ‘holistic reflexivity’ as suggested by Bleakley (1999).

Part II presents a discussion of the findings outlined in Part I through ‘interrogating’ the data via the four sets of questions arising from the TAFE experience and the literature, as outlined at the end of chapter 7.

8.2 PART I: CRITICAL REFLECTION IN THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

8.2.1 Critical Reflection: Gaps in the Literature

Despite all the work that has been done in the area of critical reflection, as discussed in the earlier literature review in chapter 3, clear and rigorous definitions are hard to come by. There appears in the literature to be a paucity of reflection upon reflection (Ecclestone, 1996; Bleakley, 1999). According to Ecclestone, educators need to offer ‘much clearer accounts of different interpretations and values which underpin reflection and to structure its forms and focuses more coherently than we do at present’
(Ecclestone, 1996: 152). She suggests that it is easier to stick our heads in the sand about what ‘reflection’ in education might mean, rather than to accept the challenge of clarifying the term and debating its value implications. This difficulty was also encountered by Hatton and Smith (1995), who found that definitions of reflection, especially critical reflection:

are often inappropriate or inadequate, and it is clear that the terms are extremely difficult to render operational in questionnaires and other research instruments (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 38).

Despite these difficulties, Smith (1999: 4) maintains that teachers have a ‘moral obligation’ to:

be aware of not only our decisions and actions, but more important, the perceptions, beliefs and understandings on which such judgements and decisions are based.

Hatton and Smith’s own research into fostering reflection in student teachers at the University of Sydney revealed three types of reflective writing: descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection and critical reflection. The first type attempts to provide reasons for actions based on personal judgement or reading of the literature; the second ‘is a form of discourse with one’s self, an exploration of possible reasons’; and critical reflection is defined as:

involving reason giving for decisions or events which takes account of the broader historical, social and/or political contexts (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 41).

They also identified ‘reflection-in-action’, Schon’s conception, as a ‘higher-order’ activity, as it required more complex contextualising of multiple viewpoints of situations as they are actually taking place, and which calls for appropriate application of any or all of the three types of reflection listed above. This type of reflection they saw as a desirable or ideal end-point. Smith (1998, 1999) argues strongly that the type of reflection used will depend on the context and purpose of the reflection—any research into the practice of reflection will be undertaken in highly specific contexts, which needs to be kept in mind when attempting to make generalised interpretations of findings. However, I would argue that while the context of my research is quite different from that of the research carried out with student teachers, useful comparisons can be made about what facilitates reflection, particularly critical reflection. For instance, Hatton and Smith’s research demonstrated the powerful effect of dialogue with a critical friend, which provided a safe environment and an opportunity for distance while being
heard sympathetically. Such a friend needs to be someone whom the student feels able to trust to risk sharing of his or her vulnerabilities and uncertainties, and more importantly, someone who ‘is able to challenge and confront ideas and inconsistencies’ (Smith, 1998: 3) in a gentle and supportive way.

Another important finding from the research at Sydney University was that ‘the students saw the academic context and expectations of essay writing established within the wider institution as inhibiting their ability to reflect in an assessable piece of work’ (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 42), a limitation which needs to be kept in mind in my own research. They also speculated about an equity issue in that there was ‘some evidence that socio-economic background may facilitate or inhibit the ability to use language in a particular fashion’. As far as critical reflection is concerned, they argue that a capacity to reflect critically ‘depends on development of metacognitive skills alongside a grasp and acceptance of particular ideological frameworks’ and that this appears rare in student teachers.

One of the aims of my research was to expand on the contribution made by Hatton and Smith (1995) to explore further questions about the process of critical reflection and to identify more clearly what it looks like in practice. The main difference between Hatton and Smith’s (1995) research and this study is that students were not asked to reflect on their practice as professionals in training, but to reflect instead on their own constructing of accounts of an imagined future society operating under a different paradigm.

Bleakley claims that problems arise because of a lack of examination of the nature of reflection itself within the emancipatory paradigm:

> Within the critical emancipatory paradigm the key goal of learners is to achieve autonomy, or take control of their own learning and its assessment through empowering facilitation. Further, this goal is underpinned by the assumed power of an educated reflectivity, but the nature of ‘reflection’ itself remains unexamined (Bleakley, 1999: 317).

One of the goals of this research is to take up this challenge to examine reflection more deeply and to offer a more rigorous understanding and definition of critical reflection.

The humanism inherent in the ontology of critical social science (Fay, 1987) has been thoroughly critiqued for its acceptance of ‘autonomy’ as a natural and transparent state
and its assumption of human agency (Usher and Edwards, 1994; Usher et al., 1997). This poststructuralist critique distinguishes critical ‘reflection’ from critical ‘reflexivity’—the latter problematises the ‘subject’ and investigates possibilities for construction of subjectivities. According to Usher and Edwards (1994), reflexivity goes ‘beyond the personal’:

However, reflexivity is not purely a matter of the ‘personal’. Autobiography and lived experience are themselves notions in need of problematisation. A failure to do so assumes lived experience as ‘presence’, a pure unmediated and authentic knowability, and autobiography as the true and correct ‘speech’ of the autonomous, self-present individual (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 148).

Bleakley (1999) also argues that the supposed efficacy of ‘reflection’ is itself highly questionable. He questions the moral assumption that reflection is intrinsically worthwhile, as a cornerstone of emancipatory democracy and individualism:

There are two issues here: first, that reflection should be automatically linked to empowerment, emancipation, and autonomy; and second, the assumption that autonomy and emancipation are transparently valuable educational goals (Bleakley 1999: 319).

Barnett (1997) argues that a postmodern higher education needs to be conceived as a rigorous and collective process of ‘becoming’ by which students become not self-contained or transcendent individuals, but social actors with a ‘self-referential capacity’. So while he positions himself in the context of education in the postmodern era, the assumptions of agency and autonomy still underpin Barnett’s conceptions. Similarly, the work of Brockbank and McGill (1998) attempts to challenge objectified individuality, as we saw in chapter 3, but does not really answer the strong questioning of the assumptions of autonomy and agency so powerfully argued by Fay (1987), Usher and Edwards (1994) and Bleakley (1999).

In keeping with a fundamental question running through this thesis, the analysis in Part II of this chapter attempts to throw light on the possibility of a deeper understanding of reflection, to demonstrate different reflective possibilities opened up by the postmodern critique, but going beyond what is encompassed in postmodernism. Bleakley’s (1999) notions of ‘holistic reflexivity’ and ‘engaged agency’ offer interesting possibilities. He suggests that ‘holistic reflexivity’ is a reflexivity which involves an ‘engage[ment] with the world as a total reflective act’.
Reflection is not a detachment, a second thought, but an aesthetic and ethical act of participation in the world, that we might now refer to as ‘ecological literacy’... The ethical dimension in particular constitutes a shift from descriptive reflectivity to critical reflexivity, where the latter theorises (problematises and relativises) action as it happens, reflecting on action against value perspectives. Holistic reflexivity is an inclusive ecological or caring act of reflection as well as an appreciative gesture, with an explicit concern for ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ (Bleakley, 1999: 328).

While Bleakley does not articulate clearly the process by which such reflexivity is possible, such a notion allows for speculation on a perspective on action and reflection that may take us beyond both emancipatory and postmodern positionings.

8.2.2 The Context: The University Setting and Course Design

A second opportunity to develop an empowering curriculum in economics emerged in 1998 at Southern Cross University in Lismore. I had been teaching in the Bachelor of Social Science (BSocSci) course offered through the School of Social and Workplace Development (SaWD). The course is structured around a number of different majors, of which students can choose two to focus on for their undergraduate degree. I had been involved in the development of one of these majors, Politics and Policy Studies for two years, and was asked to develop as one of the six units in the major (Politics and Decision Making) a unit on demystifying economics and offering alternatives to the dominant paradigm. I took the opportunity to incorporate understandings developed in the TAFE context to produce an empowering curriculum for university students.

This project involved writing a study guide, to be used by both on-campus (internal) and distance (external) students and producing a book of readings. The study guide incorporated teaching critical reflection, with modelling of my responses to critical questions about my own assumptions, beliefs and attitudes in relation to economics, described in more detail below. After writing it in the first semester of 1998, I taught the unit to both internal and external students in the second semester of that year. As the major was still in the process of development, numbers were small—eight internal and eleven external students completed the course in 1998. The internal students comprised one (working class) man and seven (middle class) women. Apart from one school leaver, the rest were mature aged. All were from Anglo European backgrounds. All of
the external students were mature aged and there were four men and seven women, all from Anglo-European backgrounds.

I had the opportunity to run the course again in 1999. Of the ten internal students who completed the course, there were six female and four male students, four young (under 30) and six mature, and again all were from white European backgrounds. Eighteen students completed the course as external students of whom six were male, and four were young. One student was from a non-English speaking (black South African) background, while the rest were white Europeans.

8.2.2.1 Differences Between TAFE and University

Unlike the TAFE students, who follow a sequential educational process, the students at Southern Cross University enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Science follow no designated educational pathway to complete their degree. There are almost no prerequisites for any of the units, so students can choose any combination of units that suits them in any given semester. This means there is no ‘group’ that follows an educational path together. At the beginning of each semester, new groups form and in any class there can be a combination of students studying in their first, second, third or fourth years. While such an arrangement permits maximum flexibility for students with diverse needs, there are educational disadvantages in the lack of sequential skill development and class groups made up of students of unequal university experience. This is further compounded by the fact that students from other schools (e.g. law, tourism, business, education and arts) may choose certain units from a Bachelor of Social Science major as electives.

A second major difference from the TAFE context is the existence of a distance education program. Units need to be designed for students studying in either internal or external mode. In the Bachelor of Social Science program, external enrolments far outnumber those for internal students.

A third difference is that TAFE students are being trained specifically to be workers in a designated industry (Welfare), while the university students studying social science have no particular vocational designation attached to their degree. Economics was
included in the TAFE course because understanding economics was considered an important part of a welfare worker’s training (before competency-based training became the dominant paradigm). However, in the particular case of this university degree, economics was ‘embedded’ in a politics major, ‘disguised’ under a different name, *Politics and Decision Making*. The politics of the university was such that including a unit on economics would have been seen to be the preserve of the School of Business (a school committed to orthodox teaching of economics).

The main differences between the two settings, as I have experienced them as a part-time and contract teacher, are summarised in Table 8.1:

Table 8.1
Comparison Between TAFE and University Teaching Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAFE (Welfare Course)</th>
<th>UNIVERSITY (BScSci)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• vocational orientation</td>
<td>• vocational orientation, thinly disguised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• emphasis on skills</td>
<td>• emphasis on academic standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• student-centred</td>
<td>• academic-centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• opportunities for teacher autonomy</td>
<td>• strong institutional requirements—less opportunity for flexibility in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• support for radical teaching</td>
<td>• radical teaching not part of the culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• collaborative and team approaches encouraged—emphasis on collegiality</td>
<td>• strong individualist and competitive culture—little real collegiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• strong links with industry and community—student placements vital</td>
<td>• research links with industry only—few opportunities for student placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inclusive of part-time teachers</td>
<td>• part-time teachers marginalised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• support for sharing resources and ideas; peer evaluations encouraged</td>
<td>• little sharing of teaching resources and ideas; evaluation of teaching confidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• poorly resourced</td>
<td>• well resourced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• centralised bureaucracy</td>
<td>• autonomous functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• head teachers seen as team leaders—welfare head teacher very supportive</td>
<td>• heads of schools more removed—SaWD head ‘leaves you alone’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued …
### Table 8.1 (continued)

**Comparison Between TAFE and University Teaching Contexts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAFE (Welfare Course)</th>
<th>UNIVERSITY (BSocSci)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Course Structure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• little flexibility</td>
<td>• emphasis on flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sequential development emphasised—students are all at the same stage of course at once</td>
<td>• no sequential development—can have (internal) students at different stages of degree in the same class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• same group stays together throughout whole course</td>
<td>• internal students only together for one semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students all doing the same course</td>
<td>• students can be doing different courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• high face-to-face contact hours</td>
<td>• few face-to-face contact hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 18 week semester</td>
<td>• 14 week semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Profile</th>
<th>Student Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• predominantly working class</td>
<td>• predominantly middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• almost all mature aged</td>
<td>• mixture of mature aged and young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• educational disadvantage prevalent</td>
<td>• some educational disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• female dominated</td>
<td>• female dominated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• predominantly Anglo-Australian</td>
<td>• predominantly Anglo-Australian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Profile</th>
<th>Teacher Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• majority have industry experience</td>
<td>• varied backgrounds; emphasis on academic qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• committed to teaching</td>
<td>• teaching not necessarily primary concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teacher training essential</td>
<td>• no teacher training required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both contexts I was a marginalised player institutionally, in the sense of being part-time and casual, but because of the particular relationships I had with key leaders in each situation, I was given a lot of responsibility for curriculum. In both contexts, my interest in demystifying economics was respected and encouraged as it coincided with the values of these particular decision-makers.
8.2.3 Critical Reflection: My Positioning

As the literature suggests, critical reflection itself is a problematic concept. It has not always been clearly defined, and the way it is understood in an educational context will depend on the values and ‘subject position’ of the teacher. In keeping with my overall intention of making my positioning as transparent as possible, it is necessary to clarify what notions of critical reflection informed my work with students studying Politics and Decision Making.

My original intention was to encourage students to develop ‘criticality’ (Barnett, 1997) in two ways, demonstrated in the two assessment tasks I designed for the course (described in more detail below). First, students were required to critically analyse the assumptions underlying the dominant economic paradigm as it related to a particular issue of their choice. This process is akin to Barnett’s ‘critical reasoning’ (in the domain of knowledge), and involves ‘unpacking’ the assumptions and ideology behind the way the issue is viewed conventionally in order to reveal a different ‘reality’ of the power relations structured into economic thinking. The aim was to help students recognise that conventional economics discourse constructs economic ‘reality’ as a given, objective fact and therefore masks the ideological interests served by such a construction. This critical analysis essentially involves the process of ideology critique developed by critical theorists. It is also part of the ‘deconstructive’ task of a postmodern educational project (Leitch, 1986; Szkudlarek, 1993).

The second dimension of criticality involved critical reflection (in the domain of self). This involved students reflecting on their own assumptions and values that influenced their critical analysis in the first assignment and their vision in the second. Hence, like Barnett (1997), I make a distinction between critical analysis and critical reflection. Critical analysis involves a process of detecting the assumptions underlying another position or text and identifying how such assumptions serve particular interests. My reading of critical reflection was as a process attached to looking at one’s own positioning, generally more difficult because of the unconscious acceptance of many beliefs and assumptions, particularly those that are socially sanctioned.
Thus, I claimed that a capacity to identify assumptions is central to both critical analysis and critical reflection. And I also assumed that it is essential to understand what an assumption is, as distinct from a value or a belief. It seems that generally, people are more easily able to name their values than the assumptions underlying their beliefs. It is also quite difficult to identify the extent to which one’s assumptions are based in cultural and historic beliefs, as they are often disguised as ‘this is just how the world is’. Influenced by the notions of reflective practice arising out of the work of Schon (1983, 1987), Smyth (1989), Mezirow (1990), Brookfield (1995), Fook (1996) and others, I identified that important indicators of a capacity for critical reflection included:

- being able to consider other perspectives or alternative ways of viewing the world, i.e. being able to identify what perspectives are missing from one’s own account;
- being able to identify how one’s own views can have a particular bias that privileges one view over another;
- being able to perceive contradictions and inconsistencies in one’s own story or account of events; and
- being able to imagine other possibilities, i.e. a capacity to envision alternatives.

In the students’ written work, the first assignment asked them to undertake a critical reflection of their own analysis of a particular issue (which can be considered to be comparable to reflecting on a particular *practice*, that of undertaking research and analysis) through identifying their own assumptions and values and the way they may have influenced their critique. The second assignment asked them to envision an alternative future in relation to their issue in the form of a story, and then to critically reflect on that account, being guided by the following six questions:

1) What influenced me to choose the particular themes explored in my story?

2) What assumptions have I made that reflect my values and beliefs in the telling of this story?

3) What gaps and biases exist in this story? What perspectives are missing?

4) What contradictions and paradoxes are evident in my account?

5) What could I have done differently?

6) What further questions arise for me as a result of taking the particular view I have in this story?
It is apparent that the assumptions of autonomy and agency permeate this approach to critical reflection. I assumed that students would be able to call on some ‘objective observation’ of their own process and identify their taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs underpinning their positions in relation to their chosen issue. I did recognise the difficulty of doing this, however, and encouraged the use of a ‘critical friend’ (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Smith, 1998, 1999; Kember and McKay, 1996)) in assisting this process, suggesting this could be:

anyone—partner, fellow student, relative, friend—who is willing to give you feedback about the assumptions you may be making that may be difficult for you to notice in yourself. You may find it most helpful to choose someone who thinks differently to you, has a different background and perhaps has different values—they are more likely to be able to identify your assumptions because they are different to theirs. It will also be important to choose someone who is sensitive about giving feedback, as offering challenge can be threatening (Fisher, 1998: 7).

8.2.4 Guiding the Process of Critical Reflection

It is argued that it is essential for teachers to make explicit their expectations of student learning, particularly in what is expected in relation to reflection, if it is to be part of their assessment (Smith, 1999). The research at Sydney University (Hatton and Smith, 1995) suggested that such ‘explicitness increases the frequency and quality of reflection’ and that strategies aimed to assist in the development of ‘metacognitive strategies’ essential for reflection made a difference in the ‘quality’ of student reflection (Smith, 1999: 19,20). In this section I describe how I made the process explicit and the strategies I used to guide the students in their reflective practice.

A model of the process was outlined for the students in the study guide written for the course, available to both internal and external students. The students were first introduced to the theory of critical reflection, embedded in the discourse of critical theory. I outlined the ideas behind the concept of transformative learning, which requires critical reflection (Mezirow, 1992); and ideology critique, which shows how ideologies serve particular interests through an analysis of their historical roots and assumptions and also discloses the distortions and mystifications they perpetuate.
The following extract from the study guide illustrates a preliminary activity (adapted from Kennedy, 1990) to prepare students for the process of critical reflection, based on such theoretical understandings.

**Preliminary Activity:**

1) Reflect back on your life and identify a moment when you became aware that you had been living in a closed cultural and ideological cocoon, i.e. you realised you had been operating in a narrow perspective or were making limited assumptions about the world ... Describe the event. Write down as many details as you can remember.

2) Situate yourself at that time in your life in relation to your socioeconomic class, your family situation, your educational or work setting, i.e. write down as many context details as you can.

3) Now, analyse all the factors, social, economic, political, family, educational, workplace (if applicable) and media that reinforced the ideology of your cocoon, and those which helped your breakthrough occur.

4) When you have done this, discuss with your critical friend and see if you can deepen your analysis through dialogue and questioning. See if, with the help of your partner, you can identify the assumptions and values that underlie your story. This is not easy to do, as they often seem ‘obvious’ or are just ‘common sense’—this is where your critical friend can play a crucial role. It would be useful if you could do the same for your partner—it is often much easier to identify others’ assumptions rather than our own (Fisher, 1998: 10-11).

To assist students in preparing for their assignments, I designed a series of ‘assessment activities’ for them to complete. For all these activities, I gave my own responses to each of the questions to ‘model’ examples to the students of a critically reflective response. Such positive modelling is considered an essential strategy in facilitating understanding of what constitutes reflection (Smith, 1998). The following extract from the study guide illustrates this process (edited versions of my responses are included for illustrative purposes):

**Assessment Activity #1:**

(1) Think of an issue or problem that is current in your life. Reflect on it, and see if you can link it to a wider economic concern …

**My response:** Issues around education are an ongoing feature of my life ... Education and education funding have become more and more linked to notions
of training for the paid workforce, rather than providing things like skills in
critical thinking or appreciation for beauty in art and literature or how to
manage relationships.

(2) Write an account of your own experience in relation to this issue. How does
it connect with your personal life? When was the first time you became
aware of it as an issue? How was it discussed in your family (if at all)? What
impressions do you get about this issue from the media? Which authorities
are considered experts in this debate? What are your opinions about how the
issue should be tackled? What has influenced these opinions?

My response: My experience in relation to education is from three perspectives:
as a student; as a teacher and as a parent ... The impression I have from the
media is that education is important to train particularly young people for the
future workforce. The rhetoric focuses around terms such as 'outcomes',
'accountability', and 'efficiency' and making sure young people have the
'basics'... My opinion is that education needs to be more broadly defined and
that schooling should be deinstitutionalised, decentralised and localised ... I
think the direct link between education and the needs of the industrial economy
needs to be questioned ... My opinions have been influenced by reading radical
educators (such as ... Freire), by involvement in community schooling as a
parent, by living in an intentional community, by being a teacher of adults for
many years, by witnessing the deadening effects of traditional secondary
schooling on young people I know ...

(3) Once you have written your account, show it to your critical friend and ask
them to identify what underlying values and assumptions they notice. As you
dialogue about this, you may start to identify others they did not see.

My response: My critical friend identified the following assumptions: I assume
that education plays a significant role in the upbringing of children; I assume it
is possible to improve the status quo in relation to education; I assume that my
experience gives me a sufficiently comprehensive view of the education system to
make judgements about it; and I assume that the public debate about education
reflects what is really happening. As far as my values are concerned, he noticed
that I strongly value personal autonomy; integration and wholeness; and
questioning and exploration. I realised that my account did not emphasise my
strong belief in the importance of the 'common good' as it focused more on the
individual aspects of the personal benefits of education.

Don’t worry if you have difficulty in identifying many assumptions. This ability
will develop as you progress through the unit. It’s important to have a go and
notice what feelings arise for you as you do it. Many people can find this quite
confronting and uncomfortable. It can feel like your very foundations are being
undermined, which in a way they are. This discomfort is generally a sign that a
‘meaning perspective’ is being challenged and is ready for change ... Be guided
by what feels manageable for you. But remember, it’s a sign that transformative
learning is taking place, and remember to congratulate yourself and thank your
The step-by-step process of assessment activities was designed to assist the students to prepare for a critically reflective process. The study guide was intended to model a critical questioning process that could be considered a substitute for (or complement to) a critical friend engaging in critical questioning face-to-face, particularly for external students. Internal students had the added opportunity to undertake this process in the classroom. This interactive process was not documented, and I have confined my analysis to students’ written work and post-course interviews, described below.

8.2.5 Student Responses: What the Assignments Revealed

In this section, data categorised and summarised are taken from a combination of the two groups of students in 1998 and 1999, internal and external, a total of 47 students. The course offered was identical in each year, with the same assessment requirements. Full details of the analysis and categorisation of responses can be found in Appendixes 2, 3 and 4. The following sections draw out illustrative examples from the analysis found in the two appendixes.

8.2.5.1 Assignment 1

It will be recalled that in the first assignment the students were asked to critically analyse (using ideology critique) the dominant economic discourse in relation to a particular issue and then critically reflect on the underlying assumptions and values influencing their critique. Examples of issues chosen included: work, banking, gambling, social welfare, the Protestant work ethic, tax reform, the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment), unemployment, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank, unpaid work, education, public goods, distribution of wealth, genetically-modified foods, environmental destruction, the role of science, Aboriginal issues, Third World debt, public health, rural decline, industrial relations, consumerism and women’s issues.

The first assignment was challenging for students introduced to the mysteries of economics for the first time. Not only did they have to come to terms with the often alienating and mystifying discourse of neo-classical economics, they also had to unpack
its assumptions and ideological foundations and then reflect on how their own assumptions and values influenced this process. Unlike assignment 2, this first assignment did not have clear and specific questions for them to consider (apart from the ‘assessment activities’ in the study guide).

While the critical analysis is not a major focus of the research, a few comments about the students’ responses may be instructive. Of the 45 assignments analysed, only 22% (10) fulfilled all the requirements of an adequate critical analysis, i.e. an historical perspective, identifying assumptions within economics and how they applied to their chosen issue, and identifying ideological interests served by the dominant paradigm’s approach to the issue. However, a significant majority of students (71%) were able to identify assumptions underlying neo-classical economics, while 58% were able to identify economic assumptions as they applied to their issue. About half (51%) identified ideological interests served by the dominant paradigm in relation to their issue.

To assess students’ capacity for critical analysis, I weighted the three criteria above as follows: history (1), assumptions (2) and ideology (2). I assessed students as having a very strong (5), strong (4), moderate (2-3) or weak (1) capacity for critical analysis or as showing little or no evidence of critical analysis (0). The results are summarised in Table 8.2 below.

Table 8.2
Evidence of Capacity to Critically Analyse in Assignment 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity for critical analysis</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When it came to critically reflecting on their own assumptions and values, a significant number of students (40%) did not identify any assumptions in their own work, while only 18% were not able to identify any values.

Students were asked to reflect on their assumptions, beliefs and values. These distinctions were not always easy to make and the students themselves were not always clear on the differences. The percentages in brackets are proportions of the total number of assignments analysed (45). In developing categories of assumptions (i.e. what students had named as their assumptions), I identified assumptions that I assessed were actually values (20%), assumptions that I thought were actually beliefs (20%), and another four categories of what I considered to be ‘genuine’ assumptions: assumptions about social and political structures akin to Mezirow’s ‘socio-cultural’ presuppositions (40%); assumptions about human beings (Mezirow’s ‘psychic’ presuppositions) (4%); assumptions about knowledge (Mezirow’s ‘epistemic’ category of presuppositions) (2%); and assumptions about personal rights (2%).

To illustrate, the following are examples of assumptions identified by the students, that I interpreted to be values (responses in italics are direct quotes).

- Perhaps my assumption is this: ‘that in an advanced, educated and wealthy democratic society it should be our aim to provide all citizens with the opportunity of some form of work, enabling them to attain a sense of dignity and self worth’.

- Corporate interests are immoral; corporate individuals lack ethics.

- Environment is primary; the environment is frail and needs protecting.

On the other hand, I identified the following assumptions as more closely resembling beliefs:

- My personal assumption of the political and economic paradigm is that labour in the workforce is primarily seen only as a corporate and government resource to be used and disused when the conditions suit.

- Aboriginal people want to live traditional ways and not oppose mining and grazing altogether.

- It was always the writer’s belief [i.e. his own] that the apparent arrogance of these people [farmers] and perhaps perceived greed, combined with conservative attitudes was what drove them. These assumptions can now be seen to be
symptomatic of a wider influence. That is the influence of economic rationalism, the ‘dominant paradigm’.

It could be argued that these are very fine distinctions. My basis for making them was that I viewed values as constituting principles to live by, i.e. what is important to the individual (e.g. ‘environment is primary’), while I saw beliefs as being indicative of a particular understanding of the way the world works, i.e. what the individual thinks is ‘true’ (e.g. ‘Aboriginal people want to live traditional ways’). On the other hand, ‘genuine’ assumptions reflect taken-for-granted understandings that underpin values and beliefs (Mezirow, 1992). Making such distinctions could be seen as problematic as there are profound philosophical issues at stake here. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in detail the philosophical foundations for these terms, although it should be recognised that the distinctions I made as a result of this analysis have helped students in subsequent classes who are embarking for the first time on critical reflection. Again, these distinctions were not always easy to identify. By far the most common types of assumptions identified were those relating to understandings about social and political structures. For example:

- that there is a right to work; work provides economic security i.e. fair wage rates; women are unhappy in part-time, casual, low-paying jobs; equity in the workforce is desirable;

- a power struggle between employer and employee will always exist; and

- that poverty for Aboriginal people is a result of a campaign to suppress their participation as citizens; the current policy position is possible because systematic neglect has kept Aboriginal people disempowered.

Two students identified assumptions they made about human beings:

- people are unable to control gambling; people do not act ‘rationally’ when gambling; and

- human beings have innate needs; human reasoning and understanding is imperfect; humans are endowed with creative power.

The student who made the latter set of assumptions was the only one to identify his ‘epistemic’ assumptions:

- there is a ‘real’ universe that functions independently of human participation; the search for truth is constrained by human biases and assumptions; much of human knowledge is constructed.
What I assumed distinguishes these assumptions from beliefs or values is that they are ‘foundations’ or presuppositions that other beliefs rest on.

As mentioned earlier, values were much easier to identify, although 22% of students implied their values rather than stated them overtly. Examples of the more common stated values include: belief in equality (15%); working class values (13%); Protestant work ethic (11%); left-wing values (9%); belief in social justice (9%); belief in community (7%); indigenous rights (7%); anti economic rationalism (7%); middle class values (7%); and Christian values (7%). A complete list can be found in Appendix 4.

Again, I made an assessment of the students’ capacity to critically reflect in this assignment, which would then form a basis of comparison with their reflections in assignment 2. Given that my interest is in critical reflection, rather than other types of reflection (such as technical, descriptive or practical), I weighted the responses in favour of a capacity to identify different sorts of assumptions: socio-cultural (2); human beings (3); epistemic (3) and gave a weighting of (1) to identification of values and beliefs. The results appear in the following table:

### Table 8.3

**Evidence of Capacity to Critically Reflect in Assignment 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of critical reflector</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the results summarised in Tables 8.2 and 8.3 that by far the majority of students had difficulty in demonstrating a capacity for critical reflection and that critical analysis was a more achievable goal for these students—this is not surprising given the strong emphasis on critical analysis in other units in the social science degree. When comparing the capacity to critically analyse with that of critical reflection, those who
had a strong to moderate capacity to critically reflect were also strong in critical analysis (27% of students). However, being strong in critical analysis was no indicator of a capacity to critically reflect, as 53% of students who were strong critical analysts were weak in critical reflection. As would be expected, those who were weak in critical analysis were also weak in critical reflection. Only one student showed a stronger capacity to critically reflect than critically analyse.

The following samples from students’ responses to assignment 1 demonstrate a capacity to self reflect on long-held assumptions (note that ‘young’ takes in the age group 20 to 30 years, while ‘mature’ is older than 40):

'I want to go back to communism. I hate capitalism' a lady said this to me when I was visiting a former Soviet Union country in the Central Asia two years ago. She was not the only one feeling this way. 'What? Is this lady crazy?' I thought. 'Why would you want to go back to a communist system. You now have the opportunity to make as much or as little money as you want. You now have freedom to strive for the things you always wanted. You will even receive financial aid from the west to help you.' For sometime I never understood why she said that—I always thought that communism and socialism were wrong; their regulated, controlled market was causing many problems. I later realised that our view of economic rationalism is only one view, not the only view. In fact this lady said to me that for many years under communism that they had everything that they needed. There was a greater sense of socialism than individualism; it was only towards the very end that things became difficult. This really got me thinking (young male, external, 1998).

I think that my attitude towards wealth and [my] disbelief in positive change for the future has an impact on my ability to even imagine future possibilities. I can’t fathom a society where people could be equal in regard to wealth or status or ability and success. One of the reasons I don’t think I can see systems other than capitalism and economic rationalism being [dominant], is because deep down I am still materialistic. I enjoy consuming and buying, etc. But also I think my views come from not believing in any kind of religion or spirituality, and I also know that my non belief puts me in a rather small minority because the vast majority of the population of the world believe in some form of religion or spirituality (young female, internal, 1999).

The real confrontation for me has been my attitude and response to the conservative values, attitudes and behaviour that have always surrounded me. I was taught, with privilege comes responsibility, and for a woman that meant being involved in the community, fundraising for charity, Meals on Wheels, school tuckshop, etc. and looking after the family. It involved practical tasks. It did not involve questioning and trying to change the status quo (mature female, internal, 1999).
Much stronger evidence of critical reflection, however, is found in the students’ responses to in the second assignment, where they were asked specific critical questions.

**8.2.5.2 Assignment 2**

In this assignment students were asked to move beyond the analytical and take up an opportunity be more imaginative and creative in order to envision a society based on different worldviews and assumptions than the one they had been analysing in assignment 1, a society no longer dominated by the paradigm of economic rationalism and globalisation. They were encouraged to use different media and to push the boundaries of familiar academic presentation. The second part of the assignment was a critical reflection on their account of their vision, this time being required to answer the six questions outlined earlier in this chapter.

As will be demonstrated below, there was a marked improvement in the capacity to reflect demonstrated in assignment 2 compared with assignment 1, although there was still a wide range of responses and interpretations of what critical reflection involves. It would seem that this improvement could be attributed to feedback received after the first attempt in assignment 1, as well as to having to respond to a more rigorous questioning process.

**8.2.5.2.1 Visioning**

Within the emancipatory tradition, a move towards a more just and free society involves not only understanding and ‘unpacking’ the oppressive structures of present ‘reality’, but also a capacity to imagine a different society. This aspect is particularly emphasised by ‘futures’ discourses (Henderson, 1988, 1991) which valorise imaginative and creative processes. The range of responses to the request to undertake such a visioning process was striking—speeches; letters; a Bible story; a video presentation; a magician’s spell; a community manifesto; a radio transcript; metaphors; science fiction stories; a newspaper report 2005; a diary extract 2020; description of life in an imaginary society; the ‘Annual Report of United Nations Debt Review Board 2012’; a
web site; a dreamtime story; and a reflection of a 75 year-old woman in 2050. While students used a range of media to articulate their visions, only a minority was able to imagine a genuinely different society operating within a different paradigm. Nearly half (45%) took a position in the present and examined what would have to change to achieve the sort of society they aspired to. Another 13% did no visioning at all and only offered a critique of the current paradigm. About a quarter of the students (26%) were able to describe life in a future time or an alternative society, demonstrating a capacity for ‘real visioning’. A small number (11%) took a retrospective view, describing the path that society took to achieve the changes that now existed, rather than describing what the future society looked like.

While the forms the visions took varied considerably, the values present in visions of a new society were much more constant—a focus on fundamental human needs, sustainability, participatory democracy, social justice, local self-reliance, primacy of community and environment, wealth redistribution, simplicity, primacy of relationships, co-operation, common good above self-interest and so on. This is perhaps not surprising given the material students were reading in the course. Such values were prevalent in the alternative views offered, all values that tend to be of secondary importance in a paradigm emphasising individual self-interest above community, and human (economic) interests above ecological balance.

The following extracts demonstrate the creativity exhibited by those students who fully engaged in the visioning process:

**Diary extract 2020:** Following morning tea we discussed the impact of the new government legislation to reduce the limit on company profit from 22% to 20%. Initially I thought this would mean that the production level may need to be reduced to solve the profit problem. Mandy, the union representative suggested that the introduction of the new machinery for manufacturing the new ergonomic bikes could be brought forward. After looking at the figures this idea seemed to solve the problem and there would be enough leeway for everyone to have a choice between reducing their hours or undertaking a skills upgrade. This seemed to please everyone so we decided to cut hours to 2 and 1/2 days a week and have new Work Agreements drawn up reducing production hours and increasing household hours. It looks like I will have the time to do that course on biomass energy systems that I’ve been meaning to after all. And I don’t need the dollars any more—I have all the home comforts I need and the extra time I can put into the community food gardens. My partner John will be jealous. He needs to cut back on hours at his production centre to be able to
concentrate on improving the community permaculture systems but there just aren’t enough young people willing to devote themselves to industrial production these days (mature female, external, 1998).

Annual Report 2015 (as part of his report a case study is included)

Norma Newway 32 lives in Binna Burra (pop: 873) a typical community in Northern NSW. Here she talks about her life and community organisation.

‘There’s been big changes for a lot of people around here in the last few years. Some people still talk fondly of the old days when they all had cars, when they were fully into money, and when most of the fields had only a few cows in them. I reckon they’ve got a selective memory though. For me life’s a lot more interesting and fulfilling than back then. People trust each other more and are more interested in looking out for each other and the food tastes better when you grow most of it yourself.

My job is one of the Naturopaths at the local hospital. When the hospital couldn’t afford to stay operating under the old system and was threatened with closure the community came up with different ways of keeping it going. I’ve been helping the hospital replace where possible pharmaceutical drugs with natural methods and locally grown herbs. The local Bundjalung elders have been sharing their medical wisdom and many other healers are now involved in operating the hospital. It now uses only 50% of the Pharmaceuticals it used five years ago and has cut other costs by 40% using solar hot water and electric and voluntary care givers while increasing patient recovery rates.

My community now meets formally once a week where we discuss community and wider issues and make resolutions to be taken to the regional and then national assembly in Canberra. We always start with meditation and a visualisation and follow guidelines in all our decision making including what will be the effects on future generations, on the environment, on the wider society, and on inequality? Last week we decided on who we think should be the regional delegates to the DRB. We also resolved to apply for a grant to install wind generators for the community and aim to be self sufficient for electricity in two years. We’re also helping co-ordinate a public transport and vehicle sharing system in the area, and private car ownership is no longer viable with the increasing costs of fossil fuels ...’ (mature male, internal 1999).

It was interesting to observe the number of students who portrayed catastrophe as an essential precursor to change. Of those who articulated a vision, 60% believed catastrophic change was necessary to achieve a fundamental shift in society’s values. Few identified this as part of a belief system, but rather incorporated it as an inevitable part of any change process.
8.2.5.2.2 Responses to Reflection Questions

The following sections examine how five of the six reflective questions were answered by the students. The fifth question, relating to what they could have done differently, I did not consider of immediate relevance for determining capacity for critical reflection (although I recognise that it links with a capacity to imagine alternatives). It should be remembered that the questions were asked in relation to reflecting on the story or vision they had produced—a ‘stepping back’ from their own work in order to identify how their own historical and contextualised lives impacted on their imaginations and their capacity to ‘tell an alternative story’ (Illich, 1971).

Q1: What influenced me to choose the particular themes explored in my story?

A critically reflective person is one who has the capacity to reflect on the position they take and what experiences and personal belief constructs have influenced that position (Mezirow, 1990; Fook, 1996; Barnett, 1997). The first question the students were asked related to this aspect of critical reflection. Only one student failed to identify any influences at all. I identified six main categories of influences emerging from the students’ work—values and beliefs; philosophies and theories; life experiences; personal situation; desires and interests; and socialisation. Examples of each are given below:

1. **Values and beliefs** (77%)—values of social justice, cooperation and participation; importance of the natural environment; belief in a looming environmental crisis; belief that only a socialist, environmental alliance, based not on crass opportunism but a genuine desire for creating a true participatory democracy can save the world.

2. **Philosophies and theories** (47%)—deep ecology, Gandhi’s economics; Max-Neef; feminism; Marxist teaching; ecological economics.

3. **Life experiences** (38%)—growing up in a supportive rural community; seeing disturbing elements of farming culture over 15 years; freedom is dear to me because I lost it at an early age when I was sent from mountain streams and waterfalls to a boarding school inhabited by sadistic moral men (of god).
4. **Personal situation** (19%)—having a partner who has never worked in formal economy and has been a full parent; personal fears of entering the workforce; working at Sydney Water; concluding from her experience that collaborative industrial relations is a fallacy.

5. **Desires and interests** (17%)—interested in the idea of leaving the planet—*I picture humanity spreading across the universe*; own personal interests and *inner magnetisms*—drawn to abstraction and theory; long held desire for shorter working hours.

6. **Socialisation** (15%)—being born white, female, middle class in Australia; own experience as a child socialised into women’s roles; parents raised in rural areas contributing to a family tradition of environmental awareness.

**Q2: What assumptions have I made that reflect my values and beliefs in the telling of this story?**

Although the majority of students were able to articulate the main influences on the way they had chosen to tell their alternative story, reflecting on their taken-for-granted assumptions proved more difficult. However, only a small minority (4% of students) failed to articulate any assumptions at all, a significant improvement on the first assignment (40%). Once again, the majority ‘confused’ assumptions with statements of values and/or beliefs, and a significant number identified assumptions based on their hopes and desires for a better world. A significant minority was able to identify ‘genuine’ assumptions about structures, human beings and processes of change. A small number went deeper, identifying more fundamental assumptions about knowledge, truth and reality. Interestingly, only one student overtly articulated her own assumptions as reflecting widely-held cultural beliefs (although a number implied this, without making the specific connection). Overall, I identified eight categories of ‘assumptions’ emerging from the students’ written responses to this question, in order of frequency—assumptions that represent values; assumptions that represent beliefs; assumptions based on hopes and desires; assumptions about society and social structures; assumptions about human beings; assumptions about how change occurs; premises; and assumptions about knowledge. Examples include:
1. **Assumptions that represent values** (70%)—all human life is equally valuable, no more valuable than non-human life; capitalists are misguided and the working classes are *infuriatingly ignorant, petty and often compliant in their servitude to the capitalist system.*

2. **Assumptions that represent beliefs** (62%)—the masses need religion to make them do the ‘right’ thing; things will keep getting worse before they get better; *all the problems of the world are created by capitalism under the thumb of economic rationalism.*

3. **Assumptions based on hopes and desires** (42%)—by maintaining a belief in civil society and social capital, I have made the assumption that ‘community’ implies ‘all will be rosy’; that harmony will automatically exist; and that inequality, class and gender issues are somehow all secondary; people want to live in communities; communal living is good for everyone.

4. **Assumptions about society and structures** (21%)—capitalism and patriarchy are connected; *polarity between men and women is socially constructed*; community is the foundation of society.

5. **Assumptions about human beings** (19%)—human beings have a need to belong; human beings have the potential to embrace change; people don’t want to change; humans are intrinsically good.

6. **Assumptions about how change occurs** (19%)—*only something substantial and cataclysmic will bring about a surge for change*; no consciousness shift without disaster; working class only militant in the face of hardship.

7. **Premises** (8%)—reason is valuable; truth must have a basis; reality is subjective; if a problem is identified then a solution should be found.

8. **Assumptions about knowledge** (4%)—western interpretation of biological processes is truth; all cultures see biological processes in a scientific way; a ‘grand narrative’ conception of reality.
Q3 What gaps and biases exist in this story? What perspectives are missing?

As well as being aware of assumptions one is making, being critically reflective also involves an ability to identify one’s own particular biases as well as what is missing from our stories and the positions we take. For a significant number of students this proved more difficult than attempting to identify assumptions, which they had practised in the first assignment. I detected three types of biases in the 48% of assignments that identified them:

- **ideological/political** (e.g. biases against employers and the business; biases against ‘corporate propaganda’ that denies scientific evidence of environmental decay);
- **gender/cultural/religious** (e.g. working class background; not questioning the ‘Word of God’; not acknowledging the role of women in perpetuating capitalism); and
- **theoretical** (e.g. a belief in the Marxist conception that eliminating private property eliminates oppression).

The task of identifying gaps was tackled by 62% of students and their responses mainly focused around specific issues related to their area of interest (e.g. not considering aspects such as unpaid work, the role of government, the benefits brought by capitalism, etc.) or a failure to articulate how change was to take place. Missing perspectives, addressed by 53% of students, tended to be closely connected with biases, falling into the categories of **theoretical** (e.g. missing green, feminist or Marxist perspectives); **cultural/gender/racial perspectives**; and **perspectives of the dominant paradigm**. One student challenged the notion of incorporating other voices into his story:

> Perhaps one might say: where is the feminist, aboriginal, religious or ethnic perspective? However I would find such a question to indicate that the questioner had missed the point altogether.

Q4: What contradictions and paradoxes are evident in my account?

Closely linked to the capacity to draw out biases and gaps is an ability to detect contradictions and paradoxes in one’s own perspective and positioning. It is usually much easier to see the contradictions in another’s positioning than it is to see our own, and having these drawn to our attention can often be uncomfortable and disorienting. A
significant number of students (19%) did not tackle this question at all, while there was confusion and misunderstanding for some (11%) about what contradiction meant and a similar number identified contradictions and inconsistencies in theories, rather than in their own accounts. From those students who ‘successfully’ drew out contradictions in their own stories and positions (59%), I identified five main categories—contradictory aspects of the vision; personal contradictions/hypocrisies; contradictions in beliefs; ‘blind spots’ in argument; and inconsistency in argument. Examples follow:

1. **Contradictory aspects of vision** (26%)—I profess the need for individual freedom, but my new society seems a schizophrenic enviro-fascist state; My beliefs in freedom, privacy and a sense of self are contradictions and paradoxes to my selfless, open, communal vision.

2. **Personal contradictions/hypocrisies** (13%)—I feel as though I am hypocritical in proposing communal living when I have rejected it myself. I also advocate the importance of the natural environment when my husband runs beef cattle which have destroyed the ecosystem in our area; While I am talking about consensus and openness, there is only one voice.

3. **Contradictions in beliefs** (13%)—identifying self-interest as a negative quality when in fact it is a necessary quality for survival.

4. **‘Blind spots’ in argument** (6%)—My critical friend pointed out to me that I could perhaps be contradictory in my argument because of my job security and unwillingness to recognise some of the environmental faux pas that my employer, the Department of Defence has committed in recent times; The tension I felt (after being challenged by a critical friend) ... made me realise that my ‘own ... gendered existence’ ... underpins a belief that economics will be described in terms of what is best for men rather than all humans and/or the environment.

5. **Inconsistency in argument** (2%)—The simplistic solutions offered in this story contradict alternative methods of problem solving that recognise and value complexity.
Q6: What further questions arise for me as a result of taking the particular view I have in this story?

Originally, the assignments were analysed with the focus on the aspects of critical reflection outlined earlier, aspects covered in the first four questions. Therefore, the students’ responses to question five are not so relevant for the purposes of the analysis in this chapter. However, what I did not anticipate was the depth of reflection revealed when students were invited to consider further questions that arose for them as a result of undertaking this process. For many, this gave an opportunity for a different level of creative reflection that had not necessarily been demonstrated through answering the preceding questions. Perhaps we could speculate here that another dimension of critical reflection involves the capacity to articulate questions that offer a deeper exploration of oneself or the issue. It is possible that speculating about alternative futures gave students more opportunity for wide-ranging questioning than if they had been reflecting on something more contained, such as professional practice.

The main categories of questions that emerged from analysing the responses were: philosophical questions, questions about change, questions about their visions, information questions and self-questioning. Examples from these categories demonstrate the depth of reflection that raising questions elicited.

For a significant number of students (30%), undertaking the visioning process led to deep philosophical questions about humanity, knowledge, truth and so on:

_Definitely the greatest ongoing question or enquiry arising from my endeavours can be attributed to the metaphysical nature of Hegel’s notion of Geist. (The German word for spirit or mind). The significance of this word, in my opinion, is that it captures the essence or most fundamental aspect of life and freedom._

_Too many questions have arisen from completing this assignment, and taking the view that I have! Much of this questioning relates to the human potential for both destructive and positive progression, particularly in questioning the possibility that ‘destructive’ human behaviour may be equally as ‘natural’ as any other behaviour. … What is ‘natural’? Or perhaps, the frightening course we have taken is simply part of the complex process towards a ‘balanced’ world in which periodic crises will continue to eliminate those traditions and practices which disrupt this balance._

A major preoccupation involved _questions about change_ (and by implication, activism)—questions such as what would it take to make the vision reality? will it take
disaster? what strategies are necessary to promote positive change? is change possible? how do we overcome barriers to change? For example:

Must a complete breakdown of society need to occur, such as those demonstrated by history, so that the pieces can be rebuilt to create a different society governed by better beliefs, values and assumptions?

Can change happen from the bottom as suggested in my story, or is the power in the real world fixed firmly in place at the top?

Do the current pressures on people at work, as well as within the family, undermine the concept of developing a community-based approach to economic and political decision making?

In reflecting on their visions, students asked—is this vision worthwhile or desirable? is it possible? what implications arise from this vision? One student questioned whether visioning itself is a good idea:

I wonder whether it is useful to envision some future utopian society ... Feminist writer Ursula K. Le Guin questions the point of imagining utopia ... I assume that my utopia is not necessarily shared by another person because it is based on all my values and beliefs which of course belong to me only. Le Guin also claims that is a male way of thinking because it is based on rational and logical thought patterns. I like to think that the universe is a mysterious place and that nature works in mysterious ways to restore harmony, so who knows what might happen between now and along the road to utopia ... that may change my views.

Other questioning was more concrete, dealing with specific aspects of alternative societies:

I wonder how a nation consisting of numerous small communities which are coordinated at the national level functions in a participatory democracy?

Are farmers in the Central West going to change their thought patterns? Are they going to allow their women to be a part of the process of decision making?

A minority of students (8%) took the opportunity to undertake deeper self-questioning:

Undertaking this assignment has made me not only question my own practical commitment to the utopian society that I have created, but it has also encouraged me to consider the minuscule level of knowledge humanity applies to the intricacies of the universe, to ourselves, our purpose (assuming there is one), and our future existence.

Perhaps my most pertinent question for myself concerns whether, in my heart of hearts, I truly believe that something better can arise out of capitalism in all its guises, not only the economic-rationalist model. I am both a cynic and an optimist, cynical with the attempt to reform something which I believe to be
unreformable, like capitalism, and optimistic that maybe, just maybe, something better will come along before everything on the Earth is trashed.

8.2.5.2.3 Assessing Reflective Capacity in Written Work

This ‘scanning’ of the students’ responses to questions which are designed to elicit critical reflection, tells a part of the story. From the examples above, we can see the range of interpretations that students offer when asked to reflect on their own constructing of accounts. As borne out in other studies (Hatton and Smith, 1995), the ‘ideal’ of a critical disposition, especially when questioning deeply held assumptions and values, is difficult to attain. Despite this, for the majority of students the task was taken seriously, and genuine attempts to reflect and stand outside their own positions were in evidence. For those who engaged with a critical friend, this process was particularly satisfying and enlightening. However, the written responses, carefully couched in ‘acceptable’ academic formats for assessment purposes, only reveal the end result of a process that is largely hidden from the reader. This supports Smith’s (1999: 22) concern that ‘evidence from written text may underestimate the degree of reflection undertaken … further compounded by the individual differences of students, and their styles of learning’. As one student pointed out in an interview:

_I was actually cursing when I was doing the last half of the assignment, I kept thinking there’s no question in here that asks me about my process …_

Smith (1999) suggests that follow-up interviews may offer one solution to this problem. Before turning to the interviews I conducted with the students, which permit deeper insights into the process of critical reflection, it is interesting to compare how evidence for the students’ capacities to critically reflect in written text changed from assignment 1 to assignment 2. The process of addressing critical questions in assignment 2 allowed for a more rigorous assessment of students’ capacities to critically reflect than was possible in assignment 1. I identified nine different criteria for assessing critically reflective capacity. These were based on the criteria derived from my own positioning, as well as an additional criterion of ‘self questioning’ which emerged from the students’ work. The criteria were weighted according to their degree of difficulty, as shown in Table 8.4:
Table 8.4

Criteria for Assessing Capacity to Critically Reflect in Assignment 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identifying assumptions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• socio-cultural (including change)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• human beings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• epistemic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identifying values, beliefs, desires</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identifying influences/background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Identifying gaps</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Identifying biases</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Identifying missing perspectives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Identifying contradictions/paradoxes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Envisioning alternatives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Self-questioning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these weightings, the results of analysing the students’ work in assignment 2 are summarised in Table 8.5:

Table 8.5

Evidence of Capacity to Critically Reflect in Assignment 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of critical reflector</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>14-22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>10-13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results indicate very strong evidence for significant improvement in students’ overall capacity to critically reflect between assignment 1 and assignment 2. All students showed some capacity to critically reflect based on these criteria, and only
three students received a lower score on critical reflection for assignment 2 than they received on assignment 1. A significant majority (69%) improved their capacity to reflect, while the remainder (24%) maintained their reflective capacity. Only four of the latter were weak reflectors in each assignment. Of those who improved their capacities, ten students improved by two or more levels (e.g. moved from being ‘weak’ to ‘strong’ reflectors). It would seem that on the basis of these findings it is not unreasonable to maintain that factors such as clear guidance about what is required for critical reflection, feedback on how reflective capacities can be improved, and modelling of critical reflection throughout the course, can all assist in improving students’ capacities to reflect critically. The assignments themselves, however, gave no real and clear indication of what assisted the students in their process. This was the task of the student interviews.

8.2.6 Reflecting on Critical Reflection: What the Interviews Revealed

To derive a more complete picture of critical reflection as practised by the students, the more hidden aspects of the story need to be revealed. To do this, I chose a sample of students to interview in-depth. The selection criteria were based on accessibility, students who demonstrated a range of experience and ability in relation to critical reflection, and a sense of which people were interested in the process of critical reflection and would be willing to discuss it in more detail. As interviews were conducted at the end of the course, I was conscious of the fact that more time spent on a unit that had already demanded a lot from students could feel like an onerous task. Fortunately, all the students I approached were happy to be interviewed, and for most, this offered a welcome opportunity to ‘debrief’ on their experience in the course.

The interviews were semi-structured, with three main focus questions that I outlined at the beginning of each interview:

1. What was your experience of economics and critical reflection before taking this course?

2. What was your experience of doing critical reflection—what helped, what hindered, what was it like to do it?
3. What role (if any) do you think critical reflection can play in activism in the postmodern world?

The first question was designed to discover the student’s positioning at the outset of the course and what changes occurred as a result of learning economics (usually for the first time) and engaging in critical reflection. It is important to locate the place from where students start, what their ‘critical disposition’ (Barnett, 1997) depends on. The second question was designed to elicit understanding of the experience of ‘doing critical reflection’ in the structured way the course required and to gain an insight into the range and depth of experiences. The third question was designed to move the student from the introspective and personal to a more global understanding—an attempt to encourage connection between their own subjectivities and broader questions of activism and social change. Another question asked of each of the students in leading up to the third main question was: ‘do you see yourself as an activist’?

The interviews produced a wealth of stories and experience—it is not possible to do justice to them all. Instead, I will firstly give a brief ‘flavour’ of the range of responses offered, my own ‘reading’ of these experiences, and then tell two stories in detail, stories which I believe offer a depth of understanding not possible to demonstrate with a mere cursory scanning of different responses. They also articulate, to my mind, examples of a more ‘holistic reflexivity’ as suggested by Bleakley (1999), unusual in their depth and complexity. What is particularly noteworthy about these case studies is that the two people, from very different backgrounds and perspectives, are among the youngest students (20 and 22), and perhaps indicative therefore of a different generational experience of the postmodern world.

8.2.6.1 Profile of the Students Interviewed

The following table summarises the characteristics of the students interviewed, which may be useful to keep in mind when we examine their responses. Note that names are pseudonyms.
Table 8.6
Profile of Student Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year/external</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>Critical reflection (#1→#2)</th>
<th>CF?*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>green/left</td>
<td>unemployment</td>
<td>Max-Neef proposal</td>
<td>moderate to moderate</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>very green</td>
<td>currencies</td>
<td>'enzyme economics'</td>
<td>moderate to v. strong</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>centre</td>
<td>rights of workers</td>
<td>letter to grandson</td>
<td>strong to weak</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>GM foods</td>
<td>critique</td>
<td>weak to weak</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>very green</td>
<td>environmental economics</td>
<td>reflection of old woman in the future</td>
<td>weak to v. strong</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>leftist Christian</td>
<td>role of science</td>
<td>theocentric society</td>
<td>v. strong to v. strong</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>right</td>
<td>reconciliation</td>
<td>model of what could change</td>
<td>weak to weak</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>Aboriginal housing</td>
<td>dreamtime story</td>
<td>strong to strong</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>consumerism</td>
<td>speech to parliament</td>
<td>weak to moderate</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>Indigenous dispossession</td>
<td>radio interview</td>
<td>weak to strong</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>green/feminist</td>
<td>globalisation</td>
<td>straight analysis</td>
<td>moderate to strong</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1999 external + some internal</td>
<td>green/feminist</td>
<td>unpaid labour (housework)</td>
<td>manifesto - intentional community</td>
<td>v. strong to v. strong</td>
<td>no**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* did student have a critical friend?

**While Sarah did not claim to have one specific friend, her 'embeddedness' in critical reflection suggests she had a number of such people to draw on in her community.
Three students from the 1998 internal group were interviewed, and nine from the 1999 group, (five external and four internal). There were three males and nine females, a gender composition reflecting fairly accurately the larger population of students doing the course. There were three very young students, (20-22), two in their middle twenties, and the rest were all in their 40s. These cohorts again reflect the age groups predominantly enrolled in social science. Seven of the twelve students (all women) identified as having strong green and/or feminist leanings, the two mature men were indisputably left of centre, one young man strongly identified as Christian (rather than placing himself on the political spectrum), and the other two women identified as ‘centre’ and ‘conservative’ respectively. Students attracted into studying politics at Southern Cross University are more likely to identify with left or cross-spectrum political ideologies such as environmentalism or feminism than those who take more right-wing or conservative positions. Three of the students were enrolled in courses other than social science—arts (Sarah), education (Lawrence) and business (Annie).

All students interviewed had made some attempt to tackle critical reflection in their assignments and all were willing to reflect on the process.

8.2.6.2 Previous Experience with and Attitudes towards Economics

While the focus of the interviews was critical reflection, I was interested to find out what sort of attitudes towards economics the students had before they did the course (question 1). Apart from one young student who was studying conventional economics through the business school (Annie), no other student had had any formal education in economics, and their opinions had largely been formed by exposure through the media. Attitudes ranged from a real passion and interest in economics:

I looked for a long time to study exactly this (Belinda);

to outright hostility:

I was probably fairly hostile towards what was happening. I could see that the emphasis on the bottom line, and the wholesale sackings of people, just purely to satisfy the balance sheet was making me pretty horrified. So I guess you’d have to say I’ve probably always been against that sort of thinking (Nigel).

Other experiences and attitudes reflect general interest, avoidance and alienation:
I’ve always had that abiding interest in politics and economics because economics has become synonymous with politics over the last 20 years. In some ways, in my mind, they’ve supplanted politics (David);

in terms of economics itself, I guess it’s something I’ve sort of shied away from to some extent (Mandy); and

my understanding of economics before that was about it just being about money, and being incredibly impersonal and incredibly alienating … I hadn’t considered my everyday life as actually being part of economics (Sarah).

These responses and attitudes echoed those of the TAFE students—the subject is alienating and mystifying, but its importance is undeniable.

8.2.6.3 Previous Experience with Critical Reflection

I was interested to gain an understanding of the influence of backgrounds and experience with reflection and critical questioning on the students’ capacity to undertake critical reflection. There is little in the literature that gives guidance to which environmental factors may impact on a student’s capacity to critically reflect, other than reference to it developing more strongly with maturity, i.e. it is predominantly a feature of adulthood (Mezirow, 1991; Brookfield, 1995; Garrison, 1991). While the aim here is not to ‘generalise’, the different experiences are enlightening and contribute to an understanding to the sorts of factors and processes that may help and hinder the process of critical reflection.

Looking at the different types of critical reflectors represented in this group, for the ‘strong reflectors’, each had an unusual upbringing, outside the mainstream. For instance, Mandy grew up with missionary parents who took disadvantaged people into their home and remembers questioning things from a very young age:

… when I was quite small I made decisions to do quite a lot of things which were different to the way things that were happening at home … I think we were exposed to lots of different things that most people, most children are not exposed to.

As we shall discover later when we tell her story, Sarah grew up on an intentional community where the adults around her had made lifestyle decisions based on questioning the status quo. And as we shall see with Lawrence’s story, he lives with his
parents in a fundamentalist Christian household, and developed an early interest in philosophy, which he believed assisted his capacity to critically reflect.

One of the ‘moderate reflectors’, Nadine, felt that critical reflection was ‘really familiar’:

\[ I \text{ think we do a lot of dissecting in my family, and analysing things. None of my family are really formally educated. I’m from a working class background. So I guess we do it without any authority, but, yeah, we talk a lot about life and about how we feel about things, not probably from an educated perspective, but there’s a lot of talk about issues, current issues. } \]

Of those who did not demonstrate strong capacities to critically reflect on their own work in their written assignments, one student (Mary) had had a conventional and ‘privileged’ upper middle-class upbringing where the status quo was never questioned:

\[ \ldots \text{ in my family, there were no real academic discussions. It was all a lot more practical based. So this is what happens, and this is how it’s worked, and basically that you can’t change it. … I mean I’ve been so involved with it (the dominant paradigm) … Like to me, it’s just, well that’s just the way it is, that’s the way it’s always been … I’ve just always grown up with this dominant set of beliefs. And it’s never been questioned. Never, ever been questioned. Like that’s just the way it is, and that’s what you should aspire to, and really you just don’t look outside the square. } \]

### 8.2.6.4 The Range of Experience with Critical Reflection

The task for students of shining a questioning and inquiring light on their work and lives is very demanding. It can take an emotional toll; it can leave people disoriented and confused; it demands more than the usual intellectual tasks of analysis and synthesis required in academic work. The experience of actually doing critical reflection has not been investigated to any great degree in the literature. There seems to be an assumption that it will be beneficial, although authors such as Barnett (1997) and Lather (1991a) have identified student resistance to the sort of critical reflection demanded by emancipatory discourses. I was therefore very interested to explore with the student interviewees their experiences of doing the critical reflection demanded of them. What was it like for them to do it? Not surprisingly, the experiences were rich and varied, with no real sense of an ‘essential nature’ of the critically reflective experience emerging from their stories.
Belinda experienced it as tiring and slow, and at times incapacitating when confronted with parts of herself she didn’t want to face:

In terms of the self-reflection stuff, I found that really difficult, really difficult and really tiring. The process of self-reflection means that you can’t go off and jump into that and jump into that because you, you know, you’re self-reflecting … and I had this image for ages of sitting there and staring at this big monster.

When I questioned her about ‘the monster’ she replied (please be warned that the following passage contains language that may offend some readers):

The monster (sigh) ... the monster is the part of me that—well, it’s the part of me, it’s the part of everything, it’s an energy that’s present—and it’s part of me and it’s part of you and it’s part of everyone—and it’s the energy that says ‘I don’t give a fuck about anybody else and I’m here for self-interest and to make a buck and to—because that’s what’s important, and I don’t care how many people I exploit and manipulate on the way. I’m going to have exactly what I want when I want it and that’s the way it is’ … I ran very far away from that monster all my life. I’ve known that place of pure self-interest. It’s been around me as a child, I know it. You know, I grew up with all that sort of bullshit. And I have always just turned my back on it, and gone ‘that’s not who I am—I don’t want to know about that’ … It’s really the part that none of us really wants to look at, but we’re faced with it everyday at the moment.

In the following passage, Cathy describes the dissonance and tension experienced by coming to see personal hypocrisies and contradictions as a result of reflecting with her critical friend:

But one of the things Anne and I did come up with in Wollongong was that in some ways we were a bit of hypocrites. Here we are saying, it’s wrong to accumulate at the expense of someone that hasn’t got the chance to accumulate. I’m in a little stockbroking club—I’ve got into the investment, admittedly in a small way—but I’m actually playing their game too? And Anne was saying, she’s done the same thing. She’s got investments in different places, and so while we’re um, we both realised that, OK, we could acknowledge what is happening, but it’s not affecting us to the point that it’s affecting other people.

Mary found that questioning the dominant beliefs that had been so much part of who she was proved very difficult, bringing with it guilt, pain and a certain bewilderment:

Well, I found that really hard. And I don’t think I did it well ... I also sort of thought ‘my God, how can I have lived this long without having questioned all this?’ ... I actually felt quite guilty about it. That was my emotional reaction ... because it was challenging and very hard. I sort of wasn’t quite sure that I wanted to go there ... Almost like, everything you’ve grown up with, your whole life, is being questioned. And then this guilt. Like I can tell you, I’ve assumed lots of things that are awful and are untrue. And suddenly again it’s coming back to challenging them, assumptions that have given me privilege, that have
enabled me to have nice things in life. And I actually ended up feeling my life was sort of a bit empty.

Interestingly, none of this process or insight was evident in Mary’s written work, where she found it difficult to meet the assignment criteria. This was part of the difficulty of having to write to academic requirements:

I’d try and write about it. I would try and write about it. But I did find that quite hard because I’d sort of think ‘this is meant to be an academic essay, not an emotional essay—how do you sort of get this into this academic form?’

Nigel described his experience as difficult, but wasn’t sure why:

Yeah, difficult for me. I’m sort of thinking now about why I find it difficult, to have to delve into why I feel about the way I do about certain things. Is it lack of practice? … Or is it a natural resistance that I have to sort of digging into my psyche too much? I don’t know yet, but it is difficult.

Despite feeling that critical reflection was an integral part of her life, Sarah noticed the paradox of how challenging and exhausting it really is:

I’ve actually been really surprised by my avoidance of it, because it is so difficult. … how much do I actually live by my ideals? How much do I actually decide to change my everyday life according to actually seeing where, where my assumptions are coming from [and] … actually acknowledging this can open up a direction of my life that I’m being closed to because it’s easy to go along my merry way … Like I feel like critical reflection actually does take a lot of emotional and physical energy and that I have to be really conscious of that, too. So I can often feel quite exhausted after I’ve been thinking about it for a while.

On the other hand, Nadine found the experience quite easy and pleasurable:

I didn’t think it was very difficult to do it. I enjoyed doing it actually … thinking back at what I did.

8.2.6.5 The Process of Critical Reflection: The Importance of Relationship

As well as being interested in the emotional, or affective experience of undertaking critical reflection, I was also intrigued by what sort of processes students went through to explore their own assumptions, beliefs, values, contradictions and biases more deeply. How did they do it? In general, the literature offers little guidance on the sorts of processes that students employ when asked to engage in critical reflection. It was not always easy for students to articulate these, but again, the attempts to do so revealed a range of processes of varying depth and complexity. While their experiences were very
different, the element of relationship emerged frequently as a key part of the process for nearly all of the students interviewed.

A strategy used by Smith (1999) to assist students in reflection, that of creative visualisation, was a process found useful by two students who took this initiative themselves. Patty, who thinks of critical reflection as ‘second nature’ (and who revealed more in her conversation than her written work, interestingly) found that a visualisation process undertaken with a fellow student (Belinda) was very helpful in assisting her to articulate her vision and to permit a deeper understanding:

The vision that I did with Belinda—one of the symbols I had was of a pandanus tree. And so there was a sense of all the seeds with a hard shell around them, and that they all feed off the same source, I guess, or core, and... so there is this interdependent sort of layer system happening inside the whole fruit, but they have quite separate boundaries... I'm quite familiar with pandanus, just from being around them—and—there were several other images—and sort of metaphors all the way through this visualisation. It took us about an hour or more. And they were all of the same message—it was this, that there was the source, the source energy, and that can take lots of different forms. And that is the driving force, like in terms of how an economy works, is that you need energy... So it's like seeing geographical laws of places, there's communities everywhere and there's things happening, and we are sort of cosmically bound in our universe into the sun and the source energy there... So it's quite a spiritual thing. It's spiritual and it's cosmic and it's—holistic and biological.

For Josie, the process was slow and essentially internal, without the benefit of a real ‘critical friend’:

I didn't really have anyone to help me, even though I was supposed to—it would have helped a lot, but I have a problem that most people that I spoke to had similar assumptions, so I kind of [thought] I'll just look at it on my own—do it that way. Um, what helped me? I don't know, just—lying in bed, thinking hard about all my assumptions... I was thinking about it [the assignment] probably months before it was due... thinking about my assumptions—it's a really long slow process.

Lawrence found that essentially critical reflection for him involved a constant questioning of what lay behind his beliefs and assumptions:

I guess I try to just question, not take too much for granted—say you're writing and you might say something that everyone takes for granted but I just try and think—it's hard sometimes—but I try and think well why do I say it—if that's my reason—is that like a self-sustaining reason? Like say people do that because they want to be happy rather than sad and that's the reason but then I try and think well why do people prefer feeling happy over feeling sad—I'm just trying to take it that one step further.
As we shall see later, Lawrence’s relationship with God was central to his particular process.

Sarah found herself following a somewhat similar process, with a continual self-questioning leading to deeper and deeper levels of assumptions:

*I’ll think about an assumption and critically reflect and then I’ll look at that and think ‘oh my God I’m making all these assumptions just by doing that’, and then I’ll look at that assumption, like that … and then I kept feeling like I’d go to that next level and I’d sort of wipe out the rest because I can’t say it all and because I felt like that was my deeper understanding, going to that next level.*

Mary, who, like Josie, felt the lack of an available critical friend, also described a type of self-questioning process that was very emotionally demanding:

*For my essay I would sit down and write my points. This is what I think I want to talk about. And then I’d go through and I’d sort of write about it, and if I sort of wrote and I thought ‘that’s right’ and then I’d think ‘well, what are you really thinking here? What are you really thinking?’*

Kath: *so, in a way—you became your own critical friend. Like you sort of, you gave yourself a voice?*

M: *yeah. I’d do it out loud too. … And when I was writing that last essay, I actually ended up in tears writing it. And I sort of thought ‘what is causing this? … So yes, I would say to myself ‘well what are you thinking here? What is causing this? Where has this come from?’—and yeah I’d sort of have these discussions with myself.*

Mandy was one of the few students who mentioned finding the process of responding to the activities in the study guide very helpful. She also found her process deepened through questioning from a critical friend:

*I guess the fact the questions that you asked and posed to think about were actually—it broke it down to manageable sorts of things for me … like when I first started doing university studies I didn’t actually know what they were talking about when they talked about critical reflection. I couldn’t get a handle on it … Whereas this was giving me a pattern and saying, well, OK, let’s think about how you feel about this, what’s your response, what’s your opinion, and how do you rate your understanding and how are you going to go from here? And for me, there was a process to follow …*

And, those first exercises, I actually got a lot out of them—the reflect back on your life and identify the moment when you became aware you’d be living in [an ideological cocoon] … and I had to actually think well, this is not just stuff that happened. Let’s start sorting this now and let’s start thinking about—well, what was keeping me in the cocoon, and what helped me break through, and then my
friend sort of looked at it and he said oh yeah, but this and that and whatever, and put a different perspective on it and he said, ‘what you’re showing here is you know this stuff about women, it’s just showing you that you’ve not really had any faith in women at all—this whole thing’s been run by men, this whole show’ ... And I guess for me he’s been a very strong influence in getting me to look at what’s underlying some of the stuff and just pointing out to me what some of the weaknesses in my thinking have been over the time.

Nadine thought of the process as being like having a conversation with herself.

I know that when I do critical reflection I really don’t have a plan ... I’m just really informal about that, and I just really try and be honest and think of as many things that relate to that question, and as many ideas that come into my head at that moment as I can. And I like it, because it’s great to be very honest—it’s like a conversation. I kind of, it’s like I’m having a conversation all the time.

8.2.6.5.1 The Critically Reflective Relationship: The Role of Questioner

While all these experiences are diverse and varying in their complexity, it appears that all involve some kind of questioning process, whether it be a ‘conversation with oneself’, with a critical friend, with questions outlined in the study guide, or even with God. This supports Brockbank and McGill’s (1998) notion of a reflective dialogue, although they argue that without a critical friend the possibility of self-deception is too great. The role of the questioner becomes very important if a depth of reflection is to be achieved. In my role as interviewer I frequently took on a critical questioning role, so that the interview took the form of a semi-structured critical conversation with a combination of listening to draw out experience, and entering into a deeper relationship involving challenging and questioning. This was made possible by the existing relationships of trust I had built with the students.

The following excerpts from an interview with Nigel, a man in his 40s whose disillusionment with globalisation and economic rationalism was very strong, illustrate the way I used critical and strategic questioning in my conversation with him. Nigel was reflecting on the way he had become resigned to accepting that the forces of globalisation could not be stopped ...

Kath: Oh, does that mean you’ve moved to some kind of—a different level of kind of fatalism, fatalistic acceptance in some way?

Nigel: Maybe that’s what it is (chuckles) Horrifying, isn’t it?
K: I don’t know—I mean I’m just interested that that’s the alternative for you.

N: Mmm (sigh) maybe it’s just my way of coping with what I see happening.

K: Mmm, so it sounds like you still experience overwhelm and despair around the issues, that it’s not necessarily understanding yourself more, it’s not necessarily moving you more towards a sense of empowerment or a sense of ‘I can do something about this’. The overwhelm and despair are still there, you’re just perhaps shifting to that in a way? Is that ... ?

N: Mmm, I don’t think I believe that I can make a difference. I think I’ve long ago given away any dreams of that.

K: That’s a big thing to say, isn’t it?

N: Mmm.

K: When you said you long ago let that go, was there a time when you thought you could [make a difference]?

N: Oh yeah, yeah. I believed it was possible to make a difference, that one person could make a difference and I think that now I really don’t believe that’s possible. I think that the system’s too entrenched, the system’s too powerful, that it would simply destroy anyone who attempted to in any way confront it. I mean I believe they can destroy whole countries, basically, if they step out of line they’ll simply withdraw the economic support and whatever that countries need, so what chance does one person have?

K: That’s a hard place to be, isn’t it? In the face of this? So ... what sort of feelings are associated with that for you?

N: Like you said before, it’s a fatalistic acceptance ...

K: So from your point of view, doing this particular study and reflecting in the way that you have, has that just in a sense, entrenched that view that was already there, rather than changed it?

N: (reflective pause) ... that’s a good question isn’t it? ... I don’t know, it’s probably, it’s given me a broader view of it ... To understand where they’re coming from. You know, I do believe that in the end this system will destroy itself anyway ...

Our conversation turned later to recent elections and I shared a different perspective with him, which led him to reflect further on his pessimism:

N: ... I mean I saw it as being an ungovernable type of majority, and um, basically pessimistic about their prospects of changing things. So I guess, yes, I do have a major sort of problem (laughs).
K: Well, it’s very interesting. I mean it’s very interesting for you I imagine to keep noticing that?

N: Oh yeah, yeah, it is. As I say, I’m becoming a bit more comfortable with examining my long-held prejudice and whatever. And to realise just how strongly I see the world filtered through the eyes of if you like social justice or injustice and how it influences me.

K: And that … any signs that are optimistic, it’s almost like they go through the filter and you say ‘oh no well, they’re not really, that’s an illusion, there’s no reason for me to feel optimistic’. That’s interesting to me … I tend to be much more of an optimist even though I do have the same kind of … horror about the injustices that you do. But … it’s challenging for me to think, I have these views about what’s possible for the human agent, if you like, and [with] someone like you, [although] we’d probably share a lot of basic values, you come to a different conclusion.

N: Yeah … I do see it as being this overpowering monolith that really is going to roll on like a juggernaut and crush everything and that I’m powerless to stop it.

K: Mmm, it’s a very strong image, isn’t it? And I guess just sitting with knowing that that perception, as much as whatever is out there, that perception is as disempowering as the system. Do you see what I’m saying?

N: Probably more so. Mmm.

K: And … would you have any desire to change that?

N: To change the perception?

K: Yeah.

N: Yeah, of course, I would much prefer to be optimistic about the world than pessimistic.

K: So what would it take to change it, do you think?

N: Maybe the insights that you just gave me …

Aspects of this interview highlight the impact that supportive critical questioning, within an atmosphere of trust, can have in helping to challenge fixed positions and unaware assumptions. It is also interesting to note my agenda as questioner—I was not prepared to accept Nigel’s powerlessness and hopelessness without challenge and it was almost as though I was ‘pushing’ him to see himself as an active agent. My own activist agenda is very apparent in this extract. However, I did not have the sense that Nigel was resistant or defensive in the face of this challenge—rather, he seemed to welcome it.
Depending on the interviewee, I took this critical challenging role whenever I saw an opportunity to confront a fixed position or an unaware assumption, using mainly the technique of strategic questioning (Peavey, 1994), for instance:

- How could you deepen that process? What would it take?
- How does it feel to think of yourself in that way?
- So you’d still see change—I mean I’m going to keep challenging you—you’d still see change then only coming about through the way that people interacted within the existing power structures?
- I suppose this is more of a challenging question than an interview question—what steps towards leadership could you take in your community?
- And what’s that going to take? What do you think it’ll take to shift that around where we move from that sort of, if you like, passivity, into more of an action-oriented approach to life?

**8.2.6.6 Activist Roles**

A significant focus for the interviews was asking the students about the relationship between critical reflection and activism in the light of their thinking about possible alternatives to the dominant paradigm. In most cases, I asked the students directly whether they considered themselves as ‘activists’. Very commonly, the students had a stereotypical view of an activist as someone ‘out there on the streets’, taking a very visible role, i.e. Moyer’s (1990) ‘rebel’ role represented the dominant perception. Consequently, when I first asked the question, the response was in the negative for a number of students.

I’m not someone that really wants to take central stage in any way at all (Cathy).

No, I haven’t been—um, well I guess, no—what’s an activist? I guess I could say I’ve been slightly—I’ve certainly always very much believed in women’s rights ... But not, getting out in the streets and demonstrating and that sort of thing (Mary).

I don’t really see myself as an activist and I’m not really doing much activism as far as—protesting or whatever, whatever you call activism (Lawrence).
I’d probably say no, it’s not a term that I apply to myself. … so if you were talking about the activist in terms of the person who’ll go out and hold the placards—then I’d say no, I’m not an activist (Mandy).

I don’t see that I really have a role in changing others. Like I’m not—yeah, I guess I’m more into changing myself, because I don’t [see myself] yet [being] a leader in that sort of setting. Like, that would worry me (Nadine).

On the other hand, the young women with a strong identification with alternative politics had no difficulty identifying with the activist label:

I feel like an activist, I feel really, like I feel that strongly, impassioned pioneering, I’m out there, I’m on the line doing it (Sarah); and

yep, well I mean I mightn’t be as active as some people are, but I’d certainly call myself an activist (Josie).

When we discussed a broader view of activism, taking into account aspects such as Moyer’s (1990) four roles of activism, it was possible for students to change their perception and see themselves as activists in a less visible or less anti-authoritarian way. For instance, Cathy could see herself taking a reformer role as a government worker being in a position to empower social security clients:

Well, it is, because it’s actually, by me, as a government worker, saying well these are your rights and you’re entitled to them, there’s no stigma attached to them, there’s no cost attached, and I’m yeah, I guess I’m empowering them as a customer too and as a person.

When I asked Mary if she saw herself as someone interested in working for change, she thought the way she had expressed that kind of activism was ‘just doing it’, meaning being a citizen who supported changes such as those brought about by feminism, and who challenged her family values about what a married woman ‘should do’.

Mandy, as someone who has worked to improve housing for Aboriginal people for many years, recognised her activism as involving a slow and steady progress towards change, involving her skills primarily as a facilitator:

In terms of being someone who’s ever since my working life began, who’s tried to change things, if that’s what the definition of an activist is then I think that [I am] … I see myself as a facilitator, I’m not sort of an out the front person. [And the progress that her team has made in gaining funding and recognition for Aboriginal housing needs] has been really hard work. And it hasn’t been through what most people would call ‘activism’. It’s been through the slow and dripping tap.
Nadine equated activism with leadership and struggled to see herself as a leader despite all the leadership actions she was apparently taking in her community. I continued to challenge her on this until she eventually conceded that organising a group of women to talk together with an Aboriginal elder about her experiences as one of the stolen generation was an important contribution to activism:

Yes, I can see how it could be. I can see I have kind of done that sort of thing all my life really … I guess it’s the first time I’ve thought about it … and when I thought about getting the women together, I thought that would just be a good day, it probably won’t lead anywhere. I thought that we’ll have fun and that will be a good thing to do. I guess maybe what I have to do is think beyond that … or maybe we could just do that on our own with the women that come there … the penny will drop, something will happen at that gathering.

8.2.6.7 Critical Reflection and Activism in the Postmodern World

Having gone through a reflective process that allowed them to think in terms of a different sort of action to ‘make the world a better place’, the students were then able to speculate about the role of critical reflection and activism in the postmodern world, especially a world characterised by globalisation. Once again, they responded in diverse ways, reflecting their own dispositions and experience.

Cathy and David, from very different perspectives, each saw that the role of the individual was central. For Cathy, it was taking the role of ‘active citizen’:

I think people have got to actually on an individual level start verbalising more and acting more and you’ll find that more people will do that, once some do, then more will and it will sort of flow on. But the other part, too, I think we have to, as I said to you, let politicians know what we actually want and you’ve got to get that through to them.

For David, it involved an integration with his everyday activity and a deeper sense of connectedness with others:

So, for me, I would like to work … that I go out and make a living and do all those sort of things, in a job where I actually feel like I’m making a difference. It’s that sense of how individuals within in the system change the system, and I’d like to find a spot in the system for me, where I feel I’m actually changing things … you know, it comes from the global to the community to the self, the individual’s where the shift is. And it probably goes back to what I was talking about, being in Laos and seeing people live their life, and strive to feed and clothe their kids and send them to school amongst this turmoil! … What drives that? You know, it’s that love, it’s that nurturing, that care, that connectedness to our own children … That to me is the sense of what the postmodern world is.
it's about rather than seeing difference, and that's where the communication comes in. It's when you see a woman grieving over her child, or a man in tears because he's lost his brother, that resonates in anyone.

Josie felt that reflecting on her assumptions only increased her sense of urgency about change as well as restoring her faith in the possibilities of change:

Reflecting on my own assumptions … it's only made me, well, it's made me get deeper into it and made me, again, like I said understand why different decisions are made. But it's only made me want to act more [laughs] because, because it's kind of given me more of an urgency. And people's assumptions, and doing this whole process, looking at my own assumptions does make them really open to change … So, by looking at them it's like, oh OK well if I can look at that, and say well OK maybe there's a few flaws in my thinking, that by acting, other people's assumptions can also be re-evaluated, not necessarily changed.

Mary looked at the question in the light of how it would enhance her own activism:

Yes, [critical reflection does have a role]) it does, yes. I mean, what are my assumptions underlying why it's necessary to do it that way? You know, why do I want to do that? Why do I think that it's not important to hang on to doing things the way we've always done them? Why would it be better to change? Why would it be better? All those sort of things. And why do I think change is good? Or I don't think change is good? So I think, yeah I think critical reflection is important in that. Why do you want to be an activist? Are you doing, being an activist to meet your own needs, or is there a real need in the community? They're the sorts of things you need to reflect on.

Nadine saw that reflection was essential to avoid fixed positionings in a changing world:

I think reflection is really important because you've got to constantly keep challenging yourself all along the line. I think maybe that [without challenge] they just become 'right' and that's 'right' and maybe too goal-focused … Even though it's good to have goals, I think they shift, the goals shift as life goes on and the story's not written. You don't really know what tomorrow's going to bring, but you've got to be really flexible about changing. And so to reflect … I guess you're always challenging, rather than becoming really firm and going for it at all costs, but if you can be flexible and reflect and be able to change and say 'I was wrong, I thought that might have been a good idea, but it really didn't work out—think of a new way, and even though the idea was good, it didn't really work for this, this and this reason'.

Patty took a personal view and reflected on the value of examining some of her long-held beliefs about how change should happen:

And I've found that it's made me go further to look at the consequences of some of my beliefs. And seeing that at times that I've resonated with a belief very strongly on a gut level, but the logic of that belief at times is not complementary with the principle behind that belief. So to see that some of what I've read about
totalitarianism, that how once the society has come this far, that you can’t start
going back to a more humane type of a society through force. You know,
because it just is a total contradiction. And so to see that some of this sort of do-
good, common-good ideology is quite dangerous.

8.2.7 Case Studies

The data presented so far give fragments of students’ voices that demonstrate different aspects of critical reflection and allow some conclusions to be drawn about its complexity and problematic nature. It may be equally, if not more, informative to hear longer, more complete stories that illustrate the embedded nature of reflection and its possibilities. I have chosen two stories that highlight very different approaches but which point to this complexity. I did not choose them to demonstrate ‘this is how critical reflection should be done’ but rather that they offer contrasting perspectives of engagement with reflection as a deep and revelatory process.

8.2.7.1 Sarah’s story

It is afternoon. They are walking
with water bottles and sticks; their hats
are shading their faces
and sometimes their shoulders.
It is hot and
she is wearing a 1960’s synthetic dress.
Her thighs rub
where she sweats;
not too much to be
uncomfortable but enough
to remind her. She turns
to the group and unfolds
her hands to show inside. They imagine
they’re pioneers. They stick
to the roads but there is a sense
of discovering; discovering the
next stage in their future.
Creating.
A heightened excitement, contributing
to the group energy;
and they are that.
A group, a team, a family.

Sarah, the young woman of 22 years who wrote this poem to open her vision in her second assignment, is one of a group of young people who have a passion to build an
intentional community on a large piece of land next door to Bodhi Farm, my own community. The land is expensive and is an established macadamia nut farm. The majority of the core group of young people who initiated this project are the children of the people who established communities such as Bodhi Farm and Tuble Falls on the North Coast of New South Wales in the 1970s.

Sarah is an articulate and passionate advocate of community. She became a mother at 21, having grown up in a number of feminist share households and multiple occupancy communities. Her partner was born in the house I now live in at Bodhi Farm. It is important to recognise that my relationship with Sarah is part of this story—I have known her since she was quite young, she has lived with me on my community, we have sat through many community meetings together, we have supported each other through personal crises, and we have an open, respectful and trusting connection with each other. I am aware that my personal experience of her influences my portrayal of Sarah and her capacities.

Sarah took the unit Politics and Decision Making as an elective to finish her arts degree, partly because she knew me, and partly because she was intrigued to learn more about the mysteries of economics. She found the course challenging and stimulating, and although she enrolled as an external student, she attended a number of the internal classes to gain the benefit of group discussion.

Having embarked on motherhood, Sarah’s interest was in the way the work of parenting and housework is valued in conventional economics, and her vision was to create a ‘manifesto’ for her intentional community that would subvert and challenge the invisibility and devaluing of such work in the dominant paradigm. This is how she describes the impact of her relatively unusual upbringing on her perspective:

*It is through the intentional communities I have grown up in, (from feminist share houses to multiple occupancies) that I believe a massive subversion of the so called ‘dominant paradigm’ has occurred. Through shared land (not just a property but a home), taking away the picket fences, communal responsibility for children, consideration of the environment and an openness to difference, in the self and in others that has effectively subverted the way labour is valued and recognised. I considered many adults responsible for my well being, and so did other children; parenting had become more complex, more supportive within these sub-groups. Women as being skilled in building and other traditional ‘men roles’ was part of my reality as I grew up. The borders between what I call*
‘housework’ and communal land work are blurred, more difficult to define and the appreciation and value of this work is diversified (reflections, assignment 2).

Her first assignment was an analysis of how economic rationalism ‘maintains an emphasis on the individual as an economic unit, and thus the unwaged house-worker becomes a shadow of all other “economically active” individuals’. When it came to reflecting on how her assumptions and values had influenced her critique, she noted:

The process of researching and writing this essay was, and continues to be, an excavation of my own ideological assumptions. These assumptions are embarrassingly mainstream. I chose the topic of unpaid housework with the intention of gaining a better understanding of how my partner and I assign varying degrees of value to housework and paid employment, through the examining the ideological assumptions of the dominant paradigm.

My first questionable value was that parenting is not a career choice, but a consequence of bad contraception planning. My interpretation of the demands by the feminist mothers I grew up around was that equal opportunity in the formal work force meant that ‘just being a mum’ is not sufficient. This assumption (was) obvious in my parenting, where I was quick to start work, sport and study so that I could prove that becoming a parent had not affected my path in life (what a case of self-deception!). The desire to be viewed as successful led to me working not just two occupations, but attempting three. I would find myself doing nappies at three in the morning after work, to ‘make up’ for being employed elsewhere. Even though my partner and I thought we shared the household work equally we now agree that we both maintained the ideology that I was ultimately responsible for it. So the ‘self realisation’ of this process has led to a very biased essay, which concentrates on the development of a paradigm in direct relation to the woman parent.

I have assumed that parenting is valuable, which actually discounts contemporary single women debates about why they should support parents when they have chosen not to be parents themselves.

I have assumed that housework is necessary and worthy of value. This is especially controversial because mainstream housework specialises in the consumption of valuable resources and the subsequent pollution.

It is interesting that Sarah was one of the few students who was able to ‘step back’ enough from her own position to recognise it as a ‘position’ with cultural and ideological biases and to identify how these influenced her critique. This awareness of positioning reveals a capacity for reflexivity, a deeper, more contextualised reflection (Bleakley, 1999). My assessment is that her understanding of postmodern writings allowed her to locate herself contextually in this way. Sarah was also able to identify
assumptions as premises on which her values and beliefs were based and hold them up to scrutiny as being embedded in socio-cultural constructions.

Creating a vision for her community, a collage of analysis, poetry, ‘guidelines for living’ and reflection, was for Sarah part of connecting the theory of her (public) university life and the practice of her (private) everyday life, a separation she had been increasingly conscious of, as this extract from her interview with me demonstrates:

*I actually feel like the process of actually writing about it and feeling like I was starting to connect the theory of university to the practice of my everyday life really shifted something for me and I actually did it in my subjects across the board this semester. I just pushed my life into them ... and I sort of spent three years talking about postmodernism and blah, blah ... and breaking down meta narratives and subverting the dominant paradigm, but actually it felt like this was actually a way to put it in action ... And a really big part of it for me was actually feeling included in the process of my own thought.*

Sarah recognised that the ideas in her vision did not constitute a ‘manifesto’ as in:

*a declaration of rules, but represent the beginnings of my voice in the discourse of community decision making that will continue* (assignment 2).

She saw that there is connection across many aspects of communal life that would contribute to a different valuing of the work of parenting and house work—the centrality of processes such as consensus decision making; the relationship to place; the way technical resources are used and valued; the organisation of growing and distributing food; the use of alternative power; the way houses are built and owned (low-cost housing is a feminist issue, she says); use of alternative exchange systems such as LETS (Local Exchange Trading System); and the ‘fluidity of roles’:

*The structure of the community needs to support and actively encourage members to be fluid in the tasks they perform. If a task remains one person’s responsibility there is the potential to ‘own’ this task, to maintain control and also the expectation and ‘taking for granted’ by other community members. This is a gender issue because it is difficult to cut across the gender division of labour if ‘efficiency’, productivity and personal comfort are valued above all other considerations. Once we begin to shift the ideology of product and capital away from capitalist definitions, the value of labour is measured in a multitude of ways, including personal satisfaction, social and political change, (the personal is political), role modelling for younger generations, role model for peers* (assignment 2).

And once again, these extracts from her responses to the critical questions at the end of assignment 2 indicate a capacity to see beyond her own constructions.
This is a ‘working project’. It has become an exercise in merging the dichotomy of theory and practice. I have lived on intentional community, and I am about to start a ‘new’ community. By writing about the issues I am examining in my everyday life, I felt that I was actually engaging in the practice of creating alternative paradigm.

I was looking at where the research from my first essay is consistent with my life, (the inequities, the patterns of behaviour, assumptions). I discovered a feeling that as a woman I needed to prove myself as more than ‘just a parent’. I realised that I, and the other women around me, were ultimately responsible for housework. Building, electrical and conventional machinery were considered as needing more skills, and as such appeared to be valued more. In the community I grew up in women without professional skills found it difficult to work. This was partly access and partly that they became responsible for ‘keeping the home fires burning’.

My vision of community is based around the idea of a small group of people, (20 or so adults, and then 20 or so children, with a range of possibilities within these forty adults). This can set up a dichotomy between ‘us and them’, from the ‘nut farmers’ to the wider community. These relationships have not been explored in my writing, and I think this is a major gap.

My model is based on the assumption that family is important and that children are central to community. This excludes childless individuals, couples, families who feel they subsidise people with children.

Also the voice of the other people is absent, as intentional community relies on many voices and many perspectives, this assignment is a paradox.

While I am talking about consensus and openness, there is only one voice.

The way Sarah reflected on reflection in her interview with me indicates a depth of integration and understanding of what we might think of as ‘holistic reflexivity’, with its characteristics of embodiment and passion. She also demonstrated a capacity to monitor her own awareness:

But I also can feel a bit carried away by it all because I am so consumed in the process of it at the moment that I’m wandering around to everyone saying ‘well are you critically reflecting?’ (laughs) ‘if we reflect on this situation and look at our assumptions about these people ...’ (laughs) so I don’t know, I’m probably sounding a bit idealistic about it, too ... It’s kind of where I’m at at the moment with it (laughs) I’m feeling a bit excited—I’m like ‘oh isn’t this fabulous, aren’t I so cool?’ (laughs) ....

I found it really difficult to separate the critical reflection from what I was talking about because I felt like it wasn’t actually a separate process—that particularly with my subject I felt like the critical reflection and the theory was integral to the action of the alternative paradigm. It was like this is what we
actually need for alternative paradigm, and so I found that really difficult to separate the two … It was like I found creating that dichotomy between the two … just really artificial.

She started to recognise that any alternative, no matter how it appears to align with idealistic values, cannot be just another ‘grand narrative’ and that critical reflection itself can be potentially excluding of some for whom this is not a familiar process, as she describes in these excerpts from the interview:

I started to write down ideas … and as I started to write I realised that it wasn’t actually the models themselves that would cut across gender inequity in labour. That if I decided, if we decided that we valued the macadamia farm and childcare the same, and everyone was paid the same for that work, that that wouldn’t necessarily do that for a different group of people and that we needed, we actually needed to as a group, critically reflect on our situation at the time. Like, year by year or decade or decade or month by month, and that, so that the action of writing a manifesto actually involves critically reflecting and looking at assumptions of the group at the time. And that we can’t write a manifesto that will apply to any situation. So that’s where the critical reflection is so much a part of writing and rewriting and living by our model or structure.

… to me alternative paradigm is not about setting up one model for everyone. It’s not about cutting, making one model, pretend that one model applies to everyone and for that process to work, for us to actually be saying we need different structures, we need fluidity, that critical reflection is central to that actually happening …

I really understand that I’m making a lot of assumptions when I say that too—I’ve got to really watch myself because I get so excited about it, and then I think well, to what extent does, how do we look at critical reflection in a way that it’s not culturally exclusive, how do we critically reflect in the group? I’ve been thinking a lot about … consensus, I feel like consensus involves a lot of critical reflection … but that it’s so biased towards people who can sit through that process.

We had a revealing exchange about the two generations of people exploring intentional communities, and what it meant to be the next generation to a certain extent ‘reaping the benefits’ of the first generation’s reflective process:

Sarah: In terms of intentional community, I feel like we’re coming to a second generation of intentional community and that the first generation … were critically reflecting … it was more about a dichotomy about what they didn’t want to be. And that this second generation community, even though we’re starting at the same beginnings and we’ll have a lot of the same problems, we actually have a bit of space—to be a bit deep.

Kath: And you’re standing on some shoulders.
S: And we’re standing on some shoulders, and we have, it’s like, when I think about the gender division of labour in this community that I’m starting, I know that a lot of the answers are hard, or the ideas I have rely on a whole generation of grandparents taking some of the load of the childcare; a whole generation of people taking some of the load off our, our ... need for tools and our need for efficiency because we’ve, you know efficiency of just getting the job done because we’ve got the space to actually live somewhere while we do it. And ... when I’m writing these things I’m thinking ‘gee, it’s no different, and it didn’t work for the people before me, why do I feel that this is so different’ ... we’ve got the space to actually think deeper about this stuff ... and [here we are] just a bunch of twenty-year olds in our meeting process, I get a bit blown away by it sometimes. I think wow, you know, just growing up—and I make assumptions about that being a valuable meeting process. The way we talk to each other, and the way we respect each other and the way we listen to each other.

A story has been crafted here. A story woven from fragments of conversation and writing designed to reveal a (necessarily partial) picture of a young woman embedded in community, embodying passion for connection and place, willing to act to achieve her vision. The story ends as it began:

*I am that woman.*

Standing here
with my fists opened, not flat
but curved, with many lines
and many stories. I am complex,
my visions are complex,
my needs will change,
there are many layers.
I am idealistic.
I make assumptions.
I can construct
a theory of intentional community:
guided by the wisdom of elder
communitarians, (sometimes intended and often not)
and it will at times seem that I am generalising;
about intentional community,
about women, about men.
I will indeed reference
shared visions, but every community has
a different shape and form.
-Every person has
a different shape and form
even when some
of the ingredients are
the same. I am
asking for fluidity.
It can be sticky. Sometimes.
8.2.7.2 Lawrence’s story

Lawrence, a quiet and thoughtful young man of 20, grew up in circumstances radically different from those of Sarah—he lives within a strong Christian faith community and has lived all his life in a protected, nurturing and conventional nuclear family environment. He made this comment about his upbringing in his interview:

*I do come from a very privileged upbringing, like I’ve had a very stable home life and ... most of my life I’ve felt quite secure.*

Given his conservative social and cultural milieu, it would be tempting to assume that his capacity for critical reflection would be limited and his outlook narrow. However, the way Lawrence approached his assignments, and the comments he made in the subsequent interview, suggest such an assumption would be thoroughly misplaced. When I asked him what experience he had had with critical reflection before starting the unit, he commented that it had not been something he had really done before, but his interest in philosophy and Christian metaphysics helped him with the process of identifying assumptions:

*Well ... because I’ve had a bit of an interest in some aspects of philosophy ... I already knew about presuppositions and that sort of thing which a lot of people probably don’t think about if they haven’t looked at it—so I guess that’s a kind of conditioning in a way to think about underlying assumptions ... I also think having an interest in Christianity that has a lot of metaphysics in it ... saying that [it] is beyond just the physical and has spiritual elements, in a way it’s philosophical as well.*

This philosophical foundation and the ‘inner magnetism’ that draws him to abstract reasoning, both underpinned by his Christian worldview, strongly influenced the approach he took in his assignments. His choice of topic was to investigate the impact of scientific reasoning on the discourse of economics, which he saw as ‘developing from the confidence which has been placed in science as a means of determining truth’, and consequently led to a claim of ‘moral neutrality’ on behalf of economists.

In identifying the assumptions underlying the dominant paradigm, Lawrence demonstrated an unusual capacity for unearthing presuppositions at their most fundamental level, for example:

- *modern science is an accurate measure of ‘what is real’;*
• knowledge is ‘out there’, and that [scientific] analysis will increase economists’ ‘understanding’ of the world; and

• economists also begin their study from the position that their analysis should, and can be, ‘value free’.

His capacity for understanding the ideological function of economics as well as his strong powers of philosophical argument are well demonstrated by this passage from his first assignment:

One possible ideological role which the use of science in economics has is that it could provide economists with an ‘air of invincibility’. From the assumption that natural sciences are perceived by society to be a reliable means of ‘discovering’ truth, it follows to argue that if economic theory can [be] presented alongside these as a similar discipline, its ‘findings’ and subsequent conclusions will appear far more credible. If economics is, however, more likely to be based upon socially constructed knowledge, and hence influenced by certain human values, it becomes more open to critique. Therefore, by claiming itself to be a scientific discipline, and thus increasing the perceived ‘rationality’ and ‘reliability’ of its prescriptions, ‘ruling class’ ideology can be communicated and maintained more effectively. Dissidents can then be claimed to be rebelling ‘against science itself’, and not against a set of ideas that have been constructed.

When it came to identifying the assumptions that had influenced his own position, he again dwelt in ontological realms and, like Sarah, was able to reflect on that positioning:

On human motivation: it is assumed that human beings have innate ‘needs’, including psychological and social, which accompany and interplay with biological ‘needs’. I also assume that human reasoning and understanding is imperfect (although it must be noted that ‘imperfect’ is a problematic or even nonsensical term unless one has faith in the existence of a metaphysical ideal of ‘perfect’), so the ‘quest’ to fulfil ‘needs’ cannot be expressed by assuming that behaviour will be purely rational.

Science and objectivity: I initially presume that matter exists and there is a ‘real’ universe which can function independently of human participation.

I presuppose that humanity has been endowed with a level of creative power ... I presuppose that ‘reality’ includes, but also goes beyond, what is visible and tangible, and that a ‘spiritual dimension’ exists as part of the physical and interacts with it.

My foundational beliefs on these matters stem from a faith in the Hebraic account of the creation of the universe, which, if accepted, provides a basis for a ‘real’ universe, and a creative, intelligent yet finite human being. This is a group to which I assume myself to belong, so even my interpretation of the implications of the existence of a Creator will be subject to the same possible biases and
imperfections ... I assume that while faith is necessary to believe, for example, in the existence of a supernatural Creator, a degree of faith is also necessary to believe in anything.

In his second assignment, Lawrence did not ‘imagine’ what an alternative society would look like, but rather developed an argument for a worldview based on ‘theocentrism’, i.e. one that has God at the centre:

The central tenet for this position is that God is the centre of the entire sum of the universe. God is the maker of all things, the measure of ethics and truth, the ‘final reality’, and the ‘infinite reference point’ ... [God is defined as love]. Love can then be defined by God’s action, which is motivated by self-sacrifice rather than self-interest.

In order to ‘make his case’ he set up an imaginary dialogue between himself and a critical questioner, thus incorporating a critical relationship into his process. Interestingly, the ‘dialogue’ began with challenges from the questioner, for example:

But surely you would not doubt the truth of science. After all, you work on a computer, drive a car and take chemically synthesised medicines. These are all a product of scientific ‘advancements’; and

May I put forward this: you are critiquing my working upon ‘faith not facts’, while you would openly admit to having faith.

Later this role developed into more of a sympathetic questioner.

Could you then please articulate more clearly this ‘worldview’ which you advocate to be embraced?

Do you have any ideas as to how such a system would work, related to economics?

Lawrence acknowledged this lack of real challenge in his reflections.

Creating a dialogue was an enjoyable writing exercise, but creates an illusion of debate, when it is really completely the presentation of one perspective.

His reflective capacity demonstrated an authenticity and humility in his desire to be as honest about the flaws and shortcomings in his account as he could:

Assumptions: my own presuppositions can be seen to be a projection of unprovable beliefs. The most outstanding assumption which I have made in this story is the existence and nature of God ... I have a strong belief that ... without any truth there cannot be hope, and truth must have a satisfactory basis ... there is an ‘ideal’ of peace, love, stability, justice, mercy etc which is found in God ... I have a strong belief in the creation of the universe, in antithesis to its arising by chance ... My assumptions that the Bible contains an accurate representation
of God and of universal truths reflects my religious beliefs ... I also assume that ‘reason’ is very valuable, in the sense that arguments should be logical.

**Gaps and biases:** My view will also be limited in that I can attempt to empathise with some feminist positions, but I cannot relate to many of their arguments from my own experience. This is because many of the ‘groups’ to which I belong suffer little oppression in our society (for example, male, ‘Anglo-Saxon’, ‘middle-class’) ... [Another weakness is] my tendency to find criticism easier than positive construction.

**Contradictions:** A personal contradiction in this account is it is easier to call for a theocentric perspective than it is to consistently live with a ‘God focus’. My own ‘hypocrisy’ in presenting a theocentric view yet frequently behaving in self-centred ways is becoming a very obvious personal affliction.

In recognising the danger of being too ‘attached’ to one’s own perspective, he concludes his assignment with the following comment, an example of his personal humility:

*I must acknowledge that a possible weakness with my position is that I have great confidence in it. This confidence is not necessarily placed in the soundness of my presentation, but is broader in that I feel quite convinced that a theocentric framework offers the greatest potential to provide satisfactory solutions to economic, ethical, environmental and interpersonal problems. Thus, if a challenge were to be posed to key assumptions I may experience some difficulty in evaluating such claims from outside this framework.*

In his interview with me, he talked about the importance of having such humility in terms of the satisfaction it gave him as well allowing him to experience grace from God:

*... so I really enjoyed talking about my own assumptions, because it made me feel better about my own work in a way ... I really feel now that in a way your writing is more persuasive if it’s questioning of itself and if it’s very clear what you’re saying ... there’s a verse in the Bible that says ‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble’ and—I want that sort of favour from God ... and I think that’s where God really wants me to be out there and to be [honest with who I am].*

A little further on in our conversation when we were talking about his process of critical reflection, it emerged that he found a ‘critical friend’ in God:

**Kath:** So it sounds to me in terms of the process that you went through that it was very much an internal one, that it wasn’t as if you were using other people to sound things off against, but you were doing this very much as your own inner practice—is that right?

**Lawrence:** I think so, yeah ... you know, I’m not a particularly introverted person, but I think with things like this I tend to more or less work on it in my own sort of space ... I guess I also felt that it was internal, because, from a
Christian perspective we believe that God knows everything, so I was trying to ask God to help me to see those sort of things in myself as well ...

K: So God was your critical friend?

L: In a way, yep, because I don’t think that God is afraid ... you can be a bit hesitant towards [critical reflection] because of fear, because you’re scared of what if my own beliefs don’t hold up [but] ... it must be true that God could have no fear of reflecting [if he is the final reality], showing me the weaknesses in what I was saying or in my own ideas.

Lawrence is a young man who strives to live according to the highest principles, which he believes God expects and yet is painfully aware of how difficult it is to sustain a life free of contradiction:

I feel like I have a lot of faith in the truth of a lot of the ideas I was saying that I guess I could see that I do have biases ... that ... other people mightn’t have and I was also frustrated—it was also disappointing because I felt I was almost incapable of really acting them out consistently.

When reflecting on what assisted him in this relatively unfamiliar process of critical reflection, he commented that my modelling and mentoring helped, but what is also needed is a conducive environment where there is encouragement to reflect, as well as the inspiration to do it. It is a delicate and fragile thing:

... it feels like there’s times when I can critically reflect a lot better—you know like now I don’t think I can very well because ... [of] how I’m feeling emotionally ... I just want to try and keep progressing because I think if you go out of that environment it is something that you could lose.

Unlike Sarah, Lawrence did not see himself as an ‘activist’, as he believed that his privileged and comfortable life did not produce the sort of dissonance and hardship that he believes is necessary for passionate engagement to change the world. But he did see that he could somehow ‘make a difference’ through passing on what he had learnt to others. Lawrence saw the role of reflection in activism in a paradoxical light—on the one hand it could enhance change by allowing a questioning of the status quo, and on the other it could be a barrier to those wanting radical change:

Yeah—it’s hard, because I kind of feel like it does, and it doesn’t. Because I think it does in a lot of ways in that you know helping people to see, to question things, and that sort of stuff is really important because if—people can’t see any alternative or any problem with how things are, then it’s very unlikely that it’s going to change ... And I think in some ways, though, critical reflection mightn’t be ... that beneficial for some people that—I guess, it just seems to temper the change in a way. You know, if we want to have really radical change, like
revolutionary overthrow and that sort of stuff, it seems like you just have to be so committed, that you would have to be so committed to that cause, just have complete faith in that cause, but if you have a questioning attitude to even your own cause it seems like, I don’t know, I would conceive it to make the process more diplomatic and more, less revolutionary, and more like—maybe—gradual sort of thing?

For him, the whole process of critical reflection was satisfying and challenging, and was having a positive impact in other areas of his life:

*I’m glad that there’s things like this available in that I’ve been privileged enough to do it ... just even with my relationship ... I’m getting better at questioning my own motives and that sort of thing ... you know with my own actions, am I doing what’s best for her or am I trying to be manipulative to meet my own ends and all that sort of stuff, so I think it’s a really healthy thing to do because it can apply to more contexts then we looked at in the unit.*

While the personalities and backgrounds of Sarah and Lawrence are very different, what they appear to me to have in common is passionate engagement in their lives, living authentically according to deeply held values. They are both intensely inquiring and both seem to have that elusive capacity to hold true to their values while at the same time being able to stand back from their own positions and see them as ‘constructions’, demonstrating what I believe to be a genuine ‘holistic reflexivity’ (Bleakley, 1999). To these two young people, the postmodern questioning of essentialised, fixed positions would make complete sense.

Part I of this chapter has offered a detailed reading and analysis of student responses to the request to critically reflect on their positions in relation to a demystification of economics and envisioning alternatives. In-depth interviews revealed deeper understandings of the process of critical reflection and how it could relate to activism in the postmodern era. In keeping with the spirit of critical action research, the next step is to reflect on these experiences, in an attempt to ‘make sense’ of the research findings by drawing together the threads through returning to the questions outlined at the end of chapter 7. Part II offers a ‘reading’ of the findings of Part I through those questions.
8.3 PART II: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL REFLECTION

As indicated earlier in this chapter, for the purposes of research in critical reflection in this context of teaching economics for empowerment, I took a particular position on what critical reflection entailed, a position based on definitions of critical reflection from within the emancipatory tradition, without making that position problematic. It would not have been possible to do the research without taking such a position. My positioning marks ‘a place from which to speak’ (Lather, 1991a: 8), and as Stuart Hall says:

... there’s no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all (Hall, 1991, cited in McLaren, 1994: 202).

However, as the arguments in chapter 7 showed, and as the recent literature on critical reflection has argued, critical reflection is not unproblematic and its lack of clear definition and articulation of the values underpinning it in much of the literature has created difficulties in operationalising it in classrooms and other contexts (Ecclestone, 1996; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Bleakley, 1999; Ixer, 1999). The data presented in Part I therefore need to be ‘interrogated’ from two different standpoints: firstly, from the perspective of the positioning on critical reflection that I took into the teaching context, located within the emancipatory paradigm, and secondly, from the perspective that this position itself needs to be questioned and reflexively examined, as required by the action research process. Hence, the four sets of research questions identified at the end of chapter 7 will be interpreted as representing a process which moves from examining the usefulness and scope of critical reflection in the context of an emancipatory project (in this case, teaching economics for social change and empowerment) to an interrogation of critical reflection itself in the light of concerns raised by critics of the emancipatory intentions of critical social science.

The four sets of questions, to reiterate, are as follows:

A. Understanding the process of critical reflection: addressing gaps in the literature.

1. How do students respond to the request to critically reflect on their work?
2. How do students do ‘critical reflection’ (i.e. what is the process)?
3. What contributes to enhancing critical reflection?
4. How significant is a ‘critical relationship’ in enhancing critical reflection?
5. How does this study compare with other findings about critical reflection in education?

B. Examining the emancipatory effects of critical reflection in teaching economics: applying understandings.
   1. How does the process of critical reflection enhance an understanding and/or engagement with economics?
   2. To what extent does research on critical reflection done in this way meet the requirements of an emancipatory project, i.e. does it lead to empowerment and/or emancipation of the participants in relation to economics?

C. Interrogating the efficacy of critical reflection in an emancipatory project: what role in the postmodern era?
   1. Given the doubts raised by critics of the emancipatory project, what evidence exists that there are limits to the rationality required for this sort of reflection?
   2. What can we learn about the efficacy of critical reflection in the emancipatory project from this experience?
   3. What are the implications for teachers wanting to promote critical reflection for emancipatory purposes?

D. Interrogating the relationship between critical reflection and activism: relevance for the emancipatory project.
   1. Given the centrality of critical reflection to the emancipatory project, which is focused on action, how do students make the connection between critical reflection and activism and to what extent does critical reflection impact on the students’ sense of themselves as ‘agents for change’?
   2. What implications can be drawn about activism in the postmodern era?

8.3.1 What is the Process of Critical Reflection? (Set A)

One of the aims of this study was to investigate how students respond when requested to critically reflect, given the relative lack of guidance in the literature about how critical reflection should be defined and particularly how it should be encouraged and/or taught.
As teacher and researcher, I took a particular position on critical reflection (which itself can be interrogated) from which to examine the process. It is important to remember that this position was taken in relation to critically reflecting on learning about economics, rather than on professional practice, the concern of much of the literature on critical reflection. As my intention was to investigate critical reflection, rather than other types of reflection (such as descriptive, practical or dialogic), my analysis focuses on the extent to which critical reflection is undertaken, rather than on what other types of reflection may be present in the students' work. (It should be noted that I will continue the convention of using the fictitious names of students interviewed, and a descriptor—e.g. 'mature male'—for those whose work is quoted, but were not part of the interview process).

8.3.1.1 How do Students Respond?

Given this context and the particular perspective I took on critical reflection, the findings laid out in Part I suggest some important conclusions can be drawn about the critically reflective process. As has been suggested time and again in the literature, critical reflection is not easy to do, is hard work and requires commitment of time and effort (Smith, 1999; Barnett, 1997; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1994). That only a few students were able to demonstrate capacity to critically reflect in assignment 1 supports the notion that critical reflection is not an immediately accessible skill, despite the guidance and modelling offered, mainly through the study guide. However, with feedback, clear critical questions and continued guidance, students' capacity to critically reflect improved markedly between assignment 1 and assignment 2. This could also be attributed to the difference in the reflective task being asked of the students. In assignment 1, students were being asked to look at their own process of critique—very few were able to see how their assumptions influenced the way they took a particular position. On the other hand, in assignment 2 they were required to reflect on how they constructed a story, with particular questions to tackle. This proved to be a clearer and more achievable task for many. Despite this improvement, there were still relatively few who were able to identify fundamental assumptions, particularly those connected with broader ideological and cultural assumptions. Again, this supports
findings that students demonstrating critical reflection defined in this way are comparatively rare (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Smith, 1999).

It would also seem from the findings of this research that a critically analytical ability, one of the requirements for critical thinking (Barnett, 1997; Paul, 1993; Brookfield, 1995), is not necessarily accompanied by a critically reflective capacity, suggesting that a more ‘detached’ analytical capacity does not imply an ability to demonstrate deeper levels of self-awareness. Most students found it less difficult to identify values, beliefs, influences and gaps in their work than assumptions, contradictions and paradoxes. I would suggest, though, that these more ‘straightforward’ requirements are important for laying the foundations for more complex and demanding critical reflection, involving deeper levels of self-awareness and self-understanding.

The difficulty of defining what an assumption actually is, was another interesting finding of the research. My interpretation of what constitute ‘genuine’ assumptions reflects my own values and understandings, and as such my interpretation must be laid open to interrogation. Moreover, given that this analysis was undertaken on written work, the analysis is limited to the extent that not all students were questioned further on their critically reflective process in the interviews. The point remains, however, that if it is difficult to define exactly what constitutes ‘genuine’ assumptions, or ‘genuine’ critical reflection, it is unlikely that students will be absolutely clear about what is being demanded of them. It must also be acknowledged that attempting to define such concepts operationally could be seen as a modernist, even reductionist, attempt to clarify boundaries that are inevitably fuzzy and shifting, and solidify notions that are essentially fluid and contingent.

8.3.1.2 What is the Process and How is it Enhanced?

Deeper insights into the actual process of critical reflection were gained through engaging a number of students in a reflective conversation about reflection itself—a kind of ‘meta reflection’—through the in-depth interviews. What was revealed was a diversity of experience, but all involved some kind of questioning process, whether it was a ‘conversation with oneself’, with a critical friend, with questions outlined in the
study guide, or even with God. This questioning was most effective when it involved iteration to deeper and deeper levels, as described by both Lawrence and Sarah.

An important aspect of the process of critical reflection is that it takes time—it is not something that can be rushed:

It’s a really long slow process (Josie); and

there must be another way to do this that isn’t so ... yeah, just really tedious ... it slowed my momentum a lot (Belinda).

Students who recognised this, gave it the time it needed. A limitation of incorporating critical reflection as part of assessment needs to be recognised here. While students were alerted to the need for time early in the study guide, the realities of university pressures do not foster a reflective environment and culture. The issue of assessing reflection remains problematic and questionable (Ixer, 1999; Hatton and Smith, 1995). One student realised she did not allow the time for critical reflection that it deserved:

For me, because I always do everything at the last minute ... I ... had to do that last part [the critical reflection] pretty much at the end in about a 4 hour period. So it was very limited. I mean I had tried to do it as I was going ... but a lot came to me afterwards, after a day or two, like ‘oh, oh that was an assumption, and that was a silly thing to have written down because I needed to take it another step deeper’ and so I think, you know maybe that would even be good to spell out to people. Like, ‘give yourself two days to do this’ (Patty).

While to an extent this limitation supports the concerns raised in the work of Hatton and Smith (1995), who found students were ‘limited in their capacity to reflect in an assessable piece of work’, the depth and range of reflection demonstrated particularly in assignment 2 suggests that having to reflect for assessment in this case was not an insurmountable barrier to the process itself.

Critical reflection was also something that demanded more than the usual academic intellectual work:

It’s not an intellectual exercise ... it’s engaging with your whole self ... in real terms, you’re talking real terms ... it’s therapy, it’s really deep (Belinda).

It seems that no matter how ‘successful’ the students were in articulating their reflections in the written form, the questioning process they had to undergo produced some sort of emotional response—dissonance, guilt, pain, confusion, exhaustion, as
well as pleasure and enjoyment. And while the students’ experiences were very individual, no doubt springing from personal strengths and vulnerabilities as well as their own contextualised histories, there seemed to be a quality about the reflection that mirrored the landscape they were traversing. They were confronted with their relationship with the economic structures and the ideologies supporting them as real and personal. If they looked, they found they had to face the ‘monsters’ of their own self-interest, their privilege, the hypocrisies and contradictions present in their everyday economic lives.

While a number of authors suggest that critical reflection is a feature of mature adulthood (Mezirow, 1990; Brookfield, 1987b; Garrison, 1991), an interesting finding from this study was the number of younger people who demonstrated very strong reflective capacities. In fact three of the ‘very strong’ reflectors were young adults (19, 20 and 22). Rather than age, it would seem that a capacity to critically reflect is enhanced by growing up in a culture that is based on a questioning attitude to the status quo (as Sarah experienced); or an ‘inner magnetism’ towards philosophical questioning fuelled by spiritual inquiry, as in Lawrence’s case. I did not interview the third young adult who was a very strong critical reflector, but knew something of her story through her contributions in class—she, too, grew up in a questioning household where independence of thought was encouraged. While her values are very much those of her age peers, she demonstrated an interesting capacity to see through them and think beyond the confines of youth culture:

> When I'm watching movies I often think that it doesn’t matter to sacrifice a few lives or even a few thousand lives for the greater good, but I consider my own individual rights to be most important. I value the right to accumulate wealth and also the right to welfare if I need it. But where do you draw the line between them? If there was to be a limit on the amount of wealth [for each individual] where should it be? It seems more important to put a limit on the amount of poverty one could live in (young female, internal 1999, assignment 2).

For exceptional reflectors such as Lawrence and Sarah, however, the process appears to go beyond the rational—there is a deeper engagement that involves commitment to a life of inquiry. Such inquiry is not separable from living consciously and ethically. This type of reflective engagement finds a stronger resonance with the ‘holistic reflexivity’ suggested by Bleakley (1999).
An environment that supports and encourages critical questioning and reflection seems crucial. Internal students valued the opportunity to reflect in class and to participate within an environment where reflection was being modelled and all of the eight students with internal experience who were interviewed mentioned some aspect of this, for example:

I think it was just through your own, I guess your example, because you kind of seemed prepared to critically reflect on some of your own beliefs and some of the beliefs you’ve had and your own experiences … (Lawrence); and

so the fact that you were creating a process and that you were creating critical reflection … meant that we followed that path. Because you created it … and I just felt grateful for the opportunity to do it (Patty).

This environment was also established for external students through the series of reflective activities in the study guide, a kind of substitute for a critical friend:

I guess the fact the questions that you asked and posed to think about [in the study guide] … broke it down to manageable sorts of things for me … like when I first started doing university studies I didn’t actually know what they were talking about when they talked about critical reflection. I couldn’t get a handle on it … whereas this was giving me a pattern … there was a process to follow (Mandy).

8.3.1.3 The Significance of Relationship

As can be seen from the above, the element of relationship emerged as a key part of the critically reflective process, supporting Hatton and Smith’s (1995) findings of the significance of the ‘critical dyad’ and also Brockbank and McGill’s (1998) notion of a reflective dialogue, although the latter argue that without a ‘live’ critical friend there is always the possibility of self-deception. However, I maintain that as long as there is a capacity for stepping aside from one’s own position through applying thoughtful questions, a critical friend is not absolutely necessary. None of the six ‘very strong’ reflectors indicated that they used a critical friend, although in her interview Belinda recognised how not having such a person in her life made the process so much more difficult, which is why she chose to seek me out to talk through questions arising for her during the semester:

I felt really alone with it, and I just didn’t have any sort of people who I could [talk to], and that’s why I started meeting you and being able to at least kind of download some stuff, cos I found it just so, yeah, really isolating. And I had so
much energy on it ... it would have been great for me to have that [a critical friend] as part of the learning, but it just didn’t happen.

It would seem that the role of the questioner or the questioning process itself becomes very important if a depth of reflection is to be achieved. The types of questions are therefore important. They need to be the sorts of questions that lead to deeper contemplation—silences become very significant indicators of the success of such questioning. The process of strategic questioning (Peavey, 1994) as demonstrated in my interview with Nigel, is an example of this kind of effective questioning strategy. As I shall discuss later, this role of ‘critical questioner’ or ‘reflexive inquirer’ perhaps, may prove to be an important role for activists and social movements (Moyer, 1990).

These comments and conclusions support the findings from the TAFE experience, that relationship is central to the process of reflection, and that reflection taking place in a relationship context (even if it is just a relationship with oneself) is important for any transformative or change process to occur.

### 8.3.1.4 Comparison with Other Studies

Apart from the significance of a critical friend and the issue of assessment, discussed above, another important conclusion from the work of Hatton and Smith (1995) was that of equity with respect to the use of a particular sort of language that they believed demonstrated a capacity for reflection, particularly ‘dialogic’ reflection. They speculated that socio-economic background may advantage some students in this respect. To determine the type of reflection used in their study, Hatton and Smith (1995) employed the way students used reflective language as an indicator. In my research, I did not use particular language constructions as indicators of reflective capacity, so this issue was not an obvious concern. However, as discussed above, socio-cultural factors do have a significant bearing on capacities to reflect and undergo self-questioning, but these, I would argue, are not based on privilege related to social class. Some of the most articulate middle-class students (e.g. David) struggled with the personal engagement that critical reflection demanded of them, while working class students, especially those raised in questioning environments (e.g. Nadine) found the process less unfamiliar. As teachers required to assess according to ‘objective’ criteria, we constantly have to face
the dilemmas raised by institutionalised disadvantage, and must be wary of falling into
traps of assuming we are ‘testing’ measurable skills and abilities, disconnected from the
particular histories and cultural embeddedness of our students’ lives.

Hatton and Smith (1995) also speculated that the metacognitive skills and grasp of
ideologies required to critically reflect were rare in student teachers, as part of their
explanation of the low levels of evidence of critical reflection in their study. Important
differences between that study and this one are worth noting. The student cohorts were
drawn from very different backgrounds. Students studying politics at Southern Cross
University are predominantly mature-aged and are predisposed towards an interest in
broad socio-political ideologies and frameworks. The young students attracted to
political studies are also different from their counterparts in other courses—they tend to
be less vocationally oriented and more inclined towards an interest in social activism.
Lawrence, as the only student teacher in the two groups, often commented in class on
the lack of critical reflection in the instrumentalist approach taken to his education
training. For him, this was a new experience. Another important difference is that
students in the Hatton and Smith (1995) study were reflecting on their practice as
teachers in the classroom, where the broader institutional frameworks are all but
invisible and their focus is on the micro teaching environment and the immediate
concerns facing them in their classroom interactions. Students in this study, on the other
hand, were engaging with the broader frameworks of politics and economics—they
were the focus of their study and therefore made very visible. Their reflections took
them into the realms of their roles as citizens and unwitting participants in oppressive
structures and power relationships within a polity dominated by economic rationalism.
Their pressures were not those of student teachers in the immediacy of classroom
interactions. Understanding context thus becomes all-important when introducing
reflection into the educative process (Boud and Walker, 1998; Usher et al., 1997).

Largely due to Donald Schon’s influence, by far the majority of studies investigating
critical reflection are conducted in the context of educating for professional practice.
Studies that incorporate critical reflection into the teaching of economics appear all but
non-existent. In the next section, I turn to the conclusions that can be drawn about the
usefulness of critical reflection in the teaching of economics for empowerment.
8.3.2 Critical Reflection in an Emancipatory Teaching of Economics (Set B)

8.3.2.1 Critical Reflection and Understanding Economics

For nearly all students, the prospect of learning economics was daunting. Many were unprepared for the sort of content that the unit entailed. The majority had little or no relationship to economics as a discipline before taking the unit. The opportunity to identify values, beliefs and assumptions allowed an articulation of a relationship to economics where none existed previously. Much of the students’ reflection related to their own values and beliefs about their place as individuals within the economy and they were able to connect with issues that were grounded in personal experience, giving added meaning and promoting understanding of economics as ‘connected with real life’:

I hadn’t considered my everyday life as actually being part of economics (Sarah); and

it was such a wonderful way to learn economics. Again, it was so much about us and how we were responding to it and all of that which was really good ... if I hadn’t have had that I don’t think I would have persevered because I’m not one for punishment particularly [laughs] (Belinda).

Critical reflection permits an engagement with moral and ethical issues central to students’ lives, demonstrated by the range and depth of issues tackled in their assignments. Students raised important questions about the sustainability of a model that does not make social and environmental aspects central:

The fundamental point of departure of my own assumptions from the dominant paradigm lies clearly in the reasoning that the environment must be first maintained to then maintain a healthy economy and healthy society, as opposed to the premise that by prioritising the economy, a healthy society and healthy environment will automatically follow (Josie, assignment 1).

Conventional economics sidesteps moral and ethical dimensions, and students demonstrated how values needed to be incorporated and embedded into alternative visions of economics, particularly values of community, participatory democracy, ecological integrity, social justice and local self-reliance. Meaning was also created through reflecting on their own values in relation to studying economics. This ‘values
engagement’ further highlighted the absence of values and ethics in the traditional economic models they were studying:

*I value my role of parent and house worker, along with the other roles I have. I have a strong belief in fostering community and the importance of being there for my children. I resent the limited value placed on this role [by the dominant paradigm].* (mature female, internal, 1999, assignment 1).

Similarly, ‘unpacking’ or deconstructing the assumptions underlying neo-classical economics further demonstrated the shallow understanding of social, ethical and ecological concerns that pervades conventional economics theories. Through reflecting on the assumptions made within the dominant paradigm, students are able to connect these with their own positioning in the broader economic system embedded in social and political structures. Such deconstruction, drawing on ideology critique, brings the teaching of economics into the emancipatory domain, informed by the postmodern concern for deconstructing totalising discourses. This is a radical departure from conventional ways of teaching economics, located largely in the technical/instrumentalist domains, informed by positivist ontology and epistemology.

### 8.3.2.2 Critical Reflection and Empowerment

As we saw in chapter 7, empowerment is a problematic concept within the emancipatory paradigm, and has a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. From this understanding, any conclusions about whether critical reflection leads unambiguously to empowerment in relation to learning economics can only be speculative. However, if we draw on the insights offered by Szkudlarek’s (1993) analysis of freedom, it is possible to make some claims about student experience of freedom through a critically reflective approach to learning economics.

One of the requirements of emancipatory research is ‘to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched’ (Lather, 1991a: 60). According to Fay (1987: 232) this ‘requires an environment of trust, openness, and support in which one’s own perceptions and feelings can be made properly conscious to oneself’, and he cites the consciousness-raising activities of the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s as an example. Lather (1991a) contends that emancipatory research therefore needs to move towards ‘full reciprocity’ through dialogic interactions (interviews) and
negotiating meaning with research participants. However, she gives no clear indication of how such reciprocity (which I also read as ‘relationship’) will lead to deeper understanding and empowerment. One of the assumptions of my research was that the encouragement of self-reflection through critical questioning would lead to empowerment, but does it? How can we tell?

Another aim of emancipatory research is to show how large issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life (Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Usher et al., 1997). The emancipatory intention of this research was to assist in demonstrating this at the level of understanding economics. Critical questions helped students locate their different experiences and perspectives within broader social conditions and show how they in turn influenced the way they thought about issues. Therefore, the opportunity to relate learning to students’ own life experiences and self-understandings, particularly in relation to a subject as confusing and alienating as economics, led to deeper engagement at more than just the intellectual level for some, as well as offering a measure of empowerment:

>You know; I don’t feel unintelligent, I don’t feel uneducated any more, because I have for a long time you know, come against people who, who’ve sort of challenged me on my way of life … And I haven’t been able to act, like I haven’t [had] the language to respond and so—I’ve really gained that (Belinda); and

> I’ve found that it [critical reflection] made me go further to look at the consequences of some of my beliefs. And seeing that at times that I’ve resonated with a belief very strongly on a gut level, but the logic of that belief at times is not complementary with the principle behind that belief (Patty).

In the current paradigm, the rational ego is central. Envisioning alternative paradigms which encompass ecological understandings that incorporate interconnectedness and ethical responsibility for the world, offers liberation in a postmodern sense of freedom, i.e. freedom from the tyranny of ‘identity as self’ (Szkudlarek, 1993; Bleakley, 1999). For those students who were able to articulate visions that incorporated such elements of ethical openness and primacy of ecology and relationship, such freedom was glimpsed as a possibility. I would argue that the extent to which it is possible to imagine such alternatives is a radical counterpoint to the disempowerment inherent in the rhetoric of ‘no choice’ that has come to characterise debates dominated by neo-liberal ideology (Theobald, 1997). Students who engaged in this visioning were not oblivious
to the tensions produced when individual identity is challenged, as these examples from assignment 2 demonstrate:

> There may exist a contradiction to my own values of freedom and individualism which resides within the idea that everyone will acknowledge their place in the ‘interconnected fabric of life’—an ‘organic’ society may in fact require a degree of freedom to be relinquished (Josie); and

> My beliefs in freedom, privacy and a sense of self are contradictions and paradoxes to my selfless, open, communal vision (mature female, internal, 1998).

Again, I would argue that only through critical reflection (and critical reflexivity) can such tensions be recognised and the paradoxes of freedom be experienced.

For some students, the process of critical reflection and visioning allowed an expression of their deepest hopes and desires for the world, an expression of the passion they feel for wanting a better future. Others were aware that they were constrained by their own fears and cynicism. Rather than leading in an unproblematic way to empowerment or emancipation, for these students critical reflection appeared to open up more questions, often producing discomfort as uncomfortable contradictions, inconsistencies and complexities were revealed. This supports findings by Brookfield (1994) who found that graduate students engaging in critical reflection experienced self-doubt, feelings of isolation, and uncertainty. Rather than producing certainty about how to act, critical reflection (for my students) seemed to lead to confusion and hesitancy in making any positive assertions. This was especially so for those willing to confront their own paradoxes and contradictions. In a way, the questions themselves were designed to produce this, although these dilemmas did not appear to surface for those whose reflection was more superficial and ‘safe’, without deeper engagement with the implications that reflection allowed.

‘Disempowerment’ can be seen as a lack of capacity to envision freedom from the chains of oppressive structures. This was particularly evident in my interview with Nigel, as demonstrated in Part 1. His hopelessness and despair was grounded in the enormity of the ‘juggernaut’ of global capitalism and its cruel outcomes, exemplified by the homeless people he works with. However, critical questioning, including strategic questioning, seemed to offer the possibility of a shift from his disempowered state.
Demystifying economics, as we saw at TAFE, appears key to a process that offers freedom from alienation and mystification. Recognising its connection with daily life as well as its role in ecological destruction, over-consumption and community breakdown, produces a sense of what is possible:

Some of the readings throughout this unit inspired me to be more optimistic about future paradigm shifts with regard to consumerism. It appeared to me that many people in the world shared my concerns. This, in turn, enabled me to divert my own apathy (i.e. that it is already too late for the natural environment), into really thinking about alternatives. After I had completed the study guide and readings, I went on the Internet and discovered that a lot of people are getting very organised about challenging the dominant discourse. This has had a huge influence on me, not just for this assessment task but for my own future (Nadine, assignment 2).

As the focus of the interviews was on critical reflection, rather than on empowerment itself, no direct questions can be analysed to draw conclusions in the same way it was possible at TAFE.

To this point I have demonstrated how incorporating critical reflection into an emancipatory teaching of economics can contribute to a deeper understanding of critical reflection. I have also shown how individual empowerment can be promoted through grounded engagement with the content of economics. Having examined the scope of critical reflection in the context of emancipatory pedagogy from the perspective of my positioning, it is now time to turn to an interrogation of critical reflection itself, an interrogation of its efficacy within an emancipatory project, given the issues raised by postmodern critique discussed in chapter 7. This will also involve a reflexive critique of my position as emancipatory educator in this study.

8.3.3 The Role of Critical Reflection in The Postmodern Era (Set C)

8.3.3.1 What are the Limits?

The aspects of the postmodern critique of the limits of the emancipatory project that are relevant for this research include:

- the problematic assumption of transparent human agency and rationality;
• the assumption that the ‘objects’ of emancipation are operating under false consciousness from which they can be ‘liberated’, implying there is one ‘correct’ view, free of illusion and distortion;

• that ‘progress’ can be achieved through liberation;

• the historical, traditional, embodied and embedded aspects of human existence which provide limits to ‘rational self-clarity’ (Fay, 1987); and

• assumptions of the existence of the separate, singular, autonomous self, able to act upon and stand apart from the world.

The ‘modernist’ focus of this research is observable in the emancipatory intention that is ever-present—the process of structuring the interviews, for instance, showed that I was interested in making connections between critical reflection and action for a ‘better’ (in the sense of more just and ecologically sustainable) world. My underlying assumption is thus revealed—we journey towards a goal, an idealised future of liberation, social justice and ecological harmony. The activist’s journey has an objective. It does not reflect Boudriillard’s contention that ‘the further you travel, the more clearly you realise the journey is all that matters’ (cited in Usher and Edwards, 1994: 12).

There is no doubt that many students had difficulty in stepping back from their embedded selves to identify clearly and rationally the illusions and assumptions under which they were operating. Any ‘success’ they achieved in this was, at best, partial. Absolute rational clarity about one’s own ‘false consciousness’ would certainly appear to be an unrealistic, if not unattainable, goal. Evidence of embeddedness in cultural stories and personalised histories was demonstrated time and again when values and beliefs were identified as assumptions, when there was a failure to question a deeply held worldview (e.g. a Christian belief). Clearly, there were limits to the extent to which students could reflect on their own contradictions, despite the modelling and guidance they received. Perhaps most decisive of all was the absence of a sense of personal agency in the face of (apparently) overwhelming totalising ideologies such as economic
rationalism and globalisation, particularly exemplified in Nigel's interview. I will discuss this further in relation to questions about activism below. The extent to which critical reflection was possible also appeared limited by the extent to which students' backgrounds reflected a culture of questioning and/or reflection, as well as the extent to which they had access to 'critical others'.

And yet postmodernism itself would maintain that the process of critical reflection is essential in order to question ontological foundations—a critical reflexivity, as argued by Bleakley (1999) seems a more satisfactory and open process, as the reflexive process is never taken for granted as intrinsically 'progressive', as it is always questioning of itself. Uncertainty, the 'lack of centre' (Usher and Edwards, 1994), becomes the preferred state, as doubt must always be cast upon authoritative statements. Complexity is to be celebrated. This aspect of the postmodern condition was recognised by one student in her reflections on her 'model' of the future:

*The simplistic solutions offered in this story contradict alternative methods of problem solving that recognise and value complexity* (mature female, external, 1998).

Asking students to reflect on their own positioning is a postmodern request. If they take the postmodern position that the way they view 'reality' is one of a multiplicity of possible perspectives, and that no position can be 'privileged', then they may have gone some way to freeing themselves from the tyranny of a fixed, enduring, 'true' worldview. This is the freedom that postmodernism seems to promise. In this way, students can reflect on their positions as constructions, and therefore move towards a critical reflexivity, as distinct from (purely rational) critical reflection. As we have seen, however, this is a difficult task for the majority of students, and a disorienting one. With 'de-centring' comes a paradoxical liberation—freedom from attachment to one's own position combined with the anxiety that comes from losing one's ground, which may be associated with psychological 'disorder' and disorientation.

Postmodern perspectives came to interrogate the notion of the unified, authentic self of modernity, claiming a place for the multiple, discontinuous self with contradictory and changing identities. To the extent that students are encouraged through critical questioning to 'detach' from their identification with their 'alternative story', they
experience some measure of this shifting identity. Of course, many found this very
difficult and a few showed strong and identified attachments to their visions:

What would have to happen to make my vision come true? (Patty)

How to implement these plans first from a grass roots level and to spread the
concept through a half blind society? (older female, internal, 1998)

What follows is the question, of whether my vision is achievable (mature female,
external, 1999).

Given modern psychology’s emphasis on ‘consistency’ and ‘authenticity’, and its
ideological sway over cultural views of the ‘healthy, whole and integrated individual’,
this resistance is perhaps hardly surprising.

8.3.3.2 The Efficacy of Critical Reflection in the Emancipatory Project: A
Move Towards Reflexivity?

Bleichley (1999) questions the notion that reflection is intrinsically worthwhile, as
implied in emancipatory and humanistic discourses. He draws on critiques from depth
psychology (e.g. Jung and Hillman) which suggest that too much introspection can lead
to a turning away from the world, rather than participating in it. While this certainly
seems a danger within psychological contexts, reflection carried out in a context which
emphasises worldly engagement and ecological responsibility would not appear to be so
at risk of excessive self-absorption to the detriment of the wider environment. Bleichley
advocates a holistic reflexivity involving an engaged agency, which suggests re-
integration of passion and engagement with the world, rather than ‘detached
observation’ implied in more rational constructions of reflection. As discussed above,
such agency is reflexive, rather than reflective, as it interrogates its own construction,
and does not unreflexively assume a separate self or ego that is doing the reflecting.

In my reading of Sarah’s position, I would suggest she demonstrates a concrete, real-life
example of holistic reflexivity. This is evidenced by her engagement with her
intentional community, her continual reflection on her theory and practice, her
awareness of her own constructions as she makes them, her passion for the land itself,
the open relationships she has with people and her emphasis on the relationships
between people and the land, all within the context of a response to the oppressive
economic discourse that marginalises such activity. The fact that she is so atypical not only suggests that such a positioning is very rare (given her unusual cultural and historical circumstances), but also that it is possible, and therefore not entirely utopian. Interestingly, while Lawrence’s reflective capacities are also exceptional, he lacks the level of worldly engagement that holistic reflexivity would appear to demand. He stays in relatively ‘safe’ realms of ideological inquiry and utopian visioning, although his passionate commitment to theocentrism suggests he may yet become a theological activist! His ‘theocentric’ vision is still a grand narrative, with reference to God, rather than rationality, as the ultimate source of truth and morality. However, he nevertheless demonstrates a critical reflexivity through reflecting on his own constructions:

My own presuppositions can be seen to be a projection of unprovable beliefs. The most outstanding assumption which I have made in this story is the existence and nature of God.

8.3.3.3 Implications for Critical Teaching: Creating Space Through Reflexive Inquiry?

It was only through a deeper engagement with individual histories, through more in-depth interviewing and ongoing relationship, that a more grounded and sensitive picture emerged of how students develop reflectivity and reflexivity. As teachers we rarely see more than the ‘end result’ of students’ work and are deprived of the ‘stories’ behind the written words, the larger context of their lives. I suggest this supports Kemmis’s (1996) call for first-person relationships in emancipatory education. The deeper we engage and connect, the more likely we are to realise the possibilities of freedom.

Despite the problematic nature of critical reflection, there is value in having students connect with the broader ideological picture through their own reflections. This can lead to a sense of how things are and how they are connected, especially if such reflection is done within a supportive, empathetic environment. Strategies of relationship building, strategic questioning and connecting across oppositions that are central to the Heart Politics approach, all contribute to creating such an environment. However, incorporating critical reflection into teaching is difficult, time-consuming, requires guidance, depends on building relationship and necessarily involves an emotional component. Teachers need to be prepared for what can arise for students when they

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question the foundations of their beliefs and the way they construct the world. I would argue that this process is worthwhile and pedagogically sound for those teachers wanting to work within an emancipatory domain and to encourage the development of critical citizens.

Guidelines for developing critical self-awareness and reflexivity are rare. It would seem that the teacher needs to take an ‘enabling’ role in creating the appropriate environment. To be such an enabler, what is required is enough self-awareness and clarity that ‘illusion’ can be identified in another. Lather (1991a: 145) suggests nurturing a space ‘where students can see ambivalence and differences not as obstacles, but as the very richness of meaning-making’, which implies tolerance for ambiguity, contradiction and complexity.

It is important for those of us who claim to be emancipatory educators to exercise self-reflexivity and question our own emancipatory intentions. Given the potential dangers of pursuing goals of empowerment, it seems essential that there is a ‘critical scepticism’—a continual interrogation of one’s own educational practices so that we can be aware of avoiding the traps of unaware exercise of power and control (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Lather advocates such self-reflexivity so we are able to look closely at our own practice in terms of ‘how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions’ (Lather, 1991a: 15). This ‘self-referentiality’ offers an opportunity for critical reflexivity that may assist in changing our educational practices, which ‘itself plays a significant part in bringing about change’ (Usher and Edwards 1994: 28).

Lather (1991a: 47) sees the role of critical intellectuals as moving from ‘universalizing spokespersons to cultural workers who do what they can to lift the barriers which prevent people from speaking for themselves’. I would suggest that this role needs a practice of reflexive inquiry to accompany it, as a possible strategy for lifting those barriers. I would stand with Patti Lather, therefore, and claim that the postmodern critique does not mean the end of liberatory struggle, or the end of the desire to see injustice resisted or gross oppressions challenged, but an end to old, unreflexive strategies that unawarely take the position of speaking for others, informed by a sense of moral superiority and elitism.
Some postmodernists have questioned the notion of ‘clarity’ as being potentially impositional—to make things ‘clear’ may be hiding their complexity and presenting a view that is seductively simple and therefore persuasive, and is another form of exercising power and control on behalf of the pedagogue (McLaren, 1994). I am suspicious of such a position. If as writer, researcher and teacher I continually critique and reflect on my own constructions, in a manner that is intelligible to me and to my readers, then I am inviting my readers to do the same about their own constructions. As a teacher, I have always found that working with where the students are produces a greater likelihood of understanding and insight. I offer my own interpretations, which are intelligible to them but are not privileged above their own (although I do recognise that my voice as ‘expert’ will carry more authoritative weight). If this voice helps to demystify, assists in showing a path that will lead to a questioning of assumptions, then I maintain that it is (potentially) doing its job as an ‘enabler’ of emancipation and empowerment and reflexivity. As long as I maintain a reflexive position, based on an authentic and non-defensive reflexivity and self-awareness (always within limits), I am not colluding in an attempt to ‘convert’ through taking a ‘morally superior’ stance.

8.3.4 A Relationship Between Critical Reflection and Activism? (Set D)

Through the process of deconstructing the dominant paradigm and envisioning alternatives, many students were preoccupied with questions of change and the possibilities offered by change. Critical reflection revealed the assumptions they made about change and also stimulated questions about how change can happen. However, with one or two exceptions, none made the connection with their own role in creating change. There was a marked absence of any sense of personal responsibility. Most appeared to take the position of passive observer, asking questions such as: ‘how could it come to pass, what would have to happen, how do we enforce the changes, can change happen from the bottom?’, and so on. The most notable exception to this was Sarah, who felt clearly grounded in her activist intention as part of her visioning change:

By writing about the issues I am examining in my everyday life, I felt that I was actually engaging in the practice of creating alternative paradigm (assignment 2).
The passivity inherent in the students’ approach to change possibly reflects the broader disempowerment and disengagement engendered by the juggernaut of globalisation and triumphal capitalism that so paralyses Nigel. In the broader community, concerns about such ‘passivity’ and powerlessness were reflected in protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and globalisation generally in Seattle in December 1999, in Melbourne against the World Economic Forum and in Prague against the IMF and World Bank, both in September 2000.

Further evidence of this paralysis and non-engagement can be found in the significant number of students (60% of those who articulated a vision) who portrayed catastrophic change as an essential precursor to a paradigm shift. Very few identified this as fundamental to their worldview, but instead seemed to assume this to be an inevitable part of the change process. The implication appears to be that the only way the monolith will crash is if it is met with an equally powerful destructive force. The role of the individual change agent seems minuscule. As Nigel says: ‘what chance does one person have?’

As discussed in Part I, most students interviewed (apart from the four young women, Sarah, Josie, Patty and Belinda) did not immediately identify with the label of ‘activist’. On further questioning, this term appeared to be associated, for most interviewees, with a particular view of activism (identified as Moyer’s ‘rebel’ role), which sees activists as being on the frontline, involved in direct action and campaigning. The four young women identified themselves as activists in this mould as well—they have all been actively involved in political and environmental campaigns. However, taking a broader view of activism allowed students to see themselves as making a difference in many different forms. It was easier for them to see themselves as activists if activism were viewed in the context of their work (e.g. Mandy, Cathy, David), in their communities as active citizens (Mary, Nadine, Nigel), or within their families and friendships (Lawrence, Annie). This understanding developed from a critically reflective process within the interviews, although it could also be interpreted as an educative, perhaps persuasive, process on my part! Reflection has the potential to lead to new conceptualisations and new possibilities of engagement.
The question of action remains largely under-addressed in postmodern discourse (Lather, 1991a), other than references to the ‘failure’ of the emancipatory project in bringing about liberation and justice and an end to oppressive structures. However, Usher et al. (1997) draw on Michael Newman’s analysis of ‘postmodern social movements’:

a reaction not against one identifiable oppressor or category of oppressors but simply against organisation and unwanted control (Newman, 1995 cited in Usher et al., 1997: 21),

to suggest that ‘critical practices’ (which replace conventional activism?) in a postmodern world are those that are not directed towards a universalistic ‘cause’:

These are practices which are rather rooted in shared interest, dismay or disquiet about the present, a reaction against current events rather than a common support for some particular end. Activists ... are motivated by a sense of injustice but see themselves as activists in a generic sense, not activists for a particular single cause. They work, not through conventional political and community action methods but by servicing local and very often subjugated knowledge and getting people to think about their situation through role-play, workshops, street theatre and popular carnivals ... it is not the efficacy of commitment to totalising projects of transformation, rather it is a more modest yet no less effective efficacy of ‘giving voice’ to specific, subjugated knowledge, of empowering through a learning that is both participative and performative ... critical practices in the postmodern do not posit idealised futures which only serve to oppress through their very totalising unattainability (Usher et al., 1997: 21-22).

Two themes are of interest in this extract: the ‘nature’ of postmodern activism and the notion of envisioning idealised futures. The generalised protests against globalisation that have dominated the activist landscape at the turning of the century certainly exhibit some of the features of ‘critical practices’ such as a ‘generic’ aspect complemented by street theatre and festivity, but they also show signs of more conventional direct action techniques (blockades, confrontations with police, etc.), suggesting a fluidity of positioning as the modern and postmodern continue to collide. Of particular interest also is the notion of the oppressiveness of envisioning ideal futures, which I have maintained is a significant element in the empowerment process. The doubts raised by many students that their ‘visions’ could ever become ‘reality’ may suggest there is an element of oppression involved in the visioning process, but I would also argue that being offered some positive alternatives to the even more oppressive dominant paradigm of economic rationalism gave students a measure of hope and optimism that a better future was possible.
What then are the implications from this research with students studying economics for activism in a postmodern world and what other ‘critical practices’ may be possible? For activists in the emancipatory tradition, the ‘answer’ to the ‘problem’ of globalisation and economic rationalism always seems to be ‘educate the people, give them the news’. Once people see the ‘truth’, it is assumed they will act to throw off the chains of their oppression (Fay, 1987). But a link needs to be made between the ‘news’ that this is how bad it really is, and the motivation to act, a seemingly impossible task in the face of the juggernaut that confronts these citizens who also happen to be students of economics. It seems that this link needs to be more than the tension that arises between conflicting ideological positionings. If reflection is to be part of this link, what form should it take? Is there a connection between uncovering the assumptions underlying the rationalist ideology, and peeling back the layers of belief and thought to reveal our own underlying assumptions, assumptions that may well allow such an ideology to hold sway over us? Does that make a difference to how we respond in the face of such a seemingly trenchant system? The evidence from the students’ written work suggests that it does not. However, the evidence from the interviews and the interactivity inherent in the critical questioning process, suggests a possible important role for activism that has not been considered, especially in modernist activist circles.

Such implications, together with drawing together the main conclusions arising from this examination of the student experience, are taken up in the final chapter of the thesis.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION:

IMPLICATIONS FOR POSTMODERN EDUCATION,
ACTIVISM AND THE EMANCIPATORY PROJECT

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter presents an opportunity to draw the threads of this work together, to reflect on its conclusions, to make its claims, to explore its implications, to acknowledge its limitations and silences, to speculate on future directions and to reflect on the experience. The research itself has been an emergent process, as befits the spirit and practice of action research, and the thesis has been framed in a way that mirrors this emergent quality.

The chapter begins with drawing together the major conclusions from the research experiences at TAFE and university, followed by an assessment of the implications and the claims I believe the thesis can make in terms of a contribution to knowledge, indicating possible directions for further research. These claims are then considered in the light of the limitations and absences that inevitably are a feature of any research process. The chapter concludes with a reflective mapping of my research journey and how it came to frame the thesis, incorporating reflection on my experience of practising critical action research over an extended period.

9.2 CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions that emerged from this research encompass four primary, connected themes: demystifying economics for empowerment; reflection and reflexivity; activism, emancipatory education and the postmodern critique; and action research.
9.2.1 Demystifying Economics for Empowerment

My original goal when embarking on the research inquiry was to find ways to heighten engagement with conventional economics—to demystify its alienating language, to expose its ideology and pretence, to bring attention to alternative conceptions—in short, to empower people to act in the face of its seemingly unrelenting and uncompromising control over almost every aspect of social, political and cultural life. In institutions where economics is taught, radical approaches are rare. The discipline is dominated by conventional teaching strategies that present the dominant paradigm of neo-classical economics as ‘this is the way the world works’, rather than incorporating critique from either within or from outside the discipline. Critics are marginalised and students are not taught that alternatives should be seriously considered. It is a discipline which has not generally embraced innovative or empowering teaching practices. The research I conducted at both TAFE and university demonstrates the value of bringing emancipatory processes into the teaching of economics. It showed that demystifying economics with an emancipatory intention is important for students to gain a sense of how the discourse of economics and the power of that discourse affect their everyday lives. Students moved from alienated and disempowered positionings in relation to the discourse to positions that permitted them to believe they could debate, critique and engage with the ‘no choice’ rhetoric they were confronted with daily in media representations.

Empowerment took different forms, including making decisions about daily consumption patterns, imagining alternative futures, re-assessing values about issues such as wealth and work, gaining new understandings about complex issues, as well as developing insight into their own histories and cultural positionings. Nowhere is the ‘culture of silence’ through which relations of dominance are reproduced (Kemmis, 1996) more pervasive than in the almost universal adoption of free market ideology as the foundation for economic organisation of societies around the world. This research demonstrates the impact of breaking that silence on a small section of the ‘depoliticised masses’ (Kemmis, 1996, citing Habermas) in TAFE and university classrooms.

The research was not only about ‘lifting the veils of illusion’ in relation to economics, however. It also demonstrated the effectiveness of bringing critical reflection and
critical reflexivity into the classroom, thereby offering ‘values engagement’ to an otherwise ‘value-free’, positivist discipline. Through consciously incorporating critically reflective processes, students were able to engage at a deeper level with their own values, ethics, beliefs and assumptions, and hence with their own paradoxical complicity with, and resistance to, the dominant discourse. Such a values engagement permitted an exposure of the poverty of values and ethics in economics itself, where values are so often disguised as ‘facts’ and ethics are marginalised as ‘outside its scope’ (or defined as ‘externalities’). The critically reflective process had students exploring the sources of their own desires and self-interest, as well as deeply questioning processes of change and potential for action.

It is important to acknowledge that my particular teaching of economics was located outside the domain of mainstream economics teaching. I stayed on the fringes, finding a way to teach economics in the way I wanted to teach it in contexts where it would find a receptive audience. I was not teaching economics to students who needed to understand its principles in a technical sense for their future vocations, as mainstream courses profess to do. Rather, I was teaching economics to students studying welfare and politics, students who may not otherwise have had an opportunity to be exposed to its basic concepts, the extent of its impact on decision making and its ideological purposes. Therefore, I needed to make strategic decisions about where to incorporate this type of curriculum. For example, I would not have been ‘allowed’ to teach economics as part of the politics major if I had called it ‘economics’, given current academic territories.

A movement from the pedagogical periphery to challenge the norms of conventional economics teaching is a direction that offers opportunities for further research. It must be recognised that teachers of mainstream courses would face a different set of tensions than I did—for example, students with a vocational orientation are likely to be more resistant to reflection that points to contradictions and inconsistencies in the theories they are being taught (they want to know the ‘right’ answers); and they are likely to be enrolled in courses that do not consider the understanding of alternative paradigms to be necessary for the development of ‘skills’ in such vocations as commerce and business management. However, I would argue that mainstream economics teachers would benefit from incorporating critical reflection into their practices, (extending the work of feminist-institutionalist teachers such as Shackleford, 1992 and Lewis, 1995), as they
are likely to encounter in their classes similar tensions about the narrowness of the neo-classical paradigm and its relevance to real-world problems.

9.2.2 Critical Reflection, Critical Reflexivity

While the focus of the content of the educational research was the discourse of economics, a primary interest and focus was the process of critical reflection and subsequently, critical reflexivity. In exploring the process of critical reflection in educational contexts (a focus for many educators, particularly those in fields of professional training) I found that critical reflection itself is an under-explored and under-theorised concept in need of further research and understanding, especially given its high priority in education and training in particular. This research makes a contribution to the literature on critical reflection in education by addressing some of these gaps, particularly in relation to the actual process that students go through when asked to critically reflect, and by addressing the lack of clarity around its definition and operationalisation.

Critical reflection, as distinct from other forms of reflection, requires students to connect their assumptions with wider sociological processes. The research into critical reflection in the university context highlights its requirement for a continual process of critical questioning, preferably with a critical friend, to explore and uncover deeply held assumptions and beliefs. The process, when taken seriously, is time-consuming and often discomforting. Critical reflection is not an immediately accessible skill. Even with modelling and guidance, it is a process that demands more than the usual ‘rational’ academic cognitive skills—it is emotionally demanding and difficult. However, the findings indicated that it was possible for students to demonstrate considerable improvement in critical reflection with clear questioning and critical feedback.

Only a minority of students was able to demonstrate strong critically reflective capacities. Age did not seem to be a significant determinant—some of the strongest reflectors were the youngest—but a disposition towards self-inquiry and being raised in or exposed to a critically questioning culture appeared significant. A critical analytical ability, requiring ‘detached’ cognition, is not necessarily associated with the capacity for critical reflection, which requires engagement at emotional and deeper psychological levels. A key finding, supporting other studies (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Brockbank and
McGill, 1998) is the significance of relationship within an atmosphere of openness and trust in enhancing critical reflection. A questioning process needs a questioner, a supportive but challenging questioner. Some students found they could do this for themselves, to a limited extent, and many had only the assessment questions and the study guide to assist them.

The understandings about critical reflection that emerged from the research offer indications of how conducive environments for critical reflection could be established, particularly in face-to-face classes. In addition, the findings suggest possibilities for future research into the teaching and modelling of skills in critical questioning, strategic questioning and reflexive questioning, i.e. training students to be critical friends, with the aim of deepening experience and understanding of critical reflection.

The problematic issue of how reflection is assessed (Ixer, 1999; Hatton and Smith, 1995) also has not been addressed in this research. Students enter courses with different existing levels of experience and capacity to critically reflect, and to find any fair criteria that take account of these differences is extremely problematic. It is possible that students with a predisposition towards this sort of inquiry would be privileged above others without such capacities. Given the importance placed on critical reflection in higher education, both in my research and others' (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Barnett, 1997; Brockbank and McGill, 1998), it is imperative that this issue be explored in future research.

The research showed that incorporating critical reflection into studying a ‘rationalist’ or positivist discipline such as economics contributed to ‘empowerment’, albeit interpreted in a number of different ways by the students. The opportunity to relate learning to students’ self-understandings and life experiences connected them more strongly to the ‘real life’ of economics than an otherwise ‘disconnected’ and removed analysis may have done. Reflecting on contradictions and assumptions underlying alternative discourses, including their own imaginings, produced a reflexive awareness of the contingency of all positions, whether ‘conservative’ or ‘radical’. This brings with it its own paradoxical empowerment: of freedom from being bound to one view through its apparent ‘logic’ and ‘truth’ and the accompanying uncertainty about any position attempting to offer an alternative version of ‘reality'.
This brings us to findings and conclusions about ‘reflection’ compared with ‘reflexivity’. My reading of the difference is that reflection involves a turning inwards, naming and identifying values, beliefs, assumptions that one holds and lives by. Most students were able to do this naming, if not of fundamental assumptions, then at least of the influences on their lives, their values and beliefs, demonstrating a degree of reflection. Their capacities varied, with a significant number demonstrating very strong or moderately strong capabilities. On the other hand, reflexivity suggests a capacity to recognise one’s own position as a construction, appreciating its contingent and shifting quality. Reflection may be a necessary step towards reflexivity, but reflexivity would not always follow reflection. I maintain that this insight may be one of the more productive contributions made by the postmodernist perspective. While critical reflection is the cornerstone of the emancipatory project, it still assumes strong personal agency and a singular, autonomous self, capable of rational self-clarity (Fay, 1987). On the other hand, reflexivity makes a conception of such a self problematic through maintaining uncertainty about subjectivities.

Reflexivity has been practised and demonstrated throughout this research. Emancipatory educators who take the postmodern critique seriously (Usher and Edwards, 1994; Usher et al., 1997; Lather, 1991a), especially those practitioners of emancipatory action research, call for reflexivity on the part of researchers and educators. However, it is rare to find researchers’ reflexive accounts of their own processes within most social science literature (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). There is still a strong tendency to keep the researcher, even if s(he) is practising in a constructivist paradigm, separate and relatively distant from the researching process—it can seem risky and ‘too personal’ to do otherwise. However, I maintain that if we as educators, wishing to work from a position that values empowerment and social change, do not openly acknowledge our own positionings and identities, we are at risk of unawarely imposing our agendas on our students. Furthermore, by modelling such reflexivity, we provide an environment which encourages a reciprocal reflexivity in our students, or at least opens it as a possibility. Another contribution of this research is that as researcher I ‘walk the talk’, demonstrating reflexivity on my educational and research practices throughout the researching process. I would suggest further that extending research into reflexivity which explores its more conscious incorporation into educational processes and
transferring it to other disciplines in social and political science would offer a fruitful direction for future research.

9.2.3 Activism, Emancipatory Education and Postmodern Critiques

This research takes up the postmodern problematising of the ‘grand narratives’ of liberation and the agency of the ‘activist’ as core premises of the emancipatory project. However, like Kemmis (1996) and Lather (1991a, 1991b), I look to a ‘re-making’ or re-positioning of the emancipatory project, not a jettisoning of liberatory practices in an unjust world, a re-making that takes account of the concerns raised by the postmodern critique but prepares to move beyond the paralysis it threatens.

The value of the postmodern perspective to this research has been its perspective on deconstructing totalising discourses, its analysis of power allowing the problematising of my own identity and power position, and its critique of personal agency, leading to an appreciation of the importance of reflexivity. The power and potential inherent in reflexive positioning and the project of reflexive inquiry is, I suggest, a productive space that has opened up as a result of the tensions arising from the postmodern critique of the emancipatory project.

Activists have been flummoxed by the depoliticisation that is occurring in the face of globalisation and the apparent triumphal dominance of free market ideology. This new era, however it is named or framed, has brought unprecedented challenges to traditional left politics, which many now see as a spent force, irrelevant in the postmodern world. This research offers a response to that debate. One of the emergent outcomes through the action research process has been the significance of relationship and reflexivity in engagement with the challenges presented by globalisation. A significant conclusion of this research then, is that a move to reflexivity may offer a productive direction for activists, not only educational activists but also activists in community and grass roots contexts. I suggest that the perspectives offered by Heart Politics have much to offer this direction, particularly the emphasis on building relationships, listening deeply and strategic questioning aimed at creative movement from fixed positions. I draw this out further in the next section on implications.
9.2.4 Action Research

This research would not have reached the conclusions it has, or produced its particular insights, if it had not adopted action research methodology. Action research demands an incorporation of reflection by all participants in its process. It was this reflective focus that drew out understandings of empowerment, permitted a reflective exchange with the TAFE students, produced reflexivity on my own emancipatory aspirations, allowed emergence of critical reflection as a focus for research and produced a deeper appreciation of the potential for reflexivity in social change activism. As my reflections at the end of this chapter highlight, my own process of reflection, enhanced by collaboration with peers skilled in reflective questioning and inquiry, and supported by the ‘social ecology’ paradigm practised at UWS Hawkesbury, allowed the research themes articulated above to emerge and informed my teaching practice throughout the research. I came to understand, through praxis, what it actually means to be a ‘reflective practitioner’.

While critical action research is firmly located in a paradigm where ‘action’ is valorised, and its emancipatory intentions are transparent, its inherent reflexivity produces the grounds for critique of its own practice. It is therefore a methodology which has the potential to transform itself, through questioning of its fundamental assumptions, ontology and epistemology. I would maintain, therefore, that this research demonstrates that the main contribution made by action research is its commitment to continual cycles of reflection, particularly when that reflection is conducted within the context of relationship.

9.3 IMPLICATIONS

In many ways, the intentions of this research were ambitious. The territory covered is broad, its claims far-reaching and optimistic. Its concerns are current. When I began the researching journey in the early 1990s, public discussions about economics and its ideological impact were relatively new, despite the work done by alternative thinkers from the 1960s onwards drawing attention to the dangers of its ideological dominance. Today, in 2000, discussions about the impact of globalisation and its attendant
ideologies dominate the mainstream media. A new social movement opposed to
globalisation and its destruction of cultural identity and local economies, is emerging in
the wake of protests in Seattle in December 1999, facilitated by the extraordinary
capacities of Internet communication. Proponents such as Barlow claim this movement
supersedes the 20th-century focus on social movements associated with marginalised
groups, collapses traditional left-right political divisions and presents a turning point in
social activism. While such activism is to be applauded as an apparent contradiction to
the passivity and mute acceptance that had previously characterised community
response to the globalisation juggernaut, there are still assumptions of righteousness
permeating the rhetoric, and opportunities for deep reflection are lost in the urgency to
rally people to the cause.

A personal experience highlighted the nature of this particular problem. In April 2000
an event was organised in our Lismore community to start a dialogue about how we
respond to globalisation at the local level. About 50 or 60 people came, many of the
familiar activist faces, with a small number of local business people. When I arrived, the
group was seated in a circle, a sign to me that perhaps a different structure or process
was to ensue—a more participatory, engaged experience. But the ‘expert panel’ model
prevailed again. There were four speakers, a local councillor, a local businessman, a
retired barrister educating himself on economics, and a respected world leader of the
‘civil society’ movement mentioned above, a committed and inspiring activist. All
speakers delivered their perspective on the horrors of globalisation. Questions and
discussion on what was already happening in the local area followed their speeches. It
was good to hear what people were doing in relation to local responses to building the
local economy—some positive initiatives were aired. They may have helped the citizens
present think about their own actions, what they could do to build the local economy as
full participants.

A critical moment in the process occurred when a young man asked about someone he
could read who could offer him the ‘logic’ of the dominant view. He wanted to
understand the counter argument, that of the advocates of globalisation. He wanted to
make decisions based on a fuller understanding of the (what I call ideological) debate.
To me, this represented a genuine desire for inquiry—'okay, I’ve heard your arguments,
they make sense, they seem pretty strong and serious. So what do the apologists say?
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What is their position? I want to know.’ What was remarkable to me was that this request was completely misunderstood and misheard. The ‘answer’ given by the leading activist bore no relation to his inquiry, as she reiterated her ideological position. My contribution at this point was to make a comment that it was important to engage in this sort of debate, that we were in danger of continuing to ‘preach to the converted’ and that requests to understand the rationalist position needed to be taken seriously and acted upon. The discussion on this point proceeded no further.

Another critical opportunity presented itself towards the end of the session. A very ‘straight’-looking farmer, probably feeling a little out of place in the crowd of ‘alternative types’, raised his dilemmas and questions: ‘I’ve doubled my output, but I’m no better off’, mentioning the decline in his mental and physical health associated with this. Again, it seemed to me there was no real engagement with this man. His story simply became more grist to the activist’s mill. I felt acutely the tension of this paradox, that when an opportunity came to move outside the paradigm we were criticising, we failed to act on it. But I, too, did not speak.

It was this experience, combined with reflecting on the implications of my research with a critical friend, that helped me identify what was missing in much activist practice. For activists in the emancipatory tradition, the ‘answer’ to the ‘problem’ of globalisation and economic rationalism always seems to be ‘educate the people, give them the news’. Once people see the ‘truth’, they will act to throw off the chains of their oppression (Fay, 1987). But a link needs to be made between the ‘news’ that this is how bad it really is, and the motivation to act, a seemingly impossible task in the face of the juggernaut that confronts citizens, such as those attending the meeting. It seems that this link needs to be more than the tension that arises between conflicting ideological positionings. If reflection is part of this link, what form should it take? Is there a connection between uncovering the assumptions underlying the rationalist ideology, and peeling back the layers of belief and thought to reveal our own underlying assumptions, assumptions that may well allow such an ideology to hold sway over us? Does that make a difference to how we respond in the face of such a seemingly trenchant system? The evidence from the students’ written work suggests that it does not. However, the evidence from the interviews and the interactivity inherent in the critical questioning
process, suggested to me a possible important role for activism that has not been considered, especially in modernist activist circles.

I would suggest there could be a fifth role of activism, extending Moyer's (1990) model beyond the four roles of rebel, reformer, change agent and citizen. I suggest this could be the role of the 'reflexive inquirer', the person who assists deeper reflection, with no agenda other than to explore, to understand, to reveal deeper meanings¹. The skill of the reflexive inquirer would be to maintain openness to possibility, similar to that offered by strategic questioning (Peavey, 1994). Through compassionate questioning, where the questioner 'stands beside' the one she questions, without the desire to see her 'recipient' move in any particular direction, but with a genuine desire to see an end to suffering, possibilities for freedom open up. This is the compassion of the Bodhisattva, who has no need of an endless deconstructive critique to show the evils and suffering caused by the machinations of power. The motivation is compassion, the method is wisdom. It is a clarity born of connection with living and non-living beings, an engagement that goes beyond the 'endless desire' of ego. It may be the path to 'holistic reflexivity' (Bleakley, 1999) leading to the sort of postmodern freedom (Szkudlarek, 1993) articulated by 'new paradigm' approaches, where we transcend the tyranny of self-identification towards a deeper connectedness with others and the environment we share.

Perhaps someone taking the role of the reflexive inquirer at the forum I attended could have changed things, created a space for new possibilities, allowing an environment of 'dynamic interactivity' which could produce a 'break out of democracy' (Blaug, 1999), a place where more profound and meaningful change could occur. The implications of this for educational activists, Moyer's (1990) 'change agents', is that taking on the role of reflexive inquirer may be a productive approach in our goal of educating 'critical citizens' (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991). Part of this reflexivity would necessarily involve a questioning of our 'expert' positionings as gatekeepers of knowledge. It seems to me that further investigation through action research of the role of the 'reflexive inquirer' in both educational and community settings offers an exciting opportunity to explore the potential of such a productive direction for activism. In addition, an exploration of more creative options such as theatre, community writing and street

¹ An idea developed in conversation with Lyn Carson, of Sydney University, and which she has incorporated into a recent paper (Carson, 2000).
performance for taking alternative understandings of economics and its role in
globalisation into the community may offer productive contexts for the application of
reflexive inquiry.

Embedded within these notions is the deeper philosophical implication about how we
think about freedom. Freedom has been defined by neo-liberal ideology as ‘freedom of
choice’—empowerment relates to the extent that we as consumers are ‘free’ to choose
from among a breathtaking array of alternative products. Digital technologies and ‘e-
commerce’ threaten to turn us into ‘hyper cyberconsumers’, where our desires can be
coded and manipulated. We hear this lauded as the apex of a ‘free’ society. So seductive
and addictive is this concept of freedom that it has penetrated almost every corner of the
globe, making the march of globalised capital almost obscenely effortless. Even the
opponents of globalisation use the rhetoric to speak in terms of its reduction of ‘choice’
as an impediment for local economies to offer an alternative to McDonald’s or
Woolworths.

One of the implications of this research is a call to rethink such notions of freedom, to
challenge the idea that our freedom as citizens is marked by our capacity to choose and
hence the mark of a free society is one which offers maximum alternatives (to those
with the resources to so choose). Rethinking freedom may mean a return to insights
offered by indigenous cultures, Buddhist wisdom, ecological philosophers and ‘new
paradigm’ thinkers. Philosophers such as Bleakley (1999) and Szkudlarek (1993) draw
on Heidegger for guidance on this—freedom is ‘a state of the world rather than an
attribute of an individual’ (Szkudlarek, 1993: 121).

It is possible that a reflexive questioning may assist recognition of the materialist, and
ultimately unsatisfying, foundations of modern (and perhaps postmodern) freedom. I
suggest it may offer a way through and beyond the postmodern, to holistic reflexivity
and ethical, engaged agency rather than a more ‘rational’ separate and personal agency.
Activism informed by such principles may well offer empowerment of a very different
kind—the freedom to experience the world free of materialist desire, valuing the
building of communities through connectedness with others and the environment.

Another, no less ambitious, but perhaps less utopian, implication of this research is in
relation to the teaching of economics itself. While economic theorising does attempt to
incorporate environmental and social concerns within its existing framework, its lack of reflexivity about its own assumptions and positioning means that the discipline itself stays unresponsive and unhelpful in solving problems of the magnitude currently facing decision-makers. I suggest that incorporating critical reflection on values and assumptions into the scope of economics teaching, including reflexivity on the part of the economics teachers themselves, would offer productive new thinking about current economic, social and political issues.

It is important to acknowledge that the claims I make for this research need to be considered in the light of the limitations, absences, silences and errors that inevitably accompany any research project. I have made such limitations apparent throughout the thesis through reflexive questioning of my assumptions, blind spots and biases. There will almost certainly remain others hidden from my awareness that may be more apparent to the reader.

In the spirit of the reflexive process that has been a feature of this research throughout, I conclude this chapter and the thesis with a reflective mapping of the research journey, incorporating reflections on my experience of doing action research, and the way it has unfolded as an emergent process.

9.4 MAPPING THE JOURNEY: REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

This research began as a response to an inner call to action: something must be done! This inner call was a response to hearing others talk about needing ‘to bring the love back into economics’ and reading about alternatives to the dominant understanding of how the world works according to economists. The context was Heart Politics in the early 1990s, a place to discuss activism with activists all united by the same belief: something must be done! Underscored by a deep desire to make a difference in the world, we wanted to do it differently, with heart and love, not confrontation and violence. We felt the urgency of the world’s problems. Humanity’s very survival was at stake. We had no doubts that the predictions of the scientists were true; we had no doubts that unless we changed the way we were behaving our doom was certain. And we had no doubts that we needed to act.
My positioning as an activist from the outset is traced in chapter 2, the story of how this 'identity', one of my many identities or ‘subjectivities’, had been constructed from significant family, social, intellectual, political, cultural, personal and even spiritual influences in my life. Chapter 4 reviews the literature on challenges to the dominant economic paradigm that I had been reading and that had spurred me to action. I wanted to see how I could play my unique part in social action, how I could find my ‘piece of the carpet to lift’. I realised that there was something I had to offer: an unusual combination of a training in economics, an understanding of social processes, experience in adult education (mainly at TAFE) and a passion to see a world free of oppression. I could see how little my activist peers understood the mysterious workings of ‘the economy’ and how alienated they were by the language and complexity of the economic analysis that dominates most public debate of our shared problems. I realised that until people, particularly social activists, could grasp this language, could see what lay behind it, could find a way to engage with it, our social activism would always be limited in its scope and power. I wondered how I could best tackle the task of demystifying economics to make it accessible to people wanting to make a difference.

My initial thought was to write an accessible curriculum for TAFE as a masters project. This soon turned into a PhD proposal in 1993 after encouragement from my new supervisor, and I was bursting with all sorts of ideas and possibilities, from writing an accessible book, to developing curricula on new economics, to conducting surveys of economists who had moved away from the orthodox paradigm, to running workshops in the community on demystifying economics. After 18 months of exploration, I realised that my real interest was education, rather than economics *per se*, i.e. the *processes* of demystification and empowerment rather than the *content* of economics itself. Education was to be the locus of my social action. Having consolidated and affirmed my real passion, I turned to the literature on emancipatory education and found therein a real sense of ‘coming home’ to my values about education and social change. I found a way to theorise and conceptualise the demystification process. That literature, along with some critique, is reviewed in chapter 3.

My first opportunity to reflect came with my supervisor asking me in 1994 to reflect on why I placed myself so firmly in the ‘emancipatory’ camp. This led to some of the insights and understandings about my background detailed in chapter 2. For the first
time I recognised that being a ‘radical’ was a position that had to be interrogated, and that self-reflection was important. I reflected at the time:

The word ‘emancipatory’ itself has something of a zealot’s ring about it. Do I have an unconscious desire to ‘convert’ others to the ‘truth’, to liberate them from the oppression that is painfully obvious to me, but seemingly invisible to them? ... So I have to ask, is this an outcome of the self-reflective process: as we come to see how we are limited, how the oppressive ideologies bind us, do we then become imbued with the desire to spread liberation to all? I guess some do and some don’t—for some it becomes an imperative to act in the world, while for others, the process stays an internal one. ... I suppose what I am arguing here is that there is no option but to be ‘radical’. Once we enter the emancipatory domain, it is not possible to turn back. But as I write these thoughts it occurs to me that many of us do—we succumb to the addiction of comfort, the ease which comes with accepting the status quo, the face value of things.

This represented the beginning of the process of uncovering assumptions and set the stage for the reflexivity that was to follow through the researching journey.

After being diverted from my educational aspirations into local politics in late 1994 and all of 1995 (a significant interruption to my process), a crucial turning point came at the beginning of 1996 when I had the opportunity to teach economics as part of the Welfare course at TAFE. I dived straight into participatory action research and produced much rich data to contemplate after 18 weeks of teaching two quite different groups of students. The questions that occupied me in the TAFE research were: What sorts of processes lead to empowerment? How will I know empowerment has occurred? The action research strategies and processes informing the TAFE research are outlined in chapter 5. The reflection demanded by action research meant that it was incorporated into my teaching practice from the outset, as the narrative of chapter 6 demonstrates. The dilemmas experienced during the research process are rarely aired in the final presentation of findings (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). An example for me at this time was the tension produced in offering ‘partial’ and ‘disembodied’ snatches of student voices to present support for a particular interpretation of empowerment (Lather, 1991a). I acutely felt the dilemma of being the ‘interpreter’ and wrote this comment (entitled ‘paralysis’) in my reflective journal before I could proceed:

In the process of writing up this part of the research, I had great difficulty in bringing myself to the point of writing about what happened in the classroom. At first I assumed it was the usual writer’s block, but after exploring it further with a beloved critical friend, I realised that there was an emotional underlay. The experience of learning and teaching with these people who gave so much of
themselves and who struggled so hard and who reflected so deeply has great personal significance for me. At many points along the way I felt deeply honoured to be part of such a profound experience. Any attempt to ‘tell the story’ feels like I could never do justice to the complex realities embedded within the fabric of that experience. As soon as I choose a starting place I become acutely aware of where I did not start. As soon as I put a layer of interpretation over someone’s experience, I feel the silences. As soon as I embark on telling my version of a story, I feel the shadow of the untold stories. The greater the distance between the actual experience and the interpretation and reflection on it, the greater the possibility of violating its integrity. These are not excuses, they are part of the invisible, unconscious dynamic that is established when people engage in a journey of inquiry together. Their visible, surface effect is to produce a paralysis, a paralysis that in my case is reflective of the deep emotional attachment I have to honouring my fellow voyagers.

For me, engaging in the research at TAFE was both rewarding and challenging. To make the decision to involve the students in as much of my reflection as possible meant taking risks. I showed them my uncertainties and dilemmas, something that could have undermined their confidence in me. Those who had built trust in me did not question this process of engagement, while those who had not had so much time to build a trusting relationship were more circumspect. When I changed my tack with this latter group I found that their learning seemed to suffer, and it was a challenge to get the balance between process and content right. There seem to be dangers in engaging in too much reflection. Many times students expressed frustration that there was too much focus on the process—they were hungry for content. I am reminded of Hillman’s position (cited in Bleakley, 1999) that we can become too self-absorbed and forget to notice what we need to be noticing in our local, national and global environments.

My part-time TAFE teaching was supplanted by (temporary) full-time university teaching in 1997. In October of that year, I was to give a presentation on my TAFE research to a group at the Institute of Sustainable Futures in Sydney. In preparing for this, I decided to reflect on the assumptions I made in conducting my research. In uncovering these, and through discussing them with a critical friend, I came to see that as assumptions any of them could be challenged or questioned. These are the assumptions identified early in chapter 2, assumptions demonstrating the influence of critical theory and ideology critique as well as radical and emancipatory education theories, reviewed in chapter 3.
Through this process of identifying the assumptions I (unreflexively) took into the research domain, I came to see the value of questioning my motivations and agendas as an emancipatory educator. I started to read the critiques of Fay (1987) and found the postmodern critiques of critical social science to support the sort of reflection on my practice that was emerging. I started to ask questions like: To what extent did I take my own biases in without acknowledging them? To what extent did I influence the way students were to think about economics through the way I presented material? To what extent did I encourage critique? To what extent was the whole approach to the classes ideological?

Thus developed the critically reflexive voice of chapter 6, the voice of self-reflexivity called upon by educators in the emancipatory tradition (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998; Usher and Edwards, 1994 Usher et al., 1997; Lather, 1991a) who accept their problematic position under the postmodern crossfire. This enabled me to interpret the findings of the TAFE research in the light of the questions raised by the poststructuralist and postmodern critiques, as described in chapter 7. Using the different voices highlighted to me the potentially never-ending nature of reflective and reflexive processes. There is always more to deconstruct, more to uncover. As reflective researchers, the action research spiral of research may turn into an endless iterative reflective spiral into our inner consciousness. This process may explain the sort of paralysis I experienced as described above. On the other hand, I have made a strong case for incorporation of such practice into teaching/researching praxis because of the insights it produces and the freedom it potentially offers.

In 1998 I had the opportunity to write a curriculum on demystifying economics as part of the politics major offered through Southern Cross University’s School of Social and Workplace Development. I saw it as another opportunity to continue the research process, fulfilling my desire to continue to write liberatory curricula. As critical reflection was so central to the TAFE process, emerging through an environment that encouraged reflexivity, it, rather than processes of empowerment, became the emergent interest of the next stage of the action research cycle to be located in the university domain. The research questions in this cycle related to the process of critical reflection itself, its role in emancipation and empowerment in relation to economics, its efficacy in the emancipatory project, and its role in activism in the postmodern era. I taught the
course in 1998 and 1999 and the results of that two-year research process and the reflexivity that emerged from it are written up in chapter 8.

The very nature of action research is an unfolding and emergent process, inevitably because of the reflection that is embedded within it. The thesis is therefore framed in a way that mirrors the unfolding research journey described here. Reflection has permeated every stage and has emerged as a primary focus of the research itself. It seems to me that action research itself invites this—what emerges is what needs to be researched. In a way, this reflects a direct antidote to positivism and its ontology of prediction and control. Engaging the spirit of action research almost demands a letting go of having things go a particular way.

I believe the emphasis on reflection in action research contributed to my commitment and determination to create many opportunities for reflection in critical communities of peers and in one-to-one relationships with critical friends. Integrating the practice of reflection at all stages of the research journey has produced direct, tangible, lived understanding and has made it possible for me to speak from direct experience about reflexivity, connectedness and engaged agency.

Finally, something that stands out for me as I reflect back over the twists and turns, frustrations and joys of this journey, is that my passion for it never faltered. What I was thinking about, studying, talking about and working with, never failed to fascinate and intrigue me. It seemed that what I was grappling with in the research was exercising and challenging the minds and hearts of people in the broader community. Its relevance never waned. The questions remain intriguing. The work goes on.
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APPENDIX 1

TAFE Student Responses to Questions about Economics

Group 1 (part-time group)

what I think economics is about is:

- money, wealth, distribution of wealth, responsibility towards the taxpayer
- the use of money, resources and products within society and maintenance of a reasonable balance between what is spent or goes out and what comes in
- (unfair) distribution of $; keeping people in the dark
- jargon; control; high flyers; unequal monetary distribution; a few (have) knowledge; keeping one sector of the community wealthy while at the same time taking from the other sector
- a system to regulate/control the energy flow between people in the form of money, figures and other artificial ways
- budgeting: allocating money where it’s seen to be productive, i.e. produces more money
- managing money, cash flow; politics; power; ownership
- money, who has it and who hasn’t; it’s about rich and poor, power, lack of power
- learning about imports, exporting goods and services, about the stock exchange, marketing, what service goes into a political service, money circling around the world; how much goes into (the) service, how much comes out.

what I would like to know more about is:

- a bit more understanding about exchange; how the dollar goes up and down; economics and the welfare system and how it affects welfare
- if it’s not all the things I think it is, then what is it?
- (to) be more informed, how it works; who gains? who loses? and why; alternative methods; and the definition of economics
- how Australia’s wealth is distributed; what Australia’s budget exactly is - how to distribute more to (the) average person
- history - how it originated; powerholders of the economic system in modern society; basic principles of the economic system; how to introduce ethical values into economics
- demystify the process; how to make it accessible to the whole community
- justifications for the distribution; how they sleep at night
- how economics relates to my personal life or is used in my life
- economics and the “welfare state”; economics in the past compared with now and economics in the future; economics and the “humane” aspect; what is economics?
Group 2 (full-time)

what I think economics is about is:

- taxation; budgets; the use of $ in employment, wages, provision of services for business, government, personal
- economics is about budgets big and small; global money markets; national production; banking; open economies
- money; profit; mathematics; business; conservative; politics; distribution of wealth; inequality
- money; organisations; power; corruption; balanc(ing) act; survival; distribution
- managing money and resources etc. on all levels, from personal to global; budgets
- how (the) government distribute(s) money; international wealth; how it differs between countries and how countries struggle to keep up; money logic and how one has to contribute to get anything
- balancing budgets, figures; politics; efficiency; boring; heartless; public servants
- taxes and distribution of money; Australia - how it works financially
- economics is about money and governments and people and how they interact/interrelate - it’s about power and it seems to be a(n) overly powerful factor in our lives
- finances/distribution of wealth; rationalisation; power; politics
- employment; wages and taxes; how to manage money
- fiscal policy: relationship between social policy and resources; application of ideology in practical terms

what I would like to know more about is:

- the major theorists etc; the major theories etc.
- more about this subject as it is new to me
- anything would be nice!
- alternative economic models; global economics - is it the only way to go? what do all the figures mean?
- economics in general
- it’s purpose, value; how it affects me; what is interesting in economics; how to understand rationalism and its effects on welfare
- how it works in parliament; what banks really do, how they are influenced and in turn influence government; how it relates to consumerism, e.g. people making themselves unhappy by paying off expensive assets; Australia in relation to trade and debt to other countries
- how it works; how to manipulate/change things
- understanding the workings of a country in economical terms; understand the positive aspect of economics
- economics
- lots - how economics works for Australia in the world situation
- how to make $10 stretch to $100! demystify economic terms and relationships to policy and the general “wealth” of the community
# APPENDIX 2

## ANALYSIS OF ASSIGNMENT 1

(all names are pseudonyms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name &amp; Topic</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Evidence of Critical Analysis</th>
<th>Assumptions - examples used</th>
<th>Values - examples used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthea (gambling)</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Used neo-Marxist perspectives; historical analysis; ability to apply assumptions to particular issue</td>
<td>People unable to control gambling; do not act ‘rationally’ when gambling</td>
<td>Protestant work ethic; gambling is wrong (produces conflict); ambling is a symptom of society’s malaise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie (work)</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Identified historical developments such as work ethic, Industrial Revolution, and relevant aspects of Australian history; ability to apply assumptions to particular issue</td>
<td>Parents’ values are the ‘right’ values, situated on the left; assumes labour is weaker than capital</td>
<td>Values are a combination of parents values – based on left politics – not spelt out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda (dereg’n of banking)</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Told the ‘story’ of deregulation rather than identifying assumptions.</td>
<td>Early influences led to assumptions about the glamour of wealth; changed radically with visiting an old growth forest as a teenager</td>
<td>Believes ‘that capitalism is based on slavery and that women bear the brunt of its oppression’ – values and assumptions implied but not spelt out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane (welfare)</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Fairly disjointed arguments, no links made between history, assumptions and the actual issue</td>
<td>People concerned for each other’s well being; ‘all men created equal’: work should be available for any worker; do not blame the poor for their poverty</td>
<td>Previous ‘assumptions’ more aptly described as values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice (Protestant Work Ethic)</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>A strange mixture of identifying assumptions and making fairly left field assertions; unable to distinguish his opinion from ‘fact’: argument not very coherent</td>
<td>No real identification of his own assumptions. He just says: ‘I have been in both positions, privileged and poor, a worker and an employer. These things have undoubtedly coloured my critique.’</td>
<td>Believes in the Protestant Work Ethic: ‘I am for private property; representative democracy is an absolute joke’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie (tax reform)</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>able to trace ideas historically and identify key assumptions - tended to ignore specific assumptions of economic rationalism</td>
<td>identified beliefs and values rather than assumptions - she says though ‘I have made assumptions which reflect these values and beliefs and they have influenced my critique’ without actually spelling them out.</td>
<td>from lower middle-class family where parents paid ‘heavy taxes’; ‘there is one rule for business and another for the worker’; public service experience working for the tax office led to a ‘cynical attitude to politician’s call for a fairer tax system’; ‘my values of equality and notion of fairness is part of my upbringing and social class’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally (work and happiness)</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>excellent appreciation of historical influences; very good application of assumptions</td>
<td>recognition of privilege: ‘work of course is needed in some form for the survival of society’</td>
<td>‘to contribute in a meaningful [way] to society that somehow does not directly support or serve the ideologies of multinationals, and to balance my own quality of life in the present with only some attention towards the future, plus how others the benefit of such a balance.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; Topic</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Evidence of Critical Analysis</td>
<td>Assumptions - examples used</td>
<td>Values - examples used</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne-Marie (MAI)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>some history, looked at a few assumptions</td>
<td>no reflection on her own assumptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darryl (youth unemployment)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>focus on Australian history and Friedman’s conceptions and assumptions</td>
<td>‘perhaps my assumption is this: “that in an advanced, educated and wealthy democratic society it should be our aim to provide all citizens with the opportunity of some form of work, enabling them to attain a sense of dignity and self-worth” (value more than an assumption). ‘It is obvious at present that there are simply not enough jobs to go around, and that unskilled and inexperienced young people are at a particular disadvantage.’ (Not identified as an assumption)</td>
<td>left of centre; abhorrence of economic rationalism; globalisation is a destructive force; little personal experience with unemployment; emphasis on PWE in upbringing; many ills of modern society result from unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris (Sydney water)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>lack of understanding of the requirements - little evidence of critical analysis</td>
<td>little evidence of critical reflection - values and assumptions implied rather than explicitly acknowledged. Her only comment: ‘On critical reflection of my own assumptions and values in relation to this issue, I have my own biases regarding the power of the free market and the increasing powerlessness of the state and its moral obligations to the community.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George (IMF &amp; World Bank)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>on a resubmit, was able to identify assumptions clearly and trace origins of dominant paradigm</td>
<td>identified having his assumptions challenged; is to right to ‘force our economic ideology onto [sic] developing countries?’... ‘many of my views about developing countries and how fix them, have been formed through the way in which I have been brought up...’</td>
<td>no real identification of values - implied rather than stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetty (unemployment)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>history not linked with current approaches; assumptions of economic rationalism identified, but as part of ‘critical reflection’</td>
<td>critical reflection confused with critical analysis - own assumptions and values not identified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry (unemploy’1)</td>
<td>1998 external</td>
<td>history OK - left out Keynesian policies; identified economic rationalist assumptions well and applied them to the issue</td>
<td>‘My personal assumption of the political and economic paradigm is that labour in the workforce is primarily seen only as a corporate and government resource to be used and disused when the conditions suit’ (more of a belief than an assumption)</td>
<td>from middle class, right wing family that believed that ‘whatever the government did was “right for the country”’; no personal experience of unemployment, but siblings have been unemployed. For ‘this reason alone I believe that unemployment should be the principle [sic] concern of the government ..’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanette (unpaid work)</td>
<td>1998 external</td>
<td>good identification of assumptions and some historical connections, showing influence of studying sociology</td>
<td>assumptions not made explicit. Most personal statement: ‘The undervalued issues of women’s work both paid and unpaid has been an underlying irritant from my personal perspective of a married working mother with two children.’ Told stories of her experiences without reflecting</td>
<td>Implied rather than made explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara (women and the formal economy)</td>
<td>1998 external</td>
<td>able to identify key assumptions and how they are ideologically biased against women</td>
<td>‘that there is a right to work; work provides economic security i.e. fair wage rates; women are unhappy in part-time, casual, low-paying jobs; equity in the workforce is desirable’</td>
<td>assumptions ‘are related to my strongly held values of equality and freedom from discrimination.’ Stems from discrimination against her mother as single working parent in the 1960s and rise of the feminist movement and Whitlam government in the 1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie (educational policy)</td>
<td>1998 external</td>
<td>no clarity about assignment task - inability to apply any critical processes</td>
<td>no critical reflection apparent - all assumptions were implied rather than acknowledged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley (public goods and services)</td>
<td>1998 external</td>
<td>excellent critical analysis, with insightful application of assumptions and identification of ideological bias</td>
<td>values rather than assumptions are expressed; opposed to individualism as espoused by economic rationalism, although ‘I am not opposed to individualism as a concept that leads to autonomy, innovation and creativity, only where individual pursuit is at the expense of others within the community. It is clear my values have influenced my critique. If I had access to power and resources, I could very well perceive individualism and the pursuit of wealth to be desirable for society.’</td>
<td>values are ‘derived primarily from my childhood and the environment in which I grew up; working class; limited education and the belief that the rewards for hard work were eroded by the capitalist system and those it was designed to serve - the elite. Consequently I believe that we all have a basic right to public goods and services and that there is an obligation for governments to remember ‘ordinary’ Australians with limited access to capital and power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; Topic</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Evidence of Critical Analysis</td>
<td>Assumptions - examples used</td>
<td>Values - examples used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betsy (distribution of wealth)</td>
<td>1999 Internal</td>
<td>understood the requirements to identify assumptions and historical influences well</td>
<td>does not believe system will change for the better; assumes that inequality is ‘inevitable’; enjoys material possessions; aspires to be wealthy; assumes the ‘right to be greedy and protect what I have’; cannot imagine a society where there is equal distribution of wealth; lack of spiritual belief</td>
<td>values and assumptions intertwined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David (GM foods)</td>
<td>1999 Internal</td>
<td>good analysis of economic rationalism and its history - links with the issue a bit weak</td>
<td>corporate interests are immoral; corporate individuals lack ethics, putting profits before people, based on own corporate and travel experience</td>
<td>believes that ‘the greatest limit on real freedom is the media ownership of global corporations’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie (environmental destruction)</td>
<td>1999 Internal</td>
<td>particularly strong analysis and understanding - incorporated history and fundamental assumptions very well</td>
<td>environment is primary; the environment is frail and needs protecting; money is incapable of repairing damage</td>
<td>an ideological environmentalist (visit to Queenstown a significant experience, combined with positive connections with nature and overseas travel); all people deserve to live in a healthy environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly (MAI)</td>
<td>1999 Internal</td>
<td>tended to use very emotive language and unsubstantiated claims - able to see how corporate power is undermining local power without a strong academic basis; evidence of a lot of reading/research</td>
<td>politicians and governments not serving the people; tendency to ‘bag them all at once’; do not have an open mind towards the potential benefits of the MAI</td>
<td>‘I don’t feel that those whom [sic] exploit the neediness of others are suitable to be wielding the wealth that has been collectively produced.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence (role of science)</td>
<td>1999 Internal</td>
<td>excellent capacity for critical analysis; identified assumptions at fundamental ontological level, which is rare (eg science is an accurate measure of ‘what is real’; knowledge exists ‘out there’, rather than being a social construction; analysis is value-free); excellent arguments about ideological purposes (see quotes)</td>
<td>reasoning on the basis of antithesis; human beings have innate needs; human reasoning and understanding is imperfect; there is a ‘real’ universe that functions independently of human participation; search for truth constrained by human biases and assumptions; much of human knowledge is constructed; humans endowed with creative power; there is a spiritual dimension to reality beyond the reaches of understanding of mechanistic science; the existence of a Creator; faith is necessary for existence</td>
<td>unusually, identified fundamental assumptions rather than values per se.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; Topic</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Evidence of Critical Analysis</td>
<td>Assumptions - examples used</td>
<td>Values - examples used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loretta (role of women as unpaid workers)</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>able to identify assumptions and use historical analysis; not clearly applied to issue</td>
<td>values identified more than assumptions which were implied rather than explicitly stated</td>
<td>value own role of parent and houseworker; strong belief in fostering community; importance of being there for her children; resent limited value of her role; raised Catholic, working class; upbringing encouraged equality and non-materialist values; how I choose to live is not ‘the ultimate truth’; feminism encouraged questioning of Catholic dogma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucinda (unemployment)</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>able to identify assumptions and ideological purposes quite well; historical analysis good</td>
<td>assume that unemployment is such a major problem that it cannot be fixed using the current approach; one of the main reasons for unemployment is opening up of markets and wealth in a few hands; have assumed importance of education until now</td>
<td>employment is important in people’s lives; belief in the work ethic; concerned about impact of hardships associated with unemployment; questions whether the ideal of the ‘right job’ is a myth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus (education in Victoria)</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>an uncompromisingly Marxist position which permits identification of assumptions and ideologies</td>
<td>acknowledges influence of Marx and Engels and other left philosophers, without explicitly acknowledging the assumptions under which this position operates</td>
<td>value the ‘idea of education as a means to understanding of oneself and of others’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary (Aboriginal Reconciliation)</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>history based in reconciliation issues, failed to connect with assumptions of neo-classical economics - misunderstood what assignment required.</td>
<td>acknowledged previous ignorance, accepting treatment of Aboriginal people as the norm; did not really spell out assumptions</td>
<td>values implied rather than explicitly spelt out - acknowledged her own privilege and ignorance and the beginning of her journey of discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony (Third World debt)</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>good analysis of the role of the IMF and WB, but little connection with assumptions of the dominant paradigm of economics</td>
<td>assumed that the ‘governments of developing countries would ... be reluctant or even resentful agents for the implementation of their “neo-colonial” master’s agenda’; surprised to find neo-liberals among elites of Third World; - tended to be more analysis than reflection</td>
<td>‘trepidation about and antipathy towards the neo-liberal ideology and its current dominance’; we chose this path of ‘mass genocide’ for Third World countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy (rights of workers)</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>good history - needed to link to issue: assumptions identified well</td>
<td>opposition to economic rationalist policies; arbitration and collective bargaining are given rights; power struggle between employer and employee will always exist; government has the responsibility to ensure protection of democratic rights; that society could not return to an equitable workplace ideology once economic rationalist policies established.</td>
<td>strong values regarding the rights of the individual; individuals without opportunities need to be supported (own experience of being raised catholic, a sole parent; with a physical disability); equity for all parties, including employers, is important (emphasised importance of critical friend)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarissa (employment</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>good identification of assumptions and understand the ideological nature of these assumptions</td>
<td>did not really draw out her own assumptions or the basis for them - discussed coming from a</td>
<td>believe that employment services should be concerned with increasing equity and accessibility; economic policy should not be synonymous with social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services)</td>
<td>external</td>
<td>(such as utilitarianism, positivism and individualism)</td>
<td>critical perspective, influenced by critical theory</td>
<td>policy; firm belief in social justice (did not identify source of these values)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin (public health)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>identified main assumptions well - did not really explore historical development of ideas; able</td>
<td>not really able to identify own assumptions - confused with analysis, disagrees with economic</td>
<td>working class background; ideas are left of centre; believe state should be interventionist in some areas of industrial relations; still has faith in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>external</td>
<td>to identify ideological biases</td>
<td>rationalism’s assumptions about human beings, but doesn’t spell this out</td>
<td>capitalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise (rural decline)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>identified economic rationalism as an ideology: focused more on sociology than economics; missed</td>
<td>‘the assumption that social inequality and the loss of opportunity to identify assumptions</td>
<td>mother believed ‘the decent treatment of others was a way to maintain a higher moral ground in the community when you were not wealthy’; discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>external</td>
<td>economic rationalism</td>
<td>underlying economic rationalism</td>
<td>social stratification in rural communities without connecting this experience with her own values and assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma (women in the</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>ability to identify assumptions, but application is confused - ideas not clearly articulated</td>
<td>experiences as a black woman in Sth Africa and Australia ‘have influenced my assumption that</td>
<td>Not explicitly spelt out</td>
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<tr>
<td>workforce)</td>
<td>external</td>
<td></td>
<td>policies and decision making are justified to suit the interests of the predominant power,</td>
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<td>compounding the inequalities that alienate marginal groups from economic power, income and</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>social justice.’</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris (industrial relations)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>did not grasp the essentials of a critical analysis.</td>
<td>Did not reflect on assumptions or values, although they were implied</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>external</td>
<td>Unable to distinguish ideology from analysis, although did recognise that economic rationalism</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>views everything other than economics as irrelevant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jack (public sector)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>understood what was required in terms of critiquing assumptions of economic rationalism, but</td>
<td>No critical reflection whatsoever</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>external</td>
<td>no strong connections with the issue or Australian politics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katrina (native title)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>identified assumptions of native debate well, but failed to make connection with assumptions of</td>
<td>Attitude changed from ‘one of fear and pity to understanding and respect’. Assumptions identified:</td>
<td>values implied in assumptions but not specifically identified as such</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>external</td>
<td>neo-classical economics.</td>
<td>don’t fear backyard will be taken, believe these fears are pushed through the media; mining and</td>
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<td>farming not the only ‘profitable’ uses of land; aboriginal people want to live traditional ways</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and not oppose mining and grazing altogether: royalties should be paid to indigenous groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ken (health)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>did not address assignment criteria - understood ideological underpinnings, but did not analyse assumptions</td>
<td>reflected on his past and his views on health without specifically looking at assumptions</td>
<td>implied rather than explicitly stated or identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel (unemploy’m)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>very weak: used sociological analysis; did not understand assignment criteria or concept of critical analysis (resubmitted assignment and was able to identify assumptions underlying economic rationalism without connecting them to the issue)</td>
<td>father from working class, a high value placed on work; as a young person, assumed she would be able to find work on leaving school (despite negative messages from school); majority of unemployed preferred to be unemployed than not doing what they wanted; no she assumes that most people want to work.</td>
<td>currently believe that ‘people today are under huge amounts of pressure in relation to employment’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy (aboriginal housing)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>excellent critical analysis with insightful understanding of how assumptions underlying neo-classical ideology impact on policies in relation to aboriginal housing: insightful interpretations of history; and mature ideological understanding</td>
<td>economic policy should be balanced by social justice; assume that poverty for aboriginal people is result of campaign to suppress their participation as citizens; current policy position is possible because systematic neglect has kept aboriginal people disempowered; see quotes for a fuller reflection on how assumptions influenced her critique.</td>
<td>believe in the fundamental worth of human beings irrespective of colour and class; society has responsibility to provide for disadvantaged; non-indigenous Australians basically self-interested; political decisions driven by assumptions of male Eurocentric superiority motivated by profit and gain; decisions for greater good seldom take account of less tangible needs; upbringing in a church where decision making the province of men; people entitled to equitable outcomes; based on upbringing in poor, large family with parents who worked to help less fortunate people;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maisie (unemploy’m)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>able to follow criteria reasonably well - found difficulty linking assumptions with the issue, but in some cases did this well - a bit mixed, with confusing expression</td>
<td>assume that others place high importance on education</td>
<td>raised in white middle class suburbia, parents always worked, instilling the value of the Protestant work ethic; if you want to work you can; ‘I do believe that it is good for people to work, but am no longer confident in the definition of work and naïve enough to assume everybody has the opportunity to work’; recognised privilege, having not experienced discrimination; strong belief in the importance of education; Christian values predominant (love, equality, respect and hope)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine (consumerism)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>sound historical understanding, placing the development of consumerist tendencies in historical perspective very well; excellent analysis of assumptions; ideological interests well identified</td>
<td>related a story about changing her assumptions and values - not explicitly identified, but expressed well as story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Nigel (indigenous dispossession)</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>placed Australian situation in historical context very well; able to clearly identify assumptions associated with neo-classical ideology and imperialism; ideological interests understood, if not spell out</td>
<td>economic factors have been the prime motive in dispossession; a spiritual connection to land has more value than 'physical possession of a title deed'</td>
<td>political orientation is left of centre; Celtic and Maori heritage which influences perceptions of injustice; opposed to economic rationalism; value the contribution of diversity; opposed to racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick (rural decline)</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>able to identify assumptions of farmers he had talked to - did not relate specifically to dominant paradigm of economics, although the connection was loosely made</td>
<td>indicated how his assumptions were challenged through exploring issue further (see quotes)</td>
<td>not specifically stated in his paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rokema (unemployment policy)</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>very strong analysis, identifying key assumptions well, although not always relating them directly to the issue, but when she did she did it well.</td>
<td>'I assume that work provides more than an income and is an essential aspect of human well being'</td>
<td>'I believe that employment should be available to everyone who wants to and is able to work'; I believe that unemployment is imposed by the current economic ideology'; influenced by parable of Good Samaritan as a child; 'I value community about individuality; cooperation above competition, and I believe that the role of government is to invest in areas of job creation that capitalism does not'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah (house workers)</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>sophisticated analysis, drawing on feminist postmodern understandings as well as conventional critical theories - touched on aspects not covered in any other pieces of work. Very clear about assumptions and ideologies.</td>
<td>Acknowledges bias from the perspective of the 'woman parent'; lack of male understandings; assume that parenting is valuable (which discounts debates from single women about why they should support parents); housework is necessary and worthy of value; analysis biased towards social implications of exclusion of houseworkers: assumed gender is constructed rather than innate; belief in the existence of a women's culture</td>
<td>values implied within assumptions - clear distinction not made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winston (role of carers)</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>reasonable identification of assumptions, but little connection with the issue</td>
<td>no critical reflection apparent</td>
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## APPENDIX 3

### ANALYSIS OF ASSIGNMENT 2

(all names are pseudonyms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Evidence of envisioning alternatives</th>
<th>Influences</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Gaps/biases</th>
<th>Contradictions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthea</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Metaphor of chook yard: practical attainable ideas for her local street; broader vision of people becoming ecological citizens</td>
<td>Spiritual studies; belief that ‘microcosm is the macrocosm’; involvement in green activism; involvement in local community</td>
<td>Human beings have potential to embrace change; can be altruistic; have a spiritual dimension; people can be empowered to participate</td>
<td>Identified leaving out Marxism, Keynesian perspectives</td>
<td>Couldn’t find any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Outline of ways in which work could better meet human needs - felt it was a ‘compromised new paradigm’ and ‘lacked inspiration and vitality’</td>
<td>Own interest in work as she nears the end of her degree; Max-Neef model leading to ERG theory</td>
<td>Current use of resources not sustainable; family and friends more important than work colleagues; growth needs satisfied wholly within work</td>
<td>Biased against employers and big business in favour of workers</td>
<td>Reiterated bias – believed contradictions emerged from that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Uses the metaphor of water in the natural system to explicate a new paradigm of ‘enzyme economics’ where currency can be viewed as water (creative ideas, not well expressed on paper)</td>
<td>Deep ecology, earth education, the concept of Gaia, own ‘abundant experiences of the natural world’, disdain for theories that support concentration of wealth, recognition that her own poverty influences this view</td>
<td>Lack of a bridge from old to new paradigm; the practical issues of trade; cultural and gender perspectives missing – specifically, issues of power not addressed</td>
<td>Identifying ‘self-interest as a negative quality when in fact it is a necessary quality for survival’ (She did not recognise the contradiction that she assumed centralisation was necessary to achieve her global vision)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Bible story based on passages in the Bible dealing with visions of peace and plenty; followed by practical suggestions for reducing welfare dependency (primacy of ecology &amp; human needs, a GMI, participatory democracy, wealth redistribution, recognising rights of young, old and indigenous people)</td>
<td>Identified important issues such as participatory democracy and ecological perspectives, but failed to recognise primary influence of Christianity on her thinking</td>
<td>‘everyone believes poverty to be bad’; ‘everyone agrees that employment is a good thing’; ‘all people would prefer to work’; ‘everyone wants to be a responsible citizen’ (not clear whether these are her beliefs or assumptions)</td>
<td>Very unclear meaning – did identify bias against corporations; suggested that missing perspectives included the weather; third world perspectives,</td>
<td>Question not really understood – listed ways in which her beliefs or premises are contradicted e.g. ‘not everyone wants to work’; ‘there are some people who want to live on the dole’</td>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Influences</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Gaps/biases</th>
<th>Contradictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maurice</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>Amazing science fiction story about an experiment which left 20 million people invisible worldwide. They became the ‘environmental collective unconscious’ and made demands on the world’s economists and decision makers to stop poisoning the planet. He says of the role of the Invises (the invisible ones): ‘The Invises looking over the elite’s shoulder is a metaphor for the natural conscience they have lost.’</td>
<td>His most telling comment: ‘Freedom is dear to me because I lost it at an early age when I was sent from mountain streams and waterfalls to a boarding school inhabited by sadistic moral men (of God).’</td>
<td>Masses need religion to make them do the ‘right’ thing: govs and corp’ns would need to be terrorised into making right decisions. ‘My values are glaringly evident … could be described as psychopathic, anti-social’: a ‘deep green’ (biodiversity more important than humanity)</td>
<td>Not willing to consider gaps and missing perspectives: ‘Perhaps one might say: where is the feminist, aboriginal, religious or ethnic perspective? However I would find such a question to indicate that the questioner had missed the point altogether.’</td>
<td>‘I profess the need for individual freedom, but my new society seems a schizophrenic enviro-fascist state.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>1998 internal</td>
<td>envisions a ‘cooperative, community based tax collection system based on actual wealth and actual needs’ - no person more than 10 times wealthier than the lowest paid; work as part of community fabric; tax favours groups rather than individuals; recognition of intrinsic value of environment making environmental taxes unnecessary; participatory democracy</td>
<td>alternative approaches to the dominant paradigm; values of social justice, cooperation and participation, importance of the natural environment, significance of caring side of human nature</td>
<td>assumes that: the taxation system is unjust; it can be reformed; people want it reformed; economic rationalism creates inequities; capitalism, consumerism, materialism, etc bad for the economy; inequities should not be part of society; it is possible to improve society; people want to improve society; I know what an improved society is; people want to live in communities; communal living is good for everyone; I know what communal living is; that people value the environment; all women are socially responsible and caring; that Third World people want to live a traditional lifestyle and reject Western culture</td>
<td>inability to provide a practical method to effect change - ‘I find it difficult to imagine that humans can change their basic nature’; issue of power not recognised: ‘I can’t imagine Kerry Packer being too keen on my ideas’. ‘One perspective that is definitely missing from my story is the notion that the poor and oppressed will endure an inequitable society on the premise that one day they, or their children, may have the opportunity to be successful or rich.’</td>
<td>(Doesn’t socialise with her neighbours). ‘I feel as though I am hypocritical in proposing communal living when I have rejected it myself. I also advocate the importance of the natural environment when my husband runs beef cattle which have destroyed the ecosystem in our area. I have also championed the cause of the common good in decision making but often do not practice it myself. My beliefs in freedom, privacy and a sense of self are contradictions and paradoxes to my selfless, open, communal vision.’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Evidence of envisioning alternatives</td>
<td>Influences</td>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>Gaps/biases</td>
<td>Contradictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>newspaper report from a town in Australia in 2009 where ‘nature, simplicity and human relationships hold higher values for residents than money and materialism’. It is a community that had developed its own ‘socio-ecological economic model’, revisiting assumptions about how economics is defined.</td>
<td>‘... that everyone would be better off knowing inner spirituality and having compassion for others ...’; ‘... the world would be a better place if we all thought as I do’</td>
<td>race, gender and class are ‘glaringly obvious gaps’; ‘My story touches on difference but does not recognise that being white holds the position of power and privilege in this society...’. Biases include left ideology; feminism; structuralist perspective; middle class.</td>
<td>Paradox of need for both individual and community awareness; local self-reliance in the global picture; community values and technology; respect for nature in capitalism without commodifying it; participatory management and government.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>rather than a vision of the future, arguments presented for more meaningful definitions of work within values of ecological sustainability, participatory democracy, social justice and human needs</td>
<td>being born white, female, middle class in Australia; questioning dominant paradigm; rejecting suburban values: strong love for natural environment; rejected working in the mainstream system: activist background: inherited a strong work ethic; desire for community reflects a need for interrelatedness society should meet fundamental human needs; participatory democracy can work; human beings have a need to belong; people need opportunity for self determination; equality is a good goal; ‘all the problems of the world are created by capitalism under the thumb of economic rationalism’. (Values and beliefs rather than assumptions?)</td>
<td>lack of postmodern perspectives; biased against ‘naive individualism’ but self interest as a driving force for survival can be +ve ; biased against global market and economic rationalism but not international trade; biased against political institutions</td>
<td>goals or social justice and ecological sustainability not always compatible; vision could be incompatible with ‘people’s egos and struggle for status and dominance’</td>
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<td>Anne-Marie</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>speech to the UN about an alternative to the unfeathered power of transnational corporations - tended to slip into critique rather than stay with a vision</td>
<td>did not explicitly acknowledge influences, but referred to stats on wealth distribution, Marxist perspectives and models of citizen participation in this section ‘By maintaining a belief in civil society and social capital, I have made the assumption that “community” implies “all will be rosy”; that harmony will automatically exist; and that inequality, class and gender issues are somehow all secondary.’</td>
<td>Acknowledged absence of ecological &amp; feminist perspectives; did not mention process of decision making; only dealt with an opposing view of the MAI</td>
<td>‘I have maintained that development such as foreign investment and economic growth is contrary to the needs of Third World countries. However, when defining poverty, I describe it as “lack of development”’.</td>
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<td>Andrew</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>no real visioning - offered a critique of economic rationalism from the perspectives offered in the course</td>
<td>frustration at unfair tax system; interested in knowing more about tax debate</td>
<td>father’s values of community over self; pursuit of happiness should not be at expense of others; assumes that fairness and equity can be reached; believes that people are resistant to change; ‘only something substantial and cataclysmic will bring about a surge for change’</td>
<td>gaps not identified</td>
<td>contradictions not identified</td>
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<td>Chris</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>feminist science fiction story which focused more on an unpalatable future - an ‘apocalyptic vision’ that precedes the ‘real possibilities of a breakthrough’ - but no real visioning of a positive future.</td>
<td>This section more of an analysis of the issue than a critical reflection. Identified themes but not influences.</td>
<td>identified a bias against multinationals - ‘the whole culture of contracts and privatisation leads to secrecy, greed, corruption and bad feelings.’</td>
<td>Only identified using a feminist perspective - not what was missing</td>
<td>contradictions not identified</td>
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<td>Darryl</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>looked at different ideas about revisioning work, without actually doing an imaginary process.</td>
<td>’A healthy cynicism that allows me to question the status quo ’…’ inspiring stories; visionary individuals; growing up in a supportive rural community</td>
<td>strengthening communities is a viable approach to youth unemployment; that communities would work to solve the problem and come up with solutions; governments have run out of ideas; need to resort to local action; strong belief in the value of communities</td>
<td>bias against economic rationalism; no reference to role of government; ignored perspectives of corporations, international and domestic</td>
<td>‘on the one hand, my idealism says “this is a great idea, it really can work, it really can happen”, on the other hand my cynicism says “get real, this would never happen”’.</td>
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<td>George</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>used a video to present ideas for an alternative model based on Max-Neef and the RMI economic renewal program - “People Centred Economics”</td>
<td>inspired by ideas that socialism and capitalism may not be the only alternatives; other theories - did not look at his own background, his work environment, or his Christian values</td>
<td>problems solved by being ‘people focused’; individual needs and business goals won’t clash; sustainable business is important; business will advance shared goals; one community’s goals will not adversely impact on another; religious beliefs in relation to debt elimination</td>
<td>biases - ‘we should not question the Word of God’; not looked at the role of government</td>
<td>focused on ‘contradiction’ in relation to the claim that the system of human needs is not hierarchical, while claiming special importance for subsistence and protection</td>
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<td>Hetty</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>letter from female prime minister to unemployed people consulting them about alternative approaches to unemployment based on fundamental human needs, although still within the current paradigm</td>
<td>themes motivated by fairness and equality; influenced by Max-Neef</td>
<td>not identified</td>
<td>decided not to use Marxist or Green approaches; shortcomings include: difficulty with defining employment, staying within current paradigm, avoided ‘the challenge to venture into alternative trains of thought’</td>
<td>none identified</td>
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<td>Harry</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>an address to parliament on sustainable employment and the environment.</td>
<td>Regards unemployment as primary cause of social problems; parents raised in rural areas contributing to a family tradition of environmental awareness; ecological pessimism</td>
<td>a relationship exists between increased economic growth and use of natural resources; unemployment is the problem of economic managers and not the fault of the individual; economic managers disregard the environment; earth will reach a point where it will no longer sustain life; government puts economic issues above environmental issues; working class people bear the brunt of sacrifice in environmental protection</td>
<td>ignored opinion of metal and resource industries; did not consider reasons for current government policies or political unpopularity of sacrificing jobs for environmental protection; did not consider costs to social security system</td>
<td>‘My critical friend pointed out to me that I could perhaps be contradictory in my argument because of my job security and unwillingness to recognise some of the environmental faux pas that my employer, the Department of Defence has committed in recent times.’</td>
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<td>Jeanette</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>letter of complaint to advertisers about an ad inaccurately portraying women’s roles in a time when women now have equality</td>
<td>her own experience as a child socialised into women’s roles and her experience as a single parent</td>
<td>lack of clarity about this question, but did identify that she has a ‘romantic vision’ of the ‘private realm existing healthily against the present vision of market greed’.</td>
<td>Did not really identify biases or missing perspectives</td>
<td>Paradox is ‘how to measure and quantify the unpaid and intangible economic contributions of the informal sector’ (goes on to analyse this debate)</td>
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<td>Lara</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>extract from a diary in the year 2020 where work is more evenly divided and the focus is on balancing community work and industrial production; shifts decision making away from markets to the community via regulatory controls; link between employment and demand and industrial production is broken</td>
<td>belief that true equality only possible with radical change to society; need a trigger for change - eg an energy crisis; concerns about impact of unbridled consumption on the environment: a preference for co-operation over competition (bad experiences in competitive sports!); and partner who has never worked in formal economy and has been a full parent</td>
<td>interdependence - people put community wishes before their own; communities can take care of people; community processes more equitable for women workers - reflect a deep level of concern for the current state of society</td>
<td>means by which power shifts will occur; bias towards feminism and ecological perspectives; 'citizenship becomes the desired focus of concern of people rather than consumerism'.</td>
<td>Paradox is 'that it still views industrialism as desirable ... The simplistic solutions offered in this story contradict alternative methods of problem solving that recognise and value complexity. ... The final outcome however has been the realisation that by looking at this issue in isolation from other issues in society, the model I created is flawed.'</td>
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<td>Maggie</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>speech about an alternative paradigm for education policy - not very clear what alternative proposals there were; appeared to be advocating a greater role for corporations in funding education</td>
<td>concern about political decision making; interest in greater social responsibility of corporations</td>
<td>place a high value on quality and availability of education; community participation is important (not reflected in her proposal)</td>
<td>bias 'against socialisation of our community' (?); supportive of work for the dole scheme; did not consider feminist perspective</td>
<td>not sure the corporate world is mature enough to support social concerns such as education</td>
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<td>Shelley</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>a story about life in 'Magari' meaning 'if only' in Italian - a society based on values of cooperation, valuing of government and the common good over individual self interest; participatory democracy central to decision making</td>
<td>inspired by Thomas More and Oscar Wilde; values of being responsible for each other</td>
<td>all people want the same outcomes; all citizens would be happier with simpler and slower lifestyles; desire for power and control over others non-existent; power struggles 'can be quickly deflated by the co-operative structures of society; values of ethics, primacy of community and non-material wealth can work locally but perhaps not globally?</td>
<td>Does not consider how power and leadership will be handled; need to consider a balance between state provision and markets; needed to more explicitly recognise women's views and ways of knowing</td>
<td>not explicitly identified</td>
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<td>Betsy</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>science fiction story set in 2225 - world degraded; spaceship set to leave earth to establish a society based on new values, where wealth no longer seen as a ‘basis on which to measure people and wouldn’t be a major focus in people’s lives’</td>
<td>love of science fiction; interested in the idea of leaving the planet; ‘I picture humanity spreading across the universe’</td>
<td>people don’t want to change; things will keep getting worse before they get better; ‘on the whole I do consider people to be inherently evil or greedy or self-destructing... I don’t think all people are equal. I consider myself to be better than some people, and some people to be better than me.’ Believe it’s important to reduce the gap between rich and poor.</td>
<td>‘... my bias against wealthy fat cats is shown by condemning them to death’; bias against ‘ignorance and uneducated people’; didn’t consider Marxist, Keynesian or feminist perspectives.</td>
<td>While wealth not a major focus, ignored the need for wealth to build spaceships; things that would be very complex were presented as simple: ‘the people with the most wealth or prestige or power obviously would have been the first to secure places on the ship’.</td>
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<td>David</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>an analysis (very good) of alternatives such as Max-Neef model, rather than a vision of how the world could be different under a new paradigm</td>
<td>believes we need to address gap between rich and poor; believes a ‘new moral culture’ is emerging (demonstrated by response to E. Timor tragedy)</td>
<td>economic rationalism and economic narratives will become increasingly irrelevant; sustainable development doesn’t mean going back to nature</td>
<td>missing the ‘holocaust’ perspective; also new global trade paradigms</td>
<td>not really identified - tended to focus on critical analysis much more than critical reflection</td>
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<td>Josie</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>reflection of a 75 year old woman (‘the oldest person alive’) - a vision of disaster due to environmental degradation (‘it was a frightening place to be - the other side of our greed’) finally leading to a new society where ‘respect is the dominant paradigm’ and life expectancy is reduced</td>
<td>belief in a looming environmental crisis (did not acknowledge influence of anarchism, very apparent from her reading)</td>
<td>earth is finite; disaster is on the way; technology can’t fix it; disaster won’t be averted through changing consumption patterns; capitalism won’t be challenged through intellect alone; no consciousness shift without disaster; people are a product of their environment; ‘life quality’ goes beyond material consumption; all human life equally valuable; no more valuable than non-human life</td>
<td>fundamental bias - acceptance of scientific evidence of environmental decay; dismisses contradictory evidence as ‘corporate propaganda’; her own interpretations of what constitutes the simple life; gaps - how did the changes come about?</td>
<td>‘there may exist a contradiction to my own values of freedom and individualism which resides within the idea that everyone will acknowledge their place in the “interconnected fabric of life” an “organic” society may in fact require a degree of freedom to be relinquished’ belief in human capacity to change but only in the face of crisis</td>
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<td>Kelly</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>speech on being appointed “President of the World in service to God” - bringing love into the political sphere</td>
<td>belief in a spiritual dimension; belief we are at risk of extinction; belief in inspiration</td>
<td>belief in thinking as a big family; belief in tearing down borders; belief in love and that humanity will 'wake up to the divinity in themselves'. ‘You may perceive this as an assumption but to me it is a knowledge.'</td>
<td>Speech reveals a lack of familiarity with many cultures; didn't cover demilitarisation</td>
<td>none identified</td>
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<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>presents a new framework of 'theocentrism', in which 'all reality and all actions and interactions are centered around God' through the mechanism of a dialogue between a questioner and a presenter of the alternative ideas (a very good exposition of a critical dialogue demonstrating critical questioning)</td>
<td>the unit content (only one who acknowledged this!); own personal interests and 'inner magnetisms' - drawn to abstraction and theory</td>
<td>the existence and nature of God; 'without any truth there cannot be hope'; without hope there is only despair; belief in the creation of the universe; the Bible contains an accurate representation of God and of universal truths, reflecting religious beliefs; a 'grand narrative' conception of reality; reason is valuable; truth must have a basis</td>
<td>feminist perspective missing (partly due to being male); little in the realm of 'practical applications': criticism easier than positive construction, highlighting missing elements; dialogue 'creates an illusion of debate, when it is really completely the presentation of one perspective'; bias towards a Christian worldview</td>
<td>easier to call for a theocentric perspective that to consistently live with a &quot;God focus&quot;</td>
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<td>Loretta</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>a feminist fairy tale based on Aladdin’s Lamp in which the three wishes encompass elimination of weapons; redistribution of wealth and valuing unpaid work</td>
<td>importance of the work of reproduction; interested in power - identified other paradigms as influential</td>
<td>equality and respect for things besides money; raising children is important; assumed capitalism large; home ownership; capitalism and patriarchy are connected; assumption of utopia 'naive' (more of an analysis than a personal reflection)</td>
<td>working class background produces a particular bias; woman living under patriarchy - did not really identify missing perspectives (covered in 'influences')</td>
<td>issue of 'marginal' nature of housework given its centrality (but failed to identify contradictions in her own account)</td>
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<td>Lucinda</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>Portfolio of the ‘Ministry of Employment and Social Development’ in 2005 following ‘massive street protests’ about unemployment - balance of economic and social values, discarding economic rationalism as a guiding principle (drew on RMI and Max-Neef material; mostly fairly vague)</td>
<td>concerned about hardships associated with unemployment and her children’s future; anger about free trade and corporate control of the economy; need for education; commitment to community and holistic lifestyles; concern about isolation and alienation; long held desire for shorter working hours</td>
<td>transnationalis create feelings of powerlessness for individuals; everybody wants to live a more connected life; that people want to work; society better off with a different educational curriculum; free trade and profit motive cause of most socio-economic problems</td>
<td>have not explained effect on GNP; did not cover regional interactions and government (assumed State government would be abolished); no account of social security system nor technology (did not identify biases or missing perspectives)</td>
<td>did not consider benefits of trade (not really a contradiction, more a gap)</td>
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<td>Mary</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>a reflection on the journey towards reconciliation from a time in the future when it has been achieved; drawing on a model designed by Pearson and Latham that fit with her own ideology - but little drawing on material from the unit</td>
<td>oppression, equality, justice and freedom are important personal perspectives; boarding school experiences</td>
<td>power of money; community is foundation of society; value of equality and justice; individual rights to exercise choice: importance of symbolism</td>
<td>only portrays Aboriginal perspective; no specified model from an alternative paradigm</td>
<td>identified contradiction between economic rationalism and community responsibility, not those apparent in her own account</td>
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<td>Tony</td>
<td>1999 internal</td>
<td>annual report of the UN Debt Review Board 2012, an organisation replacing the IMF and WB using the GPl, following catastrophe - well grounded in practicalities - an inspiring vision</td>
<td>relationships with natural world; social inclusion and cooperation: holistic decision making;</td>
<td>belief that current global problems require local and global solutions simultaneously; large mechanisms needed to ensure outcomes beneficial to the common good; for a sustainable and compassionate society, need policies of inclusion and targeted education as well as spiritual self awareness; aspects of capitalism could be retained; central role for money; technology has central role; we can own land and still have a relationship with the natural world</td>
<td>does not account for power abuses of large org’s: little direct reference to gender and race; not properly addressed is ‘what sustains the collective set of higher values’</td>
<td>how to maintain capitalism, with its expansionist tendencies and foster local self-reliance? Dilemma of land ownership combined with true spiritual relationship; an ‘egalitarian society but with vestiges of hierarchy ...’: individualist and communalistic, plus local and global</td>
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<td>Marcus</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>&quot;Revolution 2032; or how I learned to stop worrying and wait for the end of capitalism&quot; - the world plunged into disaster before the global workers’ revolution triumphs! Instigated by soldiers laying down their arms. A Marxist vision, pure and simple - although long on critique and short on actual vision (my feedback - &quot;I wonder whether the focus on the scourge actually inhibits the capacity to vision?&quot;)</td>
<td>'my ideological bent'; belief that only a 'socialistic, environmental alliance, based not on class opportunism but a genuine desire for creating a true participatory democracy' can save the world; history of ideas; personal fears of entering the workforce; only violent upheaval can create conditions for paradigm shift</td>
<td>capitalists only concerned with profit; working class only militant in the face of hardship; capitalists are misguided and the working classes are 'infuriatingly ignorant, petty and often compliant in their servitude to the capitalist system'</td>
<td>obvious bias against capitalist system and economic rationalism; no mention of benefits brought by capitalism; enjoyed the 'inclusion of the grisly fates of capitalists'; lack of feminist perspectives and critiques of capitalism other than Marxism</td>
<td>failure to define new vision - 'I came to the conclusion that without a belief that the system can change it never will, and so my story concentrated on the change of belief rather than a clear definition of the new paradigm.'</td>
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<td>Cathy</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>a 'letter of hope' to her grandson - more time spent on analysing problems with current paradigm than articulating an alternative vision</td>
<td>employment an integral component of capitalism; importance of individual empowerment (moved more into analysis than reflection)</td>
<td>everyone feels the same way I do about economic rationalism; recognise I am an idealist - again, moves into analysis rather than reflection</td>
<td>where do we begin and who begins it? (Then reflected on her role as an activist following our interview); reflected that her partner may have been a better critical friend - didn’t really understand the question</td>
<td>seemed to focus on problems with the GST - comments off track</td>
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<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>a magician’s spell involving the keys to six different ‘doors of knowledge’ that would help design a new paradigm - didn’t actually come up with the finished product!</td>
<td>Need to combine variety of perspectives; need for employment services to operate outside capitalist system (influenced by critiques); public provision influenced by Post Keynesians; restoration of participatory democracy (structural feminism and Marxism); postmodern analysis; influence of ‘magic’</td>
<td>values and beliefs originating from parents, peers and life experiences (not articulated); belief in a subjective reality; value the opinion of experts; partial to rational reasoning - need a ‘balance between positivism and subjectivism’; values non-material aspects of wealth; participatory democracy; interdependence more important than independence</td>
<td>did not adequately address efficiency; lack of green perspectives</td>
<td>'although incorporating a variety of perspectives creates a strength of the new paradigm, this may also be distorted to form a weakness'; identified contradictions in different perspectives</td>
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<td>Colin</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>letter to the editor outlining proposals for reform to the health system</td>
<td>critical reflection not included in first submission - submitted later (don’t have a copy though)</td>
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<td>Denise</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>design of a website which produces an ‘alternate economic narrative’ designed in response to the decline of social infrastructure in rural regions... I have developed a vision that centres on a sense of “place”, an interaction with nature and a simplistic lifestyle.’ A fictitious utopian world called ‘Ikuna’.</td>
<td>University studies; literature on utopian communities - major theme became morality ‘that can be found in mixing spiritualism [sic] with a community’s economy’.</td>
<td>Worth in human life and the environment; humans are intrinsically good; a society’s happiness founded not at expense of another; questioned conventional notion that humans are always rational; importance of equality; objective science is destructive; ‘polarity between men and women is socially constructed’</td>
<td>bias towards feminism; neglected possibility that ‘each gender’s needs and wants may be acceptably different’; did not acknowledge role of women in perpetuating capitalism</td>
<td>main character in story uses technology of capitalism despite disliking it; allowed institutions in Ikuna to trade and produce a surplus; and so ‘have not answered the possibility of how competition can lead to a bid for personal gain’</td>
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<td>Emma</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>fell short of articulating an alternative; tended to be an analysis instead; indicated ways in which women’s work could be more recognised in the economy</td>
<td>experience as a non-white female sole parent; living an alternative lifestyle; moving back to the city with outdated skills</td>
<td>no assumptions identified</td>
<td>recognised that including women in the existing paradigm would alter it; no attempt to ‘redefine ecs in an alternative vision’</td>
<td>no contradictions drawn out</td>
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<td>Iris</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>a speech to the ‘First Summit of Industrial Relations and the Search for an Alternative Paradigm’ outlining an approach ‘where production is based on human needs and interests’, not for profit; drew on Mondragon experience of coop’s; in this vision, ‘no need for industrial relations, because society would comprise of employee managed cooperatives’</td>
<td>working at Sydney Water; seeing from her experience that collaborative industrial relations is a fallacy (eg enterprise agreements being used to attack award conditions); Marxism; and Mondragon model</td>
<td>‘individuals can and should be living together collectively and working together in harmony for the common good’; assumes communardianism; values are ‘primacy of community; compassion for others; and collectivism rather than individualism’; state should protect its citizens for the common good</td>
<td>utopian vision does not take into account human relationships and power inherent in IR; belief in Marxist conception that eliminating private property eliminates oppression</td>
<td>‘This view of society where the worker is working toward self-determination contradicts my belief in the notion of collectivism’</td>
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<td>Jack</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>report of how one woman (the prime minister) changed the paradigm in Australia incorporating participatory democracy; local self-reliance; redistribution of wealth, etc</td>
<td>belief in state intervention; concern about non-democratic nature of WTO &amp; IMF - did not identify personal influences</td>
<td>greater control’ between govt essential; good planning permits building local economies; public sector capable of performing as well as private; tax, legal &amp; health systems need restructuring; all Aust’ns entitled to educ’n; businesses will not self-regulate with respect to env’t damage; govt must ensure sustainability</td>
<td>bias against wealthy interests &amp; privileged professions; power of bureaucracy increased; problem of assuming continuing investment in isolation from global economy; time and money involved in restructuring - problems with the vision</td>
<td>paradox ‘is that powerful and wealthy people an organisations are needed in order to change society.’ Disincentives of taxes and regulation are contradictions.</td>
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<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>Gaps/biases</td>
<td>Contradictions</td>
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<td>Katrina</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>ideas/recommendations presented for alternative policies, giving more power to indigenous custodians - no real 'vision' articulated, no evidence of reading from the unit</td>
<td>information from Land Council material; ATSIC; and other native title literature; talking to indigenous people</td>
<td>pastoral and mining industries do not want to negotiate; government and industries are apathetic about sacred sites; profit is central concern to industries</td>
<td>bias against government and industries; concern about environment; only told aboriginal perspective</td>
<td>none identified</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>speech by the new minister of health outlining direction for community health - focused more on critique than a new vision. 'I intend to generate a collective welfare mentality based on protection.'</td>
<td>Anger about user pays system in relation to health and individualist responses - health had become part of consumerism</td>
<td>Marxist assumptions - health issues attributed to class system;</td>
<td>biased towards the left of politics, but ‘felt that I lacked the conviction to be too radical in my story’; failed to take account of feminist economy or environmental aspects</td>
<td>‘I found I was contradicting myself when I wanted health removed from the economic paradigm, but used economic rationalizing arguments to legitimise my ideas.’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>letter to 'government heads' about a new approach to dealing with unemployment - changing education about economics; dispelling myths abut unemployment - very vague and little attempt to present a picture of how things could be different</td>
<td>readings, particularly post-Keynesian theory; discussions with parents about unemployment; high unemployment when leaving school; opinions of fellow students; work is important in everyday life</td>
<td>current paradigm does not ensure equality; economic rationalism does not address class structures and beliefs; cannot assume all people are rational - depends on their individual beliefs and values; given the opportunity individuals would develop new economic theories; inequality is the root of all evil</td>
<td>did not address unpaid work; biased against economic rationalism; don't address policies which could change attitudes</td>
<td>did not identify paradoxes or contradictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>dreamtime story</td>
<td>Ghandi’s economics; Max-Neef; sustainable community economics; belief in egalitarianism and participation; feminism;</td>
<td>attempts to rectify housing problems have failed because responses have not considered the whole picture; reconciliation essential precursor to success; people work to support their needs; small scale production; agreement about impact of development on the environment; assumes citizens will share responsibility when they make decisions on what they believe is right</td>
<td>critical friend 'reminded me that following the hand over of communities to Aboriginal control, unscrupulous Indigenous people stripped their communities of resources and appropriated power for their own needs’.</td>
<td>Contradiction - only men have power revealed in story (see quotes)</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Maisie</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>conservative, but interesting proposals for reform, showing evidence of being aware of Keynesian approach, but little evidence of other alternatives</td>
<td>tendency to want to stay within safe boundaries (didn’t have copy of final assignment)</td>
<td>concerns for environmental degradation and cultural destruction; role as a mother; unit readings; internet activism</td>
<td>‘my absolute belief in the ability of the natural world to sustain us if we respect it’; belief in value of family and community to support individuals; deep-seated belief in democracy</td>
<td>‘we all exist within the same paradigm’ contradicts with the reality that there exist multiple paradigms in one society</td>
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<td>Nadine</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>maiden speech to Parliament of the member for Biripi, a community taking charge of its own economy, based on RMI principles</td>
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<td>Nigel</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>radio transcript of ABC interview in 2004 with the newly elected prime minister, leader of the Australian Social Democrats Jeff Canute, conducted by Phillip Edams, respected political commentator from New Zealand - traditional owners same rights as governments; policies on women, education and environment</td>
<td>life experience shows an eclectic approach is appropriate; Marxist teaching; belief in social justice; belief that dispossession a ‘blight on Australian history’; Keynes and Swedish ‘middle way’ economists; feminism; committed to partnership and comm-unity; ecological economics</td>
<td>neo-classical economics cannot meet major challenges facing the world; Social Darwinists are wrong; purpose of education is to inform and empower; tax system appropriate to redistribute wealth; economy not separate from social and ecological system</td>
<td>bias toward social justice; Marxist philosophy; downplayed scientific claims of economics; biased towards ethics over efficiency</td>
<td>‘while I argue for partnership and consensus, in fact many of the policy statements have heavy overtones of direction and paternalism’; focusing on the individual and not paying attention to the needs of the community</td>
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<td>Patrick</td>
<td>1999 external</td>
<td>a letter from a wife to her husband pointing out that there are alternatives to doing things the way he’s always done them, drawing on insights from alternative economics - a beautiful, sad letter</td>
<td>seeing disturbing elements of farming culture over 15 years - environmental degradation that is complained about, but not responded to</td>
<td>people will change if given the right inf. (contradicted by his own observations in his work); farmers should have a feeling for their stock and land; if a problem is identified then a solution should be found</td>
<td>tended to identify farmers biases rather than his own, but did note his opinion that conservatism in his area is ‘astounding’; identified perspectives that the farmers were missing</td>
<td>‘on the one hand I am saying that the dominant paradigm theory has to change. Yet my solutions are still based upon this to a certain extent. I am left wondering if this is just the neo-classical theory with a bit of ecology thrown in to keep the ‘greenies’ at bay,’</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Rohena</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>rather than present a vision, went through all alternatives and indicated which aspects of each one she would incorporate into her new paradigm - as an appendix, listed features of new paradigm (based on table in Study Guide)</td>
<td>values, beliefs and life experiences - capitalist exploitation, exclusion, inequality against her belief system; greatest measure of wealth is spirituality</td>
<td>social issues have priority over economic; environmental protection more important than economic growth; purpose of economic activity is to meet human needs; social justice is essential for change; economic rationalism can not solve unemployment; trans-cending capitalism is beneficial &amp; possible; role of govt to represent</td>
<td>bias against capitalism and economic rationalism - bias towards social goals, justice etc reflect life experience (not articulated)</td>
<td>‘while I value individual rights I equally value and recognise the need for rights to be balanced with responsibilities we have to one another and the common good’; p.d. at the local level with r.d. for order at national level</td>
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<td>Sarah</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Attempts to articulate an alternative vision for an ‘intentional community’ she is est-ablishing with a group of young people - interspersed with poetry</td>
<td>living on intentional community; growing up with women whose work has been under-valued; growing up with sub-verting the dominant paradigm; being part of planning a new community</td>
<td>reader has knowledge of intention-al community; gender is an import-ant issue for community; inade-quate valuing of female labour; dominant paradigm does not fulfill human, social and environmental needs; commitment to ideology of intentional community; family is important, children central to com-munity; belief that openness works; assumes level of education</td>
<td>not exploring relationships between community members and wider community; excludes childless people; biased towards human relationships rather than environmental issues; voice of other members is absent</td>
<td>‘While I am talking about consensus and openness, there is only one voice. The theories of openness and consensus are biased towards those who are committed to the ideology, which could mean power games and exclusion.’</td>
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<td>Winston</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>letter to a friend about what he thinks needs to change so that fundamental needs are met - drew on Max-Neef ideas to highlight a place where children are valued</td>
<td>personal difficulties with integrating parenting and work</td>
<td>capitalism cannot work for common good; children can be integrated into everyday life; they are individuals</td>
<td>no explanation of how this can happen</td>
<td>common good vs individual rights; consultation vs expert advice; difficulty of convincing people (quotes)</td>
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APPENDIX 4

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT 1

Assumptions

Assumptions about human beings (4%)
- people unable to control gambling; do not act ‘rationally’ when gambling
- human beings have innate needs; human reasoning and understanding is imperfect; humans endowed with creative power;

Assumptions about structures (40%)
- labour is weaker than capital
- ‘work of course is needed in some form for the survival of society’
- ‘that there is a right to work; work provides economic security i.e. fair wage rates; women are unhappy in part-time, casual, low-paying jobs; equity in the workforce is desirable’
- assumes that inequality is ‘inevitable’;
- one of the main reasons for unemployment is opening up of markets and wealth in a few hands;
- assumed that the ‘governments of developing countries would ... be reluctant or even resentful agents for the implementation of their “neo-colonial” master’s agenda’;
- power struggle between employer and employee will always exist;
- experiences as a black woman in South Africa and Australia ‘have influenced my assumption that policies and decision making are justified to suit the interests of the predominant power, compounding the inequalities that alienate marginal groups from economic power, income and social justice.’
- assume that poverty for Aboriginal people is result of campaign to suppress their participation as citizens; current policy position is possible because systematic neglect has kept Aboriginal people disempowered;
- assume that parenting is valuable (which discounts debates from single women about why they should support parents)

Assumptions about knowledge (2%)
- there is a ‘real’ universe that functions independently of human participation; search for truth constrained by human biases and assumptions; much of human knowledge is constructed

Assumptions about personal rights (2%)
- assumes the ‘right to be greedy and protect what I have’

Assumptions that are actually values (20%)
- ‘perhaps my assumption is this: “that in an advanced, educated and wealthy democratic society it should be our aim to provide all citizens with the opportunity of some form of work, enabling them to attain a sense of dignity and self-worth”’
- opposed to individualism as espoused by economic rationalism, although ‘I am not opposed to individualism as a concept that leads to autonomy, innovation and creativity, only where individual pursuit is at the expense of others within the community. It is clear my values have influenced my critique. If I had access to power and resources, I could very well perceive individualism and the pursuit of wealth to be desirable for society,’
- corporate interests are immoral; corporate individuals lack ethics
- environment is primary; the environment is frail and needs protecting
Assumptions that are actually beliefs (20%)

- 'My personal assumption of the political and economic paradigm is that labour in the workforce is primarily seen only as a corporate and government resource to be used and disused when the conditions suit'
- assume that unemployment is such a major problem that it cannot be fixed using the current approach;
- government has the responsibility to ensure protection of democratic rights; that society could not return to an equitable workplace ideology once economic rationalist policies established
- Aboriginal people want to live traditional ways and not oppose mining and grazing altogether;
- a spiritual connection to land has more value than 'physical possession of a title deed'
- 'It was always the writer's belief (i.e. his own) that the apparent arrogance of these people (farmers) and perhaps perceived greed, combined with conservative attitudes was what drove them. These assumptions can now be seen to be symptomatic of a wider influence. That is the influence of economic rationalism, the "dominant paradigm".'

No identification of assumptions at all (40%)

Statements reflecting assumptions but not identified as such (9%)

Values

- values implied, not stated (22%)
- no values (18%)
- influence of background acknowledged (18%)
- equality (15%)
- working class (13%)
- Protestant work ethic (11%)
- left-wing (9%)
- social justice (9%)
- belief in community (7%)
- indigenous rights (7%)
- anti economic rationalism (7%)
- middle class (7%)
- Christian values (7%)
- unemployment paramount (4%)
- freedom (4%)
- individual rights (4%)
- environmental values paramount (2%)
- high value on parenting/house work (2%)
- education a means to self-realisation (2%) capitalism based on slavery (2%)
- compassion for others (Christian) (2%)

- individuals not blame poverty (2%)
- pro private property (2%)
- employment should be available to all (2%)
- anti representative democracy (2%)
- lower middle class (2%)
- fairness (2%)
- fundamental worth of human beings (2%)
- right-wing (2%)
- collective responsibility (2%)
- co-operation better than competition (2%)
- anti capitalism (2%)
- inequality inevitable (2%)
- lack of spiritual belief (2%)
- media ownership greatest limit on freedom (2%)
- anti corporate power (2%)
- non-materialist values (2%)
- materialist values (2%)
- faith in capitalism (2%)
ASSIGNMENT 2

A. VISIONING

Position now -- what has to change (45%)

- *Straight analysis*—fundamental human needs; sustainability, participatory democracy, human needs, social justice; Max-Neef alternatives promoted; community, local self-reliance, environment, social justice; recommendations for change (no real vision)

- *Speech*—participatory democracy, community, redistribution, needs, environment; community-based, co-operatives, human needs; environment and sustainable employment; to parliament by member for community based on local economic principles were (community, nature)

- *Letter*—of complaint to advertisers (women as equals); to the editor (reform, within dominant paradigm); to ‘government heads’ (little vision); to husband (more critique than vision) (catastrophe); to friend (what needs to change, Max-Neef ideas); from prime minister to the unemployed (alternative approaches, current paradigm)

- *Bible story*—human needs, participatory democracy, redistribution, guaranteed minimum income

- *Video presentation*—‘people centred economics’, Rocky Mountain Institute; Max-Neef

- *Magician’s spell*—analysis (no real vision)

- *Manifesto* for intentional community—community, valuing of all work, environment, etc.

- *Radio transcript*—policies on women, indigenous people, education, environment

Description of life in future time/alternative society (real visioning) (26%)

- *Metaphor*—chook yard (practical, ecological citizens); water (enzyme economics/economy as biological process)

- *Science fiction story*—humanity in service of environment (catastrophe); feminist vision (apocalyptic) (catastrophe); earth degraded, new society in space (more equal distribution) (catastrophe)

- *Newspaper report (future)*—nature, simplicity, relationships, community (catastrophe)

- *Diary extract 2020* -- balance of community, work and industrial production, environmental (catastrophe)

- *Life in imaginary society*—co-operation, common good above self-interest, participatory democracy

- *Annual report of United Nations Debt Review Board 2012*—community, ecologically sustainable development, participatory democracy (catastrophe)

- *Web site*—imaginary Utopia: nature, simplistic lifestyle, spirit/economy (catastrophe)

- *Dreamtime story*—responsibility sharing, community (catastrophe)
Looking back from the future (11%)

- *Reflection of 75 year-old woman*—respect is the dominant paradigm (catastrophe)
- *Historical report*—Marxist revolution (catastrophe)
- *Report on female prime minister changing the system*—participatory democracy, local self-alliance, redistribution of wealth
- *Dreamtime story* (as above)
- *Newspaper report* (as above)

Critique only (13%)

Catastrophe as a precursor to change (26%)

B. INFLUENCES

values/beliefs (77%)

- values of social justice, cooperation and participation, importance of the natural environment, significance of caring side of human nature
- belief that true equality only possible with radical change to society
- belief in a looming environmental crisis
- belief that only a 'socialistic, environmental alliance, based not on crass opportunism but a genuine desire for creating a true participatory democracy' can save the world; only violent upheaval can create conditions for paradigm shift
- importance of individual empowerment
- greatest measure of wealth is spirituality
- 'A healthy cynicism that allows me to question the status quo ..'
- anger about free trade and corporate control of the economy

philosophies and theories (47%)

- Deep ecology, earth education
- Marxist perspectives and models of citizen participation
- inspired by Thomas More and Oscar Wilde
- influenced by critiques: public provision influenced by Post Keynesians; restoration of participatory democracy (structural feminism and Marxism); postmodern analysis; influence of 'magic'
- literature on utopian communities
- readings, particularly post-Keynesian theory
- Ghandi’s economics; Max-Neef; sustainable community economics
- unit readings; internet activism
- Keynes and Swedish ‘middle way’ economists; feminism; Marxist teaching; ecological economics

**life experiences (38%)**

- "Freedom is dear to me because I lost it at an early age when I was sent from mountain streams and waterfalls to a boarding school inhabited by sadistic moral men (of god)."
- involvement in green activism; involvement in local community
- own ‘abundant experiences of the natural world’
- growing up in a supportive rural community
- boarding school experiences
- experience as a non-white female sole parent; living an alternative lifestyle; moving back to the city with out-dated skills
- seeing disturbing elements of farming culture over 15 years

**personal situation (19%)**

- disdain for theories that support concentration of wealth and recognition that her own poverty influences this view
- partner who has never worked in formal economy and has been a full parent
- personal fears of entering the workforce
- working at Sydney Water; seeing from her experience that collaborative industrial relations is a fallacy
- being part of planning a new community
- personal difficulties with integrating parenting and work

**desires and interests (17%)**

- interested in the idea of leaving the planet; ‘I picture humanity spreading across the universe’
- own personal interests and ‘inner magnetisms’—drawn to abstraction and theory
- long held desire for shorter working hours
socialisation (15%)

- being born white, female, middle class in Australia; inherited a strong work ethic
- parents raised in rural areas contributing to a family tradition of environmental awareness
- her own experience as a child socialised into women’s roles and her experience as a single parent
- growing up with women whose work has been under-valued; growing up with subverting the dominant paradigm

C. ASSUMPTIONS

that are values (70%)

- inequities should not be part of society
- ‘My values are glaringly evident ... could be described as psychopathic, anti social’; a ‘deep green’ (bio-diversity more important than humanity)
- sustainable business is important
- all human life equally valuable; no more valuable than non-human life
- capitalists are misguided and the working classes are ‘infuriatingly ignorant, petty and often compliant in their servitude to the capitalist system’
- values non-material aspects of wealth; participatory democracy; interdependence more important than independence
- values are ‘primacy of community, compassion for others; and collectivism rather than individualism’; state should protect its citizens for the common good
- family is important, children central to community

that are beliefs (62%)

- Current use of resources not sustainable
- Masses need religion to make them do the ‘right’ thing
- economic rationalism creates inequities; capitalism, consumerism, materialism, etc bad for the economy; that Third World people want to live a traditional lifestyle and reject Western culture
- ‘all the problems of the world are created by capitalism under the thumb of economic rationalism’
- strong belief in the value of communities
• unemployment is the problem of economic managers and not the fault of the individual; economic managers disregard the environment; earth will reach a point where it will no longer sustain life; government puts economic issues above environmental issues; working class people bear the brunt of sacrifice in environmental protection

• things will keep getting worse before they get better

• earth is finite; disaster is on the way; technology can’t fix it; disaster won’t be averted through changing consumption patterns; capitalism won’t be challenged through intellect alone

• belief in thinking as a big family; belief in tearing down borders; belief in love and that humanity will ‘wake up to the divinity in themselves’. ‘You may perceive this as an assumption but to me it is a knowledge.’

• the existence and nature of God; ‘without any truth there cannot be hope’; without hope there is only despair; belief in the creation of the universe; the Bible contains an accurate representation of God and of universal truths, reflecting religious beliefs

• ‘my absolute belief in the ability of the natural world to sustain us if we respect it’; belief in value of family and community to support individuals; deep-seated belief in democracy

• belief that openness works

based on hopes and desires (42%)

• it is possible to improve society; people want to improve society; I know what an improved society is; people want to live in communities; communal living is good for everyone; I know what communal living is

• ‘everyone believes poverty to be bad’; ‘everyone agrees that employment is a good thing’; ‘all people would prefer to work’; ‘everyone wants to be a responsible citizen’

• ‘... that everyone would be better off knowing inner spirituality and having compassion for others ...’

• ‘By maintaining a belief in civil society and social capital, I have made the assumption that “community” implies “all will be rosy”; that harmony will automatically exist; and that inequality, class and gender issues are somehow all secondary.’

• individual needs and business goals won’t clash

• people put community wishes before their own; communities can take care of people

• all people want the same outcomes; all citizens would be happier with simpler and slower lifestyles; desire for power and control over others non-existent

about society and structures (21%)

• capitalism and patriarchy are connected

• community is foundation of society

• ‘polarity between men and women is socially constructed’
about human beings (19%)

- Human beings have potential to embrace change; can be altruistic; have a spiritual dimension; people can be empowered to participate
- human beings have a need to belong; people need opportunity for self determination
- that people value the environment; all women are socially responsible and caring
- people don’t want to change; ‘on the whole I do consider people to be inherently evil or greedy or self-destructing... I don’t think all people are equal. I consider myself to be better than some people, and some people to be better than me.’
- people are a product of their environment
- humans are intrinsically good; questioned conventional notion that humans are always rational
- cannot assume all people are rational—depends on their individual beliefs and values

about how change happens (19%)

- believes that people are resistant to change; ‘only something substantial and cataclysmic will bring about a surge for change’
- that communities would work to solve the problem and come up with solutions
- no consciousness shift without disaster
- belief that current global problems require local and global solutions simultaneously; large mechanisms needed to ensure outcomes beneficial to the common good
- working class only militant in the face of hardship
- good planning permits building local economies
- reconciliation essential precursor to success
- social justice is essential for change

premises (8%)

- reason is valuable; truth must have a basis
- belief in a subjective reality
- if a problem is identified then a solution should be found
- reader has knowledge of intentional community; gender is an important issue for community
about knowledge (4%)

- ‘western interpretation of biological processes is truth’; ‘all cultures see biological processes in a scientific way’
- a ‘grand narrative’ conception of reality

connected with dominant assumptions (2%)

- ‘western interpretation of biological processes is truth’; ‘all cultures see biological processes in a scientific way’ -- recognition that these reflect ‘the dominant culture from which I spring’

none identified (4%)

D. BIASES/ GAPS/ MISSING PERSPECTIVES

(i) Biases

Ideological (political) (36%)

- biased against employers and big business in favour of workers
- bias against corporations
- left ideology
- biased against ‘naked individualism’
- biased against global market and economic rationalism
- ‘... my bias against wealthy fat cats is shown by condemning them to death’
- fundamental bias—acceptance of scientific evidence of environmental decay, dismisses contradictory evidence as ‘corporate propaganda’
- biased towards the left of politics, but ‘felt that I lacked the conviction to be too radical in my story’
- bias toward social justice; Marxist philosophy

Gender/cultural/religious (17%)

- ‘My story touches on difference but does not recognise that being white holds the position of power and privilege in this society...’.
- ‘we should not question the Word of God’;
- bias against ‘ignorance and uneducated people’;
- working class background produces a particular bias
- did not acknowledge role of women in perpetuating capitalism
Theoretical (11%)
- belief in Marxist conception that eliminating private property eliminates oppression
- criticism easier than positive construction, highlighting missing elements; dialogue ‘creates an illusion of debate, when it is really completely the presentation of one perspective’;

No biases identified (42%)

(ii) Gaps

How to effect change (11%)
- lack of a bridge from old to new paradigm;
- inability to provide a practical method to effect change—‘I find it difficult to imagine that humans can change their basic nature’;
- means by which power shifts will occur;
- where do we begin and who begins it?

Specific issues (45%)
- the practical issues of trade
- no reference to role of government
- did not consider reasons for current government policies or political unpopularity of sacrificing jobs for environmental protection
- does not consider how power and leadership will be handled
- have not explained effect on GNP
- did not cover regional interactions and government (assumed State government would be abolished); no account of social security system nor technology
- does not account for power abuses of large organisations
- no mention of benefits brought by capitalism
- neglected possibility that ‘each gender’s needs and wants may be acceptably different’
- utopian vision does not take into account human relationships and power inherent in IR
- did not address unpaid work
- critical friend ‘reminded me that following the hand over of communities to Aboriginal control, unscrupulous Indigenous people stripped their communities of resources and appropriated power for their own needs’
- not exploring relationships between community members and wider community
No gaps identified (38%)
- 'Perhaps one might say: where is the feminist, Aboriginal, religious or ethnic perspective? However I would find such a question to indicate that the questioner had missed the point altogether.'

(iii) Missing perspectives

Theoretical (30%)
- identified leaving out Marxism, Keynesian perspectives
- lack of postmodern perspectives;
- acknowledged absence of ecological & feminist perspectives;
- decided not to use Marxist or Green approaches;
- bias towards feminism and ecological perspectives;
- didn’t consider Marxist, Keynesian or feminist perspectives.
- lack of feminist perspectives and critiques of capitalism other than Marxism
- lack of green perspectives
- failed to take account of feminist economy or environmental aspects

Cultural/gender/racial (15%)
- cultural and gender perspectives missing – specifically, issues of power not addressed
- race, gender and class are ‘glaringly obvious gaps’.
- feminist perspective missing (partly due to being male);
- only portrays Aboriginal perspective;
- only told Aboriginal perspective

Dominant perspectives (4%)
- ignored opinion of metal and resource industries;
- missing new global trade paradigms

Issues -- power (4%)
- issue of power not recognised: ‘I can’t imagine Kerry Packer being too keen on my ideas’. ‘One perspective that is definitely missing from my story is the notion that the poor and oppressed will endure an inequitable society on the premise that one day they, or their children, may have the opportunity to be successful or rich.’

No missing perspectives identified (47%)
E. CONTRADICTIONS

Advocating apparently contradictory aspects of vision (26%)

- 'I profess the need for individual freedom, but my new society seems a schizophrenic enviro-fascist state.

- paradox of need for both individual and community awareness

- goals of social justice and ecological sustainability not always compatible; vision could be incompatible with 'people's egos and struggle for status and dominance'

- while wealth not a major focus, ignored the need for wealth to build spaceships; things that would be very complex were presented as simple

- 'there may exist a contra-diction to my own values of freedom and individualism which resides within the idea that everyone will acknowledge their place in the “interconnected fabric of life” an “organic” society may in fact require a degree of freedom to be relinquished'

- how to maintain capitalism, with its expansionist tendencies and foster local self-reliance? Dilemma of land ownership combined with true spiritual relationship

- 'although incorporating a variety of perspectives creates a strength of the new paradigm, this may also be distorted to form a weakness'

- main character in story uses technology of capitalism despite disliking it

- paradox 'is that powerful and wealthy people an organisations are needed in order to change society,'

- 'I found I was contradicting myself when I wanted health removed from the economic paradigm, but used economic rationalizing arguments to legitimise my ideas.'

- 'while I argue for partnership and consensus, in fact many of the policy statements have heavy overtones of direction and paternalism'

Individual/community tension (13%)

- My beliefs in freedom, privacy and a sense of self are contradictions and paradoxes to my selfless, open, communal vision.'

- an 'egalitarian society but with vestiges of hierarchy ...; individualist and communalistic, plus local and global

- focusing on the individual and not paying attention to the needs of the community

- 'while I value individual rights I equally value and recognise the need for rights to be balanced with responsibilities we have to one another and the common good';

Personal contradictions/hypocrisies etc. (13%)

- 'I feel as though I am hypocritical in proposing communal living when I have rejected it myself. I also advocate the importance of the natural environment when my husband runs beef cattle which have destroyed the ecosystem in our area, I have also championed the cause of the common good in decision making but often do not practice it myself.'
• 'on the one hand, my idealism says “this is a great idea, it really can work, it really can happen”, on the other hand my cynicism says “get real, this would never happen”.

• easier to call for a theocentric perspective that to consistently live with a “God focus”

• 'While I am talking about consensus and openness, there is only one voice. The theories of openness and consensus are biased towards those who are committed to the ideology, which could mean power games and exclusion.'

• 'on the one hand I am saying that the dominant paradigm theory has to change. Yet my solutions are still based upon this to a certain extent. I am left wondering if this is just the neo-classical theory with a bit of ecology thrown in to keep the ‘greenies’ at bay.'

**Contradictions in beliefs (13%)**

• Identifying ‘self-interest as a negative quality when in fact it is a necessary quality for survival’

• 'I have maintained that development such as foreign investment and economic growth is contrary to the needs of Third World countries. However, when defining poverty, I describe it as “lack of development”'.

• belief in human capacity to change but only in the face of crisis

• failure to define new vision—I came to the conclusion that without a belief that the system can change it never will, and so my story concentrated on the change of belief rather than a clear definition of the new paradigm.'

• ‘This view of society where the worker is working toward self-determination contradicts my belief in the notion of collectivism’

• ‘we all exist within the same paradigm’ contradicts with the reality that there exist multiple paradigms in one society

**Confusion/misunderstanding of contradiction (11%)**

• question not really understood – listed ways in which her beliefs or premises are contradicted e.g. ‘not everyone wants to work’; ‘there are some people who want to live on the dole’

• not sure the corporate world is mature enough to support social concerns such as education

• not really identified—tended to focus on critical analysis much more than critical reflection

• did not consider benefits of trade (not really a contradiction, more a gap)

• seemed to focus on problems with the GST—comments off track

**Identified contradictions/inconsistencies in theories rather than own account (11%)**

• focused on ‘contradiction’ in relation to the claim that the system of human needs is not hierarchical, while claiming special importance for subsistence and protection

• paradox is 'how to measure and quantify the unpaid and intangible economic contributions of the informal sector' (goes on to analyse this debate)

• issue of ‘marginal’ nature of housework given its centrality (no contradictions in her own account)
• identified contradiction between economic rationalism and community responsibility, not those apparent in her own account

• identified contradictions in different perspectives

**Argument reveals 'blind spots' (privilege, conditioning etc) (6%)**

• ‘My critical friend pointed out to me that I could perhaps be contradictory in my argument because of my job security and unwillingness to recognise some of the environmental faux pas that my employer, the Department of Defence has committed in recent times.’

• contradiction—only men have power revealed in story

**Local/global tension (4%)**

• paradox of need for both individual and community awareness; local self-reliance in the global picture;

**Inconsistency in argument (e.g. simplistic answers to complex problems) (2%)**

• paradox is ‘that it still views industrialism as desirable ... The simplistic solutions offered in this story contradict alternative methods of problem solving that recognise and value complexity, ... The final outcome however has been the realisation that by looking at this issue in isolation from other issues in society, the model I created is flawed.’

**No contradictions identified (19%)**

**F. QUESTIONS**

**Self questioning (8%)**

• am I off on some esoteric tangent that would never really take off by the majority of people in the world?

• I value the right to accumulate wealth and also the right to welfare if I need it. But where do you draw the line between them?

• undertaking this assignment has made me not only question my own practical commitment to the utopian society that I have created, but it has also encouraged me to consider the minuscule level of knowledge humanity applies to the intricacies of the universe, to ourselves, our purpose (assuming there is one), and our future existence.

• perhaps my most pertinent question for myself concerns whether, in my heart of hearts, I truly believe that something better can arise out of capitalism in all its guises, not only the economic-rationalist model. I am both a cynic and an optimist, cynical with the attempt to reform something which I believe to be unformable, like capitalism, and optimistic that maybe, just maybe, something better will come along before everything on the Earth is trashed.

**Information questions**

(i) **questions about specific topic/issue (30%)**

• Is need deprivation actually felt by workers? Do they attribute this deprivation to their work? What need/s do they feel able to satisfy through work?

• Should we rid ourselves of the global village concept, and attempt another form of barter-trade system?
• I wonder how a nation consisting of numerous small communities which are co-ordinated at the national level functions in a participatory democracy?

• What sort of ‘satisfiers’ would a person form the south put down to meet a fundamental need? Would it be things like family, environment, equality, fair pay, gender recognition or would it be money, big houses, cars, luxury goods from the west?

• I would like to have more information about particular problems around the world and the causes of them and I would like to be able to engage in consultation with the people from all over the world or to draw on consultations undertaken by others to discover what is needed in different areas to restore and create happiness and peace.

• Are farmers in the Central West going to change their thought patterns? Are they going to allow their women to be a part of the process of decision making?

(ii) general questions about economics etc. (15%)

• Has anyone already tried basing economic theories on biological processes?

• How do we find among the endless vapid orations of recorded law one that applies universally to greed?

• A question I have is whether economists in governments can look beyond their own education and background to accept that there may be alternative viewpoints to rationalism in economic theories.

• Is there a form of government other than capitalist/democratic that is better at dealing with this?

• perhaps my greatest challenge has been to articulate the postmodern perspective of our future ... What is postmodernity? This is a question I have found incredibly difficult to answer, because the term or concept itself defies definition and in essence is still being debated.

• Which elements of the current paradigm are working successfully and should be retained?’

Questions about change

(i) what it would take to make vision reality (15%)

• The extent of influence that employees have to make the vision reality?

• How do we transfer from this system run by law to one run by nature?

• How to implement these plans first from a grass roots level and to spread the concept through a half blind society?

• What would have to happen to make my vision come true?

• ... how could it come to pass, indeed is it feasible for such a paradigm shift to occur?

• ‘So many. It seems for each question I ask, another 10 questions come to mind. The main problem is how to travel from here to there.
(ii) will it take disaster? (4%)

- Must a complete breakdown of society need to occur, such as those demonstrated by history, so that the pieces can be rebuilt to create a different society governed by better beliefs, values and assumptions?

- Will it take a massive depression for people or the government to change their consciousness?

(iii) what strategies are necessary to promote positive change (26%)

- The first question that came to mind was one regarding change.... How do we make people realise that there are worthwhile alternatives?

- Is revolution the only option?

- Further questions that arise for me deal with the issues of how the paradigm shift can be hastened. My underlying impatience is one value that I have that can work in favour of a new paradigm. What is the most effective way for me to ensure that the new paradigm shift is implemented quickly? Is it possible to address inequality by a process other than radical social change?

- How do we convince those who have been economically successful or politically influential, or both, that the system must change, particularly if they do not want it to change, because it will undermine their own personal gain and self-interest?

- Would abolishing state governments help to bring government closer to the people?

- how do we enforce the changes so that one group does not abuse the duty of power?

- ‘The scenario presented brings up many questions including: How to go about changing the attitudes of the WTO and the IMF and the use of the GNP, and how difficult it would be if one did leave these organisations.

- ‘A lot of questions have arisen for me ... The most prominent being how to introduce a policy and reform into our community to change some of the views surrounding dominant economic reform.’ (Mentions critical friend)

- Can change happen from the bottom as suggested in my story, or is the power in the real world fixed firmly in place at the top?

- While political action, motivated by the will of the people, can counter the obstructions of vested interests, to introduce a more progressive economic alternative, the challenge is to convince people that there are better choices.’

(iv) whether change is possible (19%)

- Maybe the future is with ecological economics. The question is do we have the political will? Do we have the time?

- Can the needs of community, environment and economy really integrate to satisfy the needs appropriately?

- Have we gone too far with economic rationalism so that, consequently, both individual and systemic changes are beyond our capabilities?
• I do wonder whether decisions in the future will stem from something more ‘wholesome’ than the pursuit of profit, and I do also wonder whether the political decisions can be effectively based on anything but profit and economic rationalism while they remain in the same hierarchical and domination oriented structures conducive to such goals.

• has our system gone so far into the corporate world that it is impossible to change for the benefit of the economy or the environment?

• ‘the most pressing question that arises for me as a result of developing this specific paradigm is a concern that the impetus for such a revolution may never occur. . . .

• Can the current “greed is good” mentality be changed?

(v) how to overcome barriers (13%)

• What are the key elements that are holding back its instigation and how can I help in destroying them?

• How can a new paradigm arise and gain acceptance given the impediments (support for economic rationalist ideas by the media and key opinion makers)?

• do the current pressures on people at work, as well as within the family, undermine the concept of developing a community-based approach to economic and political decision making?

• Would people ever reach a consciousness that shorter working hours would be beneficial to improving employment?

• How to maintain the changes in an environment of changing governments and powerful forces who would be reluctant to change.

Questions about visions
(i) is it worthwhile/desirable (2%)

• Would workers want the vision created?

(ii) is it possible (17%)

• Do you think there is a chance that the idea might actually be possible?

• I am asking—is this possible? Could the cancellation of Third World debt become a possibility? Would the IMF and the World Bank allow this to happen? Would my alternative work? Would it solve the problems of developing countries?

• Will Australians be selfless enough for such a radical approach to the future of the country?

• In other words, is it truly possible to have a healthy balance of competition and co-operation?

• A related concern further arises of the paradigm being a mere theoretical proposition, unable to be successfully executed due to a number of flaws.

• ‘What follows is the question, of whether my vision is achievable. The fact is that all individuals are different and in countries like Australia, which are diverse and multicultural, to assume that changes in society will just happen is not enough . . .

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(iii) is visioning a good idea (2%)

- I wonder whether it is useful to envision some future utopian society. Kirkpatrick Sale (a man) says desirable visions are a ‘necessary part of any political construct... to offer an image of the future can be regarded as positive and liberatory and realistic and energizing’ (1997:233). Feminist writer Ursula K. Le Guin questions the point of imagining utopia. She says ‘it is pure structure without content; pure model; goal...It is uninhabitable. As soon as we reach it, it ceases to be utopia’ (1989:81). She continues ‘utopia has been Euclidean, it has been European, and it has been masculine’ (1989:88). I assume that my utopia is not necessarily shared by another person because it is based on all my values and beliefs which of course belong to me only. Le Guin also claims that is a male way of thinking because it is based on rational and logical thought patterns. I like to think that the universe is a mysterious place and that nature works in mysterious ways to restore harmony, so who knows what might happen between now and along the road to utopia (for example the millennium bug) that may change my views.

(iv) what implications arise from the vision (23%)

- could world finances return to the pre-global village perspective—or would this be a backward step?

- I wonder what effects constraining capital to national borders would have. Countries such as Albania have not been successful in keeping their economies alive in this way. How painful a process would this be for nations if all global capital stopped flowing? It may sound reasonable in theory, but its practice could be disastrous.

- How could an organisation as big as the IMF and WB become more focused on individuals and community needs?

- How will the issues around power be resolved (in the new paradigm)? Will the once wealthy once again rise up and become the ruling elites and continue with their economic rationalist paradigm that places value on the economy over broader issues?

- Question raised about ‘whether every human being is competent to manage the direction and affairs of their community or society and who is the ultimate judge of that competency?’ (Questions embedded in his reflections)

- Questions also arise about the redefined terms. For example: How will the proposed model relate with the global market? How will people be rewarded for their skills and expertise, and how will wealth be stored and measured?

- To what extent would governments interfere in the lives of the citizens?

- ‘I find it particularly interesting that the strategies and ideas I had were easier to envisage than the ideological framework, and yet in some ways they are less relevant. It seems so easy to come up with ‘fix it’ solutions, however they are only once they are actually lived by and modified according to changing needs. The suggestions I had were adapted from other intentional communities, either in their working presence or notable absence, and who knows if they can be applied to this community?’
Philosophical questions (30%)

- Is it really too hard to believe that through community activity we would all be much happier?

- Does anything really change from a paradigm that exploits and those who are exploited?

- What is the desired we wish to achieve? Is it the attainment of autonomy? Is it solidarity with others? Or is it an ecologically sustainable lifestyle? Also the question of whether it will ever be possible for humanity to go back (or forward) to a way of life that is economically sustainable, and promotes equality and community in a global level is one that may be answered in my lifetime. I would like to know whether the community can be placed first without infringing on individual rights, or whether these notions cannot co-exist without one being violated.

- Definitely the greatest ongoing question or enquiry arising from my endeavours can be attributed to the metaphysical nature of Hegel’s notion of Geist. (The German word for spirit or mind). The significance of this word, in my opinion, is that it captures the essence or most fundamental aspect of life and freedom. Essentially, it is the freedom that is the aim of all civilisations, the ultimate goal of humanity. It is now unknown, and can only truly be known when we are in the realm because it is so radically different from the current dominant paradigm and way of thinking. I believe that the world needs to experience this realm, and that it is attainable in the “spirit” of solidarity and community.

- Too many questions have arisen from completing this assignment, and taking the view that I have! Much of this questioning relates to the human potential for both destructive and positive progression, particularly in questioning the possibility that ‘destructive’ human behaviour may be equally as ‘natural’ as any other behaviour. In other words, perhaps humanity’s … destiny is to extinguish itself in order to (make) way for the next dominant species? What is ‘natural’? Or perhaps, the frightening course we have taken is simply part of the complex process towards a ‘balanced’ world in which periodic crises will continue to eliminate those traditions and practices which disrupt this balance. For example, women’s’ oppression, or nature’s oppression, may simply be the characteristic of a ‘juvenile’ society, therefore providing much room to move forward.

- From presenting this worldview, I have found that further questions do arise. For example, I will continue liking at how absolute standards and different cultural ideals relate. I regret that this question has been seldom addressed by those who would profess a theocentric outlook, but I believe it is worth pursuing.

- (Questions left unanswered include) ‘… whether or not we need material progress to ensure a balanced way of life. To me, I wonder if humanity could turn back the clock in order to ensure a more socially just society and whether or not this is realistically (an) expectation of modern civilisations. Would people be willing to ignore the privileges gained from the increase in technology and industry? Can these advancements be void (sic) of greed and thus be used in a moral way to benefit all? How can authority be redefined in order to allow this to happen?

- How do we achieve a balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of society?

- Is there going to be a return to respecting the land as opposed to using it for our own gain?

No questions (8%)